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Pros and Cons: Negotiating Value in Blog Culture

by

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Abstract

An analysis of conversations with bloggers in both focus groups and interviews as well as a decade-long observation of blogging culture informs this exploration of the ways in which bloggers discursively construct value, and the contingencies of these constructions. The goal was to examine which characteristics and behaviors emerged as privileged and valued and those which were not, extrapolating these visions of value to broader social and cultural contexts where self-documentation and public presentations of self via social media are increasingly prevalent. The participants in this study took up multiple, complex and often intersecting discourses of value. Value operated in understandings of textual conventions and standards; of the norms and potential of blogging as a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988); as social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and subcultural capital (Thornton, 1997); in the ‘scene’ (Irwin, 1977) of blogging culture; and as economic value. In this context, tensions emerge where constructions of authenticity operate as both hallmarks of independence and strategies for monetization and professional progress; and the individual quest for meaning and self-care is situated in a cultural context where usefulness (to others) and validation (from others) often shape visions of value.

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Dedication

For Rubina, Zelda, and Len.

And

In memory of Talei and Nicole.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis is an exploratory investigation into discourses of value in blog culture. Following from my earlier graduate work (Gaden, 2005), in the past decade I have been paying close attention to discourses of blogging: from scholarly perspectives, media commentary and critique, to a daily practice of reading blogs and following blog-discussion forums[1]. Before I began this project, I maintained a blog for two years (2004-2006). Throughout, I have encountered a multitude of often conflicting discourses of value around blogging. Early adopters and enthusiasts heralded blogging as an opportunity for freedom of expression, and independence from editorial control (e.g. Blood 2000, 2002; Mortensen & Walker, 2002). Others, however, criticized personal revelation on blogs, described them as narcissistic, and called into question the personal and political empowerment of blogging (e.g. Keren, 2006; Mason, 2007; McNeill, 2003). Indeed, this has been a persistent anxiety with social media: Zuern (2015) notes that "public concerns continue to beat the drum of social decay resulting from 'too much information'" (p. xi). Furthermore, there were complex and somewhat contradictory discourses of value at play in the parts of the blogosphere I frequented. On one hand success appeared to be measured in terms of popularity: blog ranking sites assessed blog influence and importance according to hits and links. On the other, bloggers emphasized a more personal vision of success. In *Blogging for Bliss,* Frey (2009) encourages others to blog in order to "awaken the creative spirit that lies within…find your voice" (p. 9). It was this apparent contradiction that initially sparked the idea for my doctoral study. The research goals for this project are:

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[1] Get Off My Internets (GOMI): http://gomiblog.com/

- To examine the discourses of value invoked by bloggers as they discuss what counts as quality in terms of blog texts: successful blogging practices, and the worth and rewards of blogging.
- To explore the broader ideological underpinnings of these discourses: how they might shape and be shaped by social and cultural understandings of value.

The second of these goals has been suggested and facilitated by the timeframe of the project. The data I am analyzing was gathered in 2009, with analysis and writing taking place during the subsequent several years. Due to this extensive period of observation and analysis, I have had the opportunity to witness the emergence of new technologies, practices, and shifts in social media (blog) culture over the course of my study. Lievrouw and Livingstone (2002) explain the process of social shaping of technologies: "People always have choices about how technologies are created, understood and used. However, when certain technologies become very extensive, embedded and taken for granted…they can also constrain or limit the range of available choices" (p. 4). Bakardijeva (2005) identifies a shift in the process of social shaping between early and later stages:

> The invention of functions and meanings on the part of ordinary users is particularly vibrant at the early stage of the social shaping of a new technology and communication medium. Later in the process, the interpretations preferred by powerful business and political interests tend to prevail. Alternative possibilities initially evolved by users die out if they do not fit into the dominant mould. Thus identifying and documenting such possibilities in the

> case of Internet development might prove to be of historical and political importance. (p. 6)

Blogging, as I will explain, is often understood as a forerunner for other Web 2.0 or social media platforms and applications, and has become an established mainstay not only of online culture, but also of mainstream media culture. As such, attention to the process of emergence and codification of conventions and standards in this context has much to offer discussions of social media at a time when these media can appear both ubiquitous and mysterious. By focusing on value in this project, I aim to drill beyond hype and buzzwords and explore the ideologies and discourses of power at play in blog culture.

Research Questions

The research questions steering this project are:

- How is the value of blogs and blogging practices discursively constructed by bloggers?
- How do multi-dimensional conceptions of value function in the social construction of blogging as a contextually specific new technological and cultural practice?

Following from this, my secondary research questions are:

- What features do bloggers identify as characteristic of blogging, of ‘good’ blogs and ‘good’ blogging practice? What attributes and practices are frowned upon?
- If hierarchies emerge, whose interests are served by the configuration of these hierarchies?

Value and Popular Culture

In this study I am concerned with how bloggers describe what they value about blogs and blogging. I am interested in what they think of as good, as worthy, and what counts as success. Furthermore, I want to explore what kind of hierarchies are constructed by these discourses of value. Discussions of value are pervasive and also problematic when it comes to popular culture both in academic discourse and everyday fandom. In their early – and influential - work on popular culture, Frankfurt School thinkers Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) addressed the popular culture industries where films, radio, and magazines (the popular culture forms of the day), were players in a system of conformity and capitalism. They simultaneously assessed the products of this system as "rubbish" and identified the discourses of value within the system as shaped by financial greed and social control: "Movies and radio need no longer to pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce" (p. 121).

Benjamin's (1969) approach to popular culture was more hopeful. He argued that the mass dissemination of media culture meant that citizens could be empowered as critics and analysts, and that media - radio, film – had potential for political engagement rather than simply passive consumption. In the 1960s in Britain, the growing movement in cultural studies opened up new discussions of popular culture and everyday life. In Chapter Three, I will discuss this in more detail, but in terms of illustrating the context for this study it is important to point to the work of British cultural theorists (e.g. Hall, 1980; Hoggart, 1957; McRobbie, 1991; Williams, 1958) who produced and influenced work concerned not only with the evaluation of cultural artifacts, but also identified the significance of paying attention to audience participation.

In this tradition, popular culture and ordinary everyday culture are examined as spaces of community expression, creativity, and the negotiation of identities, as well as of co-option and oppression. Discussions of value, in this context, have been more specifically focused on particular groups, practices, and texts rather than on popular culture in general, and popular culture itself more diversely imagined with attention given to texts and audiences (Ang, 1991;

Morley & Brunsden, 1978; Morley, 1980), and to specific communities and reception/participation practices (Radway, 1984; Stacey, 1994; Thornton, 1997). In the development of cultural studies, and particularly popular culture studies, value has (in this way) operated as a central discourse both in the foundation, legitimization, and diversification of the field of study generally, and within studies of specific sites and practices of popular culture.

Nelson (2006) points out that, although statements all the time about quality are common in everyday life, these statements create discomfort for academics, who worry about objectivity and critical distance. Questions of quality and the assessment of quality are often swept away with a brush of "personal choice" (p. 59). Writing about value and television, Nelson argues that to dismiss questions of value and evaluation is to "efface the power relations sustaining culture's endemic, though not immutable, hierarchies of taste" (p. 59). Corner (1994) highlights the link between assessments of quality and inequality. All "systems of qualitative judgment" involve an understanding of inequality, "insofar as there will be those things which, when assessed in relation to the system's standards, are judged as *not* good" (p. 142). Writing about the way we talk about music, Frith (1996) describes how value operates as a central discourse in casual conversation: "Part of the pleasure of popular culture is talking about it; part of its meaning is this talk, talk which is run through with value judgments" (p.4). Importantly, he points out, these value judgments are not rudimentary expressions of preference but are "based in reason, evidence, persuasion" (p. 4). Value is a difficult topic in literature. Herrnstein-Smith (1983) contended that "the entire problematic of value and evaluation has been evaded and explicitly exiled by the literary academy" (p. 1).

The Rise of Blogging and Social Media

As the second decade of this century progresses, blogging has come to occupy an unremarkable and everyday position in many western, urban cultural landscapes. Blogging is the forerunner of a host of applications and associated practices often discussed under the umbrella Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005, 2006). Then the subject of both excitement and curiosity (e.g. Jenkins, 2002; Mortensen & Walker, 2002), blogging is now so far from being the bright new thing that even the bright new things that came after (Facebook, Twitter) have themselves been followed by brighter and newer generations of social media (Instagram, Snapchat, Periscope, Vine). What all of these applications and practices share is the facility for individuals (even those without any significant technical know-how) to create and share their own content online.

When Jorn Barger coined the term weblog in 1997 (Dibbell, 2002), social networking platforms such as Facebook and the even earlier MySpace did not yet exist. Nobody was tweeting, and there were no online professional networks with the popularity and reach of LinkdIn. In 1990, free, easy-to-use software opened up the blogosphere to those internet users who were not sufficiently tech-savvy to code and create their own frequently updated websites. Within a few years the estimates of numbers of bloggers grew rapidly. In 2002, Paquet put the number of blogs online at half a million. By the time Bowers and Stoller (2005) published their report *Emergence of the Progressive Blogosphere: A New Force in American Politics*, they had observed a multiplication from seven to 14 million blogs in a six month period (March to August) during that year. Indeed, it was at the same time that blogging really began to garner recognition from and to converge (Jenkins, 2006) with mainstream media. In the 2004 U.S. presidential election, political bloggers became familiar talking heads and pundits in news media. Breaking news reports from the Asian Tsunami in 2004 were first documented online and bloggers stepped in when Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005, when Katrina effectively prevented the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* newspaper from being printed and distributed. In response, Nola.com, the newspaper's blog site, became not only a source of news but also directly involved in the life-saving efforts of rescue squads (Niles, 2005). The newspaper later received a Pulitzer Prize in breaking news for the storm coverage provided by the bloggers. The London Underground Bombings in July 2005 were also live-documented by bloggers when traditional media could not reach the location quickly.

By 2008, blog tracking and ranking site Technorati was indexing more than 100 million blogs (Background, Technorati). Despite the attention given to small numbers of blogs, and the proliferation of the blogosphere, the vast majority of blogs online were personal journal style blogs with tiny readerships (Lovink, 2007) sites forming a "long tail" of blog culture (Anderson, 2006 in Walker Rettberg, 2014).

Before There Were Blogs

Without the infrastructure of the internet (developed in academic and military institutions in the 1960s) and the platform of the World Wide Web (an information sharing model – a system of linked documents – that sits on top of the network of the internet, first proposed by Tim Berners-Lee in 1990), there would be no blogs. Indeed, broader public online activity and creativity was facilitated by the production and release of the first web browsers in the early 1990s. Using a web browser in this way, people with computers and access to an internet connection could view web pages and move between them with hyperlinks. Those who learned HTTP (the ability to transfer files) and HTML (the basic code used to create web pages) could create their own content online. Early user-created web content included personal home pages, fan-fiction

(Jenkins, 2006), and interactive spaces and communities such as MUDs (Multiuser Domain or Dimension) and MOOs (Multiuser Dimensions, Object-Oriented).

Rheingold (2000) wrote about his own experience with an early online community, WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link), which began in 1985 even before browsers gave the broader public access to this and other communities. Rheingold presented a vision of these online spaces as those filled with possibility and personal reward; he described MUDs, for instance, as spaces where "magic is real and identity is fluid" (p. 149). He identified the risk that tempered this vision in terms of the potential for addiction to participation in online communities and environments at the expense of offline life and responsibilities. In a new edition Rheingold (2000) wrote that this work represented his response to a public image of online culture that "only socially crippled adolescents would use the Internet to communicate with other people" (p. 324). Polarized discussions have been common since the earliest constructions of and participation in online culture (Fisher & Wright, 2001), and the utopian perspective of Rheingold and other enthusiasts has been accompanied by critique that instead of fostering and nurturing communities and democracy, participation online actually produces fragmentation (Barber, 1998). In another example of critique, Nakamura (2002) argues that the potential for identity play so lauded by Rheingold, can alternatively be described as "identity tourism" (p. 54) wherein individuals play with race, and Ow (2000) describes the title of Rheingold's book, *Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, as representative of a (problematic) romantic vision of colonization and "civilizing" (p. 61).

Lovink (2007) identified the "culmination" of the early phase of euphoria and speculation in internet culture as occurring with "dot.com mania" (p. x). During the late 1990s, the internet was a hot topic in the pressroom and the boardroom. The subsequent bust early in the new century dramatically altered the landscape. Lovink (2007) suggested that the lesson learned from the crash was that "people do not flock to the Web for e-commerce, but for conversation" (p. xix). Blogging emerged into the mainstream following this bust, a frontrunner of what eventually became defined as Web 2.0: a suite of technologies including blogs, Wikis, photo sharing sites such as Flickr, and other early social networking sites heralded for their communicative and interactive capacities and as sites for personal expression. In this way, blogging has not emerged, fully-formed, fresh from the ether. Blogs have precedents in earlier web-content such as personal home pages and communicative formats like discussion boards and online communities. Furthermore, as I describe in the next chapter, blogging has also been understood in terms of traditions of offline genres of writing; from personal diary writing to newspaper journalism.

Key Terms and Definitions

Blog & blogging.

The term weblog, as I have already noted, is usually credited to Jorn Barger, a blogger himself, who drew together web (World Wide Web) and log (a record, like a ship's log) (Dibbell, 2002). Early blogs were generally compilations of links with brief commentary, pointing users to places of interest online and often, with a technology of internet culture focus (e.g. Slashdot[2]). Following the introduction of free, easy-to-use, software, blog numbers exploded, and the content and style of blogs diversified. Individuals without coding skills or an interest in technology took to the web, and personal journals proliferated. Early commentaries classified blogs by type, distinguishing between 'filter blogs' (the earlier style of link-based blogs with brief commentary); personal journal blogs (with longer-form, text-heavy entries about

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[2] Slashdot was an early blog of this kind. https://slashdot.org/

everyday life); and sometimes other types of blogs such as the K-log (knowledge-based blog) or topic driven blog (Blood, 2002; Walker Rettberg, 2014).

In 2003, the Oxford English Dictionary included the words blog and weblog. Blogs were defined as containing “daily musings about news, dating, marriage, divorce, children, politics in the Middle East or millions of other things or nothing at all"; and Weblog was defined as: "A frequently updated web site consisting of personal observations, excerpts from other sources, etc., typically run by a single person, and usually with hyperlinks to other sites; an online journal or diary (OED 2003 cited in boyd, 2006, n.p.). Walker, a blogger and author of early scholarship on blogging (Mortensen & Walker, 2002) provided the following, often-cited definition of blog:

> Most weblogs use links generously, allowing readers to follow conversations between weblogs by following links between entries on related topics. Readers may start at any point of a weblog, seeing the most recent entry first, or arriving at an older post via a search engine or a link from another site, often another weblog. Once at a weblog, readers can read on in various orders: chronologically, thematically, by following links between entries or by searching for keywords. Weblogs also generally include a blogroll, which is a list of links to other weblogs the author recommends. Many weblogs allow readers to enter their own comments to individual posts. (Walker, 2005, p. 45)

Blogs and blogging are often talked about in the context of umbrella terms such as Web 2.0 (O’Reilly, 2005 & 2006), and social networking sites/ social media (boyd & Ellison, 2007). boyd (2009) described social media as “the latest buzzword in a long line of buzzwords…often used to describe the collection of software that enables individuals and communities to gather, communicate, share and in some cases to collaborate or play” (para. 2).

In this project I draw a distinction between blogs as texts and blogging as a practice. In simplistic terms, ‘blogging’ can be understood as the practice of producing a blog. boyd (2006) referenced the first OED definition of blog as a verb: “To write or maintain a weblog. Also: to read or browse through weblogs, esp. habitually…To blog is to be part of a community of smart, tech-savvy people who want to be on the forefront of a new literary undertaking" (OED, 2003 cited in boyd, 2006, n.p.). This highlights the link between the activity of blogging and identity of a blogger as both an individual and member of a community.

Value

Value, as I have already noted, is a slippery concept. The understanding of value that I bring to this project is relational and contingent. By this, I mean that understandings of the value of something often involves an actual or imagined comparison. In this way, value is determined in relation to something else. One way to think about this is to examine what is being exchanged for the cultural product: to imagine in what form/s its worth is being measured. In Chapter Three of this thesis I explore different ways of conceptualizing value in blog culture. Also importantly, as Corner (1994) and Nelson (2006) argued, evaluations are often comparative in that cultural products are rated in relation to one another. In order for something to be valued, something else needs to be devalued. Value, as I understand it in this way, is not intrinsic; it is socially and culturally constructed, contingent and, at times, contentious (Herrnstein Smith, 1983 & 1988).

My approach to studying value as diverse, contingent and contentious resonates with Hall’s (1992) approach towards cultural studies as a “set of unstable formations” (p.248). The recognition of instability suggests – as I will describe in further detail – research that works with complexity and what Hall (1992) describes as “dirtiness” (p.248), rather than attempting to corral or sanitize it with a unified and unifying approach. The goal of a project like this is to contribute to understanding, to move towards theoretical gains (p.290) rather than to provide neat answers and explanations.

Thesis Outline

Chapter Two is a review of scholarly literature concerned with blogging. This chapter takes a broadly historical approach, tracking the development of blogging scholarship. The review begins with early perspectives on blogging from early adopters in online culture studies, many of them acafans (scholars who are also bloggers); and considers some of the dominant arguments as scholarly interest in blogs and blogging expanded. Following from this, I outline three emergent approaches to studying blogging: work focusing on the discussions and narratives of bloggers as they make sense of their practices; work identifying the different applications and uses of blogs and blogging; and emerging critical perspectives on blogging. In the third and final section, I describe the emerging scholarly literature and outline some of the major themes in current media reports about blogging and social media practices. The aim of this literature review is to outline some of the dominant theories and observations of blog culture in scholarly work. Furthermore, as this project has been ongoing over several years, these ideas are linked with the development of my own perspective, as I outline throughout the literature review.

In Chapter Three I present the conceptual and theoretical framework informing my analysis in this project. I further explain my approach to the concept of value as contingent (Herrnstein-Smith, 1983, 1988) and contextually specific. Following a dialogic and multi-stranded theoretical approach suggested by this conceptualization of value, I outline four discursive contexts for imagining blogging and, specifically, for evaluating blogs and blogging practices. First, focusing on blogging as textual production, and blogs as texts, I take up the idea of genre as a discursive framework for classification and evaluation. Next, I outline a strategy for thinking about blogging as participation in a popular culture scene. Here, I think about how value might operate as cultural, social (Bourdieu, 1986), and subcultural capital (Thornton, 1997) in a scene where individuals negotiate social roles, hierarchies, and scripts for behavior (Irwin, 1973, 1977). The third context for thinking about value takes up Foucault's theory of Technologies of the Self (1988), in order to examine how blogging might act as an early twenty-first century practice of self-care and management (McGee, 2005; Ouelette & Hay, 2007). Finally, I outline an approach for thinking about blogging in a neoliberal flexible economy, as a strategy either for the direct production of wealth or for the actualization of contextually-characteristic professional outcomes.

Chapter Four outlines the methods I have employed in this project, and the epistemological and methodological underpinnings of these choices and strategies. The project is informed by a constructionist approach (Crotty, 1998), and is also characterized by commitments to producing knowledge that is situated (Haraway, 1988) and reflexive (Alevesson & Skoldberg, 2009). This is qualitative research comprising multiple rounds of thematic and discourse analysis of data produced through focus groups and interviews with nineteen Calgary-based bloggers.

Chapter Five is the first of three findings and analysis chapters. Here, I draw on earlier research (Bakardjieva & Gaden 2012a, 2012b) by examining the ways in which the bloggers I spoke with talked about the value of blogging as a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988). Through this analysis, I identify two ways of talking about blogging as self-help: in the context of psychological well-being and also in the context of individual agency for the pursuit of personal and professional success.

In Chapter Six, I pay particular attention to the ways in which my participants talked about value in the context of the blog as a text. I examine the conventions and standards that the participants identified as characteristic of blogs and blogging as hallmarks of a genre, and in particular those identified as specifically valuable attributes. While these assertions might be construed as mere matters of taste or preference, I tie them to existing discourses and hierarchies of literary value, cultural value, and self-management. Chapter Seven is the final chapter of findings and analysis. Here, I examine the formation and operation of cultural, subcultural and social capital through discourses of expertise, authenticity, and usefulness. These forms of capital are acquired and maintained through careful strategies of self-presentation and interaction with others. Following this, I compare the discourse of professional ambition among the bloggers I spoke with later developments in blog culture. Finally, in the concluding chapter, Chapter Eight: Pros and Cons, I synthesize these findings, recognize both the potential contributions and limitations of my study, and present some suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review - On Blogging

Introduction

In this literature review, I outline the emergence of scholarly work on blogging, from the work of early adopters (many of whom were bloggers themselves) who set out to define and make sense of these texts and practices; through closer and more critical perspectives; to contemporary perspectives and insights into blog culture (as part of a pervasive and ubiquitous social media culture). This work has informed the development of my own perspective and concerns about blog culture. Indeed, I have been working alongside the emergence of much of this work and my own perspective has incorporated the developments and shifts in these arguments over this time.

In the first part of this chapter, I outline some early work on blogging, where scholars sought to make sense of blog texts and blog practices, often in relation to existing genres of writing. Other work focuses on trying to understand the motivations of bloggers and the composition and conventions of the blogosphere. In the next section, I focus on two areas: first, to consider the findings of small-scale projects that take a closer and more personal look at the experiences and understandings of bloggers and blog readers (Brake, 2007; Karlsson, 2007; Reed, 2005); and, second, emerging critical perspectives on blogging (Dean, 2010; Keren, 2006; Lovink, 2007). In the third and final section of this review, I look to some of the more recent perspectives on blogging, both in scholarship and media commentary, which consider shifts in blog culture and explore the emergence of increased practices of monetization and professionalization among bloggers.

Early Perspectives

Early adopters and 'Acafans'

By the turn of the last century, free, easy-to-use, blogging software facilitated the growth in numbers of blogs as well as a diversification in terms of blog content and style. Discussions about this new phenomenon, initially mostly online, proliferated. In Weblogs: A History and Perspective blogger Rebecca Blood (2000) gives a comprehensive description of this development, from the construction and adoption of the term weblog; to an outline of the common features of weblogs resulting in an argument based on an observation of her own experiences for the significance of the practice of blogging and the texts of blogs. Blood followed this essay with the publication of a comprehensive how-to guide to blogging: *The Weblog Handbook: A Guide to Creating and Maintaining your Blog* (2002). In this extended format she develops several of the ideas from her initial essay: blogging, she posits here, is defined by its "format and method" (p. 39) and it is a mode of "personal expression" (p. 40). For the reader, blogs can be useful filters for the cacophony of media many of us are bombarded with in modern, wealthy, high-tech cultures (p. 12). She suggests that blogging supports media literacy and knowledge production for both bloggers and blog readers. Furthermore, bloggers develop skills of self-expression; and stand to learn the nature of their subjectivity and their potential to educate and influence others. With an enthusiasm that recalls Rheingold's (2000) advocacy for earlier online communities, Blood (2002) asserts that blogs and the practice of blogging, build better writers, self-awareness, critical thinkers, reputations, and connected businesses. The hallmarks of a superior blog were, she explained "point of view, discrimination in choosing links, and the life experience of the writer...a weblog's quality is ultimately based on the authenticity of its voice" (p. 59).

Many of the academics who wrote and spoke about blogging in its early days were, themselves also participants in the blogosphere. One way of identifying these scholars is as Acafans (Jenkins, 2006), those who brought their interests and participation in virtual environments together with their scholarly work. Mortensen and Walker (2002) examine how they used their own blogging practices in terms of their scholarly research, looking at "what weblogs do to our academic thinking" (p. 251). Blogs, they found, embody a balance between public and private domains and discourse. They are at once "enclosed and private spaces that allow the writer to cultivate an autonomous voice. And yet they are visible, open spaces that encourage linking and conversations" (p. 260). In some ways, blogs challenge the conventions of academic work. They are open to broader audiences, less intimidating, and are published and commented on at the click of a keyboard. On the other hand, the rigorous etiquette of linking and connecting to sources is reminiscent of scholarly citation (p. 261). In this way, the authors described blogging as transformative of existing genres and practices of writing, emphasizing a positive effect of blogging for scholarly production. In particular, Mortensen and Walker (2002) emphasize that blogs shrink the distance between researcher and researched, disrupting traditional modes of scholarly address and communication and, subsequently, traditional power dynamics.

Mortensen and Walker also identify specific characteristics of blogs as defining characteristics, and link these hallmarks of blogs with the communicative capacity of the internet. Blogs differ from web diaries; they explain, because of their links to other sites online, elements "vital to the genre" (p. 264). These links construct connections with other texts and sites online, facilitating "polylogues" which make discussions and conversations "easy to follow and…easy to continue" (p. 264). As such, they are interstitial, forming part of larger chains of discussion and thought for the writer and reader. Blogs, they argue, can be spontaneous texts, written on the fly, often without editing, challenging personal expectations that writing ought to be "perfect and polished" (p. 266).

Another key characteristic is the chronological order of blogs. On a blog, the most recent post appears first, and an argument or discussion can be returned to, and added to, over multiple posts, as well as in the comments section. Blogs are thus necessarily incomplete texts "always in progress, always becoming" (p. 267). Later in the essay, the authors returned to the idea of defining or common characteristics or "topoi", and identified the following characteristics: recall of past experience in the context of a gained insight; links and credit to a source; linkslutting; memes; contemplation metareflection about blogging, linking and popularity; and reflection upon one's own motivations to write, as the "formulae of blog" (p. 270). In this way, the hallmarks of blogging identified by Mortensen and Walker demonstrate a combination of formal elements (links, reverse chronological order) and elements/values associated with the specific practice of blogging: (e.g. communication with others; presentation of incomplete and imperfect work; and reflexivity).

When it comes to deciding what a "good" blog looks like, Mortenesen and Walker point to Evan Williams' trifecta of "Frequency, Brevity, and Personality" (2011). They argue that quality is "not a satisfactory or practical measure" (2002, p. 271), in a community so large that it is impossible to assess or compare all blogs. It is easier to measure popularity, in terms of links[3], and to talk about blog groups, the most well-known of which is known as "the A-list…a cluster

[3] At the time of writing, Mortensen & Walker note that statistics on readership are "untrustworthy and not publicly verifiable" (p.271). With the advent of statistics generators such as Google Analytics this has, of course, changed.

of early adaptors to weblog technology, some of the creators of popular software" (p. 272), in order to assess the quality of a blog. These popular blogs are not marked by style, they suggest, but "through persistence: writing a fairly interesting weblog over time increases the chance of being read, linked to and 'blogged' by others" (p. 272).

The relationships and connections between individuals in a cluster led Mortensen and Walker to a nascent discussion of social networks, where they make observations that might seem predictive when we think about the prevalence of social networks and social media a decade after their observations. The writers highlight the social nature of blogging, again pointing to the practice of linking, both as marker of relationships and popularity and, as discussed above, becoming an indicator of quality. Mortensen and Walker (2002) endorse and echoed Blood's (2000) narrative of self-discovery and development through the practice, finding blogging to be an "excellent method for developing and sustaining a confident and clear voice of one's own and the ability to formulate and stand by opinions" (p. 269). This essay was formative in the development of my earlier graduate work on blogging (Gaden, 2005), where I explored the potential of blogging for the work and experiences of feminist academics. Following from Mortensen and Walker and Blood, I was optimistic about the potential of blogging, specifically as a practice free from the restrictions and hierarchies imposed (as I understood it) by editors and institutions.

Biography (2003): Online Lives

In the introduction to Online Lives, Zuern (2003) draws from Lejeune's (2000) pioneering work on online diaries, recalling how Lejeune was at first skeptical about online diaries but that following his immersion in them as a reader, he came to understand that the self was not "a timeless essence that has been altered by disastrous technological / progress, and that it has always been shaped by the evolution of media" (Lejeune, 2000 cited in Zuern, 2003, pp. vi-vii). In the contributions to this special issue of *Biography,* Zuern identifies a process of mutual shaping between cultures of online life writing and the network environment. In this, Zuern notes an interesting coming together between "strategies of conveying authenticity, sincerity, and honesty in a medium with a reputation for role-playing and out-and-out deception" (p. xiii). At this time, some of the more exciting practices online revolved around virtual environments such as MUDS where the potential for playfulness with identity had been emphasized. Online diaries, as Zuern observes, purported to do something quite different. They offered a look inside the 'real' life of a 'real' person. This edition of *Biography,* presents an early collection of scholarship on online diaries and blogs, work that opens up some of the ways that academics were grappling with and making sense of these texts and practices.

McNeill's (2003) essay Teaching an Old Genre New Tricks: The Diary on the Internet presents an examination of her personal response to blogs as a reader. In an opening section, titled 'confession', she admits that "something about the online journal and its generic cousin the Weblog, or blog, makes me distinctly uncomfortable" (p. 24). She locates the source of her discomfort in two things: the level of personal revelation in blogs and an assessment of literary shortcomings. For McNeill, this response is tied to the merging of two worlds: the traditional form of the print diary with the vehicle of the internet and its inherent public quality. Contemplating her assessment of blogs, McNeill finds that she has "brought my book culture values to bear on texts not meant to be read in this way" and is therefore "drawn to Web diaries that most closely resemble traditional literary texts" (p. 25). She equates personal revelation and "unbridled narcissism" (p.25), a characteristic she identified as stereotypically associated with diaries and reinforced through her reading experience online. Indeed the public arena of web diaries and blogs served, for her, to “super-size” the narcissism. These features of diaries appear to be “essential to the Weblog” (p. 29) in McNeill’s assessment.

Kitzmann (2003) takes up this tendency to connect blogging or online diary writing with traditional, offline, ‘written’ diaries. He suggests that these adaptive approaches, although initially persuasive, are ultimately culturally deterministic and, can produce an antagonistic and false dichotomy between new and old so that:

> One medium is pitted against the other, with the inevitable result of one being championed either as victor – celebrating the advent of a more advanced technology of communication - or victim – lamenting the loss of a prior “authentic” mode of expression. (p. 49)

In contrast to this approach, Kitzmann (2003) argues for attention “to the material and experiential conditions of self-documentation” (p. 49) and the role of technology in social and cultural changes. Furthermore, Kitzmann argues for the comparison between online and written diaries without stratification. He contends that practices of self-documentation are culturally and socially contextual and proposes four core concepts: identity, privacy, reality, and time, in order to explore the conditions and preoccupations of online diarists and self-documenters. Like traditional diaries, online forms of self-documentation can serve as an aid to memory (on both individual and cultural levels), and also act as an “avatar” literally standing in place for the writer. Privacy, he suggests, is “ultimately about control: the ability to regulate the level of access that the “outside world has to one’s personal property, body, or thoughts” (p. 55). Web-based diarists might regulate or control privacy by *allowing* access to their thoughts and space. Web diaries, then, are not private documents, but are tools for communication, and for community participation. Furthermore, Kitzmann argues that these diaries fetishize an adherence to reality, especially in relation to liveness, which itself contributes to an emphasis on the present. In these ways Kitzmann finds points of commonality between on and offline diaries, but also demonstrates a number of significant departures between them.

Like Kitzmann and McNeill, Sorapure (2003) compares online diaries with print diaries, and she also positions online diaries "alongside" commercial and mass-entertainment web content (p. 1). In this essay, she identifies an interesting tension in the interactive capacity of online diaries. While the diaries she examines invited and were invested in maintaining interactions - joining webrings, engaging in collaborative writing, linking and commenting - she also found evidence of discomfort with the potential for individuals the diarist knew in real life to read these texts. To this end, a number of her subjects asked their readers to inform them if a real life friend or family member was reading the diary. Sorapure also contrasts the structure of online and offline diaries and the associated diary-reading experiences. Print diaries are intended to be read in a linear way, whereas online diaries can, and often are, read in reverse order, read in thematic sections (through the use of keywords or tags), or even randomly by dabbling through the archives. These methods of reading might produce quite a different experience and interpretation, resulting in "a somewhat different diary and a somewhat different impression of the writer" (p. 15). Sorapure addresses this comparison from the perspective of the text, the writer, and the reader. Indeed, each of these essays in this collection links blogs and online diaries with print diaries even when, as Kitzmann (2003) does, they emphasize the potential problems of doing so. These texts demonstrate how scholars, in trying to make sense of blogging, have linked the production and existence of blogs to already-established offline practices of diary keeping, and other established genres on and offline.

Into the blogosphere: Genre

Another early collection of scholarship on blogging, *Into the Blogsophere* (Gurak et al., 2004) was published online during the onset of popular blogging. Spanning over 20 contributions, this collection examines specific formal aspects such as hyperlinking (Jarett, 2004) and the visual design of blogs (Scheidt & Wright, 2004). Other contributions take up a similar approach to the one I identified above: making sense of blogs and blogging through comparison with established genres, while outlining defining characteristics (e.g. Blanchard, 2004; Gallo, 2004; Himmer, 2004; Lampa, 2004).

Following from the emphasis on defining blogging in relation to existing genres that I observed in the work I have described thus far, I pay particular attention to Miller and Shepherd's (2004) contribution, Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog for its emphasis upon these themes. In this essay, the authors applied Miller's (1984) earlier, influential work on genre to the emerging texts and practices of blogging. Their perspective emphasizes the "peculiar" intersection between public and private in blogging. Avoiding either defining blogging as something completely innovative or derivative, Miller and Shepherd describe how the emergence of blogging is enmeshed in both old and new forms: "The blog is a new rhetorical opportunity, made possible by technology that is becoming more available and easier to use, but it was adopted so quickly and widely that it must be serving well established rhetorical needs" (p. 1). Like Kitzmann (2003), they insist on paying attention to context in their assessment of the phenomenon of blogging. The significant cultural moment they identified was the late 1990s., which, they suggested, was marked by a weakening of the distinction between public and private and an extension of celebrity culture into the broader public sphere. It was also characterized by a cultural interest both in self-disclosure and mediated voyeurism; of sharing as well as consuming often revealing personal information about others and their personal lives, especially via the Internet.

In terms of defining and classifying blogs, Miller and Shepherd (2004) find that content plays an important role: there is often an expectation of nonfiction content, and especially in personal journal blogs where the content is expected to represent the everyday life of the blogger. In filter blogs this dynamic is no less true, as the content represents bloggers' freedom "of selection and presentation" (n.p.). Miller and Shepherd identify the following characteristics as defining features of blogs: reverse chronology, frequent updates, the combination of links and personal content, dated entries, the facility to comment on individual posts, and the use of the present tense (conveying a sense of immediacy). However, they note, the findings of other studies (e.g. Herring et al., 2004) do not necessarily back up these assumptions. Those findings suggest that not all (or even most) blogs use external links nor are blogs as frequently updated as one might expect**.** This raises the important question of "whether we should define a genre by an idea or by the mean, by expectation or by experience" (Miller and Shepherd, 2004). Furthermore, Miller and Shepherd draw attention to a hierarchy of bloggers, or at least the presence of 'celebrity' or 'A-list' bloggers, whose success is often measured by their wide readership and the desire of other bloggers to "be noticed by (i.e. blogged by) them" (n.p.), in contrast with a majority of unread and unlinked blogs. The bind, they argue, is that while "we should not define a genre by its failed examples, even if they are a majority…at the same time we must be open to the possibility that there may be multiple forms of success" (n.p). I find this an especially significant point in the sense that it hints toward possible inconsistencies between how blogging is conceptualized and how it might be experienced. In this study, I am concerned with whether my participants identify shared expectations of an ideal, and how these relate to the way that they describe their individual experiences.

In the next section of their discussion Miller and Shepherd consider blogging as ‘pragmatic action’ and identify two central strands to the purpose of blogging: self-expression and community development. Taking up Foucault’s (1988) theory of Technologies of the Self, they describe self-expression through blogging as a way in which bloggers might enhance their self-awareness and confirm their “already-held beliefs” (Miller & Shepherd, 2005, n.p.), clarifying and validating their sense of self via self-disclosure. Further, they identified another way that self-disclosure is used as an external, directed outward strategy to “build connections with others or to manipulate their opinions” (n.p.). Miller and Shepherd argue that it is the personal quality of the blog that both motivates and satisfies readers and writers, and that this quality is the element that will have “particular evolutionary survival value” (n.p.). The “generic exigence” of the blog is thus, they say, “some widely shared recurrent need for cultivation and validation of the self” (n.p.).

The preliminary scholarship on blogging that I have described thus far has been instrumental in shaping of the conceptual and theoretical framework that I outline in the next chapter. From this body of literature I highlight three dominant discourses. First of these is the way that genre is taken up as a way of making sense of blogging. McNeil (2003) has especially drawn my attention to the ways in which existing and powerful hierarchies of value (personal revelation as narcissism and antithetic to literary value) might emerge in interpretations of blogging and assessments of blogs. Second, Kitzman (2003) and Miller and Shepherd (2004) highlighted an understanding of blogging as a practice of working on the self and as a particularly culturally situated project. Finally, these essays identify a number of ways in which the public and communicative aspect of blogging is significant and how hierarchies among bloggers (the recognition of the A-list) might emerge in terms of popularity.

Produsers

The terms produsage and produsers were coined by Bruns (2005) in the context of online news production. He later notes that "produsage happens well beyond this area" (Bruns, 2006, n.p.). Bruns goes on to connect the concept of produsage specifically with blogs (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006) and with online culture more generally (Bruns, 2008). The concept of produsage is situated in a shift from the Fordist mass production model of the industrial age to a new model for the information age characterized by individualization, personalization, customization, interaction, interactivity, and intercreativity (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006, p. 6). In this shift, the distinction between commercial producers and consuming audiences has been disrupted, resulting in a more dynamic engagement. Audiences become hybrid producers and users: produsers.

Bruns identified four key principles of produsage: open participation and communal evaluation; fluid heterarchy and ad hoc meritocracy; unfinished artefacts and continuing process; and common property with individual rewards (n.p.). Bruns and Jacobs (2006) draw a distinction between this conceptualization and Toffler's (1980) concept of the prosumer described as "little more than a well-informed consumer who nonetheless remains engaged only passively and may never actively engage in production and expression of new ideas" (p.6). In *Uses of Blogs* (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006), the contributors describe a variety of ways in which blogging has been taken up: from political and journalistic news blogging, corporate blogging, blogging as a tool for education and educators, and for expressions of identity and participation in identity-driven communities. In this way, blogging is repeatedly viewed in relation to an existing practice, through the lenses of journalism, education, learning, subcultural participation, and is understood in one sense as a hybrid of the original practice with blogging, much in the same way that blogging was described in the essays in *Online Lives* (Zuern, 2003) as a hybrid of traditional diary writing and blog technology. Similar to the way in which Bruns combines existing concepts in order to form a new conceptualization to describe blogging (and other aspects of Web 2.0); blogging has in this way often been understood in terms of what it can and cannot do to, often juxtaposed with and compared to existing genres and practices.

Rak: Disciplining the Subject

In an important intervention to this consensus, Rak (2005) draws attention to what we might be doing when we conceptualize blogging as a genre in relation to older genres of writing. Following Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1978), she contends that the imposition of a set of conventions and expectations from one genre onto another has something in common with how sexuality was constructed as "a 'new' object of inquiry for the 'new' science of the mind" (p. 169). This involves the disciplining of a subject:

> Just as sexuality itself was constructed by discourse as something which must be analyzed, so in this case autobiography critics are beginning to look at weblogs as something which must (however uncomfortably) be made subject to a print tradition of diary writing. (p. 170)

In contrast, Rak situates blogs in a tradition of internet-specific genres, and instead of emphasizing diary-like traits, focuses on the expression of self (bias and all) through links and commentary: "early bloggers saw themselves as part of a relatively cohesive community, with shared values about the meaning of the internet and the importance of the community they were building" (p. 171). Self-disclosure is part of the ideology of blogging, though it is often instrumental: deployed for the purposes of maintaining interest, creating trust, and encouraging readership (p.173). Here, Rak raises two points that are especially meaningful for this project: first, how the process of constructing and enacting conceptualizations of genre and generic ideals might act like a disciplinary process. Second, she foregrounds the operation of community values rather than generic ideals in blog culture, further suggesting to me the importance of thinking about value in terms of social capital as well as textual or literary value.

Studying Blogs: 2004-2006

In an early empirical study of blogs, Herring et al. (2004b) compared a content analysis of 203 blogs with popular rhetorical claims about the definition of blogs. Their findings pointed to an exaggeration of the interlinked, interactive nature of most blogs. In a later study of link patterns, references, and comments between blogs (Herring et al, 2005b), the researchers did find evidence of interconnection and conversation in the blogosphere, noting, interestingly, that A-listers "blogs link preferentially to A-list blogs" (p.10). Only approximately one quarter of the blogs they located had *any* out-bound links:

> All of the available evidence thus suggests that less-connected (or unconnected) blogs represent the majority of blogs available on the Web today…it seems likely that the much-touted textual conversation that all of the blogosphere is supposed to be engaged in involves a minority of blogs as well, and sporadic activity even among those blogs. (p. 10)

Schiano, Nardi, Gumbrecht and Swartz (2004) conducted an ethnographic study of blogging as personal expression and communication and similarly found that the majority of the blogs and bloggers they studied did not show a high level of interactivity, and that most had a "fairly small set of regular readers" (p. 1144). Despite this, in another study Nardi et al. (2004a) described blogging as a "social activity…blogs create the audience, but the audience creates the blog" (p. 224). This is important as these studies highlight the way in which the discourse of interactivity has gained traction despite it not being representative of the majority of blogs. Therefore, comments and links might be understood as signs of 'success' in terms of popularity and (as Mortensen and Walker described), and make it easier to quantify as quality than more slippery understandings of textual value. Following from this, Marlow's (2006) study of linking practices among bloggers connects this with the generation of social capital. He found,

> a strong relationship between investment in the weblog and payoff in terms of audience size and feedback…these data show that the weblog community rewards the author who puts time into their work, and that the length of one's blogging history does not solely determine their future audience. In this case, it is the hard workers who get richer, not the previously rich. (p.17)

From this study, Marlow identified two forms of blogging tied to professional and social motivations:

> Professional bloggers, in the minority, tended to have larger audiences and weaker social relations with their audiences. Social bloggers, on the other hand, had smaller audiences but more multiplex relationships… social bloggers were associated with the creation of social capital through online means while professional authors did not share this phenomenon. (p.17)

In Women and Children Last: The Discursive Construction of Weblogs Herring et al. (2004a) identify an interesting feature of the attention paid to different types of blogs and bloggers. They found that the preponderance of public discourse about blogging focused on filter blogs and male bloggers. Personal journal blogs (making up the bulk of the blogosphere), which are produced predominantly by women and youth, did not garner the same kind of attention and recognition (p. 12). There is a tension, they suggest, between this finding and discourses of blogging that are steeped in the language of democracy, equality, and empowerment. In Gender and Genre Variation in Weblogs, Herring and Paolillio (2006a) focused in more detail on how sub-genres in blogging have been gendered:

> Diary writing has traditionally been associated with females, and politics and external events, the mainstays of filter blogs, have traditionally been masculine topics…previous research shows that females write more diary blogs, and males write a disproportionate number of filter blogs. (p. 15)

The studies presented above strongly shaped my initial interest in the question of value and blog culture. They highlight the importance of paying attention to how stratifications are hierarchical, and to what kinds of texts and practices are recognized in blog culture. Furthermore, they highlight a conflation between recognition and value, signifying both the recognition of certain kinds of texts as exemplars of a genre, and the role of visibility or popularity as a sign of value. These are the studies that shaped my understanding of the way in which discourses of value might operate within multiple discursive contexts. Studies such as Schiano et al.'s (2004) highlighted for me the importance of examining claims about blog culture (such as the recurring discourse of interactivity) with empirical studies. Following from this, in the next section I detail further small-scale qualitative studies with bloggers and blog-readers, studies that demonstrate the significance of interrogating even more deeply, motivations, relationships, and identities of those in this cultural milieu. In this section, I also look at the emergence of critical perspectives on blogging, drawing on work that represents an important and significant counterpoint to the optimism of some earlier accounts. Further, I consider work that also raises the significance of paying attention to the operation of economic interests in texts and practices of blog culture.

