University of Sussex

WOMEN BLOGGING IN QUÉBEC, CANADA:
SURFING BETWEEN IDEALS AND CONSTRAINTS

LAURENCE CLENNETT-SIROIS

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
GENDER STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

MARCH 2013

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:...

IN MEMORIAM

In memory of Dr. Michèle Ollivier (1956-2010), full professor in the Department of sociology and anthropology at the University of Ottawa (Canada). Michèle was one of my master's thesis supervisors and a source of inspiration, support and constructive criticism.

In one of my last communications with Michèle, she told me about the blog she started when she was diagnosed with lung cancer, *Chroniques d'un cancer*, and said that she sometimes wondered why she had decided to author this blog. She suggested that, perhaps, part of the answer might be found in my doctoral thesis.

Sadly, Michèle passed away before my thesis was completed and therefore never had an opportunity to read it. I doubt it would have provided her with a deeper understanding of why she decided to blog, but hopefully she would have seen how I have made use of her teachings in my current research. Michèle was an accomplished feminist scholar and it is my hope that her contributions to research, teaching, and interpersonal relationship building will continue to inform my practice and that of others.

Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

LAURENCE CLENNETT-SIROIS

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
GENDER STUDIES

WOMEN BLOGGING IN QUÉBEC, CANADA:
SURFING BETWEEN IDEALS AND CONSTRAINTS

SUMMARY

This thesis explores online practices of women in Québec, a culturally and historically *distinct* province in Canada that is undergoing rapid social and technological transformations, and analyses the discourses that emerge. It zeroes in on blogging, as a facilitator for exploring, constructing and challenging gendered identities. It draws on and contributes to a growing body of literature that investigates and legitimises women's online writings, an area that remains under analysed. This online ethnography was accomplished through face-to-face interviews with 23 French-speaking women bloggers, home visits and an analysis of their blogs.

Using feminist critical discourse analysis, the thesis analyses how informants locate themselves inside and outside traditional and mainstream discourses of femininities. It first explores how participants discuss their blogs using domestic metaphors, thereby linking their online expressions to ideas and *ideals* of the home. Second, it reveals how bloggers share a common concern with putting forward a favourable self, emphasising personal qualities such as education, respect, affability, and impressive online networks. Third, it analyses self-improvement narratives in participants' interviews and blog entries, examining recurring discussions of personality, values and views; body size and image; emotional and mental health; and professional and homemaking skills. The last chapter underlines how blogging provides women with opportunities for networking, a place to discuss challenges and with a means to claim time for themselves. The thesis draws out the complex engagements in an activity they find pleasurable despite working within mainstream gender role constraints and still facing a digital divide.

In both discourse and practice, participants seem at ease with blogging but remain highly influenced by traditional discourses. This gives rise to a sense of contradiction where they feel like they exist, have a public life and make a contribution but also exhibit a sense of compulsion and regulation. They break out of the limits of normative femininities perhaps – at the same time creating new 'women's worlds' – even as the use of blogging reinstates and produces conservative forms of self-management.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

The first time I heard the word blog was during my undergraduate degree a decade ago, in 2003. I had approached Denyse Côté, professor at the Université du Québec en Outaouais in Gatineau, Québec, and asked if she would hire me as a research assistant. I was a young feminist with scholarly ambitions and, it seemed to me, it was never too early to get started, so I decided to approach a professor who was known as a feminist at this university. After some discussion, Denyse suggested that I help her by writing blog posts for a project, entitled the *Observatoire sur le développement régional et l'analyse différenciée selon les sexes* (ORÉGAND[1]). This was the first time I was introduced to a blog and I was not too keen on learning more about internet[2] technologies, but this opportunity met two of my objectives: to work in academia and to work with a feminist. I wrote entries for the ORÉGAND blog from January 2004 until August 2005, when I left the Université du Québec en Outaouais to start my master's degree at the University of Ottawa. During all that time, I had never looked at the *behind the scenes* aspects of blogging: Denyse was working with another feminist blogger from the Montréal region, who designed, maintained and updated the blog using the entries we sent her.

In 2005, I started my own blog in order to explore how things were done and to share my thoughts online. I did not update this first blog very often and I was not inspired by its lack of a specific focus. However, I found blogs increasingly interesting and spent quite a lot of time online, reading on various topics related to my personal interests: feminist blogs, vegetarian and vegan recipe blogs, and, in general, blogs authored by women. I remember stumbling upon a blog authored by a young woman in France who was discussing her love life and how she was having an affair with her partner's friend. How curious, I thought, that someone would share such intimate and personal details on this public platform. I read it until her partner discovered the affair, my masters' thesis needed more attention, and I started another blog, about vegetarianism, in which I wanted to invest time. Nonetheless, this French blog always remained in the back of my mind: Why was I surprised by it? What did it say about women's relation, as authors and consumers, to this new technological and cultural form? What could women potentially speak about in this new space? My initial curiosity grew into the

---

[1] Observatory on regional development and gender-based analysis (www.oregand.ca).
[2] In this thesis, I use 'internet' instead of 'Internet' with a capital I, as suggested in 2004 by the then Wired News' copy chief, Tony Long. Long (2004) indicates that the internet is 'another medium for delivering and receiving information' and thus should not be capitalised more than other media such as television or magazines. Unless I am using a quote in which the author originally capitalised the word internet, no occurrence will be capitalised.

focus of this doctoral research and, in the following pages, I explore and expand on the questions that arose out of my initial journey into academia.

HACKING OF POPULAR REPRESENTATIONS

Beyond my initial curiosity there are several other factors that contributed to the rationale for this thesis. First, there is the limited amount of research focussing on women's involvement in digital media cultures, more specifically on women's online writings. Second, there is growing recognition that blogs may be significant in the exploration, the construction and the subversion of gendered identities. In addition, as a French-Speaking Québécoise[3] who also blogs, I wanted to know more about the blogging of other Québec women with whom I also share a cultural identity. As part of a people who make up a linguistic minority within the largely English speaking population of Canada, I felt that my insider status would facilitate or allow me to be admitted and to do research in a way that was perhaps not available to English speaking Canadians or other outsiders.

Whilst blogs might be thought about in several ways, first and foremost they offer a space in which to write or to speak. However, research in media and feminist cultural studies has repeatedly underlined how, historically, when not simply devalued or ignored, women's voices and writings have been contentious (Bartow 2006, Hvizdak 2008, Smith 2006). Indeed Judy Giles suggests that to refer to writings authored by women as '*women's writings*' may have impacted on how such writings are perceived. She writes:

> […] as both Jan Montefiore and Light argue, to read writings by women as exclusively 'women's writings' fails to contest or shift the all-pervasive assumption that link masculinity with the public sphere of politics and nationhood and femininity with the private domain of home, sexuality and feeling […]. (Giles 2004: 24).

Elaborating on this tendency to tie women's writings to the private, the domestic and the personal sphere, Katalin Lovász, in discussing blogs, contends that 'whether or not empirical data exists to support this view', this association is suggestive, in that it sustains the stereotypical belief that 'traditional gender roles remain largely unchallenged by bloggers who document their lives as gendered on their blogs' (2007:

---

[3] Québécoise is the noun referring to women living in or coming from the province of Québec. When speaking of men from Québec, the word Québécois is used. Some scholars have also used 'Quebecers' (Fournier, Rosenberg and White 1997) to refer to Québécoises and Québécois in English-language publications, irrespective of gender. In this thesis, however, I use Québécoises and Québécois consistently with Dumont and Toupin's approach, using its geopolitical meaning: Québécoises and Québécois refer to anyone living in Québec (2003: 26).

165-166, see also Winker 2005). Discussing problems related to this tendency, Trish Wilson writes the following:

> Part of the problem is the tendency to label some women's blogs as "journals" or "personal diaries" due to their more personalized voice, thereby resulting in them being taken less seriously, even when their personalized voices are political in nature. Feminism, of course, has long recognized that the personal is political. (2005: 52)

However, some researchers have raised the possibility that the communication and self-publication potential of the internet may increase the chances of women's voices being heard. Thus, this could also allow for a wider diversity of portrayals of femininities and their greater visibility. As Ann Bartow suggested:

> The potential of internet-based communication mechanism to reduce the marginalization of women's issues and women's voices in mainstream mass communication is enormous. […] Access to the "amateur" internet-based communication mediums contrasts dramatically with the mainstream media, where women are systematically excluded from influential print and broadcast journalism outlets. (Bartow 2006: 7)

The rise in the use of internet has indeed raised hopes and heightened curiosity about women's online participation (Consalvo and Paasonen 2002): Increasingly, researchers are urged to pay attention to how gender and technology are mutually shaping (Faulkner 2000). Yet women's blogs are often celebrated without much analysis or understanding of their form or how their activities 'might be considered more or less feminine practices' (Gregg 2006: 153-154). One way in which gender has informed discussion lies in the *dissociation* between internet and women: women are seen as being *caught up* in the internet instead of *participating* in its shaping (Harcourt 2004). They are regarded as playing a more passive (feminine) role and potentially becoming victims of the new technology. There are also concerns about women's continuing invisibility. Tess Pierce, amongst other (such as White 2003), writes:

> […] women are still under-represented in the scholarship that focuses on Internet and World-Wide Web. Not only are women less likely to produce scholarly research in these areas, they are also less likely to be the focus of the research itself. (Pierce 2005: 175)

At the same time and pulling in another direction there is a line of research that suggests that 'women bloggers enact cultural resistance by way of their blogs' (Lovász 2007: 153).

There is a possibility then that the use of blogs by women can be about exploring, constructing and maybe even challenging mainstream understandings of gendered

identities and femininities. Larry Gross wrote twenty years ago, how 'the most effective form of resistance to the hegemonic force of the dominant media is to speak for oneself' (1991: 144). Just as autobiographic writing has been linked to the shaping of identities (Chasnoff 1996, Stanley 2000), personal homepages and weblogs are likewise linked:

> In fact, recent research shows that people with uncertain identities have started to use the personal homepage to reflexively explore and construct their identities. (Cheung 2004: 61).

More recently, Katalin Lovász approached women's investment in blogging through 'a theory of women's engagement with technologically mediated representation' and what she refers to as the 'hacking of popular representation' which,

> engages in an ongoing critique of predominantly patriarchal cultural norms by encoding women's private, lived realities into mainstream media. (Lovász 2007: ii)

Feminist cultural studies has contributed to the development of a critical focus on discourses of femininity, advanced by scholars emphasising how it is in popular culture and mass media that 'what now constitutes feminine identity can […] be detected' (McRobbie 1999 [1994]: 68). Additionally, recent developments in internet technologies are associated with 'a new space for increased thinking about gender and identity on the part of both men and women' (Horsley 2004: 78).

It has been argued that in writing about the self, one constructs self-identity and 'the 'imaginary communities' in which we position ourselves' (Thornham 2000: 3). As a form of (digital) life narratives, homepages[4] have been further linked to 'identity construction and self-invention' (Paasonen 2002: 22), although just like the internet more generally, they are no longer considered a place where 'identities were joyfully discarded, experimented with, or reconfigured' (Consalvo and Paasonen 2002: 4). They remain nonetheless about 'manifesting one's presence online' and include information on various aspects of the webpage owner's life, as a way of introducing the 'domestic or private self, hobbyist self, the subcultural and/or professional self' (Paasonen 2002: 30). Katalin Lovász suggests that blogs 'have become spaces where women contrast the specific experiences of femininity with mainstream representations thereof' (2007: 3).

Due to its public access, a blog gives space to audiences, who may play a role in the construction of the blog, as well as in the author's work on (online) self-identity. For

---

[4] A discussion of how homepages and blogs share similarities, despite their recognised differences, follows in the next chapter.

instance, gender as a construct is displayed online and we all – even as readers – bear a responsibility for preserving its myths (Macdonald 1995). It is with these disparate and, sometimes contradictory, ideas in mind that this research has been conducted.

QUÉBEC: A 'SOCIÉTÉ DISTINCTE[5]'

The blogs I am interested in for this research are those produced by women in the Québécois context. Québec is a province located in the Eastern portion of Canada with a predominantly French-speaking population. It has displayed separatist aspirations, having held two referendums, respectively in 1980 and 1995, asking the population whether or not it wanted to form an independent country, separate from Canada. In visiting the official government website of Québec, one comes across the following paragraphs that aim to describe its society – seemingly to an audience of potential investors, migrants, or immigrant populations:

> "Unique" is a great way to describe Québec. The province is in a class of its own, with its immense territory [spanning 1,667,441 km2] and distinctive personality, thanks to its majority French-speaking, multicultural population. Québec, the largest Canadian province, is the only one where French is the population's first language [over 80% of the population identified French as its first language].
> A modern and solidary [sic] society with a universal, free healthcare system and a highly developed education system, Québec is known for its exceptional quality of life and for its democratic political system. Its diversified economy is powered by abundant natural resources and an expanding information technology [sector] and other cutting-edge industries. (Gouvernement du Québec 2011)

The constructed *uniqueness* of Québec within the Canadian and North American contexts is partly supported by its heritage and diverse population, resulting from 'its French roots together with [English influences and] Amerindian heritage, while being influenced by its proximity to the United States and the multi-ethnic population that shapes its demographic profile' (Gouvernement du Québec 2011). Furthermore, Québec is a self-proclaimed *société distincte* within Canada, due to French being its majority common language, which is unique within North America. Its distinctiveness is constructed based on its diversity of ethnicities, communities and its multinational

---

[5] The concept of *société distincte* [distinct society] is related to the idea that the province of Québec constitutes a *société distincte*, which was included in the first article of the (failed) 1987 amendments to the Constitution of Canada (Woehrling 1988: S44). Furthermore, it has been widely used since 1990, when the then Prime Minister of Québec, Robert Bourassa, discussed the failure of the *Meech Lake Accord* (which proposed amendments to the Canadian constitution) in a discourse, claiming that Québec was then – and would forever remain – a distinct society, free to decide on its future and its development (Laforest 1995: 315).

character (Laforest 1995: 326) as well as on its faith, culture and genealogy (Bélanger 2000: iv).

The French language, alongside English, is one of two officially recognised languages in Canada and remains a minority language in all provinces except Québec. Of Québec's 7.9 million inhabitants (Gouvernement du Québec 2011), 13.4% of the population have named English either as their mother tongue or as their main language spoken, according to 2006 Canadian census data (Corbeil et al., 2010: 14). French language remains nonetheless a predominant characteristic of Québec identity: To borrow the words of Rachelle Freake and her colleagues, 'French language has historically been a key marker of Quebeckers' collective identity' (2011: 22).

Québec's history, beyond marking its cultural specificity within Canada, also impacted women's rights within the province, as these were originally set out in the French *Coutume de Paris* (to become the Civil Code), which was less egalitarian than the British Common Law (Lévesque 1995: 14). Describing the unequal levels of citizenship between women in Canada and Québec, Andrée Lévesque touches upon the right to vote (granted at the provincial level to women in Canada between 1916 and 1920, whereas women in Québec gained the right to vote in 1940[6]) as well as the subordinate status of married women, stated in the Civil Code (Lévesque 1995: 20-25). Despite being relatively unknown and generally associated with the suffragette movement, feminists in Québec have worked to gain full citizenship at many levels, beyond the right to vote (Dumont and Toupin 2003: 23). Nonetheless, recent statistics reveal major gaps between men and women, as well as slight differences between Québécoises and Canadian women. Briefly, in terms of political representation, in 2011, 29.6% of MPs in Québec were women (compared to 24.7% at the pan-Canadian, federal level); in terms of income, 2008 data revealed that women in Québec earned on average the equivalent of 66% of men's salaries, whereas in Canada, women earned the equivalent of 71% of men's salaries (Conseil du statut de la femme 2011; Ferrao and Williams 2010).

Returning to the issue of internet use and internet communication technologies (ICTs) more specifically, a report published in the Spring of 2011 by the *Institut de la statistique du Québec*, which used data collected in 2009, revealed that 76.1% of women (compared to 78.1% of men) in Québec used the internet for personal reasons and that the younger the citizens, the more likely it was that they would make such use

---

[6] It should however be noted that members of the First Nations, men and women, were only allowed to vote in federal elections in 1960.

of the technology. Both men and women in Québec are slightly below national levels and show a larger gender-gap in internet usage, as 81.0% of men and 79.7% of women in Canada use the technology for personal reasons (Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2011).

Considering the realities of women in Québec, both in terms of current gender inequalities and the historical writing of women's inequality into the law, and the specificity of Québec within Canada, researching Québécoises' use of computer-mediated communication technologies may provide clues as to the impact of these dynamics on their senses of self and their everyday experiences.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

My first research objective is to contribute to the legitimacy of women's writings by featuring them in this thesis as an appropriate subject for academic scholarship. Second, in the context of research arguing that women and digital technologies are somehow foreign to one another, I aspire to open up some of the ways that women accommodate to and mobilise digital technologies. Third, I aim to explore whether women's blogging can be seen as a gender-*ambiguous* or even a gender-*subverting* practice of writing, notwithstanding that the cultural form often involves women writing about themselves in what has been associated with diary writing, a genre most often associated with feminine practices. Finally, locating this project in Québec meets my fourth objective, my desire to intervene in contemporary sociological debates in my home province, which in part focus on internet communication technologies (Hamel 2004). Approaching these objectives using gender analysis that takes into consideration current gender inequalities should contribute to the understanding of the use of the technology by Québécoises.

Given these objectives, the general research questions become: What are the discourses found in women's blogs, more precisely within women's blogging in Québec? In considering this primary question, a number of sub-questions arise, which this research aims to address: Why have some women turned to blogging? Could women's online writings shed light on discourses of femininity? Could women bloggers use this medium not only as a way to record their personal memoirs into history, but also as a tool to reflect on their futures and their own selves, as traditional autobiographies have been shown to do (Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield 2000: 4-6)? What is the space that blogging occupies in their lives (physical, temporal, emotional, relational, etc.)? How is blogging bringing pleasure into women's lives? Could blogging

be a source of empowerment for women? Finally, how does this contribute to an understanding of women's place in Québec?

In exploring these questions, I suggest that women blogging in Québec work within and against what might be described as traditional discourses of femininity. On the one hand stands the traditional discourse that values domesticity, respectability and bodily discipline. On the other hand, by engaging with this technology, participants suggest the development of more progressive and potentially subversive discourses of femininity. They proactively make time for themselves and direct their energies into activities they find pleasurable. In this way, tensions arise between the use of blogging to speak publicly and the muting restrictions found in more traditional discourses of femininity.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The first two chapters provide a necessary underpinning for my project: a literature review which engages with debates in my field and sets out relevant theoretical perspectives; and a discussion of methodological issues including the choice of methods adopted.

In *Situating Blogs in the Literature: From Masculine Technologies to Women's Genres*, I identify my approach to studying Québec women's blogging. First, I analyse the current state of the literature on internet and gender, more precisely on discourses of femininities. Then, I go on to look at studies of online life narratives and blogs authored by women and, finally, examine articles focussing on blogs authored by women in Québec and Canada. I later draw on contributions from feminist cultural studies to highlight gender constructions and to examine representations of and by women in media and popular culture, with a focus specifically on women's genres. The discussion of women's genres begins with an overview of those with audiences principally composed of women, such as soap operas, magazines and romantic fiction. This is followed by an examination of works predominantly associated with women as authors, often referred to as 'women's writings' such as diaries, autobiographies and letters. A link is made between these genres and stereotypical notions of women's writings and blogs, where we generally see women's genres treated with distain and associated with the private or domestic sphere and personal relationships. I discuss how homepages and blogs are both similar and different digital dependent forms of self-presentation and further link the discussion of women's blogs to social media. Femininities are the last topic covered in this chapter, and is addressed emphasising

the fluidity and multiplicity of femininities, while pointing to some predominant characteristics associated with femininities in contemporary Western societies, such as grouped under Connell's idea of 'emphasised femininity' (1987).

The third chapter, *Researching the Québec Blogosphere from a Feminist Perspective*, first presents feminist qualitative research and the epistemological orientation underlying my research. I introduce the methodology to help promote understandings of the analytical portion of the research. By choosing a feminist critical discourse analysis (feminist CDA), I am able to look at power and ideology, and link these concepts to gender discourses of femininities in the research data. I then detail the various methods employed in data collection. More specifically, I explain the steps executed in the online ethnography; semi-structured interviews, home visits and the study of the blogs authored by research participants. After laying out the ethical considerations inherent in conducting research with human subjects, and some ethical considerations specific to internet-based research, I describe data analysis and then draw a portrait of each of the twenty-three women who agreed to take part in this research.

The fourth chapter, *Maîtres chez nous* [Masters in Our Own House][7], is the first of four discussion chapters based on research data gathered during fieldwork. Following a feminist epistemology, which sees women as experts of their own experiences (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002), I proceeded by identifying recurring themes in the interview transcripts. Using these, I then looked into participants' blogs in order to find further clues to supplement my understanding of the comments made during the interviews. *Maîtres chez nous* focuses on how participants link their blogs to the idea of home, and often more precisely the *ideal* of home. This chapter first centres on the theme of 'feeling homey', relating bloggers' comments on the décor of the blog and how, generally, they use expressions that explicitly link their blogs to the concept of the home. The second section of this chapter discusses 'Housekeeping' in depth, relating to the various chores that must be performed by bloggers to keep their online house in order, such as publishing new entries, updating the blogroll, and generally making small changes in order for the blog to be perceived as updated. The final section of this chapter explores participants' beliefs in ownership of their online spaces, theirs to control and manage as they wish.

---

[7] The title of this chapter makes reference to the slogan 'Maîtres chez nous' (translated in English as Masters in Our Own House), used by the Québec Liberal Party as a way of promoting the nationalisation of private hydro-electricity companies in Québec – the main issue of the 1962 provincial election campaign – which led the Jean Lesage government to be elected and Hydro-Québec to be created on May 1st, 1963 (Lacoursière and Philpot 2009: 167).

In chapter five, *Être ou paraître[8]*, I address the various techniques used by bloggers to create an online personna and point out a tendency for them to display the most favourable portrayal of self, one that seemingly conforms to perceived ideals of femininity. The first section of this chapter focuses on bloggers' desire to display an 'educated self,' which is talked about in relation to the quality of their written French, their self-presentation as insiders of the Québec culture through the use of local expressions, and their efforts to use an appropriate level of language, which, for many, implies not using swear words or unnecessarily vulgar vocabulary. Bloggers also make an effort to portray themselves as 'respectful', which is accomplished through avoiding burdening their audiences by writing things that would upset them, not implicating people from their offline lives in their blogs and adhering to the prescribed protocols of *netiquette*. The networked self, a section exploring how bloggers use their online spaces to showcase their (online) friends as a means of indicating who they are and how well they are linked to others, is the third technique analysed in relation to how bloggers portray themselves. The fourth and final technique consists of outlining how bloggers present themselves as amicable, not revealing their flaws, rather aiming to please as wide and varied an audience as possible.

Chapter six, the third discussion chapter, *Je me souviens* [I remember], is again a reference to Québec's history[9]. Analysing participants' personal life stories, I look more specifically at how bloggers view their written entries as a means of recognising and assessing the work they invest in self-improvement. The chapter begins by underlining how most bloggers expressed a desire to keep their writings – for some, even printing their blogs in order to have a hardcopy somewhere that could be saved in the event that their online writing got deleted or disappeared. It then goes on to discuss four dimensions of self-improvement discussed in the blogs: personality development related to views and values; body image and size acceptance; emotional and mental health; and professional and homemaking skills. This chapter reveals that self-improvement narratives are a central component of participants' blogging, and that such self-improvement narratives are closely linked to normative discourses of femininity and perhaps may even contribute to a reinforcement and legitimisation of

---

[8] Être ou paraître [Be or Appear to Be] makes a reference to Sophie Bissonnette's film, *Être ou paraître : les jeunes face aux stéréotypes sexuels*. The short documentary is intended for an audience of 11 to 13 years old boys and girls and raises the difficulties of negotiating one's identity when confronted by gender stereotypes in media (Bissonnette 2010).

[9] Although the meaning intended by Étienne-Eugène Taché, when placing the motto 'Je me souviens' under the Québec coat of arms in 1883 is still disputed, historians generally believe that it aimed to underline the necessity of rending 'homage to the men and women who marked the history of Québec' (Gouvernement du Québec 2011).

such norms through the mere act of presenting their 'success stories' and their efforts invested in achieving success.

Chapter seven, the final chapter based on fieldwork and entitled, *Une révolution tranquille* [A Quiet Revolution], is the last explicit reference to Québec's history[10]. This chapter examines blogging as enabling research participants to take time for themselves, to meet with others who share similar interests and experiences, and to spend time in an activity that they find pleasurable. To get away from everyday tasks and responsibilities, bloggers approach blogging as a means of being self-indulgent, and this is an important dimension of blogging for them. Many participants emphasise not wanting their blogs to become a chore and express the hope that blogging remains an enjoyable hobby. Networking with others – mostly other women – who share similar interests and experiences is also identified by bloggers as a positive outcome of their blogs, which are generally experienced as sources of pleasure. It is this last section of the chapter that is a specific reference to the *révolution tranquille* moments of the 1960s. I explore how participants are quietly taking part in a movement of change: changes in relation to expectations for women, and related potential for increased empowerment of women. While blogs indisputably play a significant role in participants' lives, nonetheless they also present to them challenges and limitations, as discussed throughout the thesis.

Finally, in the conclusion of this thesis, I assess the contribution of this project to better understand Québécoises' blogging. I lay out participants' perspectives that speak to the status of women in Québec. I conclude that tensions emerging from women's blogging are palpable in participants' experiences and in their renditions of the practice. Advances in women's rights, secured by the struggles of the various waves of feminism in Québec and Canada more generally, and the possibilities enabled by new communication technologies, have led women to engage in blogging with enthusiasm. However, the data also demonstrates that women remain influenced by traditional and conservative discourses, which are expressed by bloggers in a variety of ways. This cold blanket of conservative discourse on femininity potentially limits the freedom of bloggers to explore different gendered identities or non-traditional practices of femininity; more directly, it possibly plays a role in discouraging women from blogging, leading them to abandon their blogs and jump from the public platform into the more familiar private sphere.

---

[10] The *Révolution Tranquille* [Quiet Revolution] is an expression coined by a Toronto journalist in referring to the period of (non-violent) fast transformation and cultural changes that occurred in Québec in the 1960s, including the rapid and massive decline in church attendance (Lacoursière and Philpot 2009: 165).

CHAPTER 2: SITUATING BLOGS: WHEN *MASCULINE TECHNOLOGIES* AND *WOMEN'S GENRES* MEET

Literature used in this project centres on digital media cultures, particularly work related to digital life narratives. My review is organised around three general themes: discussions of internet and gender; studies of online life narratives and blogs authored by women; and, finally, material focussing on blogs authored by women in Québec and Canada. This approach allows me to link the study of perceived traditional feminine genres, which for example includes soap operas, women's magazines and romantic fiction, to the new development of internet technologies. Furthermore, I am able to illustrate how women's blogging reframed and refreshed women's genres throught the deployment of *new* technology.

The first part of this chapter maps the most recent and relevant scholarly contributions to the understanding of women's accounts of their everyday online lives. This literature review features discussions of femininities and blogging practices, and challenges assumptions that a consensus has been achieved regarding the impact of women using new technologies. I consider major theoretical and conceptual perspectives arising out of this review, and discuss their implications for this research project. I go on to examine two main categories of cultural productions that are identified as women's genres: those targeting an audience mainly composed of women, and those characterised as feminine practices. Then, I address the shift in the online technology that brought about weblogs (blogs), including homepages and social media. Finally, I discuss various components of different approaches to the study of femininities.

GENDER, INTERNET AND ONLINE LIFE NARRATIVES

When looking at key publications about women and the internet, Sherry Turkle's research on women who took computer-programming classes at university level (1988) is one of the earlier and founding texts in this field. Participants in her research revealed a 'reticence to become more deeply involved with' the computer (1988: 42) which she interpreted as women keeping their distance since a high level of interest in objects is not perceived as acceptable feminine behaviour. This research, one of the first to address women's approach to working with technology and linking this approach to socially constructed gender identities, laid a base for later studies in this field.

Two years later, Donna Haraway's contribution 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s' (2000 [1990]) brought forward new considerations for feminist, cultural studies, communications and media scholars. In

this defining article, Haraway writes that the cyborg 'is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century' (2000 [1990]: 50) and that it 'is a creature in a postgender world' (2000 [1990]: 51). She maintains that the 'cyborg imagery' (2000 [1990]: 57) contributes to the questioning of widely accepted dualisms (2000 [1990]: 57). As explained by Julia Moszkowicz, it challenges the so-called opposition between masculinity and femininity, which was emphasised by Turkle (1988). While appreciating this aspect of cyborg imagery, Moszkowicz also criticises it for a tendency towards reasserting some key gender stereotypes:

> Whilst Haraway's work is useful in describing how images of the cyborg are helping to disperse the resilient dualism of masculinity and femininity which has dogged feminist theory, and its reading of femininity as absent/marginal and masculinity as central and universal*, it does not readily admit its own part in bringing about a reconfiguration of dominant stereotypes* – its role in assisting the female protagonist to signify (as a presence) in relation to new technology. (Moszkowicz 1999: 224 – my emphasis)

Despite criticism, Haraway's discussion does provide a starting point for women writing about their experiences with technology, by questioning essentialist views whilst also pointing out inequalities in both power and structures that remain in perceptions of technologies.

In *Women Nattering on the Net: Women, Power and Cyberspace*, Dale Spender (1995) explores 'the effects that the electronic revolution is having on society' (1995: xiv) and, after reviewing changes in printing technology and other effects of computers, she dedicates a chapter to a discussion of 'women, power and cyberspace'. Inspired by utopian outlooks on cyberspace, she writes that, despite the obstacles that women face – such as limited financial resources to buy a computer, time constraints in spending time online (1995: 170) and some men's behaviours and practices online, which include flaming, sexual harassment and posting/consuming pornography (1995: 195-212) – 'women should feel comfortable in cyberspace' (1995: 229). She goes on, admitting Sadie Plant's influence, and writes:

> Cyberspace has the potential to be egalitarian, to bring everyone into a network arrangement. It has the capacity to create community; to provide untold opportunities for communication, exchange, and keeping in touch. In other words, it is like an enhanced telephone. (Spender 1995: 229)

The transforming – albeit almost revolutionary – potential of internet communication technologies, as portrayed in Spender's book, overlooks other realities of the internet,

some of which continue to challenge her optimistic views more than fifteen years after the publication of her book. For example, she writes that 'the new technologies [are described] as leading to the democratisation of authorship' (1995: xxii). This does not admit the problem of the now well-documented digital divide that prevents many from accessing the technology (see, for example, Goulding and Spacey 2003; Kramer and Kramarae 2000). It also ignores the fact that the dominant use of English language, and Latin-based languages more generally, are still excluding many segments of the world population. As described by Molly Torsen, these realities mean that the international cooperation potential of the medium is limited:

> As technology enables more and more people to connect with each other, so must the policies about the platforms for communication correspond to international needs. Indeed, "two-thirds of content on the Internet is in English, but only one-third of users speak English as a native language. Furthermore, the inhabitants of the world's 228 countries speak an approximate 6,700 languages […]". (Torsen 2005: [2])

Despite, perhaps, being overly optimistic, Dale Spender's book has contributed to the discussion of the ways women have been excluded from the development and use of ICTs. In a similar vein, Sadie Plant, in *Zeros + Ones* (1997), discusses gender constructions of the technology, including the contributions of Ada Lovelace in theorising the basis of computer programming (Plant 1997: 18-21), and redefines them as closer to women's practices such as weaving and networking (1997: 65). Aligning herself near Donna Haraway's cyborg theory, Plant writes that online users are not limited by their socio-demographic characteristics (1997: 46) and that cyberspace 'promised a zone of absolute autonomy in which one could be anything, even God: a space without bodies and material constraints, a digital land fit for heroes and a new generation of pioneers' (1997: 180). Sadie Plant's writings allude to utopian approaches to ICTs, where users would be freed from the constraints of their material bodies and potentially could experience an egalitarian (online) space.

Julia Moszkowicz herself reviewed the state of the literature on gender and technology in the late 1990s, when she published a chapter on the representations of women and technology in cinematographic art (1999). She concluded that, in relation to technology, representations of women and femininities were either non-existent or limited to 'circumscribed levels of technical competence' (1999: 210), and that, 'even in publications with a progressive image, women are largely configured as objects of male cybernetic pleasures' (1999: 212). This, she suggests, impacted on how women are seen in relation to technology, merely seen as objects or subjects with limited creativity (Moszkowicz 1999).

More recently, Johanna Dorer published a chapter on the links between gender and the internet as they occur at three levels: 'media representations, societal conditions, and the everyday practice of doing gender' (2002: 63). Arguing that the internet, as with many technologies, is associated with men, she uses Plant's (1997) contributions in challenging such association: '[instead] of defining the Internet as a technology, it is equally possible to define it as a net, a braiding, a weaving, therefore a female coding' (Dorer: 2002: 64). However, her results resemble those of Turkle, as her interviews with female professionals also revealed that participants associate men with technology (Dorer 2002: 77). In their discourses, interviewees also tend to reassign gender characteristics to the activities they were involved in, instead of deconstructing such gender binaries. Furthermore, they tend to '[belittle] their professional responsibilities' (2002: 79).

In their work on computer-mediated communities, while contextualising their analysis of the Oprah website, Leda Cooks, Maria Castañeda Paredes and Erica Scharrer (2002) underline how most research either adopts a utopian or dystopian stance on women in such communities. It focuses 'specifically on the ways women are empowered or alternatively oppressed through their participation in or absence from virtual communities' (2002: 141). Noemi Sadowska (2002) also focused on websites targeting a predominantly female audience and acknowledges that linking the internet to men and masculinity (as did Dorer 2002) has impacted how websites have been designed. In relation to authorship of material published online, she believes that the increased ease with which users can publish material has led to 'many female users [claiming] this medium to make themselves visible through the creation of diary-like sites' (2002: 102).

We discern from these texts a tendency for internet technologies to be constructed as either excluding women or not welcoming them (Turkle 1988, Spender 1995, Moszkowicz 1999), as aiming to include more women or even redefine the internet as a more female-friendly or female-centred technology (Cooks, Castañeda Paredes and Scharrer 2002, Dorer 2002, Sadowska 2002), or as attempting to go beyond gender as a necessary consideration when analysing the internet (Haraway [1990] 2000, Plant 1997). What emerges here is no clear consensus on the internet and women. Despite the views and contributions of scholars such as Donna Haraway (2000 [1990]) and Sadie Plant (1997) asserting that internet communication technologies enable new gendered considerations and (dis)associations, traditional discourses on gendered

alliances remain strongly embedded in people's minds and demand concerted effort in order to change.

In addition to these earlier findings, more recent work illustrates the shifting understandings of new internet technologies as neither masculine, feminine, nor going beyond gender. Namely, Ellen Johanna Helsper (2010) recognised the decreasing differences between men and women's internet use in Western societies and instead identified the impacts of generations and life stages in internet usage. Although suggesting that 'the Internet is by no means gender neutral' (Helsper 2010: 367), the author added 'offline gender roles' to 'generation' and 'life stages' as identified influences on internet use. (2010: 370). Furthermore, Cindy Royal (2008) focussed on gender 'trends in usage patterns': despite recognising that internet *access*[11] (in the United States of America) has reached gender equity, she identified a 'gendering of technology discourse', without associating it with immediate negative consequences. She explains:

> This is not to assert a negative connotation around the ways in which feminine stereotypes are used to introduce and market Internet technology to women. Because women dominate the roles within the private sector of homemaker and caregiver, positioning technology for its connectedness and familiarity within the setting of the home might influence more women to explore its potential. (Royal 2008: 164)

Finally, Rosa Mikael Martey draws on work that focuses on gender in relation to 'patterns in internet use' (2010: 1208), and addresses how gender influences what women obtain from engaging with the internet specifically when performing online job searches (Martey 2010: 1208). The author summarises how the internet was initially linked to men and masculinity by many scholars (namely due to its origins in the military, to its strong links to 'male-dominated fields', to the threats posed to women online), but argues that 'different people perceive different technologies in different ways', further highlighting how people's perceptions of the technology influence how they engage with it (Martey 2010: 1209-1210). She concludes that gender alone is not sufficient for understanding how people make use of the internet, as intersection with class and gender, alongside other characteristics such as race, religion and sexuality further impacts how people navigate the Internet and their experience of it (Martey 2010: 1223).

---

[11] Furthermore, in relation to access, Royal underlines how despite having reached equal representation in terms of access (in the global West), other divides, not related to access, impact women's relationship with the technology, namely regarding 'the ways women use, contribute to, and are represented within technology' (2008 : 165).

This perspective, bringing forward the requisite discussion of intersectionality, was addressed by other scholars, such as Daniels (2009), who underlined that what she terms *cyberfeminist* views and critiques have often overlooked the effects of interlocking identity components. Specifically, she writes that:

> Yet it is exceedingly rare within both cyberfeminist practices and critiques of them to see any reference to the intersection of gender and race […]; instead both the practices and critiques suggest that "gender" is a unified category and, by implication, that digital technologies mean the same thing to all women across differences of race, class, sexuality. (Daniels 2009: 103).

In sum, the literature indicates that, as scholars increasingly studied the internet, understanding has become more refined and nuanced, moving from earlier dominant perceptions of it as necessarily gendered (as male-associated, as enabling more opportunities for women or as going beyond gender) to current understandings that make no definite claims about gender online but argue, as did Daniels (2009) and Martey (2010), for the inclusion of a variety of identity components to better understand how different people relate to, engage with and are or feel impacted by the internet.

In the context of blogging, initial research on blogs has identified some of its most frequent users as those who were also early adopters of discussion forums and personal home pages: 'young, adult males residing in the USA' (Herring et al. 2005: 150). As both blogging and research on blogs have expanded, such masculine associations have become more nuanced, although, as outlined below, some genres of blogs were and often remain gendered (Herring et al. 2004).

WOMEN'S EVERYDAY LIVES ONLINE

Looking into scholarly contributions in relation to women's digital life narratives and women-authored blogs, Michael Hardey (2009 [2004]) underlines how digital life stories, both in the form of web pages and blogs, constitute a genre enabling users to define, construct and maintain their identities. Research on women's blogs more specifically, such as that conducted by Melissa Gregg (2006), reveals how men's blogs generally receive more recognition than those authored by women, because the content of the latter is perceived as 'less noteworthy […] by virtue of their often domestic and personal sphere of reference' (Gregg 2006: 151; see also Karlsson 2007). Such contributions allow us to observe how blogging is generally approached in the literature as a gendered practice, in which political blogging is associated with

masculinity, whereas women's blogging is constructed as a practice linked to *feminine* interests such as diary writing and mothering.

Viviane Serfaty concentrated her research on a subgenre of blogs – diary blogs – that has become mostly associated with women (Herring at al. 2004), even though her studies included an almost equal number of male and female bloggers (2004: 15). Her results point towards online identities challenging naturalised gender identities (2004: 114). Although she argues against gender as a category in studying online identities, she observed that many diary blogs document 'efforts to push back the boundaries of gender' (2004: 115).

Discussing women and blogging in relation to another element of identity, May Friedman and Shana L. Calixte's edited volume looks at blogging mothers (2009). Most of the contributors were living in Canada or the United States of America at the time of writing the book, and all discuss various dimensions of mummy blogs, including personal experiences such as adoption (Dawn Friedman 2009), choosing (not) to have children (Gilbert 2009), the isolation experienced by mothers with disabilities (Ferris 2009), how queer and Black mothers are blogging (Calixte and Johnson 2009), the creation of a blog to support lesbian mothers (Barry-Kessler 2009) and the creation of a support community for mothers within the blogosphere (Wilkins 2009). Others have contributed reflections on aspects of the 'mamasphere' (Friedman and Calixte 2009: 22). These include ultrasound pictures and blogging (Palmer 2009), the political nature of mummy blogs (Connors 2009) and the evolution of mothering blogs and related commercial pressures (Douglas 2009 and Lawrence 2009). Other topics focus on the 'internationalization of mommyblogging' (Friedman and Calixte's expression (2009: 34) in describing Petrica's chapter (2009)), the links between femininity and motherhood expressed in infertility blogs (May Friedman 2009) and celebrity mothers blogging (Podnieks 2009). In editing this book, Friedman and Calixte have broken new ground, legitimising the mamasphere as a field of academic enquiry and maternal narratives worthy of study in their plurality. They also provided a platform for further discussions of the role of internet technologies in increasing the commercialisation of femininities (such as Connor's 2009 contribution) and providing a space for activism in relation to specific interest groups (Friedman 2009, Ferris 2009, Calixte and Johnson 2009, Barry-Kessler 2009, etc.). Furthermore, in exploring mummy blogs, these authors allude to self-improvement narratives of mothers and commercial pressures that aim to increase the commodification of all aspects of motherhood.

Lena Karlsson studied readers of Chinese American women-authored diary blogs, aiming to identify the reasons and contexts for this type of reading. What her research shows is that most readers follow a blog that not only seems true or real, in their opinion, and that is frequently updated, but also one in which they feel that the blog author resembles them in terms of 'gender, age, race/ethnicity, educational level, profession, and place of living' (Karlsson 2007: 143). It appears from this study that blog readers tend to insert themselves in a homosocial environment and look for life narratives and experiences in which they may recognise themselves (Karlsson 2007: 148).

Finally, Theresa M. Senft wrote a book based on her ethnography of camgirls (2008). Despite not focussing specifically on gender performativity, this dimension is discussed in relation to camgirls' digital self-presentations. Drawing on Donna Haraway's work, Senft contends that 'many 'women in' studies of cyberspace commit the same error as proponents of digital drag: they assume offline identity to be material rather than performative' (2008: 36 – emphasis in original). She aligns herself with cyborg theory in claiming that videoblogging may open up the 'possibilities for women to refashion the meaning of gender in cyberspace' (Senft 2008: 37). This aspect of gender performativity is discussed later in this chapter.

In interpreting my literature review according to geographical region, it appears that little research in Canada has focussed on blogs authored by women – and even fewer in the province of Québec. Heather Robin Beattie completed her masters' degree thesis in 2007, which focussed on women's life narratives (looking at blogs online and diaries from Manitoba archives) and discussed the value of such narratives as well as the challenges blogs posed to archivists. Despite Beattie's valuable work in illuminating a part of the Canadian blogosphere and women's historically overlooked contribution to documenting the everyday, her material sheds no light on the Québec blogosphere. Éric Vignola's masters' degree thesis (2009) also had a focus on blogs and more precisely on those published by Québec bloggers. As the basis of his discussion of blogs as a literary genre, the author selected three blogs – two authored by women and one by a man – and looked into their characteristics in order to argue that blogs constitute a genre in itself, separate from diaries and essays (2009: 107). Once again, this research contributes significantly to the understanding of blogs as a specific genre. However, despite its focus on Québec blogs, it does not enable readers to explore feminine gender constructions in women's blogging practices in this province.

There are, however, some statistical studies attempting to map the Québec blogosphere. Discussing blog reading in Québec, the CEFRIO[12] mentions how citizens are reading more blogs in 2007 (25.5% of respondents) than they did in 2005 (12.3% of respondents) and, how this specifically applies more to men, younger internet users and those who have attained a higher level of formal education (CEFRIO 2008: 37). However, once more, the published data is limited in some respects. Despite an attempt to conduct a gender-based analysis of blog readers, their results do not reveal any information about women's blogging practices, nor do they shed light on the content of the blogs that women read or author.

The studies that look at gender online posit that, despite the initial utopian and dystopian discourses on gendered identities enabled by internet technologies and digital life narratives, blogs are seen as a platform on which identities are constructed, challenged and performed. This is directly linked to the main focus of this research. Blog identities are influenced by bloggers' socio-demographic status, significantly shaped by gender and by bloggers' audiences. In sum, discussions of gender online offer a prolific field for study. Despite potential to do so, the literature so far has failed to discuss the specifics of gender construction in online life narratives that are published in the format of blogs, and how bloggers themselves approach this question. Furthermore, the specificity of Québec has largely been ignored even though this province is a self-proclaimed *société distincte* within Canada, as detailed in the introductory chapter. Québec's unique characteristics support the methodological choice of locating the research in this province, as Québécoises' blogging practices need to be considered separately from the rest of Canada's female blogging population.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES

In this discussion I consider the major theoretical and conceptual perspectives arising from the literature and their implications for the current research project. The focus of this section is fourfold. It begins with a discussion of feminist cultural studies as a specific area of study offering an approach to considering women's blogging practices. This is followed by a critical examination of some key concepts that emerge from the literature regarding women's genres, such as diaries, romance fiction, magazines, soap operas and letters. The third section deals with changes made possible by the development and increased accessibility of internet technologies, whereas the fourth

---

[12] The CEFRIO [Centre francophone d'informatisation des organisations (www.cefrio.qc.ca)] is a research centre funded by the Québec provincial government, which analyses the use of ICTs by citizens and organisations in order to favour an increased wellbeing of the Québec population.

and final section discusses the various discourses of femininity that have been analysed in the context of feminist cultural studies.

FEMINIST CULTURAL STUDIES

Concerned with power and ideology in various forms and expressions of (popular) culture (Shiach 1999: 3), cultural studies rests on an interdisciplinary approach (Hollows 2000; Shiach 1999) and offers a space for feminist research focussing on 'the complexities of women's positioning in culture' (Thornham 2000: 8). Despite this claim of space for women, a feminist branch of cultural studies emerged in the late 1970s in response to problems, identified by feminist researchers within cultural studies, 'around definitions of culture which excluded women' and which established cultural studies 'through theorists […] for whom the position of women was a given, not an issue to be contested' (Thornham 2000: 60).

Feminist cultural studies takes into account power and ideology, making it a relevant theoretical approach for analysing constructions of gender in culture. It has been credited with enabling 'the legitimation of femininity as an area of study' and works within feminist cultural studies have 'challenged the idea that the 'feminine' is inherently worthless, trivial, and politically conservative' (Hollows 2000: 33). Furthermore, some feminist scholars in cultural studies have focussed on the impact of 'cultural representations [on] the meaning of sexuality' as well as on the pleasures derived from such representations (Shiach 1999: 6).

Moszkowicz discusses how, in general, women are not associated with technologies and how femininity and women are either absent, presented as antagonistic to technology, or, in the best scenarios, as being 'able to achieve heavily circumscribed levels of technical competence' (1999: 210). Cooks, Paredes and Scharrer, scholars focussing on questions of feminist, cultural and communication theories, pay particular attention to 'discourses in and about online communities' and more specifically on how they 'are produced, to whom they matter, and to what use they are put' (2002: 141).

My own work is located within feminist cultural studies. As such, it addresses the internet as a technology and as a resource of everyday cultural life. It strives to explore discourses of femininities to observe ways women make space for themselves in the new digital technologies thereby gaining visibility. As mentioned above, studies focussing on women and the internet tend to present women's engagement with this technology in relation to other practices predominantly associated with women and with women's genres. Researchers such as Liesbet van Zoonen have underlined the

'*mutual shaping* of gender and the Internet' (2002: 6 – emphasis in original). To borrow her words:

> A core issue in the debate is the meaning of the Internet for gender: how does gender influence Internet communication, contents and use, and – the other way around – how do Internet communication, contents and use impact upon gender? In the terms common to cultural studies of technology, what is at stake is the *mutual shaping* of gender and the Internet (van Zoonen 2002: 5-6).

The focus of Liesbet van Zoonen's article, 'Gendering the Internet: Claims, Controversies and Cultures', is a critical analysis of the interpretations of internet as feminine, masculine or trans/post-gender (2002: 6). When discussing identified feminine internet practices, she names authors such as Turkle (1988) and Plant (1997), and underlines practices such as 'peaceful communication and experimentation' (2002: 10). Beyond acknowledging how various claims have provided different approaches in *gendering the internet*, the author discusses approaches to the technology, as well as results from her own research that suggest the need for a 'multidimensional understanding of the mutual shaping of gender and technology', by which 'particular contexts and practices of usage' influence its 'social meanings' (van Zoonen 2002: 20).

More specifically, blogs are often categorised as gendered, with category assignments based on the principal focus and tone of the blog entries. Two main types of blogs are recognised, personal blogs and political blogs (Haas 2005). Those adopting a more personal tone and focussing on everyday events are identified as diary blogs and are mostly associated with women internet users (Herring et al. 2004, Karlsson 2007). For instance, Lena Karlsson (2007) argues that women's blogging, albeit mainly associated with the personal, may also be seen as a form of women's genre in popular culture. The other category, the so-called political (or filter) blogs, benefits from a greater academic, journalistic and online coverage and is seen as more 'serious' and linked to male internet users' work (Herring et al. 2004, Karlsson 2007).

Various scholars have argued that to consider work authored by women as 'women's writings' fails to consider the consequences of the gendered division of written work and this failure has pervasive effects. In introducing her book, Judy Giles argues that:

> To see the fictions, oral histories or autobiographies used in this book as simply expressions of universal woman's experience is to deny the complex subjectivities from which they were produced. Many of the sources I examine are as much concerned with class as they are with gender. (Giles 2004: 24)

Despite these insights, women's blogging remains generally associated with the personal, with online diaries or journals and, as such, with other women's genres in popular culture. In considering women-authored blogs for this research, the aim is to more fully explore expressions of gender, whether those are found in 'the private domain of the home, sexuality or feeling', but to also consider how the discourses relate to and discuss 'the public sphere of politics and nationhood' (Giles 2004: 24). As discussed below, even in so-called 'women's genres', these two spheres are often equally discussed and are far from mutually exclusive.

The following section discusses two main categories of cultural productions identified as 'women's genres': the first includes soap operas, romantic fiction, and magazines, all aimed at an audience of women. The second includes diaries and letters, which are now characterised as a feminine practice. Let us begin by considering feminist contributions in researching women's genres.

WOMEN'S GENRES

Women's genres, a category in use since the mid-1980s, includes 'romance fiction, women's and girls' magazines, television soap opera, film melodrama and 'weepies'', and perhaps also 'fashion, make-up, knitting, dressmaking, and other aspects of traditional women's and girls' culture and media' (Brunsdon 2000: 19). Brunsdon, herself a second-wave feminist, explains that some second-wave feminists were very critical of 'images of conventional femininity' (2000: 20-21) seeing them as structuring limited feminine identities, which 'made [women] blind to, and collude in, their own oppression' (Hollows 2000: 20). However, women's genres have also been associated with learning about 'femininity, feminine cultures and gender identity' and how they are linked with power and ideology (Brunsdon 1999 [1991]: 343-344).

Academic focus on women's genres was triggered by two principal concerns. On the one hand, it was an attempt to respond to the criticism that cultural forms mainly associated with women are not taken seriously. On the other hand, this focus expressed a desire to better understand these genres and what within them appealed to a gendered audience, as compared to other cultural forms that were aimed at a general audience (Hollows 2000: 38). Soap operas, romantic fiction and magazines are three specific types of cultural productions aimed at a feminine audience and have been linked by Karlsson (2007) in various ways to women's blogging; these specific forms of productions provide the focus for the following subsection.