Experiences in Blog culture & Criticism of Blog Culture

Looking closely: participants in blog culture.

In this project, I follow Brake's (2007) argument for the importance of paying attention to conversations with bloggers rather than solely relying on the analysis of blog texts: "While it may be possible to infer motivations and understandings of a practice from the product of those practices, it seems more fruitful to start with the reflexive accounts of those involved in the practice themselves" (p. 2). In his study, Brake investigated the often complex and contradictory relationship between bloggers and their audiences, conducting in-person interviews with individuals who wrote personal journal style blogs. There, he found that bloggers he spoke with expressed complex views about audience: some of the participants wrote for a specific, known, group while others wrote for a specific kind of imagined reader. He found that bloggers could even be "indifferent or even hostile to other readers" (p. 4). In these instances, Brake found that participants preferred to imagine that unwanted readers simply did not exist. Furthermore, despite arguments to the contrary from some participants in his study, Brake found that the bloggers he interviewed were not necessarily always looking for meaningful debate with their readers, rather that "the most they sought from readers was praise for their efforts or agreement with their views…they were happy just to know there *were* readers" (p. 6). He tied the attribution of value to comments (as a sign of readership), to powerful media discourses that stressed the significance of interactivity on the internet.

In a similarly qualitative account, Reed (2005) carried out an ethnographic study of UK bloggers. In this project he explored how producers see their blogs as substitutes or extensions of themselves, similar to the 'avatar' suggested by Kitzmann (2003) research. The bloggers he studied, presented "a life of a sovereign subject who has a continuous identity and a coherent history" (p. 226). They also claimed to put themselves forward "unreservedly" in their blogs (p. 227). Reed identified an intriguing contradiction in these reports: on one hand "weblogs are viewed as a space in which persons can be themselves, free of constraints and able to say what they think and feel about everyone around them" (p. 230), while on the other, he noted that "there are always aspects of the subject that remain outside or beyond the text, impressions that they cannot or do not want to post. What is censored and why seems to obey no coherent rule" (p. 230). The contradiction Reed identifies here is between a discourse of value centered on individual freedom and another on self-censorship.

Reed's study also revealed a tension in his participants' descriptions of the value of readers, finding that "individuals hold that the most important visitor to the text is the blogger" (p. 230), while at the same time "knowing that others visit the weblog is a large part of what motivates the individual to keep posting" (p. 231). Interestingly, and similar to Brake's findings, Reed's participants complained about people they know reading their blogs and said that they don't usually advertise their blog with friends/family/colleagues as "it restricts what can be said" (p. 232). When people they know, are aware of and read the blog it changes its character from an informal 'brain dump' to a formal writing exercise (p. 233). In contrast to friends and family, other bloggers emerged as the ideal reader. Significantly, especially in comparison with the strategy of ranking blog quality according to popularity, Reed observed that among his participants there was a common critique of practices designed to increase readership among bloggers:

> At the heart of much criticism of weblog celebrity is a perceived alteration in the work that bloggers do. Instead of focusing on the act of 'doing it' (keeping a journal), many argue that individuals devote most of their time and energy to how they might best attract more recipients. The assertion is made that bloggers are increasingly motivated by a desire for self-publicity. Privately, individuals accuse each other of using strategies cynically conceived to attract traffic. (p. 237)

Furthermore, the acquisition of readership also came with its own problems, and the most well-known bloggers that he interviewed had the most complaints: "fame was not always welcome, they felt coerced by attention and messages: pressure to "please and entertain" (p. 237). In this instance, Reed highlights some significant contradictions in the discourses of bloggers, finding that claims of unreserved self-expression were tempered by descriptions of partial representations of self; and the desire for readers (and acknowledgment that popularity produced celebrity status) was appended with suspicion of those who achieve this rank and, for those that have, an exposition of the personal strain that comes from the demands (real or imagined) of an audience.

Turning the gaze towards the consumers of blogs, Karlsson's (2007) study paid attention to the consumption of online self-representations, focusing on the value that readers identified in reading personal blogs, along with the expectations of those readers. She found that blog-readers expect an authentic portrayal of self from a blogger: "My study shows that identity-play, common in many social spaces online, is not expected among this set of blog writers/readers" (p.

139). Karlsson not only studied blogs but also interviewed bloggers and blog readers over three years, finding that it was not only interactivity that was central to the innovation of blogs (e.g. Serfaty, 2004), but also "the possibilities for serial "real-time" consumption" (p.140), and the pleasure of following non-linear hypertext pathways through and among texts. Constant connection and availability, she wrote "is seen as the logic of the web" (p. 143) and, frequent updates are key for reader satisfaction because part of the pleasure of consumption of blog texts lies in their serial nature.

Citing Miller (2002), Karlsson (2007) identified a relational practice of reading for blog readers where they get to read along (or rather, 'live along') with the blogger. Her findings suggest that readers enjoy following the lives of people with whom they identify, and that the extended and ongoing duration of reading further increases this identification, with consistency emerging as "the most important check-up point for measuring the authenticity of the autobiographical self" (p. 149). Karlsson's study presents an important angle on blog culture, especially as I prepare for this study, particularly in its focus on a discussion of evaluation: both the identification of the value of reading blogs in the first place, and also the processes of evaluation of blogs that readers continuously engage in. Drawing from these and other qualitative studies with bloggers and other social media 'produsers' (e.g. Lomborg, 2013; Marwick & boyd, 2011) I identified in-depth and in-person discussions with bloggers as a useful strategy to engage with diverse discourses of value, and especially to identify and explore contradictions therein.

Criticizing blog culture.

In *Blogosphere*, Keren (2006) disputed a utopic vision of blogging as a practice of connection and empowerment. In this volume, he studied nine blogs from a variety of bloggers worldwide. In contrast to the studies presented here thus far, Keren remained skeptical about the actual authenticity of bloggers' self-representations, noting that we do not know the 'true' identity of bloggers through their blogs. He contends, "The person presented in the diary may be in part or in full a fictional character and for all practical purposes ought to be treated as such" (p. 7). Keren identified his approach as rooted in studies of literature connecting his textual analysis with an understanding of blogging as a form of lifewriting (p. 7).

In the opening analysis of the book Keren revisited an earlier study (2004), identifying the 'politics of melancholy' as one route to achieve the goals of the 'emancipatory' trend within which he situates blogging (p. 9). To illustrate this, he identified the blog of Jason Kottke (an early 'A-list' blogger) as an exemplar case study. Keren found Kottke's blog to be an example of melancholy, the characteristics of which he identified as the "preference for virtual reality, formation of a cult-like community, and political passivity" (p. 12). "Cyberspace is an escape for many internet users" (p. 13), he argued, and a blogger like Kottke can find refuge in this environment. His followers hang anxiously on his every post, and respond enthusiastically to the blogger's representation of self as a 'loser'. Ultimately, Keren described the connections among bloggers as a kind of false consciousness:

> Strangers linking to each other's web sites develop emotional bonds not because of any human contact between them but because of their very participation in the same endeavor at the same time. This is a new version of collectivism – a community feeling love while remaining estranged. (p. 17)

Blogging, Keren continued, invokes a kind of political passivity. Bloggers spend long hours in front of the computer with a belief in the "sheer mass" (p. 11) of blogging as an agent for political change. However, "deliberative democracy" requires deliberations between "active citizens rather than emotional bonds between the ephemerally situated and politically passive" (p. 21). In addition to a lack of confidence in the kind of 'real' political engagement and potential of blogging, Keren found that what has been seen as a 'blogging revolution' has actually been co-opted by the mainstream media and turned into a consumer product, thus further dismantling its revolutionary potential. Ultimately, he finds that bloggers are not empowered or liberated by their practices, which offer only a small in the form of the communities they find online.

While Keren writes as a political theorist with a literary bent, Lovink is a media critic and theorist, and founding director of the Institute of Network Cultures. Admitting to swings in his moods about the internet[4], *Zero Comments* (2007) is his third volume concerning critical internet culture. As I described in Chapter One, Lovink identified three phases of internet culture: the scientific pre-commercial phase pre-world wide web; the euphoric, speculative phase of the late 1990s after the internet opened up, culminating in the .dotcom bubble; and the time after this bubble burst, and post-9/11, a period that ended with the Web 2.0 bubble. The discourses of freedom and sharing, prevalent in web 2.0 culture, he explained, are actually left over from the attitude of the 1990's, a "rebel-business talk of change" (p. xiii) and blogging "closed the gap between internet and society…bloggers were the actual catalysts that realized the democratization, worldwide of the internet" (p. 4). However, despite this, Lovink identifies a more troubling side to blog culture: democratization can mean engaged citizens, and blogging

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[4] In his lecture at the European Graduate School on 'Blogging and Critical InternetInternet Culture' 2007. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PtW_ytU2j2U

has the potential to mobilize and legitimize the personal (p. 3), but what has actually emerged is a culture where: "blogs have become more of a rat race for maximum attention, measured in links and friends" (p. xxiv). Blogging, he remarks, has become a "nihilist venture" and blog entries are artifacts of cynical self-promotion, with the vast majority receiving little response ('zero comments'). Furthermore, Lovink questions the underlying economy where individuals give away content: "The core of internet ideology" he writes "makes us blind to what we actually pay, while overly happy to join the gift economy of the free" (p. xv). He argues that blogs will be simply be replaced in the same way they emerged and ended the dominance of the personal web page.

Following Lovink, in *Blog Theory* Dean (2010) studied the ways in which the culture around blogging operates with an ideology of empowerment – on the Left, a belief in political effectiveness - while at the same time siphoning away the labor and energy of the individuals who participate. Dean's central concept in this is the idea of communicative capitalism, taking the position that "contemporary communications media capture their users in intensive networks of enjoyment, production and surveillance" (pp. 3-4). In this context, creativity and resistance are *captured* "so as to enrich the few as it placates and diverts the many" (p. 4). This environment leaves the individual in a state of anxiety rather than empowerment. We are commanded to "enjoy, while also reminded that "we aren't enjoying enough, as much, or as well as others are and in this way our enjoyment remains fragile, risky" (p. 92). Dean's argument connects with the identification of 'Facebook Envy' and links drawn between social media use and depression through social comparison (Steers, Wickham, & Acitelli, 2014; Tandoc Jr, Ferruci, & Duffy, 2015). Every little action, whether it be an email, tweet, share, or like, writes Dean (2010) "accrues a tiny affective nugget, a little surplus enjoyment, a smidgen of attention, that attaches to it, making it stand out from the larger flow before it blends back in" (p. 95). Participating in this environment, she argues, finds us in an infinite loop where we circle around and around, missing our goals, but accruing this little satisfaction: from the *feeling* of being engaged (p. 121). Dean presents this feeling of engagement, of purpose and connection, as part of a trap "in circuits of drive" (p. 124), where, "with each click and intervention…we make a mark that can be traced, capitalized, and sold" (p. 124).

These critical perspectives present an important intervention into earlier discourses of democratization, engagement, and empowerment. They also connect with the development of my own perspective on blogging and social media more broadly. In the latter half of the last decade, the initial flurry of scholarly interest in blogging seemed to subside as an increasing number of social media applications and virtual environments emerged and garnered attention. At the 2007 Association of Internet Researchers conference, *Second Life*[5] was touted as an environment of (seemingly infinite) possibility, personal freedom, and creativity. Intrigued, my colleague Delia Dumitrica and I set about a collaborative autoethnographic study of the environment with a focus on exploring the potential for freedom and creativity when it came to representations and experiences of gender (Dumitrica & Gaden, 2009; Gaden & Dumitrica, 2011). We found that our experiences in *Second Life* were significantly constrained by the framework of the system, because of the limited options within, and without considerable technical skills or money, we could not be so creative with our avatars and navigation of the world. Furthermore, we found that our experiences were inevitably processed through our own gendered lenses. In terms of my ongoing work on blogging, this study highlighted the space between rhetoric (in the form of

[5] A 3D virtual environment: http://secondlife.com/

discourses of empowerment or critique and anxiety) and lived experiences. Additionally, it served as a reminder that although we might think of these environments (be they virtual worlds such as *Second Life* or a more loosely defined environment like 'the blogosphere'), as somehow separate and outside of our everyday embodied existence; that these experiences are informed, interpreted, and experienced by us, in '*real* life'. In the next, and final, section of this literature review, I follow from these critical approaches to blogging to examine scholarship and reports on blogging during more recent years, when monetization has become more prevalent in blog culture.

Professional Bloggers and the Monetization of Everyday Life

It is important to emphasize that the work I describe in this section did not inform my initial project design or data collecting (carried out 2007-2009). However, as the timeframe of my study has extended, I have brought some of these more recent observations and considerations about blog and social media culture to my analysis. I open this section with a review of some of the contributions to a follow-up issue of 'Online Lives' (Zuern & McNeil (Eds.), 2015). Following this, I expand upon early considerations of online journals, especially those themes around value and gender, focusing on the sub-genre of 'mommy blogs' (Morrison, 2011; Friedman, 2013). Finally, I address some contemporary ideas about personal blogs, identity and blogging, in the context of the commercialization of blogging and social media.

Revisiting Online Lives (2015).

In the introduction to Online Lives 2.0 Zuern and McNeill (2015) note the emergence of a plethora of autobiographical technologies online, from photo and micro blogging platforms such as Instagram[6] to the photo-sharing site Pinterest[7]. The contributors to this issue expand the understanding of autobiographical production online to include sites such as online games (Rak, 2015). Zuern and McNeill go on to observe that the conflation of public and private lives in web 2.0 practices of self-representation contributes to "a climate of exposure and risk in which identity becomes not only something we are constantly compelled to construct but also something we are constantly compelled to safeguard against threats to its integrity and security" (p. viii). Here, the editors observe a greater concern with the 'dark side' of the internet. Reflecting upon shifts in this culture, Zuern and McNeill identify two dominant frameworks for thinking about Web 2.0 from the time of their first collection of work on 'online lives': the web as a democratizing and open space and, second, as an "unseemly confessional that encouraged too much sharing by too many people" (p. xv). Online lifewriting, however, has since become commonplace, thus validating "the sharing of lives as a legitimate cultural practice…[creating] a desire to participate in the sharing" (p. xvi). Writing about the current state of affairs in 2015, despite their recognition of the risks and vulnerabilities attached to representations of self online, the editors were thus largely optimistic. They suggest that online lifewriting enables the interweaving of political discourses with everyday life narratives and that mobilization of online channels to connect people demonstrates "the potential of these media to create virtual spaces for public discourses that can transform social relations" (p. xiii).

When Sorapure (2015) revisited the sites of her 2003 study, she found that only four of the thirteen diaries that she studied were still online, and that only one has current entries. Diarist.net, the "vibrant online community" from which she drew her subjects "faded from the

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[6] https://www.instagram.com/
[7] https://www.pinterest.com/

web in 2008, and since then the domain has been for sale" (p. 267). Sorapure attributes the disappearance of sites like this to the advent of new SNS such as Facebook and Twitter and the presence of new genres for self-representation. Having brought her print-based methods and concepts for autobiography scholarship to those examples, and observing the changes and fragmentation of autobiography across so many different platforms online, Sorapure wondered to what extent those methods are still appropriate. She does not offer any firm suggestions, but comments on the increasing diversity of ways that we see selves represented in their (our) interactions with technologies, not only on SNS such as Facebook, or though blogging, but also through the use of self-monitoring technologies like the Fitbit or GPS (p.271). Kitzmann (2015), on the other hand, expressed some surprise that there have not been as many changes in online autobiographical production since his 2003 essay as he thought there might have been. He does however note the prevalence of mobile 'lifelogging': that representations of self no longer have to be produced while an individual is tethered to a desktop computer (p. 273). He suggests that the motivations of participants to document their lives online have not changed, and he identifies these motivatiosn as a "genuine" desire for community, " the satisfaction gained from sharing experiences and ideas with a wider audience, and the long-standing, perhaps universal need for self-expression and creativity" (p. 274).

The Self, monetization, and misrepresentation.

Morrison's (2011) study on the culture of mommy blogs draws upon qualitative surveys with mommy bloggers and extensive experience in the genre herself. Here, Morrison found that personal mommy blogging communities tend to be small, and that participants network with one another directly in order to maintain the boundaries of the community. She found that this kind of blogging "is marked by direct emotional reciprocity among its participants, creating strong bonds of trust and support that bloggers characterize as meaningful friendship within a community" (p. 37). However, Morrison identifies how these mommy bloggers (similar to the bloggers Brake (2007) and Reed (2005) studied) hide their blogs from friends and family and colleagues, keeping their online lives separate. This, she argues, diffuses the political potential of these communities: "mommy bloggers critique the 'real world' without endangering their status within it – but without, arguably, much improving it either" (p. 49).

In *Mommy blogs and the Changing Face of Motherhood,* Friedman (2013) studied the texts of 'mommy blogs' and connections and interactions between bloggers in the "mamasphere", finding that "Mommybloggers are reflecting the multifaceted practice of mothering as a diverse population of literate women going public with their hybrid and cyborg lives" (p. 141). In her conclusions, Friedman takes up the question of the monetization of these narratives and ponders how this might augment the communities and culture that she has identified, finding that monetization can produce a change in the style and content of these texts: "writers – women – are supplanting personal content with content calculated to generate revenue or free products from sponsors" (p. 145). On the value of these blogs she suggests that "monetized mommyblogs have the same range of quality as any other mommyblogs; some accomplish monetization skillfully while others falter" (p. 146). This skill, as she presents it, lies in the careful synthesis of product placement with personal narrative (rather than a replacement of one by the other). Friedman identifies a further risk with monetization: the erosion of the potential for diversity when successfully monetized mommy blogs might tend to reinforce patriarchal visions of motherhood and present an overwhelmingly white, able, and straight reality.

Media attention to 'mommy blogging' and other topic-driven (and stereotypically feminized) sub-genres of blogging such as fashion or lifestyle blogging has also shifted from an emphasis on personal revelation to personal monetization. In ‘The Secret Lives of Women Bloggers’ Raphael (2006) describes blogging as “the contemporary form of self-expression” (p.159). Blogging, she argues, has replaced local in-person communities: “as local communities fade and die the internet allows women to voice preoccupations online that they would otherwise have shared with their neighbours” (p.160). The web has also been taken up by women for its social networking potential, for example by musicians and DJs using it to promote themselves, while bloggers are described as finding publishing deals through their blogs, resulting in significant offline careers. Raphael acknowledged potential risks of blogging, highlighting several examples where bloggers have lost their jobs, advising: “if you’re feeling inspired and are tempted to start bashing out a blog in your lunch hour, take heed: employers are now closing in on bloggers who update their sites during office hours (p.162). Ultimately, however, she found that blogging “has given women a chance to be heard” (p.162). Nussbaum (2007) also identified an imperative to, or at least a comfort with, self-disclosure online:

> In essence, every young person in America has become a public figure…Since their early adolescence, they’ve learned to modulate their voice to address a set of listeners that may shrink or expand at any time…It’s a form of communication that requires a person to be constantly aware that anything you say can and will be used against you, but somehow not to mind. (p.7)

In ‘Welcome to Me-Mart: The Politics of User-Generated Content in Personal Blogs’ Chia (2012) referred to the accelerating logic of ‘prosumption’: “which synergizes consumptive energies, such as the purchase and review of commodities, with psychic energies, such as creative self-documentation and repurposes them within the systemic configuration of UGC [user generated capital] toward economically productive ends, such as contextual advertising” (p.

425). ‘Prosumption’, Chia argues, represents the ‘implosion’ from this convergence as these practices become increasingly indistinct:

> The logic of prosumption pries economic value from all spheres of human experience, integrating the subject – already burdened by the necessity of labor and the responsibility of consumption – more tightly into the circuits of capital, so much that *life itself* is put to work. (p. 426, emphasis original)

The fashion bloggers studied by Duffy and Hund (2015), use three interrelated tropes in order to represent themselves as “enterprising feminine subjects” (p. 2) and to monetize their blogs: representations of predestined passionate work; stating the glam life; and carefully curated social sharing. Through these strategies, Duffy and Hund found, these bloggers “depict an updated version of the post-feminist ideal of ‘having it all’” (p. 2). These studies highlight not only intersections between the presentation of personal narratives and the production of wealth, but also more generally an understanding and a normalization of calculated presentations of self in blog and in social media more broadly. This understanding has been taken up in media reports of the lives (and deaths) of individuals whose social media representations of self appear to be at odds with their lived experiences (Callahan, 2015; Fagan, 2015).

Conclusions

As I have described above, in the years following my data-gathering, the opportunities for bloggers and other social media ‘produsers’ to monetize and professionalize have proliferated (Darwin, 2015; del Monte, 2015; Hewitt, 2015). Following from my observations of these developments, and from the critical perspectives that I have outlined in this chapter, I have become increasingly interested in how discourses of economic and professional value intersect with the recurring identification of a commitment to authenticity as a hallmark of blogging (even as the construction of those representations of self are recognized) (Gaden, 2012; Gaden & Dumitrica, 2015). This project has grown up alongside these developments in blog and social media culture, and my own perspective has been recalibrated through continuous engagement with these technologies, practices, and discourses. The studies and discussions I have compiled here, then, not only present what others have had to say about blogging, they have contributed to the shaping of the perspective I bring to this project. The early work on blogging that I have described here contributed much to the formation of the central question I am concerned with and projects such as those by Brake (2007) and Reed (2005) emphasized the potential of small-scale qualitative research to explore more deeply the more general assessments made by others. Engaging with critical perspectives and conducting my own study of an online environment, has reminded me that these environments, communities and texts are a part of the broader social and cultural environment and, thus, might be shaped by, as well as contribute to shaping powerful discourses and interests. In the next chapter I draw on these discussions of blog culture as I present the theoretical framework for this thesis. The work that I have highlighted here suggests the potential for tensions between discourses of generic definition, empowerment, idealized presentations of self, psychological well-being, community participation, and commercial interventions therein.

Chapter Three: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The following chapter outlines the central concepts and theories guiding my approach to this project. Broadly speaking, there are two main threads to this discussion. One involves the presentation of a general approach to the concept of *value* that I adopt for this project, and I will come back to this shortly. The second outlines the different ways of conceptualizing blogging - the discursive contexts within which value is articulated - that I have identified and that I use in this study. One of the ideas I develop in this chapter is that understandings of value are contextually contingent. By this, I mean that the way in which we understand the value of a practice, or the value of a thing – a text for instance – is tied to the way we imagine that practice – its identity, purpose, its potential, and place – in a broader social and cultural milieu. With this in mind, it is important for me to consider the contexts within which value might be situated, understood and assessed, in blogging culture. In the previous chapter, I explored how early scholars and experts in the field conceptualized blogging, and I identified the prevalent discourses in that work. Following from this, the first concern I brought to my own data was to consider how my participants talked about blogging: what were the discursive contexts within which their discourses of value took place? What did they talk about blogging *as*? What was it *for*?

In this chapter I present theoretical frameworks for four of these discursive contexts: The first considers blogging as a genre of writing. The second draws on an earlier research project (Bakardjieva & Gaden 2012a, 2012b) to conceptualize blogging as a 'technology of the self' (Foucault, 1988): a way of working on and caring for the self as an individual. The third looks to blogging as a subcultural 'scene' (Irwin, 1973, 1977) and considers how value might operate as subcultural and social capital. The fourth context imagines blogging as a commercial enterprise and connected to professional working life, in which case I look at the different ways value might operate in a contemporary economic environment.

I have found value to be a difficult concept. Talking about value in a scholarly context can be especially tricky, and in this project I have aligned myself with studies of popular culture that place an emphasis on the significance of paying attention both to value and to everyday practices of engagement with popular culture (which blogging is). Drawing from Herrnstein-Smith's discussions of the contingencies of literary value (1983, 1988), I adopt the understanding that value is socially constructed, shared and specifically contextual, and apply this insight to the discursive contexts that I address. In this chapter I discuss my understanding of and theoretical approach to each of these ways of conceptualizing blogging. Further, I seek to conceptualize the kinds of value that might operate in these contexts.

Value as Contentious and Contingent

In her essay Contingencies of Value (Herrnstein-Smith, 1983) and the volume of the same name that followed Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1988) takes up the question of the evaluation of literature. She points out that evaluation and the study of evaluation has been a thorny issue in literary circles and that it was seen by literary scholars like Frye (1957) as part of the realm of "taste", a topic for "gossip" in the "leisure class" (Herrnstein Smith, 1983, p. 6). In his work on music and value, Frith (1996) describes how cultural studies - as an emergent discipline of study - drew from disciplines such as literary studies where "questions of taste and judgment were already kept well away from issues of academic analysis and assessment" (p. 11). However, Herrnstein Smith comments that even though evaluation has been derided and frowned upon, it is nonetheless still practiced: "Literary evaluation is not merely an aspect of formal academic criticism but a complex set of social and cultural activities central to the very nature of literature" (p. 6). In this way, there are some parallels between the dynamic Herrnstein Smith describes in literary circles, and that of early popular culture studies. In both contexts, talking about value has itself been devalued. This has served to erase and conceal practices and mechanisms of social construction and situation, and to render value as something somehow integral and objectively discerned.

Herrnstein Smith (1988) goes on to explain how value (in the case of her work, literary value) is socially and culturally constructed. The compilation of anthologies, citation practices, and other mentions by established writers and experts are all mechanisms by which value is created and shared. In this way value is created, she writes, through praise, recognition, and exposure (p. 10). She also highlights the relationship between interpretation and value, pointing to the potential for multiple, situated, readings of specific texts: "In accord with the changing interests and other values of a community, various potential meanings of a work will become more or less visible (or realizable), and the visibility – and hence value – of the work for that community will change accordingly" (p. 10). Following this, my project considers the mechanisms through which value is established and shared, and the idea that the same texts might be interpreted (and value attributed) in different ways according to the context. In this way, value is – as Herrnstein Smith outlines – contingent, and as such "a changing function of multiple variables" (p. 11). It is important, she emphasizes, to draw a distinction here between this understanding of contingency and the idea of subjectivity which refers to something that is "personally whimsical, locked into the consciousness of individual subjects" (p. 11). Unlike subjectivity, contingency recognizes the operation of social patterns and sharing of principles, the ways in which social forces and functions contribute to and construct evaluative behaviours (p.13).

In addition to following Herrnstein Smith's vision of contingent value, I also want to emphasize the importance of recognizing the diversity of ways in which value appears and operates. In his discussion of digital markets and value Bolin (2011) highlights the importance of this:

> Value appears in many different forms and results from a variety of processes. It is not one entity, unified and homogenous, although as discussed in relation of the media and culture industries it is most often connected to the sphere of economics…the uses of the concept need to be broadened, not for its own sake but because a delimited use of the world also delimits our appreciate of the wide variety of phenomena with their own special logics for value accumulation and their own autonomous status as fields of production or consumption in their own right: art, knowledge, politics, etc. (p. 127)

In order to respect this complexity and diversity, I have constructed a theoretical framework comprised of multiple perspectives. These offer four different conceptual contexts within which discourses of value operating in blog culture can be considered. Following an examination of scholarly literature on blogging in the previous chapter, my own extensive experience as a participant in and observer of blogging culture, and an initial thematic analysis of the focus group and interview data, I identified four broad and often interwoven discursive contexts for imagining and identifying blogging and – following this – for conceptualizing and attributing value therein:

- Blogging as a genre of writing.
- Blogging as a Technology of the Self'.

- Blogging as a social scene.
- Blogging as a commercial enterprise.

In the following sections I outline the theoretical concepts and perspectives I have identified as heuristic tools for the examination of discourses of value in blog culture. As I explained in Chapter One, I see this work as following from an approach laid out by Hall (1992): as intellectual work that is suspicious of fixed categories, of certainty, and metanarratives. However, although this kind of cultural studies work shies away from ascribing to or formulating a master discourse, it does " have some will to connect; it does have some stake in the choices it makes" (p.278). In other words, there may be complexity and contradictions in this work and in this way, I hope that it can provide some intervention, opening up multiple ways of thinking about blog culture; contributing to a nuanced understanding rather than a neat explanation. In this chapter I present the concepts and theories that have shaped and informed this project.

Blogging as Textual Production: Genre and Lifewriting

In this section, I locate blogging as a practice of textual production and think specifically about how it might operate as a genre and in the tradition of lifewriting. Lifewriting is a loose term for a diverse collection of sub-genres of writing and representation. Here, discussions of lifewriting and theories of genre open up ways of thinking about how understandings of genre tie into socially constructed and shared values.

Genre

In everyday life, genre is a method of classifying and making sense of the multitude of cultural products (e.g. literature, film, music) that we encounter. Genre is also a tool for managing expectations and for evaluating those cultural products based on those expectations.

Herrnstein Smith (1988) expressly connects genre with value: our evaluations are connected with the way we identify the function and identity of a work, as well as for whom we imagine it is produced (p. 14). In literary theory, genre has traditionally been a concept used to organize and classify literary texts (Frye, 1957). Classification, it might be argued, is a fundamental part of our language development and learning. It is certainly one of the first things we teach children. The ability to organize objects according to type is a precursor to the mathematics children will begin once they attend school.

In his lecture Race the Floating Signifier, Stuart Hall (1997) describes classification as “a profound cultural impulse” (n.p.), and one that is necessary for the creation of meaning. Hall is talking about people, and in particular race, but I think that this insight is useful for my own discussion of genre here. Systems of classification maintain social order, he explains:

> The marking of difference and similarity across a human population becomes a reason why this group is to be treated in that way and get those advantages, and that group should be treated in another. It’s the coming together of difference or categorization of our classification and power. (Hall, 1997, p. 2)

In this way, as Hall argues, once you classify someone or something a whole range of assumptions based on that classification come in to play. When the subject does not appear or behave in line with those understandings: “you restore the order, you police the boundaries; you know the hard and fixed boundaries between what belongs and what doesn’t” (1997, p. 3). In a genre with a clear set of conventions, the target audience knows what to expect. For example, the target audience of mass-market classic westerns will draw fairly automatically on expectations, strategies and rules concerning the essential components of narrative, with the conventions of the genre (such as historical setting), and with elements of the culture's ideology that the genre reinforces, such as crime punished, virtue rewarded, heterosexual love valued (Kearns, 2005, p. 204). For my study, I am concerned with this very process: how bloggers make distinctions between what blogging is and should be and what it and is not; what are the assumptions that bloggers hold about the function, identity, and audience of blogs?

Devitt (2000) considers how demarcations of type and understandings of textual quality have been constructed since Aristotle's classifications of literature and oratory in *The Poetics* and *On Rhetoric.* In contrast with traditional understandings of genre in a literary sense, contemporary understandings of genre in rhetoric-composition circles, attend to Miller's (2000) conception of genre as *action* where genres are defined "by their purposes, participants, and subjects: by their rhetorical actions. Genre as redefined in rhetoric-composition in complex and myriad ways, is defined by its situation and function in a social context" (p. 698). As Devitt suggests, writers and readers "enact many genres and must position themselves in multiple situations" (p. 714). Similar to Hall (1997), Devitt (1993) describes the process of classification when it comes to genre as generative: "Based on our identification of genre, we make assumptions not only about the form but also about the text's purposes, its subject matter, its writer, and its expected reader" (p.575).

Genre also comes into play when we interact with a text. In her study of romance novel readers, Radway (1991) found that the women she spoke with "exhibit fairly rigid expectations about what is permissible in a romantic tale and express disappointment and outrage when those conventions are violated…they expect and, indeed, rely upon certain events, characters, and progressions to provide the desired experience" (p. 63). As Miller (1984) argues, genre is constitutive as much as it is descriptive. When we operate within a genre (as a producer and/or a consumer), we use our understanding and body of experience to frame our expectations and actions. For instance, as readers, when we understand a book to be a crime novel, we will have particular expectations of the characters, the language, and the structure of the book. Likewise, when we come to write within a genre, we bring to the project an understanding of what that form entails (e.g. in terms of structure, content, tone) and we invoke an understanding of how our operations will translate to a particular (real or imagined) audience. Miller (1984) writes,

> Inaugurals, eulogies, courtroom speeches, and the like have conventional forms because they arise in situations with similar structures and elements and because rhetors respond in similar ways, having learned from precedent what is appropriate and what effects their actions are likely to have on other people. (p. 152)

The concept of the stock of knowledge (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973) was developed to explain the ways in which we make sense of everyday interaction, and interpret new information using existing knowledges. Miller (1984) takes up this idea in order to demonstrate how interpretations of existing genres might play into our formulations of new genres in literature, and the process of normalization that occurs through repetition of a particular interpretive classification:

> The new is made familiar through the recognition of relevant similarities: those similarities become constituted as a type. A new type is formed from typifications already on hand when they are not adequate to determine a new situation. If a new typification proves continually useful for mastering states of affairs, it enters the stock of knowledge and its application becomes routine. (p. 157)

Similarly, Bawarshi (2003) points to the role of prior experiences in shaping our understanding of genre and also makes the connection between this process and value. To do so, he takes up Foucault's concept of the author-function. In 'What is an Author?' Foucault (1994) identifies a disconnect between an author and the real writer. An author's name, he suggests, "is also a literary name, a name that exists only in relation to the work associated with it. The author-function, then, endows a work with a certain cultural status and value" (Bawarshi, 2003, p. 20). Bawarshi highlights how Foucault connects his concept of author-function with value, arguing that this process attributes a literary value or capital to written work and establishes the writer as *author*, a subject position. Bawarshi (2003) proposes that we might think about a similar concept, a genre-function (p. 20), whereby we imbue a particular genre (and practitioners of a genre) with characteristics and conventions, standards and status, value and capital, drawn from our prior experiences.

In this way, the traditional approach to genre as a tool of classification is not abandoned, but, rather, thought about in more complex terms. If we think about genres in this way, as practices of interpretation and social construction, then, as Miller (1984) argues, their analysis is particularly significant for what they suggest not only about individual interpretations but, potentially, about "the character of a culture or a historical period" (p. 158). Individual expressions, then, of what a genre is, and how a text (or the practice of producing a text) within that genre should operate, connect with broader social understandings of, not only literature and literary production, but the social and cultural context within which it is produced.

Drawing from the perspectives I have described here, I do not understand genre as a singular and clear-cut path to a clearly defined destination. Rather, I understand genre as a way of talking about and accepting textual qualities, characteristics, practices and activities of textual production and consumption, as belonging to named 'genres'. What I bring to my own project, then, is an attention to how both individual and shared understandings of genre might connect with assessments of value and worth. A text might be understood as good or valuable in how it embodies, fails to embody, or challenges specific characteristics, qualities, conventions and standards which are understood to be generic. "The criteria that make a particular genre itself enable readers to recognize a work when it fits…and to measure another by its standards when it fails to measure up" (Holdstein, 1996, p. 280). As Miller's (1984) reference to Schutz's types suggests, social understandings of new genres draw extensively on existing established types and conventions. Holdstein (1996) makes the observation that rather than offer something completely new – a free and utopian space and new genres of writing – the internet is a space where existing hierarchies and genres are reproduced.

In this project I wanted to explore this idea by asking whether bloggers draw on discourses of value that connect with other more established genres and practices of writing. Furthermore, I am concerned with examining whether, and where, they position blogs within hierarchies of genre. In the next section, I situate blogging in the context of a tradition of autobiographical lifewriting. As the work I have described in the previous chapter suggests, a prevalent discourse in scholarship on blogging, especially early scholarship, has been to interpret blogs and blogging in relation to forms of lifewriting, particularly diaries.

Lifewriting.

As I have outlined in the previous chapter, blogs and blogging were often positioned, in early scholarly work, in the tradition of lifewriting, or in relation to some form of lifewriting. Indeed, the frequent updates, the date-stamps, the colloquial tone and often personal content…these features, often described as characteristics of blogs and blogging, have been taken up as connections to both private diary-writing and other forms of published and unpublished lifewriting (Blood, 2002; McNeill, 2003; Walker, 2008). In this section I explore this milieu in some more detail, discuss some of the ways the genre (or collection of sub-genres) is described and, finally, consider how value has operated in this context. This discussion provides an overview of some of the types, conventions, vocabulary, and values common to discussions of autobiographical writing and provides a backdrop and resource for my examination of discourses focused on blogging.

In discussions of autobiography as literature (Folkenflik, 1993) and of media (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), the first uses of the term autobiography as a term date to the late eighteenth century, at around the same time as the Romantic movement gained recognition. Folkenflik (1993) suggests that early autobiography probably grew from, and was encouraged by, the Romantic emphasis on subjectivity, expressive poetics, and interest in origins; and also points to a breakdown in the traditional literary hierarchies at that time which may have made room for the recognition of new forms of expression (p. 8). Early auto/biographies were largely concerned with recounting - with an emphasis on veracity, retrospection and unity - the lives of great men. However, at the same time, these texts and practices drew criticism with autobiographers described as “neurotics who are fascinated by their own ego…authors of a robust artistic or adventuresome self-love…women who also coquette with posterity…pedantic minds… [self-deceivers]…”(Schlegal, 1798 in Folkenflik, 1993, p. 3).

In the early twentieth century, modernist literary criticism focused on the art as object, lauding the poem as the highest form of literary art. In keeping with the modernist emphasis on the object, studies in auto/biography were devoted to the object of the text rather than the unrecorded life or context of the writer and scholars focused on categorizing texts and analyzing them using the criteria of other literary genres such as the novel (Mandel, 1968). These approaches to categorization drew from Aristotle's literary types and rested on textual regularities and conventions of form and content (Freedman & Medway, 1994). The widely-understood generic characteristics of autobiography were, at this time, that the content of the text was composed of the author's own life; that the life-story was written retrospectively; and that s/he must write "with fidelity to the spirit of the truth" (Mandel, 1968, p.219)[8]. Indeed, the concept of 'truth' has been central to understandings of auto/biography: Lejeune's (1989) autobiographical pact, focused on the truth claims of the autobiographical narrative. For him, autobiography was a "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (p. 45). This agreement or truth-claim between reader and author is one of the tools most often used to generically define autobiography (Rak in Lejeune, 2009, p.17), and plays a large role in how a narrative is evaluated by its readership who assess its legitimacy: "Are we [as readers] prepared to accept this life as part of the community of lives that makes up our world?" (Bruner, 1993, p. 47).

Towards the end of the twentieth century, practices and theories of autobiography underwent a simultaneous shift and proliferation. The latter might be said to have sprung from the intellectual cultural studies movement of the 1960s and 1970s, when scholarship moved towards a recognition of the significance of everyday ordinary culture, narratives, and texts (Hoggart, 1957; Williams, 1958). In England, the foundation and flourishing of the Centre for

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[8] Mandel admits that untruths were actually fairly common in autobiographies but that it is the "avowal to speak truthfully" (p. 220) that is the hallmark of the genre.

Contemporary Cultural Studies (commonly known as The Birmingham School) created a material and intellectual space for scholarship concerned with popular low culture, including the everyday life-narratives of individuals and groups outside the boundaries of great men and women. Further evidence of this cultural shift can be witnessed in the efforts of feminists to advocate for the foregrounding of subjectivities and personal experience. Stemming largely from these movements, academic attention was newly focused on autobiographical narratives and narrators outside the conventions of traditional autobiography (Kadar, 1992; Olney, 1988; Smith & Watson, 1996), and *lifewriting* was taken up as a term which may read as more wide-ranging, more inclusive, to those for whom autobiography could not shake its traditional connotations. Indeed, the proliferation of more diverse narratives was at least partially mobilized by the surge of second-wave feminism. Among the achievements of this cluster of movements, was the politicization of the personal, as Nancy Fraser (2013) writes, feminists of this era "expanded the boundaries of contestation beyond socioeconomic distribution – to include housework, sexuality, and reproduction" (p. 3).

In this way, forms and practices of lifewriting are bound up with issues of identity and value. Narratives which would previously not have 'made the cut' were published, or at least they were self-published, for instance in the form of 'zines. This broader definition speaks to both a material growth in types of texts and practices as well as an expansion of intellectual understandings of what 'counts' in terms of scholarly attention and cultural value. Smith and Watson (1996) comment on the absolute prevalence of life-writing in their contemporary cultural climate: "If we are not telling our stories, we are consuming other peoples' lives" (p. 3). They present the "historical situation of postmodernity" as characterized by: commodity capitalism; bureaucratization of all aspects of corporate life; the shift to electronic communications networks; the condition of ‘cultural asymmetries’; and challenges to dominant ideas about a “universal, rational, and autonomous humanist self “(p.3). The telling, composition, production, performance, and consumption of autobiographical stories is, they argue, a defining condition of this postmodern experience in North America. Nancy K. Miller (2002) also identifies the 1990’s as a time where personal exposure of public figures (she points to the Clinton administration), became commonplace and identifies the memoir as the most “popular (and symptomatic) literary genre of our contemporary culture” (p.1).