WOMEN AS TARGETTED AUDIENCE

Soap operas, particularly earlier productions, are predominantly understood as feminine due to their focus on and entrenchment in the domestic sphere (Hollows 2000, Macdonald 1995), their giving precedence to so-called women's 'interests' or 'priorities', and the fact that they mainly attract women as an audience. This question of appeal to female audiences has captured the interest of feminist scholars who have tried to pinpoint reasons for their popularity with women and to discern how the audiences make use of soap operas (Hollows 2000: 108). Defining the main characteristics of soap operas, Joanne Hollows writes:

> In trying to pin down the characteristics of soap, it should be remembered that different soaps will share these characteristics to a greater or lesser extent, and that many of these features are also present in other forms of television drama. Soaps are usually characterised as continuous, open-ended, episodic serials. As a result, unlike the formal features of film, resolutions in soaps are at best precarious and always open to further disruption. Soap narratives are linear and often unfold in 'real time' (Geraghty 1991). […] Soap operas are also characterized by multiple narratives running simultaneously and a large body of characters which give multiple opportunities for identification. (Hollows 2000: 91)

A text now considered central in studying soap operas is Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas: Soap Operas and the Melodramatic Imagination* (1985). Ang approached viewers to discover why they like or dislike the *Dallas* series (1985: 10), with the objective of learning why people watch this particular soap. Her work highlighted the importance of not dismissing women's pleasure in engaging with popular culture, suggesting that this engagement might provide a more efficient way of spreading feminist ideals (Ang 1985: 131).

Since Ien Ang's work, a variety of other reasons have emerged to explain women's enjoyment of soap operas. They are embedded in the everyday (Macdonald 1995) and they bestow value on women's emotional work within the private sphere (Geraghty 1999 [1991]). Mary Ellen Brown argues that women's pleasure in soap operas is linked to its ''feminine discourse' or 'gossip'. She believes soaps may be experienced as freedom from restraints on women's speech, as expressions of feelings and as a politicized consciousness-raising about women's oppression' (in Thornham, 2000: 11-12).

Still, others attribute the appeal of soap operas to the fact that the narrative 'unfold[s] in 'real time'' (Geraghty 1991, quoted in Hollows 2000: 91) and that they emphasise women's involvement in personal relationships. For Christine Geraghty, relationships remain a prime responsibility of women, and they are recognised as such and given value in soap operas:

> For it is still women who are deemed to carry the responsibility for emotional relationships in our society – who keep the home, look after the children, write the letters or make the phone calls to absent friends, seek advice on how to solve problems, consult magazines on how to respond 'better' to the demands made on them. It is this engagement with the personal which is central to women's involvement with soaps but it is important to be precise about how that involvement works. […] It is the process which is important, the way in which soaps recognize and value the emotional work which women undertake in the personal sphere. Soaps rehearse to their female audience the process of needs, the attention paid to every word and gesture so as to understand its emotional meaning, the recognition of competing demands for attention. (Geraghty 1999 [1991]: 300-301)

One final characteristic of soap operas that may appeal to women is the blurring of the private and public spheres, where events or problems normally kept within the private sphere are exposed, discovered and sometimes solved in the public sphere (Geraghty 1999 [1991]: 312).

As with soap operas, women's magazines have a rather long history and strong association with femininity. For example, advertisers have favoured magazines for targeting women to reach wider audiences in order to market their products or services. As such, Judy Giles argues that women's magazines promoted an 'ideal of the 'professional' housewife' but, eventually, publishers stratified their publications in order to target specific groups of women, according to social class (Giles 2004: 119). In doing so they linked ideals of femininity to consumerism and further commodified femininity.

Nonetheless, women's magazines are credited with putting women first, in a society where this is often not the case: 'Women's magazines, for example, do at least prioritize women and their lives in a culture where they are usually absent or given second place' (Light 1999 [1984]: 391). Scholars, such as Janice Winship, have dedicated a part of their careers to the study of women's magazines and have uncovered how they contribute to women's lives through providing a space to envision possibilities that are not (yet) realised in their actual everyday existence:

> Women's magazines provide a combination of (sometimes wholly inadequate) survival skills to cope with the dilemmas of femininity, and daydreams which offer glimpses that these survival strategies *do* work. They are dreams of a better and different life, but one that remains well within a spectrum of familiar possibilities. (Winship 2000 [1987]: 339 – emphasis in original)

Even while recognising this role of providing survival skills for women, some feminist critics have argued that women's magazines are 'primary sites for the reproduction of patriarchal definitions of femininity' (Brunsdon 2000: 21). Many scholars have focused on the contents of magazines in order to identify what messages are sent to women through this medium (such as Evans et al. 1991; Caron 2004; Massoni 2004; and Winfield Ballentine and Paff Ogle 2005).

Romantic fiction, and by extension romantic comedies (*rom com*) and novels targeting women specifically, such as *chick lit*, has been analysed by feminist scholars to measure its ability to provide readers with 'the most utopian visions' (Hollows 2000: 95); it is also of all genres, the one that is mostly associated with women, since as a group, women constitute most of its readers and most of its authors as well (Hollows 2000: 68). In writing 'Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context', Janice Radway (1983) produced one of the first and main studies on women readers of romantic novels. Rather than dismissing this genre, her results demonstrated that her participants enjoyed the romance novels and derived benefits from reading them through spending time on themselves, gaining hope and feelings of empowerment, and being able to imagine themselves in other realities where they could be treated differently than in their everyday lives (1983: 60-63).

In Alison Light's view, for women to engage with romance fiction may be read as 'a technique for survival' (1999 [1984]: 391) as it offers narratives where 'heterosexuality [is made] easy' and where 'dissension, insecurity, and difficulty' are replaced by 'peace, security, and ease' (Light 1999 [1984]: 390). Furthermore, Light believes that romantic fiction readers are involved in a positive subculture, in discussing and sharing their novels with friends (1999 [1984]: 391).

Critics of romantic fiction have accused it of being for 'mindless, passive consumers' and have blamed its love stories for reproducing 'patriarchal culture' (Hollows 2000: 68). In the words of Light, who questions such understandings, romance fiction was identified as carrying 'a form of oppressive ideology':

> Romances have on the whole, been condemned by critics of the Left […]. They are seen as coercive and stereotyping narratives which invite the reader to identify with a passive heroine who only finds true happiness in submitting to a masterful male. […] Romance thus emerges as a form of oppressive ideology, which works to keep women in their socially and sexually subordinate place. (Light 1999 [1984]: 372)

Associated with romantic fiction, *chick lit* is described as the newest 'trend in women's popular fiction' that emerged in the 1990s, with one of its key texts being Helen Fielding's '*Bridget Jones' Diary*', published in 1996 (Smith 2005: 673). Analysed from opposing critical stances, it is perceived as presenting protagonists who are 'naïve, underconfident and in need of 'rescuing from independence' […]' (Attwood 2009: 13), or as suggesting a critique of 'twentieth-century consumer culture mediums – from domestic-advice manuals to women's magazines to romantic comedies – that bombard and affect their heroines' (Smith 2005: 673). Either way, *chick lit* is recognised because of its use of humour (Vnuk 2005), younger and often urban, single, professional and white heroines (Smith 2005) and its focus on themes such as 'love, marriage, fidelity, work, [and] friendship' (Vnuk 2005: 42).

The popular cultural forms discussed above have much in common with each other and also much in common with women's blogging. For example, digital media scholars, such as Lena Karlsson, have directly linked soaps operas to blogs:

> The diary blog typically features the following suspect traits: it is deeply personal, emotion-laden, and thrives on readerly attachment – readers are invited to enter into and identify with the thoughts and feelings of others; it runs and runs in instalments with no end in sight, just like the feminine genre par excellence, the TV soap. (2007: 139)

Other linkages can also be made. Blogging and the above mentioned cultural forms each play a role in alleviating their audiences' everyday burdens by providing a time for the self and suggesting a better life through fictional scenarios (Ang 1985, Radway 1983, Winship 2000 [1987]). The freedom of expression argument, underlined in studies of soap operas (Brown, in Thornham 2000) provides another common link. Both soap operas and blogging tend to discuss life events that occur within the home, the domestic or private sphere, and in doing so make public heretofore private information and stories, often to a public that includes complete strangers. This mirrors soap operas where the plot is mainly comprised of *private* stories and often unfolds in public space before strangers.

Blogs are also seen as an extension of the women's magazine genre, sharing a number of characteristics with this print medium such as, providing readers with sources of information about femininity and various other dimensions of everyday life like parenting, cooking, housekeeping, fashion, or beauty.

Romantic fiction, its associated cultural productions and blogs, all share similar features. Each has large numbers of women as writers and readers. Both forms of writing are perceived in a somewhat derogatory way by outsiders, the general public who are not involved in such practices[13]. Both are associated with the possibility of negotiating and offering alternative gendered identifications, and the creation of subcultures of women who share common interests. In her article entitled 'Intimate Adventures: Sex blogs, sex 'blooks' and women's sexual narration', Feona Attwood links blogs to women's fiction – *chick lit* more precisely – by engaging in a discussion of the blogs 'The Intimate Adventures of a London Call Girl' (Belle du Jour) and 'Girl with a One Track Mind. Confessions of the Seductress Next Door' (Abby Lee). In doing so, she draws parallels between the bloggers and their writings and adventures bestowed on protagonists of *chick lit* (Attwood 2009).

All these feminine genres, including women's blogs, posit other women as their predominant audiences (Giles 2004, Hollows 2000, Karlsson 2007), and historically, they have also been thought of as shallow, or for 'mindless' consumers (Hollows 2000: 68). However, feminist investigation tends to reveal a more serious place occupied by such media productions in women's lives. They provide a pleasurable form of entertainment for women, but may also provide an outlet for other expressions of femininities, as I will explore next, in looking at women's writing.

WOMEN'S OWN WRITING

Judy Giles has suggested that women's writings, focussing on the everyday, have been understood as the work of 'amateur historians' and have enabled their authors to record their own understandings of the world. She writes:

> Autobiography, biography, memoirs, diaries, travel writing and fiction have frequently been seen as the accepted forms for expressing the so-called 'trivia' of everyday life and their authors are thereby understood to be 'amateur' historians. Life stories, letters diaries and fiction have also traditionally

---

[13] Lena Karlsson discusses how diary writing has been met with 'bewilderment and condescension' (2007: 138), with the bloggers perceived as 'self-obsessed exhibitionists [seeking] attention and validation' (Karlsson 2007: 138; 151) and the blog readers seen as 'escapist voyeurs in a culture of mediated voyeurism' (Karlsson 2007: 138).

> functioned as a space in which women could articulate their
> sense of the world. (Giles 2004: 23-24)

However, the fact that 'an historical and critical bias against the apparently private genres [women] most often employed (diaries, daybooks, and journals), and their explicitly public voices (memoirs, confessions, autobiographies) too often were discouraged, silenced or denied' (Coleman 1997: 2) has meant that these writings have often been overlooked. Yet, these 'amateur' historians have played an important role in recording historical practices and preoccupations, even though such writings have been linked to the private sphere, while men's writings have been associated with masculinity and the public domain and valued more highly (Giles 2004: 24). Despite this, as Coleman points out, women's life writings have recently gained more recognition, identified as sources of knowledge regarding 'people and cultures' (Coleman 1997: 2).

Diaries are associated with women's writings since keeping a diary is a practice mostly identified with women – which, according to Philippe Lejeune and Catherine Bogaert, is not surprising, considering that generally women write and read more than men do (2006: 21).

Autobiographies, according to Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield (2000), enable their authors to inscribe their personal experiences into history, thereby projecting themselves into the future. Furthermore, for women who have been generally objectified by patriarchal culture, autobiographies are seen as an 'opportunity to express themselves as "subjects", with their own selfhood' (Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield 2000: 4-6). In discussing Simone de Beauvoir's autobiographical texts, Ann Curthoys mentions how autobiographical texts are inevitably rooted in the past (2000: 10), but how nonetheless, some of these texts have an impact on (women) readers' understanding of their own lives:

> But for many women, as their worldwide sales indicated, it was
> de Beauvoir's autobiographies and novels which more than any
> other texts indicated that it was possible to forge an alternative
> to the narrow options then facing women, and to live according
> to a different conception of femininity, intellectuality,
> independence, sexuality and friendship. (Curthoys 2000: 12-13)

Letter writing has also been associated with women for at least three centuries. For Matthews and Callahan, this is related to women's subordinated status in society, their relative confinement to the domestic sphere and their desire to express their thoughts and gain support from friends (1996: 338). In the eighteenth century, women's letter writing was a way of constructing one's subjectivity and defining or coming to terms

with one's (lack of) space in the public sphere (Goodman 2005: 11-12). For historians, these letters provide a record of women's everyday lives and more specifically of dimensions that may be neglected by more conventional research methods (Matthews and Callahan 1996: 354).

According to various feminist media scholars, women's blogs are linked to all three forms of women's writings (letters, autobiographies, and diaries) and, as a result, are belittled or disparaged (Herring and Paolillo 2006: 456). For example, Jill Walker Rettberg considers that diary style blogs may be included in the 'history of literature and writing'. She states:

> A path can be traced from early autobiographical writing through diary writing and memoirs up to the confessional and personal diary-style of blogging of today [...]. (Walker Rettberg 2008: 1)

Like letters, autobiographies and diaries, blogs also provide a valued vehicle for women to write their own life stories into history, albeit into a predominantly personal history. In this way, according to some commentators, blogs offer the possibility of speaking 'the unspeakable' and, as with the authoring and reading of letters, autobiographies, diaries and blogs, may help women feel empowered (Smith and Watson 1996: 15).

For Viviane Serfaty, personal blogs, or as she calls them, online diaries, may be perceived as the latest development in the genre of life narrative (2004: 4; see also Herring and Paolillo 2006), although other researchers perceive this as an 'abomination' (McNeil 2003: 26). Furthermore, some researchers working on diary blogs cast them essentially as the online version of hand-written diaries since their focus is mainly on 'a day in the life of' (Karlsson 2007: 141; see also Herring and Paolillo 2006). Vignola would argue that published diaries mostly relate the life of well-known persons whereas diary blogs are mostly authored by unknown bloggers and, in his view, this is one of the major distinctions between online diaries and previous forms of life writing such as the manuscript diary (2009: 62).

Despite these similarities, there are characteristics that also distinguish women's blogs from previous forms of women's writings. For example, Lena Karlsson (2007) and Viviane Serfaty (2004), raise the question of access. They point out that readers have access to women's blog entries (unless they are made private), which was not always the case for other forms of writings, especially women's diaries. Blog readers have the possibility of following the writers' lives as they unfold, in real time, reading blog entries

on a regular basis, before a finished text is published. This means that readers have access to unedited texts, whereas in the past, a third party could edit the writings, particularly before the publishing of a personal diary. In addition, blog readers can comment on bloggers' entries, as the story is being lived and written. For Nancy Baym, blogs enable 'interaction amongst people who [do] not need prior connections' (2010: 16), which brings forward two distinctions between previous forms of women's writing: interactions (not possible in the case of published autobiographies or diaries) and the absence of prior connection prerequisite (as needed for letter writing).

Nonetheless, blogs such as those discussed in this research, are mainly about the author's rendition of everyday life events, their thoughts, opinions and interests (Hodkinson 2007, Karlsson 2007); they are about their creator's own life (Herring and Paolillo 2006). As such, they provide a place for a multiplicity of discourses regarding femininities and other life experiences, as, drawing on postmodern feminism (as detailed in the following chapter), one unique experience cannot translate into nor represent the experiences of all women blogging. Rather, experiences expressed on blogs should be analysed with caution and understood as not representative of women elsewhere, including those who are microblogging, social networking and those who are not online. Specifically, contributions on intersectionality[14] should be considered when looking into online usage, as suggested by Jessie Daniels: 'people actively seek out online spaces that affirm and solidify social identities along the axes of race, gender, and sexuality' (2009: 110). Thus, just as one metanarrative cannot do justice to the variety of discourses found in offline forms of women's writings, as underlined by Cole (2009), the same equally applies to online writings.

FROM HOMEPAGES TO WEBLOGS

Internet technologies have brought new possibilities for self-presentation and, as such, have been the focus of much research. Homepages, webchat and blogs have all been studied for identity construction and presentation (Cheung 2004; Gauntlett 2004; Paasonen 2002, Wakeford 2004). For Cindy Royal, both homepages and blogs enable the presentation of identities that 'present an alternative to stereotypes found in popular media' (2008: 5). Charles Cheung defines homepages in the following words:

> Generally, personal homepages are websites produced by individuals, or sometimes a couple or family. On a personal webpage, people can put information about themselves,

---

[14] Recognising the contributions from hooks and Crenshaw, Cole uses Davis' definition of intersectionality, which consists in the following: 'the interaction between gender, race and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power' (Davis 2008: 68, quoted in Cole 2009: 565).

> including autobiography or diary material, personal photos and videos, creative works, political opinions, information about hobbies and interests, links to other websites, and so on. (2004: 53)

According to Nina Wakeford, webpages have three simultaneous identities, namely 'computer code, cultural representations and the outcome of skilled labour, such as writing HTML' (2004: 35) and these identities apply to all types of webpages, from homepages to blogs. Whereas initially homepages required some understanding and mastery of computer codes by their owners, current websites serving as blog hosts have made it possible for bloggers who have little or no understanding or knowledge of computer programming to write their own blogs (Wall 2005). Examples of such blog hosts include: Blogger, Canalblog, Hautetfort, Live Journal, MaBulle and Wordpress. For David Gauntlett, this development explains the 'newfound popularity of blogs, [since] they are much easier to create, on the Web, using simple tools which had not previously been readily available' (2004: 12). This shift in access to and usage of the computer is reminiscent of the shift in telephone use (see van Zoonen, 2002), as both started as a technology and then developed to become a consumer good, with women becoming key users, despite initially having been excluded as significant users of the technology.

Blogs have a number of characteristics, which distinguish them from homepages – although homepages may include a link to the owner's blog and vice versa. Ways that blogs have been described include being 'a dynamic version of a personal website' due to its frequent updates (Wall 2005: 15) and comprising characteristics such as relative anonymity of author (Wall 2005), normally single-authored (Herring and Paolillo 2006; Hodkinson 2007), hyperlinks inserted in entries and/or in the blogroll (Haas 2005; Herring and Paolillo 2006; Karlsson 2007; Wall 2005), calendars and archive of entries (Herring and Paolillo 2006), as well as a comment section under each post (Hodkinson 2007, Karlsson 2007, Wall 2005). Furthermore, blogs are normally available to all internet users (Herring and Paolillo 2006), although some require readers to be invited and to provide a password, and entries are normally posted in reverse chronological order (Herring and Paolillo 2006, Karlsson 2007, Wall 2005). Finally, blogs are generally understood as incorporating a degree of emotions, personal opinions and thoughts as well as lived experiences (Hodkinson 2007) despite many being published by professionals such as journalists (Wall 2005), scholars (Herring and Paolillo 2006) and 'ordinary citizens' (Haas 2005). For Tess Pierce, blogs need to be considered in their specificity and as such, analysed accordingly:

> After a web site is established, one can maintain the site's content, keeping the information updated, or delete the site altogether. The choice is up to the web site's author. A weblog is a unique web site because the archive feature makes it more permanent than a personal web page. Once a blogger adds a daily post, a visitor comments on an entry, or either of them adds a link to a related website, the information is stored as a permanent part of the blog. Therefore, different approaches are necessary to analyse web sites with these unique features. (Pierce 2005: 172)

Various scholars have drawn maps of the blogosphere, defining different categories of blogs, with the most well-known being the filter and the diary blogs, as mentioned previously. Other types of blogs such as knowledge-blogs (k-logs), photoblogs, videoblogs, other blogs and mixed blogs have also been named. Filter blogs present content available elsewhere, online, which has been collected by the blogger and which can be of any nature (Herring et al. 2004: 2), including politics, news events, recipes, etc. Diary blogs are about the authors' renditions of everyday life events, thoughts, opinions and interests (Hodkinson 2007, Karlsson 2007) and focus on its creators' own life (Herring and Paolillo 2006: 445). As mentioned above, authors such as Karlsson (2007) and Herring and Paolillo (2006) see diary blogs as the online version of manuscript diaries, as the focus is generally on 'a day in the life of' (Karlsson 2007: 141). Blogs that are created in academic or educational contexts – either by a scholar aiming to share thoughts and research interests, or within classes or courses for students to discuss their learning – are referred to as k-logs and may be created by academics, educators and even business members (Herring and Paolillo 2006: 1). Photoblogs, as the name suggests, are entirely composed of photos taken by the blogger (Beattie 2007: 4), whereas videoblogs consist of spoken or silent video-based entries that may be published on *YouTube* (Beattie 2007: 4) or blog hosting sites such as *LiveJournal* (this latter being the 'blogging site of choice among camgirls', according to Senft 2008: 2). In itself, the videoblog has a variety of subgenres, mapped in Theresa M. Senft's research: 'the real-life cam, the art cam, the porn cam, the group house cam, and the community cam' (2008: 38). Blogs associated with the 'other' category include blogs on a variety of subjects; such as a presentation of the blogger's own recipes, or the results of a hobby such as scrapbooking (Herring and Paolillo 2006: 456). Finally, mixed blogs are blogs that do not fit one definite category and incorporate a variety of approaches to blogging (Herring and Paolillo 2006: 456).

Despite the work of many scholars and bloggers in mapping the blogosphere and defining categories of blogs, two main difficulties arise: the first problem, as explained by Aaron Barlow, is that most blogs do not fit only one category and hence could all be categorised as 'mixed blogs'. He argues:

> The problem with simple categorization such as this, though, is that most blogs defy pigeon-holding. The best of the blogs always function in part as aggregators or filters, in part as sources of new ideas, in part as places of commentary, and in part as social arenas. (Barlow 2008: 32)

The second difficulty is that the category 'diary blogs' may be used as a strategy serving to marginalise women's blogging practices, as the majority of women's blogs are associated with the diary genre (Herring and Paolillo 2006). As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, diary blogs are generally perceived as unworthy of interest and seen as the work of egocentric internet users (Karlsson 2007; see also Cheung 2004). As such, breaking blogging practices into different genres and associating women's blogging predominantly to 'diary blogging' may reinforce the under-representation of women online (Pierce 2005: 175). Nonetheless, the dominant presence of women in so-called diary blogs may cement the assertion that the study of women's genres is worthy:

> Feminist scholars have long argued that it is too easy to denigrate women's traditional choices, activities, and interests, that we should rather understand what pleasure (and perhaps resistance) can be realized through these things. […] Further, we can investigate the role that the Internet is playing in the lives of various women, how this role is being integrated into their particular constructions of identity, and how the Internet becomes understood and defined in its usage. (Consalvo and Paasonen 2002: 9)

Women's blogs have been addressed as part of women's genres, as a form of women's life narrative and as an extension or further development of homepages, – offering a more direct possibility for interaction between authors and readers. Contemporary research on social media, however, sheds a different light on women's blogs, one that may contribute to a further understanding and fuller definition of what exactly are women's blogs. Henry Jenkins' work, in particular, has advanced the theorisation of new media technologies, and blogs more specifically. In his 2002 piece 'Blog This!' (republished in 2006), Jenkins speaks of the differences between blogs and other media forms:

> Blogs are thus more dynamic than older-style home pages, more permanent than posts to a net discussion list. They are more private and personal than traditional journalism, more public than diaries (Jenkins 2006a [2002]: 179).

He then goes on to discuss how bloggers make use of content created by others, not only contributing to its circulation, but also often giving it other significance and meanings. In his 2006 book *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers. Exploring Participatory Culture*, Jenkins further develops the concept of 'active audience' (2006a: 1), explaining how new technologies '[enable] average consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content', thus emphasising the *social dimension* of social media technologies.

Jenkins expands his reflection on active audiences – more precisely on 'participatory culture' – in his other 2006 book, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. Specifically, he explains how the term participatory culture captures the new interactions between media consumers and producers – located opposite 'older notions of passive media spectatorship' (2006b: 3). In his words:

> Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands. (Jenkins 2006b: 3)

Alex Bruns frames this convergence of media producers and consumers, with the concept of 'produsage', which he directly associates with new media technologies, identifying 'blogs, *Wikipedia* and *Youtube*' as some well-known examples (2009: 4). Moreover, Bruns brings blogs together with the earlier form of homepages, attributing to both of them the status of social networking sites precursors:

> Indeed, blogs themselves, and early and centralized hosts for blogging such as *Blogger* and *Live Journal*, but also early personal homepage providers such as *Geocities*, should be considered to be the forerunners for the current generation of social networking Websites; they have set in motion an important and momentous trend. (Bruns 2009: 316)

Another perspective that links homepages, blogs and social networking is that of Susanna Paasonen, in her book *Carnal Resonance. Affect and Online Pornography* (2011), which, as the title implies, focuses on understanding internet pornography. Writing about recent changes in online content, she offers a historical perspective, situating the shift towards greater 'user-generated content, social media, and community platforms' in the context of 'the dot-com crash of 2000' (Paasonen 2011: 64). She further explains how, despite definitions of Web 2.0 that emphasise the role of 'users as content producers' (Paasonen 2011: 65), the Web 1.0 was also reliant on content produced by users. In a similar vein, Ruth E. Page (2012) also argues that

although social media is represented as the defining characteristic of Web 2.0 this was also present in Web 1.0 (2012: 7-8). In relation to this point, Paasonen writes:

> So-called user-generated content was equally central to Web 1.0 in the shape of online journals, personal home pages, chat rooms, webcams, multiple-user domains (MUDs), multiple-user domains, objects oriented (MOOs), bulletin board systems (BBSs), and news groups where users set up forums and others joined and further developed them. In other words, online cultures have, from their very early days, been participatory and user-generated […]. (Paasonen 2011: 65).

Thus, Paasonen (2011), Page (2012) and others locate the internet generally as necessarily breaking away from the user/producer divide that others see as distinguishing the Web 2.0 from previous forms of the Web, emphasising how 'communication and exchange' are central to the internet (Paasonen 2011: 12). From this perspective, blogs are necessarily a form of social media. Such views are supported by other scholars, one example being Nancy Baym, who after reviewing how the internet has evolved, writes: 'The hallmark of Web 2.0 is often taken to be user-generated content, but […] one must wonder what content on the textual internet and much of Web 1.0 was not generated by users' (2010: 16). However, this remains a contested terrain with other scholars, such as Benjamin (2012), maintaining that current social media represents a rupture with earlier internet forms and is indebted to the developments and ideologies brought forward by Web 2.0.

Other scholars view blogs as now dead, having been replaced by applications dedicated to social networking, such as *Facebook*, *MySpace* and even *Twitter* (a microblogging platform). This perspective, defended by Jodi Dean in *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive* (2010), arises from her assessment of one of the key differences between blogging and other social networking sites: The intended audience. In her words:

> Even better: social network sites let us see ourselves being seen. Instead of writing for strangers, a characteristic of blogs insofar as they are available to search engines, social network sites privilege sharing with friends, with a circuit of others that one has explicitly "friended". (Dean 2010: 36)

This view is somewhat shared by Nancy Baym, who in her 2010 book *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, writes that on social networking sites, users are aware of how their self-presentation is accessed by others (friends and colleagues) and thus 'are likely to feel pressured to conform to those groups' norms (drawing on Donath 2007, cited in Baym 2010: 81). She also underlines how, on social networking sites, contrary to 'traditional […] online communities' (and one could add, blogs with

restricted access), 'messages are only seen by people tied to a user's individualized network, which is a small subset of the total members of the site' (Baym 2010: 90).

What becomes clear is a key difference between homepages and blogs, the blog presenting a dynamic format including frequent updates by bloggers (Wall 2005) and the opportunity of interacting with one's audiences, a possibility central to blogs. James Benjamin (2012, drawing on Safko and Brake, 2009) also points to interaction as a key function of blogs. As such, he reminds his readers of blogging's social media dimension, by emphasising the possibility for readers to leave comments for bloggers and for other blog readers (2012). However, another difference that sets both blogs and home pages apart from social networking sites will also be discussed in this section – the limiting of audience. Though the first two do enable their producers to present themselves to audiences through either the information displayed on the homepage, the profile section included in the blog or the overall blog entries, social networking sites offer features that allow users to limit the audience who may have access to their information, limitations that go far beyond bloggers' ability to request visitors to provide a password to access their entries. As such, on social networking sites, users add 'friends' who then have access to information posted on the user's profile and even the users are able to partly control the information their friends can access, which gives them a greater cognisance of how they are portrayed (Dean 2010: 36). This cognisance of audience also enhances pressures to conform to perceived expectations from such friends (Baym 2010: 81) – a possibility not available on homepages. This discussion will be picked up again in chapter 5, *Être ou paraître*.

The literature on social media and audiences reveals that social media complicate the presentation of self, as such technologies 'collapse multiple contexts and bring together commonly distinct audiences' (Marwick and boyd 2011: 115). The category 'social media' nonetheless marks a distinction between previous approaches to media that encompassed distinct roles between producers and consumers, and current uses (enabled by internet technologies) where interaction between participants is key. Ruth E. Page (2012) defines social media in relation to the following characteristics, which in her view includes blogs:

> I use the term *social media* to refer to Internet-based applications that promote social interaction between participants. Examples of social media include (but are not limited to) discussion forums, blogs, wikis, podcasting, social network sites, video sharing, and microblogging. Social media is often distinguished from forms of mass media, where mass media is presented as one-to-many broadcasting mechanism. In contrast, social media delivers content via a network of participants where

> the content can be published by anyone but is still distributed across potentially large audiences. Social media often refers to the range of technologies that began to be developed in the latter years of the 1990s and became mainstream Internet activities in the first decade of the twenty-first century. (Page 2012: 5 – emphasis in original)

It is not surprising that blogs would be associated with social media, as interacting with others is often a reason for blogging; as Herrings and her colleagues have stated, 'Among its practitioners, blogging is also frequently characterized as socially interactive and community-like in nature' (2005: 145).

Overall, a more recent review of the literature on blogging, social networking sites and social media more globally suggests that despite a general trend towards emphasising 'participatory cultures' (see Jenkins 2006a and 2006b, Paasonen 2011 and, to a lesser extent, Bruns 2009) and some scholars' categorising blogs as social media, other scholars are cautious in associating the two. On the one hand, the notion of intended audiences marks a certain distinction between blogging and social networking sites (Baym 2010, Dean 2010), despite blogs being a 'part of an open set of communicative practices and technologies' (Dean 2010: 46). Blogs may be authored anonymously (as mentioned above), and do not necessarily involve a colliding of audiences. Unlike social *networking* sites, blogs are not necessarily authored for one's family, friends, or colleagues to read. However, because bloggers do often create or sustain networks via their blogs, whether they are written using a pseudonym or not, blogs can encompass the characteristics of social media and social networking sites, without suffering some of their perceived constraints, such as revealing one's identity. As discussed by Nancy Baym, whereas blogs can generally be started by someone using any name, Facebook, for instance, 'requires real names' (2010: 109).

Because of the potential to learn from women's writings on the internet, my research focuses on text-based blogs authored by women, whose main subject is the everyday lives of the authors. This choice was made first because of the links between women's blogs and homepages, identity construction and discourses of femininity (on gender and online content see, for example, Cheung (2004), Gauntlett (2004), Horsley (2004), Paasonen (2002), Pierce (2005) and Wakeford (2004)). Second, my choice was made because of their possible anonymous authorship, which I perceived as potentially enabling more freedom for bloggers in their discussions and orientations.

FEMININITIES AND FEMINISMS

In looking at academic writings on femininity, it is clear that numerous authors have placed the construction of gender at the centre of their enquiry (see, for example, Ballaster et al. 1991; Buckley and Fawcett 2002; Connell 1987; Hollows 2000; Laurie et al. 1999; Schippers 2007; Ussher 1997). Despite this palpable interest in exploring constructions of femininity, most scholars have not explicitly worked towards defining femininity. In Joanne Hollows' words, '[f]emininity remains largely untheorised and self-evident in these works' (2000: 17). Nonetheless, this body of literature has generally shed some light on the meanings of femininity and this section explores some of these contributions.

Whereas many discussions on femininity have worked on the concept of hegemonic femininity (Ussher 1997), which includes features such as whiteness (Deliovski 2010, Consalvo and Paasonen 2002), heterosexuality, a middle to upper class background (Krane et al. 2004, Skeggs 1997) and the absence of sexual agency (Tolman 2006), other contributions have emphasised both the fluidity and the multiplicity of femininities.

The fluidity of femininities is understood as the capacity to change understandings of femininity, both in relation to historic notions of womanhood and to evolving realities of what it means to be a woman. For Joanne Hollows, this is related to both continuity and change:

> […] what it means to be a woman is not something fixed for all time but is subject to transformation, contestation and change. While it is as important to be aware of continuity as well as change, this does not mean that there is an abstract feminine identity or condition which transcends history. (Hollows 2000: 33)

In relation to this, Angela McRobbie argued that institutions such as culture, education, economy and politics have also influenced understandings of what it means to be a woman and have, in the past decades, brought about changes that challenge the 'old settlement which tied women (and young women's futures) primarily to the family and to low-paid or part time work' (1999 [1994]: 67-68). Furthermore, Nina Laurie and her colleagues caution their readers, who may tend to herald changing femininities as a new phenomenon, to beware, since such changes are neither new nor progressive, but rather have occurred throughout history and in various parts of the world. As they put it, 'many of the femininities that might be defined as 'traditional' were in fact once new femininities' (Laurie et al. 1999: 189).

Another contribution to the understanding of femininity is its multiplicity. As argued namely by Joanne Hollows (2000), Nina Laurie and her colleagues (1999) and Myra Macdonald (1995), interlocking systems of oppression (Collins 1990) do play a role in defining femininities. Hollows wrote:

> Furthermore, as I have already suggested, even within specific historical contexts, there is no single feminine identity, but multiple feminine identities. As I noted earlier: one is not just a woman: feminine identities are also cross-cut by class, sexual, 'racial, ethnic, generational and regional identities, and even this list does not exhaust 'who we are'. (Hollows 2000: 33-34)

Discussing the fluidity of gender constructions, Cheryl Buckley and Hilary Fawcett further explain that, due to interlocking systems of oppression, femininities are being constantly redefined:

> As the meanings of femininity have been mediated by class, race, age, national identity and sexuality, we increasingly recognise that gender identities are not fixed but always in the process of making. (Buckley and Fawcett 2002: 7)

In regards to this, the expression coined by Raewyn Connell (then known as Robert W. Connell) in 1987, *emphasised femininity*, appears to contribute to an understanding of femininities. By emphasised femininity, Connell underscores the co-construction of femininities and more specifically 'the asymmetrical positions of masculinities and femininities in a patriarchal gender order', as well as 'compliance with patriarchy' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 848). In later approaching this concept, other sociologists have identified key signifiers of emphasised femininity, such as:

> […] a range of traditional femininity norms that encourage women to accommodate men's desires for sex, attractive female bodies, power, and control. Broadly, traditional or "emphasized femininity" norms encourage female passivity, compliance with men's sexual advances, an unremitting desire to have a romantic partner, a pressure to be sentimental and emotionally committed and caring, a pressure to attract the gaze of men, and a pressure to manufacture romantic feelings and to mitigate unhappiness and abuse […] (Korobov 2011: 53)

Seen as the female equivalent of men's 'hegemonic masculinity' (Kimmel 2004: 11), emphasised femininity is arguably 'the most culturally valued form of femininity' (Kelly, Pomerantz and Currie 2005: 129).

'Compliance with patriarchy' was a key idea in second-wave feminist analysis, which frequently rejected femininity. Perceived as central to the understanding of women's oppression, femininity was linked to 'passivity, submissiveness and dependence' and women involved in feminine practices were seen as being 'implicated in their own

oppression' (Hollows 2000: 10). Femininity was also accused of '[blocking] the development of a feminist consciousness' (Hollows 2000: 17), mostly because of the time needed to learn and implement practices of femininity. More recently, feminist thinking on femininity introduced a different take on this gendered identity, where 'femininity is no longer the 'other' of feminism' (McRobbie 1999 [1994]: 84) as new femininities incorporate some of the developments rendered possible by feminism, namely the new 'structures of feeling' (a concept borrowed from Raymond Williams, 1977), new 'subject positions' and 'personal identities', rendered possible by the consumer culture of the 1990s and a reconfiguration of 'social and sexual relationships' (McRobbie 1999 [1994]: 84-85). For Angela McRobbie, younger women 'are more likely to […] assert, at least as an image, an excessively conventional femininity', while, at the same time hold explicit feminist discourses in their everyday conversations (1999 [1994]: 68). In her chapter '"I am Not a Housewife, But…" Postfeminism and the Revival of Domesticity', Stéphanie Genz approaches the return to an increased association between femininity and domesticity using post-feminist lenses:

> As I will argue, postfeminism undermines static constructions of the housewife by reclaiming the domestic femininity as a site of undecidability, of meaning in question. (Genz 2009: 50)

Other than these changes in relation to femininity and feminism, second-wave feminism is also credited with opening up the possibility of questioning the dominant images of femininity portrayed in the media to scholars and activists alike:

> So-called second-wave feminism allowed me to examine the problems for women inherent in existing fashion system, with its emphasis on slimness, and that, along with child-bearing, made me see and experience my own body differently. I began to enjoy eating again, and identified with women like those that I had admired as a young girl who were successful in other ways than in their control over their bodies and their appearance. This is not to say that I ceased to experience the conflicts inherent for women in a culture dominated by objectified images of femininity, but it gave me a distance from which I could negotiate for myself issues of image and identity. (Buckley and Fawcett 2002: 124-125)

Drawing on Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) work, Mia Consalvo and Susanna Paasonen (2002) discuss how femininity – and women more generally – have been understood in essentialist ways, as 'communicative, sharing, and caring' (2002: 6-7). More precisely, women's bodies and ability to bear children have served as basis from which to understand, or perhaps more accurately, *define*, women's interests. To borrow Consalvo and Paasonen's words:

> Thus the category of women is defined through acts of naturalization and references to women as nurturing and reproducing creatures. Consequently, gender becomes defined, to matter, as a fixed and genetically determined binary structure of differences, desire, and complementarity. *(2002: 7)*

Hence, regardless of the emerging understanding of femininities as multiple and fluid, some manifestations of femininities are generally considered necessary criteria for achieving an acceptable femininity, linked to emphasised femininity. Such manifestations, generally accepted as ways of assessing one's femininity, include embodiment practices and women's so-called 'nature', although these manifestations vary in different cultural and historical contexts (Laurie et al. 1999).

Embodiment practices of femininities refer to the centrality of the body and appearance in expressing femininity. For Myra Macdonald, the investment in women's appearances is linked to their feminine identities:

> It is this investment in appearance as a key identity marker that makes representation of the body a particularly crucial area for defining or redefining femininity. Distinguishing virgins from whores, mothers from sexual beings, 'feminine' women from 'feminists', or, more banally, the beautiful and valued from the ugly and devalued […] the body requires us to work at fashioning our own identity, and to practice as well as respond to signification. (Macdonald 1995: 192)

In relation to such embodiment practices, Cheryl Buckley and Hilary Fawcett argue that fashion plays a key role in 'representing femininity' (2002: 9) and as such, consumerism may be understood as central to feminine identities (McRobbie 1999 [1994]: 76-77). Using a similar perspective and drawing on the work of Michel Foucault (1975), Susan Bordo writes that due to the constantly changing fashion trends, 'women's bodies become docile bodies'. She continues:

> Through the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, makeup, and dress – central organizing principles of time and space in the day of many women – we are rendered less socially oriented and more centripetally focused on self-modification. (Bordo 2003 [1993]: 166)

Femininities are also associated, in the Western world, with 'caring qualities', as it is generally believed that women 'supposedly have a 'natural' talent for looking after others' (Macdonald 1995: 132). Three factors have been identified to explain this perception that femininity and caring are linked to one another: 'the responsibility for moral leadership' that has been delegated to women both within the family and the community; the division between private and public spheres and women's association

with the former; and the 'essentialist belief in [women'] biological dispositions towards nurturing' (Macdonald 1995: 132-133).

In sum, as explained by Barbara Sichtermann almost thirty years ago, acceptable femininity is not simply a matter of conforming to the expectations drawn from women's so-called 'nature', but it is also linked to women's investment in their looks and appearance:

> […] the image of the ideal woman had advocated more than just domesticity and motherhood; women also had to be attractive. Any woman who conformed to her role as a woman was supposed to be a good little housewife, but in addition she was expected to look good. (Sichtermann 1983: 41)

This discussion of femininity reveals that, although dominant discourses have traditionally linked femininity to women's nature (hence, *intrinsic* to women; part of who we are), women *display* an array of femininities. As argued by various scholars, gender is indeed understood as a performance (Butler 1990; Goffman 1990; see also Skeggs 1997), a spectacle (Tseëlon 1995; Buckley and Fawcett 2002), or a masquerade (Tseëlon 1995). Gender as a performance implies that someone seeking to ''pass' as feminine' would need to invest in understanding and implementing the ideals of femininity found in popular media, as well as in disciplining their own bodies (Thornham 2000: 12).

The performance of self is a concept drawn from Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1990 [1959]), which has increasingly been used in studying the online presentation of self. This is due to the prominence of such technologies in everyday life and the relevance of this sociologist's contributions, as explained by Trevor Pinch:

> For instance, the fluidity of online identities fits well with Goffman's notion of "performing the self." Also, the idea that personal websites can be analyzed as a form of "presentation of self" has not gone unnoticed. The dramaturgical model which Goffman offered with notions such as "front stage" and "backstage" […] has been applied with some success to discuss ethical issues and the internet and how online learning communities operate. When it comes to other new media technologies it is not surprising to again find that Goffman's work has been influential. (Pinch 2010: 411)

Gender considered as spectacle is strongly linked to popular culture and media and, more specifically, involves 'clothes [that] put young women 'on show'' (Buckley and Fawcett 2002: 132) and objectifies women. Discussing spectacle in relation to masquerade, Tseëlon argues that 'the concept of masquerade facilitates an

understanding of the woman's status as spectacle rather than a spectator', arguing that, despite appearing to challenge patriarchal definitions of femininity, masquerade depends on 'masculinity as a frame of reference' (1995: 39).

What arises from all these contributions is a common agreement that femininities are not what women *are* but rather are what women *do*. Femininities are not static but change and are adapted to various historical, cultural and situational contexts. They are not innate but are learned and exhibited. The internet has been identified as a space in which gendered identities are constructed, displayed, negotiated and contested. Because content on the internet in its beginning was only as text, people used online space to '[assume] an identity of the opposite sex [which] is commonly referred to as 'gender-swapping' or 'gender-switching'', which became the focus of much academic research on environments such as MOO and MUD[15] (Horsley 2004: 76). As mentioned previously, the early focus on women and the internet made assumptions about women's 'disinterest in technology' (Winker 2005: 191), or initially talked about how identities could be 'joyfully discarded, experimented with, or reconfigured' (Consalvo and Paasonen 2002: 4). Such discourses underline the performative aspect of gendered identities, as it was believed that internet users could 'pass' as someone from the opposite gender if they chose to do so. Although such views are now contested, with authors arguing that despite the internet user's intention to hide his or her gender online, 'gender is visible on the Internet even if the person who is gender swapping deliberately hides it' (Pierce 2005: 173), the relevance of performativity in analysing online gender identities remains. Discussing blogs more specifically, Tess Pierce argues that performativity indeed plays a role in addressing both the visibility and invisibility of gender online, since blogs enable the connection of online and offline lives and that people perform their 'individual and collective identities' in similar ways in both settings (2005: 170).

Looking into discourses of femininities in online environments, such as blogs, remains central to the understanding of the fluidity and multiplicity of femininities for a number of reasons. First, with internet being 'increasingly used for communication, consumption, and other leisure-related uses', Mia Consalvo and Susanna Paasonen argue that 'it is important to analyze critically the ways in which these practices have been gendered, how they are entwined into the structures of everyday life, and how women make use

---

[15] MUD is known as 'Multi-User Dimension', or sometimes 'Multi-User Dungeon' or 'Multi-User Domains', whereas MOO stands for 'MUD Object Oriented'. The former is a multi-user game based online, where all interactions and descriptions are text-based, whereas the latter is also a game, it involves users working through the programming code to 'create objects in their virtual world' (Nunes 1995: 319; see also Bakardjieva 2005).

of them' (2002: 5). Susanna Paasonen further details how criteria associated with conventional femininities are used on websites – and thus giving weight to essentialist definitions of women:

> Female users are addressed by Internet service providers and content producers as representative of the "category of women," defined in terms of embodied difference (menstruation, pregnancy, maintenance of femininity), the gendered division of labor (child care, housework, home decoration, cooking), or interests (relationships, fashion, beauty, romantic fiction). In these instances, gender categories are hardly subverted. (Paasonen 2002: 29-30)

Second, there is the apparent contradiction between femininity and computer-related competence and intimacy, as detailed by Turkle (1988) and Moszkowicz (1999), which led other scholars such as Van Doorn and his colleagues to argue that the study of diary blogs is particularly interesting due to the 'remarkable intersection between the traditionally feminine act of diary writing and the traditionally masculine environment of ICT' (2007: 147). Hence, blogging may be for women a strategy in exploring other, less conventional, discourses of femininity or practices that have traditionally been associated with some masculinities[16]. Blogging is henceforth a space where gendered identities may be constructed, performed, and/or challenged.

Since online content appears to emphasise essentialist definitions of women and acceptable femininities, studying women's blogs – where the content is chosen, written and uploaded by the blogger herself – may provide increased understanding of the discourses of femininity in which she is immersed. In exploring how bloggers themselves construct and see their blogs and what topics they discuss on them, this research addresses the different ways in which femininities are inscribed into online practices by women blogging.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on scholarly contributions as outlined in this chapter, including online life narratives, gender and the specific context of Québec women's blogging, it becomes clear that there is no detailed research focussing on gendered identities in Québécoises' blogs, nor is there a real consensus on answers to the overarching questions. Early and key contributors to the study of the internet (namely Turkle (1988); Haraway (2000 [1990]); Spender (1995); Plant (1997)), as well as others (Moszkowicz (1999); Dörer (2002); Cooks, Castañeda Paredes and Scharrer (2002); Royal (2008);

---

[16] Masculinities and technological know-how are generally understood as linked, although as Lori Kendall argues, men who are tech-savvy are perceived ambivalently in American culture – and perhaps western cultures more generally – namely through the 'figure of the 'nerd'' (Kendall 2000: 261-262).

Daniels (2009); Helsper (2010); and Martey (2010)) reveal that, despite work that approaches the internet as gendered, which is frequently analysed as male-associated, enabling more possibilities for women, or going beyond gender, overall, understandings of gender in internet usage have become more nuanced. The necessity of taking intersectionality into account – looking at how various identity components impact the relationship people have with the internet – now appears to provide a fuller understanding of the phenomenon.

To probe deeper, an analysis of research focussing on women and the internet was also conducted. Here, the work of scholars studying blogs (such as Serfaty (2004) and Karlsson (2007)) and online self-presentation (for example, Senft (2008) on camgirls) contributed to the understanding of the topic under discussion in this thesis. Again, recognising how blogger's socio-demographic characteristics cannot be ignored, the research tends to acknowledge that blogs may be used to construct, perform and/or challenge gendered identities. However, as of yet and despite the work of Beattie (2007) and Vignola (2009) who situated their research in the Canadian and Québécois contexts, respectively, little has been written on women's blogging in this self-proclaimed 'distinct' province of Québec.

Guided by the theoretical contributions in feminist cultural studies, as well as in new and social media studies, I then looked at other material that could provide a fuller understanding of women's blogging. One such material is work on women's genres, both productions aimed at a predominantly female audience (soap operas, magazines and romantic fiction), and those more widely understood as feminine practices (diary and letter writing). Some commonalities between women's blogging and women's genres were indeed identified, such as a general focus on the everyday, the personal and the private sphere (Karlsson 2007), as well as both being frowned upon, perceived as for 'mindless' people (Hollows 2000: 68) and met by outsiders with 'bewilderment and condescension' (Karlsson 2007: 138). However, blogs are set apart from (other) women's genres when questions of access are taken into account (Karlsson (2007) and Serfaty (2004)), as well as when considering the personal connections enabled by blogging since previous relationships are not a prerequisite (Baym 2010).

In an effort to further my understanding, I then considered forms native to the internet, focussing on homepages and social media. Again, despite similarities such as homepages and blogs both enabling online self-presentation and both forms being associated with 'participatory cultures' (Jenkins 2006a, 2006b), some important distinctions have been underlined. Two important differences are the dynamic format of

blogs as opposed to homepages (Wall 2005) and the intended audiences, where with blogs, audiences need not be drawn from one's previous network of friends, colleagues, or family members, whereas on social networking sites, such as *Facebook*, familiar audiences tend to dominate (Baym 2010; Dean 2010). Overall, blogs are both similar and distinct from other media forms to which they have been linked by various authors, namely Karlsson (2007) for women's genres, and Page (2012) for social media.

Finally, I considered feminist writings on femininity, from which various components emerged as key to my analysis. First, there is the need to approach femininity as plural, thus femininities, taking into account intersectionality (Buckley and Fawcett 2002, Cole 2009), perspectives on multiplicity (Laurie et al. 1999) and fluidity (Hollows 2000). Second, femininities are also theorised, drawing on the work of Butler (1990) and Goffman (1990), as performances; they encompass behaviours that are learned and are what gendered people do. In relation to women's blogs, these contributions emphasise the constructed and performative nature of gender – particularly in light of earlier contributions that spoke to (or critiqued) the possibility of reinventing or completely forgetting about one's gender, online (namely Consalvo and Paasonen 2002 and Pierce 2005). As recognised sites onto which genders are (tentatively) made (in)visible, blogs do offer an opportunity for studying performances of femininities for self-identified women in Québec.

These works, and particularly the last point, support my aim to address diverse discourses of femininities, constructed, expressed and sometimes contested by women bloggers in the province of Québec. I did so by conducting an online feminist ethnography in 2008-2009. This ethnography, alongside all epistemological, methodological and ethical choices, is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCHING THE BLOGOSPHERE FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE: QUESTIONS OF THEORY AND METHODS

INTRODUCTION

As stated in the literature review, women's blogging practices in the province of Québec, Canada, largely have been ignored as a subject of interest and of research. In this chapter I describe the steps undertaken to investigate women's blogs to better understand the discourses within them. The question guiding this research is as follows: What are the discourses found in women's blogs, specifically in Québec women's blogging? In considering this question, a number of sub-questions arise: Why have some women turned to blogging? Could women's online writings shed light on discourses of femininity? Could women bloggers use this medium not only as a way to record their personal memoirs or histories, but also as a tool to reflect on their futures and themselves, as traditional autobiographies have been shown to do (Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield 2000: 4-6)? What is the space that blogging occupies in their lives (physical, temporal, emotional, relational, etc.)? What emotions, including feelings of pleasure, are associated with their blogging? Finally, could blogging be a source of empowerment for women?

In order to address these questions, this research focuses on data gathered both through examining women's blogs and through conducting semi-structured interviews with women bloggers. Inspired by Sandra Harding's work (1987), Nancy A. Naples (2003) suggests that epistemological perspectives influence researchers' choices of methods. She also believes that epistemologies impact on other research considerations:

> Our epistemological assumptions also influence how we define our roles as researchers, what we consider ethical research practices, and how we interpret and implement informed consent or ensure the confidentiality of our research subjects. (Naples 2003: 3)

In line with this perspective, I first offer a brief outline and reflection on the epistemology guiding the research, followed by a discussion of the methodological dimensions. Then, I describe the methods employed to collect the data, part of the feminist online ethnography. In section four, I present an overview of the ethical dimensions related to the research, which is followed by a discussion of data analysis. Finally, I introduce the sampling process, describe and profile the women bloggers who participated in my study. In the conclusion, I briefly outline contributions made by the research.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL CLAIMS

As mentioned above, situating one's epistemological claims is central to the definition of a research project. Generally, epistemology is understood as the point of view from which knowledge claims are assessed and, to borrow Pamela Abbott and Claire Wallace's words, it 'defines what counts as an adequate theory and how research findings can be judged: what makes the findings of one piece of research more adequate than the findings of another research in the same area' (1997: 287). Research from a feminist perspective can underline how 'malestream research' (Abbott and Wallace 1997) has typically reinforced and justified women's subordination and inferiority and produced knowledge that did not focus on women specifically (Ollivier and Tremblay 2000). According to Abbott and Wallace:

> Malestream sociological theories underpin and justify the subordination and exploitation of women by men, while claiming to be 'factual'. Feminists argue that malestream theories in fact fail to meet the criteria for being accepted as adequate and valid knowledge because they are both objectionable and mistaken. They in fact serve as an ideological justification for the subordinate positions of women. (Abbott and Wallace 1997: 9)

Countering such approaches, Sandra Harding's writings (1986) have led to the general recognition of three feminist epistemologies:

> […] feminist empiricism (based on women's authentic experience), feminist standpoint (based on a feminist angle of interpretation) and feminist postmodernism (a stance that rejects the possibility of any universal theory). (Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield 2000: 13)

Feminist empiricism, also known as rationalist epistemology (Ollivier and Tremblay 2000: 69), posits that sexist research – implying research that contains androcentric bias – is the result of 'inadequate application of scientific method' (Ollivier and Tremblay 2000: 69 – my translation). According to scholars adopting this epistemology, increasing the number of women involved in science would lead to new research projects and preoccupations, hence reflecting women's concerns (Ollivier and Tremblay 2000: 70).

Critics of this epistemology underline its essentialist interpretation of science – seeing it as based on 'neutral, objective and independent facts' (Ollivier and Tremblay 2000: 71 – my translation), as well as its belief that knowledge based on science relies only on facts and descriptions – not taking into account the fact that science has historically been influenced by values that cannot be verified empirically (Ollivier and Tremblay 2000: 71).

One aim of feminist standpoint research is to produce 'socially relevant knowledge [meaning] research findings [that are] better, more adequate, than those produced by the malestream or other feminist researchers' (Abbott and Wallace 1997: 292). Thus, scholars adopting this epistemology argue that looking into globally oppressed groups (women and working classes, according to feminism and Marxism respectively) would lead to a description of power relations closer to reality (Ollivier and Tremblay 2000: 75). In relation to this, Caroline Ramazanoğlu and Janet Holland write that inherent to standpoint theory is a recognition that 'there are specific social locations (being a woman or a man) grounded in material conditions (different actual experiences of living as a woman or a man) from which real relations of power (male domination) can be best conceptualized' (2002: 69).

The feminist standpoint was developed in reaction to accusations of subjectivity (Haraway 2004) and emerged from the work of various feminist researchers, including:

> […] Nancy Hartsock's (1983) "feminist historical materialist" perspective, Donna Haraway's (1988) analysis of "situated knowledges," Patricia Hill Collins's (1990) "black feminist thought," Chéla Sandoval's (1991, 2000) explication of third world feminists' "differential oppositional consciousness," and Dorothy Smith's (1987, 1990a, 1990b) "everyday world" sociology for women. (Naples 2003: 19)

Reviewing definitions and critiques addressed to the feminist standpoint, Ramazanoğlu and Holland list its five key characteristics: 1) a focus on '[exploring] relations between knowledge and power'; 2) an attempt to make visible the power relations between women by making the researcher visible – '[deconstructing] the 'knowing feminist''; 3) a '[grounding] in women's experience, including emotions and embodiment'; 4) an awareness and wish to take into account the 'diversity in women's experiences and the interconnecting power relations between women' ; as well as 5) a recognition that the knowledge produced is 'always partial' (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002: 65-66, see also Abbott and Wallace 1997).

Researchers adopting a feminist standpoint emphasise the value of women's experiences in producing knowledge and point to how, 'as an oppressed class', women have a greater ability to identify their experiences of oppression (Millen 1997). As with most epistemologies, the feminist standpoint has been criticised by other researchers – the most common criticism being that feminist standpoint theorists tend to adopt homogenising and essentialist views of women, ignoring differences amongst women and assuming that women's *nature* gives them privileged status as knowers (for a

more detailed discussion of problems identified in feminist standpoint epistemologies, see Abbott and Wallace 1997, and Millen 1997). Furthermore, other scholars have underlined that those who have been in a position to create and contribute to such knowledge are themselves in somewhat privileged positions. In relation to this, Harding (1983) acknowledged:

> Feminist theorists also come primarily from these ['Western, bourgeois, white, and heterosexual'] categories – not through conspiracy but through the historically common pattern that it is people in these categories that have had the time and resources to theorize, and who – among women – can be heard at all. (Harding 1983: 647)

Finally, discussing both standpoint and postmodern feminist epistemologies in relation to empiricism, Sylvia Walby (2001) critiques standpoint epistemology. She argues that its version of 'authoritative knowledge' is obtained on the basis of who produced it (the oppressed), and not on evaluation of the sound scientific foundation of the process leading to it (2001: 426). Though recognising the legitimacy of feminist research, she maintains that 'rigorous methodology' is needed more than a 'specialist epistemology in order to defend [women's studies'] place in the academy' (2001: 503-504).

In responding to such criticism, Millen underlines how the feminist standpoint indeed tends to '[marginalise] other oppressive struggles in its over-riding focus on womanhood' (1997: 7.5). However, in studying discourses of femininity found in women's blogs, my research intends to provide accounts of the plurality of such discourses. As such, it aims to avoid falling into the creation and reinforcement of a homogeneous category of women. Furthermore, while writing about accusations of essentialism, Millen looks at it in relation to previous research which has shown 'that many women do experience life and knowledge in different ways to those of men' and further states that the aim of the feminist standpoint is not to discuss womanhood, but rather 'the incorporation of the feminine' (1997: 7.4).

The third recognised epistemology, feminist postmodernism (which shares similarities to what Ollivier and Tremblay call epistemological relativism) postulates the non-existence of 'universal and absolute criteria that would enable to distinguish true from false knowledge' (Ollivier and Tremblay 2000: 77 – my translation). Scholars identifying with feminist postmodernism question the possibility of truth in science and, as Rebecca Campbell and Sharon M. Wasco write, they believe that various interpretations make up scientific knowledge:

> Because they reject fundamental assumptions and values of science, feminist postmodernists question whether there can ever be a feminist science, and instead view the world as endless stories or texts, many of which serve to sustain the status quo of power and oppression. (Campbell and Wasco 2000: 782)

Recognising the role of language in structuring our understandings of social realities (Campbell and Wasco 2000: 782), feminist postmodernists also criticise approaches that see women as a unified category and maintain that attributing essentialist characteristics to women (such as 'caring, compassionate, etc.) can have the effect of reproducing existing inequalities' (Fenton 2000: 725). As such, Walby explains how feminist postmodernism emerged 'to accommodate the issue of difference', since women's lives are 'divided by phenomena such as ethnicity, "race", class, sexual orientation, generation, and physical capacity' (2001: 487). Specifically, according to Plummer, postmodernism takes into account the intersection of the above phenomena, as it moves us towards '[speaking] of masculinities, femininities, and, indeed, genders' instead of men and women (2003: 19). Moving beyond intersectionality, Plummer ads the dimension of fluidity as characterising postmodernism, writing that 'the idea of a unitary, "fixed" essence is deconstructed and delegitimated as a way of thinking about the world' (2003: 19), since each individual is confronted with a plurality of choices and thus becomes 'actor, designer, juggler and stage director of his [or her] own biography' (2003: 25). Here, Plummer perhaps alludes to Goffman's use of the theatrical metaphor (1990 [1959]), thus linking performativity and fluidity, as discussed below and again in chapter *Être ou paraître*.

However, feminist postmodernist epistemology is linked to problems, particularly in the context of feminist media studies. As argued by Natalie Fenton, despite the hierarchy embedded in the 'Enlightenment dualisms' (masculine versus feminine, men versus women, culture versus nature, etc.), and the importance of challenging the essentialist and universalist approaches to those dualisms, abandoning them altogether may compromise the political projects of feminism:

> One may object to the Enlightenment dualisms in which the feminine, or women, are always cast as inferior to the masculine, or men, but total postmodern abandonment of these binary structures runs the risk of political suicide. (Fenton 2000: 737)

In all, it is feminist standpoint's grounding in critical analysis of gender constructions and relations (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002) and its focus on the common everyday characteristics of women's lives (Naples 2003), as well as feminist postmodernism's

focus on the role of language in structuring our understanding of social realities that have informed my approach to feminist qualitative research. By studying women's blogs, my research focuses on women's everyday experiences and the gender constructions that emerge from their writings and interviews.

Moreover, the consideration of both feminist standpoint and postmodern epistemologies within this research underlines how 'patriarchal discourses and project' are problematic for feminism (Harding 1983: 654). This combination enables not only a focus on women's rendition of their life experiences and identity (drawing on standpoint feminism) but in doing so, also recognises that identity is neither fixed nor unitary, and that experiences may account for the plurality and diversity of women's lives (thus drawing on postmodern feminism).

Anchoring this research in both epistemologies enables me to 'resist the temptation to explain away the problems each [epistemology] addresses and to chose one to the exclusion of the other' (Harding 1983: 657), because I call upon the contributions and nuances of both in order to '[generate] the best available knowledge' (Walby 2001: 503). As such, this research mobilises the notions of performativity and fluidity, together with feminine identity, in order to better understand the discourses found on women's blogs.

Performativity, as in 'identity is not stable but rather a flexible performance' (Stern 2011: 262) is one concept brought forward by postmodernist approaches (Page, 2012). This has influenced research focused on online identities (see, for instance, Daniels 2009, Page 2012, Williams and Mendelsohn 2008). For example, Williams and Mendelsohn, in studying how people use clues about gender in an online text-based environment to identify the gender of their interlocutor, ask whether 'gender [is] like a uniform, to be donned at will? Or does "true" gender leak out in social interaction, despite efforts to contain it?' (2008: 280). In such examples ideas about performative repertoires of gender seem to be played out online. As detailed in chapters *Être ou paraître* and *Je me souviens*, performativity is a component of women's blogging and analysis of this helps to illuminate the available repertoires of femininity, and the extent of their fluidity, in the current moment.

Fluidity, also discussed in the previous chapter, implies that individuals identify with masculinity and femininity in various ways and identity is neither fixed nor stable (Balter Blume and Blume 2003: 788). Since identity is not fixed and is considered to be created, fluidity arises from performativity and is a key concept in postmodern

feminism. In this project, fluidity comes into play when I discuss how people self-present in chapter *Être ou paraître.* There, the reality of having one's various (and, perhaps, heterogeneous) audiences come together on the blog may heighten awareness of a participant's fluid identities – as the identities performed offline may vary according to their audiences. The offline performance may be discordant with their online *persona,* in effect illustrating the fluidity of self-presentation and its limits.

Before mobilising these concepts in discussing the data I collected, I will first, in the next section, describe the various methodological choices made.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Informed by feminist qualitative research, the choice of strategies in conducting my research – the methodology chosen – is feminist critical discourse analysis (feminist CDA). Defined as 'theories of how research should proceed' (Abbott and Wallace 1997: 287), methodologies have a mutual shaping relationship to 'research objectives, questions and study design' (Carter and Little 2007: 1316) and impact on the choices of methods.

Generally speaking, critical discourse analysis 'aims to offer a different "mode" or "perspective" of theorizing, analysis, and application throughout [the field of discourse studies]', meaning that critical analysts are aware of the link between 'scholarship and society' and that they 'conduct research in solidarity and cooperation with dominated groups' (van Dijk 2001: 352-353). Being critical in this context, to borrow the words of Wodak, 'is to be understood as having distance from the data, embedding the data in the social, taking a political stance explicitly, and a focus on self-reflection as scholars doing research' (2001: 9). Key notions of CDA include 'critical', 'ideology' and 'power', all of which are intertwined, as the approach aims at unveiling ideologies which create and sustain unequal power relations (Wodak 2001: 10). Although referred to by some researchers as a method, CDA is rather a methodology examining discourses in order to uncover '[naturalised] unequal power arrangements and ideologies' (Speer 2007 [2005]: 15). Media and cultural studies scholars have regularly used CDA in their projects (Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000, Keller 2001) as it enables 'an explicit focus on the power relations and ideology behind not only a text itself, but also the social context framing the text' (Keller 2001). Furthermore, CDA focuses on language and texts (and text production) as forms that 'mediate ideology' (Fernández Martínez 2007: 125, see also Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 2002 [1997]) and, for that reason, is relevant to an analysis of the emerging discourses found in women's blog entries. More specifically,

because CDA aims to study discourse not only in the format of texts, but also the 'social processes and structures which give rise to the production of a text' (Wodak 2001: 3), as indicated above, it is especially designated 'to analyse pressures from above and possibilities of resistance to unequal power relationships that appear as social conventions' (Wodak 2001: 3).

Despite its political objectives of identifying and making ideology explicit, a feminist version, feminist critical discourse analysis, has emerged in order make explicit the feminist goals and shared focus on gender and ideology (Lazar 2007 [2005]: 3-5). As Lazar describes:

> Feminist CDA as a political perspective on gender, concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power and ideology in discourse, is equally applicable to the study of texts as well as talk, which offers a corrective to approaches that primarily favour one linguistic mode over another. (Lazar 2007 [2005]: 5)

Such a methodology, with its focus on gender, power and ideology in discourse, is an appropriate approach for this research project. It allows a focus on women's renditions of their everyday experiences while keeping an eye on power and ideology thereby facilitating a consideration of the interlocking systems of oppression. In order to collect the data needed to explore women's blogs, I chose, as a key research method, feminist online ethnography. It encompassed three different steps: semi-structured interviews, home visits and content analysis of participants' blog entries. After presenting all three steps, I outline the ethical considerations that informed this project, then briefly present the works that inspired data analysis and finally describe how the analysis was conducted.

METHOD: A FEMINIST ONLINE ETHNOGRAPHY OF WOMEN'S BLOGS IN QUÉBEC

Although ethnography is commonly associated with anthropology, media studies has increasingly used it as a method of enquiry (Machin 2002): for instance, ethnography was used in British Cultural Studies as a method of exploring how audiences make sense of a text and the 'contexts of media reception' (Bakardjieva 2005: 77). Furthermore, media studies scholars have used ethnographies as the basis of data collection (see, for example, Radway 1984 and Seiter et al. 1996 [1989]), often strongly based on interviews and rarely undertaken over long periods of time. Participant observations, despite being core to most anthropological research projects, are not necessarily part of ethnographies in media studies – although they are increasingly used.

Feminist ethnography is adopted in hopes of providing accounts of women's everyday experiences and related challenges (Skeggs 1994: 74, 88) and the prolonged period of time over which an ethnography is conducted is viewed as a process that enables access to women's 'authentic' voices (Skeggs 1994: 87). In the context of media studies, however, ethnography as a method (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002) is used alongside 'face-to-face unstructured interviews' in order for the researcher to understand how the research subjects make sense of a text (Hollows 2000: 104).

My approach is that of a feminist online ethnography, by which I mean that I analyse online practices by looking into the material provided on the internet by users, as well as by speaking with them. Defined by Ward as 'a study of online interaction [enabling] the subjects being studied to talk back even as the process is occurring' (1999), online ethnography has been attributed with an array of advantages, including helping level power relations between the researcher and the researched. This work towards levelling power relations, implied in online ethnography, is also inherent in a feminist epistemology and is made possible by allowing the research subjects to ask questions. Participants may also, to some extent, take a '[leading] role in establishing the reality, status and principles of their group' (Ward 1999). Other advantages of online ethnography include the possibility of carrying out fieldwork from one's office – or from anywhere where there is an internet connection (Beaulieu 2004: 144) and its potentially increased level of reflexivity (Ward 1999), meaning that researchers may have more space and opportunities to question their own practices and for the 'weighing up and critical assessment of institutions and claim-makers, including those who speak with 'expert' voices […]' (Lupton 1999: 15). However, online ethnography has also been criticised for its high financial costs in the case of multi-sited ethnographies (although the dropping costs of the material needed has started to make it more accessible), high level of exhaustion and 'the chronic uncertainty that accompanies having a moving 'field' and changing actors' (Beaulieu 2004: 144). In the case of this project, this latter problem was experienced when participant Julie[17] deleted her blog entries after having her offline identity revealed on another blog. As I had just started making PDF copies of the entries of all participants, I unfortunately lost access to most of her writings[18] – this experience made me increasingly anxious, as I feared this could happen with the other bloggers whose blogs I had not yet saved. Ethnography is also often seen as

---

[17] For clarity purposes, I have decided to refer to participants using only the first name as pseudonym I attributed to them; when I use a surname or a combination of first and surname, I am referring to scholars' work.

[18] Julie later decided to republish some of her entries, but none of those in which she felt she had made herself vulnerable, meaning that much of the material she initially published was no longer accessible.

providing non-representative data (Machin 2002). To help counteract this, I have identified three steps to provide an enhanced understanding of women's blogging practices in the province of Québec: a semi-structured interview with each blogger; a home visit with those who felt comfortable in allowing me into their homes; and an analysis of the contents of their blogs including written entries, images and hyperlinks to other websites and blogs provided in the blogroll of each blog. Employing a variety of methods of data collection, also known as triangulation, aims to ensure more valid results as well as opening up possible disparities in respondents' own discourses (Gray 2003: 72). Furthermore, Paccagnella (1997) writes about some of the risks of relying solely on online methods to conduct research, as such approach could involuntarily induce biases, due to the lack of 'ethnographic context' (1997). Thus, using a variety of methods to approach women bloggers in Québec was chosen to better provide the ethnographic context:

> Even when the design of research does expect some data referring to the real world, it is never correct to accept these data without keeping in mind that obtaining information about someone's off-line life through on-line means of communication - although seemingly easy and convenient - is always a hazardous, uncertain procedure, not simply because of the risk of being deliberately deceived but also because in such cases the medium itself increases the lack of ethnographic context discussed above and it may also produce misunderstandings due to different communication codes. (Paccagnella 1997: n. pag.)

The size of the sample obtained in this research, as detailed below, as well as the contemporary nature of the phenomenon studied, might lead to characterising this project as a qualitative case study. Admittedly, case studies are used to 'examine a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context' (Yin 1981: 98) and generally involve the study of one single case or a limited number of cases (Paillé 2004), of individuals, organisations, or a community (Roy 2009). However, it is by looking at the different focuses of both qualitative research frameworks and ethnographies that one can better understand the ethnographic dimension of this project. Ethnography, as described by Cohen and Court, functions to describe 'the behaviours, values, beliefs, and practices of the participants in a given cultural setting' (2003: 283) and thus is inward looking. According to the same authors, case study research is outward looking, as it uses the data collected in order to attempt generalisation of results to other cases (Cohen and Court 2003: 286). Furthermore, whereas case study research may be conducted without the researcher having any direct contact with the field (Yin 2009: 15), this project, as ethnography, required a presence in the field and depended on 'detailed, observational evidence' (Yin 2009: 15) in order to provide a fuller understanding of

Québec women's blogging practices and the discourses they generate. In relation to this, Leander and McKim (2003) distinguish participant observers (commonly found in ethnographic research) from lurkers ('someone who reads but does not post' (2003: 216), and thus whose presence is not necessarily known to internet users – in this case, bloggers). In this research, I considered it unethical to use data without participants' knowledge and consent (as detailed below), hence I made my presence known to the bloggers I was hoping to study; however, in attempts not to disrupt participant's authenticity (Leander and McKim, 2003: 216) I chose to limit the interventions made into their blogs. More specifically, I opted for a face-to-face meeting with participants, in hopes to 'triangulate the authenticity of participant identity' (Leander and McKim, 2003: 216), as detailed below in the discussion of semi-structured interviews. It should be mentioned, however, that actual face-to-face meetings allowed some participants (such as Anabel) to underline how the identity performed on their blogs generally was not theirs *per se*; Anabel in her interview, did reveal that she wrote fiction on hers.

In preparation for fieldwork, in May 2008, I researched blogs that appeared to be authored by individual women who lived in Québec and that focussed on an autobiographical narrative – what some scholars have named diary blogs. Using the combination of French keywords[19] ('*Québec femme* [woman]', '*Québec journal intime* [diary]' '*Québec fille* [girl]', '*femme journal* [woman journal]' I made a list of all the blogs that appeared in the following search engines, blog directories and blog hosting sites: *Google Blog*, *Technorati*, *MetaFilter*, *Blogonautes*, *Canalblog*, *Hautetfort*, *Wordpress*, *MaBulle* and *Blogue.ca*. After scanning the results to confirm that a Québécoise had indeed individually authored each of them, I compiled a list of 250 potential respondents. I also looked at all the results to avoid *celebrity* bloggers from Québec (such as *Chroniques d'une mère indigne* by Caroline Allard) and people who blog as part of their careers (journalists, politicians, etc.). I contacted the first from each set of

---

[19] In using only French keywords, I am aware that I have omitted English-language bloggers in Québec. Although no statistics have so far mapped the proportion of English-language bloggers in comparison to French-language bloggers in Québec, 13.4% of the Québec population either named English as their mother tongue or as their main language spoken, according to 2006 Canadian census data (Corbeil et al., 2010: 14). If one considers effects of social class and formal education on internet presence (as do scholars assessing the digital divide), it could be argued that the Anglophone population of Québec may be online in greater proportion than the Francophone population, as just short of 25% of the former group has a postsecondary degree, in comparison to a little over 15% of the Francophone population in the province (Corbeil et al., 2010: 69). Furthermore, a 2008 study of the place of internet in Québec confirms the higher internet use among more educated populations in Québec (CEFRIO 2008: 17). In spite of the possibility of having a proportionally greater Anglophone population online in Québec, one of my research interests was also to measure the national identity factor in women's blogging practices in Québec. Hence, looking at bloggers who predominantly write in French allowed the possibility of looking into national identity, as it is quite often related to Québecois and Québécoises as a linguistic (French) minority within Canada. To borrow the words of Rachelle Freake and her colleagues, 'French language has historically been a key marker of Quebeckers' collective identity' (2011: 22).

three blogs listed, in July 2008; then, in January 2009, I proceeded to get in touch with the second blog listed in each set of three blogs, either sending them an email or leaving a comment under a blog entry mentioning that I wanted to be in touch with them (the letter I emailed to all bloggers is presented in appendix 1). Overall, I was able to establish contact with 65 bloggers, 22 of whom initially agreed to participate in the research project. In the end, two of the 22 did not participate; consequently I conducted 20 interviews with bloggers who were randomly selected. A further three bloggers helped in testing the interview questions and process, as explained below. All interviews took place between the months of July 2008 and May 2009.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

In the context of this research, face-to-face semi-structured interviews served three main objectives. First, they provided an opportunity to discuss the research project with the participants and to ensure that they understood its purpose and could give informed written consent both to participating in the interviews and to allowing their blogs to be used for the purpose of analysis[20]. Bloggers often took advantage of the interviews to ask me a wide range of questions, including queries about my previous background, about what led me to move from Québec to study in England, about what my own blogging practices were and what tips I could give them on managing one's blog. For example, I was asked questions about how to keep the blog more private and how to keep back-up copies of entries. Second, the interviews enabled me to learn about the 'offline' identity of the blogger, since most used only their first names or a pseudonym for blogging and some did not post photos of themselves; meeting them in person was a way of learning more about their offline and online identities. For the bloggers as well, meeting the researcher face-to-face helps foster a relationship of trust, allowing them to put a face to the person asking the interview questions and requesting access to their blog entries. Third, the interviews were a way of exploring, with the participants, their reasons for starting their blogs, and for searching out contextual aspects of their writings and the meanings they bestowed on their blogging practices. Although critics have argued that the 'rules and conventions [of interviews distinguish them] from everyday contexts of communication' (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 2004 [1997]: 23), nonetheless interviews are considered to be a good source of data – as long as their specific characteristics are taken into account. I ensured that the interview guide (see appendix 2), was '*fully* planned and prepared', meaning that although respondents' 'responses can't be predicted in advance' (Wengraf 2006

---

[20] A more detailed account of how participants' free and informed consent was obtained in all cases is provided later in the following section of this chapter.

[2001]: 5 – emphasis in original), a great level of preparation is needed in advance of the interview. Specifically in this case, prior to interviewing, I had looked at the informants' blogs, and during the interviews, when needed, I imposed 'discipline and […] creativity' in order to ask for clarification or make links with data from blogs and I allotted ample 'time for analysis and interpretation' following the interview meeting (Wengraf 2006 [2001]: 5).

Once a meeting had been arranged with the participants[21], I opened the interview with introductions and I presented an overview of the research project. Two copies of a consent form were given to the participant and reviewed with them in detail. Once read and signed, the participant kept a signed copy and I took the other one with me (a further discussion of the consent form follows in the 'Ethical considerations' section and a copy of the consent form may be found in the third appendix). Before administering the interview questions, I introduced[22] the questionnaire, and thanked the participant for her time; I outlined the focus of the interview and assured participants that I would not ask any question that I would not myself feel comfortable in answering. I pointed out that the participant remained free at all times not to answer any question and that she should feel free to interrupt or to end the interview if she wished to do so. I also made sure the participant was comfortable with me recording the interview for transcription and accuracy purposes. For eleven interviews, I was accompanied by a research assistant to help me in a variety of ways: she took notes about the interview process and questions, helped me in commuting to different cities in the province of Québec, some of which were new to me. This accompaniment also added a layer of safety for myself as a researcher, since bloggers knew I would not be coming alone to meet them. My research assistant, Cynthia Brunet, is a close friend of mine who volunteered to help me during fieldwork. As a primary school teacher, she was hence able to travel with me on weekends and during school holidays.

The interview guide is composed of seven sections and a total of seventy-five questions. No single participant was asked all 75 questions; some questions were included in the interview guide merely as prompts to solicit more details in the event that a general question did not evoke a full response. The sections were organised to

---

[21] All but two interviews were conducted in a public space (coffee shop, restaurant, university) chosen by the participant in order for the initial meeting to take place in a safe and neutral environment that would not discourage them from taking part in the research. Two interviews were conducted at the participant's home because they felt it was more convenient for them – on both cases, I was accompanied by my research assistant.

[22] Lauraine Leblanc (1999)'s research served as inspiration. She advises the inclusion of an introduction to the interview guide as a way of decreasing the power relations between researcher and researched and ensuring that the latter understands the process about to take place.

move from general questions about blogs, to specific questions designed to draw out the respondent's personal experience. The interview guide included the following sections: Starting the Adventure: Beginning to Blog; The Blog Writing Process; Your Blog As It Is; Your Identity As a Blogger; A Community of Bloggers?; Being a Woman, A Blogger, in 2008-2009; Some Information About You; Finally, In Conclusion…. The sections were meant to follow the structure of conversation wherein one often relates one's practices moving from the more general to the specific. Finally, socio-demographic questions were situated towards the end of the interview for three reasons: first, participants may tend to be more tired at that point and providing socio-demographic data requires less reflection and development than more practice-related questions. Second, the structure of socio-demographic questions elicits short and non-detailed answers and if administered at the start of the interview could establish an undesired rhythm for the remainder of the interview. Third, having already gone through the most of the interview, the interviewees might feel more at ease and hence be more inclined to provide personal demographic information. The last section of the interview guide included two questions: one asking if there was important information for me to know or understand that the participant had not had the opportunity to discuss. The other question queried the possibility of a follow-up meeting in case some aspects needed further development although no follow-up meeting for this purpose did in fact take place.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face with twenty-three women bloggers and the interviews lasted between fifty minutes (with Catherine) to a little over three hours (with Ani), although the majority of interviews lasted between one and one and a half hours.

HOME VISITS

All participants were asked about the possibility of conducting home visits following the interview. Home visits were an integral part of Bakardjieva's methods of enquiry, as she wished to 'see and experience the spaces' in which her participants used computers (2005: 83). Similarly, I wanted to understand the space used for blogging and to explore how bloggers integrate or dissociate these practices from the other activities and spaces in their homes. This approach is also inspired by Virginia Woolf's writing of *A Room of One's Own* (1989 [1929]) in which she discussed how women require a space that is their own, in which they can feel comfortable and free to write fiction. My intention was, in part, to verify the need for such space in women's blogging practice.

Following the interviews, I asked participants who blogged from home (some revealed that they blogged from cafés or from work) if I could visit and have a look at the place they used for blogging. I took photos of the room(s) where eight bloggers normally write on their blogs, another seven bloggers sent me photos of their blogging space because visiting it after the interview was not convenient. Finally, I do not have data on this for two participants in the research, who either did not have time to take me to their house or did not write from home and felt it was not relevant. Another six bloggers said they would email me some photos but unfortunately did not follow through on doing so. Therefore, out of the twenty-three interviews conducted, I collected 'home visit' photos for fifteen bloggers. Although this material is not extensively discussed in the following pages, it was useful in analysing blogging as a practice in which participants made time and space for themselves, as detailed in the last discussion chapter, *Une révolution tranquille* [A Quiet Revolution].

BLOGS

When initially conceived, this research project called for looking at the blogs before conducting the interviews with research participants. The intention was to have an overall understanding of the writing topics chosen by bloggers and to provide for the possibility of querying participants about some of their entries during the interview process. However, upon further consideration, this changed because the time needed to look at all the blog entries before conducting the interviews exceeded the time I had to spend on fieldwork and I worried that doing so might lead to confusion if I was unable to remember who wrote on what topic while interviewing face-to-face. There was also an important ethical consideration. I wanted to ensure that bloggers consented to my using their blog entries in this research before saving them on my computer. I therefore wanted to have them sign the consent form before I created PDF files of their blogs since the form included a statement allowing participants to specify if they did not want material on their blogs to be used as data for the research[23].

Blogs were saved on my computer as PDF files following the interviews – although due to time constraints, some were not saved immediately after the interview, which caused problems in one instance referred to above when Julie deleted her blog entries prior to my saving the material. Entries for all other blogs were saved from the moment of the blog's inception until May 2009, the date of my return to England after fieldwork. However, some bloggers had stopped updating their blogs prior to that date.

---

[23] The statement read as follows: ☐ I prefer that the content of my blog be kept anonymous and that no information (URL, blog's name) about it be revealed in the research.

Although the research was initially planned to focus on the blogs as the primary source of data, the richness of the interviews convinced me to concentrate predominantly on what bloggers told me during the interviews and to use blog entries to further illustrate what emerged from the interviews. I believe this is a positive outcome of the development of my fieldwork since there are many research projects that focus on a textual analysis of the entries published by bloggers (such as Frey Pereyra 2006, Huffaker and Calvert 2005 and Kerebel 2006). Starting with themes emerging from bloggers' own accounts of their blogging provides an additional layer of analysis and is coherent with feminist standpoint epistemology, which approaches participants as *experts* of their own experiences (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002).

Furthermore, the textual and technical forms, the content and the feel of blogging are all central to an enhanced understanding of the practice. Thus, I started my own research blog to keep in touch with research participants. Participating as a blogger enabled me to inform participants of research progress, and it was also an attempt to level power relations between the participants and myself. Through linking to the various other blogs I have created over the years and to other information I knew existed about me online, I believed that research participants would feel that they knew me better and that this would decrease the power differential that might develop as I learned a great deal about them while they knew little of me. This is consistent with one aim of feminist epistemology, with feminist scholars working towards challenging power relations between the researcher and the researched (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002). In this case, power imbalance could be potentially heightened since the research subjects are bloggers who have written online about their lives never envisaging that their entries might become the focus of academic research.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Feminist research is generally characterised by a commitment to women's empowerment, often exceeding mainstream ethical guidelines released by research institutions and funding bodies, calling for a sustained heightened awareness of any possible consequences of research that could impact research participants. This ethical rigour extends to the possible uses made of the research, the dissemination of results, as well as the power relations within research teams and between researcher and researched (Ollivier and Tremblay 2000: 11-12).

Furthermore, ethical concerns are heightened when doing internet research, where boundaries between public and private spheres are blurred and need to be considered

accordingly (Orton-Johnson 2010). As such, James Benjamin (2012) underlines how the specificity of social media – thus comprising blogs – highlights the need to reconsider ethical guidelines in relation to communications:

> While there have been calls to update codes of ethics to reflect the unique characteristics of social media, to date the professional associations have not changed their codes of ethics to directly reference social media. (Benjamin 2012: 276).

Despite lack of specific codes addressing blogs, the Association of Internet Researchers' Ethics Working Committee has published guidelines in 2002, which contain recommendations for researchers, students and organisations involved in internet research (Ess et al., 2002: 2). Relevant aspects of these guidelines were central to the design and implementation of this project and a number of steps were undertaken to decrease risk.

First, I took measures to open up a reciprocal dialogue with research participants by creating my own research blog[24] and sharing its URL with the bloggers I contacted, as did Estalella (2007). This blog includes updates and reflections on the research process including, more recently, on the writing of this thesis, links to other websites where I have published information, other blogs that I have authored, news about conferences where I presented papers and comments on readings and news stories that are related to my research interests. I have aimed at making myself as transparent and accessible as possible, by replying to all queries sent by email, giving participants a mobile phone number to communicate with me, although none took advantage of this medium, and by accepting 'friendship requests' sent via Facebook[25]. I believe that exchanging my personal information with participants helps level power relations between researcher and researched since I have a great deal of private information about them through having access to their blogs. This reciprocity has proven to be a positive experience in the recruitment of at least some participants. For instance, Ani looked up my online credentials before agreeing to take part in the research. After receiving my initial email, she agreed to participate and addressed me as 'Dear Laurence,' and described me as 'scholarly, vegetarian, twin sister, feminist and living in the Outaouais region, although soon to return to Sussex, England', clearly indicating that she had done her research and felt that – possibly – she had enough trust in me to

---

[24] Carnets de recherche: http://carnetsdelaurence.net. Unfortunately, I have not managed to keep up with the discipline of regularly updating this blog, but by having access to other platforms on which I write, I believe participants still have access to some aspects of my life as a researcher, but also as a woman from Québec who blogs.
[25] Facebook is an online social networking site, launched in 2004 and initially aimed at college students although now open to most internet users (www.facebook.com). It is also 'the top web site in Canada', due to its number of internet users joining every week (Tong et al., 2008: 532).

subject herself to an interview and to give me authorisation to use the data she publishes on her blog[26].

Second, I designed a consent form which participants were required to read and sign before the interview and I provided a signed copy to each of them for future reference. The consent form included information about the research and the use of data, including where and under which conditions the data would be kept, and provided details about confidentiality and anonymity. It also required participants to answer a number of questions, including one that authorised me to look at their blogs; it asked for explicit consent to digitally record the interview and inquired if they were comfortable with me conducting home visits. At the end of the consent form, I also included a space where participants could leave their email addresses if they wished to receive a transcript of their interviews and/or notifications of published work or conference papers. Transcriptions were sent to all but four participants who indicated that they were not interested in receiving them. Of the nineteen participants who received an electronic copy of the interview transcripts, three have mentioned having read the document or at least parts of it (Ani, Virginie and Julie). I attempted to be very open with participants by offering to keep participants informed about the research process and to provide details of articles and publications that emanate from this research, hoping to minimise any feelings of exploitation they might have. Previous researchers (see, for example, Bartow, 2006) have discussed how bloggers may come to feel exploited and resent how scholars or other bloggers may make use of their writings and blogs in order to advance their own careers and interests. One participant shared this view and mentioned the following, during our meeting:

> I really consider the content, as something personal, and it's mine. It comes… it comes from… not anything, but it's me, it's my stuff. I wouldn't want someone else to profit from it. It's funny, I never thought about that… […] It would be scandalous. It would be a lack of respect, I think. Really. (Shaindl 2008)

The consent form aimed at providing information about the research and the data collection process in order to ensure that participants achieved true informed consent before taking part in the process. For Orton-Johnson, 'informed consent presents a particular challenge to ethical research in the online field' (2010) and implies the need for reflexivity on the part of the researcher. This means that even though I received written, informed consent from each participant, I had a continuing duty to remain aware of all risks for participants.

---

[26] Ani has also granted me the permission to use this quote from our email exchanges, in another email dating from 12th March 2011.

With the need for caution in mind, to further minimise risks, I took steps to ensure confidentiality and to maintain anonymity of participants, both with regards to information provided during interviews and to the entries posted on their blogs. Bloggers were informed that interview material would be rendered anonymous by removing the name of blog, people, location, and any other identifying features and these materials would be kept in a locked drawer in my office. Participants are identified by pseudonyms to further reduce the risks of them being identified. Furthermore, quotes from the blogs themselves are edited to remove information that could lead to the identification of bloggers and are also translated from French to English, which provides a significant layer of anonymity, as one cannot recognise personal speech patterns nor use an internet search engine to identify which blog I am referencing.

One outcome of this research, which I had envisioned but thought of as unlikely, is that some participants would self-identify their participation in this research by writing about it on their blogs. This actually came to be after some interviews and has made me even more aware of the challenges of protecting participants' anonymity. People who know them personally could easily try to identify them in my research now that they have been made aware of their participation. On the positive side, bloggers[27] writing about our interviews has helped publicise my research and has reinforced my status as an insider within the Québec blogosphere. This may have helped establish trust relationships which could have facilitated somewhat my access to participants and this probably allowed me to come closer to getting participants' true stories as explained by Sandra Acker (2000). Indeed some bloggers (for instance, Simone, Julie and Éloïse) mentioned having read about my research project on other women's blogs, and wondering if I would get in touch with them.

Above all else, ethical dimensions remained foremost in my mind, not only during design and fieldwork, but also throughout the analysis and writing of the thesis; I am very conscious of this duty to protect participants' privacy. Concerns about ethics are strongly emphasised in social sciences and humanities, including media studies, but are an ever-increasing particular concern for research on the internet and for feminist research. The online blurring of the public and the private spheres and the possibility of easily conducting covert research while looking at sites with unrestricted access (Orton-Johnson 2010) may lead some bloggers to feel exploited by scholars and

---

[27] This was the case of bloggers Ghislaine, Ani, Virginie, Michèle, Lynne and, more recently, Julie as well.

researchers. Furthermore, some participants replied to my interview query by asking me how it was that I had found their blogs (this was the case with Simone), thinking that the odds were small that someone would stumble upon her blog and decide to study it. Sensitivities, such as those voiced by Simone, reinforce the need to be aware that unequal power relations often exist between researcher and researched and that there can be some discomfort in agreeing to be a research participant. The steps outlined above demonstrate active consideration of power relations putting into action the aim to safeguard participants' anonymity. Even though it can be empowering for women to have their voices recognised and studied[28], there is always an onus on the researcher to meet the challenges of keeping women safe when they are sharing personal information for research that will eventually be made public. However, blogs are also recognised as existing in the public domain and as such bloggers also bear some responsibility for choosing what information they disclose on this platform.

DATA ANALYSIS

Once I started to collect the data, I proceeded with the data analysis, which is the focus of this section. Although I began analysis immediately, I delayed detailed analysis of a blog before being granted permission to do so by the blogger during the interview meeting. First and foremost, it should be noted that though Meyer (2001) recognises the plurality of CDA methodologies, he nonetheless identifies its two key features (after reviewing the works of key CDA contributors such as Fairclough and Wodak): firstly, the fact that they are 'problem oriented and not focused on specific linguistic items' and secondly the fact that 'theory and methodology is eclectic [in the sense that] both are integrated as far as it is helpful to understand the social problem under investigation' (2001: 29). However, despite this plurality of methodologies, Jäger (2001) in a chapter published in the same edited volume as that of Meyer (2001), suggests two steps that may roughly guide researchers in processing the material. He first recommends 'processing material for the structure analysis' (2001: 54), which means looking at key characteristics of the material (in the example provided, a newspaper). In the context of my own research, as seen later in this chapter, I first went over the completed interviews and the blogs in order to identify the main topics covered (which, for instance, enabled me to present the bloggers under various categories, in the section that follows) and next asked participants to provide information regarding when they started blogging and who their readers were. The second step consisted of 'processing the material for the sample fine analysis', by considering the data in its details – both in

---

[28] For Orton-Johnson, looking at one's blog entries may feel empowering to the blogger and give them a sense of having their voices heard (2010).

terms of publication date and context, writing style, topic discussed and approach chosen – thus looking at entries 'which […] are as typical as possible of the discourse position of the newspaper [or blogs, in this specific research project]' (Jäger 2001: 55). In the context of my research, this meant looking at when blog entries were published (the date of the entry, but also the context as detailed by the blogger), looking at the other components of the entry (such as colours chosen, images, photos, videos, themes and so on and so forth), considering the 'rhetorical means' employed (Jäger 2001: 55) – such as figures of speech and vocabulary, and analysing the 'ideological statements' and other 'striking issues' (Jäger 2001: 56). Jäger encourages researchers to repeat this process until all material has been analysed.

It should be pointed out that the themes identified in the blog entries were informed by themes identified during interviews. As such, the analysis of interviews was inspired by what René L'Écuyer has termed the 'mixed category analysis' (1990: 76 – my translation), meaning that data coding and analysis were guided both by categories drawn from the literature and by emerging categories not previously addressed by literature, or not identified during the initial literature review. Interviews were all hand-processed, using colour-coding in order to first identify themes and then to form wider categories. As such, for example, the fourth analysis chapter entitled *Une révolution tranquille* centering on analysis of pleasure derived from blogging, was strongly informed by previous contributions in feminist cultural studies regarding popular culture. In contrast to this guided analysis, what L'Écuyer calls 'predetermined category analysis' (1990: 72 – my translation), the (hand coded) data discussed in the chapter entitled *Maître chez nous: An Exercise Fraught with Contradictions* was identified through the 'inductive category analysis' (L'Écuyer 1990: 66 – my translation). To be more precise, I was not initially looking for references to the domestic metaphor and once these emerged from coding the data, I went back to the literature to better understand this phenomenon in relation to online spaces (as illustrated by the reference to Susan Leigh Star (1999 [1996])'s chapter, below) and within feminist literature more generally (as explained by the later reference to Arlie Russell Hochschild's book, *The Managed Heart*).

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Over the course of the ten months spent doing fieldwork in Québec, I met with twenty-three bloggers including three personal acquaintances who agreed to test my interview guide for clarity, length and effectiveness. The other twenty bloggers had been identified during the blog sampling process and agreed to participate when contacted

by me and asked to do so. They were selected randomly without any attention to the focus of their blogs, as long as they wrote about themselves. Only later, when looking at the main focus of their writings, I realised that they may be grouped into three main categories of blogs: heterogeneous bloggers, mummy bloggers and creative writing bloggers. As previously stated, not all the blog entries on any one blog absolutely fit any one category perfectly since by its very nature the blog is variable and reflects the changing interests and priorities of its author. But categorisation of participants' blogs may facilitate an understanding of who the participants are, as bloggers.

Heterogeneous bloggers are those who do not write on any specific topic, admitting that their writings change according to their priorities, moods and inspiration. They post entries about books they are reading, films they have seen, ideas of projects they are undertaking or contemplating, hobbies they are involved in, family members, disputes, work-related events – including looking for work – news events on a host of topics, social and political issues, etc. For these women, the blog serves as a way of sharing thoughts and perhaps soliciting feedback, as well as keeping a record of their lives much like in a manuscript diary. Fifteen participants have blogs that focus on a plethora of topics and as such have been categorised as heterogeneous bloggers.

Mummy bloggers have been the focus of some scholarly research, as mentioned earlier in this thesis. This category of blogs is defined by May Friedman and Shana L. Calixte as 'the perfect cyborg artefact of mothering: here we sit with our leaking contracting bodies while telling our robots about our feelings and using totally unembodied technology to represent ourselves in these bites and bytes of pushing and hollering and being vomited on and sweating in the night' (2009: 21-22). Authors of mummy blogs mostly focus on family issues and share accounts of raising their children through stories of daily events and sometimes asking readers for advice. Six of the bloggers in this research author blogs that may be characterised as mummy blogs.

Creative writing bloggers, just as the name suggests, feature their own creative texts on their blogs. It was only when conducting interviews that I discovered that two of the blogs fit this category. When reading the blogs they appear to diarise real events in the personal lives of the authors. However, when in personal contact with the bloggers, either when asking for their participation or during the interviews, they admitted to authoring the blogs under a pseudonym, hiding from readers that the blog content is written fiction or creative texts. They told me that the majority of posted entries,

although inspired by the authors' lives, were mainly the result of their imaginations and creativity.

To add a little precision on who fits each category, bloggers Shaindl, Cynthia, Mireille, Ghislaine, Ariane, Virginie, Blanche, Bonnie, Sarah, Michèle, Denise, Ani, Kieva, Julie and Elsa, indeed, the majority of bloggers, tend to blog on a wide variety of topics and would be considered heterogeneous bloggers. Shaindl was the first to participate in this research project, she was actually one of the testers of the guide, and her interview was conducted in both French and English, depending on her preference in answering any one question. Her blog is authored in the two official languages of Canada. Participant Cynthia[29] is another friend of mine with whom I tested the interview guide and she was one of the most experienced bloggers when we met. Mireille is the last person whom I knew personally who helped test the interview guide, but unlike Cynthia and Shaindl, she did not live in the Outaouais region, having moved to Montréal to pursue her studies.

Other heterogeneous bloggers include Ghislaine, the first research participant who was recruited through the blog sampling process and Ariane, who is the youngest of all participants to this research. I also met with Virginie, who was born in France but immigrated to Montréal for work, along with Bonnie, Michèle, Kieva, Ani, Denise and Julie who also live in Montreal. Having completed her high school degree, Denise is the research participant with the lowest level of formal education – although the quality of her written French, as illustrated by the entries she posts on her blog, is often associated with a higher level of education. Julie actually contacted me before I got to her blog in the list of blogs sampled, after reading about my research project on some other participants' blogs. A passionate blogger, she started her blog with the intention of authoring a political blog and debating ideas. Sarah and Elsa are two heterogeneous bloggers who did not live in Montréal at the time of interview, born in the Outaouais and Saguenay-Lac Saint-Jean regions respectively and having decided remain in the regions where they were born.

The mummy bloggers category includes the following six participants: Dominique, who admits that her blog changed focus after she learned she was expecting her sons and although not solely focussed on family life, her family has become the main topic of her entries. Catherine, the participant with the highest educational achievement, completed

---

[29] Though I previously mentioned Cynthia as being my research assistant, I have also used her name as a pseudonym to identify one participant. Unless specified that Cynthia is my research assistant, all occurrences should be read as being a research participant.

her doctoral degree before deciding to become a homemaker and starting her family. Éloïse's blog reflects her passion for motherhood, as well as her alternative views on mothering which include a strong focus on breastfeeding, eco-mothering and preserving the placentas from her pregnancies. Simone is a doctoral candidate who was on maternity leave with her first child at the time of interview. Lucie is a French national (like Virginie) and she primarily focuses on her children and family life, her Catholic faith and the religious upbringing of her children. The last mummy blogger is Lynne. Her blog is hosted on a platform she and her husband bought and is linked to the family home page from which one can also access her husband's blog and the family digital photo albums. At some point during the interview, she underlines how she would not herself classify her blog as a mummy blog, but considering the large number of entries focussing on family life and how similar it is to other blogs on family and parenting in this research, I have chosen to place it in the mummy blog category, although again acknowledging that, as do the other mummy bloggers, she also discusses other aspects of her life, including work and friendships.

Only two of the participants' blogs, Elizabeth's and Anabel's, qualify them as creative writing bloggers specifically, although others such as Mireille, Éloïse, Denise and Ani have mentioned using the blog as a way of working on different aspects of their writing. Elizabeth found inspiration in observing her surroundings and wrote fictional entries about people she met at work, saw on the streets, or related to her everyday life. Anabel started her blog as a way of gaining a readership, since she always wanted to be read but felt that the publishing process took too long. Her blog was also directly linked to her professional goals and studies and enabled her to start writing professionally for a well-known Québec collective blog.

A socio-demographic breakdown of data gathered during the interviews suggests that participants in this research are largely not representative of the diversity of the Québec population, although considering the well-documented digital divide, the sample may be representative of the current blogging population. In generalising the socio-demographic backgrounds of research participants, the following observations emerge. On average, bloggers were 32 years of age at the time of interview, with ten bloggers in their twenties, eight in their thirties and five in their forties. The vast majority self-identified as having Canadian/Caucasian ancestry (mostly of French-Canadian ancestry, although one is of English-Canadian ancestry), with only three respondents mentioning recent Western-European ancestry (Spain, France, Italy and Switzerland) and one identifying Latin-American origins. All but two bloggers spoke French since

birth (Shaindl was brought up in English, and Kieva in Spanish). The type of living accommodation (rented/owned) was almost equally split amongst participants, with 12 being tenants and 11 owning the houses they live in.

In terms of sexuality, relationship status and family structure, participants mainly identified as heterosexual (only Shaindl mentioned being queer, whereas Bonnie and Julie spoke of their bisexuality – although all three were in heterosexual relationships at the time of interview). Only five respondents were single, whereas all the others were either married (5), in a common-law relationship (9) or in a relationship but not living with their partner (4). Over half of the bloggers I interviewed had children: Blanche, Bonnie and Simone had one child each; Ghislaine, Éloïse, Sarah, Michèle, Lynne, Denise and Lucie had two children; Dominique had three whereas Elsa and Catherine had four children each. Of those who did not have children, five were unsure whether they wanted any, Elizabeth was about to give birth to her first child and Ani and her partner were hoping to get pregnant soon.

Educational achievements were relatively high amongst research participants and are not representative of the general population of Québécoises. In the overall female population aged fifteen and over in Québec, 26.9% have a secondary school degree, 15.9% have a college diploma and 17.1% obtained a university degree, either diploma, bachelor's degree, master's degree and/or doctoral degree (Institut de la statistique du Québec 2003). But bloggers who participated in this research have generally achieved a higher level of formal education, with only one participant not having post-secondary education. See full educational results for participants in the following figure:

Figure 1: Bloggers' Educational Achievements
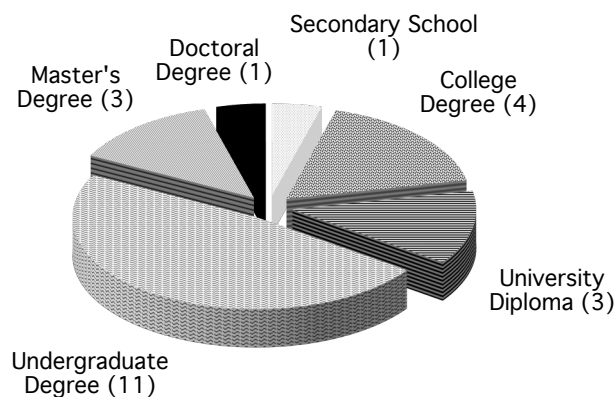
What emerges here is that the bloggers who participated in this research are generally representative of the majority group within the Québécois population which is made up of people who are white, have spoken French all their lives and are mostly heterosexual. My sample is also representative of the dominant group in Québec, that is, those who hold the most power, which is made up of those who are white, are heterosexual and generally have higher levels of formal education.