It has been in this context of postmodernity that the truth claims, as well as the idea of a consistent and real self, so central to traditional autobiographical texts have become subverted in many discussions of identity and lifewriting. Writing about celebrity in 1990s America, Gamson (1994) observes: "the anxiety about public selves, for example, is no longer met only with the continual promise of personal revelation. The private self is no longer the ultimate truth. Instead, what is most true, most real, most trustworthy, is precisely the relentlessly performing public self” (p. 54). On memoir, Rak (2004) points out the important distinctions between memoir as a (sub)genre and autobiography, delineating a hierarchy between the former as the domain of non-professional writers recanting events and the latter as creative explorations of the interior growth of writers. Rak’s essay is an important articulation of the hierarchies of literary value at play in the lifewriting arena (even as the boundaries of this arena have expanded). Furthermore, her description of the complexity and slipperiness (to define) of memoir are especially interesting to me here. Memoir, she writes, “describes private and public, official and unofficial writing, writing as process and writing as product, all at once” (p. 495). Blogs, I argue, have the potential for a similar complexity and in this project I remain mindful of the potential for multiplicity and instability within a genre.

Blogs, of course, owe their existence to the development of internet technology: web browsers and, for many bloggers, free and easy-to-use blogging platforms like Blogger and Wordpress. These developments in communications technology facilitated the production and distribution (especially, perhaps, the latter) of lifewriting (not only blogging) using the internet. Just as the printing press made widespread publication and distribution of traditional auto/biography possible in the early twentieth century, the ubiquity of the internet and easy-to-use publishing software in everyday western lives has facilitated the volume and relative diversity of lifewriting online. With these developments, self-publishing became even easier for those privileged with an internet connection and word processing skills, and personal narratives emerged as the most populous sub-category or type of blog online.

In summary, forms and practices of autobiography and lifewriting more broadly develop and operate as part of their cultural and historical contexts. New forms and genres are often shaped and understood in relation to existing genres. In this project, I examine the characteristics identified by this study as hallmarks of blogs, and of value in blogging. I also consider how these characteristics and understandings of what counts as valuable (and what does not), might draw from and relate to a tradition of lifewriting and self-representation: from autobiography and memoir to private diary-writing. Herrnstein Smith (1988) posits that literary value, “like all value…is not the property of an object or a subject but, rather, the product of the dynamics of a system” (p. 15). Additionally, even as blogging might be said to have literary roots, it also has its roots in the communities and practices of popular culture. The next section of this theoretical framework explores this relationship, particularly focusing on popular culture and subculture. I examine the ways in which individuals and groups use popular culture artefacts and practices as conduits and tools for producing and communicating themselves within social ‘scenes’.

Understandings of value and processes of evaluation, in this process, grow up in the context of a blogging 'scene', a specific social and cultural context.

Blogging as a 'Scene': Constructing Value in Specific Social Contexts

Eakin quotes Gergen when he observes that recounting memories in autobiographical writing is less an act of "consulting mental images as it is engaging in a *sanctioned* form of telling" (Gergen in Eakin, 1999 p. 110, emphasis added). In the previous section I have demonstrated how it is useful to think about the ways in which earlier genres of lifewriting contribute to the construction of a value-apparatus through which we sanction and evaluate newer forms of writing about the self. In this section I focus more closely on the ways in which conventions and standards (of text and practice) might be socially constructed in the context of specific social and cultural communities. In particular, I will explore how theories of popular culture - especially Irwin's (1973, 1977) theory of social scenes - might be especially useful for unpacking the ways in which understandings of value are construed and shared among bloggers.

Blogging as a (social) popular culture practice.

Blogging qualifies as popular culture according to to Zeisler's (2008) definition: "In a purely literal sense, popular culture is any cultural product that has a mass audience" (p.1). Indeed, while foundational discussions of popular culture once focused on media such as film and television, advertising and popular fiction, it would be difficult to imagine talking about popular culture in the current climate without paying attention to new media and internet culture. Therefore, the analysis of value in blogging can be located in a tradition of study of the hierarchies of value and the dynamics of valuation in popular culture. In this section, I turn to popular culture studies. These studies articulate a commitment to paying attention to the ways in which ordinary people make their lives meaningful through their uses of popular culture, ideas proposed and developed by thinkers who influenced and came out of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (e.g. Williams, 1958; Hoggart, 1957; Hebdige, 1979). And, although many of the early CCCS thinkers paid more attention to texts than practices, the Centre did go on to produce work, as I have already described, particularly in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which marked a turn towards audience and reception. Much of this work drew from or responded to Hall's (1980) Encoding/Decoding model, a theory of media that saw meaning as encoded by popular culture producers and decoded by audiences and consumers, though not always in the ways intended or imagined by those producers. In their extensive and acclaimed Nationwide Project Morley and Brunsdon (1978; see also Morley, 1980) explored Hall's theory in a qualitative study of audiences of the popular British news program, *Nationwide.* Ang (1985, 1991) also disputed the idea of a homogenous and passive audience and argued for the recognition of audiences as complex and active.

Against this backdrop, smaller-scale qualitative studies of audiences of particular forms and aspects of popular culture, examined the experiences of these audiences, exploring the processes of interpretation and identity construction involved in popular culture practices. Stacey (1994) drew on interviews with women where they discuss their relationships with images of Hollywood celebrities, and how these 'stars' related to their own self-presentation and understandings of femininity. Stacey disputed powerful arguments against these practices: arguments critiquing the consumption of Hollywood glamour as narcissistic, self-commodifying, and ultimately disempowering. This approach, she argues, ignores the complexity of experiences and the creativity of individual negotiations of the relationship with film and film stars.

Radway (1991) was likewise concerned with identity and engagement with popular culture. In her study of romance-novel readers, she drew a connection between participation in popular culture practices and broader lived experiences and social contexts. Romance reading, for many of her participants, extended beyond the appreciation of the texts; many of the women she interviewed described how they did not even really *like* some of the books they read. For them it was the *act* of reading that was often most important. Radway (1991) found that both appreciation of the text and of the practice of reading connected with her participants' experiences and understandings of gender roles. The books were comforting because they "provide a utopian vision in which female individuality and a sense of self are shown to be compatible with nurturance and care by another" (p. 55). Furthermore, the pleasure of reading was often attributed to the act of claiming a space for themselves and relief from the "emotional drain" (p. 57) of caring for others. Radway's participants connected through a shared source for their novel (a local bookstore). There, they availed of the advice and recommendations of Dot, the bookstore's resident expert in romance fiction. Dot described to Radway how she began reading romances at the urging of her doctor, to combat exhaustion. Dot exercised her expertise in her work at the bookstore where she advised customers on selection, and also in a newsletter produced with her daughter, replete with information about new releases and book reviews. Although her participants might be considered 'mainstream', Radway's description of Dot and her customers, and their engagement with romance novels, has something in common with popular culture studies focused on subcultures and more public communal 'scenes'. Furthermore, this study resonates with me as a researcher for reasons I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

Subcultures and 'scenes'.

As proponents of popular culture studies moved on from foundational arguments justifying its significance and potential, and incorporated more work on practices and people as well as texts and aesthetics, the focus of a number of researchers and thinkers fell on subcultures. Although subcultural texts and practices of engagement might be *available* to a mass audience, they tend to emerge around smaller groups of individuals, many of whom position themselves outside the mainstream. Mass culture theorists (e.g. Macdonald, 1962) had critiqued popular culture as commercial, crass, and responsible for decline in art and stable social structures. The perspective, often described as 'cultural populism', took an opposing approach, arguing that popular culture (particularly subcultures) could act as forms of social subversion (Fiske, 1990). Strinati (2004) explained that according to a populist perspective, "popular culture cannot be understood as a culture which is imposed upon the thoughts and actions of people…but as a more or less genuine expression of the voice of the people" (p. 242). In this project, I draw upon a populist commitment to the *potential* of popular culture and subcultural texts and practices for resistance, subversion, and empowerment but also remain mindful that these spaces and practices are not isolated from or immune to broader social structures and powerful interests. Indeed, as I have already explained, a commitment to recognizing this connection between individual experiences and shared (group) understandings on the one hand and the broader social and cultural landscape on the other is central to my analysis.

In the late 1970s, influential scholars (e.g. Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979) began to pay closer attention to subcultural groups. These ethnographies of sub cultural groups such as punks, mods, skinheads, and rastas pointed to the social and cultural resistances enacted through appearance and practices. Muggleton (2000) describes a shift away from the modernist, aesthetic approach, of CCCS commentaries with their clear distinctions between mass culture and subculture, towards a 'post subcultural' approach: an understanding of a more fluid cultural vista, with no coherent divisions and no single authentic mode of expression.

The emergence of the internet has also seen the emergence of studies in online subcultures (e.g. Chee et al, 2006; Burgess & Green, 2009; Hellekson & Busse (Eds), 2006). Petridis (2014) observes the differences between current youth subcultures and those of his own youth in the mid-1980s. In his own teenage years he remembers how he and his peers would represent their subcultural affiliations through their appearance: dress, hairstyles, and make-up. Current subcultures, he notes are both less clearly defined and far more transient; they are often enacted online. In this essay, Petridis focuses on how music-based subcultures have transferred online. In this project, I want to think about how new practices of writing and expression online might actually operate as subcultures themselves and how we might use the concepts and vocabulary of subculture to explore them.

Irwin (1973, 1977) draws on the theories of his mentor Goffman (1959) in order to think about self-representation. Like Goffman, Irwin (1977) points to the importance of recognizing how contextual presentations of self are: "In presenting a self, individuals do not start in each social setting with a clean slate, but occupy a social category with shared meanings, definitions, norms, and roles" (p. 196) specific to that setting. However, while Goffman suggested that everyday actors are largely restricted by the social script of their role, or position in a particular context, Irwin argues for more flexibility and agency to bring their individual spin to existing social categories. Furthermore, the individual, he posits, can occupy multiple social categories. Even within more defined, closed roles there is room for spontaneity, individuality, creativity. Irwin uses the example of Jazz improvisation to illustrate this possibility: "Spontaneity occurs within areas set by accepted limits, not in wide open spaces" (p. 199). Social and cultural perspectives on self-conscious behavior are contextual. In the 1950s, for instance, self-conscious and conformist behavior was frowned upon. This, Irwin points out, is evident in the literature of the time; J.D. Salinger's character Holden Caulfield repeatedly rails against the "phonies" who perform their social roles in line with cultural expectations:

> It's full of phonies, and all you do is study so that you can learn enough to be smart enough to be able to buy a goddam Cadillac someday, and you have to keep making believe you give a damn if the football team loses, and all you do is talk about girls and liquor and sex all day, and everybody sticks together in these dirty little goddam cliques. (p. 131)

Although Irwin departs from Goffman in his contestation of complete pessimism regarding performances of self, he follows in his recognition of the importance of audience. Categorizing everyday acting into four types, he describes the first two as rituals and deception dramas (Irwin, 1977, p. 205). The first of these describes formal rituals such as initiations where there is an openly accepted script and formula for the events. The second refers to performances of false selves with the specific intention to deceive. The third and fourth types of performance are those that interest me most here, however. In the former, 'audience precipitated acts', Irwin discusses how individuals are concerned with audience evaluation, and how this concern shapes their decisions and actions: "The primary aim, or an important aim, is to be accepted, esteemed, or at least not ridiculed, rejected, or repulsed by an audience which is actively or potentially judgmental" (p. 205). In the fourth form of everyday acting Irwin identifies, he speaks to popular culture and media. He points to demonstrations and the culture of activism that was popular in the late 1960s and 1970s and also introduces the concepts of activity systems and participation in scenes. These scenes may revolve around an activity (he uses the example of skiing) or a subculture such as punk, and have *scripts*, or shared understandings of practice, dress, and communication. They form an outline "to be filled in by actors during the activities, allowing freedom for a great deal of spontaneous, creative behavior" (p. 207). In his earlier analysis of surfing culture, Irwin (1973) observed that these shared understandings of practice can provide a sense of cohesion for those participating in the activity system (p. 133).

Irwin describes the kind of 'everyday acting' that goes on in the participation in these scenes as characterized by self-consciousness; a motivation of impression management; an awareness of 'other selves'; and an awareness of existing social categories. However, it is important to note, participants do not necessarily follow the guidelines they discern for this scene passively, they may also be innovative and creative with the script. This freedom to innovate, however, occurs in a context of familiarity and knowledge: "The more knowledgeable have a clearer conception of the script and are freer to innovate within its limits. Some can even attempt to break these and to "rewrite" the script" (p. 207). In literature, Herrnstein Smith (1983) identified another group who might present challenges to 'scripts' of this sort:

> The prevailing structure of tastes and preferences … will always be implicitly threatened or directly challenged by the divergent tastes and preferences of some subjects within the community (for example, those not yet adequately acculturated, such as the young, and others with "uncultivated" tastes, such as provincials and social upstarts) as well as by most subjects outside it or, more significantly, on its periphery and who thus have occasion / to interact with its members. (pp. 17/18)

Following Irwin's approach, I am concerned with exploring if and how the discussions of blogging I analyze articulate common and coherent codes of presentation and practice: in short, to think about what the 'script' for the activity system of blogging might look like. If there is a recognizable 'script' among bloggers I ask how it connects with value: do bloggers evaluate themselves and other bloggers along the lines of ‘scene’ standards and conventions? In this way, then, the ‘scene’ might operate in some ways similar to genre as I have outlined in the previous section. For this project it is also useful to think about the ways in which bloggers talk about, identify, and occupy roles within the ‘scene’ such as, for instance: insiders, outsiders, new participants, and gatekeepers, and how the negotiations between these positions might connect with the articulation and enactment of codes of value and success (or failure). In this context I consider how value operates as social and cultural capital.

Social and cultural capital.

The idea of social capital has been attributed to a 1916 essay by Lyda J. Hanifan (1916) where social capital is identified as: “that in life which tends to make these tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of people, namely goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse…” (p.130). However, Putnam’s (2000) book *Bowling Alone* has put the concept into contemporary discourses. Both Hanifan and Putnam were concerned with a *lack* of social capital in the milieu they observed. Hanifan saw an absence of social capital in the urban environment from a rural perspective; and Putnam took an historical approach, looking at social and cultural shifts in the twentieth century.

I begin my own discussion of social capital with Bourdieu’s (1986) conceptualizations of cultural capital and social capital. Bourdieu argues that through confidence and skill in the practice of aesthetic evaluation, cultural capital can be earned and displayed, and that it can also, at times, be converted to economic capital (p. 243). Social capital, in the same essay, is defined as:

> The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words to membership in a group – which provides its members with the backing of / the collectively-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (pp. 248-9)

Bourdieu (1986) goes on to write "The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected" (p. 249). A group, then, is reproduced through acts of mutual recognition and exchange. These also reaffirm the limits of the group and take the form of an "unceasing effort of sociability" (p. 250). In any group there is an individual, or a small group of individuals who are imbued with the bulk of the social capital, and who are thus allowed to speak on behalf of the group. These individuals can defend the honour of the group when a weaker member is threatened or by closing ranks when participants act in a way that is deemed inappropriate, thus "expelling or excommunicating the embarrassing individuals" (p. 251).. In this essay Bourdieu emphasizes that life is not a game of chance, like roulette, where one can spin the wheel and have potentially the same chance of winning as the next person. To explain this, he points to the importance of recognizing, not only economic capital (which I will explore in more detail later), but less visible forms of capital: social capital as I have already described, and cultural capital, the latter of which can be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications and tied not only to available economic leverage, but also to the cultural capital passed down in families (p. 244).

Both Frith (1996) and Thornton (1997) take up the concepts of social and cultural capital and apply them to popular culture. In her influential work on social capital in urban dance culture in the UK, Thornton (1997) contests earlier work on youth subcultures (Hebdige, 1979) which, she argues, romanticizes these cultures and overestimates the degree to which they provide contexts of empowerment for their participants. In her study, she draws on Bourdieu's theory to develop her own concept of *subculture capital* which can be objectified or embodied: displayed through outward appearance or being in the know, demonstrations of in group membership and prowess. A key contribution of Thornton's work is her recognition of the role of media in governing the circulation of subcultural capital. The media, she argues, "is not simply another symbolic good or marker of distinction…but a network crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge" (p. 203).

In summary, then, popular culture and subculture 'scenes' are important sites for the study of value, in the form of subcultural and social capital in action. Frith (1996) describes how popular culture might be thought of as an arena where all participants can claim the right to pass judgment even though it is not formally stratified in the ways that academic circles, for instance are. Despite this, he asserts, "In practice, though, there clearly are people – loosely defined as "fans" – who do claim precisely that their superior knowledge, experience, and commitment give their judgments a particular weight" (p. 9). In this project, I will explore social and subcultural capital in blog culture. In the next section I turn back inwards, considering not only how value might be constructed in a social environment and context, but also in the more intimate context of the self. Furthermore, I want to examine how, as Bourdieu notes, the work of acquisition of cultural capital is "work on oneself (self-improvement)" (p. 244). In the next section of this framework I take up the idea of blogging as a 'technology of the self': a strategy for work on and improving the self.

Blogging and the Individual: Technologies of the Self

In this section I introduce concepts that I will use during my analysis of the ways in which bloggers articulate value in blogging practices in terms of self-improvement. I begin with Foucault's (1988) theory of technologies of the self – a way of thinking about certain practices as strategies for personal development and improvement. Drawing from Foucault and from the other contributors to the Vermont seminar (Gutman, Martin, & Hutton, 1988), I think about technologies of the self as practices of self-surveillance and management evolved in a particular historical and cultural context. In this section I explore the idea of contextually specific practices of working on the self and conceptualize blogging as one such practice.

Foucault's Technologies of the Self.

In the years before his death, Foucault shifted his focus from institutional power and self-governance to everyday practices of surveillance and control exercised by the self on the self. Leading a seminar at the University of Vermont, he described these practices as Technologies of the Self (Foucault, 1988), which

> Permit individuals to affect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality. (p. 18)

In his contribution to the seminar Foucault considers practices of self-reflection, conversation, writing, and public demonstration in specific cultural contexts from Ancient

Greece through to early Christianity and in each instance connects the specific practice or technology to the historical and cultural context within which it is embedded. For example, the Epicureans of the mid-Hellenistic period practiced the examination of conscience and the recollection and memorization of past pleasures for the purpose of facilitating the distillation of pleasure from present events. For a Stoic of the first century AD past action must be recollected and recorded for a different purpose: to benefit strategizing the future. In contrast, early Christian technologies of the self represent a marked departure from the solitary retreats and scribbling. For them, self-knowledge was sought for the purpose of purifying the soul:

> Each person has the duty to know who he is…to try to know what is happening inside him, to acknowledge faults, to recognize temptations, to locate desires, and everyone is obliged to disclose these things either to God or to others in the community and hence to bear public or private witness against oneself. (Foucault, 1988, p. 40)

In early Christianity exhibitions of shame and modesty were employed as visual representations of (self) revelation and (self) punishment (p. 42). One particularly evocative example of this is the hair shirt or cilice worn by monks, a device through which the wearer could physically manifest and perform his denial of self.

Foucault's technologies of the self are socially and culturally situated practices, carried out by individuals with contextually specific motivations: to shape, manage, improve the self in some way. Foucault described the diary-writing practices of Marcus Aurelius. For Aurelius, there was an emphasis on the details of everyday life, on the corporeal: for example describing what he has eaten during the day, how his health is, his romantic and sexual relationships. This may seem to be trivial and, indeed, Foucault notes that someone like Cicero would not have deemed these details important, but for Aurelius "these details are important because they *are you* –what you thought, what you felt" (p.29, emphasis added), and what you did (or didn't do) during your day – calculated by comparing daily descriptions with the 'to-do' lists of the night before - could be as important as what you thought.

Gutman's (1988) work on a later, diary-writing technology of the self, points to the way in which this practice might also become used as a way of strategically constructing the self in a desired image. He writes about Rousseau's *Confessions* as a production of self via writing that professes to reveal the inner self through the minutiae of daily life, and a centering of the emotive life. He cites Rousseau's statement of purpose: "The true object of my confessions is to reveal my inner thoughts exactly in all the situations of my life. It is the history of my soul that I have promised to recount" (Rousseau cited in Gutman, 1988, p. 102). Gutman describes how despite Rousseau's protestations that he writes his inner-most truth, the self produced in this work is a careful construction: "Rousseau confesses in order to justify his existence. He would constitute a self, in writing, as he feels his self to be" (p. 105). He does this to produce an alternative to the (perceived) publically-held version: "He will hold this self up as an alternative before the gaze of a public that has only been able to see a Rousseau who is asocial, self-serving, immoral, and dangerous" (p. 105). In response to these social accusations, then, Rousseau confesses the details of life, constantly, in order to recreate himself "as a character with a history" (p. 106).

Importantly, Foucault (1988) was careful to introduce the idea of technologies of the self not as isolated practices, but as a part of a suite of technologies: technologies of production, of sign systems, and of power (p. 18). In this way, although the concept of technologies of the self might evoke ideas of individual activity and agency in how a person acts upon herself, they also operate in conjunction with the kinds of technologies of domination that Foucault had expounded upon in his earlier work (e.g. 1965, 1979a, 1979b). Indeed, following Feenberg (1999), the concept of technology itself might suggest "standardized sets of means and rules established under the dominant rationality of a given social order, marked by its inherent power differentials" (Bakardjieva & Gaden, 2012a, p. 402). Here, we pointed out a tension between this view and the potential for individual agency and empowerment, in these technologies of the self. We also emphasized the importance of context: of the situated-ness of these practices. Each contribution to the Vermont seminar bears out the ways in which technologies of the self are historically, culturally, and socially situated. In the next section I outline some of the prevalent discourses of self, well-being, and identity in recent years before and during the emergence of blogging, and in social media culture more broadly.

The 'age of the individual': personal responsibility and branding.

Baumeister (1989) writes about a shift from a process of self-definition which was once ascribed and all-at-once achieved to one that – following the cultural shifts of modernity – is continuously achieved and chosen by the individual. This is the process and practice that Giddens (1991) calls the "reflexive project" of the self:

> What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity – and ones which on some level or another, all of us answer either discursively or through day-to-day social behavior. (p. 70)

In a twenty-first century, Western, urban context, the landscape within which the individual addresses these questions is characterized by the hallmarks of what we can call 'advanced capitalism' (McGee, 2005) or neoliberalism, where "the ethic of individual self-fulfillment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society" (Beck, 2001 as cited in Bakardjieva & Gaden, 2012a). In a neoliberal context the individual is not only center stage, but also bears the entire responsibility for her successes and failures, the former of which are presented as perpetually possible if only by the hard work and determination of the individual. This is a 'flexible economy' where there is little, if any, job security and where – via communications technologies – many desk-jobs become mobile and, consequently, the boundaries of the working day blur (Ericson, Barry & Doyle, 2000).

In this environment the individual is urged to take responsibility for promoting herself, and the discourse of 'personal branding' has gained traction. In *Fast Company* magazine, Peters (1997) introduced the idea of personal branding as being of key importance in the "age of the individual". Peters (1997) closes with a call to action: "You are a brand. You are in charge of your brand. There is no single path to success. And there is no one right way to create the brand called You. Except this. Start today. Or else" (n.p.). This connects, I suggest, with what Cronin (2000) calls a culture of 'compulsory individuality', where the "ultimate goal of self-hood" is understood as finding and expressing a 'true identity'. Indeed, Peters recommends that the process of personal branding begins with some reflection: "start by identifying the qualities or characteristics that make you distinctive from your competitors – or your colleagues" (n.p). In this way, the focus on individuality is put in service of a representation of self for the purposes of social and economic advancement: professional opportunity and 'successes, the production of – at once – economic, social, and cultural capital. The discourse of personal branding is often incorporated in discussions of social media, including blogging (Marwick, 2013). Through our profiles on social media sites, personal blogs, even our comments on other sites online, we are urged to carefully mange our personal brands.

Twenty-first century self-management.

Self-surveillance is a pronounced element of a number of the technologies of the self described by Foucault and the other participants in the Vermont seminar. Hellenistic technologies of the self-involved taking detailed notes about daily activities to be reviewed later on: “A relation developed between writing and vigilance” (Foucault, 1988, p. 28). Christian confessions saw the confessors verbalizing their sins with a view to policing their thoughts as well as actions (p.45). In modernity, psychoanalytic techniques were employed to search for a “lost self”, where individuals “retrieve from the oblivion of the unconscious mind lost memories of painful experiences or unresolved conflicts” (Hutton, 1988, p. 124). In these diverse practices, the individual engages with herself, to learn something about herself, to change herself or some aspect of herself in some way. To do so, she watches herself, or her expressions (verbal/written) of self. The constant attention to the representation of self, in this way, can be understood as a form of care of the self.

Ouelette and Hay (2007) suggest that reality television shows, another form to emerge into the mainstream of twenty-first century popular culture, encourage “real” people to objectify their lives in order to pursue this care of the self . Here, through television, the self becomes something that can be studied, reflected upon, surveilled and therefore recalibrated” (p.97). They bring together Foucault’s theories of self-care and self-surveillance in their analysis of contemporary “makeover” shows such as long-running TLC’s *What Not to Wear*[9] (WNTW),

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[9] WNTW first aired in 2003.

shows that bring together these discourses of surveillance and consumption as strategies or techniques for self-management and the production of a (palatable) personal brand. At the outset of each episode, the subject is surprised by hosts Stacy London and Clinton Kelly and told that they have been nominated by friends and/or family for the make-over. They are shown secretly-filmed footage of them going about their daily lives and of their loved ones trawling through their closets and critiquing their clothes. Once they agree to participate, the subjects are further scrutinized using a 360-degree mirror, where Stacy and Clinton demonstrate the unsuitability of their wardrobes and their current 'look'. Ouelette and Hay observe how "*What Not to Wear* relies on strategies of close supervision, humiliation, and surveillance only as a means to an end, which is the creating of a self-governing subject" (p.110). Throughout the course of each episode, the subject 'learns' how to shop for, dress, and construct a more suitable self for public presentation. The new clothes are topped off with hair and make-up, and the subject is 'revealed' to their loved ones with much fanfare and excitement. What is especially interesting about this show, and about contemporary makeovers in contrast with earlier makeover segments in television shows such as *Oprah* or in women's magazines, is the focus on the potential of an active subject. Rather than presenting the makeover as something that is 'done-to' a passive participant, the women who are featured on WNTW and other, similar, shows, experience a 're-education' of sorts whereby they emerge not only conforming to what Pozner (2010) describes as a "single upper-middle-class, mainstream-to-conservative, traditionally feminine standard of fashion and beauty (p. 150), but at the same time expressing their newfound empowerment via the skill set they have acquired in this process.

In summary, this example from a mainstream popular culture format contemporary to the mainstreaming of blogging, offers a sense of how the discourses of personal branding, self-management, and technologies of the self might come together. Returning to Bourdieu's (1986) identification of different forms of capital, I am interested in exploring how and/or whether bloggers talk about blogging practices as avenues for the acquisition of and/or the presentation of social and cultural capital. In makeover shows such as WNTW, a recurring theme is the importance of 'correct' or 'appropriate' self-presentation for the purposes of acquiring desired professional success. In this way, the discourse is that economic capital can be connected with self-management and improvement. This connects with Bourdieu's argument that in some instances social and cultural capital can translate into economic capital (1986, p. 243). However, there is an important distinction to be made here. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital is something passed down in families, which – in addition to economic capital investment – can facilitate the acquisition of educational qualifications, which in turn confer additional cultural capital on the bearer. In the contemporary discourses around self-management and presentation that I have introduced here, there is an underlying discourse of unlimited potential and possibility. What I mean by this is that structural inequalities (for example: class, gender, race) are erased in favour of a neoliberal gloss of personal responsibility and choice. In the next section of this chapter I look more closely at how economic value operates in a contemporary neoliberal, 'flexible' economy. Blogging, as I have already noted, has become increasingly commercialized as greater numbers of bloggers monetize, and seek to monetize, their blogs. However, it is also worth exploring how discourses of literary value, social and cultural capital, and personal development intersect with and might be underpinned by discourses of economic capital and value.

Economic Value: Work and Self in a Neoliberal Flexible Economy

One of the ways that early blogging experts talked about the value of blogging was with regard to how it operated beyond the reach of big political and corporate interests. Blogging, in this view, had the potential to be 'independent' and this independence was, significantly, one from economic forces. However, as blogging has moved into the mainstream, and has been taken up by traditional media and by politicians, it has also been taken up by businesses. Business leaders have used blogging to communicate with audiences: promote their products, garner feedback, to present a hip and authentic image, and ultimately to increase profitability (Chen, Hu, & Liu, 2007; Jackson, Yates, & Orlikowski, 2007; Cox, Martinez, & Quinlan, 2008). At the same time, an increasing number of bloggers have begun to make money from blogging: blogging *has become their business*: "blogging is now a diverse, successful enterprise that covers a multiplicity of online writers" (Eaton, December 22, 2009). When I began this project, and began to conceptualize these different discursive contexts for talking about value and blogging, economic value was not on my agenda. I held on to the above idea that blogging somehow operated outside of economics. During the first phase of data analysis – when I sought to verify and further shape the theoretical framework for my analysis – I noted that my participants were indeed talking about the actual and potential economic value of blogging: both in terms of a direct monetization of their blogs and of the potential for their blogs to propel their professional careers and individual marketability. Furthermore, as I have outlined in the previous chapter, the growing literature on blogging identified economic drivers behind Web 2.0. Dean (2010, 2012), for example, identified blogging and other new media practices as sites of communicative capitalism where social media converge with democracy and neoliberalism and, ultimately, where democracy is co-opted as a marketing slogan and communication is trapped in capitalist circuits. As my own project has carried on, and as a growing number of bloggers monetize their blogs in a myriad of ways, it seems more important than ever to consider how discourses of economic value operate in this milieu and whether the arguments of critics like Dean might connect with the findings of my own analysis. In this section I begin by revisiting the central Marxist/economic concepts of value, commodity, and labour. Following from this, I think about how these concepts might fit in and operate within a contemporary information economy characterised and driven by the principles of neoliberalism.

Industrial capitalism: value, commodities, and labour.

Hall has acknowledged that although cultural studies approaches might not fall in line with Marxism – in particular questioning the base/superstructure model and the notion of false-consciousness – it is important to recognize the contributions and usefulness of "working within shouting distance of Marxism" (1992, p. 279). In order to set the scene for a discussion of contemporary understandings and lived experiences of economic value, I look to Marx for a conceptual grounding, before considering how these concepts are relevant today. The four concepts I want to touch on are: value, the commodity, labour, and exploitation. Marx holds that the value of things can be thought about in two ways: first, use-value: how useful they are in satisfying needs and wants (1996, p. 46); second, value rests on the exchangeability of commodities in other words, their worth is in relation to other commodities. The two types of value are connected: use values only "become a reality" when a thing is consumed, they are the "material repositories of exchange value" (1996, p. 46). Both forms of value are socially contingent; exchange value is especially contingent and has nothing to do with the natural qualities of a thing (Marx, 1976), but is socially determined "because it arises from the fact that the commodity is a product in a system of production organized through exchange" (Foley, 1986, p. 13), and this system can shift in time and place. As, Biewener (1998) explains:

> Value, in Marxian economics, may then always be defined as socially necessary abstract labour time, but what this refers to will depend upon the particular circumstances under consideration. With new social processes included in the analysis, the negotiation of what is 'socially necessary' changes, and thereby, so does the meaning of value and value forms. The concept of what value is understood to be, both quantitatively and qualitatively, is in this sense, socially contingent. (p. 63)

The basic unit of this value system is the commodity: "an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another" (Marx 1996, p. 45). Importantly, this thing is produced not to simply satisfy the needs of the producer: "A man who produces an article for his own immediate use, to consume it himself, creates a *product,* but not a *commodity"* (Marx, 1935, p. 30). Labour represents the work to produce these commodities, and thus to create their value. Foley (1986) points out that Marx does recognize a private labour existing in a commodity producing society: "This labor produces use-values just as does the labor expended to produce commodities, and these use-values may be quite essential to the reproduction of the society (think, in particular of domestic labor in housekeeping and childrearing)" (p. 16). The products of private labour, however, do not contain exchange-value because they do not count as commodities. Only *social* labour – that which goes into the production of commodities to be exchanged on the market counts in terms of the creation of this kind of value.

The Marxist view that individuals are constituted by their social and cultural environments is in contrast to a contemporary liberalist perspective, underpinned by the ideal of an independent and autonomous individual. In contrast, from a Marxist perspective, the individual is exploited in the production of profit, which comes “from surplus value and the extraction of surplus value involves the appropriation of the product of forced, unpaid, surplus labour” (Holstrom, 1977, p.358). In this study, which takes place within and is concerned with a *late* capitalist context, characterized by neoliberalism, these concepts are still useful and relevant. In the following sections I outline some of the characteristics of this environment, and consider how these ideas about the production of economic value might operate in this context and be applicable to my analysis.

The information society/economy.

Following Bell (1980), the information society is a social framework based on telecommunications. In a post-industrial, information society, the “crucial variables …are information and knowledge” (p. 167). Based on a review of influential sources, Webster (2014) identifies a popular definition (focusing on the economic aspect of this society) that “we have achieved an Information Society when the preponderance of occupations is found in information work” (p. 17), and that this represents a shift from an earlier, manufacturing-driven economy. Castells (2000) identifies “the revolution in information technology, and its diffusion in all spheres of social and economic activity, including its contribution to providing the infrastructure for the formation of a global economy” (p. 219) as the most distinctive factor in the shift in economic structures from the earlier to later halves of the twentieth century. Although, at this time, we might often tie the concepts of an information or knowledge society and economy to the development of the internet and personal computing, this is actually not a new concept, but has been in circulation since the 1960s and the emergence of “new science-based industries and their role in social and economic change” (Powell & Snellman, 2004, p. 200). Indeed, Webster notes that Castells “does not straightforwardly announce the arrival of an ‘information society.’ In his view all societies have used information, and hence the term ‘information society is of little analytical value with regard to the distinctiveness of the present era” (2006, p. 100).

Neoliberalism.

Earlier in this chapter, I wrote about blogging as a technology of the self, an individual and personal practice, which is specifically connected to a culture of individual personal responsibility, self-management, and surveillance. Here, I return to the cultural context of neoliberalism with a focus on economic value and lived experiences of work. Neoliberalism, is at heart writes Harvey (2005) a theory of political economic practices that situates the imperative of individual entrepreneurship within a framework “characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade” (p.2). The state, in this way, provides a framework within which the individual is responsible for her own success (or failure). The burden of responsibility for governance and care is placed on the individual. “Neoliberal thought” writes Kotz (2015): “rests on a highly individualistic conception of human society. Individual freedom of choice is seen as the fundamental basis of human welfare, with market relations understood as the institution that allows individual choice to drive the economy” (p. 11). Here, I explore three elements of the neoliberal society and ideology, with particular attention to how these might be useful theoretical tools for thinking about the connections between ideology and lived experience, particularly in the economic sphere of work and the generation of income.

In a neoliberal society and economy the individual is personally responsible for her own successes and failures. Negotiating risks and making ‘good’ choices are down to the individual, who is charged with taking up an active role in the information/knowledge economy. The discourses of personal improvement and self-help – technologies of the self - that I described earlier in this chapter thus are deeply embedded in this aspect of neoliberalism. In this realm, Beck's (2001) theory of individualization is especially relevant. Beck defines individualization, not only in terms of an autonomous and self-sufficient neoliberal subject, but also in relation to the social and cultural shift whereby traditional group dynamics and social forms have broken down: "for example, the increasing fragility of such categories as class and social status, gender roles, family, neighbourhood etc." (p. 2). In this context, Beck is careful to emphasize that the individual does *not* find herself outside of a social milieu. On the contrary, she operates within a network of "labyrinthine complexity" (p. 2). The key feature of regulations and guidelines in this context is that "individuals must, in part, supply them for themselves, import them into their biographies through their own actions" (p.2). In her study of the blur between work and life in creative industries, McRobbie (2002) argues that "What individualization means sociologically is that people increasingly have to become their own micro structures, they have to do the work of the structures themselves, which in turn requires intensive practices of self-monitoring or 'reflexivity'" (p. 518). In this environment, she suggests, "the individual becomes his or her own enterprise" (p. 519). Furthermore, Beck (2001) describes individualization as a "compulsion…to create, to stage manage, not only one's own biography but the bounds and networks surrounding it and to do this amid changing preferences and at successive stages of life, while constantly adapting to the conditions of the labour market, the education system, the welfare state, and so on" (p.3).

Hypercapitalism and the ‘flexible’ economy.

In the context of the realities of work, the economic landscape has seen a shift away from the long-term security of mid-twentieth century employment practices. Kotz (2015) is careful to point out the danger of claiming that this ideological and economic shift was actually *caused* by technological innovations, noting that the major information and communications technology (ICT) developments – the personal computer in particular – came in to widespread use only after neoliberal capitalist agendas had taken hold (p. 49). However, for workers, the developments in ICTs have surely at least partially shaped or facilitated shifts in their working environments: “Because information can be shared instantly and inexpensively among many people in many locations, the value of centralized decision making and expensive bureaucracies decreases. Individuals can manage themselves, coordinating their efforts through electronic links with other independent parties” (Malone and Laubacher, 2003, p. 106). Furthermore, I want to be careful about adopting the determinist position that these technologies have caused these shifts in professional practices, indeed it is important to recognise the possibility that these technologies may have been chosen for advancement and investment in these contexts because of the potential they presented for fulfilling the mandate and conditions of a neoliberal economy and society.

In terms of the lived experiences of workers in an environment where a great deal of work is carried out online this also means dissolution of workplace boundaries. A great deal of knowledge-based work can be carried out at home, or at locations other than a traditional office. Meetings can take place via teleconferencing technologies, and training and education can also be carried out online. Workers can be accessed via email and mobile phones not only outside of their physical offices but also outside of their office hours. This shift towards the dissolution of boundaries between work and life; professional and personal has been conceptualized as *hypercapitalism* by Marxist scholars who, observed how the commercial sphere engulfs the once separate domestic and cultural spheres, “allowing commercial or business interests to penetrate every aspect of human experience” (Vujnovic, 2012, p. 978). As Graham (2000) argues, with hypercapitalism, we have seen an expansion of what counts as labour, as more “intimate and intricate facets of human activity have become formally commodified” (p.228). Vujnovic highlights how hypercapitalism speaks to a significant change in “the meaning of *value* in political economy” (p. 978, [emphasis added]).

The “borderless workplace” (Couldry, 2010, p. 34) is also characterised by its ‘flexibility’. Flexibility refers to a work environment itself characterised by less clearly defined roles, hours, and even place of work. In the flexible economy there are an increasing number of freelance and contract workers with little job security, and where – in a hypercapitalist sense – workers no longer have clear delineations between the insides and outsides of their work spaces and time. Neff (2012) examines the practices and ideologies of those engaged in ‘venture labor’: entrepreneurial work in high-tech industries. By studying high-tech workers in Silicon Alley[10] at the time before the dot-com bubble burst at the turn of the century, she observed neoliberalism in action, and specifically in the arena of internet technology and new media industries. Neff argues that the cultural conditions predating the dot-com bubble produced a new dominant (neoliberal) discourse about risk: “magazine and newspaper articles celebrated and naturalized these economic risks by urging a casual, even positive attitude toward losing one’s job. Such portrayals framed economic and financial risks as inevitable, necessary, and beneficial for one’s career and companies, reinforcing cultural messages about the attractiveness of risk” (p. 3). What

[10] The area of Manhattan where high-tech businesses have located their centers. However, as these businesses spread themselves throughout the island of Manhattan and New York metropolitan area, the name has come to refer to the entrepreneurial activity of its participants rather than a specific geographical location.

emerged, Neff goes on, “with the rise of dot-coms, was the powerful cultural message that workers should willingly take risks as the requirements for their jobs” (p. 5). Neff situates this acceptance of risk within the broader culture of the ‘flexible’ workplace and economy, drawing on Beck’s *Risk Society* thesis (1992) and the work of sociologist Vicki Smith (2001) as she draws a connection between diminishing employer support and increasing employee/individual responsibility (p. 8). In her study of workers (and unemployed) in the United States Smith found that “uncertainty and unpredictability, and to various degrees personal risk, have diffused into a broad range of postindustrial workplaces, service and production alike. Tenuousness and uncertainty have become “normal” facts of work and employment across the spectrum in the United States” (p. 7).

In addition to the ways in which workers are expected to navigate risk, work conditions also embody this flexibility in a trend towards reduced hours and/or remote work. Kelliher and Anderson (2009) found these particular ‘flexible’ work conditions often produced an intensification in the amount of work individuals had to do: “A dominant discourse among these respondents was that their workloads had not decreased in line with their hours when they moved to a reduced hours contract” (p. 93). This connects with Castells’ observation that “The historical evolution of employment structure, at the roots of social structure, has been dominated by the secular trend toward the increasing productivity of human labour” (2000, p. 243). Respondents in Kelliher and Anderson’s (2009) study indicated that the way to address this demand was with an increased imperative to focus intensely (to be more productive) while at work, and it was also common for them to express a sense of obligation to be available (on the phone, by email etc.) even when they were not scheduled to be working (p. 93). Here, again, the responsibility lies with the individual to manage her own success within these conditions, conditions that demonstrate an encroachment of work into personal time and space.

Networks and networking.

"As a historical trend" writes Castells (2000) "dominant functions and processes in the information age are increasingly organized around networks" (p. 500) where "a network is a set of interconnected nodes" (p.501). Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) describe a contemporary 'networked culture' as one constituted by "social and cultural practices [of the use of online social networks for interacting and sharing information], and the related technological innovations that grew up around them" (p. 12). However, as well as the landscape and affordances produced by social networks online, networking has a broader meaning in the context of working life. In addition to embracing (and taking personal responsibility for managing) risk, employees in this milieu were also encouraged to take on the responsibility for their own self-promotion and professional success via extensive networking outside of traditional office hours and spaces. Neff found that "People who worked in Silicon Alley had clear ideas that they "benefitted" from attending parties and other events by meeting people who could potentially be useful in promoting themselves, their work or their companies" (p. 118). McRobbie (2002) also noted an imperative to network beyond traditional corporate functions and conferences: broader social networking and even partying becoming important sites for self-promotion. In this context, social media application and spaces can be economically leveraged. For example, as social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and (the most obviously concerned with professional identity) LinkdIn, have become mainstreamed, individuals are encouraged to maintain a 'profile', and the economic benefits and risks associated with this are taken up by the mainstream media as well as by specific professional advice outlets. Relations between individuals become valuable, instrumental, a situation where, as Gandini (2016) describes it: “collaboration mingles with competition and cooperation in a unique domain” (p. 136).