I acknowledge that my research sample is non-representative of the entire population of Québec and when considering results one must take into account the privileged location from which bloggers in this research write and speak. However, since my research does not make claims towards generalisation of results, which is coherent both with an ethnographic approach to research and one influenced by feminist standpoint and postmodernism, this non-representativeness is not a problem in and of itself.

Although bloggers taking part in this research are not representative of the overall female population in Québec, they nonetheless share characteristics of the most-connected internet users in the province. This is supported by data published in the spring of 2011 by the *Institut de la statistique du Québec*, which focussed on personal internet use from either home or work and compared the province of Québec to that of Ontario and to Canada more generally, taking into account a variety of socio-demographic factors, may shed some light on the adequacy of my sample. This data was collected in 2009, which is also when my fieldwork ended, and reveals that 76.1% of women in Québec use the internet for personal reasons and that the younger the citizens, the more likely it is that they would make use of it. Furthermore, when looking at levels of formal education, the *Institut de la statistique du Québec* indicates that those with the highest educational achievements are also using the internet for personal reasons in greater numbers (92.8% of those with some level of higher education) in comparison to other groups. For example, 60.7% of Québécois and Québécoises who either have a secondary school degree or less use the internet (Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2011).

CONCLUSION

In choosing feminist CDA as my methodology, my research emphasises the need to consider the presence of ideology in discourse and related power relations. Because femininities are social constructions and because they are often positioned as contrary to and inferior to gender constructions of masculinities (Risman, for instance, refers to

gender as a 'socially constructed stratification system' (2004: 430)), the aim is to examine women bloggers' interviews and their blog writings to discern how they approach discourses of femininity. Identifying emerging themes in interview data and then looking for blog entries where the same themes are discussed permitted an in-depth exploration and analysis of discourses found in women's blogging.

In order to provide answers to the questions posited at the outset of this project, a feminist online ethnography was chosen as the method of inquiry. Three steps of data collection were carried out over a ten-month period from July 2008 until May 2009: face-to-face semi-structured interviews, home visits and blog analysis. Overall, twenty-three women living in Québec each took part in an interview, permitted me to use the material they posted online in my analysis and some allowed me to visit the physical space from which they blog.

In approaching bloggers for this project, questions of ethics, in terms of anonymity, confidentiality, and power relations, were central to the methods employed. I tried to be as transparent as possible with participating bloggers by providing them with a detailed description of the project, by fully explaining a consent form and having them sign it and by sending participants a full transcript of their interviews. Furthermore, issues of representativeness and critiques addressed to feminist standpoint related the epistemology's ability to reinforce a unitary category of women and dismiss women's diverse experiences were constantly considered during the sampling process.

Despite care taken, the socio-demographic characteristics of research participants indicate that they are generally representative of a privileged portion of the female population of Québec. As mentioned previously, this may be due to the digital divide, a reality where even today some groups of the population continue to be disproportionably represented online. Donna Haraway, in her now well-known article 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', discusses the problems posed by positivist and scientific expectations for general applicability of results and objectivity. She proposes the following solution:

> The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision. All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see. (1988: 583)

The notion of situated knowledge proves useful in discussions of femininities, while also enabling a realistic use of the data collected through the sample of bloggers involved in this research. Instead of attempting to make homogenising statements about what femininities are for all women bloggers in general – or modifying the sample in order to include some women from a variety of backgrounds (an approach which is criticised by people belonging to such groups as a form of tokenism – see Scott, 2005, namely, for a discussion of tokenism) – this research focuses on discourses found in the blogs of women who still represent the majority of Québécoises and who perhaps remain those most present in the blogosphere: younger women, who in general have a high level of formal education and are of Caucasian origins. Although this may be perceived as a limitation in terms of the possibilities of generalising results, it should be seen as providing insights into the experiences of some women bloggers within the province of Québec. As such, I wish to again make reference to the discussion of intersectionality and postmodern feminism presented above: recognising the multiplicity of experiences and social categories (such as race, class, aboriginal status, etc.) that shape women's lives, this qualitative research presents *one* portrait of women blogging in Québec.

Having described the research process in this chapter, the following chapters go on to discuss results gleaned using this research process, and in particular L'Écuyer's mixed category analysis (1990). Most immediately, the next chapter focuses on bloggers' desire for their blogs to be a place that corresponds to the ideal of the home – a space in which a woman should be safe and in which she should feel comfortable being herself.

CHAPTER 4 : MAÎTRES CHEZ NOUS[30]: AN EXERCISE FRAUGHT WITH CONTRADICTIONS

INTRODUCTION

The analogy relating a blog to the domestic sphere implied in the title of this chapter may inspire both curiosity and scepticism: how could one feel at home – the quintessential representation of the private sphere – while exposing personal thoughts, photos and memories to the scrutiny of others online, on a blog with uncontrolled and unlimited public access[31]? Nevertheless, during interviews, many informants directly linked their blogs to their homes. Discussing her own homepage, the late Susan Leigh Star approached the online domestic metaphor when writing: 'It is a new addition to the way I think about myself and my sense of home' (1999 [1996]: 578).

Other scholars have also used this analogy in approaching other research topics, as did Arlie Russell Hochschild in her book, *The Managed Heart*. In it she studies the 'commercialisation of feelings and emotions' by looking at flight attendants discussing how they are encouraged to see and consider their customers as guests in their own homes (2003 [1983]: 108). Without any prompting on my part, bloggers in this study, such as Bonnie, Denise and Julie, used the domestic metaphor, in explaining why they bought their own domain names. They did so to have more freedom – just as one would leave rental accommodation and buy a house to have more control over one's environment:

> […] it still needs to have something of myself, you know what I mean? If I take… [pause] the theme they give us, and I leave it as it is… it feels like… I am not home, it's like… if I lived in a rented flat and wasn't really allowed to put colours on the walls. So… yes, it happens, sometimes, that I change it, because… I mean, even in your house, sometimes, you change the colours, move the furniture: well, I do the same. (Bonnie 2008)

> It's like being the owner when you used to be a tenant. You know, it's fun to be home. It's mostly that. And, also, there're more functions. Still. Some things that make blogging simpler, easier, more… easier to upload videos, easier to upload photos, easier to… loads of things. (Denise 2009)

---

[30] *Maîtres chez nous* [Masters in Our Own House] is, as further detailed in the introduction of the thesis, a reference to Québec's history.

[31] Although at the time of selecting the blogs for this research, all participants gave uncontrolled access to their blogs, since then, a few like Shaindl (before the interview was held, in 2008) and Lucie (in December 2009) decided to limit the access to their blogs. They have invited some visitors and now request them to identify themselves with a username and password before they can access the content published. A complete description of how participants' blogging changed since I met them is provided in the conclusion of the thesis.

> So that's why I bought my… I bought my dot com, I wanted to
> be home, to be able to manage my things… (Julie 2009)

I argue in this chapter that participants look upon their blogs as a place to fulfil the desires that they associate with the *ideal* of home. However, I also explore limits to this analogy. Throughout the chapter, I analyse bloggers' references to the work involved in *making* home, which does not exist as a physical entity and can only be conjured up if feelings of home are produced and sustained by blogging. The notion of the blog as an online home is supported by the fact that most participants described their desires to customise their blogs through using techniques such as changing their frames and colours. They feel an ownership of their blogs similar to the feelings that homeowners might have. They believe that their blogs constitute a personal space in which to discuss whatever they choose, to organise as they like and to personalise as they see fit.

The analogy of blog as home is first explored through looking at the blog as a place where one must feel comfortable in order to write and share personal life experiences – a place to feel at home as in *Feeling Homey*. The analogy is sustained through the second section, which explores the tasks and chores that must be performed in order to maintain the blog in a manner that makes visitors feel welcome and where the atmosphere makes it a popular place to visit (*House Keeping*). When envisioning blogs as one form of social media, as discussed earlier, it is perhaps not surprising that bloggers would find means to '[promote] social interaction between participants' (Page 2012: 5). This discussion is informed by scholarly contributions to the understanding of social media. Finally, in the third section, the domestic metaphor is retained in looking at *A Woman's Blog As a Room of Her Own*. This is done by examining bloggers' perceptions of owning their blog spaces, of being in charge of decisions that govern the blog, of designing personal ways to welcome visitors, with all of these perceptions pointing towards a desire to keep some control over both the appearance and the contents of their blogs. Taken as a whole, the chapter is a reflection on the blog as a space that spans both the public and private spheres, where bloggers make use of a public platform to discuss personal experiences, emotions and thoughts.

What emerges from discussions of the domestic metaphor embedded in participants' description of and approach to blogging are some contradictions: first, there is a tension that arises between their belief in the right to have a space for unfettered self-expression and the reality that readers, often strangers, can enter their online homes at will and leave behind unwanted comments, personal insults, spam or even unwelcome

advertisements from uninvited commercial interests. Second, it is hard to reconcile blogger's *ideal* of a home – referred to as homey, comfortable, safe – with the lack of protection that a blog provides from a variety of abuses. Despite being aware of such contradictions, which I discuss in more detail throughout this chapter, women bloggers repeatedly speak about their blogs as home, both during interviews and in entries posted on their blogs.

FEELING HOMEY

The idea that the blog must be made to feel like home, to accommodate writing of personal thoughts, emotions and experiences is reflected in participants' desire to make the blog feel homey. Bloggers like Virginie and Mireille want a comfortable, cosy nook from which to share their personal experiences:

> […] what I was looking for, it was… well… you know, like you write your manuscript diary at home, in your little nook, and I wanted to write my blog like at home, in my little nook. And… share ideas with people who would not be… I was going to say: narrow-minded. (Virginie 2008)

> It seems like I can't [write] in a public space. Just because… [pause] it's impersonal, and… it's an impersonal location and myself, I… I try to write things that are sort of personal, so… I need to be, a little, alone with my thoughts. (Mireille 2008)

Bloggers also want their blogs to reflect who they are. Just as a woman might decorate her home to reflect her personality, participants spoke of customising their blogs to truly express who they are. Whether by customising the colours, columns, font or header, or going to the expense of buying a domain name to host their blogs, participants often justified these decisions by pointing to the desire to meet an inherent need to create a place in which they feel comfortable and can be completely themselves. Furthermore, they are apt to publish photos or images, either found online or from their own photo albums as a way to add a personal touch. This can be related to hanging photos or paintings to personalise their houses.

In decorating their blogs to correspond to their tastes, bloggers invest in transforming a public interface, the blog, in the same way one transforms a house, that could belong to anyone, into a home. As explained by Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd, making a home has been emphasised by advertisers in terms of purchasing items that reflect one's needs and tastes: '[…] advertisements for commodities to fill that house and make it a 'home' evoked the comfort and delights of a 'home of your own'' (2004: 35). This is reminiscent of how people invest in displaying the self in the most public rooms of their homes (the living room, dining room and kitchen, for example). Daniel Miller,

author of *The Comfort of Things* (2008) explains in relation to this that his book is 'about how people express themselves through their possessions and what these tell us about their lives' (2008: 1). He later explains that by meeting people in their homes, he could have access to various stories about the participants in his research:

> The person in that living room gives an account of themselves by responding to questions. But every object in that room is equally a form by which they have chosen to express themselves. (Miller 2008: 2)

Discussing living spaces in the Australian (and generally Western) 1950s home, Johnson and Lloyd write that the bedroom barely received attention when it came to home decoration, if compared to 'the emphasis placed in the living areas, including the kitchen' (2004: 79). As rooms that tend to be seen and visited by guests, living areas were linked to:

> [a] discourse of self-expression through discerning consumption and generating the 'right look' [which] reflects an increasing exteriorisation of the self through consumption and display. (Johnson and Lloyd 2004: 79 – my emphasis)

This section thus focuses on strategies aimed at personalising one's blog, by making various choices that aim at having one's individuality shine through and making the place as *comfortable* as possible. In sum, the blog may be perceived as both *a room of one's own* (to borrow the title of one of Virginia Woolf's most famous essays (1989 [1929]), to which I return towards the end of this chapter), but also a room to which people are invited and made to feel welcome. Hence, in this section tensions begin to emerge, between making one's tastes dominant without overpowering potential visitors and making them feel uncomfortable.

BLOG DECORATING

When asked to describe their blogs, all participants explained the colours they chose and how they came up with a specific header, title, theme or font. On several occasions, bloggers had a hard time describing their blogs, as they mainly visit the administration section, which is only available to the blogger, rather than the public page, which is accessible to readers. Often they expressed feeling that their blogs could have a better or nicer appearance. This section demonstrates that a certain level of reflection and a number of choices come into play when starting a blog – and often while maintaining it – choices that go beyond the topics bloggers write about and the frequency of their updates. For each participant, the appearance of the blog was based on choices, each choice backed up by a rationale that they saw as relatively important – although no one takes this point as seriously as participant Blanche:

> Because, for me, the aestheticism of a blog, it is… really important. The aestheticism of my blog. It's… I am really anxious, very meticulous, at that level. So… I like when things are… how should I say this? Nice on the eye. So… not to write too small, not to write too big, I like when it is… that's it: nice on the eye… (Blanche 2008)

Blanche included a cautionary note to her readers, just below the header of her blog, which reads: 'This site was built to be fully screened with Firefox. Surfing my blog with Internet Explorer is really discouraged as the presentation and aestheticism are greatly altered' (Blanche, n.d.).

Choice of colour surfaced as one way of creating a personalised atmosphere on a blog. When justifying the use of more colours or less colours on their blogs, it became apparent just how important this dimension was to respondents. Some chose to use a white canvas with black writing to give more prominence to their writings, as informants Cynthia and Denise explained:

> [My blog] is on a white page. I see a blog as a writing project and you rarely write on coloured paper unless you're seven years old and you're making Christmas cards on craft paper! (Cynthia 2008)

> […] it's really New York Times, you know, it's black on white, eh… not thingies, no flower, no yellow, no colour. Black, white. I wanted it to be… I wanted people to see the text. Not the thingies. (Denise 2009)

This technique aimed at portraying their blogs as professional and serious endeavours, and not the result of a *mere* hobby, pastime or leisure-laden activity. Cynthia and Denise's references to 'page', 'paper' and newspaper references when describing their blogs, contrary to many other bloggers' who use 'home' analogies in this context, may reflect their desire to distance their practices from *private* or *domestic*-style writings since their blogs were related to their paid work. Cynthia wrote blogs as part of her job as a public servant and Denise is a writer in the arts production field. At the other end of the spectrum, some participants chose very vibrant colours for their blogs as a way to construct a place to express creativity or to further personalise the space. But for most, the colours they had chosen were their favourite colours or were an attempt to make their entries easier to read:

> […] the look of my blog… it must be blue, since my favourite colour is blue. So I must have put it blue. (Elsa 2009)

> It shows that it's a girl's blog. Because… of the header, because of the photo I chose to represent me, because of the colours… the colours of the photos I chose, the colours of the writing, also. I use pinks, purples, blues, you know… colours…

that are quite joyful. More feminine colours attract me. (Ghislaine 2008)

I noticed that now, it's really fashionable, many people write their blogs in white, on black. I would never do this. And I find it hard on the eyes […] (Bonnie 2008)

Regardless of which colours were used, for all but one blogger, the colours chosen meant that the place felt comfortable enough for them to write on the blog. Shaindl was the exception, describing her blog as pink, a feature she dislikes:

I like the way that my blog looks. It's not perfect, I wish it weren't pink, but every time that I've tried to change it […] it's like my god, no, no, no, no, no… I always go back, always. (Shaindl 2008)

Apart from colour, the header is another feature that bloggers actively use to personalise their blogs, as underscored by blogger Ghislaine (above). Whereas some headers automatically accompany the theme bloggers choose, more creative and computer-savvy bloggers can change the stock header through buying one online, finding a free one, or creating one. Blogger Anabel, for instance, chose a simple header hoping that visitors would focus more on the written text than on the decorative aspects of the blog, whereas blogger Elsa changes her header frequently, adapting it to the change of the seasons, just as one might decorate her home to express a holiday theme, Christmas, for example.

[…] You know, a really simple header […] To accentuate, I think, the writing, more than… the gadgets. What is important is what is said, it's not… it's not so much how it's presented, you know. (Anabel 2009)

[…] there's a header on top, with a snowperson, and… there's a carrot that got a lot of people talking, mainly in the comments… They think it's ugly: there's one who said 'it's really ugly, that red thing, that you added'. [laughter] (Elsa 2009)

In order to further customise their blogs, others have chosen to include photos of themselves and family members in the header of their blogs, as seen on this participant's blog:

Figure 2: Customising One's Blog
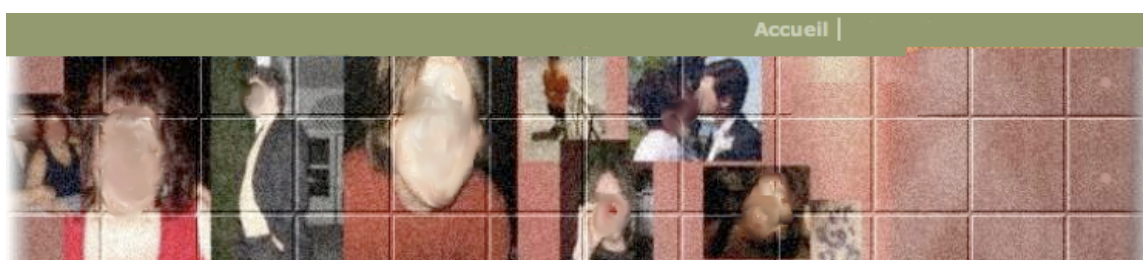
For the most part, bloggers pride themselves on the fact that their blogs look nice and that they generally have managed to adapt them so that they reflect who they are, as underscored in the following excerpts from interviews:

> […] I find it aesthetic, I like looking at it, and I like the… I like the font, and I like the size and I think that it's… […] I think it's fun; I think it's nice. (Shaindl 2008)

> I thought it was… a little ugly, you know, for instance to start writing my thoughts in a Word document, let's say. So when I [laughter], and when I discovered this media, I thought it was interesting […] Mostly the blogs I had seen on *Wordpress*, I thought they were… really… classy, well done, well referenced and all. And… I don't know. It added a touch of… I don't know: it really got me, you know. It was really a matter of, on the computer, it looked nice, it was accessible, and all of that. I could do it on an anonymous basis and get feedback on… on my stuff. (Julie 2009)

> They know more than I do, you know, how to change their… how to make their blogs look nice, and… I think there's a certain pride […] (Simone 2009)

In having their blogs look 'nice', bloggers are making them acceptable, in the sense that they would most likely not shock nor alienate anyone. Before presenting the blogs to a readership, participants seem eager to adapt the basic canvas that blog hosts provide and to make it better reflect their tastes to project who they are: 'nice' people, whom readers would find interesting to read and perhaps worth getting to know better. This is discussed more extensively in the next chapter, but in passing, it must be noted that because of the work involved in customising blogs, even though bloggers are proud of their products, they do not appreciate others copying them. This happened to Julie, when someone copied the template she and her boyfriend had worked on for many hours. She found that offensive:

> […] the following day, after I launched my blog, [another blogger] wanted to copy the design of my blog and she managed to do it, in the end, so… Yeah, it sucks [laughter]. She just said "oh! Look! I'll do the same on mine" and I said "well, I'd prefer… if you didn't do exactly the same, on yours…" and… Well, that's what started… that's what started a sort of argument, you see… (Julie 2009)

Because customising a blog implies making it reflect the essence of the blogger, if custom aspects are copied and appear elsewhere, the creator is robbed of her uniqueness; despite her hard work she loses the look that sets her apart and makes her different, it is a violation of her personal brand. Although never confronted with this particular reality, blogger Shaindl talked about the distress and outrage she feels at the

very idea that others might steal her content and benefit from it, as detailed in the ethical discussion above.

When discussing women decorating their blogs to reflect who they are, much like decorating a home, it is worth commenting on the technical nature of customising the space. Customising the blog is a process easily accomplished if one chooses a blog hosting website such as *Blogspot*, *Canalblog* or *Wordpress*: some templates, colours and fonts are readily available to create the blog and to change its look at any point by the blogger. Any blogger can do this without much know-how. However, if one wants to make a blog even more personal, or has chosen to purchase a domain name in order to have more scope, more technical knowledge is required, as blogger Julie mentioned:

> But, yes, it was quite a lot of work [laughter]. I didn't do it! My boyfriend modified it all, you know. I was looking and I would say… [laughter]. (Julie 2009)

This is somewhat reflective of the gendered nature of other types of construction where building houses is generally associated with men, while women's work is to plan the living space and to decorate it. Julie's quote alludes to a man, her partner, taking charge of building the blog – the rest, the decoration and blog keeping, is up to her, the blogger. Lynne's blog, which is also hosted on a domain she and her partner bought, and Sarah's blog, which was a gift already set up by her father, were also 'built' by the men in their lives.

This rather parallels a phenomenon that can be found in looking at media productions from the 1940s and 1950s where we see the same gendered division of labour represented – where 'planning the home became a feminised activity, while building it (and earning the money to invest in housing) remained masculine' (Johnson and Lloyd 2004: 54).

Despite the technical difficulties and the work required to get the decorating done, bloggers in this study described significant efforts spent in creating as unique and personal a blog as possible. Beyond attempts to personalise their blogs in a manner that reflects their own tastes and preferences, a glimpse at the literature on social media furthers another understanding of the care taken by bloggers in choosing colours, fonts and templates for their blogs; the pursuit of credibility. As such, James Benjamin concedes that credibility, in social media, does not solely rest on a critical consideration of the source, but also on other perceptive factors:

> Studies of social media format indicated that credibility does not rest solely with assessing the credibility of the source. Instead, a variety of factors intrinsic to the message and the media, such as appearance and navigability, become indicators of credibility. […] Thus, our criteria for the evaluation of credibility of social media must extend beyond the more traditional factors of source credibility and *ethos* used for decades in the assessment of communication. (Benjamin 2012: 276 – emphasis in original).

Taking into account this different take on why appearance and navigability matter to research participants (as illustrated by Blanche's cautionary note mentioned earlier, as well as Cynthia and Denise's rationales for choosing the colours of their blogs' backgrounds) adds further weight to the social dimension of blogs. Aware that readers may come by and judge the trustworthiness of the blog on factors such as appearance and navigability, bloggers invest in improving look and ease of use. They perceive that the more trustworthy blogs will be deemed worthy of future visits. Other strategies and techniques that take personalisation of their blogs to an even higher level are discussed in the following section.

PHOTOS, PICTURES, AND ALL THINGS PERSONAL

It is clear from interviews and blog analysis that participants put a great deal of effort into ensuring that their blogs look good and are inviting places for people to visit – their online home. Detailing this sense of having an online home, Sherry Turkle explains:

> On the Web, the idiom for constructing a "home" identity is to assemble a "home page" of virtual objects that correspond to one's interests. One constructs a home page by composing or "pasting" on it words, images, and sounds, and by making connections between it and other sites on the Internet or the Web. (Turkle 1995: 258-259)

In an attempt to go beyond palette and border to convey a sense of self, or to highlight a subject under discussion, bloggers use images – either personal images such as photos, drawings, etc., or less personal images they find online. Not all participants, however, see the publication of images in the same fashion. Some publish copious photos of things and places they see or create, of family including children and themselves, almost turning their blogs into digital photo albums. They do this hoping their readers will get a better sense of who they are, where they have travelled, with whom they share their lives. Others choose to publish no more than a profile picture. Still, others prefer to publish only impersonal images that they find online, such as photos of landscapes or objects.

For one group of respondents, including Mireille, Ariane and Cynthia, publishing a photo of themselves on their blogs was an attempt to be as transparent as possible to their readers, or to facilitate readers' ability to better relate to them as the authors of the blogs. As mentioned by Cynthia, it was a way to assert that she stands by what she writes – an illustration of her desire to be trustworthy:

> I think I published one photo of myself, because it was a desire
> to… of integrity, I wish to be honest, totally, and to say… yes,
> this is what I think. It's to assume full responsibility [regarding
> what I write]. (Cynthia 2008)

The practice of publishing photos of oneself and the reasons behind this practice will be more fully discussed in the following chapter. However, here it is worth mentioning that some participants, like Mireille, said they would not publish photos of people they know on their blogs, as a matter of respect; they believe it would add nothing to their blogs for readers to be able to see their friends and family. This view is shared by Ani, who prefers not to publish photos of herself or of people around her and who is actually critical of such practice.

Other bloggers consider their blogs almost like a family album, or a personal photo gallery, and frequently publish pictures of themselves and their children as they grow up. Éloïse, Sarah, Simone, Dominique and Lucie do this, although the latter two mentioned they will stop posting family photos once their children are a little older. They said that they would cease to publish any kind of photos at all, out of safety concerns for their children, since having their pictures on public display might put the children at risk:

> I put photos of the children. Because they are still very small,
> and they are always with me, but eventually, it will… I know that
> I will change my perspective on this. (Dominique 2008)

> It's like at some point, I took them off, I think, but I had put
> photos of them, in the bath, naked. And those, I took them off.
> It's stupid, because I would show them to my family! But you
> never know, what people can do… I'm not suspicious, but…
> (Lucie 2009)

These safety concerns are at the same time both related to and distinct from the concept of the physical home. On the one hand, the home is imagined as a space in which children should be safe. Just as the 'modern suburban home' was portrayed and imagined as 'a proper place to bring up children' (Johnson and Lloyd 2004: 36), the blog is perceived as a space that should not harm children in any way or put them at risk. On the other hand, the fact that respondents raise the safety of children in these discussions demonstrates awareness that their blogs are public spaces – hence,

represent the antithesis of the safe place that the ideal home is imagined to be. The knowledge of this inherent contradiction limits the bloggers' desire to publish photos of their family or of themselves, because they do not wish to publicly expose themselves or their loved ones to danger.

Sometimes bloggers structure their blogs in a way that offers some protection from the strangers who visit. This may be akin to the stratification of rooms in the home, where people display objects differently in different rooms, bearing in mind that guests have access to some rooms more than others (as explained above – see Johnson and Lloyd 2004 and Miller 2008). Lynne's blog illustrates this idea of room stratification, with her requiring a password to view more private entries and photos, the password acting like a key to gain entry to the home or more accurately, to gain entry to specific more private rooms within it. Blogger Catherine publishes only photos of her personal creations, not of people, whereas participant Blanche once did publish personal photos but she later removed them from her blog. Respondent Michèle reveals that, following a series of reflections on the matter, she decided to publish a photo of herself, even though she recognises her fears about having her identity revealed on her blog:

> I had to think about it for a long time before I put one up. I was
> scared that people would recognise me. (Michèle 2009)

Despite these voiced apprehensions, it is clear from interviews and blog analysis that participants put a great deal of effort into ensuring that their blogs look good and are inviting places for people to visit. As with anyone's home, if the blog is to continue feeling comfortable and inviting, it must be well maintained. This requires housekeeping and the next section details the housekeeping entailed in maintaining a blog that remains inviting and appealing.

HOUSEKEEPING

Housekeeping, the title of this section, is also the title of a post published by Shaindl in 2007, where she advised her readers of having made some changes to her blog. As recognised by bloggers, there is a great deal of housekeeping involved in maintaining a blog, not necessarily to be done weekly, but nonetheless a regular requirement if one is to author a blog[32]. The majority of bloggers care about and are satisfied with the appearance of their blogs (with the exception of Simone) and they want readers to find it in order and comfortable. Actually, the tidiness of blogs as a publishing tool has made it even more attractive to some like Julie (above) and Kieva:

---

[32] As defined by Wall (2005), one of the blog's main characteristics are that they are frequently updated. Other researchers, such as Henning (2003) as well as Li and Walejko (2008) consider a blog to be abandoned if it was not updated in more than two months.

> And, I realised that the computer, as a medium, really interests me. Because I… I really write badly… my handwriting, it's horrendous. I write badly, I have a hard time reading my own writing [laughter]. You know. And… finally, it works well. It's clean, it's already clean [laughter] on the page, I can erase, you know… everything goes well. So it really satisfies me. (Kieva 2009)

Once the initial creation of the blog is completed, it requires less time to maintain, but as with any space where guests are invited to visit and enjoy, time is needed in keeping it up-to-date and fresh looking. To do so takes time:

> It's not always as regular, because things change… but that's life! It's because it's time consuming: it takes time (Sarah 2009)

Similar to housekeeping, a task in constant need of repetition, maintaining a blog involves many tasks that must be performed if one is to have readers linger or return to enjoy. This differentiates the blog from the more static homepage, the blog format being more social and interactive. Publishing regular new entries is perhaps the most obvious of these tasks, as discussed in the next section. Later discussions focus on tasks such as the need to update the blogroll and remove hyperlinks that are no longer relevant, and to eliminate spam and undesirable comments, and for some, to even update the look of their entire blogs.

PUBLISHING NEW BLOG ENTRIES

Most participants are aware that if they wish to attract and retain readers to their blogs, they must update them regularly, as Ani explained to a friend of hers who wanted to create a blog and attract readers:

> […] it's quite a commitment to write every second day, or to write regularly. […] I said: if you really want your blog to be alive, you must write regularly. And… other things, too, but mainly that. For me, it's simple. That's the basic recipe, you know? (Ani 2009)

By linking her blogging practice to the idea of a 'basic recipe', Ani perhaps alludes to cooking as a daily practice that homemakers use to help keep others satisfied. Although participants recognise that the reality of everyday life makes it hard – if not impossible – to always be faithful to writing and publishing new entries, some develop strategies to ensure that their blogs are regularly updated, despite not having enough time to write. For Ani, this was a choice between postponing the update of her blog for another day, and posting photos instead of a well-developed text:

> […] when I don't have much time… I'd rather not blog, wait until the next day, than just… post a annoyance that says 'I don't have time, today, to blog', you know? I mean: what's the point?

> Do I have shorter posts? Yes, but I found a trick. Often, what I will do, in those days, is I will post a photo. That's when I will use a photo. And… I think it's more… it's nicer than just saying 'sorry, don't have time, will be back eventually'. (Ani 2009)

A few other participants described how, before busy periods, they would write a few entries at once and delay their publication, scheduling them to appear in accordance with their normal updating schedules, in order to give their readers the impression that their blogs were being updated, even though they had no time to dedicate to writing new entries. In so doing, they hoped that readers would not get the sense that the author had less time for the blog – or for them as an audience. This type of scheduling of entries is also used to avoid publishing too many posts at once, in order not to overwhelm their readers, as explained by Elsa and Lucie, respectively:

> Sometimes, I have two or three ideas in advance, you see. Then, I will write… for the future, sort of. Yes. So then, I know that at least for the next three days, I will have entries, let's say. […] But eh… like, now, I knew I'd be very busy with the exam period, let's say. So, well, eh… I will… I will write them. They are ready, they look good, it' okay, I added the photos. I will send them… and at least I know they'll be published… at the right time. (Elsa 2009)

> […] For example, I have three posts at once, really well written, with great photos… But I can't publish them all at the same time, I… really, it's too much for them. So, I publish one… and set the others for two, or three days later. That way, they're slowly released… [laughter]. It's the advantage of computers! [laughter]. (Lucie 2009)

Ensuring that their blogs regularly provide visitors with new content in the form of new published entries is one way participants try to attract a regular readership through making return visits more relevant. In keeping with the home-cooking analogy invoked above, it seems that bloggers Elsa and Lucie use the time-tested technique that homemakers use to keep family, friends and surprise guests well fed. When time permits, they cook large quantities of food and freeze it so that when they are too busy to cook they can still serve up a good meal. Writing many blog entries and storing them, sounds a lot like storing food in the freezer to make sure you have a blog meal to serve when time does not permit writing. This keeps guests satisfied and more likely to return to the blog.

Keeping blogroll links up-to-date, so that they are functioning well, is another housekeeping task that makes it more likely that visitors will return.

CLEANING UP: THE BLOGROLL

Most participants provide their readers with a list of their favourite blogs and websites, as a way of associating themselves with online content that they themselves appreciate (discussed in more detail in the next chapter). As content on the internet may be ephemeral, with many bloggers starting and stopping blogs and sometimes deleting all their entries, or restricting them only to invited readers (Henning 2003[33] and Li and Walejko 2008), often blogs referenced on one's blogroll become inaccessible. Although it is rare for bloggers to verify regularly the links they provide, most will remove links if they notice they do not work anymore, thus ensuring that the blog's navigability is not compromised. One participant had an interesting way of indicating that a link was broken, by leaving it in her blogroll, but crossing out the name of the blog that no longer existed, as shown on the image below:

Figure 3: Broken Link on One Participant's Blogroll

It appears, however, that most participants do not regularly update their blogrolls, since of the 524 websites provided, a total of 89 broken or private[34] links remained on the blogrolls of participants in the research. For Dominique, Éloïse and Sarah who discussed updating of blogrolls, keeping track of blogs which are deleted, abandoned or made private is time-consuming and not something that frequently crosses their minds. Just as spring cleaning implies a more meticulous cleaning of one's home – taking more time and consequently being done less frequently – updating the blogroll, albeit seen as important, is not foremost on participants' minds every time they post an entry:

> Well… actually, it's two people who don't write regularly. But they are friends. Personal friends, you see. So, yes, I visit them, occasionally… but I didn't leave their URLs on my blog because… well that's it: they don't write regularly. That's why I took their URLs off. (Dominique 2008)

> Is Mère indigne [Unworthy Mother] there? I took her off when she abandoned her blog… I don't know, I can't remember if it's there or not [since she returned to blogging]. It must be there. I

---

[33] Henning's paper was based on a Perseus Development Corporation research and underlined that 'The most dramatic finding was that 66.0% of surveyed blogs had not been updated in two months, representing 2.72 million blogs that have been either permanently or temporarily abandoned. Apparently the blog-hosting services have made it so easy to create a blog that many tire-kickers feel no commitment to continuing the blog they initiate.' (2003: 3)

[34] It should be noted that a blogger might have access to the blog for which a password is required, and does not therefore have a problem with leaving the blog on her blogroll to indicate that she knows and reads that specific blogger, even though it is not a valid invitation for her readers to visit it.

> don't know – I don't really update my blogroll often, really. There are some blogs that don't even exist, anymore, I think, and they are still on my… [laughter]. (Éloïse 2008)

> In my [blogroll], it will be… it will be family, although they don't update very often. My friends who post… Normally… but I don't update it very, very often, so… there are some… who changed blog host and I didn't update them. And there is, also, some bloggers who I met via our respective blogs. (Sarah 2009)

> Sometimes, there are some who change their URLs, or I don't read them anymore… But they are still there. Oh well. It takes too much time. It really is when… when I am bored that [I update the blogroll]… But I am not bored, lately… I am not bored. (Lucie 2009)

Others, such as Bonnie (who titled her 15th September 2007 entry 'New links'), Sarah, Blanche and Denise sometimes leave a short note on their blogs, indicating to readers that blogs have been added or changed in their blogrolls, in the same way perhaps as one would point out to guests new curtains, drapes or colours on the walls:

> […] But nonetheless, I still took a few minutes to update my blogroll. I added my mother's knitting blog, as well as the blogs that I visit everyday but hadn't added to the list. So, if you're looking to read some blogs while I look for a little spare time to sit in front of the computer, well go and read these! (Sarah 27th August 2008)

> A new update in my blogroll: a few blogs to which I became a dedicated reader. I haven't commented on them much, yet, I remain a quiet reader who gets in on the tip of her toes and leaves the same way. I hope you will enjoy them as well… (Blanche, 21st May 2008)

> Six months later in the Maritimes[35]
> I just realised that I did not update the URL leading to the 'Trash Indigne' [Unworthy Trash], authored by the 'Mère Indigne' [Unworthy Mother] herself…
> My God, […], you could've told me! It feels like I've had parsley stuck in my teeth for the past six months! (Denise[36] 1st October 2008)

Furthermore, some bloggers pointed to other reasons for cleaning up their blogrolls – sometimes because they lost interest in a blog they once enjoyed or they are in conflict with bloggers and no longer wish to be associated with them or to promote their blogs.

---

[35] "…In the Maritimes" is an expression people add after a period of time (Six months later, four hours later, etc.), referring to the Maritimes provinces of Canada (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland) and the difference in local time (the Maritimes provinces and Québec being in two different time zones). The expression implies that everyone except the one using it was long aware of a certain phenomenon or reality.
[36] This quote is from Denise's blog; from an entry published when she added a blogroll to her blog. She did not have a blogroll at the time of her interview.

Removing these links and contacts serves the same purpose for bloggers as 'taking out the trash' does for a homemaker:

> I have cleaned up my blogroll. In fact, I think I am in a global cleaning up phase.
> In sum, I deleted the URLs leading to closed-down blogs and also leading to the blog of a self-centred and racist misogynist. Aren't these big words! But it's the truth. Whatever does not come from his own head, whatever does not suit his views of the world, is shit. And if by any chance we dare telling him, we automatically become anathema. (Bonnie, 29th September 2006)

> […] Which I try to update as much as possible, you know. When I stop reading a blog, well I stop advertising it [laughter], normally. And… well that's it, it means that this list, well it has changed quite a lot, you see, it changed. But now, it's been quite stable, for a little while. (Anabel 2009)

> Well, then, before I changed it, lately, there was… About ten. Now, I updated it: there's about three, four left. And the reason why I updated it was because some people gave up their blogs, or, you know, it had been a year or so that I had… stopped [reading them]. (Kieva 2009)

Providing potential readers with an up-to-date list of recommended readings is important to most participants in this research. They want to provide guests with up-to-date, functioning URLs but the demands of everyday life make it a challenge to do so. Bloggers give a signal to readers when they do make changes to the blogroll since such changes are more subtle than altering the colour or header of the blog. The changes are made frequently, as most bloggers are very keen to keep their blogs as current as possible.

Bloggers actually view updating blog rolls as necessary housekeeping, a task that is never completed and must be done over and over and over again. As blogs focus on the fluid process of personal life, blog updates have to keep pace with the living story as it unfolds.

Apart from keeping up with personal life changes, other bloggers update the look of their blogs to reflect temporal changes in their lives. Elsa, for example, often changes the header of her blog to reflect the changes of seasons. Another approach, chosen by blogger Dominique, is to update a header with recent photos of her children as they grow and change. Some bloggers just get tired of how their blogs look and spend time on changing them, as illustrated by the following excerpt from Bonnie's blog, linking the new design of her blog to home decoration:

> Thank you […] for your excellent guidance! Because of you, I have managed to redo the decoration!! It really pleases me and, at the same time, it adds to my concept of pearls and gemstones, sort of as if my URLs (your blogs) were kept in a treasure chest, at the bottom of the sea! From now on, when it will rain, here the sun will still shine, so there!! (Bonnie, 24th May 2006)

Bloggers also follow new trends on the blogosphere in order to keep their blogs in vogue, even though some may try to resist following the fashion parade, as demonstrated by the following interview excerpt:

> And I noticed that there are… fashions, on blogs. Well, some… I find… There are some blog expressions… Some girls who have… like 3,000 visitors per day… well, mostly French women, here, I am not sure… And… I find that… when I read these girls and after, I visit other less known blogs and you see they are trying to use the same expressions, but really, it's not… it's not… It's not that other girl's style. […] Whereas, myself, I never tried to imitate… (Lucie 2009)

For participants Éloïse, Lynne and Kieva, the very act of authoring a blog was perceived as quite fashionable in itself, trendy, something they heard a lot of buzz about and, for Kieva, it resembled the craze for '*chick lit*'. Although they may not all choose to follow the popular trends on the blogosphere, or admit to doing so, reading other blogs may nonetheless influence their uses of expressions, writing styles or choices of topics.

Even though the blog requires decorating, personalising, maintenance, clean-up and up-dating – tasks all akin to housekeeping which may feel familiar and also are characteristic of social media (Page 2012: 8)[37] – in the end this work appears to be worth the effort to achieve the prize: *A room of one's own*. It appears that the feeling of having an exclusive space to write about one's life, having control over what to tell, how to say it and the setting where it is told, is important to the bloggers in this study. The ability to take the private story to a public space and still maintain some control over it offers the woman blogger a feeling of empowerment. Perhaps this helps explain a woman writer's need for a room of her own, a space, even on a public platform, that she can control while she shares her story in her own words.

---

[37] Specifically, Ruth E. Page describes social media as 'collaborative, dialogic, emergent, personalized, and context-rich environments' (2012: 8).

A WOMAN'S BLOG AS A ROOM OF HER OWN

Many interviews revealed that participants perceived their blogs to be exclusively their domains, not to be invaded by unwanted visitors or comments – truly rooms of their own. Although most participants recognise that they are not totally in charge, since they could lose the content if, for instance, the blog host closed down or there was faulty backup of entries, as happened to Blanche's first blog, they still talk about the blog as if it is theirs and theirs alone. This belief is embedded in explicit statements, such as: 'But it's always for me, yes, it's quite centred on myself. It's my blog.' (Sarah 2009) or 'It's mine' (Anabel 2009).

Bloggers can assert ownership by placing limits on readers' access to their blogs through password protecting. They can also limit visitors' comments. These limits vary from blogger to blogger. Although all participants enabled the comment section on their blogs – either for all or for most of their posts – they still acknowledged that some comments were less welcome than others, as explained by bloggers Elizabeth and Simone:

> And those… who dare criticise… commenting "listen, you, it's boring – we don't care about what you're saying"… Well, they are not welcome. […] We live in a society in which… we don't accept criticism. It hurts. It annoys. So, blogs, they're the same. That's it, also. Having said that, if I received a bad critique, it would hurt me. I… I am human. (Elizabeth 2008)

> But, you know, at the same time. I don't… I'm not sure I am ready to… get comments… you know, I find negative feedback or… it really gets to me, and I know that when you… when you blog very often, and you are [well-read]… You're used to it… Like the Mère cornue[38] [Horned mother], for example… she also got messages that said 'oh, come on', and… So I… I… I'd like to have more readers, but I'm not ready to accept the other side of the coin, that… that you may be read by people who… don't share your views. (Simone 2009)

The desire for exercising control over both entries and the comments comes to light when exploring two main attitudes. On the one hand, the participants expressed a desire to self-select topics and formats for their blogs to avoid feeling that external editors were shaping their writings. On the other hand, many expressed a desire to please their readers, but within limits. Overall there was a feeling that if those who visit their blogs were not happy with what was said or how they looked, they could just

---

[38] The *Mère cornue* wrote a post on her blog on the day that she lost her youngest son (at that time), Benjamin. This post received 436 comments (most of them within a week of publishing this message) and was mentioned by some of the participants to this research, as a reaction they did or did not understand. (http://mafamilia.wordpress.com/2009/02/04/mon-petit-benjamin-est-decede/).

leave and not come back or get out and come back later. The bloggers felt no obligation to respond to their readers' desires.

Furthermore, in addressing absolute freedom of expression, participants were clear that they would not use posts on their blogs to get even with someone who offended them. They did not want to insult guests on their blogs anymore than guests who visit their homes. However, even here they still maintained that they would not limit their own freedom of expression to avoid insulting someone.

"IT'S MY BLOG". OR WHY THE BLOGGER SHOULD MAKE ALL THE DECISIONS

We have seen here how most participants feel about control over what their blogs say and how they look. Herein lays a dilemma. Many participants do not have full ownership of the blogs they author because they use blogging websites such as *Blogspot*, *Canalblog*, *MaBulle* and *Wordpress*. Ignoring this fact, they talk as if they have exclusive entitlement to all decisions about content:

> […] you know, it's sort of my blog, therefore I decide what I talk about. On the theme I will speak of… and those who read my blog, well, if they want to comment, add stuff, they can, of course, add comments and all. (Mireille 2008)

> You know. I… [pause] I have complete freedom, it's my blog. (Mireille 2008)

> […] it's my blog. You wouldn't appreciate if someone told you what to write in your diary. Well, it's exactly the same. (Virginie 2008)

> It's like… a notebook, possibly. I can only say it that way. A notebook, you know, you write what you want in it. (Bonnie 2008)

Feeling ownership without having unrestricted freedom may be a little closer to having a freehold home on someone else's property. There are boundaries to be observed. Interviewees clearly know this but chose to overlook it until confronted with direct questions. Perhaps they remain in denial regarding ownership because they so crave having freedom to speak and be taken seriously. Often they speak out on their blogs when they cannot speak out in a group discussion. Éloïse, for instance, views her blog as a space where she may express her ideas on motherhood, even though such views might not be welcome on a forum discussing maternity-related issues:

> […] in the end, on my blog, I mostly talk about things that… I talk about things I wouldn't talk about on that forum, because I knew that people… I felt their judgements, via their writings, if

you want. […] Well, I… I still censor myself a little, yes. (Éloïse 2008)

A blog, looked at from this perspective, is more like a 'home', a space where bloggers' views are tolerated by invited guests more readily than in the public square. It is harder in a home to criticise the host's ideas. But apart from facing pressures from peers who may not share their views, bloggers are also facing pressures to conform to sponsors' leanings or to visitors' views. Participants, for the most part, knew that all these pressures were causing them to exercise caution in choosing topics and approaching subjects, as referenced in Éloïse's quote, ('Well, I… I still censor myself a little, yes').

This tension between freedom and self-censorship also emerged while looking into sponsorships of blogs. When asked about the possibility of some of their posts being sponsored by advertisers, most perceived this as a definite limit to freedom of expression and saw it as being somewhat deceptive to readers. For blogger Ani, it was important that she would not feel compelled to write anything on her blog, whereas for Michèle, sponsored blogs were perceived as limiting her freedom, as she explains:

> However, when you are paid for it, it becomes an obligation: it's less fun. And there're expectations, and… you're obligated to write in a certain way, and to talk about defined topics… (Michèle 2009)

Julie addressed the phenomenon of sponsored posts very early in her blogging career,[39] when she stated outright that she felt sponsorship diminished authenticity of the blog and presented a lie to readers. This comment attracted a lot of visitors and she believes accounts for the early visibility of her blog. Here is what she wrote when she discovered bloggers publishing stories in which they mentioned a specific vacuum cleaner:

> This type of hypocritical publicity, which is not even up-front on those blogs, really disappointed me. For me, that's straightforward prostitution. Instead of just posting a banner, or whatever else one might do to include advertisement on a webpage to make a few coins, we chose to invent uninteresting stories, aiming to make some advertisement for some random company. (Julie, 22nd November 2007)

The responses to Julie's post were rapid and angry. Bloggers maintained that they should be allowed to do as they please. If they chose to author sponsored blogs, why should they be stopped? In a number of caustic comments, bloggers asserted that they should be allowed to write on whatever pleases them regardless of whether or not an entry is a disguised advertisement.

---

[39] When the quotes are taken from the participant's blog, the date of the published entry is included; when a participant's name is only followed by 2008 or 2009, it means the passage was taken from the interview.

Julie's comment on commodification of the blog, or the home, along with those of Michèle and Ani, are linked to discussions of the moral economy, also known as the gift economy, which is closely associated with the domestic sphere (Helle-Valle and Slettemeas 2008: 50; Näre 2011: 399). A moral economy, according to Helle-Valle and Slettemeas, is embedded in culturally agreed upon notions of the home and thus, distinct from market economy:

> […] it is a moral economy because culturally formed notions about what a home should be make the household economy operate in ways that are significantly different from the market economy. (Helle-Valle and Slettemeas 2008: 53)

Blogging represents to participants transactions based on gift exchanges as seen in Ghislaine's comment, during her interview, who spoke of sending pyjamas to the children of a blogger whom she had never met, and to Denise's reference to the many bloggers who offered their help when she faced a problem with her blog. As such, the moral economy's role of maintaining relationships (Näre 2011: 399) is seen by participants as more appropriate for blogging than is the market economy with its advertising for businesses and market interests. Combining the two economies, particularly without being transparent, can be as abhorrent as using one's home for commercial purposes, without warning guests of the wish to sell them something.

Regarding the role of outside criticism of their blogs, participants tend to dismiss most of the criticism they receive from their readers, ranging from comments about the design of the blog to opinions expressed and personal preferences discussed in the entries. They particularly ignore criticism of the banner or colour choices and choice of topics. For example, Elsa who decided to change the banner of her blog to include one with a snowperson, as it was wintertime, dismissed the negative comments she then received:

> But I know there's a header on top, with a snowperson, and… there's a carrot that got a lot of people talking, mainly in the comments… They think it's ugly: there's one who said 'it's really ugly, that red thing, that you added' [laughter]. But that's a man who spends all his time making unpleasant comments. (Elsa 2009)

Participants find it hard to break free from the scrutiny of others – even online – to leave behind traditional gatekeeping that keep women in line. Thinking about her mother who might come across her texts, blogger Éloïse felt that her posts might not always please her mother, but she felt that regardless of this, she should write what she wants, as the blog constituted her own space:

> In the end… that's it: I think about it before I start writing a post, but I… Writing… I wouldn't really write depending on that, but I may say to myself 'my mother will probably talk to me about it… if I write that', or be more careful with how I will write my things… But… Really, I said to myself: if she's not happy, she shouldn't read it. It's my blog, I have the right to do what I want. (Éloïse 2008)

Despite approaching her blog as a space on which she should write what she wants, Eloïse actually does temper her thoughts, aware that her mother could be offended by some of her writing. This view was shared by blogger Lucie, who felt even more challenged by the fact that her mother would visit her blog and comment on her posts, from time to time:

> Now, it's fine, but before, I got tired that my mother came on my sewing blog. It drove me nuts! [laughter] […] Because… it's a blog where... well, we want to feel… well. When we have a mum, it's always… not diminishing, but… we want to feel like a grown up, you know! And then, you have mum who comes and says 'well I did it this way… and if you did that…' yes. [laughter] I do what I want! (Lucie 2009)

Even strangers invite themselves onto a blog, share their thoughts and give advice to the blogger. Although some bloggers, like Simone, think of this as a positive outcome of blogging, others, like Lucie, despise it. Lucie shares her thoughts because she wants to talk to others, and not necessarily because she is looking for advice:

> Also, the 'I know everything' ladies, they get on my nerves [laughter]. Yes, yes, those who… who know better than us. It's possible that they do, really… but in terms of education, I doubt it: they are girls with no children, but… They need to comment, you know. If we write, it's because we want to feel… to free ourselves, a little. We want to say to someone. And… not necessarily… not always to those people [laughter]. (Lucie 2009)

Reactions like Lucie's appear to indicate that bloggers see their blogs as a place where they are free to air their thoughts, where they should enjoy freedom of speech, the liberty to express themselves, as reinforced by both bloggers Éloïse and Simone:

> I don't think I will make much difference in people's lives, but I can still give my point of view, and make a little space for myself… (Éloïse 2008)

> You know, it's a relief. It's refreshing, and... I think it's nice to… to say things that [we're not told]… and that we're not [meant to say, in a way]… (Simone 2009)

Interviewees believe their visitors' points of view should not limit what they write. This extends to commercial interests as well. They freely criticised the intrusion of advertisement on their blogs via free blogging platforms, although they would not be

willing to pay for blog space to prevent such interference. As Lucie said, this is a phenomenon that mushroomed over the past years:

> With the blog, it's nice. We… we don't do everything. We write our stuff, we change the look and that's it… But there's a lot of advertising, now. Before, there wasn't any… Under each post, really. Eh… when we want to see the comments, between the actual post and its comments, there are three ads. Three… before, there were none! (Lucie 2009)

Just because authors believe that a woman's blog is a room of her own, and that they want to control all aspects of it, does not imply that the authors necessarily want to impose their thoughts on others. They do want to be read, but they put their ideas out and adopt the view that if the visitors are not happy with what they see or read, they are more than welcome to move along to someone else's blog. This view is discussed in the following section.

DEAR READERS

Many strategies used by bloggers illustrate their desire to be read. By acknowledging readers and their comments, participants welcome and encourage internet users to visit regularly. This section discusses the various methods bloggers use to ensure that others feel welcome to visit and, in a majority of cases[40], to comment on their published posts.

Bloggers have developed a number of interactive techniques to engage others. This engagement makes readers feel welcome, increasing the probability that they become regular guests on the blog. At times, participants may even involve their readers in the construction of the narrative, by asking them for topics to write on, giving them unlimited access to the comment section, or asking for suggestions:

> So I wrote it, I wrote… 'tell me what you'd like me to write about'. You know, me, in life, I really can talk about anything. But perhaps there's someone who'd like to know more… on one aspect of my life… (Dominique 2008)

> Once, I did this activity… well, it's because I thought I didn't get any comment for quite a while [pause] and I started to [laughter]… […] the activity consisted in… people had to leave, in the comments section, three words. And, I, I had to include those words in a story I was to write [on my blog]. […] But there were posts when I didn't receive any word and, hence, I had to continue the story, anyway. And, at some point… I just went back… to my authentic voice. (Ani 2009)

---

[40] Participant Lucie was the exception, as she explained during her interview how she turned down 'unknown' visitors from leaving comments on her blog, by either emailing them directly, saying that their contributions are not welcomed, or by simply deleting the comments from her blog

> And I did, also, and that, I think I'm the first blogger to have done so… […] it's like 'listen, I have absolutely no inspiration for this post, so… I will…' I used to call the Opens Posts. 'Open Post: listen, I am opening the comments section for you, so you can talk about whatever it is that you want' (Bonnie 2008)

Bloggers often address their readers directly by giving notice of an upcoming absence from the blog because of a busy schedule, a planned holiday, childbirth, or moving, or by asking for forgiveness when they did not update their blogs because of illness, lack of inspiration or motivation, etc. The following excerpts from participants' blogs illustrate this practice. These deal with lack of inspiration, no interesting events to discuss, or when their everyday lives become *too monotonous*:

> I know, I know, I am neglecting you [readers]. On my defence, let me tell you that my life is boring. Boring, boring, boring, boring, boooooooring! It's hell. (Cynthia 30th October 2006)

> [after spending 22 days without posting anything on her blog] … I really should tell you a story before the month ends! [sigh] Tomorrow morning. Maybe. (Elizabeth 24th October 2008)

Other bloggers are a little more comfortable with taking time away from updating when their everyday offline lives intrude on their blogging. But the following quotes illustrate how some bloggers are uncomfortable discussing their everyday lives online when they are going through harsh, crude, unpleasant events, or when they feel fragile, sad or vulnerable after experiencing difficult times:

> It's been almost a month since I last wrote a post! However, it's not as if nothing has happened to me! I don't know where to start: there's too much to tell. I probably should talk about what affects me the most at this time: my break up. (Mireille 8th November 2008)

> The word that best describes my weekend is: shit. Which explains why I did not post a new entry. I really want to write about aspects of my life, but not to make anybody cry… I'll be back when I'll feel better (as in, very soon, I promise!). (Bonnie 20th February 2006)

> I have this unbearable desire to write to you, but I still have the impression that I am walking on eggshells. What can I say and what must I not say? What do I want and what would I rather avoid? Should I discuss why I smashed out of the blogosphere and what followed, or not? (Julie 21st July 2009)

> I have died. It has been a week. A small and quiet death, without drums and tubas, nor a half-mast flag. But, fortunately, people survive small deaths. Hence, here I am, pale looking, absentminded, but alive, at least.

> I really needed to be alone. To tell the truth, I have been extremely lonely for the past month or so, but then, I now needed a less suffocating loneliness, closer to reality. I wanted to be alone without being reminded every minute by all these busy people next to me, all these things looking at me, judging me, denigrating my inactivity. Being alone, without any reminder. (Anabel 14th July 2007)

Sometimes authors do not update blogs because of the demands of home life, when time is limited, as discussed in the following:

> [...] Let's just say that for the past 3 months, time spent in front of the computer was mostly at work, during the day. During the evenings, I didn't feel at all like sitting in front of a keyboard. We also had quite a busy autumn, which didn't help with free time in the evening. And, one must not lie to oneself, the one who has priority over the computer, at home, is my man. Also, most of my free time this autumn was dedicated to making our Christmas cards. Taking all of this into account, it wasn't easy finding time to be in front of the screen. (Lynne 4th January 2009)

> I know, I know, I didn't write much lately… It's just that 'real life' has expressed some demands over the past few weeks. As in 'essential queries demanding your full attention'. Life, love, death, life. (Denise 27th March 2009)

> Still alive… I just don't feel like writing here… I take advantage of the little free time I have to myself to read, sleep, cycle, and write for myself only… I opened another blog, elsewhere and private, it requires time that I can't invest here! (Michèle 12th August 2008)

> [Writing about an upcoming important family gathering] So, if I do not write, or only write a little, lately, it's because my energy is mostly directed towards the organisation of this great party. Imagine! (Ghislaine 18th May 2007)

Like Ghislaine's rendition of the party she is organising, other positive events like travel and holidays can swamp a blogger. Although most participants warn their readers about upcoming absences, some explain the lack of blog updates after the fact:

> [...] I am leaving Friday for Austria, to receive an intense training in order to become a yoga instructor. [...] I will be back mid-January. In the meantime, I hope you will be well and do not forget to go play outside! (Dominique 13th December 2006)

> I know, dear captive audience, that the possibility of me abandoning you for a little while breaks your heart but, it must be said, I, too, have a right to some holidays. I am flying tomorrow night for the only destination worthy of myself: Paris, of course. [...] To sum up, as internet cafés are suspicious places that I intend on avoiding, I do not know when my next out-of-this-world meeting with a computer may occur, meaning

> that posts on this blog will be very seldom for the next month. (Kieva 26th July 2007)

> It's been a while since I last wrote. At least four months. I lost the touch. It flew away! Eh… I don't feel like it! Is it gone forever? I might have lost it in some box. In some cardboard box full of clothes, which I safely secured with tape, a little over four month ago, just before I left to explore the Canadian West coast and the American West coast. (Ariane 28th August 2008)

> I know, it has already been one week since I came back from Crete and I haven't posted anything… It's not that I have forgotten you, but only that I am so focussed on studying […] that I forget about everything else… or just about! So, promised, starting from today, I prepare articles so I can publish them as we go along… By the way, how were things when I wasn't around? It wasn't too hot??? (Virginie 31st July 2006)

Finally, other life events such as childbirth and relocating have kept participants away from their blogs:

> I am sorry I haven't written earlier, but considering the circumstances [giving birth to her daughter on the 15th of January], I believe you will find a way to forgive me a little! (Sarah, 21st January 2008)

> Our dearest treasure […] was born a week ago! […] I am really sorry it took me so long to write to you. As the delivery was rather difficult, by C-section, we had to stay in the hospital for four days; hence we have only been home for three days. (Simone 5th May 2008)

> Short break from the blog… [My partner] is at home, on holidays ☺ Also, my father-in-law and mother-in-law are here, following the baptism! I will have quite a post to write about this event! (Good things happen to those who wait ☺). 'Later! (Catherine 8th August 2006)

> I am finally home, connected since this morning. For the time being, we are drowning under boxes, tired, but happy! (Éloïse 26th June 2007)

Other bloggers, as exemplified by Anabel and Julie, rarely address their readers in their posts, but generally participants do directly speak to readers. Although comments are welcome, bloggers insist they will not change focus, tone or content, to meet readers' criticisms just to retain their readership. Participants actually express significant resistance to receiving criticism from their readers as the next sections points out.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO STAY IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT HERE

Bloggers in this research generally identified two types of audiences who offer support or criticism: the first is made up of people they know in their offline lives and the second is made up of strangers online. When it comes to the first group, most participants characterise their family and friends as knowing about their blogs and being supportive and helpful. However, a smaller but significant number report having been criticised by a current or previous partner, or by a friend or by a family member. Many respondents felt their partners 'didn't get it', characterising them as not supportive and sometimes even as being judgemental towards their blogging practices, as illustrated by the following statements:

> And… you know… I didn't feel like… And he didn't get it, what I said before, and the possibility to write and publish right away. Thank you, good night. […] It can be part of the blame, too… he always thought I blogged too much. We would argue, too, for the computer. I took too much time. But, you know, I am intense. When I start something, it's like… (Elizabeth 2008)

> […] because the last one, my last relationship, I felt guilty about writing, because my boyfriend didn't like it. It was… it took three months into our relationship before he learned that I had a blog. And then, he read it and didn't really like what I wrote. I was blamed for that and… There was some blame and it did put a strain on our relationship for a while. But it was mostly the fact that he made fun of me for blogging. Like there was a very… there was a very… it was insulting. (Shaindl 2008)

> Well, it's also… for example, my boyfriend, he's really uncomfortable with it. He… for him, it's exhibiting your life in public, and… Well, he talks about voyeurism, a little. And… I don't want to make him feel uncomfortable. (Virginie 2008)

> At some point, Internet is quite big and… well, also, my partner, well… he has a position with the university and… knowing that his wife blogs, it may… 'frankly my dear'. And, also, 'let's go see if Doctor this… what did he do last weekend, you know, so we can mock him'. You know? (Catherine 2008)

> Or my boyfriend who's like 'now, you're not going to spend the whole evening on the computer, are you? Yadeyadeya. We need to wash the dishes…' That's it. (Sarah 2009)

> [my boyfriend's] opinion, his own, real personal, is… 'you're wasting your time doing that.' 'Write and be paid for it' [laughter] My boyfriend is a journalist, so [laughter], it makes him mad that I… he considers that I am wasting my time. (Michèle 2009)

In describing the reactions of their partners, participants underline two major sources of criticism. First, participants such as Elizabeth, Sarah and Michèle were criticised for investing time in blogging – perhaps for not dedicating enough time to their partners, somehow depriving them, or for not making their blogging practice into a more lucrative venture by writing professionally instead of *just* blogging for pleasure. Such criticism points towards the assumed binary between home and work, or perhaps the type of work that is accepted within the home: taking care of others and of the home itself. The partners of these respondents do not welcome blogging as an activity within their home, unless perhaps it is financially lucrative. Second, comments by participants Shaindl, Catherine and Virginie point to a need within themselves to manage the feelings of others, to be responsible for those close to them and to always consider any impact of the blogs on the reputations of their loved ones. This is a heavy burden to carry when speaking in public about one's private life. However, despite these criticisms and the guilt elicited by them, participants have the strength to persist in keeping up-to-date blogs. Although some validate their partners' criticisms, *understanding* their reasoning and blaming themselves for causing such reaction, they still have managed to put these feelings aside and maintain their blogs. Clearly they are putting priority on their overwhelming desire to blog. This may attest to the degree of pleasure they derive from their blogs, as discussed in a later chapter.

Beyond partners, some bloggers have received comments from friends or family members, which caused them to reflect. For instance, Éloïse felt guilty when her mother told her one of her texts made her cry and she concluded that perhaps, she should avoid some topics. Although she rules out completely self-censoring on topics, she says she apologises to her mother if any of her posts make her cry. Lucie also expressed anger at her mum providing advice after reading her blog entries.

Criticism is also levied at participants from the blogging community – by other bloggers or simply visitors and readers, as detailed in the next chapter. Here, suffice to say that bloggers are criticised due to design, their opinions and their writing style, but they meet most of these criticisms with defiance. Bloggers maintain that their detractors are not obligated to read their entire blogs or any specific message. They can go to another blog altogether. However, participants tended to be more affected and apologetic when the negative feedback came from a reader they knew personally than when it came from a stranger. If they know the commentator they are more apt to apologise or acknowledge understanding their criticisms, even though they may still carry resentment towards the intervention. For instance, although blogger Éloïse would

apologise to her mother for making her cry in one of her posts, she stated in her interview 'if she's not happy, she shouldn't read it' (2009). She did, however, acknowledge that she takes more care in how she writes her messages, in light of her mother's feelings. Ani, who spoke about her brother-in-law telling her that she was sharing too much information on her blog, believes that there is nothing wrong with readers feeling uncomfortable when reading a blog any more than there is something wrong with feeling discomfort when reading a book:

> And… if it makes people uncomfortable, I mean… it's okay, you know? Go on, or wait until the next post, and stop reading for now, you know? It's like anything. Like a book from the library.
> (Ani 2009: 4)

The bloggers' reactions were a little more clear-cut when confronted with random readers who criticised their blogs. Michèle and Anabel would answer back and tell the concerned readers to leave if they were unhappy with what they read or with the appearance of the blog, asserting that the blog was theirs and theirs alone to do with as they please. For example, after dedicating some entries to her character's inner thoughts and emotions, Anabel (who writes fiction) chose to write poetry on her blog and received a negative comment. This was how she chose to reply to the 'unsatisfied' reader:

> I hear your comment, ô you, anonymous writer, but I have nothing else to reply than "oh well". […] I am in this stage in my life where I no longer wish to recount my life in a public arena. So, sorry, but I doubt the [Anabel], a little exhibitionist, whom who enjoyed reading, will be coming back any time soon… […]
> (Anabel, 27 June 2008)

Many participants were straightforward in their responses to people who were not happy with their blogs especially if the critics were strangers to them. They believe that if they do not like what is offered, they can simply go away. And they say so bluntly:

> it's my blog. If you're not happy, go away (Anabel 2009)

> You know, those who read me, mostly, I don't know them. So, in the end, if they're not happy, well… I don't care [laughter].
> (Éloïse 2008)

> I said to myself: if they're not happy, they can move on… In the end, one has to be coherent, you know! If… how to say [laughter]. (Lucie 2009)

In summary, bloggers here tend to safeguard their freedoms while authoring their blogs, although they are somewhat receptive to criticism if it comes from people they know in their offline lives. While they may still ignore criticism from offline acquaintances, especially if paying attention to it would mean having to stop blogging,

they do appear to try to understand the criticism and they often acknowledge it. But if criticism comes from readers they have not met, they are more inclined to dismiss it and recommend that the unsatisfied readers leave.

Blogs may effectively provide an outlet for self-expression for bloggers, free from the social pressures to please people that they may experience in their offline lives. Blogging may also represent finding an opening in their lives to take time for themselves (as discussed in chapter 7). According to Dale Spender, this opening may be very small, since not only do men control conversations in the real world, but they do so even more in cyberspace: 'Women have fewer rights to discourse in cyberspace, and the penalties for challenging male control could be even harsher than in real life' (Spender, 1995: 195); these findings have been reiterated by Kramer and Kramarae (2000), van Zoonen (2002) as well as Goulding and Spacey (2003). Although the women bloggers I met with may not be explicitly aware of such findings, their lived experiences both online and offline may have led them to adopt clear-cut attitudes towards exercising control over their blogs in order to preserve this space for freedom of self-expression. Commercial and profit-driven undertakings by blog hosts, as well as comments from readers and other bloggers threaten the absolute freedom they seek. Conflict arises between their beliefs in the right to have space for unfettered self-expression and the reality of having their blogs invaded by criticism, abuse and, as of late, unwanted advertising. This tension has led bloggers to somewhat modify behaviours in order not to alienate readers and even to concede some space for blog hosts to make profits so they continue to offer free hosting. Even though bloggers are looking for a completely free space to express themselves, they are very aware that this must involve making compromises with others.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I explored the analogy made by some participants between the home and the blog. First, by discussing how they created a homey feeling through the organising of their blogs, customising their interfaces, making them more personalised to better reflect their tastes and make them more welcoming. This was linked to adding a personal touch to one's living room – a room within the home where visitors are most often received and which, as with other living spaces, is seen as a reflection of the owner's tastes (Johnson and Lloyd 2004) – participants have made colour and templates choices that they felt reflected their personalities and tastes and which increase their credibility as bloggers and the perceived reliability of their blogs. Adding

photos and pictures as well and a variety of other visual cues all combine to truly reflect the bloggers in their online spaces.

Tasks required to maintain a blog include posting new entries regularly, updating the blogroll when links are obsolete, and freshening up the look of the blog. As a venture much like spring cleaning, housekeeping on the blog replicates cleaning of one's home, in that it demands time and attention and has to be done over and over and over in order to keep a fresh look that welcomes visitors. Participants seem motivated to put thought and effort into creating and sustaining an atmosphere for online visitors that is interesting, nourishing and comfortable. Ultimately they want their guests to leave satisfied, return often and recommend their fare to friends, implicitly recognising the social nature of the media they have chosen to express themselves.

While they want their blogs to be appealing to others, participants assert that the blog is their exclusive space to manage, a space where they retain control over invited guests. They attract visitors through a variety of interactive practices, often directly acknowledging the readers by addressing them in authored posts or through replying to their comments or explaining lengthy periods of not posting new entries. According to Page (2012), awareness of audience is a characteristic of blogging as bloggers place importance on their audiences:

> The blogger's awareness of his or her audience is evident throughout the writing, and shapes the blog posts in various ways. Many bloggers directly invite comments, encouraging members of the audience to make their identities known. (Page 2012: 54)

While they enjoy receiving guests and being read, some aspects of the blog world are less appreciated: They complain about ads that intrude, as mentioned earlier by Lucie, even though they realise that blog hosts aim to increase profits. They resent having to follow editorial guidelines imposed by a publisher or sponsor. They are also clear that they do not tolerate totally negative comments by readers. Bringing these unwelcome intrusions to light signals participant's desire for the empowerment that comes with owning and controlling their blogs. They want to exercise complete freedom of expression while at the same time they feel discomfort with the medium that they know will not permit them to have complete control. They know that blog hosts are in business for profit and that forces some compromises for the blogger. It also brings them a free of charge blogging platform.

There are also social pressures and safety concerns that provide restrictions on what private facts and artefacts can be posted in this public sphere. An increasing number of participants have protected their blogs with a password, which may reflect bloggers' desire to welcome only invited guests, just as in their offline home they would invite friends, colleagues or family members. Many participants may wish their blogs to conform to their ideals of a home, where they feel safe, comfortable and respected, but the home analogy may fail them. Arlie Russell Hochschild discussed this analogy in underlying how flight attendants are encouraged to perceive passengers as guests and the plane as a living room, mentionning:

> Despite the generous efforts of trainers and workers themselves to protect it, the living room analogy remains vulnerable on several sides. For one thing, trainees were urged to "think sales," not simply to act in such a way as to induce sales. […] The cabin-to-home analogy is vulnerable from another side too. The flight attendant is asked to see the passenger as a potential friend, or as like one, and to be as understanding as one would be with a good friend. […] The passenger has no obligation to return empathy or even courtesy. (Hochschild 2003 [1983] 108-110)

Later on, Hochschild discusses how the 'home is no longer a sanctuary from abuses of the profit motive'. I would add that the online home created by bloggers, the blog, may be intended as a place to escape the abuses of everyday life but it nonetheless remains a space where they may be subjected to abuse of all sorts and where they feel the need to manage the amount of information they disclose, and the feelings of others, (for example when Éloïse is cautious not to upset her mother who reads her blog, as discussed above). Perhaps for women, the reality of their online home may come close to that of their offline home. Neither home is a place exempt from possible abuse, as Star reminds her readers:

> We have known for a long time that home can either be a safe haven or the most dangerous place for a woman to be (statistically, it is the most likely place for a woman to meet a violent death). (Star 1999 [1996]: 569-570)

While less dramatic than Star's reminder, the following quote taken from Lucie's interview, illustrates her awareness that her blog does not represent a space free of possible risks and abuses:

> That's it, there are risks, I don't know… […] It's like at some point, I took them off, I think, but I had put photos of [my children], in the bath, naked. And those, I took them off. It's stupid, because I would show them to my family! But you never know, what people can do… I'm not suspicious, but… that's it. (Lucie 2009).

Lucie possibly would have photos of her children, naked, in her home – and may even display some in albums or on the walls. However, considering that people had unlimited access to her blog and she did not know if she could trust everybody visiting her blog, she removed the photos. Making home, and making a safe home, requires work and reflexivity on the part of bloggers.

In sum, two main sources of contradictions and tensions emerge from the approaches to blogging presented in this chapter. In relation to the environment of the blog, many bloggers engage in home making practices – customising or decorating the blog, adding photos, images and other personal memorabilia. They engage in housekeeping practices by publishing new blog entries, cleaning up the links on the blogroll and maintaining an up-to-date blog. They seize the blog as a room of their own and invite readers to come and enjoy themselves in it, at the same time refusing to cede too many concessions to readers. However, limitations to online home making arise: as a space publicly accessible online, bloggers are not in control of all aspects. Unless they make their blogs private, they cannot control who visits, what types of comments visitors make, or when spam is posted. Additionally, as most blogs are published via blog hosting websites, participants' blogs are often invaded by advertisements, breaking with an idealised perception of the home as a commercial-free space.

In interacting with readers another set of contradictions arise. Bloggers generally aim at being nice – both to themselves by engaging in a practice they appreciate (as further explained in chapter 7), and to others by making the blog a pleasant and welcoming place to visit. Again, however, their intentions are met with various limits, as their *ideals* of the home are confronted by the *realities* of the home – either online or offline – as spaces that are not sheltered from abuses. Being nice online, as in real life, does not guarantee that one will be met by equally nice people and be treated well by them.

Although participants may see their blogs as a space for themselves, where they are meant to be in charge, failure to take others and their feelings into account bears the risk of alienating audiences and, furthermore, being considered as less feminine (Hochschild 2003 [1983]: 166). Femininity is not only articulated through nesting, or building a home within the blog. As discussed in the next chapter, femininity for women bloggers is also a matter of looking good.

CHAPTER 5: ÊTRE OU PARAÎTRE[41]

INTRODUCTION

There are a variety of ways through which participants portray themselves online and, most often, they aim to cast themselves in the best possible light. Self-presentation, according to Goffman, 'is the intentional and tangible component of identity' (in Schau and Gilly 2003: 387), which is put forward by individuals according to who they perceive their audience is and what their idealised values may be. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman indeed suggests that 'when in the company of others, one has plenty of reasons for trying to control the impression others may have of the situation' (1973: 23 – my translation). Using a theatrical analogy, the sociologist further writes:

> Hence, when an actor is facing a public, his representation tends to incorporate and illustrate officially recognised social values; even more so, in fact, than he would normally do in everyday life. (Goffman 1973: 41 – my translation)

Looking into Goffman's insights on the presentation of self in everyday life, Chris Brickell summarises:

> Performances or presentations of self, then, involve one's management of self-impressions to other participants in the interaction. It is in one's interest to perform in such a way as to guarantee a favourable impression, for this will be assessed by others. (2005: 30)

Applying Goffman's theorisations to his study of personal homepages, Charles Cheung (2004) argues that the medium enables actors/internet users to work around the problems faced in everyday offline presentation of the self. More specifically, Cheung notes the following:

> To put it simply, the core problems of our self-presentation in everyday life are that we lack control over (1) what 'selves' we should display in a particular social setting and (2) how well we can present them. The personal homepage, however, can 'emancipate' us from these problems. (Cheung 2004: 56)

He continues by explaining how the personal homepage contributes to solving these two problems, in that the technology enables a more strategic presentation of the self since it 'is a self-defined 'stage' upon which we can decide what aspects of our selves we would like to present' (Cheung 2004: 56). Because of the time that can be invested

---

[41] *Être ou paraître* [Be or appear to be] refers to Sophie Bissonnette's (2010) short documentary, titled *Être ou paraître : Les jeunes face aux stéréotypes sexuels* [Be or appear to be : Youth facing sexual stereotypes (my translation)], as further detailed in the introduction of the thesis.

in building and updating a homepage, Cheung also suggests that, contrary to face-to-face interactions, the homepage 'allows the individual to give a more polished and elaborate presentation, with more control over 'impression management' (2004: 56). However, as mentioned in chapter 2, impression management on blogs is easier than in face-to-face communication. But homepages and blogs still face limitations in this regard, limitations that are not encountered on social networking sites (such as *Facebook*), where audiences may be circumscribed and identities performed accordingly. Bloggers, by and large, face an unknown and often heterogeneous audience thereby having a diminished ability to present themselves in ways that may be received positively or understood properly by all visitors to their blogs. As such, their presentation of self may seem more complicated on blogs than on social networking sites, as internet users on blogs and homepages do not know who reads them (Baym 2010, Marwick and boyd 2011). In relation to gender more specifically, Susanna Paasonen underlines how the internet has been approached as enabling the exploration of gendered identities, notably due to the perception of homepages as 'sites for identity construction and self-invention' (2002: 22). She writes:

> Since the early 1990s, discussions on gender and the Internet have had a strong focus on the possibilities of play and experimentation. The Net is said to enable gender blending and bending, the taking up of different identities, and the exploration of the limits of "the self." (Paasonen 2002: 21)

Despite recognising that Goffman's input into understanding the presentation of the self is useful when looking at online identity presentation, Paasonen cautions readers by writing that the sociologist's framework does not pay sufficient attention to 'power relations or desire' and, as such, is 'insufficient for discussing the norms, limits, and conventions of identity construction, for conceptualizing gender, power, and performativity, online or offline' (2002: 26). Cheung and Paasonen's findings, as well as Goffman's contributions, even given their limitations with regard to gender, may be extrapolated to blogging when considering the similarities between blogs and homepages invoked in the chapter entitled 'Situating Blogs: When Masculine Technologies and Women's Genres Meet'. Furthermore, according to Schau and Gilly (2003), having access to what is seen as an unlimited number of digital symbols in online environments may enable users to convey their ideal self or selves.

Aware of the potential plurality and heterogeneity of their imagined audiences, participants aim for the best and most favourable presentation of the self they can achieve, striving to control what elements of their identities they reveal and how they portray their online personalities. When control is not possible, participants either

invoke anonymity as a strategy, or avoid a topic altogether. In the posts they author, bloggers aim at presenting a 'self' in four major dimensions, which they consider desirable: educated, respectful, networked and amicable. These may be linked to the five strategies used in self-presentation described by Joseph R. Dominick (1999: 648, drawing on Jones (1990)): ingratiation, competence, intimidation, exemplification and supplication. More specifically, I call upon the notion of *competence*, linking it to Bourdieu's notions of *cultural capital* (1986) and discussed in the following section, as well as to *social capital* and discussed in the Self as Respectful and Networked Self sections. I also make use of *ingratiation*, approached in the last section of this chapter, the Self as Amicable, as both strategies appear to be used in bloggers' presentation of the self.

THE SELF AS EDUCATED

> It's super important that it flows well. It's super important for it to be… it has to sound nice. It has to be… like, I hope that anybody who reads it reads it and can know what it is that I was feeling when I wrote it. So, with the choice of words, with the imagery that I'll put into, the different posts… but I don't… I don't want to sound like an ignoramus, either. (Shaindl, 2008)

In this comment made during her interview, Shaindl speaks to the desire of bloggers to appear well educated through their writing, to self-present as skilled writers, a sign of *competence*. Defining competence as a strategy in the presentation of the self, Dominick writes:

> The goal of this strategy is to be perceived as skilled and qualified. Common characteristics include claims about abilities, accomplishments, performance, and qualifications. (1999: 648)

The quality of their written French (Shaindl is the exception here, as she blogs in both French and English) is seen as having impact on how they may be perceived. Without necessarily using *international French* (as referred to by participants Michèle and Dominique[42]), bloggers put effort into structuring their posts, crafting their sentences, choosing their words and using correct grammar. For instance, participant Lucie mentioned how time-consuming this process was, whereas blogger Sarah even used the *Antidote* software, specifically designed to review the quality of written French:

> It's consuming, writing! Well… mostly since I really want to write nice sentences, in French and… without mistakes! That, it… I jump from my chair when I see mistakes. That… I can't stand it!

---

[42] During her interview, participant Michèle indeed stated, 'I don't necessarily write in an international French all the time. I wondered if that should be taken into account.' (2009), meaning that by her use of some local expressions from Québec, her writing may be harder to understand by internet users from other countries of the *Francophonie*, or who have learned French in other French-speaking societies.

> I don't like mistakes. It's not because we're authoring a blog that we need to write in SMS[43]. It gets on my nerves. Youths… they can't write! But, really, in SMS. Oh my God! But it's… […] it looks like it's in phonetics! But I really like well-written posts. I don't say it needs to have an introduction, a paragraph, and a conclusion. Not at all! But… nice sentences. With a little humour, it can never hurt [laughter]. (Lucie 2009)

> I have Antidote for this [laughter]! […] I have colleagues who read me, so if I make mistakes… or if, one day… And it's not anonymous, you know. If you *google* [my name], you will get to my blog. It's definite. […] And, if at some point, for one reason or another, I do not work for my current employer and want to freelance, or do something else… Well, many employers now *google* the names… And if they see that I write with tons of mistakes… well… it's not very good [laughter]. (Sarah 2009)

As illustrated by Sarah's comment, bloggers are very aware that others read them, which is a reason they put such effort into writing well. Participants Simone and Virginie directly related this awareness of readers to the care they took in their writings:

> Also, something that's funny is that in a manuscript diary, I rarely care about my… my spelling and my… the structure… my mistakes… Whereas on my blog, well… of course I… in my blog, I realise that, although I don't care so much about the form, I do care more than when I write in my own diary. (Simone 2009)

> It's a lot more romanced, on the blog. You do… I think you're more careful. With… well, how you turn your sentences, your syntax, your spelling, everything. You still try to have a guiding idea, if you have an article where… well everything goes, sort of, in all directions… well people will read you less. (Virginie 2008)

Furthermore, some participants describe their blogs as a writing school or a gym; a place where they practice their writing in order to improve their skills[44], to become more competent bloggers and writers, to strengthen their posts and make them more interesting:

> But at the same time, it's sort of a writing school. You know. (Mireille 2008)

> […] it's my Nautilus[45]. Like going to the gym. [A hobby?] No, it's not a hobby at all. No, it's bodybuilding. (Denise 2009)

> […] I gain personal practice, sort of, to write for the blog from work. Because it keeps me in shape, to know how to render

---

[43] SMS is an acronym for Short Message Service.
[44] A more detailed discussion of self-improvement narratives found in interviews and blogs is the focus of the following chapter, *Je me souviens*.
[45] Nautilus is the name of a gym club that can be found in the Montréal, Québec and Outaouais regions of the province of Québec (http://www.nautilusplus.com/).

> something interesting, when it's short and well written, and nice to read. I think that… I work on [my skills] while blogging [laughter]. (Cynthia 2008)

Hence, blogging is a serious practice for many participants, which they see as a way of keeping in shape. Referring to blogging as a writing school or a gym, bloggers also allude to this practice as enabling them to gain more control and remain in control of language. Blogging also provides them with a means of presenting themselves as insiders of Québec culture, primarily through the use of local expressions. Some participants addressed their use of French as culturally specific to, and sometimes even specific to a region within, Québec:

> […] but mainly from [my region], we have so many nice expressions that… yes. Yes, I use local expressions, and sometimes I will… I will write as we speak. It depends on the post, it depends on the… the intention, really, behind the post. (Elsa 2009)

> Slang, when the word imposes itself, I will use it. […] Will I use words in English? Sometimes, the word in English will… it's the only one that will come to my mind. And… sometimes, at some point, I used italic when I used an English word, I would put it in italic in my text. I am… really, as I was saying: really traditional, you know? [laughter] (Ani 2009)

> I will use the word which I find is the most adequate to describe what I want to describe. So… you know, if I am… [pissed off], I will write: I am [pissed off]. But if I'm mad, I will write: I am mad. But… if it's just… it annoys me [laughter] or it gets on my nerves [laughter], than I will write it. But I… I won't swear just to swear. (Sarah 2009)

> In my spoken vocabulary, I make use of many English language expressions and that's what I'll write. But they really reflect who I am, but… I try to write well anyway. (Lynne 2009)

> My tone is… quite neutral enough. Correct… enough. In the sense that it's rare that I will insert slang words, or words… you know, it's very rare. Most time, it will be in an international French. (Dominique 2008)

> I am proud to be Québécoise, but I am also proud to be Canadian. However, my pride in being Québécoise resides in my language. But my language, it's not proper French. It's… slang. (Elizabeth 2008)

> You know, I'm not vulgar, I don't use any [swear words]… (Simone 2009)

The use of French by participants is also predominant (exception Shaindl as noted above), although English words may find their way into the posts here and there. This is not surprising as the English language is dominant in North America. Despite living in a predominantly French-speaking province, Québécois and Québécoises are not insulated against this cultural and linguistic influence. Ani's comment, however, on italicising English words in her blog entries, marks her desire to point out the English influences in her writing. In addition, participants generally recognise the need to use a certain *level* of French, to avoid swearing or being unnecessarily vulgar, to have as accessible and respectable French as possible, although for a majority of participants native to the province of Québec, this involves the use of 'slang' and more local expressions. The use of French language in the province of Québec has long been recognised as playing a role in the construction and articulation of a 'collective sense of self':

> In this respect, the French language has always been a key part of the francophone community's collective sense of self, the symbolic marker which identifies them as a distinct and coherent collectivity, differentiating them from most other Canadians and indeed from the rest of North America. The preservation of the French language despite 200 years of British domination was a major accomplishment of francophone Quebecers, a shared source of pride in the past and a collective point of concern for the future. (Fournier, Rosenberg and White 1997: 7)

Furthermore, in 'The Forms of Capital', Pierre Bourdieu (1986) describes cultural capital as a form of capital which may be converted, under certain conditions, into economic capital, and which comes in three forms: embodied, implying that effort and work on oneself are needed – and may be perceived as one's culture or 'cultivation'; objectified, which enables an agent to appreciate or understand the meaning of an object, such as a painting; and institutionalised, representing the institutional or academic recognition of one's cultural capital, such as degrees, diplomas, etc.. The embodied cultural capital of language arises as a theme in many of the interviews, with the quality of written language being seen as a sign of belonging and a characteristic by which one is being judged. For instance, many bloggers mentioned how they picked up on others' mistakes and, often negatively judged the writers because of their mistakes:

> My French is really good. I see the mistakes others make (Cynthia 2008)
>
> Myself, personally, I can't read a blog full of mistakes or that has a lot of… syntax errors. It's hard to read, it's not interesting… even if the topic, from the outset, could be

interesting. For me, it ruins it. I… I can't do it. And… well it's too bad, it's not everyone who has the same… the same ease, but that's how it is: I really have a hard time. So, no, for me, it's important. I try… when I publish my post, often, I will read it again to see… sometimes there're little mistakes in French… (Julie 2009)

So, you know, may it be on the internet or elsewhere, to become a book… At the very least, you respect your mother tongue. (Mireille 2008)

[…] I try to make it so it's nice to read, because I… There are blogs that I read because I like the theme, the tone, and all. But, sometimes, I… when it's… and on forums, when it's written really badly… I can't read. That, I see it as a lack of respect for the reader. (Éloïse 2008)

Regarding *institutionalised cultural capital*, also linked to the self as educated and to *competence* as a strategy in self-presentation, participants seldom refer to their educational achievements in their blogs. The exceptions are the students who write about deadlines faced in end of term work, such as Mireille, Kieva and Ariane. However, the most striking exception is Catherine, who indicates in the title of her blog that she has a doctoral degree, emphasising her wish to be seen as highly educated. The comments of Mireille and Ariane may be related to their still being students at the time of interview, hence not as yet having gained the recognition of their skills; they do not define themselves by their diplomas. Kieva did complete her undergraduate degree but was looking for work – her competence in the professional world was yet to be recognised. Other bloggers who have completed university-level degrees did not really emphasise their educational levels, perhaps defining themselves by displaying other skills, such as personal and professional skills. Catherine was the only participant who put emphasis, in her blog, on her *institutionalised cultural capital*. In her case, this may be a strategy aimed at deconstructing perceptions that would define her as *only* a housewife. She mentioned in her interview how she faced the judgement of others for leaving her post-doctoral research position and choosing to be a homemaker. She specifically linked her mother-in-law to this judgement. When I asked Catherine about what it means, in her opinion, to be a feminist, this was her answer:

Well. We should probably ask my mother-in-law [laughter]. Yes, my mother-is-law is very… very in favour of the [women's movement]. [Is she an activist?] Yes. Her, she is… for example, [she would say] 'the children will have both your surname and that of my son'. She is… she says… 'It would be to your advantage to go back to work, since you have a PhD.' […] If I am compared to my mother-in-law, I am almost anti-feminist… But… I am not… like… her, you know. (Catherine 2008).

By identifying her educational accomplishments so prominently, Catherine signals to readers immediately that she is not *only* a homemaker, as she may feel her mother-in-law perceives her, but also a highly educated woman. All participants, however, chose mastery of language over formal education as a sign of competence. As stated by Ani, 'Culture is the language', which seems to be a sentiment shared by most bloggers. Participants tend to harshly judge the author of a blog if the writing contains a lot of mistakes or if they believe the quality of the written language is poor. Aware of how they evaluate others based on the quality of their French, participants make a conscious decision to invest time and effort in revising and correcting their posts. Even more so, the quality of one's French is associated with being respectful. Not writing properly is seen as not showing respect towards readers, as suggested by Éloïse in her quote above. Respect, however, is not expressed only through language, but also in what one writes about, as explained in the following section.

THE SELF AS RESPECTFUL

Not only do participants believe that one should make an effort to author well written posts, they actually use a variety of writing or reflective practices in order to portray themselves as respectful. Interviews revealed that the three prime policies participants use to ensure that they are seen as respectful and *socially competent* are: aim to avoid burdening their audiences (by not posting material that might upset them), do not implicate people from their offline lives in their blogs, and strictly follow the rules of *netiquette*. Drawing from Dominick's description of competence as a strategy used in self-presentation, Denise S. Bortree suggests that the teenage girls she studied display their *social competence* by showing their popularity: linking to other bloggers, mentioning friends in entries, etc. (2005: 36).

In this research, social competence is primarily expressed through respecting others. It implies not being a burden on their audiences, which is interpreted as not writing anything like mood swings or sad thoughts that could worry their readers. For some, this constraint was a named difference between a manuscript diary and a blog. For instance, Simone discussed the limits of her blog, mentioning how she misses writing about some of the topics she normally explored in her manuscript diary:

> And I realise that… well, how it made me feel to write, and all that I wrote about, which I don't write in my blog… I… I have a need to write it. I'm starting to have… to take note of how the blog is limited and… to what extent I… You know, of course the blog makes me feel good… to write those things… But there're other things I wouldn't write on my blog. But I still need to express… someplace else. (Simone 2009)

Other participants, such as Dominique and Lucie, expressed this more in terms of what their readers would not want to read, when visiting their blogs – for example family anxieties and negative impressions of the blogger's own life.

> I don't think my family would like to read me… to read something in which I complain about the kids, or complain about my boring life, and… Anyway, that's not what I think, so… (Dominique 2008)

> I don't talk about my rubbish moods… Well… you wouldn't tell that to your grandparents. It's a quality blog, I mean. [laughter] (Lucie 2009)

By avoiding such topics, bloggers perhaps illustrate what Page deemed 'a more affective style of storytelling', which permits 'solidarity' between readers and bloggers, thus '[promoting] a shared and supportive experience' (2012: 60). Furthermore, not only do these quotes refer to a desire to avoid burdening one's audiences, they also speak to what Goffman terms 'impression management' (1973), meaning the necessity of sustaining the role and the presentation of self; ensuring that how an audience sees the blogger is not compromised by posted entries. If offline audiences see the blogger as a dedicated and happy person and mother, the blogger risks ruining this impression by writing entries that portray her otherwise, even if these contrary-to-image events are very temporary in nature. For another set of bloggers, their concerns were centred on not worrying their friends and family, which in their view corresponds to being a burden to audiences. This was also a result emerging from Bortree's research, where some participants felt that knowing about bloggers' 'thoughts and opinions [could] cause strain [on relationships]'(2005: 33) and hence would be a sign of social incompetence. Virginie, Ani, Sarah and Kieva discussed this awareness during their interviews:

> […] as long as you write something positive, it'll be alright. People won't really worry if you don't write one day. But… if, for example, you say… it's not going well, or something like that… well, there you go, after three days, everybody will write to you: what's going on? Do you want to talk about it? (Virginie 2008)

> But, there are things I will censor… because, also, as I was saying… I don't like to… I don't want people… to start having pity, you know? I don't want their pity. (Ani 2009)

> […] when I feel it's too much… well… perhaps I won't talk about it. For example, ok, here's an example of what I'm saying. Well… in the last year, as I was telling you, I went through harder times. But did I annoy my readers, for a whole year, with… everything that… was eating my soul? No. Not at all. Did I, sometimes, post brilliant things and made an effort to do so? Yes. (Ani 2009)

> My grandmother who is in Montréal reads me. So I can't write just about anything either [laughter], but… She is… she's quite open-minded, but… there are limits [laughter]! (Sarah 2009)

> But, at the same time, I think I have a deeper side, I studied, topics that I consider deep, I like… You know, deeper things interest me, but I don't feel like talking about it [laughter]. I feel like talking about crazy stuff. (Kieva 2009)

On the one hand, participants revealed that they tried not to upset people from their offline lives. They would be cautious on how they write about certain topics, and worry about how their posts could be interpreted, as seen in Simone's interview where she describes becoming very cautious after being criticised by a member of her family. Avoiding upsetting those around them is one way of ensuring that they remain in control of how people from their offline lives see them. Some went so far as to include short notes on blog entries addressed to those who may be offended by the content. This was a strategy that Julie, amongst others, discussed during the interview:

> So, now, I am trying to be more cautious, or, you know, I will add a note, you know, eh… 'this is nothing against my family or my in-laws, I love them', yadeyadeya… You know, I feel obligated, you know, to… to add a lot… to put some gloves on to say 'it's not because I don't love you, it's because…' And… it takes away some of the… my pleasure in expressing myself. In the end, you know, my idea is still there. But that's it. I am obligated to… [laughter] put loads of cushions. (Julie 2009)

On the other hand, being aware that people from their offline lives may read them, participants were careful not to involve them directly. For instance, they would not use the blog as a way of discussing and resolving an offline dispute, would not reveal people's identity or refer to aspects of other people's lives, as suggested by these quotes:

> For instance if I have an argument with someone, I wouldn't write it on my blog. It's just a note… a note to myself, not to… not to talk about such things […] It's to bear in mind that this person may read it and I should feel okay with what I have written. (Cynthia 2008)

> I have an editorial policy. I wouldn't get even with anybody. (Michèle 2009)

> It is certain that… there are some boundaries. If I was writing in my manuscript diary, I would say what I want about my mother-in-law and it wouldn't be crucial [laughter]. But it's certain that on my blog, I won't talk about it. I have written about it a little… but with a lot of restraint. Metaphorically, let's say. (Elsa 2009)

> I, myself, have decided to author a blog… still, of diary type, but it should not implicate all these nice people who haven't asked

[to be included]… they may not want their names to be on internet 'he told me that'… 'she did this… and it really pissed me off', etc. (Mireille 2008)

There is a post in which I talk… of… about the sexual assault I lived, when I was little. I wrote it in my stories and I wrote it to say that I had forgiven my abuser, *without naming him*. (Bonnie 2008 – my emphasis)

You know, also, in comparison to a manuscript diary, you know… I could bitch a lot more in a diary… manuscript, than… on my blog, you know. So, then again, I wouldn't disrespect anyone on my blog. (Ariane 2008)

[…] in my blog, I… I never use events… of someone else's life. That's… that's a matter of respect. I won't… you know, I receive confidences in some conversations… I will never use those confidences… (Ani 2009)

As indicated in the previous chapter, when it came to their children, many bloggers reflected on questions of anonymity and involving them in their blogs. Some believed they should be cautious because of the possible risks of exposing children online, whereas others simply thought it was not appropriate. Just as it is considered unacceptable to reveal aspects of a friend's life it is equally unacceptable to reveal aspects of your children's lives. Generally it was participants with children of their own who discussed this, although Ani, who did not have any children at the time of the interview, also pondered:

Well, it's…. I don't really want for people to associate… Myself, I wouldn't really mind, eh… well, then children – I am a little ticklish with children's names, photos of the children… I think… that's it. At some point, internet is quite big and… (Catherine 2008)

[…] I mainly try to preserve the anonymity of those in my surroundings, and… well, yes, I put the children – I mean, I put photos of the children. Because they are still very small, and they are always with me, but eventually, it will… I know that I will change my perspective on this. (Dominique 2008)

But… eventually, you know, we must stop… well, I don't know. Exposing one's children: it's scary! [laughter] […] That's it, there are risks, I don't know… Well, they are not our property and we put their heads up... (Lucie 2009)

I find it totally… indecent, sometimes, when I get on a blog… where it's just… indecent, sometimes, to get on a blog… where it's really… covered, wall-to-wall, with family photos, with the children… I find it… I think people are… they're not conscious enough, I don't know. (Ani 2009)

These comments illustrate how bloggers aim at being respectful towards others through avoiding being a burden on their audiences. Since they cannot know exactly who reads their blogs, participants may also choose to avoid certain topics in order not to be surprised by people, offline, who stumble upon information the blogger would not usually share with them, or who might take offence at the nature of a post in which they are mentioned. In this way, participants are also protecting themselves. The above comments by participants relate to the field of ethics in the blogosphere. According to Ben-Ze'ev, not showing one's deep and true emotions are read as symbols of politeness in our society: 'Emotions can often hurt people, whereas the main function of good manners is to prevent such harm. Accordingly, good manners are a useful means of hiding genuine emotions' (2004: 73). *Netiquette* is the computer-mediated communication (CMC) term coined to express such behaviour.

According to the rules of netiquette, internet users must not behave in ways that may offend others – and the ways can vary from situation to situation. More precisely, for Crystal, netiquette consists of:

> The conventions which govern acceptable behaviour when engaging in Internet dialogue, especially in emailing, chatrooms and virtual worlds. The politeness conventions vary greatly, and many sites now give guidance about such matters as greeting and leaving a group, addressing messages, the sort of subject-matter which is unacceptable, and the avoidance of offensive language. (Crystal 2004: 77)

Although bloggers write on various blog hosts and therefore do not have to subscribe to a commonly agreed upon netiquette[46], many of those I interviewed had thought about ethics in blogging, whereas others specifically mentioned netiquette. Either way, bloggers in their interviews, at least show themselves to be competent bloggers, aware of acceptable online behaviours. For them, netiquette was primarily about requesting permission from other bloggers before adding their blogs to their own blogroll, such as mentioned by Simone:

> I was thinking: well, I do read those blogs… Why wouldn't I reference them? It's… I would have the feeling that… that I would have to ask for the permission [laughter]! (Simone 2009)

For Julie, adding someone else's blog to her own posts was sometimes a way of warning other bloggers that she had written about them, allowing them, if they so desired, to respond. They could do so either on their own blog or in the comment section following the post on Julie's blog:

---

[46] Having said this, some participants, such as Mireille (2008) discussed the netiquette rules of her blog host, *Blogspot*, where members were apparently not allowed to write racist comments or have posts related to hatred – a situation which she found reasonable.

> But, you know, generally, I add the URL, because… well because people have the right to defend themselves [laughter].
> (Julie 2009)

Being ethical in blogging, for Denise, is a sign of a blogger's seriousness since others may denounce a blog that has not followed netiquette:

> […] most serious bloggers have a lot of ethics. They give their sources […] Those who don't are easily noticed. And… it's not pretty. I would say that people who tend not to have a sense of ethics, they don't make many friends, and… when a gang of bloggers starts to be on someone's case who didn't act properly… the person knows it. (Denise 2009)

Overall, participants took care to ensure that their blogs respected online politeness norms – although some associated those norms with netiquette, others such as Kieva were not quite sure what that meant and what it implied:

> In general, I ask, before: is it okay if I link to… And I discussed that, on my blog: what is netiquette, precisely? How do I ask someone if I can link, you know? But, myself, I never ask for others to link to my blog. Never, never, never, never. (Kieva 2009)

> But I was shy to ask, you know? Then again, maybe it's netiquette, you know: do you want to be my friend in real life? Would you like us to get in touch? (Kieva 2009)

Nonetheless, the desire to be appreciated and well perceived by their readers and other bloggers influences how participants behave online. As stated by participant Elizabeth (2008), this is a little like being the new pupil at a school, or the newly hired employee in a firm: 'you're nice to everybody'. By being polite bloggers hope to create and maintain a circle of online friends, and by doing this, become part of a blog ring and portray themselves as networked.

THE NETWORKED SELF

Aware that people may visit their blogs, most participants use this online space as a way of indicating who they are, which includes how they are linked to others; who their friends are. This is what Dominick refers to as 'social association' (1999: 655) and may be a sign of *social competence* (Bortree 2005; Dominick 1999). For Schau and Gilly, '[…] personal Web sites allow consumers to self-present 24/7 beyond a regional setting to the virtual world' (2003: 387) and on the blogosphere, who a blogger knows can enhance her online visibility and credibility. To paraphrase Walker Rettberg, blogging not only enables a presentation of the self as individuals; it allows for users to 'publicly proclaim our relationships' (2008: 75-76). In addition, Turkle asserts that: '[…] one's

identity emerges from whom one knows, one's associations and connections [on the homepage]' (1995: 258-259).

Various strategies are used by bloggers to portray themselves as well networked, which has the effect of increasing the size of their own networks. For instance, leaving comments on blogs is a way of attracting readers to one's own blog. Adding blogs to one's own blogroll has a similar effect since by giving their approval to a large number of sites, bloggers show how active they are on the blogosphere and, to some extent knowledgeable. By seeing whom the blogger reads or knows, a visitor may gain insights into who the blogger is and what she enjoys. For example, one can assume that if a blogger references many mummy blogs, or vegetarian blogs, she may be a mother or a vegetarian herself. Bloggers also often keep track of their readers by installing a statistics counter on their blogs, generating data that is either public or restricted to the author. This section explores these strategies before going on to discuss the networked self in relation to one's social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and how this too is linked to social competence (Bortree 2005).