Couldry (2010) explains that under the mandate of individual responsibility in neoliberalism “there was no space left, on any scale, whether public or private, work-based or family, that was not amenable to reform in terms of producing more perfect competitiveness” (p. 28). The individual is not only responsible for competing with others in the workplace but to continuously compete with herself, as exemplified by the neoliberal maxim to “be your best self” (e.g. Husain, n.d.; Beck, n.d. ; Kendall, 2015; King, 2016)**.** In this environment, Marx’s concepts of commodity and labour are still relevant, even if the playing field might look and operate differently. Here, I examine how the participants in this study might point to a commodification – a transformation from product to commodity (Banet-Weiser, p. 4) - of their blogs, and also their social connections or networks. In a contemporary neoliberal environment, labour is still required to produce the commodities for use and exchange. At this time, however, the collapse between work and personal life/public and private has implications for what kind of labour might ‘count’ or how types of labour have been transformed. Marx had identified private labour (domestic work/childrearing etc.) as outside the remit of the production of exchange value. With the increasing trend in monetized blogs about domestic life (and childrearing in particular), it is important to think about how this might represent another instance where the boundaries between personal, on the one hand, and professional and commercial on the other might become disrupted.

Communicative capitalism and exploitation.

In the previous chapter I introduced Dean as a critical thinker on blogging culture (2010). In this work, and as taken up in her lecture on ‘The Limits of the Web in an Age of Communicative Capitalism’ (BIT THOMPT, 2013) Dean presents her concept of ‘communicative capitalism,’ which, she says, describes the convergence of multiply-interlinked democracy, social media, and neoliberalism’ (BIT THOMPT, 2013). Dean’s focus rests upon how this configuration represents an appropriation of discourses of democratic values for capitalistic purposes. Dean’s theory provides an interesting perspective to think about the way in which neoliberal ideology might play into a form of communication, and particularly in terms of these questions about how ideas around value, commodities and labour shift. Dean describes a shift in how value is attributed to messages and communications: “away from use-value to the primacy of its exchange-value: its ability to be shared, to an environment where “repetition equals intensity” (2010, p. 90). This has shaped a transformation of work and of specific industries in particular, in terms of how labour and remuneration are understood. In the flexible economy, we can be caught in a cycle of perpetually competing (with others, with ourselves) not only in contract jobs with relatively little security, but in other cases even for *the opportunity to be paid* for our labour (BIT THOMPT, 2013 [emphasis added]) . Attention (hits and links and comments) can become the capital used to propel an online writer to paid work. Here, Dean presents an interesting twist on the observation that free labour proliferates in the digital economy (Terranova, 2004). Terranova defines as ‘free labour’ the “excessive activity that makes the Internet a thriving and hyperactive medium” (p. 73). The ‘ephemeral’ commodities online are “excessive…with relation to the limits of ‘real’ social needs” (p. 90).

Dean argues that the production of this excess is stimulated by an imagined possibility for success. She sees this as a form of exploitation: "Exploitation consists in the efforts to stimulate the creative production of the field, in the interest of finding and monetizing 'the one'[11]" (BIT THOMPT, 2013). Dean describes this in the context of the marketing of creative writing programs as well as online where "everybody writes for basically nothing and then if you get a particular number of hits on your post then you might get a little income and then if you're *really* one of the chosen few you will actually get some kind of other book…contract" (ibid). In this way, Dean argues, the stimulation and expansion of the field does actually produce 'the one', but moreover "contributes to the expropriation of opportunities for income in paid labour and we see this in the collapse of print journalism and academic presses" (ibid). It is this Dean identifies as a "primary condition of labour under neoliberal capitalism…rather than having a right to the proceeds of one's labour, by virtue of a contract, ever more of us win or lose such that remuneration is treated like a prize" (ibid).

Conclusions, Moving Forward

While I identify my own approach as critical, and I find Dean's theory appealing, I want to take these ideas into my own project with a commitment to think *with* them rather than to use them as a model. For, in keeping with the ideology of critical thinking (Paul & Elder, 2008) my goal is to improve and contribute to thought on blogging culture rather than to justify a specific position, and to challenge my own tendencies to say 'Yes! This!' as much as to critically analyze the discourses of my participants. In this, I remain mindful of the potential for individual empowerment in even the most apparently exploitative situations, and the often problematic

[11] 'The one' is Dean's term given to the tiny minority who break out from the larger population -'the common' - producing content online/writing novels/writing academic papers and books.

nature of assuming the authority or privilege to call foul on another's experience. In this chapter I have laid out the framework of concepts and theories that inform this project. Following Herrnstein Smith, I am taking a position that sees value as ultimately contingent: that is, not something objectively determined, or integral, but something discerned via specifically situated perspectives. As such, paying attention to value – complex and slippery as this may be – represents a useful and important entry point for a meaningful cultural and social analysis.

In order to accomplish this, to perform an analysis that focuses on the diversity of discursive contexts where value might operate as well as the social and cultural contingency of value, I look at blogging culture and the discourses of my participants in several discursive contexts. In laying out this framework in this chapter, I began by taking up the concept of genre as an entry point for thinking about how generic characteristics might translate into hallmarks of value. Genre, in this way, might act as a framework for thinking about conventions and standards of quality and value. Following the situation of blogging in the realm of discourses of contemporary popular culture I take up the idea of understandings of value as constructed, negotiated, and circulated among participants in the blogging culture 'scene' or smaller blogging community scenes. Using this entry point, I can consider how value might operate as social capital and cultural capital. With these understandings of capital and value in mind, I can examine the ways in which individuals practice self-improvement, management, and surveillance: taking up blogging as a contemporary 'technology of the self'.

Finally, I explore the economic climate of neoliberal hypercapitalism and consider how economic value might factor and operate – directly and indirectly – in social media practices of self representation and communication such as blogging. This framework informs the questions I bring to my data analysis. As such, I direct my attention not only to the particular ways that value might be located and talked about: literary value; the value of self-improvement; social and cultural capital; and economic value; but also to the ways in which the boundaries between these discourses are blurred, and speak to broader social and cultural values. In the next chapter I unfold the strategies and techniques that I have employed in this study, as well as the principals underpinning these selections and their applications.

Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods

Introduction

I began my doctoral program in the fall of 2006 and, at the time of writing, almost a decade has passed. In this time, I have taken two one-year maternity leave-of-absences from my program. This has meant that the period of time where I have been focused on this study has been extended, inadvertently presenting me with an opportunity to observe and think about shifts in the culture I am concerned with over a longer period of time. This has had consequences for the research. On one hand, it has afforded me a particular perspective on the data gathered through focus groups and interviews with bloggers. As I will describe in more detail in this chapter, I analyzed the data over a number of years and through shifts and developments in the landscape of blog culture. It has also meant that as I have been observing, thinking about, writing and speaking about (e.g. Gaden, 2012; Gaden & Dumitrica, 2015) blog culture over this period, I have drawn on that material in the production of my analysis for this larger research project. In this chapter I outline the range of theories about research and methods for research which have informed my approach to gathering and dealing with this information in the production of this thesis.

This chapter is organized into three sections. First, I will describe the epistemological framework I have identified with as I have progressed throughout this research and writing process. Second, and with this in mind, I outline the methodological approach which shapes my selection of and use of research methods in both the data-gathering and the analysis/interpretation of my data. Finally, I outline these methods and my use of them for the purposes of this project in detail.

Rationale for Research Approach

Epistemology.

Schȍn (1995) describes epistemology as "conceptions of what counts as legitimate knowledge and how you know what you claim to know" (p. 27). This informs the way that I organize and conduct the work in this project, and also how I understand the ways in which the subjects of my research produce their knowledges and beliefs. In the broadest sense, the epistemology underpinning this project can be characterised as following a constructionist-subjectivist framework (Crotty, 1998). Following Crotty's explanation of constructionist epistemology, I have worked from the understanding that meaning is constructed by human beings through "engagement with the world they are interpreting" (p. 43), and that this meaning is "developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42). Crotty explains the difference between constructionism and another epistemological stance, 'subjectivism' where meaning "does not come out of an interplay between subject and object but rather is imposed on the object by the subject" (p. 9). With subjectivism, individuals, writes Crotty, "import" meaning and ascribe it to objects. Throughout this project I have embraced both understandings of how meaning is constructed.

This project is dedicated to exploring discourses of value - discourses which I commonly describe as slippery and contingent throughout this thesis. This, coupled with a perspective rooted in construction and subjectivity, rubs against a desire to make *some* claims to knowledge production through the research process. Navigating this, I have found Haraway's (1988) 'Situated Knowledges' useful, and in particular her strategies of using reflexivity and 'positioning' by the researcher. Following from this, I consider what it means to be reflexive in the research process and what this brings to the knowledge produced.

Making claims: feminist poststructuralism & 'situated knowledges'.

In this section I present two approaches – feminist postructuralism (Weedon, 1987), and Haraway's (1988) proposition for 'situated knowledges' (1988) - to scholarly work which have influenced my own approach. Significantly, these approaches might be understood to represent quite divergent schools of thought. However, I suggest that they can also be taken up in a way that draws these important insights together. From poststructuralism I emphasise the significance of paying attention to the relationship between experience, social power and resistance (Weedon, 1987). Furthermore, from an attention to the significance of material specificity exemplified by Haraway (1988), I present the understanding that these ideas might inform work which recognizes the potential of the production of thoughtfully reflexive research to respect the questions raised by poststructural concerns with truth-claims.

An emphasis on individual stories and personal experience is central to much feminist thought, especially since the 'second-wave' of feminism when the personal is political was a common catchphrase (Hanisch, 2006). However, as Weedon (1987) points out, we cannot refer unproblematically to experience as the source of reality: "Theory must be able to address women's experience by showing where it comes from and how it relates to material social practices and the power relations which structure them" (Weedon, 1987, p.8). She goes on to describe how feminist poststructuralism presents a theory of "the relation between language (paying attention to how people understand things, reality, values), subjectivity, social organization, and power" (p. 12). Epistemologically, poststructuralism allows for a complexity and messiness to subjectivity rather than positioning the subject as always rational, unified, and knowing (p. 21). Furthermore, in this, the author's claim to authority and the text's claim to "reproduce (not to mention 'mirror') some extrinsic reality, are equally undermined: the researching subject and the researched object are both called into question" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 11).

One of the challenges I have encountered with thinking about knowledge in this way has been the problem of unending complexity and contradictions: if everything is relative and contextual, how can I make any truth-claims or suggestions at all? If my research has to recognize this level of fluidity, won't it just slip away, through my fingers?

Weedon does acknowledge a subjective agency:

> Although the subject in poststructuralism is socially constructed in discursive practices, she none the less exists as a thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices. She is also a subject able to reflect upon the discursive relations which constitute her and the society in which she lives, and able to choose from the options available to her. (p. 125)

Haraway (1988) takes up this question and discusses her own struggle to untangle the problematic relationship between feminism and epistemology in science. Despite her recognition of the merits of the social constructionist argument that "science is…rhetoric, a series of efforts to persuade relevant social actors that one's manufactured knowledge is a route to a desired form of very objective power" (p. 577), Haraway still looks for a way that she can still "talk about reality" (p.577) and finds, ultimately, that the further she ventures down the social constructivist rabbit hole, the more nervous she gets: "The imagery of force fields, of moves in a fully textualized and coded world…is …an imagery of high-tech military fields, of automated academic battlefields…the knowledge and power game" (p. 577). In this she makes a call to feminists that especially resonates for me: "Feminists have to insist on a better account of the world; it is not enough to show radical historical contingency and modes of construction for everything. (p.577). Alevesson and Skoldberg (2009) address one of the most common practices for situating knowledges, reflexivity:

> This concept means that serious attention is paid to the way different kinds of linguistic, social, political and theoretical elements are woven together in the process of knowledge development, during which empirical material is constructed, interpreted, and written. Empirical research in a reflective mode starts from a sceptical approach to what appear at a superficial glance as unproblematic replicas of the way reality functions, while at the same time maintaining the belief that the study of suitable (well thought out) excerpts from this reality can provide an important basis for a generation of knowledge that opens up rather than closes and furnishes opportunities for understanding rather than establishes 'truths'. (p. 9)

Rose (1997) takes up Haraway's theory and discusses its application in her own field of geography. Knowledge that is positioned or situated, she writes, does not claim universality unlike the god-trick (a direct reference to Haraway) of knowledge claims which purport to see the whole world at an objective distance (p. 308). However, following her survey of a number of applications of this epistemology in her field, Rose raises some important concerns about the claims of positionality. First, she draws attention to the assumption that the researcher-self is actually a "transparently knowable agent whose motivations can be fully known" and, following this, that the position and relation of the self to power can likewise be known (p. 309). In short, Rose suggests, these research practices and discourses (which she calls transparent-reflexivity) are presumptuous about the reflective power of the researcher.

Identifying my own epistemological standpoint for this project I take up the aim of ‘situated knowledges’ which is, as Rose (1997) describes, “to produce non-overgeneralizing knowledges that learn from other kinds of knowledges” (p. 315). Furthermore, I take up Rose’s commitment to critical situated understandings through thinking about differences and similarities between the researcher and researched (p. 313). In Chapter Two, I outlined the scholarship shaping my perspective on blog culture, and within which this work is situated. This has been an ongoing process, with each shift in blog culture and response from those thinking about it my own perspective has developed. Rose writes about *betweeness*: between theory and practice, researcher and researched (p. 313), acknowledging in this a messiness which “may be beyond the kind of understanding invited by a sort of reflexivity that assumes a transparently knowable self separate from its transparently knowable context” (p. 314). After all, as McRobbie (1982) points out, this research work grows out of lived experience, both in the questions we ask and the strategies we employ to locate our answers. In the next section I outline another characteristic shaping my own situated knowledge: slow scholarship.

Slow scholarship for reflection and strong subjectivity.

In response to the apparently ever-churning research and knowledge production of contemporary universities, and contemporary academic culture, Jeremy Hunsinger (2013) has joined a call for slow scholarship, arguing that

> coming to know is not fast, nor is it becoming faster, and while new technologies aid us in creating knowledge and the larger communities engaged

> with questions might create a simulation of acceleration of knowledges, the communal nature of knowledge and the trust we build into knowledge limits its speed of personal and communal knowledge production and acquisition. (n.p.)

Research needs time, he argues: time to think, to engage with other scholars and scholarship, and to build more knowledges. Hunsinger posits that "knowledge should be constructed in relation to one's life, one's community, and with an eye toward the global future" (n.p.) and that the need to be fast makes it hard to be strategic and creative. In this environment "we become calculating machines in ourselves and could be best thought of less as humans in that light, then as information processors like computers …we become the creators and operators of robots inside ourselves that manage the optimizations that the accelerating world requires" (n.p.). The 'speed capitalism' underpinning this reality is governed by the ideology of neoliberalism and market supremacy: "this neoliberalism assumes these markets are just systems of exchange for mutual profit, and all goods are about profit" (n.p.).

Hartman and Darab (2012) observe with the corporatization of the university there has become an emphasis on the neoliberal values of self-reliance, market rationality, and flexibility with the resulting shift towards "speedy scholarship" (p. 53). The value of slow scholarship, on the other hand, is that it allows us to build trust in the knowledge we are producing. We have time to reflect upon the processes of knowledge production and to sit with our work. With this project, I am operating within a very particular set of circumstances, and do not have the same pressures and tight deadlines of many scholars in their postdoctoral years. This has afforded me the opportunity to spend several years participating in blog culture while I work. Walker Rettberg (2014) has highlighted the benefit of some immersion in blog culture for scholarship: "To really understand blogs, you need to read them over time" (p. 5). Blogs are cumulative texts, she writes, and the process of learning about a blog is similar to getting to know a person. The practices of reading blogs, reading blogging forums, and doing some blogging myself (all of which I describe as forms of immersion in blog culture) have become part of my everyday routine. Slow scholarship has thus, in ways that I did not anticipate at the outset of the project, given me a chance to observe the developments and shifts in blog culture over the past decade, allowing me to consider the data of the focus groups and interviews both from a contemporary perspective as well as one informed by these developments and shifts.

Methodology: Interpretive and Critical Approaches to Qualitative Work

There are many definitions of research, but what they all have in common is the notion of inquiring into, or investigating something in a systematic manner" (Merriam, 2009, p. 3). Merriam writes about different types of research each shaped by its purpose: to contribute to knowledge, assess value, or to address a specific, localized problem. The purpose of my own project might be described as to contribute to thought and discussion on blogging specifically, and social media culture more broadly. As I have described, this is particularly important at a time when a large general population is increasingly using social media platforms to construct and conduct themselves online in practices which have become a routine part of everyday personal and professional lives.

As Merriam (2009) describes, qualitative research methods are driven by the goals of "understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). In this project, I draw from interpretivist and critical approaches to qualitative work. Qualitative research can be understood as the closer examination of small things. The goal, here, is not generalizability or comprehensiveness (Baym, 2009) but, rather, the development and expansion of understanding. I accept that my project will leave me (and the reader) with dangling questions and that it will leave other areas of thought unexplored. I am not attempting to map an objective reality applicable to all bloggers and all of blog culture. Rather, I am attempting to examine, more closely, the ways in which particular discourses of value in blogging operate and are connected with broader social and cultural norms and ideologies. While the empirical scope of the project is not broad in itself, my goal is to produce work with broad appeal and relevance: work that can be compared and contrasted with other similar investigations across disciplinary and professional boundaries to achieve a deeper and more nuanced understanding of blog culture.

There are two methodological strands of thought influencing my approach to this work: interpretivism and critical inquiry. As in the previous section, I acknowledge that there may be tensions between these approaches. While interpretivism "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p.67), critical inquiries uses "thoughtful analysis and reflection" (Willis, 2007, p.86) in order to identify and challenge distortions in individual perceptions.

In this study I am concerned with the task of developing an understanding of constructions of value in blog culture. In the next three chapters, I present the major discourses of value that I identify in the narratives and discussions of participants. This aspect of the project connects with an interpretivist approach, and more specifically takes up a simplified version of the hermeneutic circle Crotty (1998) identifies, with which a researcher can start with the ideas and terms that "presuppose a rudimentary understanding of what one is trying to understand" (p. 92). In Chapter Two, I described how the early literature on blogging contributed to my understanding of dominant discourses in blog culture, and in particular shaped the questions about value that this project addresses. Throughout this study, I moved between these discourses of blogging, through to the development of conceptual frameworks for thinking about value in blog culture, through the data, and back through this cycle again. In this way:

> Understanding turns out to be a development of what is already understood, with the more developed understanding returning to illustrate and enlarge one's starting point. (Crotty, 1998, p. 92)

As I have already mentioned, critical inquiry may make for an odd bedfellow in this approach. Crotty notes that interpretivism, with its remit to *understand*, is generally an uncritical approach. Critical inquiry, he writes, seeks to challenge and bring change, not merely to explore or maintain the status quo. As I have laid out in the previous chapter, some of the critical theory on blog culture to date (e.g. Dean, 2010; Lovink, 2007) has provided me with an important perspective on blog culture, and contributed to a framework for thinking about value in an economic context. A critical hermeneutic approach, writes Crotty (drawing from Ricoeur, 1974), takes a text as a representation of a "false reality" and the work of the researcher to "remove the masks and illusions and gain new interpretation" (p. 112). In this project, I identify a softer version of this approach: I do not meet the discourses of my data from the position that they are necessarily representations of a false reality but, rather, that they are constructions of reality. My work, as I see it, is to identify the discourses of value in these constructions. The critical aspect of the work involves tying constructions to broader social and cultural discourses and hierarchies of value.

The methods I selected for this study are empirical. As Herrnstein Smith (1983) argues (and, as I have discussed in the previous chapter), value is something we talk about, indeed, evaluations are "among the most fundamental forms of social communication and probably among the most primitive benefits of social interaction" (p. 20). With this in mind, for this study, I am primarily paying attention to the social communication and interaction of bloggers, in order to identify and analyze discourses of value. In the next section I describe my selection and implementation of these methods in more detail.

Research Methods

Data gathering: context.

By the summer of 2009, when I ran the focus groups and interviews for this project, I hardly ever had to explain to anyone what a blog was or why I would want to write my thesis on blogging culture (a common occurrence while I was writing my MA thesis on blogging in 2004/5). Even my technophobic mother was occasionally reading blogs. Blogging had made the transition to mainstream media staple. Bloggers were often featured on news television as pundits and were contributing to newspapers and magazines both on and offline. The blog tracking site Technorati put the number of blogs online at 133 million (Scott, 2009). Among these there was a growing number of bloggers who were garnering book-publishing deals and in the summer of 2009 while I was recruiting and running my focus groups and interviews, a film version of one of these books was showing in Calgary cinemas. The major motion picture *JulieJulia* was based on a book by Julie Powell. Powell's book had been drawn from her blog where she documented her experiences of cooking her way through Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking.* Jennifer McClean, from Technorati notes in 2008/2009 that there has been a rise in a "professional class of bloggers" (Scott, 2009). Popular tech site *Mashable* listed six books born from blogs during the same year (Ehrlich, 2009). Indeed, Technorati's State of the Blogosphere report from 2008 finds motivations for blogging to range from "self- expression and sharing expertise, followed by networking and gaining entry into the media world. Other reasons include activism, book publicity, personal satisfaction and to become known as an expert" (Scott, 2009). Blogging had become a mainstream, professionalized practice.

In the 2010 municipal elections in Calgary, Naheed Nenshi's victory was discussed by many in terms of a race and a victory at least partially due to the mayor and his team's mastery of social media (Braid, 2010, n.p.; Davy, 2010, n.p; Gignac, 2010, n.p.). A year earlier, when I was talking with Calgary-based bloggers for this project, there was already some cohesion in the local social media community. Although not many of my participants knew each other prior to our meetings, there was some name/blog recognition among them and some had encountered one another via blog networks and social groups. In Calgary, Social Media Breakfast (SMBYYC) began in 2008 with a small group of enthusiasts. Another site, YYC Blogs had been set up as an aggregator and organizer of Calgary-based blogs and news (Thorburn, 2009)[12]. Although the social media scene was not as heavily populated, or as professional as it has become in the years since, it is reasonable to say that there was certainly an established and growing social media culture in the city.

Using methods where I could engage face-to-face with my participants presented the best opportunity for me to produce conversations and discussions where I could dig into discourses of value. In the next section, I outline my rationale for choosing these methods of data-gathering and explain how I employed them in practice.

Focus groups.

Hughes and Dumont (1993) describe focus groups as "in-depth group interviews employing relatively homogenous groups to provide information around topics specified by researchers" (p.

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[12] Note: This website now appears to be defunct.

776). In their study of the use of Focus groups to facilitate culturally-anchored research Hughes and DuMont were working in the context of research with culturally specific groups, in the case of their work, with African-American families. Bloggers are a group in a different way, with a shared identity grown out of a practice. A great deal of blog-related research has been done using the texts of blogs as data (Herring et al, 2004; Keren, 2006; McNeil, 2003); online surveys (Marlow, 2006; Johnson & Kaye, 2004), and email interviews (Doostdar, 2004). The relative lack of research engaging in-person with bloggers was highlighted for me with Keren's *Blogosphere* (2006), work that produced some strong responses from the blogging community (Administrator, 2007; Joel, 2007; Rettberg, 2007). I have discussed the content of Keren's critique in chapter two of this thesis, but the method for his research (an analysis of nine blog-texts) and blogger response to it was also significant in the design of my own project. Walker-Rettberg, an academic who blogs and who has written about blogging (Moretensen & Walker, 2002; Walker-Rettberg, 2008) wrote that she found Keren's book

> annoying…A major fallacy in Keren's interpretations of "blogosphere" in general and of these blogs in particular is his assumption that a blog represents the blogger's life – that bloggers actually blog everything or even that what they blog is intended to portray a "whole" picture of their lives. (Walker-Rettberg, 2007, n.p.)

Another blogger wrote "Wow Michael, I think you've been reading only the nine blogs you covered in your book. World is a whole lot richer than that…" (Administrator, One by One Media, 2007). In fact, Keren (2004) himself demonstrated his awareness of the potential difficulty of only studying blog texts: "The analysis of blogs focuses on representations of individuals, not on the individuals behind them" (p.11). I do not think that empirical research with bloggers will get me closer to an essential truth about blog culture (discussions with bloggers will surely present narratives that are partial and mediated in their own way). However, I suggest that through conversation there is an opportunity for these narratives to focus on specific and relevant topics. Furthermore, as a participant in the proceedings, I can also make observations based on both verbal and non-verbal cues that I could not make with a blog-text. I can ask follow-up questions, move off-script where it seems useful, and in short be more responsive and active in order to produce richer data. Additionally, as someone who has been immersed in blog culture for close to a decade, I have a great deal of respect for the participants in this community. In this project, I wanted to demonstrate this respect by listening to what they had to say.

The data gathering process

I did not run a pilot focus group or interviews but in 2007 and 2008, recruited for and co-facilitated a number of focus groups on blogging and social media (Facebook) with my thesis supervisor, Dr. Maria Bakardjieva. I drew on this experience when I was preparing for my own research. My only criteria when I was locating participants was that they had been blogging for at least one year; that their blog was currently active; that they lived in or around the Calgary area; that there was some personal content on their blog; and that they were not blogging for an employer. I located blogs through basic Google searches for Calgary blogger; used the location tag on Blogger software; searched through the blogrolls of blogs I had already located, and those listed on a local blog aggregator called YYC Blogs. Where a blogger listed an email address or a Contact Me button on their blog, I sent my call for participation directly. If there was no email address or other avenue to contact them, I posted my call for participation as a comment on their most recent blog post. For the full text of this communication see Appendix A. I contacted 35 bloggers in May, 2009 and I received interested responses from 26. I scheduled focus groups to take place in June and July, 2009, with twenty bloggers. Of these, there were 18 attendees across five sessions. I was not concerned with accessing a sample of bloggers who would be in some way representative of an (unknown) whole. Following Hughes and Dumont (1993), my selection was "purposive and based more on suitability and availability, rather than on representativeness" (p.777).

The participants consisted of seven men and 11 women. The youngest participant was 22 and the oldest 53. Most of the participants were university or college educated, and all were using some other social media applications, predominantly Facebook and Twitter. For more details about the participants, see Appendix B. All of the focus group sessions were held at the Department of Communication, Media and Film at the University of Calgary. Prior to each session I sent each participant details of the location (including a map of the university campus) and of the parking/public transit options available. I set up a research-project webpage attached to the University of Calgary website[13]. Here, I outlined the project and gave some information about my background. I included a link to this page in my communication with participants so that they could learn a little more about me as well as the project before they took part, and so that they could be reassured of its credibility (as affiliated with the university).

At the beginning of each session I gave participants detailed consent forms to read and sign (Appendix D), and introduced myself and, when she was in attendance, my supervisor. I provided snacks and drinks for participants in order to create a comfortable, social atmosphere and because, from my experience, it can be difficult to concentrate and relax when you are

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[13] http://www.ucalgary.ca/ggaden/

feeling hungry or thirsty. The groups ranged in size from five to just two participants and each ran for approximately two hours. Participants received a 30 dollar honorarium for taking part in the project. I welcomed smaller groups to facilitate in-depth conversations, rather than rote turn-taking. With smaller group sessions each blogger would have the opportunity to talk at length. Ideally, I would have preferred to have had at least three participants in each group. I was unaware of any connections between the bloggers, but there were some who were aware of one another, or at least of their blogs. In one group, two of the bloggers actually knew each other outside of blogging. Gill et al. (2008) comment on the potential benefits and drawbacks of participants who know one another:

> Pre-existing groups may be easier to recruit, have shared experiences and enjoy a comfort and familiarity which facilitates discussion or the ability to challenge one another comfortably…In other research projects it may be decided that stranger groups will be able to speak more freely without fear of repercussion, and challenges to other participants may be more challenging and probing, leading to richer data. (p. 293)

I used a discussion guide for the focus group sessions (Appendix E). This was divided into two sections with two groups of questions in each. These began with general questions about blogging routines and practices and progressed to more focused questions around conventions and values, a strategy which I hoped would put participants at ease, build rapport, and generate rich data (Gill et al., 2008). My discussion guide included specific questions but these were organized under more general topic headings. During the focus groups I made it clear to participants that they were free to range off-question, and to talk about anything the questions or topic triggered for them in order to facilitate a more fluid and natural discussion, and also to allow new topics to emerge in the discussion (Hughes and DuMont, 1993). Although I was not blogging at the time I ran my focus groups, I did maintain a blog for almost two years and I had been reading blogs and paying close attention to blogging culture since 2003. As such, I identify myself as a blog culture insider and I made an effort to communicate this to my research participants in order to develop rapport and trust.

Of course, the main characteristic that sets focus groups apart from other methods is the group dynamic of the discussion. This connects at the deepest level with the perspective underpinned by social construction and the discursive construction of evaluation which frames this project: "Underlying this approach is an assumption that opinions, attitudes and accounts are *socially* produced – shaped by interaction with others" (Tonkiss, 2005, p. 194). Hughes and DuMont (1993) write that using focus groups can

> provide researchers with direct access to the language and concepts participants use to structure their experiences and to think and talk about a designated topic. Within-group homogeneity prompts Focus group participants to elaborate stories and themes that help researchers understand how participants structure and organize their social world. In their reliance on social interaction, focus groups can also help researchers identify cultural knowledge that is shared among group members as well as to appreciate the range of different experiences individuals within a group may have. (p. 776)

Although I present myself as somewhat of an in-group member, bloggers might not accept this presentation of self, especially given the context within which they have met me: as a researcher rather than as a blogger. With other bloggers, however, they might feel more at ease talking about something which was, at this time, still a relatively niche practice, despite its mainstream recognition. This aspect of focus groups meant that my data would be more likely to incorporate the language, stories, and themes that Hughes and DuMont (1993) describe. It also prepared the ground for the interviews in two ways: first, it allowed me to gain trust and credibility with the participants and, second, I could draw on the stories and themes of the Focus groups when I was preparing questions for the interviews. Furthermore, the time between the Focus group and the interview could, I hoped, allow my participants some time for reflection. Allowing for time for reflection between the Focus group and interview in this way, allowed participants to think over our discussions while they were back in their routine of blogging and reading blogs, and to, perhaps, draw out some important observations for the interview discussions. Running Focus groups also presented an opportunity for me to think about where I fit in (if I fit in) in the blogging community, and to develop a stronger sense of my situation and context as a researcher. The Focus groups prompted me to think about my assumptions going into the project. Following data gathering, I wrote a brief reflection on the process.

Interviews.

After each focus group (from two days, up to a week afterwards), I emailed each participant asking if they would be interested in doing the interview portion of the study. I received 14 expressions of interest in doing the interview and ultimately completed interviews with 11. Participants were invited to meet again at the university, or at a coffee shop or other relatively quiet public place convenient for them. The interviews were each approximately one hour in length. In my notes from the sessions, I wrote that I found the interviews very enjoyable and that the participants appeared relaxed “possibly because they felt more comfortable with me having met me already, because they had some idea of the tone and content of discussion, and because they didn’t have any concern about the judgment or comments of other participants” (Gaden, September 2009). I also observed that there was an even greater level of personal disclosure in the interview sessions, and that I, too, entered the discussion more actively, in order to create an ambiance of casual conversation rather than formal interview. I noted: “There was a lot of laughter, and back-and-forth conversation” (Gaden, September, 2009).

DeVault (1999) describes the relationship between researcher and respondent in interviews as a partnership: “The things that are said are responses to these words of this particular researcher. The researcher is actively involved with respondents, so that together they are constructing fuller answers to questions that cannot be asked in simple, straightforward ways” (p. 65). Researchers, she writes, must pay attention to the construction of their questions in this regard and put thought into developing categories and concepts that will make sense to respondents. In her own experience, she found this helpful when doing research on “household routines for planning, cooking, and serving meals” (p. 63). Struggling to find a way to articulate this field of activity in questions for her interview respondents, she was tempted to use the term “housework” but found this term insufficient (it included work she didn’t want to focus on and erased some of the work she did). Finally, she asked about “all the housework that has to do with food – cooking, planning, shopping, cleaning up” and found that her focus on the everyday relatable practices drew a more focused response (p. 63).

DeVault also connects the need to ground interviewing in accounts of everyday activity with the work of Dorothy Smith (1987), who suggested that, DeVault writes, “when we ground interviews in this way, we find that social organization is “in the talk and that we can mine the talk for clues to social relations” (DeVault, 1999, p. 66). In this way, the focus group experience provided an excellent preparation for the interviews, not only in terms of the participants developing their understanding, interest, and comfort with me and the project, but also in terms, as I have already noted, of putting together the questions for the interviews. In my post-data gathering reflection-piece I noted that the interviews:

> Followed up on some of the questions from the focus group…I found this useful because the focus group sessions themselves allowed me to think about these questions and to reflect upon where there were gaps in the discussion and what I would like to get into further with these participants. (Gaden, September 2009)

Gill et al. (2008) wrote that "the purpose of the interview is to explore the views, experiences, beliefs, and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters" (p. 292). Questions about value can be understood as personal. What we value might be socially situated and constructed it can feel intimate, related to our understanding of our identity, our sense of our core selves, our values. In this project I am interested in understandings that are shared by bloggers, but from a methodological point of view, a route into these more broadly held perspectives, can be taken through individual views. Individual stories and narratives are, in this way, essential to my project and give the project the depth and nuance it requires. I am also concerned with how bloggers use their practice as a way of working on themselves, indeed, whether they do this at all. Speaking to them individually not only gives each person the opportunity for enough air-time to get into sufficient detail and to develop their stories without interruption but also allows for the discussion of more sensitive topics or controversial opinions without the potential judgment of peers. Gill et al. (2008) comment that interviews are "particularly appropriate for exploring sensitive topics, where participants may not want to talk about such issues in a group environment" (p. 292).

The central benefit of employing interviews is the potential for depth, especially where the participants are already knowledgeable about and comfortable with the project and with the researcher. My interviews were semi-structured, with some key questions and areas for exploration, but also scope for divergence where an idea or a response called for it (Gill et al, 2008). My experience and immersion in blogging culture meant that I understood the references made by participants to, for example, blogging platforms; 'A-list' or 'big-name' bloggers; other (then nascent) social media platforms. My familiarity with the 'scene', the language and stories of the participants (from the focus groups), and the flexibility of the semi-structured format meant that the interviews could proceed in an organic way but still maintain some focus on the questions I had put together following the focus groups.

In Chapter Three of this thesis, I theorized blogging as a practice of both community/subculture participation and an individualistic way of working on the self. In this way, my methods reflect this dualism: speaking to bloggers in groups and also individually. More importantly, as I have already described, this approach presents an opportunity to tackle my questions with the depth and nuance that this kind of small-scale qualitative project demands. Through focus groups I gain access to in-group language and stories: the ways that bloggers talk about blogging, the meaning that is socially produced, legitimized, and contested. These focus groups also allow me to develop trust and rapport with participants and prepare interview questions drawing from the group discussions. The interviews themselves are opportunities for more in-depth conversations focused on individual, potentially more personal and private experiences which participants may have been reluctant to share with the group or with a researcher in a first meeting. This strategy of combining focus groups and interviews ultimately provided a richer set of data and strengthened the overall quality of the research.

Situated observations as additional data.

I have already outlined how the extended time-frame of this project is a central feature of the work. Significantly, I conducted these focus groups and interviews in 2009, and engaged in multiple rounds of analysis over the following several years. During this time, and indeed throughout the entire project, I not only paid attention to scholarly work on blogging, but to blog culture in practice: I tried blogging for myself; I read blogs daily; attended the Northern Voice conference in 2007 and spoke at it in 2012, and attended the BlogWest conference in 2012. At these events, and throughout the project, my perspective was informed and shaped by my observations. This reflexive immersion in blog culture has offered me an experiential background for my analysis in the following chapters. It has also provided me with a body of diachronic observations of the developmental trajectories of blogging as a phenomenon. In a sense, then, these informal observations have come to act like a pool of additional data and knowledge which I return to (in the simplified hermeneutic pattern that I described above) as I analyze my interview and focus group material.

Data Analysis

An attention to discourse explains Cheek (2004) has two central characteristics or concerns: first, an attention to contextual specificity: "Texts are both constitute of and, in turn, constructed by their context" (p. 1144); and a concern with the workings of power in and through these discourses (p. 1145). A discourse analysis approach can appear to be used in diverse ways. Cheek highlights the poor reporting of the use of discourse analysis techniques as a contributing factor to the confusion around what discourse analysis actually is (p. 1141). She follows Foucault in an understanding of discourse as referring to ways of thinking about speaking about aspects of reality. For example, in the *History of Sexuality* (1979), Foucault looks at how sexuality and in particular sexual ‘deviance’ has been historically discursively constructed, in different ways in different contexts. Here, Foucault reminds us that discourses are not linear, but multiple, simultaneous, and competing. He reflexively positions himself as a specific intellectual: “a radically situated critic who analyzes the specificities of practices and power relations from a participant's standpoint” (Fairfield, 2002, p. 54).

In relation to critical theory, Foucault found fault with generalization and truth-claims. In his lectures to the College de France, he explained his conviction about the “inhibiting effect of global *totalitarian* theories” (1980, p.81). Here, “Foucault looks with suspicion upon Marxists and others who view their method of critique as bestowing definitive insight into human affairs (Fairfield, 2002, p.52). Foucault (1980) described an alternate approach, one focused on the “*local* character of criticism” (p.81), and the potential for the “*insurrection of subjugated knowledges”* as a means to challenge the dominant discourses (“established regimes”) of knowledge. In his later work, Foucault suggested that the individual has scope to refuse to adhere to dominant discourses and the power to take them up in creative and anti-oppressive ways (1984; 1988). In this project, I find Foucault’s challenge to hierarchies of knowledge and the generalizing critique of critical theory very useful. In Chapter Three I introduced critical and Marxist approaches to economic value as an important element in the theoretical framework for this study. However, as I noted there, I want to remain open to the potential for multiple interpretations of the discourses of value in blog culture; and, furthermore, to use Foucault’s concept of subjugated knowledges as a tool for examining these discourses.

I also adopt the argument that some discourses can become so prevalent that they come to be taken for granted, understood as truth: “Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (Foucault, 1980, p.131). These discourses, as Cheek (2004) describes, can become “invisible or assumed” (p. 1142). In his work on madness and crime (1965, 1979b), Foucault examined the shifts in regimes of truth and their implementation in modes of treatment and punishment. His later work focused on the self, rather than society or institutions, and on the invention and government of the self (e.g. 1979b). In this study, I am interested in identifying precisely those discourses of value that have become normalized and, relatively, those which might be contested or positioned as ‘deviant’ or subjugated.

Wolcott (1994) describes the process of analysis as one which “proceeds in some careful, systematic way to identify key factors and relationships among them” (p. 10). In this project, I took up a three-part approach to the analysis of my data. The first phase involved a holistic approach, “eyeballing” (Willis, 2007) the data in order to “familiarize” myself with it (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002) and to test out the discursive contexts I had already identified for discourses of value. In the second phase, I conducted a complete thematic analysis of the data, working to maintain a somewhat holistic approach while dividing the data in to manageable chunks. In the third phase, I carried out a closer discourse analysis and interpretation of the data, drawing from some of the principles of critical discourse analysis as I sought to make connections between the discourses of value I identified and broader social and cultural trends or ideologies.

Phase 1: familiarization and ‘eyeballing’.

Drawing from the first versions of the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Three, as well as the scholarship outlined in Chapter Two, I conducted a broad, thematic analysis of the transcripts from my focus groups and interviews.. Here, I was concerned with identifying broad themes and discourses of value. I wanted to test out my conceptual framework and develop it further. It is important to note the time-lag between data gathering (Summer 2009) and this thematic analysis (Spring-Fall 2012). As I have already discussed, I think that this matters very much for the flavour of the project as a whole, but especially for the process and results of analysis and interpretation. Wolcott (1994) explains why this might be so:

> Time itself fosters / the seasoning of both of the data and of the individual who gathered them…Data and scholar alike mature within social contexts that exert a sometimes subtle influence on interpretation that we fail to recognize…Descriptive details are not likely to change through time; descriptive statements stand pretty much as they are written…On the other hand, the idea of finally finding a way to interpret one's data, or suddenly realizing how to go about reinterpreting it, denotes the possibility of fresh insight or a long-awaited breakthrough. (p. 38)

For this project, the time between phases of research has also meant that there has been time for significant shifts in blogging culture. My data and my perspective then, becomes even more apparently situated.

Ryan and Bernard (2003) point out that although thematic analysis is a staple part of much qualitative research and even quantitative work, it is often presented without explanation of the process and in this way can appear mysterious. This method, then, has something in common with discourse analysis, which as I described already, can appear fuzzy. When I began working on this project, I thought that thematic analysis was something that I must simply 'get on with', to do intuitively, engaging with my common sense practicality as well as my scholarly know-how. Willis (2007) describes this practice as "eyeballing the data" (p.298), in this case for broad theme. Ryan and Bernard (2003) describe themes in this way: "To us, themes are abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs that link not only expressions found in texts but also expressions found in images, sounds, and objects. You know you have found a theme when you can answer the question: What is this expression an example of?" (p. 87). In this, Ryan and Bernard identify with Opler's 1945 introduction of the concept of themes as a tool for analyzing cultures as well as a way of employing everyday language in the presentation of research.

Thematic analysis can be either inductive, where themes come out of the data, or a priori, where the researcher begins with themes constructed from a combination of her knowledge of the phenomenon being studied, or her theoretical expertise. In this project, I began my thematic analysis with some a priori broad themes, or conceptual contexts for thinking about blogging, that had come from my literature review and observations of blog culture. These themes act as conceptual vessels for thinking about value and blogging. As I embarked on data gathering, I had already begun to think about value in the context of blogging as writing/literature/lifewriting; blogging as a subculture or 'scene' and blogging as a technology of the self. The first round of this analysis was carried out in Spring/Summer 2012. At this time I brought together my initial work on the theoretical framework, literature review together with multiple close readings of the transcripts (it was important to complete multiple readings, because I had not conducted the transcription myself). Ritche and Spencer (2002) describe this process as a "familiarization" with data: "During the familiarization stage, the analyst listens to and reads through the material, listing key ideas and recurrent themes" (p. 313). In this way, I used my initial immersion in my data as a basis for the production of a 'thematic framework': a framework within which material can be sifted and sorted at a more detailed level of analysis. I conducted a hand-coding (without the use of software) of one focus group and one interview transcript in order to test the categories I had identified.

Following from this process, I added a fourth theme or context: economic value, where blogging might be or become a commercial enterprise. The data supported this category and I had another motivation for wishing to include it. Just before I began this phase of coding, I attended BlogWest (a blogging conference, March 2012). Monetizing blogs and professionalizing as bloggers were dominant themes of the conference. At the same time, blogs I had read for several years had begun to include an increasing amount of sponsored posts, advertisements, and affiliate links. Furthermore, as I found in my literature review, early adopters of blogging *did* invoke discourses of economic value, albeit in a different way. Blogging experts like Blood (2000, 2002) identified the value of blogs precisely in their *independence from* the obligations and implications of engagement with systems of economic value. Following this, I began to review more recent scholarly work on blogging in order to see if this was an emerging theme in this body of work (I have discussed some of this work in Chapter Two); and I developed a theoretical framework for thinking about economic value in this context and for the analysis of my data (presented in Chapter Three).