One strategy to attract readers employed by participants is to leave comments on well-known blogs. Ani, openly admits to using this strategy:

> I think that, once, I left a comment on... *Un Taxi la Nuit* [A Taxi at Night], because… I said to myself: perhaps if I leave my URL... My… The hyperlink, you know, it'll lead to my blog and it might bring readers to my blog. (Ani 2009)

When leaving a comment, bloggers may include the URL of their own blog. In providing this URL, they not only invite the author of the blog to come and pay them a blog visit but they also make it easy for readers of that blog to also pay their blogs a visit. By leaving comments on popular blogs, participants hope that they increase their chances of being seen, as illustrated by the above comment made by Ani and those made by Elizabeth, Éloïse and Anabel:

> When you start writing a blog, you go and post comments everywhere, you flatter them, you want to be known, you want to be seen… (Elizabeth 2008)

> It's when I started, really, to comment on other blogs, I knew that people would click on my name and end up on my blog. (Éloïse 2008)

> Yes, well… I used to read some, but I must admit I started to read some more regularly when I got my own and wanted it to be publicised. Eh… I understood that this is how it worked, you know. […] Sometimes, I read a post just because I wanted to

> leave a comment. It really was… very self-interested [laughter].
> (Anabel 2009)

Participant Kieva also believes that if someone came to visit and commented on her blog on a regular basis, it would be good practice to visit that person's blog and to add it to her blogroll:

> And, at one point, well of course there is this kind of blogging… politics. That when you know someone often comes to leave comments on yours, who often comes to read you… You must go on theirs and link it. And it doesn't cost anything, in the end, it's really okay [laughter]. (Kieva 2009)

Hence, commenting on other blogs is a way of attracting readers and gaining greater visibility as a blogger, through associating oneself to other and often more popular blogs. Bloggers may also link to other blogs in their posts, which enables the reader to visit the website being written about, but is also a strategy used to alert another blogger that one is writing about them. This is made possible by the *Trackback* feature as it allows for a comment to be added onto the blog of the author being written about in order to alert her or him that they are being referenced (Walker Rettberg 2008: 67).

By associating themselves with other blogs through their writings, bloggers come to recognise the popularity and authority of certain blogs within sub-groups of the blogosphere and work to increase their own visibility by linking to such blogs. The 'maternal blogosphere' (Stadtman Tucker 2009) is an example of such a sub-group.

Returning to Alex Brun's discussion of *produsage* (as outlined in chapter 2), what characterises *produsers* is the possibility of obtaining social status within a defined community:

> Produsers, in other words, are attracted largely by the social, communal, network features of the produsage environment, and realize that they are able to gain social status within the community (whether implicitly, or as made explicit through Karma scores and similar systems) by contributing constructively over time. (Bruns 2009: 85)

As such, the social media characteristics of women's blogs emerge clearly as bloggers participate in social networks by leaving comments on each other's blogs in order to increase their visibility and, potentially, increase their recognition as well. This is further acknowledged by Bruns who identifies blogs, blog hosting sites and even 'homepage providers' as 'the forerunners for the current generation of social networking Websites' (2009: 316, see also Page 2012).

Another strategy used by bloggers as a way of associating themselves to others and henceforth making their connections visible is to create a list of favourite blogs (blogroll). For Serfaty, bloggers link to blogs with a similar writing style or topic:

> Linking moreover is very often done under the heading "other diaries I read", showing that no matter how personal self-representational writing may be, it relates to other writings of a similar kind, in a vast movement toward intertextuality. In keeping with the general Netiquette in force in diarists' webrings, none of the links provided are objects of criticism or rejection. Only valued diaries appear in the links list, and if a comment is included, it is invariably laudatory. (2004: 26)

Moreover, Ruth E. Page (2012), when discussing blogs as social media, underlines how 'hyperlinks have a social dimension' since they serve to identify one's network and also to position oneself within a blog subgenre. She writes:

> However, hyperlinks have a social dimension and may indicate what the blog is perceived to be "good for" (Beaulieu 2005, 35), through both the hyperlink's point of reference and its position within the blog. Hyperlinks may be found both on the sidebar of the blog homepage and within individual entries. Links on the homepage are deemed more significant due to their permanent presence (once individual posts are archived, they disappear from view) and because of their function in identifying the social network to which a blogger belongs (Nilsson 2007, 8). (Page 2012: 56)

When reviewing the blogroll of participants, two bloggers had no blogroll at all (Denise and Shaindl), whereas another blogger (Ani) used the blogroll section to refer to websites rather than to blogs[47]. This might be explained by the fact that by the time I interviewed Shaindl and looked at her blogroll, she had made her blog accessible to invited bloggers only, probably to those who may want to read updates about her life, and who would not necessarily be interested in visiting other blogs. Ani had mentioned during her interview that she had no time to read blogs, which might explain why she did not link to any, whereas Denise uses her blog to practice her writing and may not want to use it as a networking tool. Overall, in total, 23 participants in this research included 524 links on their blogrolls, of which 372 were blogs (individual, collective or professional) and 251 were blogs featuring the author's everyday life more specifically[48] (see appendix 5, *Participants' Blogroll*, for details). Because participants sometimes refer to the same blogs, it should be clarified that there are references to

---

[47] Of the nineteen blogs that did include links to other blogs, it should be noted that many did not do so exclusively, often referring to general interest website such as journalists' blogs, news sites, community groups, clothing businesses or local music bands.
[48] This data does not take into account the blogs that have been deleted, removed or for which access has been denied to the researcher (the latter being referred to as "dark blogs", because a password is needed to access their content (Charman 2006: 57)) – which, in total, accounted for 77 of the 524 sites in participants' lists of blogs.

213 unique blogs. While exploring the blogrolls, it became apparent that a degree of networking was taking place among participants, without my knowledge. This is illustrated by the figure below:

Figure 4: Online Links Between Participants
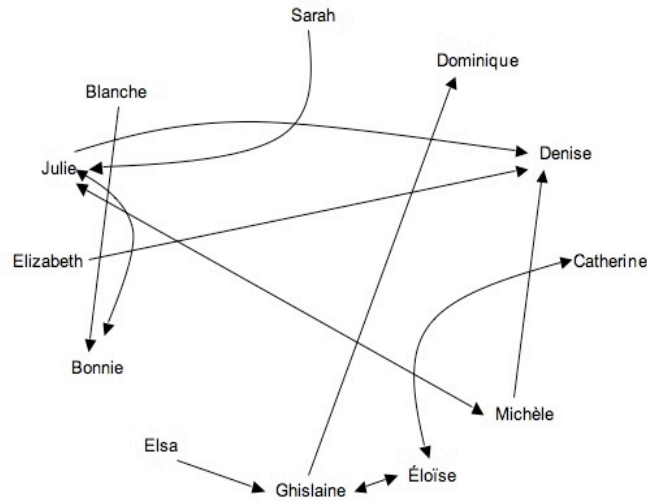
Furthermore, bloggers may have identified some blogs that could be referred to as *A-List bloggers* in the province of Québec. A-List bloggers is 'a common term used to refer to the best-known (most-read, most linked to) bloggers – many of whom blog about the news, or about blogging itself' (Bruns and Jacobs 2006: 1). Researchers and journalists writing about the blogosphere often rely on blog search engines such as *Technorati.com* in order to map the blogosphere and identify such A-List bloggers, as it:

> […] not only lists the most popular (or at least the most linked-to) blogs, it also allows you to search for any blog or URL and see which other blogs are linking to it. By tracking links from blogs, Technorati provides a tool for following trends. (Walker Rettberg 2008: 58)

However, *Technorati* does not appear to be recognised as an authority by Québec bloggers, as, for instance, a search by name and URL of participants' blog on the database revealed no result. Hence, none of the participants have taken the necessary steps to register their blogs with the website, and none of their readers have marked them as "favourites" on the site. Although participant Denise mentioned during her interview having registered her blog on this website, *Technorati* shows no record of her blog.

Nonetheless, bloggers in Québec may create their own *A-List* by referring to blogs that they appreciate, listing the most authoritative blogs in the Québec blogosphere. Mapping the blogs linked on participants' blogroll, it appears that some blogs appeal to

quite a few participants, such as *Juste un peu frustrée* (Just a little angry – linked to by participants Julie, Michèle, Sarah, Blanche and Éloïse), *Le secret est dans la sauce* (The secret is in the sauce, read by participants Éloïse, Simone, Sarah and Catherine), *Mon petit nombril* (My little belly button, in the blogroll of participants Bonnie, Elsa, Ariane, Julie and Anabel) and *Grande Dame* (found on participants Ghislaine, Blanche, Catherine and Elsa's blogs). By referring to popular blogs, not only do bloggers participate in legitimising a particular blogger's authority on the blogosphere, but they also associate themselves with this person, perhaps hoping to gain vicarious visibility and credibility. The tagcloud below illustrates the most common blogs referred to by participants (all blogs in cloud have been mentioned at least twice):

Figure 5: Most Common Blogs Listed by Participants

By associating themselves with other bloggers – either by leaving comments, by linking to them in an entry on their own blog, or by including a link on their blogroll, participants make visible their connections to others, thereby publicly displaying some of their *social capital*. Pierre Bourdieu defined social capital 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 each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various sense of the word. These relationships may exist only in the practical state, in material and/or symbolic exchanges which help maintain them. (Bourdieu 1986: 249).

In the case of the blogosphere, relationships are mainly enacted online, although it happens that such relationships are made concrete offline. The support bloggers receive from others may be in the form of technical support, as acknowledged by

Denise, or it can also be emotional support, such as illustrated by Lynne's rendering of the message posted by a Québécoise blogger in February 2009, following the sudden death of her youngest son:

> […] I asked other bloggers… […] in the blogosphere, there's plenty of people, also, who would say 'you should try this, try that, try this'… it's like a… There a lot of sort of virtual godfathers who offer themselves, quite naturally, I would say. At that level, the conversation is easily created. Exchanging technical skills of… you know, you put a question out there and… Sometimes, I would post a question on my blog and I would have 25 people who would say 'do this! do that! to this!', 'try that!' (Denise 2009)

> […] there's a blogger, last week… I don't know if you saw that… who lost her child, you know. So, obviously, there's no one who blogged for fun, in that network, no one blogged just for fun, that day. (Lynne 2009)

Furthermore, despite Denise not having a blogroll, she is known and referenced by other participants: Elizabeth, Michèle and Julie all link to her blog, as shown in figure 4, above. Denise mentioned in her interview how she stopped looking at her statistics once she realised that over a thousand people read her blog everyday, feeling that awareness of such a large audience might inhibit her writing. This large number further illustrates her online popularity and her social competence. Similarly, the blogger who lost her child surfaced in the tagcloud above ('mafamilia'), since it is included in the blogroll of Éloïse, Blanche and Catherine. A review of the specific post about the death of the author's son, *Mon petit Benjamin est décédé*, reveals that 426 comments were left under this message in February 2009, mostly by bloggers offering their condolences. This last piece of data should be interpreted with caution, since it is possible that some bloggers left their condolences after reading this story on someone else's blog (for example, despite knowing about this story, Lynne does not include 'mafamilia' on her blogroll; indicating possibly that she is not a regular reader). The 426 comments left may therefore not all be from regular readers or even from bloggers who continued to read the blog after leaving their condolences.

Much like Bourdieu, Coleman (1988), defines social capital as reciprocal relationships of 'trust and obligation' existing in social networks, which may be used by members 'much like monetary capital' (in Drewry, Burge and Driscoll 2010: 502). In their study of social capital and its impacts on high school dropouts, Drewry, Burge and Driscoll discuss four specific types of social capital: family social capital (the 'extrafamilial resources'), community social capital ('a commodity attained through relationships with other members of the community'), school social capital (a combination of 'assistance

from […] school personnel' and 'school personnel guiding students') and a fourth that is made up by combining various aspects of the three other enumerated types of social capital (2010: 503). In terms of blogging practices, community social capital is the most prevalent, although family social capital does at times exist, for instance, when bloggers' partners help them set up their blog, or in the case of Éloïse, whose sister designed her banner, as does school social capital with blogs being increasingly used in teaching contexts, mostly at more senior education levels, but also at the primary level as with Elsa in her classroom. Furthermore, the authors underline how mobility is one factor that may negatively impact community social capital, as 'movement of living situations' may imply a 'loss of social capital established in previous living situations' (Drewry, Burge and Driscoll 2010: 512-513). Many bloggers in this research stated how changes in their lives (parental leave, illness or regional and sometimes international mobility) have led them to start their blogs, as a way of getting in touch with others. As online networks are transportable, one does not have to leave a network when relocating. Even if a blogger decides to change her URL or joins a different blog host, her readers can easily change their bookmarks or blogroll to continue following the blog at its new web address. Furthermore, starting a blog to facilitate relationships is another sign of social competence.

When examining the practice of linking to other blogs, it appears that this may be a strategy to increase social capital and to display social competence. In their paper, Drewry, Burge and Driscoll mention that 'White and Wehlage (1995) advocated that collaboration in neighborhood groups and the provision of mentors can increase community social capital' (2010: p. 517). This is easily linked to the blogging practices observed amongst participants. Community social capital is increasingly built amongst bloggers by the inclusion of URLs in one's messages, blogroll and comments section. As demonstrated by Denise's experience of 'godfathers' helping with technical difficulties faced from time-to-time, mentors do (informally) exist in the blogosphere, and they not only provide support with technical problems, but many also comment on each others' blogs to offer emotional support, advice, condolences and congratulations.

Although not explicitly stated by participants, it appears that increasing social capital may be an objective behind blogging, done to enhance and display social competence. By linking to and presenting themselves in association with others, participants make their connections visible. For Walker Rettberg, blogs are distinct from mass

communication media, as they 'support a dense network of small audiences and many producers' which makes them a form of *social software*:

> Blogs are a relatively free-form type of social software, and are decentralized, often running on their author's own domains and connecting haphazardly to other blogs. (2008: 57)

This correlates to Schau and Gilly's work on 'digital association', by which internet content producers, such as bloggers, associate themselves with objects or brands, in this case other bloggers, as a way of constructing and displaying an online self, a presentation of self commonly aimed for on homepages (Cheung 2004). In Schau and Gilly's words:

> Although projecting a digital likeness refers to Web site creators' efforts to reference their physical bodies, digital association refers to efforts to reference relationships with objects, places, and so forth. Digital stimuli are appropriated or manipulated to convey meaning. As in real life, where products are used as social stimuli to construct and enact notions of self (Solomon 1983), consumers call upon products and brands within personal Web space. Through digital association, personal Web space offers a new venue for consumers to create and enact consumer-brand relationships (Fournier 1998). People use such digital stimuli to present themselves to an assumed audience, constructing and managing impressions at whim with no financial or physical constraints. Thus, consumers add depth to their digital selves by using brands and their logos as shorthand for more complex meanings. Interestingly, the site creators also add depth to the brand's own meaning and identity, perhaps blurring the distinctions between production and consumption at least for brand meaning (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). (Schau and Gilly 2003: 396-7)

According to these authors, linking to others may be a strategy aimed at presenting oneself in a favourable light, of showcasing a well networked identity to their assumed audience by making their relationships visible. Certain characteristics of a blogger can be read into such relationships, as detailed earlier. Presenting or performing the self is prevalent on blogs and, as the next section demonstrates, bloggers aim at making sure audiences perceive them as amicable.

THE SELF AS AMICABLE

Conscious that their audiences are plural, changeable and heterogeneous, bloggers put effort into presenting themselves in the best possible light, not only to attract new readers, but also to avoid conflict with visitors and, perhaps even more important, with people who may know them offline. It is clear that bloggers are indeed aware that others access their blogs and feel they need to self-present in a way which will please their readers, known or unkown offline, as suggested by Nancy Baym (2010) and

discussed in chapter 2. Going back to self-presentations strategies, Dominick describes *ingratiation* as 'being liked by others' (1999: 648) and is 'the most used self-presentation strategy', both online and offline (1999: 655). He explains:

> A person using this strategy has a goal of being liked by others. Some common characteristics of ingratiation are saying positive things about others or saying mildly negative things about yourself, statements of modesty, familiarity, and humour. (Dominick 1999: 648)

In my research, several strategies to 'win the affection and approval of others' (Bortree 2005: 35), what Dominick (1999) calls *ingratiation*, were employed by participants and include focussing on positive and happy memories and being careful not to reveal their flaws to readers. Another strategy, which emerged in some interviews and was confirmed while looking at the blogs themselves, is providing clues to reveal physical appearance.

In *The presentation of self in everyday life* (Goffman 1990 [1959]), Goffman discusses the performances of individuals presenting themselves face-to-face. Although bloggers do not literally face their readers, the process described by Goffman closely relates to how bloggers portray themselves:

> When an individual plays a part he [sic] implicitly requests his [sic] observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he [sic] appears to possess, that the task he [sic] performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are as they appear to be. (Goffman 1990 [1959]: 28)

During interviews, many made reference to the first presentation strategy, not revealing one's flaws. As illustrated by the following excerpts, participants are reluctant to share feelings of anger on their blogs (whereas they might do so in a manuscript diary):

> In the end, it allows us… to free our anger in a more… controlled way. (Elsa 2009)

> My manuscript diaries, they're a lot more on emotions, to get the frustrations out. They're to write without thinking. They are something I know won't be read. They're to sort things out, in general. Whereas, my blog, is to say things to people. It is… it will be something that is of general interest, or which I think may interest people. (Cynthia 2008)

> […] often, emotions that I will feel are because I am mad, are related to anger, I feel some anger, and I don't necessarily want it to be… public. (Cynthia 2008)

> I think that the diary, by definition, is there for you to blow off steam, to discharge some emotions. And, sometimes, you wouldn't even want to read it yourself. It's only a matter of throwing it all on a page to get rid of it, you know? (Anabel 2009)

> […] when I am really upset, I will start… I will save it and go back to it later. Most times, I erase it [laughter], but it happens that… well, I will go back to it and all, because… Whatever I write when I am angry, I… I end up regretting it. And I don't want… I never erase something I publish. I stand by it. (Sarah 2009)

These comments speak of bloggers' desire to be in control of their emotions in order to present themselves in an appropriate manner in public. Walker Rettberg noticed from her research that 'Bloggers often avoid writing directly about their emotional and personal affairs' (2008: 116), hence acting upon their awareness of the acceptability of some behaviours and emotions in the public eye. Not revealing one's flaws also implies, for many participants who have children of their own, not discussing events where their children's actions have caused them to lose their tempers, or have made them feel angry or annoyed, as referenced by bloggers Éloïse and Dominique:

> But that… I wouldn't say: today, my children got on my nerves, on my blog… no. Not really. Because… it's not… it's not… Most times, this is not what I think and, I mean, that's it: it's normal. And I'd rather focus on the good parts, and… (Éloïse 2008)

> I chose to write on what I write. I could choose… to use the blog as a catharsis and say: today, it really was a shitty day. The kids have been excruciating… Because I do have days like that. But I don't write about them. Because I chose to share moments… [silence] (Dominique 2008)

In not disclosing feelings of frustration, although part of everyday parenting, participants disclose their awareness of how audiences may react negatively to such comments and how this could impede their goal of adopting an ingratiating self-presentation and perhaps even have consequences in their offline interactions. For other participants, it was a matter of not sharing everything or making sure that negative attributes could not be linked to their identities. To illustrate, participant Mireille said that she would just not write on a topic if she did not feel proud of her role in it. For similar reasons, participant Ghislaine blogged under a pseudonym: to protect herself, since she did not want people from work to know she had suffered from an eating disorder.

To sum up, not revealing their flaws is a strategy used to highlight their ideal selves and avoid making themselves vulnerable. Discussing the positive aspects of online self-presentation in relation to homepages, Cheung writes that 'even if some people dislike our 'homepage selves' and send us negative responses by email, these responses are not instantaneous, so we feel less pressure to respond to them' (2004: 56). However, as many bloggers are known by people in their offline environments, they may face consequences in face-to-face situations, or during a phone conversation, as did Simone when confronted by a family member criticising her protective ways with her son. This also happened to Lucie who shortly after immigrating, blogged about her difficult integration in Québec culture, only to be confronted by her family in France. Hiding, minimising or underplaying one's flaws, particularly when bloggers know that offline acquaintances are or could be in the reading audience, appears to be a way of appearing amicable, while at the same time protecting oneself. Related to this strategy, participants generally tend to focus more on positive memories and events although from time to time they have shared some harsher memories, like Michèle and Blanche discussing their depressive thoughts, Kieva undergoing psychotherapy, Bonnie surviving a sexual assault from a family member when she was younger, and Elizabeth discussing her brother's suicide. Nonetheless, many participants have expressed their conscious choice of focussing on positive memories. While this is the explicit motivation behind Lynne's blog, others also stress the importance of accentuating the positive and minimising the negative on their blogs:

> But that, for me, it's more like a diary, I don't debate opinions, I won't put… often, my personal views, about current news, or whatever – unless it's something which makes me happy, but I mean… Not… for me, it's not a tool to create a polemic. To tell people… to define myself as a person… really, that's not it. (Lynne 2009)

> You know, I don't talk about the traumas I suffered as a child, in my blog. I didn't talk about reactions I had from guys… that were quite ordinary. But even then… nothing… [laughter], nothing traumatising either. (Kieva 2009)

> […] And to emphasise funny situations that occur, but that I wouldn't necessarily think of telling them over the phone. (Catherine 2008)

> I try not to talk too much about the negative stuff, unless it… it allows me to think about it, to… to have other people's points of view, which could help me progress. (Virginie 2008)

> I think that fundamentally, I am a positive girl so… I… I put the emphasis… on fun stuff. I don't think my family would like to

> read me… to read something in which I complain about the kids, or complain about my boring life, and… Anyway, that's not what I think, so… (Dominique 2008)

Generally, participants are conscious that people may read their blogs and hence decide that some thoughts or experiences are better left unshared. Furthermore, participants need to address their various audiences, and although some would share some information with their friends via their blogs, the idea that their parents, employers, neighbours or clients may read their thoughts influences what they write and how they write about it. This implies finding a way of presenting a self that is acceptable to all possible readers and one that would not seem foreign to any. For Goffman, this idea of multiple audiences and how one performs in front of each of these audiences is called 'audience segregation':

> As both effect and enabling cause of this kind of commitment to the part one is currently performing, we find that 'audience segregation' occurs; by audience segregation the individual ensures that those before whom he [sic] plays one of his [sic] parts will not be the same individuals before whom he [sic] plays a different part in another setting. (Goffman 1990 [1959]: 57)

Although offline individuals may have to successfully manage their self-presentations in front of various audiences, such as family, friends, professional associates, etc., online environments complicate – or perhaps prevent – this 'audience segregation'. Again, Goffman's contributions provide useful insights. In discussing this concept, he emphasises the actor's awareness that presentation of self varies according to the perceived audience and, hence, the use of audience segregation in ensuring that impressions are preserved (1973: 52). According to Goffman, this prevents confusion or disappointment amongst audiences who would be confronted with two different roles presented by one actor (1973: 132-133). On this topic and in the context of online communications, Senft explains:

> These new developments force us to make difficult decisions regarding our 'presentation of self' according to perceived audience, a largely intuitive process in the offline world. Offline, the self I might present to a Riot Grrl group is not the one I present to my brothers, and the one I present to a lover is not the one I present to a colleague – or a different lover. There is sometimes overlap among these audiences, but that overlap (or, as warranted, distinction) is itself managed and facilitated by physical boundaries: I can change my self presentation as I move from the bedroom to the classroom, and from the classroom to the bar. (Senft 2008: 7-8)

Whereas this can generally be avoided in the offline world (although sometimes these audiences come together (Goffman 1973: 134)), what Walker Rettberg has termed the problem of having '[various] social networks that are meant to be separate [colliding]' (2008: 77), such as those of family, friends, work, etc., is indeed a reality of blogging. The challenge posed to bloggers who are aware that their audiences cannot be completely segregated was also recognised by participants in Bortree's research on teenage girls' blogs (2005). Many participants in my study were wary of seeing these various offline audiences meeting in a unique online space – their blogs. For instance, Julie found it difficult to blog after her focus changed from political to more personal entries, considering that both her parents and her in-laws had access to her blog. Having friends read her entries was not a problem, but her family reading it made her uncomfortable and consequently more cautious in her writings. Similarly, Éloïse felt she could discuss some matters on an online forum for mothers more easily than she could on her blog, as she was confident no one really knows who she is (offline) on the forum:

> Well me, when I write on the forum, where I went… No one knows me and… I could write things… still a little more personal than on my blog, even if it's… online, you know. (Éloïse 2008)

Others mentioned how the threat of being identified online by people from their various offline networks impacted on either their writings or their desires for anonymity. For some participants, like Julie, Éloïse, Michèle and Cynthia, this meant not discussing work-related events or thoughts in case this would result in negative professional repercussions, whereas others such as Blanche and Ghislaine admitted not wanting to be identified on their blogs, because of the negative impacts this could have in their offline lives with neighbours and colleagues. Hence, showing one's more complex and more complete self is a risk that most bloggers are not willing to take, preferring to show a fictional, made-up self, or only parts of who they are, in order to please as varied an audience as possible (Schau and Gilly (2003)).

Pleasing one's audience by presenting the self as inoffensive is not only done through the written content, but is also done through images, such as the photo a blogger may choose to (re)present herself to her readers, or a chosen avatar to represent her physical self. Of the twenty-three bloggers I met with face-to-face in this research, twelve participants had actual photos of themselves on their blogs – either in the 'about the author' section, in posted messages or, rarely, in the banner of the blog. While not posting a personal photo, other bloggers chose images or avatars that resemble them although this was not universally true. For instance, participants Kieva and Denise

decided not to upload any image at all to represent themselves. Blanche posted a drawing of herself made by an artist she knows, whereas others chose images that did not particularly resemble them: a sheep for Elizabeth, a teddy bear for Elsa, a *South Park* inspired avatar for Virginie, a fruit for Catherine, hands for Anabel and a finger print for Julie. Ani explained how she used an image of one of her favourite artists, David Bowie, in that they both had non-traditional gender appearances and identifications:

> […] and there is a photo of David Bowie. Who is… an artist that I like and that I adore and who… who I think… is… well… Exactly, in this idea of neutrality, he is an individual who… even if you look at the photo, there is something ambivalent, you know. He is an individual… neither woman nor man. Who is just there and who is brilliant. […] in my head, it's a little like what I was saying regarding David Bowie: in my head, I am asexual, you know. I… I am not a woman, I am not a man. (Ani 2009)

All participants either chose images of themselves (a photo of their face, of themselves posing with their children, or pregnant) or images that could represent them and elicit tender feelings in observers and that are not threatening in any way (a teddy bear, a sheep, a fruit, a cartoon character, etc.). According to Schau and Gilly, providing images or clues about one's physical appearance is a strategy for 'digitizing likeness':

> One strategy for digitizing a likeness is to reference the [real life] body directly through pictures and textual descriptions. […] Another strategy for projecting a digital likeness is to create a nonphotographic likeness. In our sample, even the avatars used on the personal Web sites did not depart from human forms generally and the owner's specific physical appearance. […] From self-photos to stylized animated avatars, many informants in this study digitized their physical selves as part of their self-presentation in personal Web space. Although the use of these digital elements differed, the practice of choosing images that visually represent their physical bodies is common. (Schau and Gilly 2003: 396)

It should be added that the images chosen by participants not only are representative of their physical bodies – although they may well be – but they are also representative of perceived ideals of personal or personality traits – tenderness, motherhood, beauty, cuteness, comical, etc. For Goffman, as soon as individuals present themselves in front of others, they will aim at doing so in as ideal a way as they can, trying to 'incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society' (Goffman 1990 [1959]: 45), hence what they *perceive* as the most valued attributes and behaviours.

Because the presentation of the self online can be accessed at any time of day, possibly out of context, when a visitor reads a blog entry without going back to previous ones, and is read by heterogeneous audiences, bloggers tend to be cautious in their writings and present themselves in accordance with the values they view as reaching the widest group possible – a kind of lowest common denominator presentation. As Lynne suggested above, they avoid creating *a polemic*. One characteristic of blogs is permanence, which implies that 'the information you enter is recorded and can be accessed later' (Walker Rettberg 2008: 76) and is linked by Pinch to Goffman's concept of *co-presence*. Goffman discusses *co-presence* in the context of face-to-face interactions, which permit for other (non) verbal statements to enter the interaction and thus supplement the understanding that all parties have of one another (2005: 1). Pinch writes that *co-presence* may also apply to online interactions:

> If co-presence is interpreted as only bodily co-presence, then the idea will have limited applicability to online worlds. But if co-presence is conceived of as a means whereby interactants are available and accountable to each other for their mediated interactions, it has a wider application. (Pinch 2010: 420)

However, distinct from face-to-face interactions, blog entries run the risk of being received out of context and thus misunderstood by audiences. Furthermore, bloggers are unable to see others' reactions as they read and cannot immediately rectify misunderstandings or change their approach. The following extract from participant Ani's interview summarises this somewhat conscious desire to please one's audience, to be appreciated by her readers, and an awareness that the content published on blogs remains for readers to read at anytime:

> […] when I write, it's not to charm people, but there's always a bit of it, anyway. Because I want… I want to enchant them, I want them to be touched by magic. […] that's my aim, with the blog. To say, ok, it may not be easy, everyday, we have times when it's easier than others, but let's keep our focus on that objective. (Ani 2009)

CONCLUSION

The interviews and exploration of participants' blogs revealed various strategies used to present themselves in the best possible light, in their writings, through linking to other blogs and web sites and through the images they post. As such, blogs and homepages have been deemed ideal as tools to enable a 'carefully controlled performance through which self presentation is achieved under optimal circumstances' (Papacharissi 2002: 644). Feeling in control of their presentations of self, bloggers adopt four general strategies. One dimension consists of portraying themselves as educated, which is done mainly through the care they take in writing their posts,

ensuring accuracy in their writings and, generally, employing expressions that confirm their status as insiders within the francophone Québec community. Participants here emphasise their cultural capital and competence as bloggers, writers, and as citizens of Québec. Moreover, participants have expressed a desire to improve their styles of writing, sometimes referring to their blogs as a place to gain practice in writing interesting and engaging posts (such as Mireille and Denise, who respectively referred to their blogs as a writing school and a gym). This is further developed in the next chapter, where I focus on self-improvement narratives both in participants' interviews and blog entries.

Another dimension is to behave in a respectful manner on participants' blogs. This strategy is partly related to the first, as some participants linked not paying attention to the quality of their written French to a lack of respect for their readers – and for some participants, even a lack of respect for their culture. Other means of showing respect include not burdening their audiences by not discussing issues that could cause them distress, never resolving or discussing conflicts that involve people from their offline lives, and strictly observing the rules of netiquette – for instance, allowing another blogger to know when they write about them or their blog, and asking other bloggers for permission to link to their blog.

In showing respect to audiences, bloggers simultaneously aim at protecting themselves. Denise S. Bortree speaks of the fine balance that must be struck by teenage girls who, while sharing thoughts and experiences in their blogs, are also aiming to sustain and strengthen social relations within their existing networks. However, by doing so publicly via their blogs, when read by unintended audiences, they are putting themselves at risk of abuse and are increasing their possible vulnerability, both online and offline (2005: 37-38). Similarly, participants sometimes increase their own vulnerability when disclosing personal information. Perhaps the use of respect towards others is actually a cover, whereby they are ensuring that they do not reveal information that could backfire, either in online or offline relationships. Perhaps, they need a cover because they know it is impossible to segregate audiences or of ever knowing who exactly makes up their audience.

The third dimension, somewhat related to the second, consists of linking to websites, mostly blogs, to present themselves as networked. None of the participants did this as explicitly as participant Catherine who, on her blog, would link to other blogs most often referring to the blogger's given name instead of using their pseudonyms, thereby demonstrating to visitors on her blog that she *actually* knows these bloggers

personally. Nonetheless, as demonstrated above, the majority of participants included a list of their favourite blogs in their blogroll, referencing either popular blogs within the Québec blogosphere, or others writing on similar topics to their own. Analysing the blogrolls revealed that some participants in this study networked via their blogs with others in the study. Through research, it became evident that bloggers were abundantly referencing some well-known bloggers from Québec. This can be seen as a sign of appreciation, but also as a means of garnering credibility for oneself as a blogger, or increasing visibility on the blogosphere by displaying social capital and emphasising social competence.

Finally, the last dimension emerging from the interviews and the exploration of participants' blogs is how they present themselves as amicable. This is linked to *ingratiation* (Dominick 1999), which is a follow-up to consideration of portrayal of the networked self. Somebody who is well networked has the approval of many others, which could be perceived as a sign that others appreciate her both as a blogger and as an individual. Thus ensuring that others see them in the same positive way calls for a lot of care in how participants write and portray themselves. Participants try to avoid exposing their flaws on their blogs, and strive to share mainly positive memories and happy thoughts. Aware that their offline networks (professional, personal, family, etc.) may collide to form one heterogeneous audience, participants are cautious. Cautionary approaches include not revealing their offline identity, or only writing about safe topics, where their opinions would not come as any surprise to any of their readers. The final way by which participants project their 'digital likeness' is by giving clues about physical appearance or personal characteristics (Schau and Gilly 2003). We have seen in this chapter that all participants, with the exception of two, uploaded images onto their blogs, either of themselves or images that, in their view, represent characteristics of their personality thus providing more positive portrayals of themselves. All images invoked sympathetic response in observers or at least did not alienate them.

Online, internet users have the possibility of presenting themselves however they desire. This was in fact one of the positive features associated with internet: they could be judged not on what they look like and who they are offline, but on how they behave and present themselves online (Cheung 2004, Schau and Gilly 2003). It is worth mentioning that despite this optimistic approach to the internet, some realities of the technology limit the extent to which bloggers have freedom over their presentations of self. As underlined by Cheung, the digital divide limits the possibility of democratic access (2004: 62). Commercial providers, with their control and guidelines regarding

what content is allowed on the pages they host (Cheung 2004: 64) and ideological forces, constrain bloggers' freedom. Ideological forces include those from the webpage providers who often define an accepted template, and gender-based ideologies that impact, for example, on how women think they will be perceived if they publish some types of material, such as personal photos (Cheung 2004: 66), or express feelings of anger towards their children, etc.. Furthermore, as explained in the previous chapter, bloggers also feel somewhat constrained taking into account the feelings and reactions to others which leads to them avoiding or tempering their approaches to topics.

For Schau and Gilly, self-presentations online 'often evolve around repressing personal information or supplanting it with modified or fabricated details more congruent with a desired self' (2003: 387), representative of how internet users wish to be perceived. This is linked to bloggers' awareness that, online, their various offline audiences collide (Walker Rettberg 2008) so that they choose a lowest common denominator presentation of themselves and emphasise qualities that would not come as a surprise or shock to any of their audiences. This is somewhat paradoxical in that participants acknowledge their desire to mask information or events they are not proud of, in a desire to portray an acceptable self, while also underlining their desire to be genuine on their blogs, with writings representing who they really are. Despite the seemingly paradoxical nature of such self-display, the desire to portray oneself as favourably as one can is not foreign to other media researchers: 'Of course, individuals still feel compelled to enrich self presentation online', writes Papacharissi (2002: 645). Nonetheless, desires of authenticity are illustrated by the following comments:

> It's important for me to really be forthright, so I wouldn't be able to say… underplay or exaggerate something… (Cynthia 2008)

> When I say I'm not writing fiction, it's because the words that I write are the words that I live. So when I reread them, I relive them, you know? (Dominique 2008)

> No, it really is… it represents me. Me, that's what I think and… it's been confirmed by other people. (Lynne 2009)

> I am not hiding. (Ariane 2009)

> I don't necessarily want to give myself the good role. […] it's not really worth it, you know, because… on the other hand, do we lie in our manuscript diary? No. Not really. So. Listen, if there are things that I would prefer not to let others know, because I'm not really proud of myself, then I just won't write them [laughter]. (Mireille 2008)

> What I am on my blog I am in real life, so… There's no… I didn't surprise anyone, really… (Julie 2009)

Although most of the participants claim authenticity in their writings, that their blogs really reflect who they truly are, it emerges from this chapter that bloggers do not reveal the entirety of who they are, their personality or their thoughts. However, claiming authenticity may be part of the *performance* embedded in the presentation of self in everyday life. For Goffman (1990 [1959]: 15-16), Schau and Gilly (2003: 388) and Cheung (2004), the awareness of one's audiences and what their ideal values may be influences how actors perform the self, what they may chose to disclose and what they try to keep for themselves. As suggested by Papacharissi, inserting oneself in a network of bloggers, a *webring*, may be an attempt at defining one's audience in order to identify what performance to put forward (2002: 657), such as bloggers who identify as mothers and link to other blogs from the mamasphere – Catherine, Éloïse and Simone, for example. This practice, however, does not safeguard against the multiplicity and heterogeneity of possible audiences; it remains impossible to segregate audiences online. This leads to bloggers attempting to control their presentation of the self in order to limit their misperceptions and possible vulnerabilities, by showcasing what they see as positive or valued characteristics and using their editorial policy, as suggested by Michèle, to *control* their online behaviours. The realities of online communication and presentations of the self challenge the feelings that participants may have regarding the control over their performances. For anonymous bloggers such as Catherine, there are even perceived risks, offline, related to her online presentation. As she is uncomfortable in assuming her online presentation of the self in front of her husband's academic circle, she must constantly be cautious not to reveal any clues that may lead to others identifying her.

Looking at interview data, not only reveals a desire from bloggers to portray themselves under the best possible light. They also use the blogs to engage in self-improvement narratives, as detailed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6: JE ME SOUVIENS[49]

INTRODUCTION

According to Viviane Serfaty, online diaries may be perceived as the latest development in the genre of life narrative (2004: 4) – although other researchers consider such association between online diaries and the genre of life narrative 'an abomination, or at least a contradiction in terms' (McNeil 2003: 26). However when invited to compare blogging to their perceptions or practices of manuscript diary writing, most participants (with the exception of Elizabeth, Anabel and Denise) spoke of how they use blogging as a way of recording, in writing, their own lives, diaries, and autobiographies. For example:

> You know, my posts, they really are anecdotes of my life, things
> that happened to me, yadeyadeya […]. (Mireille 2008)

> And, sometimes, it's also to keep... keep track of things I find
> fun, or that the children do, for example, which I never think of
> writing down in the baby notebooks, or things like that. (Éloïse
> 2008)

> I thought: ah, yes, it would be a nice way for me to… write down
> what happens to me, to write down… the nice things that
> happen in my life. (Lynne 2009)

> What's a blog? A notebook for the road, eh… yes, that's it: like
> if we had our own little journal. (Lucie 2009)

The fact that Anabel, Denise and Elizabeth did not relate blogging to keeping memories was not surprising, as all three, in their own ways, are creative writers: Denise writes for a living and she uses her blog to improve her writing, and from the outset of their interviews Anabel and Elizabeth linked blogging to creative writing. However, this chapter illustrates that despite differences between these three participants and those who admit using blogging to record their lives, from time to time they also use their blogs in a similar fashion. Participants expressed their desires to save their blog entries, as a means of keeping track of changes and events in their lives. As such, they are making an effort not to lose track of their pasts, even if they one day may decide to stop blogging. This is how some described keeping their writings:

> If it causes me problems, I would shut it down. I would make a
> backup and it would be done. Thank you, good night. […] That's
> it. I would want to have a copy for myself. So I would print it,

---

[49] The title, *Je me souviens* [I remember], makes reference to the history of the province of Québec, as detailed in the introduction of the thesis.

and attach it to my manuscript diary [laughter] but… I would shut it down. (Cynthia 2008)

They can't just close it for fun, you know [laughter]. Mind you, I really should back it up, anyway, you know [laughter]. (Sarah 2009)

[…] I just don't understand it! I wouldn't be able to do it. [My first blog], I stopped it, but I wouldn't be able to delete it. (Michèle 2009)

[My family blog], as long as it's there… I like it. It really is as if we archived our life, step by step. I don't know how it would be if we didn't have it. Because it started… when we started our family. (Lucie 2009)

I mostly wouldn't want to… to lose my history, you know, my… And, precisely, we… we're a bit stressed these days, because I realise that… There's a lot of material on there, and I never printed anything… […]. We're realising that we should print it and we… But at the same time, my boyfriend was saying to me that it was quite complicated to print because… it would cut pages, anyway. But yes, we're thinking about it… (Simone 2009)

By blogging about events, thoughts and changes in their lives, participants use this online space as a platform on which to evaluate and record personal changes in their lives. As Viviane Serfaty comments, diarists record their lives online for a specific reason:

[…] by communicating about their inner lives, diarists are not merely engaging in self-expression, but are actually trying to better appropriate some elements of their own lives by theatricalizing them through words and pictures. Although self-dramatization may sound like another impediment to total openness, it actually helps externalize inner processes and display them to others in the hope that they will respond, so that they can be internalized anew, in modified form. This externalization of one's intimate life is what Jacques Lacan, followed by many others, called 'extimacy'. The drive toward self-revelation is thus one of the means through which individuals attempt to gain better access to their inner life. (Serfaty 2004: 92)

Hence, participants blog as a strategy to better understand themselves and, as argued in this chapter, to identify areas in their lives that might benefit from some kind of improvement or that have benefited from improvement. Furthermore, by using their blogs much like a manuscript diary, participants write about changes that affect them personally. This chapter looks at how bloggers write about those changes and what this means for them now and in the future. By engaging in self-improvement narratives, women authoring blogs discuss the various personal investments they are making in

order to better identify and improve who they are. As briefly mentioned in the conclusion of the previous chapter, and as suggested towards the end of this chapter, such narratives may also be linked to the online presentation of the self.

Before going any further in discussing self-improvement narratives, it should be mentioned that the changes that bloggers seek to make in their lives and the 'improvement' narratives and practices that participants engage with should not be read uncritically. While I pick up this discussion in the conclusion of this chapter, I wish to point out how having the self as project – which is what emerges here – is characteristic of 'late or second modernity' and often equated with agency (McRobbie 2009: 19). In relation to this, Angela McRobbie writes, drawing on Giddens and Beck, that the perceived dismantlement of traditional structures has brought responsibility for success and failure onto the individual herself. Specifically, she addresses the younger generation of women:

> Young women are, as a result of [modernity], now dis-embedded from communities where gender roles were fixed. And, as the old structures of social class fade away, and lose their grip in the context of late or second modernity, individuals are increasingly called upon to invent their own structures. They must do this internally and individualistically, so that self-monitoring practices […] replace reliance on set ways and structured pathways. […] As the overwhelming force of structure fades, so also, it is claimed, does the capacity for agency increase. (McRobbie 2009: 19).

McRobbie accuses Giddens and Beck of paying too little attention to the pressures under which individuals are meant to make all such choices, changes and decisions for themselves, writing that '[choice] is surely, within lifestyle culture, a modality of constraint' (2009: 19). Before moving further in this discussion, I wish to introduce part of Giddens' work, which is relevant to the arguments made in this chapter.

Anthony Giddens' *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in Late Modern Age* (1991) is concerned with such self-improvement narratives, which he approaches from the perspective of the 'reflexive project of the self', a condition of self-identity in our modern times (1991: 9). Providing a definition for his idea, Giddens writes that it consists of 'the process whereby self-identity is constitutive by the reflexive ordering of self-narratives' (1991: 244). As such, women's blogging may be approached as a strategy for creating a self-identity by engaging reflexively with oneself, thus implying the 'monitoring of, and reflection upon, psychological and social information about possible life trajectories' (Elliott 2008: 44-45; see also McRobbie 2009: 19).

As alluded to above, one of the most valued benefits of blogging, identified by participants, is the possibility of going back to their previous blog entries and reading them – either in relation to a theme (if they classified their entries by category or added a tag[50] to each entry) or by going back to a specific period of time. Participant Lynne uses the timeframe to review posts as she chooses to read the entries published on her blog by looking at a specific month:

> I believe, when I started, it really was the main goal of my whole thing… it was to keep a diary of my things, my joys, of… so of course sometimes it'll happen that I'll go back… It'll happen that, sometimes, I'll go back to read a month, you know: January 2007, or something like that. (Lynne 2009)

Reading past entries may be a source of pleasure, as analysed in the following chapter. However, it is also perceived as a practical activity, which allows bloggers to look back and examine how they have changed and evolved. Looking back at how they used to think, how they used to look, how they used to feel, the *limited* skills they used to have as compared to now can be a source of pride, pleasure, satisfaction – and even reassurance:

> […] You see… how you evolved. You know, as much about your writing style as in… how you structure your articles… and in… I was going to say: What animated your life. (Virginie 2008)

> […] Sometimes I will go back to read, yes, sometimes… because it happens, sometimes, that I read my archives, because, as I said: I find it enlightening to go back and read previous writings. (Bonnie 2008)

> […] Either I feel a little sad, or I… I am looking for an answer to something and… it will happen that I go back to read. Just to… find comfort in my choice, or… see how I felt at that time, so I don't fall back into the same things… (Michèle 2009)

By writing about their lives, women's bloggers reveal their personalities, their values and their views, their feelings about body image and size acceptance, emotional and mental health, their professional and homemaking skills. These themes, the most predominant in participants' interviews and blogs, are the focus of the following subsections. In approaching all such themes, I hope to contribute to the work started by McRobbie, who focuses more generally on interpersonal relationships and professional pathways, in her book *The Aftermath of Feminism. Gender, Culture and Social Change* (2009: 19).

---

[50] A tag is a word or sentence by which a blogger identifies an entry as belonging to a certain category or focussing on a particular topic: family, work, hobbies, etc.

PERSONALITY, VALUES AND VIEWS

Blogging, along with many other forms of life writing, is characterised by the 'quest for selfhood' (Walker 1996); an exploration of what constitutes the self in terms of the author's personality, values and views. Writing about French language texts in postcolonial contexts, Keith L. Walker underlines how francophone literary culture is intertwined with a desire to define and articulate the self:

> The early phases of francophone literary culture are characterized by assertion of identity, the reinvention of language, the quest for selfhood, […]. (Walker 1996: 246-7)

By authoring a blog, participants explore who they are and what values they hold. Readers' comments and feedback constitute the 'mirror' in blogging, according to Viviane Serfaty, who 'argues that online diarists and bloggers use their writing as a mirror that allows them to see themselves more clearly and to construct themselves as subjects […]' (Walker Rettberg 2008: 12, see Serfaty 2004: 12-15). As explained by many participants, the online space is used to write down how they feel, and it provides the time and space to further explore and articulate their values and ideas. As such, blogging is an opportunity to increase knowledge of self:

> I think that's it: people who have blogs, it's a way of exploring their own values, up to a certain extent. It's… it's like a way to deepen a dimension of who they are, which they decided to put forward. (Ani 2009)

> It's not just a political blog: there's a part, also, about how I see things. And it's… my life, personal life, also. So, at some point, this makes it… when there's too many people who have access to it, you are obligated to, really, to censor yourself and be more careful about the things you say [sigh]. (Blanche 2008)

> Because [my character], I consider her to be like me, but at an extreme. You know, like myself, but multiplied by 1000, for instance. You know, all my little habits, my defects and all… my… my obsessions… Well, she has them, but you know, even closer to insanity, you know. (Anabel 2009)

> It's like… it's like diaries, but you know… you read the notebooks since the start and you can really see our evolution, since… my god, 2000, I was… 24 years old? Now, I am 32… it's not mature, it's completely crazy, it's therapy via writing. […] And what I appreciate about this concept is that it's not like diaries. In a diary, you don't get feedback. In principle, mind you. (Elizabeth 2008)

> But, when I'm done writing my post, that I… got the bad stuff out. And, then, I read comments, I interact… but there's like a distance now, and I've been able to… think better, have a better

> understanding, a better analysis, to act better [pause]. (Michèle 2009)

Using blogs as a screen onto which to project themselves and receive feedback from readers, bloggers are able to critically reflect on their views, values and personalities and move forward to construct personal self-improvement narratives. From a Lacanian perspective (used by Serfaty 2004), the sole act of going back to one's writings and reflecting on them enables self-awareness (this is what Jacques Lacan referred to as the 'mirror stage' – an idea developed within psychoanalysis according to which human knowledge about the self is built by (mis)recognising the self in a mirror, following a confrontation between the *image* of the self reflected in the mirror and the *idea* of the self (Lacan 2006 [2002])). As explained by Serfaty (2004) and some participants, self-awareness indeed is a central component of blogging:

> But… when I wrote alone, it was mainly to help me think, in fact. It wasn't… it wasn't to make the novel of my life. It was just… it helps to think. (Lucie 2009)

> […] I took it as… almost like a daily exercise. I always… well, not found, but tried… to tell myself: ok, what made you progress today? What do you feel like talking about and how would you say it? Now, I… I am quite sure that there are things that are not interesting for my readers, but I don't care! [laughter] I just need to… I think it leaves a mark, you know. It's stupid, but when it's not going well, you look and say to yourself: woo, finally, my life isn't shit, when I think about it. (Virginie 2008)

There are a wide range of subjects covered in reflections of research participants, but two main characteristics, mentioned by Virginie, appear to be embedded in these bloggers' approaches to self-improvement. The first is the *need* to progress, to move forward, and to improve oneself. Participants discuss the need to improve as if it was a common pursuit, or universal practice. Making progress on self-improvement is a quest for all bloggers, period. The second characteristic is a need to state that their lives '*aren't shit*', that they are moving on, towards a more positive ending, deeply engaged in this quest for personal progress and general improvement. Different participants used different means to make these points. Ani openly expressed her views on spirituality while Lucie discussed religion in less depth, being less comfortable doing so. Others, such as Cynthia and Blanche, used their blogs to clarify thoughts and ideas on various themes – sometimes in relation to current news events, or regarding various types of relationships. On the whole, bloggers explore how they feel and think about various personal or social events – trying to better understand themselves, their opinions and beliefs. Participant Lynne describes this practice in the following words:

> But I would say that this is what characterises, somewhat, a
> diary blog: most times, it starts from something that you live,
> personally. It starts from… a feeling that you, you have, in
> regards to something, which may have happened in the news,
> or… in your own little life. (Lynne 2009)

Overall, blogs are used to define oneself in relation to the world – against or alongside wider accepted ideals, values and world visions – by either comparing one's perspective to an impression of a widely accepted ideology, or by seeking approval through conforming to predominant ideas. In general, bloggers who took part in this project rarely engaged in controversial discussions. For example, Kieva realised how challenging it is to publicly express non-mainstream positions, whereas Anabel realised that she cares about people's opinions and that no matter what she says, she remains self-conscious about how her ideas might be received:

> Women's fight for equality… eh… I did… write about this, what
> it meant, for me, to be a feminist. I did write about it, and that's
> when I had the… the worst comments, the most readers, eh…
> (Kieva 2009)

> Well… anyway, it allowed me to realise that… [silence] maybe I
> am less… how should I say this? You know, I… You know, I
> would love to be able not to care about others' opinions. And to
> say… I live my life without compromise, and yadeyadeya. It's
> like… a goal that I have. But… I now realise, through writing this
> blog and creating extreme situations for [my character], where
> she reacts in ways that are more extreme than I would… Deep
> down, others' opinions count a lot for me. And that… I have a
> lot of reservations, in life. […] So I became conscious of certain
> things, like this fact. (Anabel 2009)

Some bloggers, who felt somewhat more confident in their views, or were comfortable with some self-effacing, were not so fearful of criticism and expressed the belief that the blog remained a place to clarify their ideas or the place they believe themselves to hold in the world, as exemplified by Cynthia:

> It allows me to clarify… my opinions and ideas. When I really
> think about it, to deepen some aspect… like critical thinking.
> And as I really enjoy writing, it's a good tool to practice this.
> (Cynthia 2008)

This quote demonstrates that some bloggers use their blogs as a platform to try out ideas and views about the world; to further explore who they are and what their beliefs are. By going back to their writings, discussing with other bloggers, or by really looking at the feedback from readers, participants are invited – or pushed – to consolidate their thoughts and to defend and strengthen their claims. In so doing, they work on defining and improving who they are. However, not only do bloggers discuss and develop their

points of view and their values, many also reflect on personal issues such as body image and size acceptance.