Phase 2: thematic analysis II.

The second phase of analysis was a stop-go affair, with several false starts. Initially, I planned that this phase would involve a more focused discourse analysis, where I identified discourses of value at work within the already coded for broader thematic areas, and would code these using qualitative analysis software. However, as I moved on with this process, I experienced an increasing discomfort with this strategy. Working from data already portioned out by theme erased the contexts for those discourses and, in particular, the ways in which conversations were shaped by the questions I had asked. In this way, although I wanted to move beyond the entirely holistic eyeballing approach (Willis, 2007) that I had used for the first thematic analysis, I did find that chopping up the data in this way threatened its meaningfulness. I tried another software (QDA Miner) to see if there was a better way to organize my data in a different system, but ran in to similar problems. I could not shake the feeling that breaking down the data in order to code it in this way would mean that I would end up interpreting the comments of my participants out of context in way that was quite problematic. In her description of her own empirical study of internet users, Bakardjieva (2005) describes a tricky moment in her own process of data analysis:

> I performed a qualitative content analysis of the transcripts assigning excerpts to topics: what the respondents talked about. In the end, this analytical procedure left me with an intimidating number of different topics originating from the different interviews that showed very few points of convergence. This was a terrifying moment in my research. I could not figure out what I could find in this body of data other than a number of disparate individual experiences and opinions…My model of the Internet connection as a point of overlap of several heterogeneous networks – physical, social, informational and semantic – felt too artificial to provide a basis for re-assembling the various subtopics emerging out of respondent's talk into a meaningful structure. My typology of activities underlying the pie-cutting exercise was not supported by respondent's experiences…I was in need of a different logic to make sense of the interviews, other than my original model. (p. 88)

Bakardjieva abandoned her fragments and went back to the transcripts: "I read each of them carefully, this time looking not for labels that could be attached to selected fragments, but rather for the underlying structure of the narrative." (p. 88). I returned to my own project reassured that I could revise my approach. Coding, as I found it, was reflective and ongoing process, rather than one that was premeditated effectively (Basit, 2003). In order to move forward I decided to code my data by hand rather than using software, and to use my Focus group and interview questions as an organizational tool. I organized the questions themselves into thematic categories as follows:

- Becoming a Blogger: motivations, inspirations, and technical choices.
- Being a blogger (routine and offline life)
- Payoff and rewards of blogging.
- Characteristics and evaluations of blogs (own and others')

I used this approach to isolate manageable chunks of data which still retained conversational integrity, so that I could perform a more detailed discourse analysis for discourses of value. Tabulating the answers in this way allowed me to identify patterns and recurring discourses. In this sense, this part of the coding approach was top-down. Not only did this allow me to structure my data in a workable way, it represented an acknowledgement of my role in the generation of the discourses I was studying.

The first set of questions and answers were concerned with motivations to begin blogging. In these discussions, the most significant discourses around value connected with the idea of blogging as a technology of the self, a strategy for working on the self in some way. I proceeded through all of this data, focusing primarily on identifying discourses of value in this context, flagging them, and collecting and beginning to organize excerpts according to sub-themes in a new file. At the same time, I flagged aspects of the data that that invoked other discourses of value, creating new tables as I identified new discourses. In this way, data organization and analysis happened in layers. A key part of the process was a continual passing through the original transcripts to see how the findings that were emerging, fit with the discussions as a whole. Did they make sense? How do they support/challenge my initial ideas? Bliss, Monk and Ogborn (1983) identify a simple categorized report of data as a common approach towards working with qualitative data. However, following Antaki et al. (2002) I maintain that this organization and summary report of the data does not in itself constitute analysis. In the next, and final phase of analysis, I carried out a closer discourse analysis.

Phase 3: detailed discourse analysis and interpretation.

Following tabulation of answers and identification of key discourses, I examined these discourses in order to highlight:

- Understandings of what counted as valuable (or not) in blog texts and blogging practices, which appeared as taken-for-granted and normalized.
- Where there were tensions and contestations around these norms and conventions.
- The broader discourses underpinning and produced by these norms and conventions.

It was in this part of the process that the influence of my participation in and observations of blog culture since data gathering became especially apparent. It was impossible to 'un-observe' the shifts and developments in this cultural milieu. Blogging had become increasingly professionalized, and the scope for monetization far greater (and tools more diverse) than when I conducted my focus groups and interviews in 2009. These observations have contributed especially to the more critical aspect of my analysis and in the chapters that follow I have endeavored to lay out my findings and analysis in a way which makes clear how I reached these understandings.

Reviewing the process.

Wolcott (1994) writes about the process of transition from description to analysis: “Tell the story. Then tell how that happened to be the way that you told it” (p. 16). He points out, though, that even description is laden with an implicit analysis and interpretation: we never report ‘pure’ facts/’how it happened’ (p.16). In order to check in on the integrity of my process, I employed the procedures recommended by Antaki et al. (2002). Here, the authors identify the importance of maintaining a focus on actually performing analysis, and highlight some of the practices to avoid. The first of these presents an under-analysis through summary, which does not pay attention to the discourses participants use, and instead presents all in the analyst’s words. The second, under-analysis through taking sides involves “position-taking…the analyst substitutes sympathy or scolding for detailed examination of what the speakers are saying.” This is something I have thought about a lot throughout the research process. I have a personal and emotional connection to blogging culture, and as I have already discussed, my perspective has shifted over the years. Although I don’t want to (nor do I believe it is possible to) assume an objective pose, I do think it is important (and I have already noted this) to maintain a critical perspective on my own critical perspective in order to ensure avoiding the kind of under-analysis that Antaki et al. describe here. Following this, they point to ‘under-analysis through over-quotation or isolated quotation’. Again, this has been a concern for me. Following my first two phases of coding and thematic analysis, I was left with a large number of tables filled with excerpts. To present these excerpts alone is not enough.

The fourth pitfall that Antaki et al. identify is: “the circular discovery of a) discourses and b) mental constructs” (n.p). With this in mind, it has been useful to identify the framework for discourses of value as I have in Chapter Three. Using this framework, and my observations of and engagement in blogging culture throughout this study, I can as Antaki et al. (2002) suggest, take up "evidence that is beyond the specific conversational extract, to substantiate the claim for the existence of such repertoires, ideologies or discourses" (n.p.). In the same vein, they caution against circularity due to mental constructs, i.e. the assumption that empirical data from interviews and focus groups might somehow give access to what is going on in the participants' minds. In this work, I remain mindful that the data I am analyzing does not equate inner thoughts or authentic truth. This is foregrounded in the fundamental focus of the study on constructions of value. Furthermore, one of the theories I draw from heavily in this project, Irwin's (1973, 1977) theory of social scenes, foregrounds the ways in which individuals might modify their behavior (including what they say) when they are participating in a scene. I am mindful that to some extent at least, participating in blog-related research (where these participants are specifically being called upon to speak 'as bloggers') might constitute activity in just such a 'scene', particularly in the context of Focus group discussions. The final weaknesses identified in this study are 'under-analysis through false survey' and 'under-analysis through spotting'. In the first, the danger presented is of extrapolating to the world at large from the data, of generalizing. I have already made clear that this project does not set out to define the experiences or psychology of all bloggers based on my analysis of the discussions of the participants in my study. However, especially considering the connections I draw with my own (critically considered) observations and attention to a range of sites of blog culture (blogs, discussion forums, journalism as well as scholarly analyses of blogging, and blogging and social media conferences), I think that it will be reasonable to draw some connections (or at least make suggestions about those connections) between the discourses of my participants and blog culture more broadly. In their final example of 'under analysis', Antaki et al. highlight the importance of researcher familiarity in conversational features and rhetorical tropes. The recognition of features, they caution, does not equate analysis: “original analysis should seek to show how established discursive devices are used, in new sets of material, to manage the speakers’ interactional business.” (n.p.). Here, again, I turn to the material outlined in chapter three, as a framework of reference for the recognition of established discursive devices in the way that Antaki et al. describe.

Conclusions.

Wolcott (1994) identifies the goal of qualitative interpretive analysis as “ to make sense of what goes on, to reach out for an understanding or explanation beyond / the limits of what can be explained with a degree of certainty usually associated with analysis” (pp. 10/11). Throughout the process of analysis, I found myself balancing this agenda with a suspicion of interpretation that purports to locate hidden meanings. Throughout, then, I checked in with myself to ask ‘could it be anything else?’ as I went through the data. In keeping with the commitment to critical thinking that I have highlighted before, I tried out alternative interpretations, and endeavored to recognize and challenge my own bias as I went along. In this way, I endeavored to emulate what Rabinow (in Stewart, 1993) said of Foucault’s work: that Foucault would re-raise big questions about aspects of daily life, re-raising them “ in a way that makes you pause, and stop and think about the kind of beings that we are and the whether we want to be like that” (n.p.). In this chapter I have laid out my approach to this project and the methods that I have employed in order to achieve my research goals in line with this perspective. In the subsequent three chapters I present my findings and analysis from this investigation.

Chapter Five: Findings & Analysis I – Blogging and the Self

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I described the processes of organization and analysis used for this project. In Chapter Three I presented the theoretical framework that informed this process. Central to this work is the idea that blogging can be conceptualized in a number of different ways and accordingly, that discourses of value are produced within multiple discursive contexts. Blogging involves the production of a text, but is also a practice of identity production and negotiation for the blogger. Drawing from my existing work on blogging and Foucault's (1998) theory (Bakardjieva & Gaden 2012a, 2012b), and following the first round of thematic analysis that I carried out on the data from my focus groups and interviews, I identified the Self as a thematic context for discourses of value. In subsequent readings and coding of the data, I started to explore this in more detail. In this chapter, I present a discussion of these discourses.

Although he disputes a vision of progressive development where new technologies and practices usurp the old, Kitzmann (2003) identifies a connection between cultural and social context and practices of self documentation. He describes the common location of the rise of personal diaries in conjunction with the rise of "modernity and institutions" (p. 51) and compares them with Christian practices of confession with Augustine as forerunner or ancestor. However, more important than locating "the seed" of contemporary practices, he argues, is the need to pay attention to shifts in these practices and their conditions: "Over time", he writes, "this process of self-monitoring adapted to the rhythm and demands of individualism, capitalism, nationality, and other hallmarks of modernity, making diaries the sites of self-construction, self-expression, and self-exploration – places where the "true self" can be both constructed, and observed by potential readers" (p. 52). The initial discussion in this chapter takes the questions I asked my participants about their motivations to blog as a starting point. From the analysis of these responses, I drew out two broad themes which could be used to examine the ways in which these bloggers talked about value in relation to themselves as individuals: blogging as a strategy for self-help in terms of psychological well-being and self help in terms of self-improvement and self-articulation. Following this presentation of findings, I explore what this means for blogging practices as culturally specific technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988).

Technologies of the Self: Practices and Routines

In his exposition of ancient technologies of the self, Foucault (1988) highlights the repetition and routine of those practices. Ancients would write daily, meet with mentors frequently. Similarly, early Christians confessed on a regular schedule. The blog format where most recent posts are displayed first and each post is time and date stamped, calls attention to the routine and activity (or inactivity) of a blogger. I asked my participants to talk about how often they blogged and the time they spent on writing and editing blog posts. The responses to this set of questions varied: some of the participants said that they blogged very frequently, even daily (e.g. Nicole, Stuart), on a regular schedule (e.g. Art, Glutastic), while others noted that they were more sporadic and inconsistent (e.g. November, Michael, Sean and Vincci). The time they spent posting depended on the types of blog posts they were creating. Short, link-filled posts are quick and relatively easy to put together. Art noted that most of his posts are of this type and take only a few minutes to create and publish while his longer article-style posts are produced monthly or even less frequently. Several bloggers commented that editing photographs and compiling photo-heavy or video content takes more time: Ramona noted that a tutorial post can take “several sittings” and Geoff (who posts a lot of video) said that a post can take him anywhere from two hours to a whole weekend. Even if not all the bloggers I spoke with were blogging frequently, many had an idea of a schedule to which they tried to adhere. In the next chapter, I will discuss the value of regular and consistent blogging as a generic characteristic of blogs. However, in terms of thinking of blogging as a technology of the self, it has something in common with technologies of the self identified by Foucault and Gutman (Foucault, Martin, Gutman, Hutton, 1988); practices such as the daily detailed recollections of Romans such as Marcus Aurelieus, or the self-justifying diary-writing of Rousseau. In their practices, bloggers create their own routines (or lack thereof). Regular, frequent, blog-posts might be understood as a sign of quality in a generic sense, but for the personal development or needs of the blogger, a more sporadic practice may be what works.

Motivations

The regularity and frequency of my participants' blogging routines had something in common with the motivations they identified for blogging (an outline of these motivations can be found in Appendix C). In short, I found that the bloggers who had professional aspirations tied into their blogs said that they blogged regularly and that many of them maintained or tried to maintain a schedule. The same was suggested by bloggers who participated in specific (known and imagined) communities: Carrie's blogging was tied to a running community; Jody's to a smaller community of parents with children who shared a common health issue; Glutastic's to a community of people living with celiac disease. The bloggers who talked about blogging much more sporadically, such as Aisling, Iris, Michael, Geoff, and Vicki, themselves, had motivations which might be thought of as less clearly defined or where posting might be tied to specific triggers such as participation in an event they decided to share or irritation about something in their daily life. For example, Iris had begun blogging to deal with heartbreak and to communicate with her ex. She had, she noted, as the breakup receded into her personal history, been blogging "less and less. Like it's now where I'm lucky if two or three times a week, where I used to diligently try to do it every day" (Focus group 2). Aisling noted a similar pattern (or lack thereof) in her own blogging practice: "It depends how fired up I am about what I'm writing about" (Focus group 1). For both bloggers blogging acts as an emotional outlet, and in this context, might operate more on an 'as needed' basis. Beyond the question of routine, for a study of value, motivation is important. Blogging consumes considerable resources in terms of time and effort. Many of the bloggers I spoke with talked about sacrificing leisure time or domestic work in order to maintain their blogs. When I asked participants to talk about their motivations to begin blogging, I was asking them the anticipated and imagined value of this practice for them, in their lives.

The premise of technologies of the self (as I have described in Chapter Three) is that they are practices which serve as an exercise "of self upon the self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self and to attain a certain mode of being" (Foucault, 1988, p. 2). They are, as Foucault and the other participants in the Vermont seminar (Martin, Gutman, Hutton (Eds.), 1988) demonstrate, entirely contextual: that is, they speak their social, historical, and cultural contexts. The published papers from the seminar offer a strong example of examining these techniques of self production and self-management in a historical perspective. Doing so draws attention to the ways in which technologies of the self connect with (that is, that they are shaped by and contribute to the shaping of) their historical and cultural contexts.. As I was working with this data, I had in mind Goffman's (1959) idea of "front stage" and "back stage" performances and behaviors that he introduces in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. According to Goffman, we present ourselves differently in public and in private. In public we perform for an audience and manage our behaviour closely. In private, we can relax our guard. However, while it was useful to think about the ways in which bloggers talk about themselves as both public and private, it was hard to separate the two clearly. In the next section I will outline two ways in which my participants attributed value to their blogging practices with regards to the self. In the first, ‘self-help and self help’, I examine how my participants describe blogging as a technique for cultivating their well-being with a focus on their psychological well-being. I follow this with a discussion of the ways in which blogging could be harnessed to help them in a broader sense, perhaps a more public sense, for personal, creative, and professional advancement.

Self-help: Blogging as Therapy

Vicki Love described how she began blogging: “I was going through a lot of upheaval in my life, and I just started – I needed an outlet and somewhere to express myself, so I started blogging” (Focus group 5). Iris had a similar motivation: “to be perfectly honest I went through a very bad romantic breakup in January, and it was something to keep my mind off my heartache” (Focus group 2). Indeed, one of the dominant discourses of the value of blogging for my participants was voiced in terms of its benefit to their general well-being and specifically their psychological well-being. Not all identified this as a factor in their motivation to *begin* blogging, some described it in terms of an unanticipated payoff. For example, Stuart was one of the few participants to say that his motivation to blog was commercial; however, he identified an “inner-satisfaction” as one of the greatest payoffs from blogging. Furthermore, Stuart connects the potential for his professional success with the practice of expressing his thoughts on his blog. In this he takes up discourses of karma and the law of attraction to explain his understanding of the benefits of blogging: The popular book and film *The Secret* (Byrne, 2006), centers on the concept of the law of attraction: the idea that whatever you imagine, you will attract. Accordingly, if you imagine professional success and personal fulfillment, you have the power to manifest those things for yourself. Stuart also takes up the vocabulary of self-help when describing the blogging experience of another blogger whom he identifies as his mentor: "For him it's a *therapeutic* process he needs to go through" (Interview, emphasis added).

Jody took up blogging when she became frustrated with the process of managing her son's complicated club foot condition and switched from communicating on a private message board to a blog: "I just didn't know where else to turn, and just started blogging there, and so I've been -- I've brought it all over onto the public blog." In our interview discussion she described how the blog acts as an outlet for her concerns about her son's condition, and allows her to separate it away from her daily (offline) life:

> I have the more specific blog about my son's foot, and what it means, and what journey our life is on because of this. I mean it's been six and a half years and our lives are still surrounded by appointments, and doctors, and castings, and surgeries, and, you know, it just continues and continues. So in my normal life, that's just sort of put on the back shelf, but here I can put it on the forefront, and talk about it, and, you know, and put out my anxieties and my uneasiness and my worries, and not have to… deal with it in my regular life. So I can go back to my regular life and not have everybody question me consistently about it? (Interview)

In their focus group Nicole and Glutastic got into a discussion about the therapeutic benefits of blogging with regard to their own health concerns. Glutastic had been diagnosed with celiac disease and had begun blogging following this. Nicole, whose blog focused mainly on her daily life and creative writing, talked about her journey towards a possible MS diagnosis. Nicole describes the effect of having people to talk to via her blog as "normalizing" and that blogging is “therapeutic…It’s like cheap therapy”. Here, I identify three recurring themes in participants’ descriptions of blogging as therapy.

Catharsis.

Catharsis refers to the purging of emotions for therapeutic purposes (Nichols & Efran,1985). The cathartic act might involve some element of risk and be thrilling. Scheff (1979) describes catharsis as “thrill-seeking.as an attempt to relieve, and therefore resolve, earlier painful experiences” (p. 13). Aisling noted that her posting schedule was irregular, and the frequency and intensity of her blogging practice depended on how “fired up” she was about something. Often, she said, she wrote something for her blog without publishing it. The posts where she managed to get the ideas that “bounced around in my brain” out were rewarding: “when I sort of was able to get them out on paper there was … satisfaction, self-satisfaction” (Focus group 1). For Aisling then the writing of the post is important in of itself, regardless of whether it makes it onto the public space of the blog because some of the value of the practice is located in the expression of the idea, not necessarily always the sharing of that expression with an audience.

When Ed described the experience of post that he “felt the most satisfaction at writing”:

> I found myself in a situation where if I didn’t write about it, like right now, I was probably going to throw up my hands and walk away from politics altogether. So I sat down and I wrote and it took me about four hours to get my thoughts down, and I wasn’t going back and deleting anything I’d written… What I came out with, eventually, was something that was really heavily quoted, or really heavily commented on, I should say, but it was almost beside the point. I wasn’t necessarily writing it for anybody else. I felt gratified that

> people were using it as a frame of reference to start a conversation, but *it was just such a relief to unburden myself in that way. It was a cathartic experience for me to be able to write what I was feeling at that time*, after I hit submit I was capable of taking a deep breath, and actually paying attention to politics without getting angry anymore. (Focus group 1, emphasis added)

When I initially asked about their motivations to begin blogging, Mary did not point to self-help; she talked about keeping in touch and updating family and friends on her life and children. However, she describes this in cathartic terms: "Since my first pregnancy I've been writing updates and *just getting it all out*" (Focus group 1, emphasis added). In our interview session I asked Mary about what it meant to her to be a 'good' blogger and she described how, at times, the craft of writing takes a back-seat to the importance of expression: "…[at those times] I know it's not good, but it doesn't really matter to me. Just the point that I got it out is what matters" (Interview).

Later in our discussion, Mary explained that she has two more blogs, one of which is an anonymous personal journal. This blog is where she writes about her "bad days" (Interview), the negative thoughts that are edited from her public family blog. Of the anonymous blog, she explained, "*it's kind of like this is me pouring myself out*...I just write however it comes out, and leave it like that. It's really raw" (Interview, emphasis added). In this discussion, when I asked about what the biggest payoff from blogging has been for her, she answered: "I think it would be relief to myself…when I'm feeling any sort of emotion I just write…it gets me out of my head…helps me to think through it more" (Interview). When I asked *why* she began the anonymous blog, Mary said

> I started it as a self-improvement blog. Like these are my goals that I don't necessarily want to share with everybody, right, and so I can keep track of how I was doing on them…but it kind of changed into this venting blog, just so I could get whatever was stressing me out, like out of my mind, and once I write it down I feel better all the time (Interview).

In our interview session Sean told me that after the focus group he had begun a new blog. This blog, he said, addressed a lack in his life:

> I need an outlet… when I am at work, I have ideas or interests that I need to pursue at some point that I can't on work time, but I cannot let go of them, and they actually, you know, they sit there, and they occupy time and space in my brain, and I need to expunge them in some way. And that is what the blog is for" (Interview).

The effect has been calming:

> I think I'm calmer… it really does create, for me, some degree of anxiety and a lot of tension when I have an idea in my head that I don't want to lose, but I have no place to put it…and so it's much easier for me to now, you know, to pick up my phone, write a quick email to myself…and when I get back to the computer / just cut and paste it to the blog. (Interview)

When I asked him if he felt a sense of relief when he makes a post Sean answered "Yeah, like sometimes it is, you know…you get an idea, and you don't want to let it go, and you've got to put it somewhere" (Interview). Here Sean describes two types of catharsis: that of an outlet for his creative self, an outlet he does not find in his regular job, and also an unburdening of the worry that he will lose his ideas, a safe place to put them. Similarly, Vicki Love describes a benefit of the catharsis of blogging as an opening up to new thoughts and ideas (once the idea or thought that has been bothering her, has been blogged): “I just need to get it out, get it out of my head, get it off so my brain can grab onto something else” (Focus group 5).

Geoff pointed to the way in which he finds blogging therapeutic:

> Like kind of sometimes blogging is like if I’m upset about something it’s like you kind of might write the post just to work that out, or think about it. Like the process of writing makes you think about that thing that you’re writing about hard, so that you can articulate it more clearly, and once you get that out of your system you might not invest that much mental energy in the topic again. Like you might have it sorted out in your mind, but, you know, you’re not necessarily going to revisit the topic all on your own. So yeah, so some of those things it’s like nice to have gone through the process, and have it all kind of encapsulated in a blog post, even if it’s a dated blog post, right? It might not be as pertinent anymore. (Focus group 4)

For him, the catharsis is not simply an unburdening but an unburdening as part of a larger therapeutic process of working things out. At the beginning of this chapter I introduced Vicki Love and Iris, two bloggers who also talked about the cathartic benefits of blogging for them as they navigated relationships and, for Iris in particular, the end of a relationship. In her focus group, Vicki Love talked about blogging as a practice of “getting it all out” (Interview), a process which can be calming: “For me mostly it’s about getting out whatever my thought is, because my brain will latch onto something, and it will spin, and spin, and spin, and spin until it makes me crazy” (Focus group 5). In this way, a blog can become a repository not only a venue for unburdening the self of emotion, but also a repository for those expressions of feeling and ideas. Foucault (1984) recalled a type of notebook, called the *hypomnemata*, taken up by ancient Greeks as a technique for storing information, ideas for writing. Blogging, as it is described by the participants in this study, has something in common with this device: providing a space for the unloading and storage of thoughts, feelings, and observations.

Support.

Jody came to blogging as a way to cope with her son's complicated club-foot condition. In our interview session, when I asked her what the impact of having the blog as a resource for her was, she identified a cultural shift where women have fewer support resources in terms of family members and friends to help and support them. Her own mother, she said, lives in British Columbia and is often busy, and she doesn't want to talk to her dad about "some things" (Interview). Her blog, and specifically the community of readers, have become, she says "my little support community online, a very specific support community" (Interview). When I asked whether getting comments and feedback is important to her, she said:

> I mean I'd be lying if I said no, no it was only just for me. I'm only writing for me, because like -- and I had said that then. If I was only writing for me I would make this private, and no one else would see it, right? I mean that's just silly to say that it's just private -- or it's just for me, and put it out there. So yeah I mean I do like comments, of course, and that's sort of how you're talking back and forth, right? Without comments it feels like you're talking to the wall, which really you are when you're sitting in your little computer room. (Interview)

In one specific incident, Jody posted a photo of her son's footprint, and found that the feedback from other parents was important to her, validating her concerns with the way the footprint looked. Jody also described blogging success in terms of giving as well as receiving support. As the mother of an older child who has been through a treatment process, she can offer advice and encouragement for parents of babies and younger children: "it is nice to show them videos of him running, and they can go, oh, you know, my kid is actually going to run one day, and my kid can play soccer one day (Interview).

Glutastic and Nicole both talked about blogging and support with their own medical issues. Glutastic located her start at blogging when she was diagnosed with celiac disease. While Nicole blogged mostly about her everyday life and her writing, also talked about a diagnostic process she was going through for MS. Blogging, she said, was useful for keeping track of symptoms and dates, but also for support in this process:

> Nicole: From the personal side, going through the MS diagnosis blogging has been a bit part of that for me, because I've connected with other people with MS the way that -- people who started the blogs because they couldn't find (indiscernible) the way that you did.
>
> Glutastic: That's how you find other people, right.
>
> Nicole: For someone like me, who is still experiencing that, it's nice to hear from other people what they went through, and what to -- a little bit of what to expect.
>
> Glutastic: What they did, and -- yeah. (Focus group 3)

Glutastic described her experience of finding a community "that you didn't think was there before" (Glutastic, Focus group 3). Readers who have experience with celiac disease, she explains, understand her struggle and don't make her feel as though she is just being grumpy when she gets frustrated about the inconvenience of not being able to eat freely, or the pain and discomfort that comes when she accidentally eats some gluten at a restaurant.

Carrie's motivation to blog prompted some amusement in her group. An avid runner, she began sending long race-updates to her friends and family via email. A friend suggested that she translate her (lengthy) updates to a blog-format so that readers could choose to follow rather than receive them by direct email. Here, she talked about support in the context of a community of understanding and encouragement for her specific pastime. She describes this community as the "running blog family" (Focus group 3). Identifying with others, she said, is a strength of blog culture: "individual experiences are really good. That's one of the reasons why it's nice to read blogs instead of scientific journals is because you're reading personal experiences, and you can identify with them better, and you can find other people that you can identify with" (Focus group 2). Recalling other observations of bloggers who were not keen on having 'real life' friends and family read their blogs (Brake, 2007; Reed, 2005; Morrison, 2011), the bloggers in my own study presented a different take on this discourse. Their family and friends may not be an ideal audience for another reason: that they lack the interest or life-experience to validate and identify with the blogger. Indeed, support can be characterized in terms of validation. Ramona raised this in her focus group when she identified the value of getting comments on blog posts: "It's the external validation. It's like, yeah, I did do a nice job on that…this is a great forum for getting those pats on the back" (Focus group 2).

Compartmentalization.

Another recurring discourse of psychological well-being among my participants was the articulation of blogs and blogging as tools and practices of compartmentalization. Specifically, they talked about this compartmentalization in the context of its effect on their well-being and mood. Jody said of her blog "it's just a nice way to put it all right there, and then I can walk away from it, you know, and -- like if I don't turn my computer on it's almost like I don't have to think about it" (Interview). She specified the importance for her of being able to talk about her son's condition with moms who themselves have children with club feet and other related conditions, rather than her "regular friends" or with her husband "I can do that, talk about it there, and then my husband comes home from work, and I don't have to agonize over it anymore, because I already had that conversation, you know?" (Interview).

As Ed talked about the ways in which blogging has allowed him to take up an active role as a participant in Alberta politics, he also noted that this has allowed him to separate his political conversations from his private life and relationships. Like Jody, he had found a forum for communication on a topic that was important to him, but that he did not always want to share with his friends and family: "It's also really relieved my relationships with my friends and family in that I don't feel as though I have to take advantage of their willingness to engage me in discussion, just to get my outlet anymore" (Interview 8). Glutastic explained how blogging had actually made her more concerned with compartmentalizing herself, with different parts of herself or different selves altogether:

> Before blogging I wasn't too concerned about dividing the academic brain, the social brain, and the work brain, and those - - I wasn't too concerned about

it, but now I'm acutely aware of the different parts of my personality, and where they fall in the hierarchy of importance. (Interview).

In their focus group discussion, Glutastic and Nicole described the benefits of blogging in terms of compartmentalization with their health issues:

> Glutastic: …it's been really great to separate things.
>
> Nicole: Yeah.
>
> Glutastic: I've said it a couple of times tonight, like yes I have celiac, but it's not the only thing, so -
>
> Nicole: It doesn't have to become you.
>
> Glutastic: Yeah, so you have this outlet, and you can get it out of your system, and you can talk to other people, and learn, and carry on to make that other life, the more whole life easier.
>
> Nicole: Because it's so easy, yeah it's so easy to get sucked into a narrative of being sick, and that becomes your whole experience… It doesn't have to become a totalizing experience (Focus group 3).

Compartmentalization is a strategy employed to "organize self-knowledge in ways that facilitate acceptance and confrontation of negative self-beliefs" (Thomas, Ditzfeld, & Showers, 2013, p. 719). In their study, Thomas, Ditzfeld and Showers (2013) found that some individuals compartmentalize themselves, identifying positive attributes with certain self-aspects and negative attributes with others. For them, compartmentalization means that they can focus on those positively identified self-aspects. In such cases, “having easy access to positive self-knowledge may be one reason why these individuals report mostly positive self-feelings” (p. 722). Here, I suggest that blogging might act as a strategy for just such compartmentalizing: the blog can be a site for easy access to representations of positive self-aspects. Furthermore, individuals can cope with negative self-aspects by compartmentalizing them so that “those attributes are activated only in certain situations” (p. 722). Although this research suggests that individuals may act in this way in order to minimize their experience with these negative attributes, I consider here that blogging might provide a space where these self-aspects and their associated attributes can be accessed, not necessarily minimally, but in a way that is controlled and self-regulated. As Glutastic and Nicole suggest, their blogs can be spaces to activate their struggles with health, but also serve to aid in keeping these struggles, so to speak, in their place. However, at the same time the blog can also be a place to present positive self-aspects, to generate self-esteem and positive feelings from frequently accessing these aspects and, moreover, receiving recognition and validation from others via clicks, comments, and shares.

Self help: Blogging as Individual Accomplishment

’Self help’ in this context refers to the development and advancement of the self in more material but no less personal ways, specifically: the development of skills, professional progress and benefits, and social skills and opportunities. Participants described blogging as instrumental: a tool for developing skills, switching careers, growing social confidence, networking and gaining access to particular social and professional circles.

Developing skills.

Nicole identified the benefits of blogging for developing her skills as a writer. As her "blog voice" developed and shifted it became "very casual, very open", a development connected with a similar shift (and improvement) in her creative writing:

> Now the narrative voice that I achieve in the stories that I write and publish is more flowing, and open, and more real…and I think that's partly because of this practice of trying to compose and write, because what I write in my blog is very personal, very casual, not very formulaic... it seems to flow a lot better now than it did. (Interview)

Another self-identified writer, Sean, said that he felt that through blogging, he had become "a better writer…it's certainly easier for me to write now, I write more often" (Interview). Blogging, in this way, might act as a stimulus and practice space for creative processes. In professional terms, Stuart explained how he found blogging helpful in terms of embracing the "analytical creative" side of himself (Interview). Vincci, a nutritionist, has also noted that blogging had improved her skill as a writer and photographer: she attributed an improvement in her descriptive vocabulary in particular to blogging. Speculating about the future, Vincci went on to say "I think it would be really cool to do writing on the side, whether it's food writing, whether it's nutrition writing…yeah I think it would be really cool to be published somewhere" (Interview).

In this way, blogging might be thought of as both a way of improving skills and also as a way of preparing to professionalize those skills in some way. For example, Jahaluid used blogging as a strategy to build credibility and legitimize his professional status. Like Vincci he noted that he improved his photography skills through his participation in a blogging and social media community, yet the biggest reward for him was professional and financial: "networks which means money" (Focus group 5). He described himself as an early adopter. When he began blogging the territory was unmapped: "So there was no -- it was like, it was like -- blogging at that time… No way to know who else was out there" (Focus group 5). I asked him if he had been reading blogs when he began:

> No, nobody even knew what another blog looked like. When I did it I was like look at this cool thing. It's called a blog… So, but sometimes you can start something so early on that nobody -- even the guys that built it probably aren't even sure where it's going to go, so that's how early I started blogging. (Focus group 5)

In this way he has legitimized his professional identity as an expert and facilitated his consultancy work. Networks, he said, are not only a reward of blogging, but a motivation *to* blog. Jahaluid describes networks as sources of information, strategies for building knowledge about the latest technologies and applications, rather than building relationships. Art also drew a connection between blogging and professional accomplishment. An aspiring photographer, he said that he began blogging as "a professional accompaniment to what I was doing…putting myself out there" (Focus group 1). He began a local blog hub website which further embedded him in local social media culture. When I asked how his life had changed since he started blogging, Art said that because of his work on "tech webs" he ended up "having to go to a lot of tech events" (Focus group 1). In this way, blogging has given him access (a responsibility even, he *has* to go to these events) to a social and professional environment and an associated identity and status. Furthermore, he mines the blogosphere and specific blogging communities for information and instruction. So, in addition to the potential for developing skills and expertise through blogging oneself, the work of other bloggers and writers online can also become instrumental for developing this knowledge base.

Professional accomplishment.

Reed (2005) observed how the bloggers in his study presented blogging as “an antidote to the necessity of their employment, which for many involves sitting in front of a computer terminal all day” (p. 229). While a number of participants did the same, others had taken up blogging as an active strategy for transitioning in their careers. November had navigated a professional transition that she credited to her online work, the beginning of which was blogging. She began blogging and then thought about how to professionalize, becoming an online editor. When I asked about the rewards of blogging she pointed to the evidence of her new career: primarily the recognition from others of her position and authority. Ramona distinguished between “internal” and “external” payoffs from blogging: the “internal” payoff was the catharsis and calming effect that came from having blogging as an outlet; the “external” was the potential for a professional payoff. She identified a desire to pursue a new career path, to professionalize as a food writer, and to make a lifestyle change in order to live a more creative (and thereby fulfilling) life. Blogging had facilitated some productive introspection for her, leading her to her decision to try to change her lifestyle. This in turn prompted a shift away from her corporate/science based job towards something that engaged her passions for the handmade, for food, and sustainability (Interview). In this way, Ramona identified blogging as a means to this end.

Like Ramona, Ed had cultivated a passion (his, for political engagement and commentary) through blogging and had come to think seriously about a professional change. He described how he began blogging with the motivation to find an outlet for his political opinions. Blogging proved beneficial for his communication skills, namely his ability to present both sides of an argument. The discussions that follow his blog posts in the comments section offered him the opportunity to “get inside peoples’ heads”, to take the temperature of a community and an electorate. Ed’s readership had grown and he received attention, not only from readers, but also from the mainstream media where he was quoted. When I asked him about the payoff from blogging he said:

> I think the first time I really felt like what I was doing was making a difference is when I Googled myself under my blogging pseudonym, and I started getting results back…and then I realized as I followed these links around, people were writing about me…and that felt really, really good to me, and that inspired me to keep going a little while longer. (Interview)

Later in our conversation Ed mentioned that he was thinking about running for political office himself in the future. In this instance, he said that he would proudly identify himself as his blog’s author: “I wouldn’t run away from my work, I would run with it” (Interview). In this sense the blog can be an asset, a tool not only for the development of skills and knowledge, but for the demonstration of the fruits of this labor, the attraction of attention and recognition, and, like an artist’s portfolio, a repository of work to show off to potential employers or clients.

Alliances and networks.

Just as Nicole talked about how her blogging practice had improved her writing skills in terms of loosening up a creative flow, she pointed to a similar opening up in terms of her own personality. Blogging has led to social connections for her which she had previously been lacking: “It seems like blogs have given people an access to a like-minded circle” (Interview).

Blogging, she said, also helped her to overcome shyness and represented a shared interest and identification with other bloggers that she compared with the identification via shared-experience among mothers. Mary also talked about struggling with shyness. Her blog acted as a practice arena, a testing ground where she could try things out before she engaged in social interactions offline. Ed explained how blogging gave him entry to the circle of political movers and shakers he could not access prior; and Stuart talked about the social benefits from a professional perspective, his blog connected him in "open dialogue" with people he would not otherwise have the chance to meet. November has found herself able to connect with "the kind of people that I want to know" through her blog. Blogging, in this way, becomes a strategy to build alliances, an act of positioning the self in a specific, desired milieu. Furthermore, this can also be described in a more personal way. Nicole, for example, identified how she used blogging as a way of becoming a more social person, a person with friends, whilst simultaneously maintaining her identity as a "quiet", "nerdy" person.

Interestingly, all of the men who participated in my study: Ed, Sean, Art, Stuart, Mike, Geoff, and Jahaluid, talked about themselves within a tech-savvy milieu. For some of them, this could be interpreted as an effort to take up an 'expert' position and to justify this status. Ed and Sean shared experiences about being active on pre-internet communications technology communities (BBS) in their focus group discussion, and Art had set up a Calgary blog hub called YYC Blogs. He identified himself as a tech-savvy individual, with experience in new media communities and with new media technologies in his use of specific vocabulary. In Chapter Seven I will look at these discourses again, in the context of the production of cultural and subcultural capital. At this time, I take up these findings from my data in order to articulate how blogging can be thought of a technology of the self.

A Situated Technology of the Self

The published papers from the Vermont seminar on Technologies of the Self (Foucault, Martin, Gutman, Hutton, 1988) are arranged in a historical progression of these techniques of self-improvement and management. In Bakardjieva and Gaden (2012a, 2012b), we followed the contributors' descriptions of diverse individual practices. These practices ranged from the dialogues between young men and their teachers or mentors in Ancient Greece, practiced in preparation for public life. By the Hellenistic period, wrote Foucault, care of the self became a life-long practice, and that practice was now often writing, constant writing about the self. Epicureans focused on the examination of their conscience and recollections of past events, with a view to distilling pleasure from present events. In these and in the other examples described in this collection, technologies of the self ranged from intellectual dialogue to private writing, to public writing with a limited audience (letters) and then later into pubic exhibitions of shame and modesty through private confessionals and confessions to a priest or other religious leader.

In the next section of this chapter I consider how these discourses of the self that I have identified thus far are contextual: although the individual might constitute herself in "an active fashion", these practices "are not nevertheless something that the subject invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested, and imposed on him by his culture, his society, and his social group" (Foucault, 1997, p. 11). Here, I suggest that the blogging as a technology of the self is tied to a broader culture of self-help; neoliberal self-surveillance and self-governance.

Self-help culture.

The participants in this study talked about blogging in the language of self-help: blogging as therapy, as a relief, a release, and a source of support. Here, I want to connect these to a broader culture of self-help and, furthermore, a cultural environment where the individual is encouraged to take up responsibility for the advancement, the success, of not only her professional life, but the minutiae of her daily existence. McGee (2005) takes up the swelling self-help industry in the later part of the twentieth century and traces its foundation to a cultural shift of insecurity and individual responsibility: "With social welfare programs all but dismantled, and with lifelong marriage and lifelong professions increasingly anachronistic, it is no longer sufficient to be married and employed; rather, it is imperative that one remains marriageable and employable" (p. 12). To cope with this anxiety, she writes, "individuals have been advised not only to work longer and harder but also to invest in themselves, manage themselves, and continuously improve themselves" (p.12). In this context, self-help becomes shouldering of personal responsibility for both well-being and success: personal, professional, and creative. Furthermore, while this discourse of personal responsibility and possibility, to be 'self-made', is nothing new in the professional domain. However, McGee observed, domestic lives (largely those of women), have not always been considered relevant to the idea of self-invention. This is, she argues, a feature of more recent cultural shifts:

> The extension of the possibilities of self-invention to women and to others who had been traditionally excluded from the possibility of reinventing their lives revealed the fundamental gendered fault lines in the idea of the self-made man: namely, that the labours of women's daily lives – the bearing and rearing of children, the care of the ill and infirm, attending to myriad domestic activities – were largely incompatible with traditional notions of success through self-invention. (p. 13)

In the ways that I have already detailed, my participants took up these discourses of self-help and self help both in relation to their psychological well-being and their personal and professional progress and success. They noted how blogging stood to benefit them, or had benefited them, in their relationships, their professional lives, and their creative lives (and, often, how these lives overlapped and intersected). This connects with how Illouz (2008) identifies the way in which therapeutic discourse has become prevalent. It has, she writes, "crossed and blurred the compartmentalized spheres of modernity and has come to constitute one of the major codes with which to express, shape, and guide selfhood" (p. 6). When Giddens (1991) proposes the concept of the reflexive project of the self, he references *Self-Therapy* (Rainwater, 1979), where Rainwater advocates for and instructs the reader in techniques of self-care, actualization, and self-therapy. Rainwater recommends ""keeping a journal and developing a notional or actual autobiography…as a means of thinking ahead"" (quoted in Giddens, 1991, p. 71). However, this journal, Rainwater goes on, should be private and never written with the thought of an audience other than the writer, ""it is a place where the writer can be completely honest"" (quoted in Giddens, 1991, p. 72).

Although blogging might seem to follow this kind of therapeutic, autobiographical thinking, it is different. Blogging is carried out in a public space and the self that is articulated (even when she is articulated in the shape of innermost thoughts) must be done with some understanding of a potential (known and unknown) audience. This is not a private therapy session, or a diary tucked under the mattress. With this in mind, I think about the therapeutic- self-help - discourses of my participants as evidence of a technology of the self that is also concerned with producing a mediated self, for public consumption. Sonia Livingstone (2009) points up the shift in meaning in her address to the International Communications Association: In English, mediation "has been ‘re-purposed’, away from the old meaning of conciliation towards an emphasis on media” (p. 3). Here, I think of mediation as a marriage of both: Blogging is a technology of the self that takes up a specific, (then) newish, media channel, it is the mother of the social media that we use today; social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have followed blogging and are often described as forms of “micro blogging”. I propose that blogging can also act as a mediation in a conciliatory fashion where individuals construct a version of themselves, or some aspect of themselves, and share it with a potential audience. In doing so, they meet this audience with an understanding - their interpretation - of the values, social norms and conventions, expectations, prejudices and preferences, that the audience might hold. Blogging, in this way, has something in common with other popular culture media that present a version of reality: lives (or aspects of lives) of real individuals. One comparison I find useful is with reality makeover television - shows where, as I introduced in Chapter Three, individuals participate in a process underpinned by a neoliberal ideology of self-governance similar to the one informing these discourses around blogging and (care of, production of) the self.

Self-governance culture.

Television schedules have become increasingly populated with the cheaper-to-produce reality television shows. By 2009 the major American networks devoted up to 41% of programming to reality content (Pozner, 2010, p. 282). Within this format are a wide range of shows focusing on interventions and makeovers. The former “mobilize professional motivator and lifestyle experts, from financial advisors to life coaches, to help people overcome hurdles in their personal, professional, and domestic lives” (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, p. 63). In makeover shows, participants also engage in processes of transformation as they “correct” their rituals and practices of self-care and presentation (Pozner, 2010, p. 150). Here I suggest that the way in which my participants talk about their practices of blogging and articulate their understandings of the role that blogging plays in their lives connects with this culture of intervention, self-care, and personal responsibility, as seen through trends in television programming. Bloggers, I argue, might be seen as interventionists who act upon themselves and who articulate this potential as one of the central assets of the practice (of blogging). However, as my comparison with makeover television suggests, blogging has much in common with other, mass media and popular culture trends.

Nicole and Mary talked about how blogging has encouraged them to address their shyness and Mary credits it with helping her to remember to take her vitamins; Jody describes empowerment as a mother to a child with a disability by blogging; Vicki Love and Aisling use their blogs as spaces to release whatever is frustrating or bothering them. Indeed, like personal blogs, a great number of the life intervention shows Ouelette and Hay (2008) write about are concerned with everyday life: parenting, decluttering the home, personal finance, home hygiene, and nutrition. In much the same way, bloggers put these parts of everyday life on public display and "objectify their lives in order to pursue the care of the self" (p. 97). Furthermore, this speaks to a broader cultural environment where the self-governing self – that is the self who is seen to control her own self-care, presentation, and behaviour - is respected, admired, *valued*. Through blogging, like makeover television, the self becomes something that can be studied, reflected upon, surveilled and therefore recalibrated" (Ouelette & Hay, 2007, p. 97).

One of the characteristics that set contemporary makeovers apart from earlier versions in television chat shows or in women's magazines, is a focus on the production of an active subject. Rather than presenting the makeover as something that is done-to a passive participant, the women who are featured on WNTW and similar shows experience a re-education of sorts whereby they emerge not only conforming to what Pozner (2010) describes as a "single upper-middle-class, mainstream-to-conservative, traditionally feminine standard of fashion and beauty (p. 150), but at the same time expressing their newfound empowerment via the skillset they have acquired in this process. Here, what is so strikingly similar between this popular culture trend, and the discourses of the bloggers in this study, is the emphasis on the importance of self-governance and individual agency and, at the same time, an erasure of the role that any broader social structures might play in delineating the boundaries of what is acceptable or not when it comes to presentations of self.

Blogging: Monitoring and Moderating the Self

Mary uses blogging as a way to monitor and work on herself in "real life": "I can kind of track like, oh the last time I took my vitamins is this, and I've had seven bad days since then, you know, like that kind of thing, so I can see how different things affect my life, and fix it that way" (Interview). Jody talks about how blogging has helped her to remain positive, to focus on the positive in her daily life. Ramona described how blogging has made her more of an advocate for eating local, and living a "creative life" (Interview). By articulating themselves in this way in a public space, these bloggers align themselves with specific voices and values, and they can take up multiple, reflexive positions. Following from this, blogs can become sites where individuals actively and strategically monitor their self-representations in order to shape and massage a public persona and identity. In this way, Ed talks about his blog as his 'brand' and notes that he moderates and reserves the right to edit comments on his blog in order to maintain the flavor of his brand:

> Comments on my blog are moderated, so I have to approve them before they appear because even though I'm technically anonymous, the "Enlightened

> Savage" is my brand, and I don't want hateful or libelous things appearing there. And there has been a very small number that I've had to reject because either they didn't contribute to the conversation in anything resembling a positive manner other than to say, you know, this elected official is a douche bag. (Interview)

Many of the bloggers I spoke with were careful about the content of their blogs, whether they were editing posts or comments; avoiding foul language; or holding themselves accountable to a particular tone or ethos. In our interview session, I asked Glutastic about different rules for different kinds of writing and in her response she used language often invoked in discussions of physical presentation, of dress: "I think blogs are more casual than formal print, but I think there is a fine line between formal, casual, and thrown together" (Interview). When I asked about the effort that goes into producing something "casual", she went on:

> Glutastic: "I know there is a lot of effort that goes into -- for myself, blogging in a casual and sarcastic and yet funny way without crossing the line between inappropriate sarcasm, and just not caring. Sometimes I reference to it as pajama blogging because, you know, like when you read it you know the person is just sitting in bed in their pajamas and they're just kind of blog to blog, but then you read something else, and you know that they got up, and they got dressed, had a shower, and now they're blogging. Like a task versus a pastime….
>
> Georgia: And which do you identify with in your own practice?
>
> Glutastic: A task, yeah.

Georgia: So you're not in your pajamas?

Glutastic: No.

Georgia: Or you blog to appear as though you're not in your pajamas.

Glutastic: Exactly, even if I am.(Interview)

Bartky (1990) explored how our behaviors of self-moderation are informed by culturally situated assumptions. In *Femininity and Domination,* she focuses on how discourses of femininity have consequences for individual practices of self-surveillance and production. She describes how, in practice, women discipline their bodies: dieting to become thinner, minimizing gestures so as not to take up too much space, and decorating themselves to be appealing. Beauty routines (skin-care, make-up) are, she argues, a form of timetabled discipline such as that Foucault describes in the practices of prisoners and schoolchildren. The individual is not without agency to resist dominant discourses; Bartky observes that there are many women who refuse to perform mainstream discourses of femininity (p. 77) and, moreover, women who lack the resources to perform them *properly* (p. 76). Bartky highlights how the rhetoric of cosmetic companies and fashion magazines tells a woman that she can "express her individuality", but finds that "making up the face is, in fact, a highly stylized activity that gives little rein to self-expression" (p. 70). Here, Bartky identifies a contradiction that I find within the ways in which my participants talk about blogging in relation to their selves. They, too, take up rhetoric of individual potential and creativity, but they also point to the ways in which they self-govern through blogging and self-govern *in* their blogging. Through blogging they might manage, articulate, and promote themselves. In blogging, there might be the potential for a certain freedom of expression: there are no editors or publishers to impress, or to act as gatekeepers.

However, there are conventions and standards which my participants were aware of, and often at pains to observe. Stuart speaks to this dialectic in our interview session. We were talking about the difference between blogging and writing articles and I asked Stuart if he found that there was more freedom in blogging. He agreed that there was, and noted that his readers had a specific understanding of an authentic self-expression, and that they would notice if he deviated from that In his blog, he said, "I don't want to give the perception that I'm this super brain -- brainiac type professional. I'm a down-to-earth grass-roots type person." He expresses this identity by writing as he says he speaks, and using language that is representative of that self. He watches his language and his self-presentation carefully, in order to sustain this personal tone in his blog because "that attracts the reader." Stuart imagines what his audience might be thinking about him while they are reading his blog "People -- you know, it's almost like what will Stuart say next? What pearl of wisdom or total nonsense will he say, right." Indeed, even when Stuart identifies authenticity (along with integrity) as a key value of blogging he has in mind the potential regulation of an audience who "can spot phonies right away" (p. 24).

Indeed, the specter of the other recurs in these conversations. When Michael talked about how he monitors his blog content he said "I'm always wary, too, of what I put on there, because…anyone can read it…On Facebook at least you have some kind of control…Anybody can see it…so I try not to get too deep with it…I just want to put up some nice pictures…and hopefully some people will enjoy it." (Focus group 4). Here, the audience has the power to both uplift (by enjoying and validating his blog content) but also to censure. He is careful about what he posts, perhaps especially because he intends to use his blog as a tool of self-promotion when it comes to finding work. In this way, self-surveillance and censorship is often more about what is left out, unsaid, omitted. Mary admits that she tries "not to be negative" and edits details such as "if my husband or I yelled at the kids" on her family blog, and blogs more freely on her anonymous blog.

Returning to the physical bodies of make-over and weight-based reality television, I think about Bordo's (2003) critique of western cultural anxiety when it comes to bodies: "burgeoning industries centered on diet, exercise, and body enhancement glamorize self-discipline and code fat as a symbol of laziness and lack of will power" (p. xxi). Being fat or unfashionable betrays a lack of control or self-management on the part of the individual. A successfully self-governing person will keep themselves in check. Following this, I suggest that the same goes for blogs and bloggers. The bloggers in my study use their blogs and blogging practices as strategies for self-governance, and at the same time they carefully manage their blog-content to demonstrate their success with this. In the next chapter I will consider this in more detail: what my participants identify as the hallmarks or characteristics of a 'good' blog and 'good blogging'.

Conclusions: The Mediated Self

Following the emergence and growth of what Nikolas Rose (1996) terms 'psy' (psychology, psychiatry, etc.), the late-modern individual has become increasingly concerned with the self in terms of the production of and care of that self (McGee, 2005; Giddens, 1991). Furthermore, McGee connects the contemporary culture of self-invention and self-help to a broader cultural context of advanced capitalism (p. 22) a concept similar to the landscape of neoliberalism I described in Chapter Three. Here, job security has crumbled in favour of the 'flexible' economy, and the self in this environment is, as McGee terms it 'belabored': "overworked both as the subject and as the object of its own efforts at self-improvement" (p. 16). In this context, responsibility for the self has extended beyond the professional environment of paid employment to “the intimate sphere”, which “becomes a site of ongoing and tireless production, a design studio for reinventing one’s most marketable self” (p. 22).

Paradoxically, “the imperative of inventing the self that is found in the literatures of self-improvement is often cast in the form of discovering or uncovering an authentic, unique, and stable self that might function – even thrive – unaffected by the vagaries of the labor market” (McGee, 2005, p. 16). In reality television makeovers the processes of scrutiny, humiliation, and consumption precede the ‘reveal’ where family and friends applaud an authentic self, *uncovered* in the makeover process. In a study of the popular reality television show *The Bachelor,* Dubrofsky (2007) calls this process of affirming a consistent (unchanged) self “therapeutics of the self” (p. 266). Participants in *The Bachelor* affirm themselves via presentations of consistent, authentic selves – presentations which are confirmed via the seemingly constant surveillance on the show. In the next chapter I will examine these discourses of authenticity in blog culture in more detail.

In our discussion, Glutastic identified how blogging had helped her to *recognize* divisions within herself: “Before blogging I wasn’t too concerned about dividing the academic brain, the social brain, and the work brain…but now I’m acutely aware of the different parts of my personality and where they fall in the hierarchy of importance” (Interview). Here, she talks about her newfound ‘awareness’ of these “parts” of her personality as though blogging had facilitated the revelation of something naturally occurring, already there. However, as well as pointing to the way in which the value of blogging is located in its capacity as a tool for this kind of personal actualization, Glutastic also speaks to the discourse of compartmentalization that I identified earlier in this chapter. Here, I suggest that compartmentalization and the other discourses of psychological well-being I highlighted in my data, as valued effects of blogging - catharsis, and support networks – can also be understood in the context of discourses of self-mastery and discipline. Ouelette and Hay (2008) drew parallels between their subjects and the ancient Greeks studied by Foucault. Citizens in both contexts were "enticed to work on "mastering" themselves in practical as well as aesthetically pleasing ways, so that living one's life became akin to creating a work of art" (p. 109). To this end, compartmentalizing oneself and experiences, practicing methods of catharsis, and even finding networks of support to prop one up through difficult experiences might all contribute to this self-mastery. Through these strategies, the self can be made more manageable, purged of the undesirable, validated by others.

One difference Ouelette and Hay (2008) note between the technologies of self of ancient Greece and our contemporary culture is that now: "unlike ancient Greece…the care of the self that is promoted in …makeover programs is inseparable from commerce" (p. 109). In the neoliberal context characterised by a 'flexible economy' (McGee, 2005), the individual bears responsibility for their own success, and, as part of this, for the production of their own best self. For several of my participants, blogging was an avenue through which they could work on their skills, especially in areas where they wished to professionalize: Ed in the political arena, Art as a photographer, Ramona in food and craft writing, Sean and Nicole as creative writers. Still others had already professionalized and engaged in blogging as a strategy to promote themselves or represent themselves as experts, e.g., November, Stuart, Vincci, and Jahaluid. In Chapter Seven I will examine these discourses of professional and economic value in more detail.

In this chapter I have explored the ways in which the participants in my study talked about the value of blogging for them: their selves, identities, their personal and professional lives. My findings here trace the recurring discourses of working on the self. These bloggers talk about how they find blogging useful as a practice of working on the self and articulating the self – a technology of the self for an emerging social media culture. Blogging can be a strategy for self-governance on two counts. First, it can be a practice through which the individual articulates herself in a specific way, claiming a specific identity, and also taking actions to shift towards other desirable positions. Second, by monitoring what they blog, bloggers engage in self-surveillance, governing against saying the wrong thing, or sharing 'too much'. In all of this work upon the self, an audience is present: a known audience, a desired audience, an imagined but unknown audience, and, sometimes, an unwanted audience. In *Blog Theory,* Dean (2010) writes:

> Foucault's technologies of the self rely on the installation of a gaze, of the perspective of another, before whom the subject imagines itself. In a first instance, the installation of this gaze can be thought of as the substitution of a symbolic position in the place of the audience of others customary in classical textual performances. (Dean, 2010, p. 54).

This 'other', she goes on, "provides the subject with an ego ideal, a point of symbolic identification, from where the individual "sees one's' actions as valuable and worthwhile, as making sense" (p.54). Following Zizek, Dean describes how "the gaze is thus reflexive, doubled in sofar as the subject sees itself being seen." (p. 54). Reed (2005) describes a similar condition in his research on bloggers, but situates it in a comparison between blogs and diaries: "Just like a private diary, this document is produced so a subject can view himself or herself in mediated form, exteriorised as text" (p.230). In the next chapter, I explore what kind of understandings of value – what constitutes a 'good' blog or 'good blogging' and what kinds of blogs and blogging practices are frowned upon – in order to think through the kinds of standards and conventions that may inform (and be informed by) the practices of the self that I have discussed here.

Chapter Six: Findings & Analysis II - What Makes a Blog 'Good'?

Introduction

In this part of my project, I examine how my participants talked about value as it pertains to blogs (both their own and others'). In early studies and discussions of blogging, scholars, journalists, and bloggers themselves often conceptualized this 'new' phenomenon, in relation to existing genres of writing. In this way, political blogs were conceptualized about in comparison and contrast with traditional political journalism and news reporting (e.g. Carroll, 2004; Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Scott, 2007). Personal blogs were conceptualized in the context of a historical plethora of lifewriting: autobiography, memoir and personal diaries (e.g. Kitzmann, 2003; Nardi et al, 2004; McNeill, 2003 and Reed, 2005). With this in mind, and using the framework that I outlined in Chapter Three, I take up the idea of *genre* as a tool for thinking about value. I examine my participants' discussions to explore if and how they talk about blogging as a formalized genre of writing, and more specifically whether there are shared norms and conventions, and how/whether these might be taken up as hallmarks of value.

Making Sense with Genre

As children, we learn how to organize by type, and to recognize the characteristics of a type. My daughters learn these skills in daycare and kindergarten and I find myself reinforcing them at home every day when we play and when we tidy up: like goes with like. When they ask me about anything that is new to them – a game, a food, an event – I often describe it in relation to something already familiar. In this way, they learn to organize things using named categories (based on characteristics) and to make sense of the unknown in relation to what they already know. As I have discussed in detail in the second chapter of this thesis, in early scholarship and journalism on blogging, many of the recurring conversations around this ‘new’ practice were the attempts to conceptualize it in relation to existing genres of writing**.**

The participants in this study also drew parallels between blogging and more established genres and media. They described diverse experiences (and lack of experience) as writers, bringing these skills, knowledge, and values to the blogosphere with them. For example, Art, a blogger with training in journalism, described his longer posts as “like a magazine” (Focus group 1). Sean also identified himself as someone with training in journalism and explained the goal of his group-blog endeavor as a hope that “it would lead to an online magazine” (Focus group 1). In contrast, Ed identified differences between blogging to print journalism, positing that in print you might have to “kiss up to your editor” to get exposure.

Participants also drew on their experiences of academic writing in order to explain their approach to and understanding of how to write well for their blogs. Sean explained how his academic work had shaped his ‘voice’, and how this flowed through into the way he writes in all formats, including blogging: “Graduate school, it changed the way I thought… changed my rhythms and cadence” (Interview). He identified the conventions of communication in graduate school as the same as those he uses in his work and that these find their way into his blog: “…eight hours a day that’s my primary mode of expressing my thoughts…sometimes the blog sounds like that Sean” (Interview). Vincci drew a connection between the time she spends working on her blog posts, and her proclivity for including links, with her own university experience: “… they were huge sticklers for referencing…going into university it’s like how can you not know how to reference” (Interview). Mortensen and Walker (2002) make a similar connection between the rigorous linking etiquette of blogging and scholarly citation (p. 261).

In my conversation with Nicole, who writes creative fiction and who was, at that time, also planning her own graduate studies, she articulated a hierarchy of writing genres and positioned blogging therein:

> They [blogs] are generally hierarchically somewhere in the range of a personal journal, and a newsletter, almost a newsletter type – they're a little higher than a newsletter, a little more than a personal journal, but they're not quite at the essayist level. (Interview)

At the top of the hierarchy, and representing an unattainable standard (in Nicole's opinion) for blogs, is the novel or the short-story. Indeed, as I have already noted, the resemblance to personal diaries and journals has been the most persistent comparison drawn between personal blogs and precedent genres of writing. Personal blogs have been and are still often referred to as 'online journals'. Indeed, one of the earliest popular blogging platforms was called Live*Journal* , explicitly foregrounding the connection. Stuart, who as I wrote about in the previous chapter, worked to establish himself as an expert in social media during our conversations, clearly connected blogging with journaling: "by definition it's an online diary. That's where the roots came from" (Interview). When Mary talked about beginning to blog, she identified past paper-journal writing as a reference point and springboard for working on the new medium of the internet: "I've been keeping journals forever, so it [blogging] …was just kind of a continuation of that, like from journaling in a book to journaling on a computer" (Interview). Aisling, November, and Vicki Love all also talked about writing diaries offline before they began blogging.

The bloggers I spoke with, then, often imagined blogging relative to existing genres of writing, and particularly their own experiences with other forms and practices of writing. They applied this experience and knowledge to the new context. With this in mind, in this chapter, I study the characteristics identified by the bloggers in my study as hallmarks of blogging. What I am interested in here is this: what are the elements of blogs and of blogging practice that are valued by these bloggers? What are the characteristics of a 'good' blog and of 'good' blogging? Following from this, I draw connections between the elements which give shape to a shared understanding of blogging as a recognizable genre, the discourses of value therein, and a broader cultural characateristics.

Characteristics of a Blog

When free, easy-to-use blogging platforms became available at the beginning of the 1990s there was, theoretically at least, an opportunity for anyone with an internet connection, basic word-processing skills, and something to say to publish their thoughts online. As I have already noted in Chapter Two, this 'freedom' to publish whatever a blogger might want was a recurring discourse in early scholarship and commentary on blogging. Mortensen and Walker (2002) note the contrast with scholarly work, writing that blogs "allow ourselves to write half-thought, naked ideas and show them to others rather than saving them for fully fleshed out carefully thought out papers" (p. 267). Participants in my study not only noted how they brought their scholarly training to their blogging practices, but also expressed a similar understanding of a freedom to write whatever and however they liked when blogging. Ed described his way of writing his blog as "almost stream of consciousness writing" (Focus group 1). Sean identified the freedom of a space where there is no "word cap, there is no space constraints" (Focus group 1**)**. Mary described blogging as a 'no rules' practice:

> I don't think there are rules. I think that the draw of blogging is that you can make it whatever you want, and so people will -- they can write what they

> want, they can -- their blog can be anything…. You know, they can write on anything that pops into their head, and yeah, I think that's the draw there. (Focus group 1)

Nicole took a similar stance: "I don't think there is any way of doing it right or doing it wrong, because there really is no standard. You play kind of fast and loose with the rules, but they're not even rules or guidelines" (Focus group 3). Reed (2005) also noted the prevalence of this discourse with his subjects, but found at the same time that they talked about censoring themselves with both specific (family, friends, colleagues) and imagined audiences in mind. I argue that the refrain of freedom in blogging has become a discursive convention. As I outlined in the previous chapter and as I will continue to present in this one, I have found that the texts and practices of bloggers are heavily mediated by the (experienced and imagined) responses of (experienced and imagined) audiences and also by contextually specific conventions and standards.

'Good' English.

There may not be a formal editor or professor with a red pen in the blogosphere, but almost all these bloggers noted the importance of general writing standards in blogging. Nicole described a good blog post as "strictly one that has a literate voice that is free of a majority of grammatical errors, and spelling mistakes, and strange wording" (Interview). Glutastic put it this way:

> Grammar, spell check, proper paragraphs, structure, beginning, middle, end. Like I'll often start my blog post off with a very random story that people can't figure out why I'm talking about it… but it's tied in at the bottom, that sort of a thing. (Interview)

Talking about another blogger who “was all like yo-yo-yo, and hyphenated words” Glutastic said that she “couldn’t take him seriously.” Indeed, Glutastic presents the importance of writing style as in service to readers: “I would just advise that keeping it structured helps people really get to the root of it because not everyone can understand what it means when you, you know, OMG and all that kind of stuff” (Interview). Vincci also linked spelling and grammar to credibility and Vicki Love identified care with writing style as something she has developed over time as a blogger, when she began blogging she said: “I would type the way I speak, because I don’t speak ‘I’m going to’, I say ‘I’m gonna’. This has changed: “I’ve gone from gonna to going to. I’ve sort of thrown it up a little bit with the spelling and pronunciation.” (Interview) In this way, although bloggers expressed a belief in blogging as a form and practice of writing without rules, in these instances it appears that there is an expectation of ‘proper’ English and that the use of slang or incorrect grammar can translate to poor quality blog-writing. Most of my participants were university or college educated, and that the youngest of them are in their twenties. They are not teenagers, and they have experienced (indeed, they reference as influential) the regulations and expectations of academic environments. It is significant, however, to note the tension between the discourses of ‘no rules’ and a parallel discourse of propriety, especially as this emphasis on ‘good’ English might seek to establish blogs among (or at least bring them closer to) understandings of ‘literary’ genres, and claim some associated cultural value, in doing so reproducing what Bawarshi (2000) calls the “entrenched hierarchies that are prevalent in English Studies…that privilege literary texts and their ‘authors’ as somehow more significant than nonliterary texts and their writers” (p.338).

Being nice and staying positive.

Like the mommy bloggers Morrison (2011) studied, the participants in my investigation emphasized the importance of being nice, polite, and not being intentionally hurtful or nasty on their blogs. This was something they remained mindful of in their own blogging practices and something they would advise others to do. Mary, for instance, was clear that she did not “want to hurt people” (Focus group 1). While she writes about daily life, the details she edits are those that could be characterised as less nice: “like in a certain situation if my husband or I yelled at the kids or, you know, that kind of thing” (Interview). Morrison (2011) explains the impetus not to hurt or upset others as a feature of behavior in these communities (I will take this up again in the next chapter), and I suggest that it is also significant to think about how this might also operate as a generic characteristic or convention of blogging: a guide for content as well as behavior.

A related and similarly recurring discourse was of positivity, both in participants descriptions of their own blogs and their assessments of others’. At the same time that Jody talked about the importance of being ‘nice’, she criticized other bloggers who posted ‘negative’ content: “One thing that really turns me off is the negativity or the whining” (Focus group). Of her own blogging practices, Mary said:

> Generally I like to keep it upbeat, chipper. I find that people would rather read that than if – say, you write about your bad day. If people can’t relate then they won’t comment, and then you kind of feel like why did I share that. Whereas if you’re sharing like good news or something then you get a lot more feedback from other people. (Interview)

Here, Mary speaks to an underlying theme in these discourses of positivity and niceness: the objective to please, draw-in, and not to alienate readers. Ramona described the importance of being polite in these terms: "you can't go on other people's blogs and say that's crap…*if you want people to come to your site*" (Interview, emphasis added) Stuart, who maintains a professional blog as well as a personal blog, again invoked the concept of the 'law of attraction' in his explanation for why he maintains a positive spin in his blog. Indeed, although he described his blog as a space where he can "vent about what's all wrong in my view of the world," he was quick to add that he tries "to blog more about what's right than what's wrong." He does not blog when he's in a bad mood precisely to avoid this "negative stuff" coming out. Presenting positivity is intentional: "I think that if you can give that perception to the world that you're more positive that you attract more people into your life" (Interview) and Stuart credits his professional success via blogging to this positivity: "For me to get the speaking engagements, or the media interviews, or whatever, on a particular topic, I find that I attract those opportunities more than if I was constantly negative (Interview). In "Shiny Happy Tweeple: has the Internet Gotten Too Nice?" Doll (2012) identifies a culture of niceness in online communities and social interactions. Following (Shafrir, 2009) she notes that some of the biggest social media players only have one-click avenues for approval, rather than critique: Facebook's like[14], Twitter's star, Tumbler's heart. Indeed, although niceness and positivity might be understood here as a generic convention, a hallmark of a good blog, it is also important to recognize a parallel motive. As Stuart explained, he maintains a positive spin in his blog in order to attract readers and, importantly, professional opportunities. As blogging as continued to professionalize and bloggers

[14] Facebook has since introduced alternative responses: Love, Haha, Wow, Sad, and Angry. These can be accessed by hovering over the 'Like' button.

work with sponsors, promoting products (for pay) through their blogs, the motivation to be 'positive' shifts towards the fulfillment of an obligation to an advertiser.

Humour.

Humour is something that the bloggers I spoke with pointed to as a characteristic of the blogs they enjoyed and admired, as well as something they strove for in their own practices. Vincci was inspired by blog *Amateur Gourmet* to develop her style into something more fun and humorous (Focus group 3). Ed talked about how he "adopted a little bit of …[the] tone" of comic media commentator Stephen Colbert, making statements on his blog with a "wink and a nudge" (Interview). Aisling admires the blogger Yarn Harlot, whose work, she says, had her "falling off my chair with laughter…you have to get a smile on your face when you read her writing" (Focus group 1). Ramona enjoys Heather Armstrong, the blogger behind Dooce: "she's hysterical…she's funny" (Interview) and Julie Van Rosendaal (*Dinner with Julie*), also because she is "funny and honest" (Focus group 2). Vicki Love describes "keeping things funny every once in a while" as her "only rule" when it comes to blogging (Focus group 5). Furthermore, several participants noted that their favourite posts were those they thought were humorous: "if someone said that I made them giggle, snort…then I know I hit the mark" (Nicole, Focus group 3). Writing a blog that is humorous, then, is a sign of quality and, importantly, is again something that is understood in relation to pleasing an audience. The evidence of success for these characteristics of blogging can be measured in the response from readers. Participants either described their own validation of other blogs through an expression of pleasure and amusement, and of their own blog through similar responses from readers.

Personal voice: Honesty and authenticity.

Zuern (2003) highlights a shift from the identity-play and deception of MUDs and chat rooms in earlier internet culture towards an emphasis on authenticity and sincerity in online journals and blogs. Indeed, at the same time that the bloggers I spoke with insisted on some formality of language and manners, the use of a personal, colloquial voice in a blog was compulsory. The call for personal voice recurs in guides to blogging and in early definitions of blogging (e.g. Blood, 2000 & 2002; Hill, 2006; Nardi, et. al. 2004), Nicole noted this first-person narrative as standard:

> It would be really weird to read a blog where someone is writing about themselves in the third person, unless it was a joke blog…a personal blog, I think is always in the first person voice, and it's usually pretty informal, in my opinion. (Focus group 3)

For Stuart, some of this perfectionism of 'good' grammar and writing can be sacrificed for benefits of flow from informality: "when I'm writing my blogs I'm more me speaking aloud" (Interview). Personal voice, then, is understood by these bloggers as a convention, and expectation in a generic sense.

Personal voice also contributes to the construction of another expectation among bloggers: honesty and authenticity. In his 2006 guide to blogging, Hill describes honesty and authenticity as "universally cited as a requirement of the genre" (p.268). Similarly, Chia (2012) identified the connection between personal blogging and authenticity as a "generic expectation" (p. 424). As with conventions of niceness and positivity, the participants in my study identified the importance of authenticity as requirement for attracting and maintaining readers. In 'The real deal: strategic authenticity, politics and social media' (Gaden & Dumitrica, 2015), we introduced the concept of *strategic authenticity* in order to explain how politicians use social media, and specific conventions (such as personal voice and details of everyday life) in order to carefully construct an authentic self, online, in order to gain trust and support from (potential) voters. The bloggers in this study also talk about authenticity in strategic terms. Glutastic presents this as her advice to would-be bloggers: "I would say keep it authentic *because people know when you're BS-ing them*" (Interview, emphasis added). The presentation of an 'authentic' self is thus done with a reader or audience in mind; an audience who can (and will) reject the blog and blogger if they are not convincing.

One of the hallmarks of authenticity, Ramona explains, is the presentation of evidence of imperfection: "if I look at the sites that I really enjoy, they tend to be ones that show the disasters, or the mistakes" (Interview). Indeed, this is something that she says distinguishes blogs from other kinds of published content: "If there is an article, and it's very well constructed, and photographed, and everything like that, so it could have been written by anybody…If I want that, I'll read a magazine" (Interview). The blogs she does not enjoy or return to, are missing this mark: "some of the ones that are just a little too perfect, a little too Martha, I don't tend to read, no matter how popular they are. If they are a little too perfect…I don't want to read them" (Interview). In his analysis of blogs, Keren (2006) identifies the self-representation by Jason Kottke as a "loser" as an example of individuals using cyberspace to escape reality, of an underlying melancholy (p.14). Here, I suggest another way of looking at those self-deprecating representations of self: they can be used to communicate realness, authenticity, and humility and thus to attract readers. Indeed, Keren (2006) acknowledges that Kottke's portrayal of himself as an "ordinary person" enhances "the cult-like behavior of the community" (p.16). Reed (2005) found that the bloggers he spoke with tended to "downplay their role as writers or authors…insisting that there is no real act of construction in what they do" (p. 228), and he ties this presentation of an unmediated flow to a discourse of catharsis where blogging is presented as an act of channeling rather than writing. In the previous chapter, I identified a discourse of catharsis and here, I suggest that the appearance of this unmediated flow might be what counts as a strategy for producing the authenticity so central to understandings of 'good' blogging. In a broader cultural sense, Lai (2006) identifies the "increased valuation of the authentic in an overly mediated society" (p.228) in the context of celebrity culture where celebrities stage photo opportunities specifically so that they look spontaneous, with an elaborate construction of realness.

Ramona explained how she intentionally conveyed a sense of authenticity by including details of imperfection and 'disaster' in her own blog: "Like I had one…it just a kitchen disaster and I posted about it", one of her readers then commented to her that it was "so refreshing…no-one ever posts about their disasters and shows a picture of something ugly" (Focus group 2). "Disasters" become valuable in a way as content for a blog and particularly as a strategy for injecting humanity and authenticity into the text. As a businessperson, Stuart posits, including personal details and stories, especially those of struggle, makes him more relatable, likable, and even desirable (to do business with).

In 'Life as Narrative,' Bruner (2004) argues that lifewriting texts are not straightforward representations of reality: they are a "continuing interpretation and reinterpretation of our experience" (p. 692). The choices writers make about what to include in their narratives and how to write them, he goes on, are specifically culturally situated (p. 694). Authenticity was understood as a hallmark of value for early blogs, especially when taken in comparison with other genres such as print journalism, because of their perceived independence from external (powerful) interests such as publishers, editors, or advertisers (Bahnisch, 2006; Blood 2002). For web-based diarists and video diarists, Kitzmann (2003) found that the adherence to reality "has almost been fetizhized: proclaimed as a kind of value, especially in terms of 'liveness'" (p. 60). As I have already noted, this sets blogs and online diaries apart from the practices in MOOs and other virtual communities where participants often deliberately take on alternate personae and where "simulation is assumed and expected" (Kitzmann, 2003, p. 61). Authenticity has become a norm of blogging, and a quality upon which the valuation of a blog might depend. As I have described, my participants not only demonstrated their understanding of these norms and how they connected with good or correct blogging, but also acknowledged their intentional cultivation of an authentic self in their blog content.

It is a fine balance, however. For although these bloggers spoke to a dominant discourse of authenticity and honesty as hallmarks of 'good' blogging, they also identified the importance of not straying too far into personal diary territory: blogs that are too much like daily diaries might not measure up. In my conversation with Ramona, I asked her what she had thought about blogging before she began to do it herself:

> Some of the stereotypes I had were sort of that online diary kind of thing, and I went oh, you know, as much as I'm a person who craves external validation I didn't need to do that…There is 10 million [online diaries], who really cares, sort of thing. (Interview)

Ramona connects online diaries with a kind of narcissism; it is writing with no value other than to act as a prop for the blogger. The mundane details of everyday life are also a turn-off for her when it comes to micro-blogging platforms such as Twitter: "I don't care that someone is sitting on their porch, you know, sipping a cup of tea" (Interview). Ramona also rejected the ‘mommy blog’ for similar reasons: There are too many of them, they are nothing special and nobody will care about baby photos and stories about your kids anyway. When I asked her directly what it was about online diaries that made them ‘less valuable’, she said:

> I don’t know that I would say it’s less valuable. I don’t find them interesting…unless it’s like my really good friend who is, you know, posting a weekly photo of her kid, or something like that… I just find it self-indulgent to a certain extent. (Interview)

Although Ramona declares that online diary-style blogs and mommy-blogs are *not* less valuable, and that it is a question of personal taste, she draws upon some significant and recurring discourses of value related to blogging and diary-like content (mundane, daily details, domestic life - specifically motherhood). Vincci also noted that the diary-style blog of a stranger is not interesting to her: “I guess I don’t read a lot of personal journal blogs, because it’s like I don’t know you” (Interview 2). However, Vincci is keen to disconnect this value judgment from one on the quality of writing on these kinds of blogs:

> I guess you could say that they’re on the bottom [of a hierarchy], but like I don’t want to say -- like I don’t want to kind of inadvertently knock the quality of their writing of these people by putting them on the bottom, but I guess you could. (Interview)

Like Ramona, November names Twitter as an offender in terms of mundane content: “well you see a lot of blah-blah-blah on Twitter, right? Went to the store, had a chocolate bar. My hair is drying. My cat threw up” (Interview). In this way, although blogs might resemble diaries in their dated-entry format, in their inclusion of personal content and personal tone, and the priority of authenticity, there is an associated risk for the production of the kind of blog that is not valued: one that is interpreted as narcissistic and pointless (for the reader). In her comparison of blogs and personal diaries, McNeil (2003) found that the public arena of blogging allowed bloggers to “supersize” narcissism.

In terms of connections with other genres, Rak (2012) identified the perceptions of difference between autobiography and memoir, describing autobiographies as creative accounts of the growth of a writer’s personality, interior journeys. Memoirs encompass a broader range of narratives by non-professional writers and are more concerned with recounting events (p. 324). Memoirs, especially those confessional memoirs written for a mass audience, can struggle for critical acceptance even, among politically progressive scholars (Rak, 2004, p. 493). Women’s popular fiction, as well as lifewriting, has historically been denigrated (Harzewski, 2011) and the late twentieth century emergence of the genre that has become known as ‘chick lit’ has not only be critically panned but significantly criticized by ‘serious’ women writers, judged as a “pink menace” (p. 5). Similarly ‘soft news’ (the integration of celebrity gossip and lifestyle programming with current events) is devalued using gendered language. Baum (2003) and Patterson (2000) criticize ‘soft news’ on the basis that it contains limited political content, is presented in an emotionally subjective manner, and has an emphasis on entertainment and celebrity.

The divisions between hard and soft news, and between serious literature and ‘chick lit’ are, I suggest, similar in that they produce a discriminatory hierarchy that privileges particular knowledge claims, narratives, and styles. Following this study, I suggest that bloggers speak to a significant and complex negotiation between the importance of ‘authenticity’ for blogging and, at the same time, the imperative to avoid the production of a blog that is trivial, self-indulgent, and banal. In his study of self-taught artists, Gary Fine (2004) noted a comparable tension: self-taught artists derive their artist-identity from their independence from institutions, and much of the value of their work comes from “purity – the unmediated quality” (p. 6). However, at the same time they struggle for recognition and possess a continued “low status in the art world” (p. 4). Personal journal bloggers might be credited with authentic representations, ‘warts and all’, of their lives, but they are also (in danger of being) criticized for writing pointless drivel about everyday life that serves no purpose and has little value (Keren, 2006; Mason, 2007; McNeill, 2003).

Consistency and frequency.

Further conventions of blogs identified by the participants in this study as contributing to the production of a credible and valuable text and representation of self, were consistency and frequency. Stuart imagined his readers’ response if he changed his style of writing: “… that doesn’t sound like him, you know…using big confusing words” (Interview). He said that presenting a consistent message and style build trust with readers. Aisling expressed her own disapproval of when a blogger’s tone suddenly swings from, for instance, happy to angry (Focus group 1): a kind of change that she says she finds unsettling, and that causes her to doubt the blogger’s authenticity. Ed was proud of the consistency in the views he has expressed on his blog over time, and he presented this as evidence of his integrity.

As participants responded to a question about what kind of advice they would give to a friend who wanted to begin her own blog, there was a common discourse of consistency: a new blogger is advised to carefully pre-plan their focus – indeed, to *have a clear focus* – for their blog, and to maintain it. In this way, good blogging practice becomes something that is not quite so off-thecuff or spontaneous. It is pre-planned, and consistent in tone, style, and content, right from the outset – before the first post.

At BlogWest (2012) I attended a number of panels designed to instruct personal bloggers. One of these was a presentation by Dr. Jared Tabler[15] on personal brands and blogging. Dr. Tabler asked the attendees how they would describe the brand of their blogs and emphasized the importance of having *a clear and consistent* personal brand.

Furthermore, while Technorati were ranking blogs, their calculation of "authority" also used consistency or focus as hallmarks of value: a blog's authority was measured by the extent to which it was focused on its topic (as ascertained by Technorati analysts) as well as the number of links to it. The more tightly focused the blog, the higher it scored (McKenzie, n.d.). However, although consistency might be a desirable characteristic in a blog, Jody shared an anecdote about a friend that suggested how the pressure to be consistent might be problematic for a blogger:

> She was telling me that she feels pressure as to write these witty -- not witty -- thoughtful, meaningful, airy blogs, and sometimes she has a really hard time, and she can't even post, because she feels that that's what her readers are looking for. And so her blog is lost -- like she likes it, and she is really happy with that, but she can't just go and blog, oh well today I went to the park, because she knows that people are going to go well that's not what you normally write. So she is finding pressure. (Interview)

[15] *Style Guy Jared:* http: //styleguy-jared.blogspot.ca/

This is interesting because although consistency can be interpreted as authenticity, the pressure to maintain a voice, a point of view, or a topic in a blog might actually impede a blogger from representing her personal developments and changes, as well as her inconsistencies and contradictions in her blog.

Elsewhere (Gaden & Dumitrica, 2015), I identified the frequency and immediacy of blog posts as a contributing factor to understandings of authenticity and of value; the 'live' quality of communication (Kitzmann, 2003). Furthermore, frequency has been understood as a hallmark of blogging from its early formal definitions (OED, 2003). Indeed, a blog departs perhaps most obviously from its predecessor, the personal home-page, by virtue of the capacity for ongoing updates and the way in which the most recent update is presented first, giving blogging as Reed (2005) suggests "an ethos of immediacy" (p. 227).

Among my participants, Ed found keeping a blog updated to be "critically important…If you go to a blog and the newest post, the one at the top of the page is over a month old, you're going to delete it from your favourites as a dead blog" (Interview). In his advice to new bloggers Sean urges them to write every day or at least to maintain a regular schedule. When she is reading other blogs Ramona values 'fresh' content. In this, bloggers may again find themselves under pressure. Ed suggested that readers may abandon a blog in droves if there is not a new post at least every fortnight and Ramona disparages what she describes as filler content or posts that apologise for not posting. She wants to see fresh, original, creative blog posts, posted without obligation, and on a regular or at least ongoing basis. Like Ed, she is impatient with 'dead' blogs. Jahaluid, a self-professed expert on blogging and social media, argued that quality of content is more important for new bloggers, and frequent updates only important for established bloggers: "then you've got to feed the machine that you create" (Focus group 5). In this way, the conventions and characteristics of good blogs that have emerged thus far: good English; presenting content that is nice, positive, and humorous; the use of personal voice and expectations of honesty and authenticity; as well as the maintenance of a consistent self and blogging schedule, were all articulated in relation to an imagined reader or audience. These bloggers talked about the conventions of blogs in terms of pleasing or impressing those reader. In the next section, I turn to pay attention to how my participants talked about value in relation to the design and visual aspects of a blog.

Value and the Visual: Design and Photographs

Drawing from Lejeune (2000), Sorapure (2003) observed that one of the differences between online diaries and their traditional print counterparts is the concern with design and layout:

> At a computer and network-mediated writing interface, diarists must make decisions about page design and about the overall architecture of the work – considerations not so immediately present for print diarists. Online diarists must also consider the layout of text and image, and decide which, if any multimedia and interactive elements to use. (p. 4)

Online diaries are evaluated on and can win awards for Best Design and Best Use of Multimedia (Sorapure, 2003, p. 5) highlighting how expression in online diaries is not limited to language. Indeed, although the first blogs were primarily text - links with short descriptions and commentary,- images and design are now considered an important part of the content. The participants in this study identified these elements as significant for the evaluation of value and quality in a blog.

Photographs and photographers.