BODY IMAGE AND SIZE ACCEPTANCE

The pressures felt by women to conform to specific images of femininity in terms of body size appear in many blog entries – sometimes in commentaries about how much one struggles to lose weight, or how one successfully controls weight. At other times, the pressures to control one's weight are not specifically mentioned in relation to self-image, but rather surface in the form of 'comedy', or fatophobic comments in their writings. Analysing women's body image, Sylvia K. Blood (2005) argues that the female body is the focus of a variety of discourses, positioning women in contradictory ways. She explains:

> A range of discourses, of femininity, sexuality, self-improvement, self-acceptance, as well as body image discourse, to name a few, converge on the female body in contemporary Western society. These discursive formations position women in often contradictory ways. For instance, a discourse of self-improvement centred on women's physical appearance constitutes women's bodies/subjectivities as needing remedial work. At the same time, a discourse of self-acceptance (evident in body image discourse) positions women as 'pathological' if they do not accept their bodies as they are […]. (Blood 2005: 51)

Approaching media portrayals of women's bodies in Western societies, Bordo (2003 [1993]) and Sprague Zones (2005 [1997]) go beyond the contradictory nature of bodily discourses to argue that the women beauty ideals are ever harder to attain. The latter describes:

> Although there have always been beauty ideals for women (Banner 1983), in modern times the proliferation of media portrayals of feminine beauty in magazines, billboards, movies, and television has both hastened and more broadly disseminated the communication of detailed expectations. There are increasingly demanding criteria for female beauty in western culture, and women are strongly pressured to alter their appearance to conform with these standards. (Sprague Zones 2005 [1997]: 66)

Bordo explains that there is a never-ending pursuit of femininity ideals, as they are constantly changing. This requires women to always pay attention to new developments in fashion and beauty standards. In doing so, women constantly police their own bodies and try to adjust in the face of an incessant feeling of inadequacy. The latter, according to Bordo, may have serious and critical consequences, such as 'utter demoralization, debilitation, and death' (Bordo 2003 [1993]: 166). In the words of

Deliovsky, such a Foucauldian approach '[highlights] the ways women are subjected to the self-regulating and policing regimes of patriarchally defined beauty' (Deliovsky 2010: 102; see also Blood, 2005), policing regimes that bloggers themselves apply to their own bodies and those of other women. This practice of criticising one's own weight, and that of others, illustrates, according to Sprague Zones, how often women's views collude with patriarchy, a phenomenon she refers to as internalised sexism. Sprague Zones argues that by doing so, unrealistic beauty ideals remain uncontested and hence women's oppression remains unquestioned:

> Competition between women is a prominent feature of internalized sexism, reflecting women's collusion with beauty expectations that are both limiting and unrealistically demanding. Women become each other's critics, keeping each other anxious and in line, thereby maintaining the status quo. (Sprague Zones 2005 [1997]: 68)

In relation to this, McRobbie argues that in the context of late modernity, women are more pressured to invest in their bodies. Their bodies are also assessed in their professional lives – and how, consequently successful body management becomes an index for women's successes. Specifically, she writes:

> This landscape of self-improvement substitutes for the feminist values of solidarity and support and instead embraces and promotes female individualization and condemnation of those who remain unable or unwilling to help themselves. The new temporalities of women's time mean that they are now called upon to attend to body image and personal skills so that they will remain presentable in the workplace and employable in the longer term. (McRobbie 2009: 73).

With this increased pressure (implicit or explicit) from ever changing beauty ideals, contradictory discourses on body image, and policing regimes, it should come as no surprise that women's blogging takes up discussions on weight and body image. This section analyses bloggers' weight-related comments and what immediately emerges is that in the narrative of the self, participants are compelled to reference the body, or more specifically, body size.

Weight and body image concerns of some bloggers who participated in the research first became apparent in comments made during email or telephone exchanges to set up meetings for interviews or during the interviews themselves. Although body image and size acceptance have been the focus of much research conducted on representations and imagery of idealised femininity (see, for example, Bordo 2003 [1993], Deliovsky, 2010 and Sprague Zones 2005 [1997]), it was not until participants made weight-specific comments that this was identified as a significant subject of

analysis in the blog entries and interview transcripts. For example, during a telephone conversation before meeting with blogger Bonnie, she refers to her blue glasses and her large size as characteristics that would allow me to recognise her in the restaurant where we would conduct the interview. At the restaurant, during the interview, she underscores that, by reading her blog, readers would probably deduce that she is fat:

> You will learn… probably that by reading my blog, you will reali… you will end up understanding that I am a woman…. a fat woman. Because I talk about it, it is also part of… of who I am. (Bonnie 2008)

However, it appears that not all bloggers express concerns about their body image. In this study five participants, Catherine, Mireille, Shaindl, Michèle and Denise, avoided any discussions of their own weight or body image or that of others and only one participant, Ani, expressed positive views and satisfaction with her weight. Nonetheless, most have engaged in such discussions to some extent. For example, while discussing the topics Sarah chooses, she mentions food and immediately justifies how and why she writes about it:

> Food, I spoke about it a lot, lately… in the last year, since the summer, because I started to make my own homemade preserves. So I added some… I spoke about it, a lot, with photos and everything. Eh… but before then, I spoke about [food] a lot because… because of my weight-loss steps, which I talk about… the motivation… (Sarah 2009)

Furthermore, others mention how body image, size acceptance or weight control issues are recurrent themes in their entries. Blogger Ghislaine, for instance, evokes her post "Eat!" (16th March, 2007) during the interview as one of the posts she was most proud of[51]; in this entry, she describes her anti-dieting approach and how she struggled with her weight and body image from an early age. As these various accounts of difficulties in relation to body image and weight became evident, closer attention was paid to the verbal expressions of size-acceptance and body image, both within the interview transcripts and in the entries posted on the blogs.

---

[51] Although blogger Ghislaine recently mentioned, during an email exchange, that she no longer agrees with what she wrote in this entry, it was significant at the time of the interview, and remains relevant to this chapter, in terms of size-acceptance. In this email exchange, Ghislaine underlines how she still does not believe in dieting as a weight-control strategy, but that she realises how this entry was filled with anger. She also details the changes she implemented in her life, such as eating less, going to the gym and into therapy. Then, she asks 'Loving oneself, fat?', to which she answers 'No. Being fat is hell' (Ghislaine, personal email, 26th October 2010). Furthermore, it should be noted that some of her discussions in relation to size-acceptance were referenced by other bloggers as material that needed to be read, perhaps contributing to her status in the blogosphere.

One analysis focused on the types of websites and blogs included in the blogrolls of participants,[52] where some level of preoccupation with body image and size is expressed. However, only one participant, Sarah, included a reference to a specific weight-control website[53] in her blogroll. Nonetheless, body and size acceptance are indirectly referenced through the inclusion of various other types of websites and blogs such as those on eating disorders (resources website and blogs), on weight loss (blogs), on empowerment for plus size women, on clothing for plus size women, on beauty products and, predominantly, on recipes and food sourcing. Websites and blogs belonging to the category of recipes and food were found on twelve out of the 23 participants' blogrolls (bearing in mind that 21 bloggers had a blogroll at the time of interview), with 37 blogs or websites focussing mostly or exclusively on recipes (27 unique blogs mentioned). None of these blogs are explicitly related to low calorie recipes, some named with mouth watering titles such as '*Les gourmandises d'Isa*' [Isa's Gourmandises] and *Chroniques gourmandes* [Gourmand Chronicles]. However, their inclusion on participants' blogs, considering also that nine out of the twelve participants had mentioned struggling with size acceptance or desiring to lose some weight on their blogs, illustrates a vigilance regarding food intake.

Additionally, blogs were scrutinised to identify entries where the authors discuss topics related to body image, size acceptance and weight control. More specifically, the blog entries were coded for clues about the aforementioned topics – including the use of words such as *livres*[54] (pounds), kilos, *poids* (weight), *diète* and *régimes* (two words used in referring to diets). In twelve blogs, some comments were found where the blogger expressed some level of dissatisfaction with her size, weight or body image, or awareness of the *dangers* of becoming fat. For those who were unhappy with their looks, two approaches dominated: bloggers who discussed their desires (and often methods) to lose weight and bloggers who acknowledged they *should* lose weight, but had committed to size-acceptance views. In addition, some bloggers (Éloïse and Anabel) use weight as a derisive characteristic of people they describe or as the basis of jokes. This section explores participants' various approaches to try to determine levels of awareness of social pressures to conform to a specific body type providing evidentiary excerpts from interviews and quotations from the blogs.

---

[52] Further discussion of the blogs and websites participants have included in their blogroll may be found in another chapter of this thesis, *Être ou paraître*.

[53] More specifically, the Canadian Weight Watchers website (http://www.weightwatchers.ca).

[54] *Livres*, in French, refers to pounds if used with a feminine pronoun, whereas when associated to a masculine pronoun, refers to its homograph, books. Thus, the use of *livres* had to be situated in the context of the wider entry, not to confuse the two homographs. Blogger Kieva used this as a play on word, when stating she had to lose ten (10) *livres* – referring to books she wanted to get rid of, and not pounds she wanted to lose (15th April 2009).

A small majority of participants expressed dissatisfaction regarding weight or body image. Of these, most explained how they wanted to lose weight and were either looking at measures to do so, had started to follow advice on weight loss or dieting, or shared their tips and previous experiences of weight loss. Often, the comments are brief, without any or much focus on how much weight they would want to lose, or how they intend to lose the weight:

> [Mentioning her resolutions for 2008] I would also like to lose a little weight… (Elsa, 13th January 2008)

> [Reflecting on a photo taken of her as she was seven months pregnant] I didn't know I was so fat… until [my husband] took this photo of me. (Lucie 28th January 2007)

In other cases, and sometimes on the same blog but in other entries, bloggers are more specific when talking about the weight they want to lose, have previously lost – or gained – as well as, sometimes, the methods followed:

> [Answering a tag-quiz on her blog, where she had to write seven facts about herself] I once was addicted to PEPSI… As a matter of fact, my most conclusive diet occurred when I stopped this infernal drug… I then lost 30 pounds in a couple of weeks… unfortunately, I gained it all back and as I no longer drink Pepsi (or just about), it's really hard to lose it again!! (Elsa, 1st June 2007)

> […] I want to move a little more. In fact, I admit it in a whisper, I wish to lose a little weight, tone my muscles and not lose my breath so quickly. You know what? I am annoyed with myself, because I want to lose weight. I have always been relatively satisfied with my looks, even if I could not wear a size 7 since I was in CÉGEP[55]. Far from it. But I always made a point of honour of finding myself not too bad… to be satisfied with what I had which was fine and hide as much as I could what I had which wasn't fine. But now, things have changed.
> 1 – I gained 22 pounds in the past year. Well… Hello???!!!???
> 2 – My newfound femininity, which I've expressed more and more, in the past three years, would really like to buy some styles of dresses and skirts that just do not work with the chubby look.
> 3 – My 27 chins in photos bother me more than they ever did before. (Lynne, 7th June 2009)

> On Tuesday, [my son] and I are starting aqua-stroller classes! I am really looking forward to seeing how it'll be. It's time I get back in shape a little, because the pregnancy left some kilos,

---

[55] CÉGEP is an acronym for Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel [General and Professional Teaching College]. CÉGEPs were created in Québec in 1967, following the Parent Commission, which recommended new institutions in order to increase access to post-secondary education in all regions of Québec. Although some colleges in Québec are private, CÉGEPs are public institutions (Fédération des CÉGEP, 2007).

> which I must now say bye-bye to. (Simone, 9th January 2009)

> I lost 52 pounds in 52 weeks while on Weight Watchers. I am still following the programme to maintain my weight. But I will NEVER say that I followed a "weight-loss diet," because it is not true. I changed my habits and I became aware of what I put in my mouth. (Sarah, 14th July 2006 – emphasis in original)

Having tried various diets and methods, two bloggers decided to share some advice with their readers. Bonnie mentioned in her interview having tried the protein shakes method, which ended up not working. Nonetheless, when she started using the protein shakes, she decided to start a parallel blog to note her progress. She then said that since this approach had not worked, she had abandoned the blog, but wanted to go back to it when she identifies another diet or approach to weight-loss. The idea behind this other blog, in Bonnie's words, is to 'document everything I do, because I say to myself, who knows, it could possibly help another woman' (Bonnie 2008). Walker Rettberg suggests that dieting blogs of this sort do not focus solely on 'a short-term goal'; rather, they put the 'emphasis on the process' and by publishing the entries in public, on a blog, 'keep the dieter accountable' (2008:114).

On the contrary, blogger Sarah, while having lost the equivalent of one pound per week for a whole year (52 pounds in as many weeks, as previously mentioned), warned her readers not to follow weight-loss programmes (such as the one mentioned above by Bonnie), underlining how the focus has to be on a balanced diet, which in her view involved paying attention to quantities, prioritising quality and above all else, trusting one's own judgement (Sarah, 4th November 2005). Doing otherwise, according to an entry Sarah posted in January 2006, is to have a 'fat woman's mentality', that is, avoiding responsibility regarding one's food intake and finding excuses not to implement positive change in one's life (a mentality which, according to Sarah, is not only related to one's weight, but may also interfere with other aspects of life (Sarah, 18th January 2006)).

Another approach, a commitment to size acceptance, emerged from other bloggers' comments addressed to those who were not satisfied with their body and size. They discussed how their weight struggles had made them unhappy and perhaps even caused some of their issues with weight:

> But, there is a small but… when I was 8 years old, while at a regular doctor's appointment, a doctor came to the conclusion that I had to lose a few pounds. Yes, perhaps, I was a little chubby, but due to an adult's judgement, I became mentally huge. This adult stuck the image of 'The fat one' in my head. An image that I kept with me for 35 years. The fat one. Even when

> I weighed 119 pounds, I was the fat one. Hence, because of deprivation, fasting, diets, I starved myself. And, in secret, I overate. Because my body wanted to survive. For 35 years, I have attempted to survive by becoming a bulimic. (Ghislaine, 16th March 2007)

> I am fat, I know why and I will do what needs to be done, but only <u>when I will have decided, for my own health and not to please anybody else</u>. In the meantime, I am sick and tired of reading nasty comments about us. I am fat. But I am NOT ugly. I like nice clothes, I wear make-up, I see my hairdresser 10 times a year and I take care of myself and how I look. I have quite some bosoms, which attract looks and I do not hesitate to show them off. And I couldn't care less if some people are not comfortable with this. Your boring jokes have made fat women feel uncomfortable for much longer and nobody told you until today. It was about time someone did. (Bonnie, 13th February 2009 – original emphasis)

> [Commenting on the word combinations used in Google to find her blog] **Overweight and belly dancing:** Oh, this… one needs to learn to accept one's body!!! (Elsa, 17th September 2007 – emphasis in original)

Elsa's entry on belly dancing, when compared to a previous entry posted on her blog, reveals a personal change in relation to size-acceptance. In February 2007, she had acknowledged that her weight and body image had previously kept her from joining belly-dancing classes:

> Belly dancing. What a lovely dance… sensual and feminine!! I had previously wanted to register, but because of my excess in weight, I had put this project to the side… Last year, a girlfriend asked me to join a class with her… I accepted… and I have absolutely no regrets!! (Elsa, 16th February 2007)

Furthermore, blogger Ghislaine, who during her interview discussed the need to tell women that diets do not work and are not the solution, wrote an eye-opening entry in September 2007, six months after publicly acknowledging her bulimia on her blog. She wrote:

> It's nice and easy to say [that women who are seen as plus-size should diet], really nice and easy, while we know that thousands of women are struggling to escape diet hell. Thousands of women are haunted and terrified because they are fat and inflict the worse forms of torture upon themselves, as a result of fighting against their own bodies and their own minds… (Ghislaine 13th September 2007)

All these bloggers articulate the pressures they feel to conform to specific body image and size. Even when claiming they are not really preoccupied with their weight, bloggers are aware of such pressures: Ani is the only blogger who clearly stated that

she was satisfied with her weight – aware, perhaps that her body did not conform exactly to ideals of feminine beauty and thinness, she writes:

> Well, of course my stomach is not exactly flat – I have leftover baby fat that always remained – but let's just say that my weight, it really isn't a preoccupation. (Ani 27th November 2007)

Overall, a general preoccupation with body size and weight seems to permeate the writings of bloggers who participated in this research.

Although most do not write about their weight as a central concern or focus, there is one final strand of comments about weight that runs throughout the data. Some bloggers' comments about weight identify it as a source of mockery or speak to eating habits as reinforcement of thinness as an ideology. Most bloggers who mock themselves about weight do so in relation to the weight they gained during pregnancy, such as Elizabeth and Simone. But others make a mockery of how they may become fat or may be perceived by others as fat. Elizabeth for instance refers to a conversation she previously had with her partner:

> [Referring to herself as 'a whale, but at least without any stretch marks' and addressing her partner, while pregnant] […] Do you love me? I mean, do you love me even though I weigh more than you? (Elizabeth 18th December 2008)

Simone confessed, on her blog, to joining a women-only fitness centre, despite knowing readers such as her sister would probably judge her:

> 9:32 am. I enter… Swann[56] (I can hear from here, my sister screaming her heart out… LAME!!!!!!) And, yes, on the 4km walk between the day-care and my house a LADYZ' fitness centre can be found. The pregnancy has left me with a couple of extra kilos that I would really like to lose and I wanted to make an inquiry. First impression: too much happiness, too much pink, too LADYZ, owner is too skinny… but I must admit that the idea is interesting… […] P.S. My trial session at Swann is on Wednesday… [laughter] (Simone, 9th March 2009)

Lynne and Kieva, despite using humour in describing their *unhealthy* eating habits and approaches to food generally, speak of the risks embedded in such attitudes to food – the *risk of becoming fat*. For example, they write:

> [After discussing how bad a day she had just had] So, in order to change my mood and end this evening on a high note, what do I do? I think about my dinner. What could I eat, which would make me feel better? That's what I do. I reward and spoil myself with food. I shouldn't. I know. It's dangerous. I know. Weight

---

[56] Swann is a fitness centre where membership is restricted to women only (Swann [http://www.swann.ca], accessed 9th November 2010)

> Watchers, dieticians, O.A.,[57] Chantal Lacroix,[58] my mother: they would all say it's not good. But you know what? All these theories? Useless, today. (Lynne, 15th March 2007)

> I eat my emotions; there is no doubt on that. When I am stressed out, I eat. If I am angry, I eat. If I am happy, I eat. And if I want to party, fast, fast to a restaurant, so we can eat! I must have a really fast metabolism, since I have not yet become fat like a pregnant cow. (Kieva 16th April 2007)

> If I go on like this I will: […] Turn fat like a sow, due to my almost-nil level of activity that may resemble physical activity and due to calories intake, coming almost solely from chocolate (well, y'a know, 1 pound of Easter chocolate for $2, I couldn't miss it). (Kieva, 2nd April 2007)

Cynthia's comment is, at first glance, a critique of the weight-control advertisements she sees online, when logging onto her *Facebook* account. How she discusses this ad, however, is reminiscent of how she may feel about her own body or how she thinks others perceive her body. Instead of dismissing the ad completely, she jokes about how Facebook employees could have targeted her after seeing some of her photos – despite not referring explicitly to Foucault's *panopticon* (1975), she feels she may be watched, her body is being policed, despite her not being able to see her observers:

> But, in the past few days, a new type of advertisement has emerged: diets. Well, you know! Knowing that *Facebook*[59] mostly focuses on profiling for its advertisement, as a source of funding, where did they get that I needed to lose some weight??? What, they looked at my photos and went 'Issshhhh! Yeah, well, I'd say we should send her some diet ads, it's urgent'!!!?? (Cynthia, 18th April 2008)

The use of humour or blatant descriptions of one's body provide other ways of focussing on weight. Some bloggers, such as Bonnie, do not hesitate to identify with the word 'fat' – whereas Elizabeth (in comment above) and Anabel[60], describe only parts of their bodies or describe their bodies in specific circumstances such as during pregnancy using humour, but still making reference to weight and fatness:

> I spend Christmas on my ass. In the literary sense: sitting on my two fat ass cheeks without being able to move. (Anabel, 27th December 2008)

---

[57] O.A. stands for *Overeaters Anonymous*, an organisation that aims at helping its members to "[recover] from compulsive eating". (Overeaters Anonymous [http://www.oa.org/], accessed 8th November 2010).

[58] Chantal Lacroix is regarded as a healthy eating and exercise guru in the province of Québec, having hosted a television show on physical exercise, released some physical exercise and toning DVDs and now the founder of the *SOSBeauté* [SOS Beauty] programme [http://www.sosbeaute.ca].

[59] *Facebook* is a social networking website [http://www.facebook.com].

[60] It should be underlined that many of the entries posted by Anabel are fictional, as she declared in her interview. For example, although the 27th December 2008 entry on her blog suggested she fracture her left ankle and wrist, there was no sign of such injuries when I met with her on the 9th of January 2009. Nonetheless, the comments she makes in relation to her own and others' bodies may be related to internalised pressures to conform to thinness ideals.

Another example, is the image posted by a blogger on March 25ᵗʰ, 2007, followed by the caption 'Let's say that it's me, with a healthy weight!!':

Figure 6: A Blogger's 'Healthy Weight'
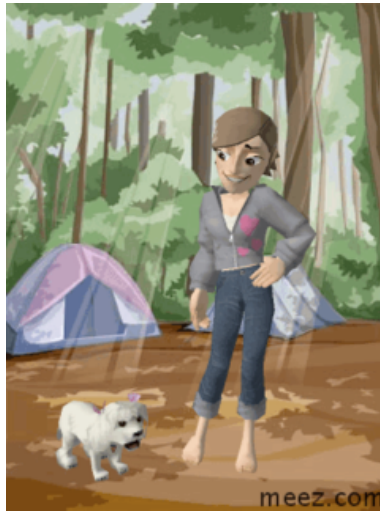
Through their comments on weight, either in relation to their own bodies or how they judge or feel judged by others, many entries testify to the overwhelming societal pressures on women to control the food they eat and the size of their bodies. The effect of these pressures is often transmitted through assumed guilt, or expressions of disgust, even if the blog entry is cast as humorous. The following blog excerpts provide examples of statements made in relation to food, body size, and others' bodies, while the bloggers are using a humorous tone:

> [Describing a cake she baked and ended up eating entirely] For once, I had followed the advice that states that one should never go to someone's house empty-handed and I had baked a huge chocolate cake, from the famous recipe which falls directly on girls' hips and causes weight-gain just by daring to look at its icing. And the icing, let's just say that I had coated the cake with loads of it. (Anabel, 30ᵗʰ June 2007)

> […] here I am, competing as best belly blog (belly, as in mummy, not as in should go on a diet) (Éloïse, May 4ᵗʰ, 2008)

> I thought it would be a good idea to move a little. And as if the rain wasn't enough, I decided to get even wetter and visit my neighbourhood's swimming pool. I swam laps for half-an-hour, in the 'Slow' lane. I didn't have the confidence to go in the 'Average' lane today, so I decided to swim with the women fatsoes and the octogenarians. (Anabel 25ᵗʰ October 2008).

> [After mentioning how she insulted a customer at her job and was subsequently dismissed] She should bugger off, the fat

> Outremont[61] lawyer with her squid. She should have eaten an
> Atkins'[62] salad instead of ordering fried food; it would have been
> better for her waistline and I, I wouldn't have lost my job.
> (Anabel 19th June 2007)

We see here that bloggers' self-policing of their bodies, and those of others, takes place in their everyday practices, as well as in their blogging. Participants also tend to notice when others caution them to discipline their bodies. This comes across clearly in Cynthia's blog entry when she realised *Facebook* was *sending her* diet ads. Lynne's comment dated March 15, 2007 (above), where she acknowledges that her use of food as a reward would be perceived reprehensible by weight-loss gurus – even her own mother – is another example of being aware of others policing their bodies. Virginie also points to outside pressures referring to spam posted on her blog (in the form of weight-loss advertisements):

> It's just that for a while, I unfortunately mentioned that… that I
> would like to lose a little weight. So it was two businesses,
> which wanted to suggest that I… that I try weight-loss products.
> […] And you know… this, this is the type of thing that gets on
> my nerves. Well, at the beginning, it really made me laugh, I
> thought, that's it: I wrote, once, 'I'd like to lose a couple of kilos'
> and here we are! [laughter]. (Virginie 2008)

However, some of the messages regarding ideals of beauty may go unnoticed, perhaps because they are so pervasive in everyday life that they are rendered invisible. For example, Ariane made no mention of the advertisements suggesting weight loss methods on her blog, which I noticed proliferated when visiting her blog. Nonetheless, writings in relation to weight demonstrate an internalising of pressure to conform to ideals that comply with norms of femininity – as explicitly mentioned by Lynne and Bonnie (above) and described as a motivation for weight-loss on Virginie's blog:

> Me, old-fashioned? Just thinking about it freaks me out… As I
> have just started my cream-diet-new clothes program in order to
> feel more feminine and sexy, I discover that I am old-
> fashioned… (Virginie 20th April 2006)

Other bloggers, possibly aware of these pressures to conform to thinness norms of beauty, have aligned themselves with a growing size-acceptance movement and

---

[61] Outremont is a neighbourhood situated in the Eastern part of the city of Montréal, Québec. It is known in the region as being the wealthiest of all Montréal neighbourhoods. According to 2005 data, the average income per person aged 15 and older, in Outremont, was $66,370 (this compares to $34,334 per person in Montréal in general). The gender-based disparity in personal income is also more noteworthy in Outremont than in Montréal generally, with men earning on average $91,788 per year and women $43,280. In Montréal, men's annual income averages at $40,104 and women's at $28,127 – which means that in Montréal generally, women earn 70.14% in comparison to men's earning (similar to the Canadian average), whereas this falls to 47.15% in Outremont. (Ville de Montréal, 2006)

[62] This is a reference to Atkin's program, a low-carbohydrate diet. (Atkins website, 2010 [http://www.atkins.com], accessed 9th November 2010)

provide thoughts on the negative aspects of dieting or on how they were or, for some, still are satisfied with their bodies. Nonetheless, thinness ideals are pervasive in most discussions surrounding weight, with some bloggers using weight and size matters to mock themselves, to express dissatisfaction with their bodies or as providing guidelines for self-policing their bodies. For many of the bloggers, improving themselves involves losing weight and/or the toning of muscles.

It emerges from this discussion that by paying attention to their looks and body, most bloggers align themselves with beauty ideals promoted in Canadian society, as revealed in Deliovsky's research:

> Turning to patriarchy's portrait of women, what does it actually look like? I asked the research participants "what kind of images do you think Canadian society promotes in the media and in magazines?" They unanimously stated that the feminine images promoted by the media were those that were slim and beautiful. Notably, a 'fact' riven with contradiction, the images they described were not necessarily ones that reflected their own beauty ideals. (Deliovsky 2010: 104)

From this discussion of body image and size acceptance, I suggest that for a majority of participants, self-worth is linked to self-improvement, which is in turn linked to self-control and self-discipline. It is perhaps not surprising that fat bodies – and fat *women*, particularly – are portrayed as being out of control. So by blogging about size, body image and efforts to control their weight, participants point to their self-discipline but they also open up the subject of needing to police their own bodies. By publicly committing to losing weight, going to the gym, dieting, etc., participants may feel accountable to their readers and actively bring the audience into the policing role to help them stick with the programme.

What is interesting with regards to discussions of body image and size acceptance by bloggers is the constrast it presents to earlier work on internet technologies. In the 1990s, it was suggested that the technology would alleviate some of the pressures of embodiment (as discussed earlier when highlighting Sadie Plant's work and her 1997 book *Zeros + Ones*). Instead, what we see when looking at the discussions of bloggers is an intensification of pressure as bodies are re-inscribed online, and lived and inhabited in often difficult and somewhat oppressive ways. This issue was also noted by Jessie Daniels (2009), who focussed on embodiment in relation to race and gender within two online communities (pro-ana and transgendered). She underlined how the body was brought online and how, in turn, information gathered online had impacts on the offline body, intensifying gendered bodywork. She writes:

> In both instances, self-identified girls and women engage in practices with Internet technologies to manage, transform and control their physical bodies in ways that both resist and reinforce hierarchies of gender and race. Instead of seeing cyberspace as a place in which to experience the absence of the body, or even as a text-only place with no visible representation of the body, these girls and self-identified women use digital technologies in ways that simultaneously bring the body "online" (through digital photo uploaded to the web) and take the digital "offline" (through information gleaned online to transform the embodied selves). (Daniels 2009: 117)

Bloggers do not only try to improve themselves and their personas solely through examining their track record in relation to beauty ideals. They also write about work invested in improving themselves in relation to their emotional and mental health, as explained in the next section.

EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Writing about their feelings and states of mind on a blog, with the attendant opportunity to go back to read these posts later, plays two major roles in the lives of research participants. On the one hand, this practice is a strategy to externalise one's personal emotional and mental health difficulties, providing some distance in order to gain perspective. On the other hand, the blog provides a space to receive and offer support, and to find comfort. In these ways blogging may serve a similar purpose to diary writing or journal writing used by women throughout the ages. Indeed, scholars have discussed how diary style blogs might be studied in relation to life narratives (Serfaty 2004: 4) and to the 'history of literature and writing'. Jill Walker Rettberg states:

> A path can be traced from early autobiographical writing through diary writing and memoirs up to the confessional and personal diary-style of blogging of today [...]. (Walker Rettberg 2008: 1)

Blogs authored by participants include reflections on mental, emotional and psychological health as a way of distancing bloggers from difficult thoughts, as a form of introspection and as a way of sharing often taboo mental health-related thoughts in order to offer or receive support from readers and other bloggers. Keeping track of previous and current introspections of this nature enables bloggers to assess their progress towards wellbeing. For Julie LeBlanc, this practice is implied in diary writing:

> The manuscript diary is often considered to be a precious document within which the writing subject explores the secrets of her/his own consciousness, strives towards a transcendent value of the self, and as a textual space onto which the diarist takes pleasure by describing the vicissitudes of her/his states of

> mind, the intermissions of her/his subjectivity (LeBlanc 2008: 48).

Struggles and reflections in relation to one's mental or emotional health have inspired writings by some research participants, but not by all of them. Five participants, Catherine, Éloïse, Cynthia, Lynne and Ariane, make no mention of emotional distress.

The difficulties and challenges bloggers address include depression and burnout; psychotherapy sessions; and eating disorders. However, references to the word 'depression' or other mental-health difficulties are rarely related to *diagnosed* illnesses. Such references mostly relate to difficult periods in their lives and the use of medical jargon may constitute an attempt to have their struggles taken seriously. Furthermore, participants find wide acceptance of the idea that blogging can be used as an outlet for authors to discuss psychological and emotional difficulties – however taking care not to burden their own audiences by being too explicit or only writing about such difficulties, as discussed earlier. Elizabeth suggests this acceptance is common knowledge:

> Hum… at one point, there was a blogger who pointed out to me the following: you will notice that, often, people who start a blog do so because they are in a burnout. A depression. A big change in their life. A separation. (Elizabeth 2008)

Elizabeth approaches blogging as a place to discuss issues very close to the self, which may be related to difficult moments in the blogger's life. Researching the internet drawing on the wide range of self-help literature and practices, Shani Orgad writes that self-help is often linked to 'some form of crisis' (2004: 147) and that internet users are attracted by the interactions enabled by the technology:

> As the Web provides individuals with interactive means of exchanging experience and maintaining reciprocal relationships, it is a key site where processes of self-formation and self-interrogation take place. (Orgad 2004: 150)

She goes on to suggest that personal homepages are a key strategy used by 'self-help seekers' who aim at 'working on their self-identity' (2004: 151). This may also be the case for blogging and for participants such as Michèle, as detailed below.

However, this internet approach to self-help, emotional and mental health may be better understood using Anthony Giddens' contributions on reflexivity, as detailed in the first part of this chapter. Writing about going back to one's memories and previous life events, in relation to modernity, Giddens suggests that, 'not confined to life crises' (1991: 33), this is an approach to self-reflexivity, just as therapy would be. In his words:

> Therapy is not simply a means of coping with novel anxieties, but an expression of the reflexivity of the self – a phenomenon which, on the level of the individual, […] balances opportunity and potential catastrophe in equal measure. (Giddens 1991: 34)

This quote enhances the understanding of blogs acting as 'mirrors', a contribution made by Viviane Serfaty (2004) and inspired by Jacques Lacan (2006 [2002]), presented above. It also enables a better understanding of the caution that participants use when disclosing this type of information on their blogs, perhaps a subtle sign of their awareness of the risks embedded in this practice. Notwithstanding, depression and burnout are stated as factors that have led some bloggers to either start blogging, or to blog with increased intensity or assiduity for periods of their lives. Michèle, who discussed the benefits and disadvantages of blogging while suffering from depression, mentioned how blogging became increasingly important when she, herself, was struggling with burnout:

> And, in 2006, I had a burnout. Then, really, my blog became a therapeutic tool. Because I didn't have the energy to go out, to see people… so… I saw people online. (Michèle 2009)

Therapeutic writing also came up in Elizabeth's interview, as illustrated at the beginning of this chapter ('it's therapy via writing', 2008). Ani, who was not diagnosed with depression or burnout, also recognises how her writings sometimes focussed on more difficult topics and experiences, when she was quite unhappy:

> Ah… sometimes, do I talk about discouragement, yes! You know, I had… the last year has been extremely difficult. I would say, 2008, it really hasn't been funny. Eh… did I talk about it on my blog? Yes! But not… not to extremes. (Ani 2009)

Ani also indicated during her interview how her partner suggested that she starts her blog when she was, according to her own words, going through a 'small depression' because her manuscripts were not accepted by various publishers. Her partner said that blogging would provide her access to readers.

Similar emotional or mental health struggles are discussed on a few others blogs, such as Bonnie who, in January 2007, added a page on her blog summarising the struggles she faced during the years when she was suffering a diagnosed depression. She describes struggles of a professional, familial, conjugal, financial nature, including a time when she had suicidal thoughts. She further discusses her recovery, including how she came to terms with needing to take anti-depressant drugs everyday for the rest of her life.

Michèle wrote an entry about coming back to blogging after a short period when she did not feel like writing anything on her blog. She attributes her absence to having previously blogged a lot during her burnout, in 2006 (Michèle, 24th February 2008). Inviting a new character onto her blog, Anabel who normally writes more fiction than accounts of her own everyday experiences, referred to a need to be 'freed from depression' at a time when she and her partner were breaking up (Anabel, 23rd December 2007). Virginie titled part of her 16th November 2006 entry 'Nearing depression,' as she waged struggles with school and her professional life. Ghislaine described the food-'orgy' she would go on during the Christmas period, when still suffering from bulimia, and ended the post with 'a guaranteed depression on the 15th of January' (Ghislaine, 31st October 2008).

Admittedly, most references to depression on participants' blog do not refer to a diagnosed depression, as indicated above, but describe a lack of energy and low morale, in other words, used as a figure of speech for having a difficult time. This may also be a strategy to ensure that readers take their difficulties seriously, by relating their feelings to mental illnesses thereby making it harder to downplay them. Other words, more or less associated with medical diagnoses, are used to reference emotional or psychological hardship in bloggers' lives, such as: *déprime* (having the blues – Virginie, Blanche, Bonnie, Anabel, Michèle, Lynne, Denise, Ani, Julie, Elsa, Cynthia and Mireille), down (used in reference to *feeling down* – Ghislaine, Blanche, Bonnie, Lynne, Ani, Elsa), burnout and the French equivalent, *épuisement* (Ani, Elsa, Bonnie, Michèle) and this same term is used in a way similar to depression, as referring to a diagnosed illness in the cases of Bonnie and Michèle, and refers to an actual burnout.

Going back to the interviews, other emotional and mental health topics are discussed by participants, including therapies of all sorts (literally and figuratively), such as psychotherapy:

> Sometimes I wish I could deepen… You know, talk more about, for instance, my psychotherapy sessions, without giving all the details, but talk about it more. But, I thought, at some point, it's so public – to people I know, for example, from *Facebook*, at some point that's how it got publicised, that I had a blog… I say to myself: well, do I really want all these people to know? (Kieva 2009)

Actual references to therapies in participants' blog entries – apart from the references made to therapy in general – involve references to therapies in a figurative sense: Investing time in one's physical appearance ('putting make-up on and doing my hair

are my therapy', wrote Kieva in her profile description) or indulging in one's pleasures and hobbies (shopping, eating and writing were mentioned by Kieva, in the first two instances, and by Virginie and Ani in the last instance).

When discussing therapies in the literal sense of the word, participants generally did so in reference to past therapies: Denise to the ten years she spent following various therapies (with a psychologist, a psychoanalyst and a psychotherapist (Denise, 25th August 2006)); Bonnie to the two years she was in psychotherapy (Bonnie, 10th October 2008); Ghislaine to the benefits brought by her therapy in overcoming her eating disorder (2nd May 2008) and how it taught her to let go (5th August 2008); and Mireille who while mentioning all the topics she would like to write on, took the opportunity to criticise the past two psychologists she consulted:

> There are so many things I would like to discuss, really. I can pour out an amazing flow of words, of sentences, but very few will actually speak of what I really feel. My first psy [psychologist] often made me aware of this, by reminding me of the topic on the agenda, during our sessions. My second psy – who wasn't really one – was too busy making analogies and talking about me in the third person to take note of it. (Mireille 14th March 2009)

However, for some research participants, psychological distress was an ongoing theme, a topic they discussed from time to time: for example, Michèle mentioned how excited she was to be meeting her future psychologist when she would be back from her holidays (Michèle 16th July 2008), and how she was still working on a task given to her by another psychologist a year and a half ago (the task being writing a letter to her mother (Michèle 1st February 2008)). Kieva also mentioned current sessions with a psychologist (how they made her feel better, although she considered them to be very expensive and they always made her cry (19th January 2008)). Although Kieva said during her interview how she may discuss her sessions in more detail if she blogged anonymously, she did not seem to mind that friends, family and acquaintances knew about her sessions, writing:

> Since it no longer is a secret for anyone (really: my mother, […]-the-hairdresser, even my ex-date are aware of it, darn!), I will go forward and give you some news about the new star of this blog: Ms-psy-who-nods-her-head-for-$90/hour. (Let's call her MsP$90/h, for short and intimacy purposes). (Kieva 1st February 2008)

For those who dedicate part of their writings and blog entries to discussions of their states of mind, it is widely associated with serving two main functions: writing as a way of clearing one's head and distancing oneself from the issues at stake; writing as a way

of seeking or offering support and comfort. Although these functions are generally not discussed on the blogs or in the blog entries (with the exception of Bonnie), they were talked about during the interviews. Ani, for instance, spoke about the power of writing, to structure thoughts and how writing was a paradox:

> But when you're writing, you're trying to describe something. But you… you're using words. And… because you're using words, already, you're further away from that thing that you're trying to describe. Words are extraordinary, but words… words create that distance. It's like… the paradox of writing. (Ani 2009)

Participant Michèle related her writing on these topics to a form of self-inquiry and self-analysis which she mentioned was no longer needed but had proven useful when she was suffering from burnout (Michèle 2009), whereas Kieva saw such writing as a 'way to relieve oneself' (Kieva 2009).

Writing about emotional and psychological distress on a blog also makes possible the offering or receiving of support and comfort. Ghislaine, Sarah and Bonnie believed writing gave meaning to the hardships they endured and the thoughts that were associated with them while dealing with eating disorders (Ghislaine), feelings following a miscarriage (Sarah) and depression (Bonnie). Michèle believed that topics related to emotional distress were of interest to her readers. Participants derive benefits through exploring their states of mind in their blogs such as support from others, a written record of events that seems to help in finding comfort and erasing doubts about choices made. Reading past entries as a testimony to difficulties they have endured and their journey to recovery helps validate their choices, as for Shaindl who ended her previous relationship and Michèle who talks about not falling 'back in the same patterns'. When considering these comments made by participants during their interviews and corroborating them with entries posted on their blogs, it could be argued that, when it comes to discussions of an emotional nature, blogs do serve the same or a similar function as manuscript diaries.

In addition to bloggers working on improving various aspects of the self, there remains a fourth self-improvement narrative that surfaced in participants' writing and interviews. The topic relates to developing participants' professional and homemaking skills and is discussed next, in the final section of this chapter.

PROFESSIONAL AND HOMEMAKING SKILLS

When coding the interview data and searching for clues related to assessing professional skills, it became obvious that participants desired to reflect on their homemaking skills as well. This lead me to return to interview transcripts where I did in fact find indices related to homemaking. As a consequence, this section is divided into two topics, the first devoted to developing and improving professional skills through blogging, and the second, on skill improvement through homemaking. Writing on homemaking, Lopez mentions:

> One lesson the gender-biased division of labor at home taught women was that homemaking is hard work. (Lopez (2005 [2002]: 466)

As such, improving homemaking skills even though it takes place offline, is talked about on participants' blogs as a way of assessing and demonstrating the quantity of work they accomplish. Professional skills are developed online, via blogging, whereas development of both professional and homemaking skills are described and assessed online. However, not all bloggers who participated in the research provided clues to help further understand skills development in each specific area. Denise, Cynthia, Anabel, Ani, Mireille, Elizabeth, Éloïse, Elsa and Ariane address only professional skills both during interviews and in their blogs. Homemaking skills, despite being generally associated with women's everyday lives, are not discussed by two other participants who use their blogs for professional purposes: Elizabeth who authors a fiction-based blog (Anabel, who authors the same type of blog, does speak of homemaking skills, as detailed below) and Denise, who although she writes about everyday encounters, makes no mention of homemaking skills.

When it comes to development of professional skills, some participants link blogging to improving their skills, generally in relation to improving writing skills, which they believed might enhance their professional and financial standing, as illustrated in the previous chapter. This is the reason why, for instance, Denise compared her blogging practices to going to the gym – a way to gain strength in writing and to tell a more interesting story. For blogger Cynthia, who authored a blog as part of her tasks at work, having her own personal blog was also a way of improving her blogging skills and an excuse to sometimes blog from her workplace. The majority of participants mentioned writing as the main professional skill improved by blogging. Anabel, who studies creative writing and aims to be a published author, uses her blog as a portfolio, which enabled her to get a position writing for a local (online) magazine:

> My blog allowed me to write for them, because… for once, I had something readable, for a public. I gave them the URL, they liked my style and said to me: 'ok, it's nice enough, you will become our collaborator, we like you'. You know? So, finally, my blog gave me more opportunities, and… maybe that's partly why, at some point, I let it go a bit – the other opportunities were more interesting, more concrete, let's say. (Anabel 2009)

Not all participants who want to be recognised as authors and be published were met with success, as discussed with Ani, Mireille, Elizabeth and Éloïse. Even if others did not aim to become published authors, many still recognised the difficulties of authoring interesting and engaging entries that would entertain or capture their readers' attention. Lynne, Kieva and Ariane, for instance, spoke about the difficulties encountered:

> It's not one of my great strengths, writing, not at all. And… my subjects are as ordinary as it can get. (Lynne 2009)

> I believe that knowing how to make people laugh through writing is not really obvious. (Kieva 2009)

> Rereading it, sometimes, it allows… sometimes I see sentences: oh! Okay, that's weird… So I rework them a little… but always keeping the same idea in it. (Ariane 2008)

Others reported learning and improving computer-related skills while blogging, such as posting photos in their entries (a difficulty discussed by Denise in the early days of her blog) and general computer-based knowledge, such as mentioned by Elizabeth:

> I would say that having a blog, it probably made me aware of computer-related technicalities that I didn't know about. (Elizabeth 2008)

The knowledge gained through her blog prompted Elsa to create another blog for her primary school class, intended for parents, on which she posts photos, birthday wishes, and news about the progress of pupils. Participant Catherine, who is a homemaker and previously trained in the natural sciences, produces homemade soaps which she sells online with the help of a webpage she created to advertise her products. Homemade products of all sorts are often displayed and discussed on the blogs.

Homemaking skills mentioned on participants' blogs are those traditionally associated with women's roles in the home, such as food production including gardening, baking, canning and cooking as well as crafts, including sewing, knitting and scrap-booking. The one homemaking skill, which is not traditionally associated with women's role but is mentioned by some research participants, is home improvement including renovating and painting. While in the *Maîtres chez nous* chapter, home decoration is generally associated with women, with structural changes associated with men, participants here

also refer to doing some of the physical renovations. In analysing the entries on participants' blogs, it became obvious that participants use their blogs to describe the problems they encounter and to either ask for solutions or offer their own recounting of successes they encountered along the way.

Food production is a central theme on the blogs, mainly for the participants who are homemakers or on parental leave, and those who live with a partner and/or have children. However, Ariane, Kieva, Anabel and Virginie, despite either living alone or with housemates at the time of the interview and not having children, also talk about culinary experiences. This was not a topic Mireille, Cynthia or Shaindl discussed and likewise Elizabeth and Denise (discussed above), who both live with their partners, do not mention any homemaking skills in their entries. Gardening, canning, cooking and baking are the four components discussed by participants, grouped under the food production umbrella, and explored in this section.

When it comes to gardening, bloggers discuss many aspects of this skill – from a desire to have an outside space to plant and tend a garden to the benefits they derive from the act of gardening. Éloïse mentioned her desire to have a garden while looking for a new home (5th March 2007) and so did Michèle, when discussing her search to find land on which to begin a garden and the benefits a garden would bestow (15th April 2008). Most bloggers who do talk about their desire to garden, however, already have a home garden and talk about investing time in it and experiencing both frustrations and pleasures, as well as benefits from the fruits or vegetables for home consumption. Blogger Catherine, for instance, mentions how her partner rarely shows much enthusiasm towards the flowers appearing in the garden, her new garden arrangement plans or any other thoughts she has in relation to the garden (22nd June 2006). She also writes about the challenges she faces in her garden and how she learns to overcome them:

> Hence, I do all I can, every spring, to embellish the front and back of the house and I became friends with the mulch… Slowly but surely, I learn from my mistakes and what likes to grow in my garden and what doesn't. (Catherine 3rd June 2006).

Other bloggers, such as Ani (2nd August 2007) and Sarah (17th August 2006) mention what vegetables they grow in their gardens and what use they have made of them. Sarah, Éloïse and Catherine are the only bloggers who mention canning, as a way of making use of all the vegetables that grow in their gardens and of saving time by having some ready-meals. In the quote presented here, Sarah is asking for advice on canning cucumber dill pickles:

> Does someone have a good recipe to make cucumber and dill preserves? There's loads of websites discussing this but the recipes vary too much… (Sarah 17th August 2006).

Catherine also mentions canning as a strategy to preserve vegetables that she would have lost, whereas Éloïse discusses canning spaghetti sauce as a source of happiness ('Happiness is… […] making spaghetti sauce preserves', posted on the 20th December 2005). More precisely, Catherine writes:

> I had leftover tomatoes that were begging for their lives in the garage. Before I wasted them all, I decided to cook them to make tinned tomatoes, with thyme and oregano from the garden. Also, with peaches season just around the corner and teasing my taste buds, I made peaches-maple syrup-vanilla jam and last time I made cream cheese, I tried the witch's trick: in small balls, macerated in oil with herbs. I can't wait to spread this on crusty bread for bruschetta! (Catherine 29th August 2008)

Baking and cooking, perhaps because they are daily tasks, are covered by a wider range of bloggers. Bloggers who bake their own bread admit to using a bread machine to facilitate the process, when, as was the case with Elsa, the machines do not break (9th April 2007). Catherine also had misadventures with her bread machine, whereas for Sarah, it is one of the many machines she uses frequently to help her with home cooking:

> Last Thursday, it was quite hot outside… and I still decided to make some pizza for dinner. This meant that I made my dough (in the bread machine, still!!!). I left the dough in the machine for 30 minutes after the cycle was over, because I didn't have time just then to garnish it… Eh, well, with the heat… The dough was ready to leave the container on its own!!! And even while dressing it, I left it on the counter before baking it… another mistake… it was going to escape the cooking sheet!!! After baking it, I had a 5 cm-long crust, without garnish, due to the expanding crust. It was a monster!!! (Catherine 6th August 2007)

> [In relation to her new resolution, which involves eating meals which either have a maximum of two ingredients or which she has prepared herself] Well, it's not a radical resolution, for me. I already make my own bread (in the bread machine), yogurt (in a yogurt maker), sorbet and iced cream (in the ice cream maker), minute-meals (in the pressure-cooker), jam (in a regular cauldron), pastries and meals (in my kitchen). (Sarah 4th July 2008)

In acknowledging the problems they face, or their desires to eat healthier and tastier meals, these bloggers assess what went wrong and how they have decided to improve their homemaking practices. Others such as Anabel refers, ironically, to her 'devilish Friday,' when she stayed home to bake a banana-chocolate bread (25th October 2008),

whereas Lucie mentions how a book on bread making was passed on to her husband, and inspired him to become an amateur baker (10th April 2007). Furthermore, Elsa takes photos of the cakes she decorates and discusses her class on cake decorating. She mentions:

> Well, I admit I still need practice, but still, after only 3 classes, being able to do this, it's not bad at all. I wanted to practice the 'basket' effect and the torsade we learned in the last class!! For the top, I was less inspired!!! I am still quite satisfied with the result!! (Elsa, 21st February 2009)

Then, in March, after the classes were over, Elsa posted a photo of her latest creation, the cake she decorated for her final exam and described her feelings of accomplishment:

> For the last course, each had to bring a cake to decorate according to one's desires… with the technical assistance from our teacher… !!! If you could have seen all the lovely creations for all the girls… it was absolutely beautiful… To say that after just 5 weeks, we are now able to make such things… it's completely astounding!! (Elsa, 2nd March 2009)

Baking appears to be a practice enjoyed by a few participants (Sarah, Catherine, Anabel and Elsa). However, the most prevalent practice, perhaps not surprisingly due to the everyday repetition of this task, is cooking meals. As mentioned previously, copious recipe blogs are found on participants' blogrolls. Furthermore, many participants also upload photos of their culinary experiences (and successes), when posting the recipe they used or invented. At times, though, bloggers are very vague in their instructions, with maybe a small hint of aiming to keep a family recipe secret:

> I am preparing a vegetables soup by adding pieces of the plum tomatoes from our garden and short brown grain rice. (Ani 19th August 2007)

Others, such as Kieva, write about food preparation in a derisive fashion, perhaps mocking ideals of femininity that *require* women to know how to cook[63]:

> Some recipes of the next book I will publish (get out of the way, DiStasio[64]!):
> Morning chocolate spread: Toast, butter, Nutella[65] (and nooooooo, not the store's own brand, the real thing!)