In order to keep his own blog up with emerging standards, Sean described how he was working on his photography skills: “I take pictures more, you know. Not that I’m a good photographer, but because a lot of the other guys took very good pictures, and that’s inspiring to see” (Focus group 1). Ramona also noted that her photo-taking has “increased” since she started blogging, and that she actively tries to improve her skills in this regard. She identifies a shift in the kind of photography that she does now, from the causal digital photographs that she used to take of her children pre-blog: “I take a lot more in an attempt to get the right one … So my kids are quite used to holding their hands out with things in them” (Focus group 2). Vincci notes that she has been inspired by other bloggers to develop her own focus on food photography. For Michael, photos are “good stuff” for his blog.“ Jahaluid also identified a specific culture of photography among the bloggers and online publishers he connected with when he was living in the UK. There, he would meet up with other photographers and do a “photo walk” and he bought a DSLR camera especially for this purpose.

These bloggers also commented on how photographs, and the quality of those photographs, influenced their assessments of other blogs. Blog posts, Mary said, “are just more interesting with pictures” (Focus group 1). The other members in her group agreed. Ramona noted an imperative to “improve your game” if you choose to have photography on your blog because “bad photography on a food blog will kill it no matter how good the writing is” (Focus group 2). In this, she draws comparisons with other genres, and the importance of appealing to an audience: “it’s like a food magazine, you need to draw people in from the cover.” Vincci identified this specifically as a trend in food blogging: “people want to look at the pictures…

they don’t just want to know how the food was, they want to know like what it looks like” (Focus group 3).

Blog design.

At the same time that these bloggers talked about the importance of ‘good’ photographs(well composed, lit, and edited) and other images for a blog, they also talked about its overall ‘look’ or design. Here, the dominant discourse centered on the idea of an *uncluttered, easy-to-read* page. Mary commented that “If a page is messy and cluttered then I probably won’t go back …if it’s too hard to read then I won’t make the effort” (Focus group 1). Ed described a similar preference, calling it a “much more Spartan design” (Interview). Stuart said that he likes blogs to look “professional”; when I asked him to clarify what this meant, he said “when I load it up on a browser…I really don’t like blogs that are full of colours, and all these fancy designs and stuff” (Focus group 3). Ramona explained that she had made the decision not to include ads on her blog because “I don’t like the way they look on other people’s sites…[they are] irritating” (Interview).

Stuart went on to explain how he found the design and look of a blog to be a reflection of its blogger, a position that connects with Rak’s (2005) proposal that blog design can stand in as a presentation of the self, as a representation of individual personality and taste (p. 173). When we met for his interview session Stuart described his observations following the focus group (he had tracked down the blogs of his fellow group-members): “knowing these people now, and seeing what their personalities are like, I can almost see them in the graphics that they choose and in the colours” (Interview). Glutastic also highlighted the discourse of self-representation through design: “it’s your personality you’re putting on paper” (Interview) and described her own process of blog-design. She had had her fiancé, who is a web-designer, design her blog for her. It was colourful, but also containted plenty of white space, and little visual clutter of the sort other participants had complained about. Again, these bloggers expressed the importance of blog design in terms of reader satisfaction:

> Keep it clean, just because people are going to be going here. And in the first five seconds they're going to decide whether or not to read you. If they can see what they're supposed to read they're going to start to read it. If they have to fish around for your content, they're not going to bother. (Ed, Interview)

Stuart's advice to new bloggers drew on the same discourse: "Just make sure the person reading it can see the message" (Interview). Readability is key, as Vincci and Nicole discussed:

> Vincci: There was this one person who has been commenting on my blog… But when I went to it, like it was like black, and it looked like --
>
> Nicole: Oh, with the white text? That's terrible.
>
> Vincci: No it was like lime green text, or it's a different colour every time.
>
> Nicole: Yeah, the contrast is terrible.
>
> Vincci: And the font is like bold Times New Roman, and I'm like, I want to enjoy this blog so much, but I just can't, because like it's just not aesthetically pleasing and I'm not … I'm not like, you know, really picky, but, you know, just like make it easy to read, and.

Nicole: Easy on the eyes (Focus group 3).

In this way, the values here are not simply aesthetic, they are pragmatic and reader-focused: the idea that readers (either readers of their blogs, or for themselves as readers of other blogs) will prefer an uncluttered, clean, look because it facilitates easier reading, and thus may encourage persistent readership.

Furthermore, these bloggers spoke to a trend in clean design which has persisted and is, I suggest, part of a broader cultural shift. On the influential web culture site *Mashable*, Ehrlich (2010) notes that "of course, it's important to avoid creating a messy, busy GeoCities-esque[16] travesty" (n.p.). Here, Ehrlich highlights 'Lots of White Space' as an important trend in blogging: a heavy use of white in the design of a blog is good for readability, and is popular with blog designers as well as bloggers who select those themes for the look of their own blogs. Another trend is the recommendation for bloggers to 'Go Easy on the Widgets' (Widgets are elements of the interface that perform functions, such as drop-down lists, search fields, scroll bars, etc.).

This *clean and simple* aesthetic has been a growing trend, not only online, for a number of years. It runs strong in the realm of lifestyle culture and media. For instance, the lifestyle magazine *Kinfolk,* launched in 2011, presents images of beautiful, seemingly serene, young people:

> Wearing loose braids, knit caps, calico skirts and plenty of comfy flannel and doing earthy things like communing over groaning boards of roasted

[16] GeoCities websites were early, easy to create personal home pages.

> garden vegetables, diving into swimming holes and lazily traversing the world's byways on vintage bikes with picnic baskets affixed to them. (Murphy, 2014, n.p.)

The magazine and its website follow the heavy-white-space aesthetic and artfully styled photographs (of apparently impromptu moments) abound. When mainstream magazine, *Real Simple* launched a clothing partnership with clothing brand Cuyana, a report on the collaboration noted that the apparel brands "minimalist aesthetic … perfectly aligns with the publication's mission" (Wilson, 2014, n.p.). The magazine posits in its mission statement that it will help its reader "simplify, streamline, and beautifully edit her life" (Real Simple Mission Statement, 2015).

Food culture in the western world has also seen a rise in a trend known as 'clean eating'. Tosca Reno's *The Eat-Clean Diet* (2007), is an early and influential trailblazer for clean eating discourse: it has been picked up and promoted by a myriad of food writers, celebrities, and bloggers alike. Discourses of clean eating connect with those of the simple and decluttered lifestyle that I described above: food ought to be 'natural', unprocessed, and prepared by hand. However, I suggest that it is important to recognize that the ultimate goal of Reno's diet is weight loss. Clean eating, in this way, can operate in the service of editing and managing one's body: minimizing it, sculpting it (especially when done in conjunction – as recommended – with physical exercise). The discipline of the body is something that feminist scholars have been writing about for decades (e.g. Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 2003). At the same time consumers are urged to refine their bodies through 'clean' eating, we are urged to 'declutter' our living spaces. Marie Kondo's 2014 book *The Life-changing Magic of Tidying Up* has become an 'international bestseller' and testimonials proclaim that employing the approach has resulted in personal transformations, career changes, and health and relationship improvements. Decluttering experts like Justin Klosky (2014*)*, and Andrew Mellen (2010) often appear on television, instructing members of the general public on how to declutter and organize their homes (and lives). Peter Walsh (2005, 2008, 2009, 2010) is another clutter expert, and his most recent book *Lose the Clutter, Lose the Weight* (2015) specifically connects paring down possessions with paring down one's body. I argue that the 'clean and uncluttered' aesthetic that the participants in my study talked about, in addition to the de-valuing of blogs with too much personal detail, draws on this cultural trend where clutter is associated with a lack of self-control and failure. In contrast, a streamlined and carefully edited appearance (or blog) is comparable with a self who is disciplined, clear-headed, and successful. This, I suggest, might be linked with the kind of self-governance that I described in the previous chapter.

Interactions and Connections

As I outlined in Chapter Two, blogs are often described in the context of Web 2.0, an umbrella term that points to a generation of online media where users share content and interact online (Walker, 2008), making bloggers produsers (Bruns, 2006), individuals who produce as well as consume and use media content. Early computer and internet use had already typically displayed "a high level of sociability" (Flichy, 2002, p. 200) in, for example, the swapping of software, sharing code, playing games. However, until the late 1990s, user-created websites had tended to take the form of personal homepages which were more static, and did not afford public interactions between their creators and readers. Blogs, on the other hand, were in their earliest incarnations collections of links, directories of "interesting stuff" online (Rosenberg, p.79), and have typically included a commenting facility (Blood, 2002; Lenhart & Fox, 2006). In this way, comments and the scope for interactions are part of what sets blogs apart from other online media, and from many other genres of lifewriting. The participants in this study talked about comments, and other interactions on their blogs and the blogs of others, both in terms of these features as generic characteristics of blogs, and the value they added to the texts of blogs, and also in terms of the generation and maintenance of social and subcultural capital. I will discuss the latter in the next chapter. Here, I address the former.

Comments, conversation, and community.

Ed identified the interactive potential of a blog as its defining feature: "The advantage that blogging gives over the newspapers is the interactivity, and the ability to have the conversation" (Interview). The conversation afforded by comments is something that Ed both admires in other blogs and wants for his own: "I would rather have a blog…that had 20 or 30 comments at the end of every post, than have one where I was really happy with what I had written, and nobody was commenting." Ramona noted that an engaged readership in other blogs influences her assessment of them: "if it has a lot of readers…I'll look at all the people who are compassionate towards this blogger" (Interview). Jody made a direct connection between the number of comments on her blog posts and the their value: "Every now and then I'll have something really, like I think it's really profound, and I'll put it on, and I'll get like two comments. I'm thinking, oh I guess it wasn't as profound as I thought" (Interview). Aisling also suggested that comments add value to a blog: "the comments are sometimes more interesting than the posts (Focus group 1).

These discourses of value and comments and interactions were an especially complex aspect of my data. Some of the participants argued that they did not expect or even want comments on their blogs, although they showed an awareness that this was a hallmark of value. Stuart spoke to this complex and sometimes contradictory relationship between comments and an understanding of the quality or value of a blog. He was quick to connect his low comment rate with the design of his blog:

> Well I don't get a large amount of comments on my blog, and I think part of it is just because it's of the design, because it's not easily for -- easily, you know, available to people to comment…Yeah, it would be nice to have 24, 50 comments a day, but some days I get one a week, and I'm okay with that. (Interview)

However, at another point in our conversation, when we were talking about what advice he would give another blogger, he noted that "if nobody is reading it, you've got nothing."

Admittedly, comments and readership are not the same thing: a blog might be fairly widely read, and not receive a large number of comments. Comments are, however, a *sign* of readership, and particularly a sign to other readers that your blog is being read, that someone is taking the time to respond, or to join in a conversation in a space that a blogger has created. As I have already described, comments are also a feature that set blogs apart from other, earlier, personal websites and were also a feature that (as Ed pointed to) set blogs apart from traditional news media (at least until most traditional news media started allowing comments themselves on their online editions).

The value of links.

In addition to providing the facility to add comments to blog posts, another feature that set blogs apart from related media was the inclusion of hyperlinks within the text of blog posts. And while the majority of blogs quickly became of the personal journal variety, even these blogs integrated text and links in their content. Art, who positioned himself as an early-adopting, informed blogger, talked about the kind of blogs he likes to read: “As far as what makes a good blog…as long as you’re sending me to cool places…” (Focus group 1). When I asked him whether it would be a turn-off if a blog did not contain links, Art responded: “Well, yeah…that’s just … contributing. That’s just part of the internet” (Focus group 1). Early blog-tracking and ranking sites such as Technorati and the Truth Laid Bear Ecosystem calculated blog rank and status by counting the links into a blog (McKenzie, n.d.). When he was researching his book *Blogging Heroes: Interviews with 30 of the World’s Top Bloggers,* Banks (2008) used Technorati and other blog-tracking and ranking sites as a way to locate and assess bloggers, in order to find ‘top bloggers’ for his project (p. xii). In her anthology, *Ultimate Blogs,* Boxer (2008) employed a different strategy to locate noteworthy blogs: “I read, I surf. I look at blog contests. I follow links. I ask people I like about the blogs they like. I look at their favourites, and then at my favourites of their favourites” (p. xi). However, she also acknowledges the power of the Technorati rankings: “The most famous blogs – the Technorati Top 100 and the so-called Higher Beings in the Blogosphere … are the ones that other blogs link to the most. That is both the mark of their fame and how they became famous….fame and links are one and the same” (Boxer, 2008, p. xii). Here, I draw a connection between links and reader interactions as a sign of quality in a blog: the participants in my study highlighted the traces of social interactions on blogs (links, comments, and other interactions) as valued features of blog texts as well as sites for the generation of social and subcultural capital and thus they represent the fulfillment of the assignment of this genre.

Conclusions: Genre and Value

Hall (1997) argued that we use systems of classification in order to make sense of the world. Understandings of genre, a type of system of classification used to make sense of cultural products, bring with them sets of assumptions about the function, identity, and audience of these products (Herrnstein Smith, 1988). These assumptions contribute to the shaping of our evaluations. In this study, I have examined the assumptions about the conventional and ideal characteristics of blogs demonstrated by the bloggers who participated in my project.

Here, I found that these bloggers drew on a number of established discourses of value in cultural production: discourses among which there was some tension. The dominant tension here was again between a rhetoric of freedom and discourses of value. In this way, blogging was characterised by many as a practice with few rules and regulations, a discourse prevalent from the earlier days of internet culture; and, at the same time, they outlined shared understandings of conventions and standards that contribute to the evaluation of a blog. They also demonstrated a persistent concern with honesty and authenticity, expressed in the identification of characteristics such as the use of a personal voice and the inclusion of details of everyday life as hallmarks of blog-identity. This bears connection with assumptions about the truth-claims and credibility in autobiographical writing. However, at the same time that these bloggers placed a premium on authenticity and honesty, they also cautioned against the expression of too much personal information, especially that which is not of interest or use (something I will take up in the next chapter) to a broader audience. This is especially interesting because although bloggers identify the expression of an authentic self and daily life as integral to the function of a blog, they also reproduce long-standing hierarchies about what kinds of lives and life-experiences are worthy and valuable enough to be represented in public lifewriting.

Bruner's (1993) observation that the evaluation of autobiographical writing is taken up by a readership that assess its legitimacy and credibility is important here. As I have outlined in this chapter, the bloggers in this study repeatedly articulated their understandings about the quality and value of a blog in relation to its ability to pass muster with readers. Readers, they said, could sense inauthenticity; would be bored or disinterested by trivial content; would become frustrated with a difficult-to-read blog design. In this way, although blogs have something in common with traditional diaries – dated entries, personal content – they have a responsibility that the private diary does not: to satisfy an audience. Indeed, the traces of audience engagement (through comments on and links to a blog) improve value of the text itself.

Finally, I return to Hall's (1997) argument that systems of classification maintain social order; and Miller's (1984) that the analysis of genre as practices of interpretation and construction stand to tell us something about the character of the context within which they operate. The characteristics of blogs identified by these bloggers connect with the discourses of value that I outlined in the previous chapter: they are shaped by and contribute to the shaping of an environment where there is an imperative to tell one's story, yet to manage the representation of self meticulously: to be nice, positive, clean, neatly consistent and regular. Transgressing these boundaries: using slang language and having poor grammar; giving too much trivial personal detail; being inconsistent or untruthful in the presentation of self; including 'low quality' photographs and having a cluttered blog design all come to represent not only a lack of quality in the text of the blog but a representation of an incontinence of sorts on the part of the blogger, again a failure to manage the self.

Chapter Seven: Findings & Analysis III - Social Capital and Economic Value

Introduction

In Chapter Five of this thesis, I identified the intention to participate in a community as one of the recurring discourses of motivation among the bloggers I spoke with. The social aspect of blogging, however, extends throughout and beyond discussions of traditional community. In this chapter, I am using Irwin's concept of a social 'scene' (1973; 1977) in order to explore how value might operate and circulate as cultural, subcultural, and social capital in blog culture. In Chapter Five I suggested that blogging provided an opportunity and a space where bloggers worked to actively claim the identities they desired. Here, I think about how bloggers might take up specific identities as strategies for the generation and expression of cultural capital. As I outlined in Chapter Three, Bourdieu (1986) describes cultural capital as a combination of an individual's privilege afforded or acquired via birth (family reputation, wealth etc.), and education. Popular culture scholars such as Thornton and Frith have taken up this idea and translated it to contemporary cultural enclaves built around a popular culture medium (music) and/or subcultural scene (dance clubs). 'Subcultural capital' is defined by Thornton (1997) as displayed by being 'in the know' or demonstrations of 'in group' membership and prowess" (p. 202).

With these concepts in mind, I begin by identifying instances where participants engaged in displays of what can be described as both cultural and subcultural capital. Following from this, I identify and explore intersections and tensions between subcultural and social capital. In the latter half of this chapter, I draw the concept of economic value into this discussion. With responses ranging from a disapproval of advertising on blogs, to a recognition of the potential of blogging as a strategy for professional development and commercial gain, I explore how the bloggers in my study spoke both to the convergence and points of contention between the pursuit of wealth and the production of social and subcultural capital in blog culture.

Cultural Capital

Several of the bloggers who participated in this study identified themselves as ‘writers’. Art drew an immediate connection with his own standards for blogging and his journalistic training. Sean, too, quickly identified as a writer and a journalist. Iris was a working freelance journalist who talked often about her work as a writer. Nicole was a writer of fiction. Ramona was actively seeking the status of a professionalized writer. In contrast, Jody, specifically identified herself as “not a writer” However in this she, too, refers to her education, “I’m a science person”. Of her blog, she noted, it’s “*just* a journal”, an identification which indicates to me an understanding on her part of journals as a somewhat ‘less than’ genre. Jody’s acknowledgement is as interesting to me as the deliberate alliances drawn with traditional genres and writer-identities: Jody’s cultural capital is not coming from a literary affiliation or qualification, but she nonetheless demonstrates her understanding of these discourses.

Being a writer in a traditional (offline) medium or genre such as newspaper and magazine journalism or fiction, might have had a certain legitimacy and cache, that blogging (especially in its early days) struggled with. Writers in these genres and media have been approved by editors and publishers, or they have the credentials of education and training in a specific field. The participants in this study also highlighted instances when their blogs had been recognized or featured in mainstream media. In the previous chapter, I outlined how some of the bloggers specifically identified hierarchies of genre, with traditional literary and media forms occupying higher positions. Production of these forms, or the identification of a blog with one of these forms (Sean’s identification of his collaborative blog as an online magazine, for example), might be understood as strategies to legitimize, through the conferral of cultural capital, of their blogs and blogging practices. Furthermore, In the previous chapter, I outlined a trend among these bloggers to dismiss writing that did not come up a standard of 'good English'. This standard was not clearly defined by the participants, although they identified adherence to rules of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and eschewed the use of slang in blog posts. As the profiles in Appendix A suggest, the majority of these bloggers were college educated. A number of them, as I described already, drew on this education to explain their approaches to blogging. In this way, the imposition of guidelines and standards from the academic establishment, as well as the identification of themselves as writers again employs discourses of cultural capital to legitimize their individual practices as well as the practice of blogging itself.

Subcultural Capital: Veterans and Tech-experts

Another trend among the participants was to identify themselves as veterans or experts in blog culture. Jahaluid did both. In his focus group, he immediately questioned me about my own expertise, and continued this throughout the session. He identified himself as a veteran blogger and early adopter (of technology and social media more broadly): "I really can't tell you why I started blogging, because it simply could have been the fact that I was the first, literally you know. Out of anybody I knew, I don't think anybody blogged" (Focus group 5). He offered unsolicited advice about technology and blogging to the other participants in his group. In this way he repeatedly demonstrated and established his expertise. Every activity system, wrote Irwin (1977), has its insiders who: "are people who are in and around the activities and the location so much that they are known to the owners and managers in constructing the main action of the scene" (p. 208). The position of insider in the blog scene is conferred by the acquisition of social and subcultural capital. Being recognized and validated as an insider by others, confers further capital. In his focus group Jahaluid was positioning himself as a leader or in-group member in the 'scene' of blogging. When we talked about blogging platforms, he offered commentary, judgments, and suggestions, e.g.: "I didn't blog very much, because Blogger sucked so much…that's why I find it really funny that they're [his fellow focus group participants] both on Blogger" (Focus group 5). In the same vein, he engaged in gatekeeping during the focus group discussion; both with me, and with the other participants in the group. In this, he assumed the role of conversation facilitator a number of times, asking questions to the group.

Whereas the tools and strategies for building cultural capital in blog culture engage with class-based discourses of education and literary hierarchy, subcultural capital rests on characteristics such as the length of time (veteran status) in the scene; expertise (knowledge of blogging platforms, other social media, jargon etc.); and connections with well-known (star or A-list) bloggers and/or extensive social networks. At the outset of the focus group meeting, Sean introduced himself to the group: "my name is Sean…it's nice to meet some of you. I've come across you a couple of times, so it's nice to put a name to a handle." He went on: "…I was quite active in the pre-internet era…you know, just running around on the BBSs…" at which point Ed chimed in: "Back in the dial and squawk days" (Focus group 1). Aisling shared the story of how she had lost her blog-archives three times. The group commiserated and shared their own fears about losing their blog data and about platforms closing down. In moments like these, participants claimed the subcultural capital that is linked with expertise and experience: length of time they had been blogging and demonstrations of familiarity with and expertise in blogging platforms, widgets, and other social media platforms.

In addition to experience and expertise, subcultural capital among bloggers is also accrued via the development and maintenance of social networks. As I have already explained, blog-ranking has typically been calculated by counting links and hits to a blog: the signs of readership can be read as signs of quality or value. And while the understanding and use of site meters and other readership tracking and stat counters can demonstrate a level of expertise and comfort with the technology of blogging, the work of generating those hits and links, relates to the more amorphous technology of the networks, and the work of their establishment and maintenance.

Social Capital: Authenticity and Usefulness

Blogs with high readerships and connectivity rated highly on early blog-culture ranking sites like Technorati. In this way, the result of an accumulation of social capital – an extensive network of "mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.248) - became used as a signifier of status and value. The bloggers I spoke with also pointed to the readership of the blogs they admired as justifications for that admiration, as emblematic of their worthiness and quality.

In Chapter Five, I identified blogging as a strategy or tool used by bloggers to work on themselves by developing their social skills and building alliances. Mary described how blogging allowed her to practice her social skills in preparation for 'real' life encounters. Nicole, November, and Ed described blogging as an avenue for placing them among desirable individuals and communities. In this way, production of social capital contributes to personal and social well-being. Putnam (1995) raised concerns about the depletion of social capital and decline of community in America. Commentary and criticism of blogging and other Web 2.0 technologies and practices have been both cited as part of this alienation (Keren, 2006) and lauded as its antidote (Walsh, 2007). In my data, I have distinguished two dominant strategies for building networks and generating social capital. The first is a recurring drive to be useful: to provide something useful for readers and other bloggers, and an associated devaluing of blogs that fail to do this. The second is the imperative of authenticity. In Chapter Six, I wrote about authenticity in the context of generic convention. Here, I want to explore how authenticity might also be performed and employed as a strategy for the construction of networks and the acquisition of social capital., As Keren (2006) pointed out in his analysis of the Jason Kottke's blog, engaged readers and extensive networks might be symbolic of social capital in blog culture, but do not necessarily translate into meaningful social relations. In other words, a blogger could have extensive social networks and still experience isolation and alienation.

The notion of use-value emerged first in discussions with these bloggers about their motivations to blog. Here, the desire to provide something of use to (real or imagined) readers was a recurring theme. For example, Vincci and Glutastic both described a desire to share something (recipes, tips for dealing with celiac disease) with their readers. Geoff said "If I have something that's technical, and potentially useful to someone I can't think really what else to do with it other than blog about it" (Focus group 4). Jody earns social capital by being useful in the creation of and presence in a network. She draws a connection between this and her personal well-being in the following excerpt:

> I like to think that maybe one of those moms that are coming there has a problem with - - maybe one of their kids has a neuromuscular club foot that's very different, and very difficult to treat, and maybe they just don't know where to turn, and now they've found a place, and I don't know, it makes me feel good. (Focus group 2)

Being useful, in this way, builds social capital, the benefit of which Jody describes in terms of pleasure and satisfaction. It *feels good* to be useful. Being useful allows Jody to take up a position (however modestly she frames it) of expertise and care-giving and in this way discourses of social capital and individual well-being intersect. Ed presented his role in blog culture in the context of social capital. He identified himself as someone who is "trying to start discussions" (Focus group 1). Like Jody, he described a personal satisfaction (an "ego tickle") from the fruits of this labour: for him, hearing other people talking about his blog. Nicole followed a similar discourse, saying that by sharing her own stories (specifically health-related stories), she can "know that maybe someone else with be helped with what you have to say." She also identified a potential return for this: "And maybe you'll be helped reading what they have to say" (Focus group 3).

A parallel discourse of the negative evaluation of blogs without use-value also emerged in these discussions. Ramona criticized 'mommy blogs' and described them as "nothing special…baby photos and stories about your kids." In our interview she expressed her dismissal of the use of Twitter by celebrities:

> Like the whole Ashton Kutcher thing, like trying to get a million followers, and stuff like that. You would see celebrities…and they would talk about being on Twitter, and I'm like I don't care that Elizabeth Hasselbeck fell, right? Like who gives a shit? (Interview)

Jahaluid also expresses a disdain for purely journal-style blogs: "you'd look at it and go, hey I went into work today and I had a Coke. Good for you. I'm never going to read your blog again. Back to mine" (Focus group 5). The blogs most often criticized in this way often fell into the personal journal or 'mommy blog' categories. In as the previous chapter I cited this as a convention of the genre: a tension between the valorization of personal information on one hand and the dismissal of this kind of information when it exceeds an (itself contingent) threshold of propriety. Here, I suggest that the presentation of something 'useful' counts in evaluations of blogs, not only as a textual convention, but in terms of behavior and the accrual of social capital.

Accusations of narcissism, then, have something to do with a failure to provide something useful (information, tips, even an emotional connection or thrilling narrative) for the reader, and represent selfishness and self-obsession on the part of a blogger, as well as a poor blog.

In the surfing scene, wrote Irwin (1973), to become “authentic…[for a newcomer]…meant acquiring considerable surfing skill and this required at least a year of hard work” (p.150). In her study of subcultural capital in club cultures in the UK, Thornton (1996) notes how, in music culture, authenticity is seen as a “balm for media fatigue and an antidote to commercial hype” (p.26). The expertise and experience that produces subcultural capital also translate into authenticity. Authenticity, produced in this way or through the strategies I outlined in the previous chapter, also generates social capital. A failure to convince readers in this regard can mean a loss of this capital (expressed through the withdrawal of readership). Ramona indicated that if her “bullshit detector” goes off, she won’t “come back to your site” (Interview). Glutastic echoed this, noting that “people can tell” when a blog is not authentic. Ed spoke about the importance of publishing even negative comments (bloggers can moderate the comments on their blog posts). Failure to post dissenting comments he suggested, could result in a loss of readers: “The first time you don’t [post a critical comment], somebody is going to go to a different blog…you’ll be outed in the blogging community as somebody who doesn’t tolerate dissent” (Interview). A failure to convince readers of authenticity, through behavior as well as the content of blog posts, then, can result in a negative evaluation, and the potential of measurable social consequences. These can become visible on sites meters that track readership, the number of comments received, the number of incoming links. An authentic post or blog can be rewarded, though signs of readership in the same way. In this way, when social capital can be measured in terms of readership and engagement, one way of understanding the rewards for a convincing construction of an authentic self is in the proliferation of this social capital, and one way of understanding the penalty for failure in this regards is the loss of social capital.

Just as early advocates of blogging (e.g. Blood, 2000 & 2002; Mortensen & Walker, 2002; Stone, 2004) highlighted a connection between authenticity and independence (in contrast to the mainstream media) from political and commercial interests, the participants in my study similarly maintained this discourse. The relationship between authenticity and commercial activity was particularly contentious. Ed compared blogs with heavy commercial or sponsored content to press releases (in this way such blogs are also failures in a generic sense) and noted that this would prompt him to disengage as a reader: “if I’m reading press releases, I’m surfing to the next blog, I’m done” (Interview). Nicole, in particular, was suspicious of commercialized blogs, saying that she hated advertisements on blogs, that she finds blogging for profit “disingenuous…I never really thought that was the intention of a blog. I’ve always seen it as something personal and social” (Interview). Blatantly sponsored or commercial content, then, for these bloggers could detract from the presentation of authenticity on a blog, resulting in the loss of social capital and audience.

In other work on authenticity and social media use by politicians (Gaden & Dumitrica, 2015), I found that politicians can gain trust and support through the ‘correct’ use of social media, and identified the presentation of an authentic self as a core requirement. Here, the social capital earned through the development of trust and support can consequently be expressed in the tangible form of votes, and lead to election. In recent research on social media (Marwick & boyd, 2010) authenticity was similarly found to be a central discourse among Twitter users who negotiated their audiences by “strategically concealing information, targeting tweets to different audiences and attempting to portray both an authentic self and an interesting personality” (p.

122). The authentic self, then, can be strategically produced with specific audience(s) in mind. Later in this chapter, I will discuss in more detail how social capital can be leveraged, not only in terms of political power, but also in pursuit of wealth and professional success.

At the same time that the presentation of an authentic self was described by these bloggers as a hallmark of good blogging, and vital for maintaining readership, they also identified limits to self-revelation, also with a view to preserving social capital. Ramona described how she is careful not to alienate readers:

> A lot of my readers on the quilt side in particular are Bible Belt Christians, and I am so not a Christian, and so if I put my stuff on there I risk offending readers. I don't want to alienate people who like my work. (Interview)

Mary identified her limits as shaped by potential readers: "I will never ever say anything mean or hurtful about anyone on my blog" (Focus group 1). Morrison (2011) made similar observations of mommy bloggers, identifying an imperative not to hurt or upset others among the bloggers she studied. In the last chapter, I introduced this discourse of 'niceness' as a convention of blogging. Here, I suggest that this convention might be founded on a motivation to preserve social capital, itself linked to a more fundamental understanding that the acquisition and preservation of social capital is important in evaluations among bloggers.

Goffman (1959), wrote about the practices of individuals participating in performances of self within specific establishments. These required the cooperation of the players in their performance of a given situation for an audience. Their cooperation was founded on a shared understanding of the "ethos that is to be maintained by rules of politeness and decorum" (p.238). In this way "politeness and decorum" might be strategies for the successful production of a performance, an (unspoken) agreement between social actors. Here, I suggest that authenticity and niceness can be identified both as conventions of blogging in a generic sense, and as strategies for the further purpose of maintaining and preserving social capital. Ed emphasized the importance of preserving his audience when he explained that the "worst" thing that could happen is "to lose readers…how I'm judging my success at this is how many people are reading" (Interview). I also suggest that a tension between the imperative of authenticity for the purpose of creating and maintaining social captial and the preservation of social capital (by not alienating or offending those readers), is resolved through the use of 'strategic authenticity' (Gaden & Dumitrica, 2015): an impression carefully formed through attention to tone, style, content, and interactions, the characteristics and conventions of a 'good' blog that I identified in the previous chapter.

Power-players: A-list Bloggers and Social Capital

The bloggers in this study confirmed that approval from powerful readers (specifically bloggers with large audiences, other individuals who hold significant social or cultural capital), can produce a bump in social capital for a blogger by drawing more readers in to their blog. Powerful bloggers possess a great deal of social capital, and can influence the development of conventions and standards in blog culture. In his early manual for bloggers, Hill (2006) pointed out that the tropes of honesty and authenticity came at least partly from influential bloggers: "because so many prominent blogs straddle the line between objective news and personal opinion, all bloggers demand attempted truthfulness at all times" (p. 268). Furthermore, as I have already explained, both those studying blogs and the participants in this study have demonstrated a shared comparison between blogs and other forms of lifewriting, especially diaries and journals, formats where there is a generic expectation of truth and honesty. Indeed, in the early days of blogging, those bloggers who populated the A-list (bloggers who had high Technorati rankings and were well known in blog culture) were largely early adopters, trailblazers of the blog scene (Mortensen & Walker, 2002). However, among the bloggers I spoke with, there were mixed feelings about A-list or star bloggers, often associated (as I have already described) with their understanding that these bloggers were inauthentic. In his study, Reed (2005) noted a similar suspicion among his participants. I suggest that this points to a tension between subcultural and social capital. Early 'A-list' bloggers possessed a great deal of subcultural capital from their 'early-adopter' status, particularly because being an early blogger equated to more technical know-how (i.e. blogging before ready-made blogging platforms and templates became available). However, bloggers who grew in popularity later on, do not necessarily have that cachet. They might possess a great deal of social capital from their extensive networks, but that does not always translate directly into subcultural capital. The introduction of increasing levels of monetization in blog culture has, I suggest, complicated this further. In the next section, I continue my examination of this tension: when economic forces come into play (when blogging can mean income), how does social capital operate?

Economic Value: Money, Careers, and Blogging

In the 2006 edition of *Blogging for Dummies,* (Hall, 2006) there is a single chapter on 'Blogging for Bucks (or Pennies)' Hall opens the chapter noting that it is written for "the most ambitions bloggers who believe that their entries are worth money" (p.283). At this time, then, bloggers who were focused on making money via blogging were a minority, and there appeared to be relatively little to gain. The most common strategies for monetizing a blog were to either include clickable 'banner' ads or relevant text ads (Oberoi, 2013). As one of the largest providers of relevant word advertising, Google's Adsense advertisements used keywords from a blog's content to place relevant advertisements on the page, and bloggers earned on a per-click basis: every time a reader clicked through a link in an advertisement.

Among the bloggers who participated in my study, this kind of monetization was not a dominant theme. Ed said that he found embedded advertising tiresome and annoying, and that it put him off reading: "I find it extremely distracting… all of a sudden now you've got an advertisement popping up on your screen. I just want to read the guy's opinion" (Focus group 1). The inclusion of advertising was described by some of these bloggers as a threat to the integrity of a blog: throwing into question the blogger's authenticity, as well as spoiling the aesthetic appeal of the blog itself. Ramona explained how she was unsure about including advertisements on her blog to generate revenue: "I don't think I'm ever going to do that, mostly because I don't like the way it looks on other people's sites …I find it kind of irritating when I see it" (Interview). Mary didn't object to advertising but suggested that the blog take priority: advertisements were acceptable, as long as they "don't take over the blog…as long as they go with the theme of the blog" (Focus group 1). Michael was the only participant who noted that the potential for making money via advertising was something that had attracted him to blogging. However, he had not yet managed to convert this motivation into any income. At this time (2009) then, earning significant revenue from including advertisements might not have been understood as attainable for these bloggers, or at least not enough to compensate for the loss of authenticity and aesthetic appeal.

Monetization in blog culture.

In the years since I conducted this research, however, the opportunities for paid blogging have developed significantly, and my observations of these developments has contributed to the analytical perspective I brought to my data, as well as my interpretations of my findings. One of the pivotal moments in my own understanding of blog culture came through my attendance at the 2012 BlogWest conference: a conference for bloggers in and around western Canada.

At BlogWest, I was surprised by how prevalent the theme of monetization was in the conference proceedings and I attended sessions where participants learned about various methods for generating income from blogging. In addition to a traditional pay-for placement approach to advertising, for the presenters and participants were discussing more integrated forms of advertising where bloggers wrote sponsored posts and reviews for products. One of the panelists in session specifically devoted to monetization, Cora Brady, was a founder of Mom Central Canada[17] a market consulting company that connected bloggers with brands. Once part of this network, bloggers could be matched with brands and given assignments for sponsored content. To be considered, Brady explained, bloggers must have been posting to their blogs frequently (a minimum of once per week) for a least a year and must have a minimum of one thousand unique readers a month (though she admitted that the requirement for some brands was often closer to five thousand). Bloggers were also assessed on the caliber of their writing, their engagement with readers (how many comments they got and how they responded to them), as well as their presence across other social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, etc.). Finally, to become a 'brand ambassador', the content of a blog must be confirmed as 'brand friendly' in order to collaborate with large corporations such as Mattel and Fisher Price. Bloggers could then take part in campaigns by writing about particular products (sometimes with posts on specific products organized to roll out on the same day by a number of bloggers). In this way, at this time, writing sponsored content was understood as one of the most lucrative ways to monetize a

[17] Mom Central has been re-branded as Influence Central: http://influencecentral.ca/

blog. It was a significant development from the 'pennies' for Adsense advertisements that Hill (2006) described, and that the bloggers I interviewed talked about in 2009. Advertisements still feature on many blogs: both independently sourced advertisers and those organized by participation in an ad network such as Federated Media[18] which sells advertising space on blog sites to vendors.

Nicole Balch, a blogger who has used all of these monetization strategies posted a breakdown of her income on her blog in 2013 (Balch, January 16, 2013). She supports her family through her blog, and at that time the largest slice of her earnings (she presented them as a pie-chart with no exact percentages given) came from sponsored posts. Indeed**,** sponsored content can be very lucrative: "A blogger with a big audience, and a prominent persona, she'll make the bulk of her income from brand partnerships" (Vanessa Flaherty in Phelan, 2013, n.p.)**.** A blogger can be paid anywhere from two thousand dollars for a single endorsement (she uses the example of hosting a party or writing an advertorial) to "six figures" for longer-term partnerships "like a year-long ambassadorship or a major full-scale advertising campaign." A much smaller slice of Balch's income she identified as from affiliate linking, a practice which she admitted, she did not use as "effectively" as she could:

> To do well with them, you have to actively push them. I use them passively. Meaning, that if I was already planning to link to an item, and they happen to participate in the affiliate program I'm a part of, I will use the affiliate link. I don't go looking for products in order to drive sales, and as such I don't make that much with them. (Balch, January 16, 2013)

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[18] https://advertisers.federatedmedia.net/

The affiliate link program that Balch uses - rewardStyle - describes itself as an "invitation-only monetization tool for premium style publishers" ('Apply', rewardStyle). When a blogger uses an affiliate link - which largely looks like any other hyperlink - and you (as a reader) click on the link, it deposits a 'cookie' on your browser. These can either expire soon after, or be quite persistent. The next time you make a purchase from that vendor, the blogger whose link you clicked will receive a commission (Phelan, August 20, 2013). As with sponsorship networks, to be considered a candidate for affiliate partnerships, a blogger has to demonstrate a certain level of readership and specific criteria. Affiliate marketing networks such as rewardStyle are invitation-only, which means that only particular bloggers 'earn' the ability to generate income in this way. To give a sense of this exclusivity: in 2013, at the rewardStyle conference "one hundred style bloggers and online magazines met with 31 major retailers … to brainstorm about monetizing blogs" (Haber, 2013, May 22). In order to sign on with rewardStyle, a blogger must be approved by the network. Once in, bloggers can track which retailers bring them the most business. rStyle can also act as a booking agent for flat-rate posts and Instagram[19] features. Style bloggers can include many affiliate links in a single post. Although affiliate marketing technology has been available for over a decade (Brown, 2009), it was not common-place in the blogosphere in the way that it is now when I conducted my focus groups and interviews. Bloggers can actually *cash-in* or exchange their social and subcultural capital (readership numbers, evidence of readership engagement) for access to the networks which provide the most efficient and potentially lucrative methods of generating monetary income from blogging activities. The bloggers I spoke with were exchanging (or hoping and planning to exchange) subcultural and social capital accrued by blogging in a different, but related, way: by shifting or improving their professional status through building and operationalizing helpful networks.

From risky business to business-savvy.

A turning point for my own understanding of blog culture came when I read Tribble's (2005) article 'Bloggers Need Not Apply. Writing about the dangers of blogging for aspiring academics' careers, Tribble prompted me to reconsider my own position on blogging as a useful and empowering practice for feminist academics. Furthermore, at the same time there were a number of high profile cases where individuals lost their jobs because of blogging (Barkham, 2005; Crawford, 2005). The bloggers I spoke to in 2009 spoke to an awareness of these risks when they identified the importance of being 'nice' and not hurting anyone's feelings or jeopardizing relationships (emphasizing professional as well as personal relationships). However, they also spoke to an identification of the potential of blogging as a strategy to benefit them professionally. Stuart commented on a shift toward the ubiquity and professional-acceptance of social media/online culture:

> Before when we used to play around with computers…it was a geeky thing to do. Now it's a part of life. We all have one, we all use it, and writing blogs and social networking is part of today's normal - - it's part of the culture today. (Interview)

The participants in my study certainly indicated their understanding of a potential tension between blogging and professional development: that a blogger takes risks when she criticizes her employer online, but as Ed describes in this scenario, another way of interpreting this is to identify a cultural difference, than a simple foolishness on the part of the blogger:

> I know that some of the more institutional corporations, and corporate entities are having a hard time adjusting to the fact that Johnnie in the mail room has a blog, and has a Twitter account, and has Facebook, and he posted yesterday, God I had my job. Mr Evans is such a doofus, and Mr. Evans gets this, you know, printed version of this, passed through nine people, and now Johnnie is in trouble. Instead of the social media mentality, which would be if Mr. Evans was a blogger himself, he would sit back, perhaps, and say was I out of line in how I was dealing with Johnnie yesterday?" (Interview)

Here Ed suggests that intolerance to blogging and social media is linked to an outdated outlook. Social media culture, on the other hand, is characterized as open-minded, ready to engage positively at all times. Interestingly, however, he has been carefully guarding his own anonymity in order to control the trajectory of a professional move he is hoping to make. In this way, at this time, the ideals of social media culture might not translate to the lived experiences of its participants.

In Chapter Five I identified how these bloggers talked about using blogging as a strategy for creative and professional development, as a facet of personal development. For example, November was using blogging as a technique for trying out new things (as a writer), and had received some opportunities (travel and public speaking) via her blogs. Jahaluid had built a professional reputation through blogging and social media expertise. Stuart talked about building his business and reputation online. Art hoped to promote his photography business online. Sean had tried (and failed) to launch an online magazine. Nicole used her blog as a way to develop her skills and communicate her accomplishments as a writer. Vincci was developing her reputation as a food expert – related to her career as a dietician – through blogging.

In the following section I focus on and compare the narratives of two particular participants: Ramona and Glustastic. Considered in detail and in comparison with one another, I find that, although they articulate very different positions on the application of blogging for professional ends, Ramona and Glutastic speak to a shared understanding of the context within which they are operating: they are both negotiating the landscape of a neoliberal 'flexible' economy in which blogging is presented as a possibility for self-branding and promotion (Marwick, 2013; Neff, 2012). A detailed examination of their narratives is an opportunity to think about how different discourses of value are in play when blogging becomes a tool of professional development and, thus, of economic value.

Blogging and Professional Development: Ramona and Glutastic

Ramona.

At the time of our meetings, Ramona had two blogs: a quilting blog and a food blog (with some daily family life content). She also worked a full-time corporate position as an environmental manager. Ramona emphasized the dissatisfaction she feels with her full-time job: "I come home from work and I tell my husband that I feel like a little bit of my soul has died" (Interview). Blogging, she said, might act as a "bridge" for her to access a new career as a writer. The central theme in Ramona's explication of her motivation and use of blogging is networking. She talked about networking in two ways: networking with other bloggers and readers to increase her readership, and also networking by using capital accrued via blogging forge connections and to launch an offline writing career (she distinguished between blogging and 'real' writing jobs).

Ramona identified the kind of networking that she did online as "lazy networking" and compared it to some of the obligations of her corporate job (attending corporate functions).

‘Lazy networking’ in the blogosphere involved visiting other people’s blogs, commenting on them, linking to them. However, she went on, there is a higher level of networking that is more active: “it’s actually making contacts with other writers, and going that way, or guest posting places, and stuff like that” (Focus group 2). She used a site meter to see if her readership was impacted by these efforts, and had begun using her full name online so that she could be searchable by the network she was developing.

As she described the culture of blog networking that she was engaging in, Ramona demonstrated an awareness of hierarchies among bloggers in the scene. Interestingly, she was not as interested in getting comments from a blogging ‘star’, but wanted to make connections with and receive validation from:

> Other professional food writers…it’s a pat on the back, but it’s different, because it’s about them complimenting me on my writing, which I take to be an even bigger compliment than anything else, because those are the people that are helping me sort of expand my network on that. (Focus group 2)

In this way, Ramona identified an understanding of smaller, specific scenes within a broader blogging scene, or a blogging aspect to other cultural scenes, such as a local food culture scene: Returning to the premise of accruing value by providing something useful, Ramona explained that her blog might act as a hub for the local network: “among producers, and people in the … professional food community, locally, and having them all come, and so that we can, you know, talk about different events that are coming up, and stuff like that” (Focus group 2). Blogging, for her had a purpose: it was a strategy for accessing other scenes, namely the local food culture and professional food writers’ scene.

Ramona also highlighted another recurring theme: the labour entailed in blogging. Photographs (taking, editing, and uploading) add considerable time and effort to blogging, and have become increasingly normalized as a convention of a 'good' blog. Ramona identified a number of different elements to the work involved in producing her blog: working on photographs, creating tutorials, and thinking about or "daydreaming" about blogging as well as writing posts. She admitted that she spends so much time on her blog (and related activities) that she has to remind herself to do something else with her time. She also noted that blogging has led shifts in her family's practices of eating, and eating out. She has even found herself blogging from work: "just to get it done because I just, I need it", and she also sacrifices sleep to keep up with her blogs.

Here, Ramona speaks to a significant tension between the struggle to maintain the (not inconsiderable) labor of blogging 'well'; and a discourse of passion and fulfillment behind the motivation to blog. Indeed, although she acknowledged the work involved, Ramona minimized complaints about this, and worked to follow up her acknowledgements of pressure and exhaustion with a positive interpretation of these experiences. For example, when she talked about needing to quilt and cook more (in order to create material for her blogs), Ramona noted that "people are coming there [to the blog] to look at quilts, or to see something new…I think that's a *good* pressure on me" (Focus group 2, emphasis mine).

Another instance highlighting a struggle to meet obligations, was when she explained why she is not active on Twitter: "That's just one more thing that I would have to pay attention to, and I struggle to keep up with the things that I already want to do. So I'm not going to add something else to my list." (Focus group 2). Two months later, in our interview discussion, she said that she had begun using Twitter: "to develop a further network… I strictly use it as a marketing tool for the blog" (Interview). In this way, Ramona identified the potential of using blogging as a strategy for a long-term plan to transform her career (and her life). The labour involved in enacting the behaviors and producing the products that she understands will help her to accomplish this is considerable, yet she presents this information with the stipulation that this work gives her pleasure, or that the pressure to accomplish it is 'good'. For her, the potential benefits of blogging outweigh the strain involved to achieve them.

Glutastic.

In contrast with Ramona, and to other participants who sought professional returns from blogging, Glutastic was interesting to me because she vehemently rejected this motivation and described her rejection of the corporate interest her blog attracted and the professional opportunity that was presented to her. As I outlined in Chapter Five, Glutastic said that she began blogging after her diagnosis with celiac disease when she "took to the internet to tell people what I found" and to "connect with other people" (Focus group 3). In this way, she engaged with discourses of networking and social capital in a different way: connections are important and desirable, but she identified her motivation in terms of the give and take of support, rather than to build a bridge to a desired professional destination. In this way, Glutastic identified her motivations as entirely personal, explicitly drawing a distinction between personal and professional blogging.

Business blogs, she maintained, require a different level of commitment: "when you're servicing people with it there is an expectation, and it almost becomes like a job" (Interview). Glutastic described a struggle that she had experienced with where to locate her own blog. She identified it as personal, because "the tone of voice is definitely not professional", but found that this understanding had become confused as she her blog had attracted corporate attention. She had been approached with an opportunity to be involved in the opening of Canada's first gluten-free grocery store. Blogging, she said, would have been a part of promoting the products in the store.

Glutastic described her decision not to enter into professional blogging as tied to the level of commitment and work it would demand. Blogging professionally, she said, would have entailed making it her "whole world." Indeed, Glutastic described an ongoing and active practice of restricting her blogging in her daily life. In the previous chapter I identified frequent or regular posting as a strategy for 'good' blogging, for pleasing readers and producing a 'good' blog. Glutastic identified another way of thinking about this; she said:

> I try to blog three times a week. It's usually Monday, Wednesday, Friday. I never post on the weekends…I've made that quite set in stone. Weekends are just time to relax from the week, so I try not to do stuff on the weekends. (Focus group 3)

In this way, she maintained a continuous and conscious effort to separate her blog from her professional self, and also to separate it from her 'free time' or 'leisure time'. The intentional corralling involved in this suggests an ease with which blogging can move between aspects of daily life. In this way, it is emblematic of the shifts in work culture that I described in Chapter Three; towards hypercapitalist environment where the boundaries between workplace and home, work and leisure, are being dissolved.

Like Ramona, Glutastic described the craft and labour that went into her blog in some detail. Some of this work is less visible, much of the "legwork" (for her, buying and testing gluten-free products) "takes longer than the actual post" (Focus group 3). In her writing, she strove for a conversational tone: “as if I was having a conversation with my mom, or you know, a friend” (Focus group 3). Maintaining her casual style takes effort: “there is a lot of effort that goes into …blogging in a casual and sarcastic and yet funny way without crossing the line between inappropriate sarcasm and just not caring” (Interview).

The careful maintenance of style and tone is in the service of preserving readership: “I don’t want to be too personal, but I also can’t be too medical, because that will alienate the readers either way” (Interview). Indeed, she had recalibrated her approach following reader response: the first negative response she received (in response to a negative review that she had written) had prompted her to restructure her posts with an even great awareness of a reader, and with an even greater focus on promoting conversation. Furthermore, the positive corporate interest she began to attract also prompted her to modify her approach, and she identified a pressure to: “Write like I know what I’m talking about”. Changing her blog in this way, however, made her uncomfortable (she said that it felt ‘weird’):

> My posts were dry, and people weren’t commenting or having conversations, and I went, okay, I’m not catering to the people selling the products, I’m catering to the people who are eating these products. They’re the ones that matter. (Interview)

Making the decision to reverse her approach, Glutastic anticipated that she would lose readership, and some of the perks that she had been enjoying (free food to review), but that this did not actually happen. To her surprise, readership and response from readers actually rebounded, and she continued to receive corporate interest: “I’m finding that I’m getting contacted by more and more companies because of the honesty” (Interview).

Glutastic's narrative speaks to a struggle to maintain (a carefully constructed) authenticity in her blog. She attributed the corporate attention she received to her 'honesty', a characteristic of her blog which she, interestingly, linked to her refusal to take up a corporate affiliation. Ironically, in this way, the authenticity produced through her refusal to engage in professionalize blogging, makes her more attractive, an even hotter commodity, in the eyes of corporate interests. Maintaining the integrity of her authentic 'voice' online extended beyond her blog, Glutastic took over a Twitter account for the Glutastic blog that her Fiancé had started up: "I had to remove his voice from it because it wasn't mine" (Focus group 3). In addition to her focus on voice, Glutastic was careful in other aspects of self-presentation. Glutastic's Fiancé designed her website, and she described taking pleasure in what she identified as creative control "I'm not making money off of it, I don't care to, so I don't have to cater it" (Focus group 3). Despite the work and care that she put into her blog and her presentation of self online, Glutastic did not necessarily envision herself blogging long-term, she acknowledged a possibility that life might "push it out of the way", something she said that she is comfortable with. This is linked with her resistance to the idea that the 'Glutastic' part of herself should occupy anything more than a clearly defined portion of her identity and life; a part that, in hierarchical terms she located "at the bottom"(Interview).

Conclusions

The bloggers who took part in this study spoke to complicated intersections between subcultural capital, social capital, and the potential of blogging for the generation of economic value. Simply put, social capital could be accrued through the provision of use-value and the presentation of an authentic self in a blog. These strategies could attract and maintain readers. Furthermore, bloggers might be able to impress and attract particular readers through the demonstration of subcultural capital in terms of experience and expertise in blog culture. An endorsement from a well-known blogger (in the form of a link or a comment) could increase readership and raise visibility. There is a distinction, however, between the social capital associated with popularity and that linked with subcultural capital. I found this distinction to be muddy, but important. Bloggers will forfeit subcultural capital if it appears that they are accruing social capital for the sake of achieving the status of 'A-list' or 'star' blogger. Indeed, although I wrote about various aspects and strategies of impression management in the previous chapter, here perhaps the most important impression to manage is the camouflage of the process of this management itself.

In this chapter I have also described the ways in which blog culture has engaged with increasingly lucrative practices of monetization. At the time of writing, the accumulation of wealth directly through blogging (sponsored posts, affiliate links) is easy to spot. In this context, social capital has become an important bargaining tool: bloggers can exchange their social capital for access to the networks which will facilitate the production of this income. In this context, the subcultural capital that I described here has receded in significance. An affiliate linking network might require that a blogger has been active for a certain period of time, but they do not care whether they were using BBS prior to blogging, or whether they can code their own webpage. In contrast, monetized blogs tend to have professionally designed sites fitting into the standards and conventions that I outlined in Chapter Six.

The bloggers in this study, however, were blogging at a time before the mass proliferation of these monetization strategies. They took up three main discourses with regard to the economic potential of blogging. In the first, direct monetization (inclusion of advertising) is defined as problematic, antithetical to the autonomy and authenticity of blog culture. This draws on the discourse of subcultural value and the establishment of autonomy as a hallmark of early blogs. The cultural value associated with book deals or mainstream media recognition can soften the threat to subcultural capital, and bloggers who have expanded their reach in this way may establish A-list status less problematically. Even still, this can be tricky, and bloggers may accuse one another of catering to an audience, or changing their voice (breaking the convention of consistency) once they have achieved either mainstream recognition or blogosphere star-tus.

As an exemplar of another take on economic value and professional success in and via blogging, Ramona took up the challenge to achieve professional (and self) actualization through careful self-management and un-paid work. Here, I identify a tension between on one hand a discourse of the struggle to accrue the social capital necessary for success: to meet the expectations of readers, and fulfill the requirements of 'good' blogging and, on the other hand a discourse of pleasure and fulfillment in this work. Glutastic, presented a very different take on similar circumstances. She, too, identified the blurring of distinctions between personal and professional in blog culture although, unlike Ramona, she worked to preserve this distinction. Glutastic's narrative spoke to the very careful construction and considerable work that can go into the presentation of an authentic self, online. She also highlighted the way in which professionalization might threaten, not only social capital, but also the value associated with blogging as a technology of the self.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions - Pros & Cons

Introduction

In his study of the surfing scene (1973), Irwin projected a trajectory for the life-cycle of a scene: a trajectory that terminates with its ‘decline’. In this, he identified four evolutionary phases: articulation, expansion, corruption and decline. The articulation stage requires individuals with the time and means to piece together the scene, and also the “patterns, forms, traits” (p. 136) out of which the scene can be put together. In the expansion phase, patterns have taken shape and numbers are increasing, a development that Irwin describes in the case of surfing as being precipitated by media attention. This in turn precipitates a corruption of the scene, giving rise to competitiveness, invidiousness, and quashed spontaneity and experimentation (p. 148), resulting in a loss of community and extreme competition for legitimacy. In the decline phase, the scene has grown too fast and loses its integrity. Irwin noted that “this is probably true of all scenes; that is, the patterns of the original scene virtually disappear while it is still growing” (p. 155). In this study, I found Irwin’s model of the evolution of a scene a useful frame of reference for my own findings and observations about blog culture. The evolutionary model is not without its problems, however, and in this case I propose an interpretation of my findings that suggests more than a single, unified, trajectory.

Summary of Findings: Discourses of Value

Through this study I further developed the idea that blogging might usefully be thought of as a technology of the self, an individual practice taken up as a strategy for managing and/or flourishing in the world (Bakardjieva & Gaden, 2012a, 2012b). The bloggers in this study described blogging as a way of working on themselves in a number of different ways, with a shared discourse of self-help which is, I demonstrated, underpinned by a neoliberal ideology of self-governance and individual responsibility. They also shared understandings of generic conventions and characteristics. It is useful, I suggest here, to think about defining a genre as a disciplinary process (Rak, 2005). Doing so, creates boundaries between what is inside the genre, and what is not, which in turn makes it possible for artifacts to hit (and miss) the mark. Shared understandings of genre among bloggers, then, link with the production of social capital in the form of networks and interactions, via successful performances and articulations of generic ideals. Furthermore, those networks and interactions themselves contribute to the value of the blog. Social capital, in this way, is embedded within understandings of textual value and can be accrued via the successful performance of a genre.

In Chapter Seven I outlined a tension between subcultural capital and the instrumental use of social capital for the purposes of self-aggrandizement and/or monetization. Subcultures are implicitly positioned outside of the mainstream. Here, social capital might operate in in the context of a community with shared values and interests. In the blogosphere described by early adopters like Blood (2000; 2002), 'A-list' bloggers like Jason Kottke held a great deal of social capital, and also subcultural capital. As blogging has emerged, and entered the mainstream, I suggest there is a difference between the kind of social capital linked to subcultural capital and that linked to popular recognition and/or monetization.

The discourse uniting all of these ways of thinking about value is that of blogging as a technology of the self. I propose that producing a good blog, and generating (and maintaining) social capital, call on the same discourses of self-surveillance and self-governance that are characteristic of blogging as a technology of the self. The focus groups and interviews that I conducted for this study took place after blogging had entered the mainstream, but before monetization techniques such as affiliate linking and sponsored content had become as ubiquitous as they are in the present moment. In the next section, I present one vision of value in blog culture: an embodiment of the characteristics of 'good' blogs that I have identified in this study. This vision, I suggest, connects with an understanding of blogging as increasingly polished and monetized, where bloggers operate as, I suggest, 'pro's and 'cons': professionals and con-artists. This, however, represents only one - contextually specific - interpretation of value in blog-culture, and following from this I present an alternative interpretation.

'Pros and Cons: Professionals and Con-artists

Here, I propose this as one vision of value or success in blog culture based on an embodiment of the multiple characteristics of 'good' blogs that I have identified in this study, and following the subsequent developments in blog culture. Here, 'pros and cons' describe the careful productions and constructions of bloggers who have themselves become, to varying degrees, professionals and con-artists. In practice, a blogger must gain the trust of readers by convincing them of their authenticity in order to leverage the social capital of those readers and networks in exchange for sponsorship deals and cashback from affiliated links. This vision connects with the idea of the corruption of a scene that Irwin (1973) identified, and can be seen in the tension between different forms of social capital that I described already. It also shows up in media critique of blog culture. In a piece for *Wired* magazine, Boutin (November 20, 2008) describes an environment where:

> The blogosphere, once a freshwater oasis of folksy self-expression and clever thought, has been flooded by a tsunami of paid bilge. Cut-rate journalists and underground marketing campaigns now drown out the authentic voices of amateur wordsmiths. (n.p.)

Here, Boutin again presents the mainstreaming and monetization of the ‘scene’ in terms of a decline, or a loss (of quality), and other commentary has suggested that blogging is ‘dying’ because produsers are moving to other social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, or Tumblr, including a piece by Jason Kottke (Kottke, December 2013). Another perspective celebrates the new definition of blogging as “a highly trafficked, commercially appealing platform whose best years are ahead of it” (Kabadayi, July 2014). I propose that all of these visions of change: whether they are presented in terms of corruption or opportunity, miss an important aspect of the emergence of revenue production and changes in personal blog culture. The criticisms, in particular, imply an understanding of a previously uncorrupt ‘scene’, prior to the invasion and colonization by neoliberal capitalist forces. I suggest that focusing solely on this evolutionary narrative distracts from an important recognition of the hierarchies that have informed the construction of generic norms and conventions in blog culture: hierarchical conventions that are leveraged in (rather than caused by) monetized blog culture.

My own perspective on this ‘scene’ is shaped by commentary on blog culture (such as that I presented in Chapter Two); by the experiences and analysis of the discussions I have engaged in with bloggers for this study; and by my continuous observations of and participations in blog culture. From this study, the discourses of value that I have found myself returning to throughout the project have congregated around another theme: of personal voice and its role in the construction of authentic selves and/or the production of income.

Personal Voice and Value

Personal voice and personal information have been identified (both by scholars and by the participants in this study) as key defining characteristics in blogs. However, ‘too much’ personal information, particularly without any perceived use-value for a reader, can be interpreted as narcissism and/or lack of self-control. Filter blogs (with links and brief commentary) have been more commonly recognized as a generic ideal (Herring et al, 2004), a status perhaps partly rooted in their affiliation with early adopters, and early 'logs of the web'. However, as Herring et al (2004) suggest, this hierarchy also connects with a perspective on personal narratives, such as the one I have described above. In this context, as I argued in Chapter Six, the blogger walks a fine line between authenticity and banality. A carefully managed strategic representation of an authentic Self accrues value. In this way, the value of a blog might be contingent upon the successful articulation of self within these boundaries and potentially evaluated by an audience who must be convinced that the Self that represented on a blog is authentic (or, at least, authentic *enough*). This presents bloggers as con-artists quite apart from any money-making enterprises: they are engaged in an endeavor to persuade readers of their authenticity in order to accrue the more diverse forms of value I have described. In this way, the "sanctioned form[s] of telling" (Gergen in Eakin, 1999, p. 110), are articulated in shared understandings of conventions, both of text and practice.

Miller and Shepherd (2004) raised the question of whether we ought to define blogs by expectations of an ideal or by an average individual experience. In the previous chapters, I have largely outlined and discussed shared understandings of value and 'ideal' blogs among the participants in this study. Together, these construct a complex map of a good blog and directions for good blogging. Next, I argue that despite – or as well as – this knowledge, bloggers might also find value in blogging that does not adhere to these standards.

'Pros and Cons': Blogging and the Individual

The participants in this study pointed to a multitude of ways that their own blogs and blogging practices did not adhere to these standards and conventions that I have identified here. November noted that she did not do anything to increase the readership of her blog, or even follow her readership on a site meter; Aisling wrote multiple blog posts which she never posted to her blog (they stayed in the draft folder). Most of these bloggers did not receive many (if any) comments on their blog posts: when Ramona said that she sometimes received ten comments on a blog post, Carrie and Iris both responded enthusiastically that this was “a lot” and indicated that for them comments were more unusual.

I propose that what might be understood as failure, for instance a blog with too much personal information, no use-value, no comments or interactions, might also be usefully thought about in terms of individual agency. Foucault (1980) described ‘subjugated knowledges’ as those “that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (p. 82). Following an approach that recognizes the mutual-shaping dynamic between technologies and society (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002), I suggest that the choices that bloggers make in their individual practices of and understandings about blogging are shaped and mediated by their understandings of value in a broader sense. However, I also propose that the bloggers I studied in this project *negotiated* discourses of value, rather than strictly adhered to them and that, in fact, the production of a blog which transgresses those standards might not only be understood in terms of failure, but can also be read as daring eruptions of subjugated knowledges in the public arena of the blogosphere.

When Sorapure (2015) returned to the sites of her earlier (2003) study of online diaries, she found that most had become inactive, and that some of the domains were for sale. Similarly, in the time since my data gathering, all of the blogs my participants maintained at that time have either become inactive (i.e. with no posts for at least six months) or are no longer available online. One of the participants (Ramona) left a forwarding address: a new, professionalized blog (a full list of the status of each blog can be found in Appendix F). According to the ideal, Ramona is the marked success story: she has since published several books and professionalized as a writer and craft-instructor. Although it is possible to think about Ramona's blog in terms of a successful articulation of the standards and conventions of blog culture (and of neoliberal self-determination), I argue that it is important not to think of the others in terms of failure. Indeed, although bloggers may share these understandings of value, and may shape their blogs and behaviors with these standards (and the rewards or punishments for adherence/transgression) in mind, they may also make decisions about their own blogs and blogging practices based on more complex and personal factors. For example, although bloggers might articulate a disapproval of 'dead blogs' or blogs without regular posts, at the same time they may post sporadically themselves and eventually stop blogging. Thinking about quitting in terms of failure, I argue, returns to a perspective of individual responsibility and continuous work towards success and entrepreneurship. An alternative way of thinking about quitting in this context is an act of personal enfranchisement. This study highlights the potential for multiple visions of value, and demonstrates how these are shifting, culturally and socially constructed and contingent.

Study Limitations

From a quantitative research perspective, these findings are not generalizable. There were a restricted number of participants, and they were not a diverse group, particularly in terms of race and class. It would have been interesting to conduct even more interviews, with all of the initial focus group participants especially and with a more diverse group engaging a broader demographic in terms of blog-type . Although beyond the scope of the project, follow-up interviews with willing participants would have provided a fascinating opportunity to compare discourses of value ‘then’ and ‘now’, and especially to investigate their motivations for stopping blogging. Questions for these interviews could have focused on participants’ reasons for stopping, their use of other social media, and their responses to the increasing culture of monetization and professionalization in blogging and social media more broadly.

Another limitation or, perhaps more accurately, a missed opportunity in this study was that I did not ask more direct questions about the potential for monetization. More explicit and nuanced questions in this area could have provided an even greater insight into the then-nascent practices and attitudes to monetization in blog culture. In the same vein, the data for analysis could have been made richer (though perhaps less manageable) by employing a comprehensive analysis of the blogs of each participant. As it stands, I familiarized myself with their blogs before the focus groups and interviews, and have revisited them a number of times in the time since. However, formalizing this line of inquiry would have added another layer to this study. In future work on social media I think that the combination of empirical work with produsers (Bruns, 2005) and content analysis of their blogs or other social media accounts could provide a useful way of comparing a researcher’s interpretation of these texts with bloggers’ own descriptions of and narratives about their production. Using this project as a starting point, in the next section I outline some specific avenues for further research.

New Research Directions

Dead blogs and failed bloggers.

Following from my findings, especially the observations I have detailed in this chapter, I suggest that it is important to shift focus on why people are blogging, and to inquire as why they might stop. This course of inquiry might open up a fresh and interesting avenue into thinking about motivations for using social media as a temporary and individually defined practice, rather than an integral part of an encompassing lifestyle.

The web is awash with abandoned blogs, for although a blogger might stop blogging, the content of a blog is sticky (even when a blog has been removed or a domain expired, text is usually at least somewhat retrievable by using a web archive. Dead blogs were criticized by my participants, although most of them went on to leave their own blogs in the same way. By studying why people stop blogging or using social media, we can avoid imposing a discourse of failure upon these actions. Such a study could investigate further the hypothesis that blogging might be instrumental for individuals in specific contexts. As I have already described, there are a huge number of dead blogs online, for although blogging might not stick, online content is 'sticky': it can often be accessed using a web archive, even when the domain has expired, or become occupied by another site. Dead blogs appear to have ceased being a dynamic text and become something different, static. Like Reed (2005), boyd (2006) found that bloggers displayed a high degree of ownership and identification with their blogs. What might become of this relationship once a blogger has stopped blogging?

Exploitation and personal blogs.

In this investigation, I have highlighted the connection between strategic authenticity and the potential for revenue generation and professional success in blog culture, furthermore drawing a clear connection between the generation of social capital and economic revenue. In this context, bloggers work hard on their blogs (and on themselves), in a practice exemplifying the exploitative aspects of the flexible economy where individuals work for the "opportunity to be paid for our labour" (Dean in BIT THOMPT, 2013). Furthermore, monetized personal bloggers are specifically commodifying the most intimate aspects of their lives; daily lives which become the raw material for blog content. Following from this, I propose the importance of examining more carefully the exploitation of selves that might go into monetized personal blogging, specifically the exploitation of children, who cannot give consent for the use of their images and their experiences.

In her foundational guide to blogging, Blood (2002), raised the issue of child protection and risk, cautioning parents against publishing identifying information about their children, and even recommending a private blog if it is to be devoted to: "Keeping your friends and relatives up-to-date on the daily details of your family life, consider making it private" (p.138). Following my observations of several online communities of (monetized) 'mommy blogs', I have noted that not only do these not maintain the level of privacy recommended by Blood; they include daily photographs of their children and reveal information about the location of their schools and homes, their friends and family, their interests and their 'uh-oh' moments. Furthermore, they consistently use affiliate links and other forms of monetization in order to generate income. Following from this, I think it is imperative to investigate how images of children are being used as strategies for the generation of income on personal blogs. Moreover, it is imperative to consider how this might be problematic in terms of consent and exploitation.

Hate and/or resistance: Get Off My Internets (GOMI).

A third direction for future research coming from this project is to examine closely the blog-discussion boards GOMI (Get Off My Internets[20]), and the response of bloggers to this site. The message boards on GOMI are comprised of discussion threads focusing on specific bloggers. When Bruns (2006, March 25; Bruns & Jacobs, 2006) introduced his theory of produsage, he

[20] http://gomiblog.com/

recognized the potential for produsage-driven products to be appropriated by capitalist interests but argued for the capacity of communities to stand up against this. In media commentary, GOMI has been characterized in terms of ‘snark’ and even ‘hate’, (Lieber, 2014; Van Syckle, 2016).

I have been reading the message boards of GOMI daily during the past two to three years. As I have already suggested, these participations (however passive) in this aspect of blog culture have contributed to the shaping of the perspective I have brought to the project, in particular to the final stages of analysis and writing. Here, I propose that it could be significant to examine whether communities like those on the GOMI discussion boards might represent an intervention as an important discourse of resistance to the powerful norms and conventions that I have identified in this study. For example, I suggest that is particularly important to investigate how the cultural conventions of GOMI might specifically rub up against the powerful convention of ‘niceness’ I have identified in blog culture.

Closing Remarks

This study has shown how bloggers draw on diverse and sometimes conflicting discourses in their construction of the visions of value that inform their blogging practices and the shape of the blogs that they produce. Bloggers, I propose, observe and negotiate these interconnected discourses of value as they make decisions about how to make blogging work for them. In this work, I have also engaged in a process of negotiation among diverse, and sometimes conflicting, theories of text, identity, and value. In this way, one of the central challenges of the project has been to navigate and respect this complexity, and I have worked to do so in a way that I understand to be advised by Hall’s commitment to intellectual work that refuses to “close the field, to police it, and at the same time, a determination to stake out some positions within it and argue for them" (1992, p.278).

In this research, then, I identified that for some bloggers, the value of blogging and the success of a blog might involve employing this practice and production of a text as a strategy for the achievement of at once individually specific, and socially and culturally situated, goals. To an extent, bloggers engage in a degree of con-artistry: they present partial, modified versions of themselves and their lives on their blogs for validation by readers. Social capital can be accrued through these endorsements that the presentation of self is authentic. In the context of monetized blog culture these strategies can be employed in the pursuit of earnings while hiding away this very commercial activity; practices that suggest that bloggers have learned the lesson Lovink (2007) took from the dot.com bust: "people do not flock to the Web for e-commerce, but for conversation" (p.xix). These activities, I have demonstrated, might present a challenge for the maintenance of a scene organized with subcultural capital, and produce another vision of value in blog culture. In the previous chapters, I have drawn connections between this vision and mainstream discourses of neoliberal individualism and self-management.

As I have highlighted, one of the recurring themes in this study has been the tension between the importance of personal voice and detail for the identity of blogging, and an anxiety about those narratives which transgress the rules of propriety. This positions blogs with too much personal information, that are poorly written (i.e. not in good English); that rant too much; that post infrequently, have a cluttered design and are difficult to read, as low on the hierarchy; a positioning, I have suggested, that recalls existing hierarchies of value and propriety for autobiographical subjects, autobiographical content, and voice. Despite this anxiety, the persistence of these narratives and practices of bloggers who break the rules, speaks to the persistent potential of blogging as a site for the emergence of subversive subjugated knowledges, diverse activities, and visions of value.

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Appendix A: Call for Participants

Dear Blogger,

With the growing number of people blogging and reading blogs, this once-marginal practice has become, arguably, mainstream. Personal journal style blogs are the most numerous online but tend to receive less attention from both academics and journalists.

My PhD research project is specifically focused on personal journal blogs and is concerned with addressing the following questions:

- What are the motivations for blogging? What are the rewards (personal and/or professional) for this practice?
- Do bloggers share understandings of what the conventions and standards of blogging practice are? What are they?

The research will involve a small Focus group discussion that will be held at the University of Calgary campus at a time convenient for all potential participants. The discussion will take approximately 2 hours. Refreshments will be provided. There will also be $30 compensation offered for participation in this research project.

An optional one-on-one interview, where agreed-to by the participant, may also take place at the University of Calgary at a time convenient for the participant. This discussion will take approximately 1 hour.

If you are interested in the project and would consider participating, please e-mail the principal investigator Georgia Gaden (PhD Candidate, Faculty of Communication & Culture at the University of Calgary) at ggaden@ucalgary.ca.

Appendix B: Meet the Participants

The names listed below, and used throughout this thesis, are the participant's choice of name or pseudonym. If they elected to use a pseudonym, they could either choose their own or allow me to select one for them.

Focus Group 1

Name	Sean	Aisling	Mary	Ed	Art
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Male	Male
Age	33	47	30	31	26
Occupation	Educator/writer/knower of bears	Banker (currently on disability)	Stay at home mom/homemaker	Information Officer	Photographer
Education	Master's Degree (history)	Business College	1 year university, 1 year SAIT	Some university	Bachelor's Degree (Communication)
Originally from	Vancouver and Calgary	Saskatchewan	Winnipeg	Edmonton	Calgary
Marital status/ Children	Married, 1 child	Married, 5 children	Married, 4 children	Engaged	Single
Using internet since	1994	1997	1996	1995	1992
Started blogging	2003	Approx August 2006	Jan 2005	Dec 2006	2006
Other applications used	Blogger, Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In	MOOs, MUDS, Forum, WoW, Blogger, Ravelry, Yahoo Groups	Facebook	Facebook, Twitter	Message boards

Focus Group 2

Name:	Jody	Ramona	Carrie	Iris
Gender:	F	F	F	F
Age:	40	34	42	50
Occupation:	Stay at home mom	Environmental Manager	Professional Assistant (Admin)	Writer, Artist, Yoga Instructor
Education	BSc BEd	MEDES, BA	2 years university (English Major)	BFA (from RI School of Design)
Originally from	Sakatoon	Edmonton	Camrose, AB	New York
Marital status/ Children	Married, two children	Married, two children	Married, two teens	Separated, 2 children
Using internet since	Approx 1986	1991	1996	1998
Started blogging	Jan 2008, went 'public' Nov 08	Aug/sept 2007	October 2004	Jan 2009
Other applications used	Facebook, PhotoBucket, Yahoo Groups	Facebook, Flickr, Yahoo Groups	Yahoo Groups, Facebook, Twitter, Ravelry, Flickr	Facebook, Twitter

Focus Group 3

Name	Glutastic	Nicole	Stuart	Vincci
Gender	F	F	M	F
Age	26	31	40	22
Occupation	Oil and Gas Consultant	University Admissions officer, Evaluations	Business Development	Dietician

Education	BA Urban studies	BA, MA in prog	College	BA
Originally From	Calgary	Toronto	Toronto	HongKong
Marital status/ Children	Engaged, no children	Single/none	Married, 2 teenage sons	Single, no children
Using internet since	1998	1992	1997	1997
Started blogging	Jan 2008	Nov2004/3	Oct 2004	2002
Other applications used	Twitter	Twitter, New Café.org (formerly Café Utne), Facebook	Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Corp Networks	Facebook, Twitter, Flickr

Focus Group 4

Name	Michael	Geoff
Gender	M	M
Age	31	37
Occupation	Student Advisor	Developer/Videographer
Education	Business Degree, set to start MBA	College
Originally From	Calgary	Toronto
Marital status/ Children	Single, no children	Married, no children
Using internet since	1994	Usenet in 1993, Internet approx 1995
Started blogging	Feb 2007	Early 2007
Other applications used	Facebook, Japan Soc.	Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Google Analytics

Focus Group 5

Name	November	Jahaluid	Vicki Love
Gender	F	M	F
Age	53	33	42
Occupation	Editor	Principal	Sales, consulting, training
Education	B.Sc. LI.B, MBA	Masters Marketing	College
Originally From	Collingwood, Ont.	Not specified	Fort Nelson, BC
Marital status/ Children	Married, two children	Single, no children	Divorced, two children
Using internet since	1993	1997	1996
Started blogging	Approx Jan 2006	Jan 2001	April 2005 or 2006
Other applications used	Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIN, Suite 101.com, Blogspot, Gmail, Gmail Chat	Too many to mention. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn.	Facebook, Twitter

Appendix C: Motivations to Blog

Blogger	Motivation to blog
Aisling	Desire to communicate
Art	To promote self as a photographer.
Mary	To keep in touch with family and friends. “Getting it all out”.
Ed	To have a voice in political discussion.
Sean	To start an online magazine and community with a group of friends.
Iris	To cope with a relationship break-up.
Carrie	To talk about running. To connect with other runners.
Jody	To write about her son’s foot condition. To find and provide support to others.
Ramona	To develop networks. To find creative inspiration. To improve writing skills and professionalize as a writer.
Glutastic	To cope with diagnosis with celiac disease. To connect with other people with celiac disease and share knowledge.
Nicole	To connect with people.
Stuart	To promote business.
Vincci	To share recipes and experiences with food with people she knows.
Michael	To keep in touch with friends and family. To market self.
Geoff	To present professional self. To provide something useful for audience.
November	To practice writing. To maintain a good reputation.
Jahaluid	To continue early-adopter/ tech-expert activities.
Vicki Love	To find an outlet and a place to express herself.

Appendix D: Consent Form

FACULTY OF COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

Graduate Programs

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Georgia Gaden, PhD Student Faculty of Communication and Culture, University of Calgary, Email: ggaden@ucalgary.ca, Phone: (403) 4409286[21].

Title of Project:

'Landscape for a Good Blog': Thinking about value in the blogosphere

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

[21] Supervisor's contact name and details have been removed from this thesis for privacy purposes

Purpose of the Study:

As the Internet has become, for many, an increasingly integral part of daily life, activities such as blogging have also become more widespread and, even for those who do not blog themselves, blogging has entered the vocabulary and collective consciousness of the wider population.

This study will examine the constitution of shared understandings of quality and success among bloggers. It will analyze how concepts of best practice, success, and value are understood and shared among bloggers, and consider how they might pervade and regulate the production of their texts? On a second level, the study considers how these concepts permeate the wider lived experience of bloggers: how understandings of 'good' blogging, might also become akin to guidelines and motivations for 'good' living.

Participants in the study are selected according to the following criteria:

Maintenance of a personal (that is, personally owned and run) blog for at least six-months.

Residence in the Calgary area.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

Your participation in this research is strictly voluntary. Should you agree to participate, you will be:

Invited to take part in a group discussion (a Focus Group) with other bloggers where you will be asked to discuss your own blogging practices as well as your thoughts on blogging in general.

Later, if you so agree, you will be asked to take part in a one-on-one interview discussion with the researcher in order to discuss further some of the issues raised in the group discussion.

Asked to provide information regarding your socio-economic profile such as gender, age, occupation, and family situation.

The focus group discussion will take approximately 2 hours. It will be carried out at the University of Calgary Campus and will involve 4-6 participants. The discussion will be moderated by the researcher for this project. It will be audio-recorded. Participants will be asked to contribute their comments and to deliberate on the questions collectively.

The subsequent interview may also take place at the University of Calgary Campus (though, in this case, an alternate venue more convenient to the participant may also be arranged). This discussion, with the primary researcher alone, will take approximately 1 hour.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your gender, age, educational level and occupation.

Your identity will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher. Any information that is obtained during this study will be coded and quoted under pseudonyms. You can choose a pseudonym for yourself or allow the researcher to choose one for you.

The pseudonym I choose for myself is

____

You may choose a pseudonym for me: Yes:___________

Your contributions to the focus group will be known to the other participants. Each participant who agrees to participate in the focus group (including yourself) will be asked to keep the comments of other people confidential. However it is important to note that absolute anonymity cannot be guaranteed in a focus group setting, as the researcher is ultimately unable to control what is said by individuals outside of the group.

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

I do not anticipate that you will experience any major discomfort and/or inconvenience associated with your participation and encourage you to state openly any concerns that you might have throughout the research procedures. Please be cautious not to disclose information you may not want others to know.

Note that you may feel tired by the end of the focus group discussion.

A potential benefit of your participation will be the possibility to reflect on your blogging practices and to discuss them with other bloggers. Through its published results this research could help your voices to be heard by the public in Canada and internationally.

You will remain in contact with the researcher during the course of the research and are welcome to call her with questions, suggestion sand concerns at any time. You will be informed when the project is completed and will be entitled to receive copies of all reports and publications resulting from the study if you so desire.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the data generated by this research. Materials (including recordings and notes) will be held in a locked filing cabinet separately from identifying data such as contact information and signed consent forms. Identifying data will be destroyed six months after the defense of the thesis that is supposed to result from this study. Data resulting from the above procedures coded under pseudonyms will be stored indefinitely in a secure location for future reference and comparative studies performed by the same researchers and having similar objectives.

Data stemming from your participation in the study will be quoted using a pseudonym as indicated above in any presentation and publication of results. The results of the study may be reported in academic articles published in journals, books, and on the Internet. Publication may also occur in the media, at conferences and symposia. Audio recordings made at the time of the focus group/interview are for the purposes of transcription (and following analysis) only. They will not be played as part of any public presentations of the data.

Signatures (written consent)

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time up to one calendar month following the completion of the focus group and/or interview although it is important to note that, in such cases, data gathered in a focus group environment will be retained for use by the researcher. In such cases any data gathered through single-participant interviews will be destroyed following withdrawal from the study. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant’s Name: (please print)

____

Participant’s Signature ____Date:

____

Researcher's Name: (please print)

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Researcher's Signature: __________________________________Date: _______________

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact: Ms. Georgia Gaden.

Faculty of Communication & Culture
Phone: (403) 4409286; Email: ggaden@ucalgary.ca

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary [22]

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

[22] Contact name and details have been removed from this thesis for privacy purposes.

Appendix E: Discussion Guide for Focus groups & Interviews

Focus Groups

Starting out.

1. When and why did you start blogging?
2. Was there a blogger/ were there bloggers who inspired you to begin blogging yourself?
3. What blogging software did you use when you started and why? Do you still use the same set-up? Why/Why not?

Blogging routine.

1. How often do you blog?
2. Where you blog – at home, at work, at school?
3. How much time would you say that you spend updating your blog? How long does it take you to write a post? Do you proofread your posts? Do you ever edit them later?
4. Do you find it difficult to maintain your blog: have you had to make sacrifices, do you spend less time doing other things since you started blogging?
5. Have you ever considered stopping? Why/Why not?
6. Who is the audience you imagine reading your blog? Do you share your blog with family and friends? Do you think that this influences what you write in any way?

7. Do you also use Facebook/MySpace/Twitter/Flickr (other sharing/networking applications)? How do these interact (do they?) with your blog?

Conventions and consequences.

1. Are there any conventions or rules of etiquette you follow in your blogging practice?
2. Have you ever received criticism for something you wrote on your blog/something you did in the blogosphere? How did you feel about it? How did you respond?
3. Do you have any 'favourite' blog posts that you've written or been particularly proud of? What was it about these posts that you liked?
4. How do you feel about comments? Do you want to get comments on your posts or is this not important to you at all?
5. Would your blogging style/practice change at all in a 'perfect' world or if circumstances were in any way different?
6. Have your offline activities changed in any way because of blogging? e.g. Do you do things you wouldn't have done otherwise? Has your social life changed in any way? Do you take more pictures/notes about anything…?
7. Has blogging changed your perspective on anything in anyway?

The wider blogosphere.

1. Do you read other blogs? How much time would you say that you spend reading blogs?

2. What kinds of blogs do you favour reading – personal journals, knowledge-based blogs, political blogs, link-based blogs etc.? Why do you like these blogs?
3. Are there any blogs/bloggers who you 'look up to' or admire in terms of style, content, practice? What is it about these texts that you admire?
4. What would turn you off reading a particular blog?

Interviews

1. Was there anything you wanted to follow up on from the focus group? What did our discussion get you thinking about (if anything)?
2. What does being 'a blogger' mean to you? Has it changed over time? Do you feel proud about it?
3. What has been the payoff of blogging for you so far?
4. What do you see as the potential payoff for you in the future?
5. Do you tell people about your blog easily or are you shy about 'coming out' as a blogger? If so, what do you worry that they might think?
6. If a friend was to tell you that they were starting up a blog and wanted advice about it, what would you tell them? Do and don'ts etc…
7. When you read a blog you really enjoy do you comment or usually stay as a 'lurker'?
8. Does reading other blogs ever influence how you blog yourself (can you think of an instance of this where you've gotten ideas from another blog)?

9. Is your blog an online representation of you?

Appendix F: Update on Participants

Blogger	Blog Status
Aisling	Last post August, 2015
Art	Blog no longer available
Mary	Last post December, 2014
Ed	Last post December, 2015
Sean	Blog 1: Last post June, 2009 Blog 2: Last post December 2011
Iris	Last post August, 2014
Carrie	Last post October, 2015
Jody	Last post July, 2012
Ramona	Last post November, 2011 Now maintains a blog on her professional website
Glutastic	Blog no longer available
Nicole	Last post January, 2016
Stuart	Blog no longer available
Vincci	Last post April, 2015
Michael	Blog no longer available
Geoff	Blog 1: Last post December, 2014 Blog 2: Last post December, 2011
November	Personal blog now open only to invited readers
Jahaluid	Last post July 2010
Vicki Love	Last post February, 2012