---

[63] In her interview, Kieva explains why she started blogging, feeling that ideals of femininity portrayed in the media are not representative of who she is:
> That's why, in some way, I started to blog, because I felt like it didn't represent me. I don't obsess about productivity. Some may say I'm lazy, but that's not how I see it [laugher]. And, also, I think it's one of the greatest… differences between the sexes? It's that I claim the right to be lazy, coarse, vulgar, independent, a big spender, and all of that. Without it… I don't know. I think that… I feel like I am being judged for that. Because… I think that we tend to judge men less for that, you know? (Kieva 2009)

[64] This is a reference to Josée di Stasio, chef, recipes book author and host of the television cooking series '*À la di Stasio*' (2002-…) (Télé-Québec website, accessed 15th November 2010).

>Starter or Antipasto: Spoonful of peanut butter.
>Pork dumplings with sauerkraut: Steamed hotdogs with cabbage, onion rings (fries are excluded, because requiring condiments), beer
>Salad: Iceberg lettuce already shredded, ready-made dressing, cheese, beer.
>Mexican-style stuffed bun: Pita bread, cheez-wizz[66] [sic] to give personality, beans dip, beer.
>Two-cheese casserole: Kraft Dinner[67], Cheez-wizz [sic], tomatoes, wine
>Bolognese casserole: Kraft Dinner, Mum's leftover meat sauce, Cheez-wizz [sic], wine.
>Dessert: Spoonful of Nutella. If desperate, spoonful of peanut butter. (Kieva 30th March 2009)

Although less frequently mentioned than food preparation, bloggers also describe activities categorised as arts and crafts. These include sewing, knitting and scrap-booking and are discussed by Sarah, Lucie, Virginie, Catherine, Lynne, Bonnie and Ani. Virginie is the only participant who did not have children of her own while enjoying knitting for herself or to give as gifts. She did also express a desire to learn sewing, recognising that it was not one of her strengths:

>[Discussing a magazine she purchased, which provided many knitting and sewing ideas] There are of course many other ideas for sewing fanatics, but as I do not master the sewing machine really well, I will only show you what is accessible to me [referring to the knitting ideas]. (Virginie 1st July 2008)

>In this moment, I take advantage of a visit in my [partner's] family to start sewing… with a machine (I know, it's not a project I had for to 2008, but it still keeps me busy!). (Virginie 30th January 2008)

Other bloggers, such as Lucie and Sarah, were comfortable enough with a sewing machine, to the extent that they even sewed clothing and accessories for themselves and their families:

>[Discussing the tasks she wanted to accomplish in order to get the house ready for their first baby] Loads of things to sew! Two sleeping bags, sheets for his little bed (a basin covered with foam, which came from [my husband's] factory!), number of reusable nappies, […] towels with caps, hence, we're not ready, we're not ready! (Lucie 17th January 2007)

---

[65] *Nutella* is a hazelnut and chocolate spread launched in 1964 (Ferrero website, accessed 15th November 2010).
[66] Cheez Whiz is a dip made of processed cheese by Kraft Foods. 'Cheez Whiz adds personality' was a slogan, part of their publicity campaigns. (Kraft Foods Canada website, accessed 15th November 2010).
[67] Kraft Dinner is another product of Kraft Foods Canada, consisting of a ready-meal version of macaroni and cheese (Kraft Foods Canada website, accessed 15th November 2010).

> [Discussing her need for a new sewing machine] As I sew a lot (all of [my son's] clothes, mine, and some things for [my partner]), on top of all our costumes, gifts, sheets, blankets, curtains, chair covers…), well I need to invest in quality, a little: I do not want the basic model. (Sarah, 26th September 2006)

Noticing skills they wish to master on other blogs, some participants compared themselves to others. Catherine, for instance, in comparing herself to a friend who blogs, listed all their similarities but then concluded that:

> She is amazing in crafts/sewing at home… NOT ME (well, what… one must also find differences!). (Catherine 11th December 2008)

Another craft enjoyed by some research participants was scrapbooking and miniature models (mentioned by Bonnie in her profile description). Scrapbooking was popular, with Virginie hoping to start the practice (5th November 2008) and even making this her New Year's resolution for 2009 (10th January 2009); Lynne mentioned the scrapbooking classes she took (31st July 2008), Ani commented on how her scrapbook reflects her environmentally-friendly personality (31st December 2006) and Elsa, who is involved in digital scrapbooking, sometimes posts her 'scrap of the month' (4th August 2008). However, some bloggers made sure to disassociate themselves from such craft, as did Elizabeth on her blog, qualifying this hobby as *lame* (8th April 2008).

In contrast with the skills above, other skills that participants wish to develop and hone would be categorised under home improvement – renovations and decorating. For instance, Dominique and her partner were glad to receive help in looking after their children while they focussed on other tasks at home:

> While they helped grandma with the boys, we got the garden ready for the winter, prepared the walls of the study in order to paint them, and put some primer everywhere! It had been months since I was waiting for this. (Dominique 25th October 2008)

Painting was a task that many bloggers did not hesitate to undertake, although sometimes struggling with related decisions, and having too many other activities and commitments: choosing colours (Kieva 7th May 2007), finding the discipline to finish the project (Michèle 8th April 2008), or finding enough time to complete the project (Lynne 14th September 2007). Nonetheless, with many bloggers addressing home improvement (including, also, Ani and Lucie), it appears that participants do get involved in a variety of renovation projects.

It is striking that most professional and homemaking skills undertaken by bloggers, either via the sheer act of blogging, or via daily tasks, such as cooking, gardening and sewing are associated generally with Western conceptions of femininity. While research participants do not necessarily unconsciously learn and integrate all homemaking skills, very few openly criticise this like Kieva, as noted earlier. For example, some participants consciously assess these changes in who they are and their hobbies and offer some resistance:

> The more I age, the more I become girl, and it scares me! I buy dresses and high heels. I venture towards clothes that have glitter and spangle. For the first time in my life, I paid for a manicure while travelling. I sew and make scrapbooks. I am almost comfortable with the flat iron… (Lynne, 20th April 2008)

Virginie, referenced a comment made by her brother years ago – his perception of her as a woman who would make a good wife:

> Some years ago (6, to be exact), when mummy died, my brother said this incongruous sentence 'you, you're right to marry'. Really? Because, according to him (I have said, according to him), I was a good housewife: I cook, I am fussy around tidying up, I do not complain (or almost) in face of silly tasks (?) to be accomplished in a house. (Virginie, 20th April 2006)

Despite some level of self-consciousness about conforming to societal norms of femininity, bloggers still invest time, effort and financial resources on booking classes and purchasing equipment to improve professional and homemaking skills. These investments of time and money are viewed as necessary since the skills associated with homemaking, although *naturally* associated with women, do not come naturally to them: they involve work.

This discussion of investment in improving homemaking and professional skills may be better understood when situated within the context of late modernity. Since women are no longer singularly and primarily assessed on their roles in the private sphere, though this remains a sphere in which participants feel they have to perform and improve, they have taken up self-improving skills that are positively received in the workplace. McRobbie illustrates:

> Occupational identity and the acquisition of qualifications mean that young women are no longer qualified primarily according to their place within the structures of family and kinship. Their highly visible bodies are now marked by the possession of grades, qualifications and occupational identities. (McRobbie 2009: 73)

CONCLUSION

When examining the data presented in this chapter, self-improvement narratives emerged as a central component of women's blogging. These narratives touched on the various ways in which bloggers assess the changes in their lives in relation to their values and personalities. The types of changes that arose also spanned body image and size acceptance; mental, psychological and emotional health; and professional and homemaking skills. When bloggers write about experiences and practices, they engage in self-improvement narratives. More specifically, in relation to their values and personalities, bloggers use their online writing as a mirror (as demonstrated by Serfaty 2004), in order to 'construct themselves as subjects' (Walker Rettberg 2008: 12). This is done in collaboration with their readers and other bloggers who offer their thoughts and comments on the on-going narratives being built. For bloggers Simone and Michèle, this was one of the main functions served by their blogs, as they explained during the interviews:

> Well, in fact, of course I really see it as personal, because…
> well, in my case, it's really related to a theme, and something I
> live on a daily basis, on a day-to-day basis, and my… My blog
> is… it's a place when I express myself, it's… in relation to my
> emotions, my worries, my joys, my sad thoughts, it's… And,
> myself, I am someone who really always had a manuscript
> diary. (Simone 2009)

> Because it doesn't happen often that you will introduce your
> notebook to someone for him or her to read and comment on.
> And… on internet, it's different. You… you offer it as grazing to
> whoever wants to read it [laughter] and… that's it. You get
> comments. (Michèle 2009)

Drawing on McRobbie's work, again, it can be argued that such self-improvement work and attendant narratives – and the related effects on the construction of one's subjectivity – are a consequence of late modernity. Specifically, changes in market and social institutions have put more weight onto the individual, who is now seen as solely responsible for her own success and in consequence, for her own failure. Angela McRobbie details:

> In the second modernity, and with the changes in the economy
> which produce a shift to post-Fordist forms of production,
> individuals are required to become more reflexive, to reflect on
> the various rules and constraints and structural factors which
> impinge upon them, as a necessary mechanism for self-
> realisation, and also to become more self-reflexive, to monitor
> and evaluate themselves, to plan their life biographies, to
> regularly assess the opportunities available to them, since, from
> now on, no one or no institution will bear that kind of
> responsibility. (2009: 44)

Another explanation for this public display of self-improvement narratives may be found in Alison Hearn's analysis of 'self-branding' (2008). She writes that 'the work on the self is purposeful and outer-directed; self-production is heavily narrated' as a 'strategy in promoting the self' (2008: 197). She explains:

> Here, an improved self is not just a pleasant outcome of fulfilling work within a corporate setting, but is explicitly defined as a promotional vehicle designed to sell: one that anticipates the desires of a target market. The most important work is the work on the self. (Hearn 2008: 205)

As such, participants' involvement with self-improvement narratives could result from their desire to portray themselves under the best possible light, as detailed in the previous chapter. On the other hand, these narratives might be saying 'we are not perfect, but we are at least trying to improve ourselves' and may serve to publicly document each and every step towards this self-improvement goal. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Angela McRobbie links self-improvement narratives to the period of late modernity and identifies the diary, for example, as a 'self-monitoring (practice)' (2007: 35). Blogging, as detailed below, may be playing a similar role. Furthermore, McRobbie points out how individuals are increasingly perceived as responsible for their own success and how structural inequalities (such as those of race, gender and class, to name only a few) fail to be considered by dominant discourses (McRobbie 2007: 24-26). Given this, it is not surprising that self-improvement narratives emerge as central in women's blogging.

In terms of their body image, the pressures on women to conform to specific ideals in relation to body size spring forth from the written entries of many bloggers, although the messages are not always explicit, nor critical. Indeed, pressures are sometimes cloaked in the desire or need to lose weight or in the aim of going back or reaching an ideal or preferred size. It appears that most bloggers who engage in body image and size acceptance narratives do so, officially, to track changes in their own lives and to provide support for other women who may be struggling with similar weight issues. By engaging in such practices and discussions, many bloggers, somewhat unconsciously, support thinness ideologies and very few of them question the prevalent idealised image of women's bodies. When discussing weight by commenting on other women's bodies, bloggers are policing other women's bodies and their own. They sometimes invite readers to help police their bodies by declaring their weight loss plans publicly on their blogs making it harder for them to abandon those plans.

When writing about their emotional, psychological and mental heath, bloggers engage two strategies. The first strategy is to distance themselves from inner-feelings in order to free themselves from unpleasant thoughts. The second focuses on the hope of receiving or offering support, and to gain comfort from the act of blogging about emotional aspects of their lives. While looking at the blog entries and the interview transcripts, it is clear that bloggers discuss a variety of mental health issues including psychotherapy sessions as a means to heal from a variety of life's hardships such as burnout, depression, eating disorders, experiences of domestic violence and suicides within the family. Although some would find immediate comfort in blogging (such as Michèle expressed during her interview, as a way of being in touch with people while she did not have the energy to leave her house), others hoped to make sense of their past by helping others through sharing their experiences (as mentioned by Bonnie and Ghislaine, for instance).

The final topic discussed in relation to self-improvement narratives is assessing and developing one's professional and homemaking skills. Whereas professional skills were emphasised during some of the interviews, homemaking skills emerged as a major theme for bloggers while coding blog entries. The professional skills discussed mostly relate to writing and computer skills and writing blogs is linked to improvement in these areas. The homemaking skills are practiced offline but are discussed in detail on the blogs, mostly relating to food production, arts and crafts, and to a lesser extent to home improvement. The self-improvement narratives are particularly apparent in discussions of professional and homemaking skills, as participants tend to identify areas of improvement and report on steps they have taken to improve current practices (cake decoration classes for Elsa, scrapbooking classes for Lynne, sewing help from Virginie's family-in-law, etc.).

With regards to the various areas of self-improvement identified in the interviews and on the blogs, it may be suggested that values, body image, professional and homemaking skills and emotional stability are all related to the pressures on women to conform to feminine ideals. This may be related, in Western societies, to achieving upward mobility: as suggested earlier by Alison Hearn (2008), this public display of self-improvement narratives may serve as a form of self-branding and promotion of a woman's engagement with discourses of femininity, to make herself more desirable. For instance, while discussing physical appearance, Sprague Zones explicitly makes the link to upward mobility for women:

> Appearance-based discrimination targets women more than men. Women's self-esteem and happiness are significantly associated with their physical appearance; no such relationship exists for men as a group […]. Women's access to upward mobility is also greatly affected by physical appearance, which is a major determinant of marriage to a higher status man. By contrast, potential partners evaluate men more for intelligence or accomplishment. (Sprague Zones 2005 [1997]: 67)

McRobbie's discussion of self-improvement in relation to late modernity may again provide some insights into the wider context in which such investments in and displays of self-improvement practices are located. She identifies a pervasive move away from feminist claims to claims made in a post-feminist context:

> These interventions offer support in times of stress, and they overwhelm the subject with choices, possibilities and advice in pursuit of control, self-esteem and success. They regularly draw on elements from well-known feminist discourses in terms of independence and the desire for agency, but subject these qualities to further transformation, so that they more fully conform with the dictates of a postfeminist sexual contract which seeks resolution to sexual inequality without challenge to or contestation of masculine hegemony and the heterosexual matrix. (McRobbie 2009: 111)

Furthermore, it is clear on the one hand, that research participants perceive their blogs as generally positive, providing them with the opportunity of going back to previous life experiences and assessing changes in their lives, particularly positive changes that demonstrate to them how their work investments have paid off in moving forward. Bonnie's, Virginie's and Michèle's interviews help illustrate the perceived positive role played by blogs and what an impact that has on bloggers:

> […] And you know, it's when it allows you to… well, myself, I can see my evolution, you know: oh! I used to think like that? […] It's like you are getting to know someone, once more. My gosh, finally, it's… I don't know. I think it's formative. (Bonnie 2008)

> Or… well, that's it: a source of inspiration. And… you know, maybe a research, to – always going further… seeking to overcome one's self, to push… your limits… it's a little strong, but open one's mind. (Virginie 2008)

> […] Because it makes me evolve, me, and my writing, and me, personally. And I dare to… believe that it helps someone else evolve, somewhere. (Michèle 2009)

However, on the other hand, such renditions of one's self-improvement narratives and experiences may serve to legitimise and reinforce women's perceptions of and investment in emphasised femininity. Very few bloggers tend to question their desires

to conform to such societal norms and pressures in this regard. Pitts, in 2004, worked on 'personal web pages […] as sites for generating new forms of knowledge, awareness and agency in relation to [breast cancer]' (Pitts 2004:34). Discussing the possibilities and limits inherent to the internet, she wrote:

> I suggest here that women's web pages might offer potentially critical opportunities for women's knowledge-making in relation to what are often highly political aspects of the body, gender and illness. [sic] However, the Internet is not an inherently empowering technology, and it can be a medium for affirming norms of femininity, consumerism, individualism and other powerful social messages. (Pitts 2004: 34)

Thus, by blogging about self-improvement, participants may generally be reinforcing norms of femininity by presenting success-stories and downplaying failure to their readers. There may be a more personal purpose in bloggers writing about their self-improvement efforts. It is possible that when they declare their goals online, as a way of becoming accountable to readers for reaching such goals – whether that is achieving a weight goal, improving mental health or becoming a better homemaker – they feel more apt to achieve those goals. There are thus two levels of control over their self-improvement – self-policing and reader policing.

Deliovsky, writing on white femininity in the Canadian context, links together all the dimensions of self-improvement presented in this chapter, pointing out how normative femininity not only incorporates appearance, but also self-control and self-improvement:

> Normative femininity is clearly more than aesthetics and appearance. It is additionally concerned with performance and the regulation of behaviour. (Deliovsky 2010: 108)

Moreover, the identification of one's gender online may in itself limit women bloggers' freedom to engage in narratives that would not be oriented towards self-improvement – which adds weight to the dynamics of late modernity and responsibility of individuals towards being successful. As such, Melissa J. Williams and Gerald A. Mendelsohn remind us that the the double standards still exist in regards to how various skills and competences are assessed (2008). They provide the following examples, which are also generally found in women's blog entries:

> Further, the effects of gender labelling on social perceptions are manifold and profound: Whether an otherwise identical target is accompanied by the label "man" or "woman" has been shown to influence such diverse judgement as parenting effectiveness […], emotions […], painting ability […], quality of professional writing […], social skills […], and suitability for specialized medical procedures […]. (Williams and Mendelsohn 2008: 291).

On the whole, participants' self-improvement narratives again illuminate tensions and contradictions implied in women's blogging. They may be regarded by their authors as strategies holding them accountable for their personal goals and integral to the 'reflexive project of the self' (Giddens 1991). However, a deeper look at the matter reveals a number of additional reasons for bloggers' engagement with self-improvement narratives: by writing on such topics, they not only engage in *self-branding* (Hearn 2008), promoting themselves, but they also reinforce standards of idealised femininity. In sharing their *recipes for success*, bloggers generally tend to engage uncritically with discourses that suggest that they are not good enough and therefore in need of constant physical, emotional, professional and personal improvement.

CHAPTER 7: UNE RÉVOLUTION TRANQUILLE[68]

INTRODUCTION

Feminist scholars of cultural studies have since the 1980s examined popular culture with a focus on ideologies of femininity, the pleasures women attain from them and the constraints they can present to women's gender freedom. Such practice contrasts with previous research on media, when attention was paid to more '"serious" forms of media', and scholars were 'suspicious of the pleasures of media' (Croteau and Hoynes 2003: 294). Writing about women and media texts, in the context of mass and commercial media, Sue Thornham explains some findings from her literature review:

> Such work moved the textual study of woman and media away from a focus on 'images of women', and towards an exploration of the ways in which ideologies of femininity are produced and reproduced in media representations. These representations offer pleasures – the pleasures of self-recognition, of finding women placed centre-stage in a 'woman's genre', of participation in a shared 'women's culture' – but simultaneously act to contain women within the accepted bounds of femininity. (2007: 7 – emphasis in original)

Key academic work on the pleasures, and their limits, derived by women from popular culture and media include Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (1985) and Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984). As explained previously in the literature review, these works focus respectively on soap opera and Harlequin novel genres. In recent years, pleasure has been analysed in relation to the development of the internet, approaching a media form that now enables a more diverse participation of a wider public. For example, research suggests a general shift in use of technology since the mid-1990s with computer use having shifted from being heavily work-related to being predominantly a domestic and pleasure-seeking endeavour:

> Now people log on more often from home than from places of employment and do so for pleasure and for personal purposes rather than for their jobs. (Cummings and Kraut 2002: 221)

For example, websites that targeted women specifically, such as *iVillage* (meant as a social media site, enabling women to connect), designed its marketing around this shift from the internet as work-related towards internet as a source of pleasure (Royal 2008). Cindy Royal details how this specific site emphasised both its relevance for women and the site's social and interactive potentials:

---

[68] This chapter title, Une révolution tranquille [A quiet revolution], is a reference to the history of Québec and its 1960s period of fast and non violent social changes, as detailed in the introductory chapter.

> [iVillage] provided the following reasons for "moms to join the Internet revolution," including staying in touch with friends and family, keeping isolation at bay, finding information on interests such as recipes, chatting with friends, learning a language, banishing boredom, and saving money by shopping online. (Royal 2008: 162)

Other scholars have started to focus on pleasures derived through blogging, such as: Kathleen Fitzpatrick (2006) who discusses the pleasures obtained from reading blogs, with a particular focus on personal blogs; Junghoon Moon and his colleagues who worked on blog use in relation to quality of life and found that it positively influences participants' 'global life satisfaction' (2006: 4091); and, more recently, Marilee Lindemann (2010) who writes about her own experience and that of other feminist bloggers and of their satisfaction with blogging 'in relation to feminist strategies of "talking back," as (the pseudonymous) bell hooks termed it, to patriarchal authority' (Lindemann 2010: 210). These results, along with the sheer numbers of blogs published since the late 1990s (2007 data suggested that over 63 million blogs have been created (Hodkinson 2007)), are testimonies to the keen interest, and in all probability the enjoyment, derived from the practice of blogging both within and outside academia.

It is perhaps not surprising that the pleasures of blogging took up significant space in *all* of the interviews with women bloggers. Articulated through words, expressions and phrases infused with various degrees of passion, a pleasure derived from blogging springs forth. A wide range of phrases are used, such as: 'fun' (Shaindl 2008, Mireille 2008, Sarah 2009, Michèle 2009, Lynne 2009, Denise 2009), 'I enjoy blogging' (Cynthia 2008), 'I love writing' (Ghislaine 2008), 'I like to write… and I thought it was an interesting formula' (Elizabeth 2008), 'the act of writing… I always enjoyed it' (Ariane 2008), 'It brings me pleasure' (Virginie 2008), 'I enjoy it' (Blanche 2008, Sarah 2009), 'That's really fun' (Bonnie 2008), 'I felt like I blossomed more with the blog' (Catherine 2008), 'I enjoy writing' (Éloïse 2008), '[…] it's something I appreciate and… it's still a form of literature in which I believe' (Anabel 2009), 'I enjoy it, updating it' (Lynne 2009), 'I really discovered a passion for writing and… what I gain from… other bloggers' (Julie 2009), 'Slowly, I realised that it was something… I liked' (Simone 2009), 'It makes me feel good' (Elsa 2009) and 'I didn't know at all that blogs existed! I thought it was amazing' (Lucie 2009).

In general, although acutely conscious of the critiques addressed to bloggers, it appears, as Dominique insists, that the enjoyment garnered from blogging overrides their awareness of criticisms, be those critiques directed at others or themselves:

> And, yes, I could be very critical and say that… it's a little like pollution on the web, all these diary blogs. [Silence] There's a small part of me who thinks so. Hum… But at the same time, if I write… and I have a diary blog, so… it must be because… my desire to write and… my desire to share what I write is stronger than my critique. (Dominique 2008)

In this chapter, I suggest that tensions between the interlocking concepts of gender, technology, power and pleasure become particularly evident in the exploration of women's blogging. As a source of pleasure, blogging enables women to put themselves 'out there' and to choose to put themselves first. As explained in the first chapters of this thesis, the social world and technologies are both gendered: 'their gender is inevitably masculine' (de Castell and Bryson 1999: 235, see also Hacker 1989). Furthermore, research has demonstrated how 'technology offers a symbolic promise of power' (Faulkner 2000: 106) and that the pleasurable dimensions of technology need to be addressed, as they impact on the 'social shaping of technology' (Kleif and Faulkner 2003: 298). This chapter acknowledges critiques levied against applauding 'pleasure' in popular culture. Seen as fostering a false-consciousness due to the fact that pleasures are embedded in fantasy (as discussed by Ang 1985); they are accused of 'serving […] to re-inscribe the 'patriarchal status-quo' […]' (Thornham 2007: 64). Similarly, the chapter acknowledges the risk, raised by Turkle, that instead of addressing problems of inequality in the real world, people may choose 'to live in unreal places' (1995: 244). Taking these criticisms into account, the argument developed in this chapter follows Katalin Lovász' line of argument:

> I challenge the predominant discourse in feminist theory that,
> while acknowledging women's pleasure in popular media forms,
> argues it is there to pacify and – ultimately – betray them.
> (Lovász 2007: ii)

Like Lovász, I also focus on blogs created outside large media industries (unlike soap operas and romance novels) and suggest that women's pleasures in popular culture are worthy of academic consideration. Just as Croteau and Hoynes underlined, I encourage the 'need to take fun seriously and explore what it is that makes media a source of pleasure' (2003: 294). Despite real limitations to empowerment derived from pleasures gained through media and popular culture, interview data suggests that blogging permits an awareness of gender constructions and inequalities, meaning that it may not work towards '[re-inscribing] the 'patriarchal status-quo'' (Thornham 2007: 64). Blogging is thus employed as a strategy to place one's interests first and to exert control over one's self-representations. Topics covered in this analysis include: making time to blog ('Putting Oneself First'), blogging and blog reading as sources of pleasures

('Blogging as Fun') and blogging as a source of empowerment ('Putting Oneself Out There').

PUTTING ONESELF FIRST: MAKING TIME TO BLOG

One aspect of blogging that women enjoy, as briefly discussed in the chapter *Maîtres chez nous*, is the incentive that blogging provides to structure a schedule that frees up time to update their blogs. It is a tactic geared to finding time to invest in a practice they enjoy; in other words, time dedicated to themselves. Shaindl reveals in her comment during interview that her blog is the only thing she has had a choice over that she has stuck with over a period of time:

> And with the writing, it's probably the only thing that I've done consistently for the last… well, aside from working, school… for myself, as a personal interest, that I've maintained, even if there are some months where I only wrote one or two posts, I keep going back, I keep writing. (Shaindl 2008)

An analysis of the interviews reveals that the majority of participants ensure they *make* time in their everyday lives to update their blogs and to read what others have posted on the blogosphere. When compared to other feminist accounts of making time for media use and consumption, it seems that both the domestication of the technology and the control over schedule (when women decide to blog) are innovations increasing the appeal of the medium. For instance, Ang discusses the control that television networks have over scheduling (1985: 23). One could argue, in relation to this, that blogging shares similarities with women's magazines, as both can be 'easily put down' (Hermes 1995). However, whereas magazine readers have little or no control over the content presented to them, blogging may bring an increased source of pleasure due to the, albeit somewhat limited, control over both content and time. This becomes obvious when considering that at the time of the interviews (2008-2009), participants had been blogging for at least one year, and a couple had started in 2003 (Blanche) and 2004 (Cynthia). However, the majority of interviewees started to blog in 2005 – Éloïse, Sarah, Michèle, Kieva and Lynne – or 2006 – Ghislaine, Dominique, Elizabeth, Virginie, Catherine, Bonnie, Denise, Ani, Elsa and Lucie. Thus most were experienced bloggers by the time they were interviewed. It is clear too that they integrate blogging into their daily routines. Catherine, for instance, makes it part of her morning routine, when after having breakfast, her children watch some television and she uses the time to update her blog. Lucie updates her blog once her children are having a nap, and she is enjoying her coffee. Ariane uses blogging as a way of taking a break, mostly from her studies and end-of-term assignments. For Elsa, blogging is a way of guarding some time each day just for herself, as a space in the day when she can say no to

everyone's demands and dedicate herself totally to an activity that she enjoys, an approach reminiscent of Janice Radway's results when studying women who engage with romantic novels (1984) and other scholars focussing on women's magazines (Hermes 1995, Winship 2000 [1987]) and soap operas (Ang 1985). Sometimes, as in the cases of bloggers Cynthia, Michèle, Julie and Lynne, when they need a little break from work and feel the need to write, they take a short break from their paid occupations, to post an entry on their blogs. They may, as Lynne reported doing, delay the publication of their entries in order not to get caught by their employers. The benefits attributed to blogging are directly linked to the technology. It is significant for women that authoring a blog may be done from any computer connected to the internet, and may be done in steps, as a blog entry can be saved without being published. As such, when a blogger is interrupted in her writing, she can save her entry and return to it later, from any computer with connectivity. The portability of the medium and its flexibility enable bloggers to 'take blogging with them'. This is crucial to participants who frequently mentioned that their love of writing drove them to find a way to update their blogs when the demands of everyday life make it hard to take time to write.

Despite time constraints, many bloggers do make time to blog. They either insert this activity into their busy schedules, as discussed above, or use their readers, known or unknown, as an excuse to blog, telling themselves that they must blog in order not to disappoint, worry, or lose audiences. These reasons for blogging were explicitly mentioned by Éloïse, Lynne, Simone and Elsa, as a reason why they started to blog instead of writing in a manuscript diary:

> If I relate to… why I decided to start this, in the end, it was a little for that, when it started. To write… to force myself to write, sort of, because I enjoy writing and… If I told myself that some people may read me, who may wait, maybe, for me to write something, well it would motivate me to put some thoughts down. (Éloïse 2008)

> It's one of the objectives I've had for a long time. Finding a way… that would make me hold on to the discipline to… to keep my memories and my… things. So… And it… the blog responded to that. You know, it responded to the fact that it had to interest me enough to convince me to go on, so… I hope I'll continue later. It's something that I've been meaning to do for a long time, and I hope I will continue to do it. That's really how I am. (Lynne 2009)

> […] at the beginning, it was contradictory. I really did it… for myself. And for others. It really was… both. I can't tell you that… But obviously, now, I'm at a point where… I'm at a

> point… I feel a certain responsibility. When it's been three days… two, three days, I'm thinking: 'hey! You know, there are people, they read me, still'. (Simone 2009)

> At the beginning, I… I had in my head this objective, to… to write – to try to write – at least one post per day. Because I… Or at least every second day, you know, to try… to stay: to keep the interest. Because when you… I saw, exactly, the blogs that were abandoned for weeks… it's boring for people, you know, when they arrive on your blog and there's no new post… you know? (Elsa 2009)

Furthermore, interviews reveal that although participants enjoy having to make time to blog, they would not enjoy updating their blogs if doing so became an obligation or a chore[69]. Losing interest is cited as a reason why many would stop blogging, as evidenced by the statements of Éloïse and Anabel:

> […] if I lose interest, I will stop, actually. It will probably be… I don't write… I don't give myself any obligation in this regard. If I decide to close it, I will close it. And I'm not the type who does never-ending goodbyes: 'dear readers, I decided to stop…' (Éloïse 2008)

> I do it when… I feel like it. I feel the need, but… I don't want to force myself, as I was saying earlier, if it became a chore, then I would close it. And that's it: I write loads of things in various other places. (Anabel 2009)

Blogging is hence seen as a practice that enables making time for oneself but it must be done on a voluntary basis. The flexibility of blogging is appreciated by participants. For Ani, Simone and Julie, this leads them to think that there is probably no reason why they would stop blogging, since they have almost stopped putting pressure on themselves to update their blogs too frequently. However, there are two additional aspects to be discussed that put a damper on women's blogging practices. On the one hand, blogging seems to be something that one does *in the meantime* – while there are no other activities to be done, while one's writing talents still lack official recognition, or while one is not feeling very well. Once other activities begin to provide more recognition and to take more time, many participants indicated that they might stop blogging. The following interview excerpts illustrate this:

> You know, if it gets to the point when I no longer have time to post on my blog, well… people will have to stop reading me. So, then, you know… I… it would be for myself, it would be like… what I think it would come to… if I take so much time before I post on my blog… well… maybe it's because it's not so important anymore. (Mireille 2008)

---

[69] This was analysed in more depth in the *Maîtres chez nous* chapter.

> But… you know, I mean… it's not… it's not an absolute priority, in my life. You know, I can spend weeks without… without publishing and it's like: yeah, maybe I should write, but you know, it's not an obsession. (Bonnie 2008)

> It's because the blog, it's not my priority. That's it: end of term, break-up, changing flats, yadeyadeya. At some point, you're like: listen, blog, you're taking too much energy. (Anabel 2009)

> It's always for me. It's always time for myself. It's always for myself. If… If I don't have time, I don't have time. You know, I will… sometimes, I will take the time, you know, because I need it. But it's always for me, yes, it's quite centred on myself. It's *my* blog. (Sarah 2009 – emphasis in interview)

For some, previous writing practices, such as manuscript writing in Ani's case, or private diary writing in Simone's case, have suffered since they started blogging because the blog is now taking up the time they used for those activities. Time, because it is limited, tends to be allocated to the preferred practice of the moment and sometimes in relation to the feedback received after writing blog entries, as in the case of Kieva. Having invested a lot of time in an entry where she detailed her views on feminism, Kieva found that the investment was not worthwhile since she received a lot of criticism. However, she explains abandoning such topics in relation to the time it took rather than the negative comments she received:

> I did write texts more opinion-based that shocked, a lot more than 'today, I put lipstick on'. Real opinions, and I got… criticised. And it… that's not why I stopped. It's only because I had… put in at least an hour, or two, per post, you know. And it was long and it was tiring. And eh… And surprisingly, that's when I got most readers and when I got most negative comments, it was for that. That's not why I no longer do it. It's just…. because of time. (Kieva 2009)

On the other hand, bloggers often characterise time used to blog as a way of giving news to friends and family, keeping track of memories of their children, providing support to other bloggers, or being an active and contributing member of the Québec blogosphere. Perhaps this is because they fear being accused of egocentrism when working on something that gives them pleasure. Consequently, they explain their time investments as something that benefits others:

> It's certain that when I sit down and take a moment to write… often, it's my bubble. It's a time for myself. At the same time, why do I do that instead of… taking a bath? Well, on the one hand, I am not a bath person [laughter]. But, you know… I could go take a shower, for example… why do I do it? Because… Probably because I know that people read me… Sometimes, I feel a little… pressure… in brackets. It might be me, who puts this pressure on my shoulders. (Dominique 2008).

> Since I have friends who are… in Europe, just about everywhere: spread around, I thought, also, it's a good way to… I can tell them: I have a blog. If you want some news, this is where I will write, and that's it. (Bonnie 2008)

> […] it's obvious that when I write… it makes me happy, you know, it's… I'm proud of it. So… I do it… I have the impression to do it really for my son… But I also do it for myself. Because I gain a lot from it. (Simone 2009)

The time used to blog is justified not only in terms of one's own enjoyment, but also the benefit to readers and in order to retain that readership. Blanche was rather pragmatic about this, whereas Michèle and Denise realised that writing to keep readers had negative impacts on the quality of their entries:

> Listen, if… if I talk to myself… only to myself, and I take over an hour to write an article, and it's only for myself? Look, I'll go someplace else… […] It's… it's to be read, definitively. (Blanche 2008)

> And… and it was what was going through my mind, at that time, I thought: well, I feel like I'm not writing anything good, anymore. That I force myself to write. To keep my readers, to continue the exchange, because I like to write, also, you know. (Michèle 2009)

> […] sometimes, like, when I spend many days without writing, I feel a little guilty, I have the impression I should force myself to put something up. The posts are never good when I force myself. (Denise 2009)

It might be argued here that gender constructions of femininity weaken the affinity between women and technology, encouraging women to abandon it when other demands are made or other priorities present (Corneliussen 2005). Nonetheless, by blogging regularly, participants resist everyday pressures to dedicate *all* their free time to others, particularly resisting pressure to serve family members. Even though interview data suggests that blogging serves as an excuse for women to take some time for themselves, women bloggers still tend to limit and control the amount of time they spend online. This is often a consequence of receiving criticism about spending too much time on the computer, as demonstrated by the comments of Sarah's husband and Elizabeth's partner. According to Gill Valentine, this strongly relates to gender:

> Excessive amounts of time spent online by an individual family member can also be a cause of tension (Cooper et al. 2000; and Shaw 1997; Leiblum 1998; Cooper 1998), particularly when an individual gives precedence to spending time online over spending time with other family members (Steward 2000). Women traditionally have made time for family and in "doing" family. In contrast, men's time is more often their own, and

> rather than spending time on producing and sustaining the family they tend to spend time with family members (Leccardi 1996). Women also tend to make up the greatest percentage of non-ICT users across all age groups. Not surprisingly, therefore, it is mothers who most often regard ICT as an interruption to family life […]. (Valentine 2006: 373)

Although they control the quantity of time they spend online, participants make time to blog in the midst of other tasks and responsibilities. Certainly, this is one means of advancing their own interests, at least meeting the need to take a break from the demands of everyday life and to focus on themselves for a little while. In the interviews, Dominique mentions how the time taken for blogging could probably be dedicated to other activities, but that she still chooses to update her blog instead of engaging in the more solitary relaxation provided by the bath or shower. Blogging in this case provides more than just an excuse to focus on herself – it also represents connecting with others on the blogosphere, a pleasurable activity, as addressed in the following section.

BLOGGING AS FUN

Interview data reveals that not only do bloggers enjoy reading blogs, but they also take pleasure from the mere act of blogging. This section explores how blogging, including creating a blog and posting entries, reading one's previous entries, reading other blogs and connecting with others all contribute to the pleasures of blogging. The section concludes with a discussion of some earlier research in feminist cultural studies, which critiques pleasures derived from consuming popular culture, claiming that it really amounts to false-consciousness. It ends by suggesting that these media-related pleasures may also constitute acts of cultural resistance.

As a practice that is entirely voluntary, bloggers have to be motivated to update their blogs, and the pleasures gained from blogging appear to be the greatest motivator. There is, initially, the enjoyment found in using the technology itself, as well as the creation of the message and the satisfaction involved in the personalisation of the blog. Bloggers Elsa, Lucie and Kieva found pleasure in the use of the computer itself:

> I always loved writing. And this, it's giving me a reason to write. And, also, writing on the computer, I like it. I like… I like being in front of my screen and writing words that are adding themselves to the screen. And it's silly, but I… I think it… yes, I like it. I like it, it's magical, and it's like technological, magical, you see. (Elsa 2009)

> I really thought it was amazing. Sometimes, even when I don't publish my posts, I still enjoy word-processing something and… word-processing texts… I love it! [laughter] (Lucie 2009)

> And, I realised that the computer, as a medium, really interests
> me. […] And, finally, it works well. It's clean, it's already clean
> [laughter] on the page, I can erase, and you know everything
> goes well. So it really satisfies me. (Kieva 2009)

Shaindl, Cynthia, Ghislaine, Elizabeth, Lynne and Ani identified the creation of the blog

and creating messages, involving writing, sometimes looking for and adding photos

and images, as pleasurable activities:

> I like the way my… I like the way my blog looks. (Shaindl 2008)

> Myself, I like blogs… I like short blogs. I like when there are
> images, and I tell myself, well, what I like… I will reproduce. Not
> necessarily that it will please others, but… it's always more
> interesting a blog with images, with visual aids, and… Even if
> it's not really related, it's nice to look at. (Cynthia 2008)

> What I find very satisfying is creating the message. I find it very
> satisfying to… to build a message, to write it, to… to… to…
> create, really, a portrait of a situation. (Ghislaine 2008)

> And, I thought that… the blog, it was a good way to… to be
> known. To publish. And that, rapidly. Because… the person that
> I am… I am really artistic. I love to create. […] I thought it was a
> good way to be known by a public. (Elizabeth 2008)

> […] rarely did it annoy me, in life, not to take time to do
> something, but the blog, it gets to me. I enjoy it, updating it
> (Lynne 2009)

> It's a space I learned to like, and that I… I have fun going there,
> and writing about what I do. (Ani 2009)

Second, pleasure is also derived from the exchange made possible through blogging,

as friends, family members and total strangers meet at the blog to read, comment and

engage in a conversation with the author and/or with one another. It is perhaps this

function of blogging, enabling a conversation between the blogger and her various

audiences, that most explicitly underlines blogging's status as a form of social media.

As stated earlier, social media are characterised by social interactions between

participants (Baym 2010) and this component is central to participants' enjoyment of

blogging. However, as also specified earlier, such interactions are not new to Web 2.0,

but enjoy expanded possibilities within it:

> The dialogic potential of social media is present in earlier forms
> of CMC. The e-mail lists, bulletin boards, and text messages of
> the 1980s might be seen as precursors to the participatory
> culture (Jenkins 2006) that characterizes twenty-first century
> Internet behavior. But the mid-1990s saw a decisive shift in the
> way that social media enabled interactions between participants,
> and placed that interaction in public rather than private or semi-
> private contexts. Blogs and wikis extended the range of CMC's

interactive possibilities, with blogs allowing individual writers to connect to other bloggers (through blog rolls, links, comments) […]. (Page 2012: 6)

Moreover, connections can be made through blogging despite no prior relationship between the blogger and reader (see Baym, 2010 – prior relationship needed, for instance, in most cases of email exchange) or common interests or involvement within an online community (as in the case of bulletin boards). Connections, in blogging, may be established simply because one stumbles upon the bottle someone else threw into the internet sea, as one blogger referred to our encounter, on her blog, after her interview with me. As well, bloggers appreciate the recognition they gain by having readers, as illustrated in the following quotes:

> But of course it's fun when one tells me 'listen, we know that you blog – could you send us something so we can have it?' I am like 'ooooh! of course!' (Shaindl 2008)

> I like that, putting [my writings] on my blog, thinking they may be read. But if not… it just makes me feel good. (Ariane 2008)

> That people tell me they read me, it makes me extremely happy. It's true. But it's not… You know, I [hesitation]… I don't have the feeling that I am unique because I have a blog and you don't, you know? (Bonnie 2008)

Also, bloggers take pleasure in the conversation that takes place with visitors, as expressed in the following excerpts:

> Well, I was a stay-at-home mum, but I had… I felt like I blossomed more with the blog, I would say. It filled the relationship [void]… my social network that I no longer had, from when I was a worker… Having moved from worker to stay-at-home mum, my network really shrunk, because of the context. But it re-opened that network of relations. And it… it filled that need, which I didn't even know I had… I realise, now. (Catherine 2008)

> So there, in the end, it allows me to… that's it: I met people, even if just online… people I am glad I met, people like me, also, who… Who express their little lives as mummies and their little challenges and their little things… and it's fun. You know? (Éloïse 2008)

> And, what I find interesting, also, is… the feedback, there're people who leave comments. There're friends, and there're also people I've never seen in my life! (Sarah 2009)

> […] I… was looking for… as much to have fun for myself as to interest people. Because, it's nice to write, but… when you write in your black notebook, you know, you don't have feedback from others. And… I don't… have the pretension to be

published. The web, it gives me that, too: the interaction, direct, with people. (Michèle 2009)

So, often, it… yes, I feel like chatting with someone and… When I publish a post on my blog, it's as if I was chatting! (Lucie 2009)

Third, having written down memories and events from their (recent) pasts, participants enjoy the ability to go back to previous entries and reading what they wrote, regarding it as a means of engaging with positive memories and with their own life stories.

[…] it's like a photo album, you know, you take photos, you put them in an album… and sometimes, you feel like going through its pages. It's a little like that. (Bonnie 2008)

But, sometimes, I will read posts and be like 'that's true! that was fun!' [laughter]. (Sarah 2009)

It's also a way to… put words on… it's also a way to put into words my happiness. Me, my… my blog is updated regarding my little happy moments, and… I enjoy being able to see them again, written, afterwards. I find it fun… it enables me to remember the little things that make me happy, when I read my entries. (Lynne 2009)

I like going back to read what I wrote. I like it, it's nice to read, and it's nice to relive what I had at that time. (Elsa 2009)

Fourth, it appears that reading others' blogs is also satisfying and pleasurable. It provides a source of entertainment, something to read to distract oneself, or a way of finding people who share similar backgrounds, experiences and thoughts on what is happening in their everyday lives. Reading the blogs of people much like themselves seems to provide enhanced pleasure, which supports Lena Karlsson's findings, that what blog readers enjoy is 'finding themselves in another person' (2007: 151). The following quotes exemplify the pleasures derived in these ways:

And… I like it, reading [blogs], because well… it brings a view onto… another view on life, on people, on… just about everything which may happen to us, and… well… it makes me feel less lonely, also [laughter]. (Mireille 2008)

Now, I realise that, while reading other blogs, you know, that's it, that's also what's nice about blogs, to realise that… you know, for instance, Caroline Allard's blog, Mère Indigne [Unworthy Mother], well… I read it recently and… That, it's really something refreshing, and… in my view, clearly why I… to realise that we're mostly the same, and that… There're lots about maternity… Of course, my blog is mainly about maternity…. There're loads of things you can't really say, and that our… our mothers-in-law, our mothers, our… they don't tell us. (Simone 2009)

> I'll randomly click on the articles. Just for fun, in fact. But it's also true that, sometimes, I'm looking for something: When did we visit this place? Did I talk about that? And then we get carried away [laughter]! Mostly with videos: It's so funny! But that, that's not only for my blog. I go to watch others more often, still. (Lucie 2009)

This data indicates that pleasure is partly derived from the act of blogging itself, that is creating the blog entries by choosing the right words and images or working on the layout, and partly from reading blog entries, their own or others'. As discussed in the introduction of this chapter, many scholars in feminist cultural studies have paid attention to the pleasures derived by women through media representation of ideologies of femininity. My research acknowledges that experiencing pleasures from media consumption or production, which in the case of blogging are intertwined, is not necessarily liberating or involve a critical engagement. However, some scholarly perspectives on users posting content, like that of Lindemann, drawing on bell hooks, suggests that blogging enables the possibility of 'talking back' (2010: 210). Furthermore, Lovász discusses blogging as a 'form of cultural resistance' by which women take upon themselves to create what they believe to be more 'authentic' representations of their own realities and hence influence definitions of femininity and womanhood (2007: 174-175). Although unaware of such research, but feeling that mainstream media did not do justice to her realities as a woman, participant Kieva confronted stereotypes of femininity by starting her own blog. This was partly discussed in the previous chapter, while analysing Kieva's derisive approach to cooking. Here Kieva expresses a desire to 'talk back':

> [...] The performance in women's magazines, which pretend to be a reflection of our society. But that's not it. Seriously... most magazines from Québec, I think they're not at all reflective of... you know, for my age group, not at all. That's why, in some way, I started to blog, because I felt like it didn't represent me. I don't obsess about productivity. Some may say I'm lazy, but that's not how I see it [laughter]. And, also, I think it's one of the greatest... differences between the sexes? It's that I claim the right to be lazy, coarse, vulgar, independent, a big spender and all of that. Without it... I don't know. I think that... I feel like I am being judged for that. Because... I think that we tend to judge men less for that, you know? (Kieva 2009)

'Talking back' is also to claim a visibility via one's blog, and to be empowered, an idea pursued below.

PUTTING ONESELF OUT THERE

Critics may rightly allege that the type of blog focused on in this research is the least discussed by mainstream media, underlined, for example, by Herring and her colleagues (2004). It is also suggested that such blogs are dismissed by the general public (see Karlsson 2007), yet bloggers successfully make their presence felt on the blogosphere and do connect with others in pertinent ways. Some attract a regular readership and most find affinities with other bloggers and readers through sharing common interests. In this way they gain a support network with blog acquaintances. For example, this is characteristic of the mamasphere (Friedman and Calixte 2009), where bloggers approach mothering in various ways, finding commonalities, often developing friendships or, minimally, appreciating and reading one another. This was clearly illustrated in the support expressed by other bloggers when *Mère cornue* [Horned Mother], a blogger who did not participate in this research, wrote an entry immediately following the death of her youngest son[70]. This post was met with a spontaneous outpouring of concern and support for the grieving mother.

Through putting themselves out there, authors gain empowerment in several ways. First, bloggers use the medium to gain recognition, by recording their lives, having others look at them, and somehow rendering their lives more worthy. Secondly, blogging validates their lives and experiences. Thirdly, blogging feels empowering to participants because they perceive themselves to be in control of how they present themselves, at least those representations that they post themselves or allow others to post on their blogs. These three dimensions of empowerment are explored below.

One prevalent reason for blogging, identified during interviews, is affirming one's existence. Cynthia was the first to explicitly mention this, in the second interview conducted for this project. She referred to blogging as a source of reassurance and drew a parallel with having her name in the phone book[71] as a confirmation of her existence:

> Hum… because I enjoy blogging. Because… it reassures me!
> To know… that I leave a mark on the blogosphere [laughter]. It
> reassures me in the sense that… well, it's a little silly, but it's
> like… for me, having my name in the phone book. When you
> have your name in the phone book, you really exist. If you have
> a blog, you really exist [laughter]. It isn't… it's not that I doubt

---

[70] This issue was explored in the *Maîtres chez nous* and *Être ou paraître* chapters.
[71] Drawing on Marshal McLuhan's comment on the telephone ('The telephone began as a novelty, became a necessity and is now regarded as an absolute right'), Alexandre Laurin mentions how the phone directory could replace 'telephone' in this quote, meaning how by the end of the 20th century, in North America, the phone directory was invested with great importance in most homes (2010: 169).

> my existence, I know I exist, it's just leaving a mark… (Cynthia 2008)

Having been struck by the underlying meaning of this quote from Cynthia – that some women feel marginalised to the point of invisibility in everyday life – I began looking for data that either affirmed or contradicted such feelings in the interviews of the other participants. Although not a feeling voiced by all, similar remarks about looking for a way to leave a mark and affirm their existence were found. Many participants (Shaindl, Mireille, Catherine, Michèle and Lucie) mention how connecting with others makes them feel less lonely, while some such as Lynne and Simone indicate how their lives may be of no real interest, no relevance, but they still enjoy blogging about it. As Simone (2009) puts it, 'I have the impression that no one would care. That… My anxieties, my little life, it… it's of no interest!' Stronger affirmations of one's existence, of a desire to make oneself visible, are expressed in the following interview excerpts:

> […] I believe the internet has democratised some things. The… you know, there are some people who wouldn't have had a right to speak and now, they do. Precisely via blogs or things like that. We can say things… Myself, I can say: my little self in my little house in the suburbs… I don't think I will make much difference in people's lives, but I can still give my point of view, and make a little space for myself… (Éloïse 2008)

> [Reflecting on mummy blogs more specifically, which is not the type of blog she authors herself] Even if I, myself, am not so interested in that, personally. But I think it's amazing. And I think you feel like you exist, more, you know, when other mothers tell you 'hey, I thought that was funny' or 'hey, that was cool' or… (Kieva 2009)

> First of all, only the fact that you found me, in my view, that's a prize. You know? I say to myself: wow! You know, I exist [laughter]. You know, I mean… not that my readers do not provide me with this satisfaction, but I really said to myself 'that's cool', you know? (Ani 2009)

> So that, it was really important for me, at the beginning, I really had, like, that desire to be visible… and… I don't know about the others, but I ended up getting sick of it. (Julie 2009)

Reflecting on feminism and women in literature, particularly as authors, Anabel concludes her interview by denying that her own writing has a feminist purpose. However, she admits that equality of women as writers is *a* part of her blogging:

> […] for a long time, it was an occupation… seen as masculine, writing. And, still today, I think that we… we have a tendency to… believe that men writers produce more and all. I think that, well, in fact, it may be true because… well women, when they are pregnant, they have children, they have less time to write, and everything. But I think that the gift of writing is not only for

> men. And… I am proud to write as a woman, but I… I don't position myself as a feminist who defends… feminist ideals, and… That's not why I write, it's not to claim a space for women in society, but I think that's all part of it, you know. (Anabel 2009)

What emerges from the interview data is a desire by women bloggers to have their lives noted – and perhaps, even more important, to have their lives seen as they themselves dictate. In writing about etiquette literature authored by women, Jorge Arditi identifies this genre as a practice by which women 'forge new discursive space within which women cease being the "other"' (1996: 430). Similarly, by writing about themselves, women bloggers tell their stories in the first person; they are not spoken about – they speak for themselves. Though participants are aware that women's blogs are not necessarily perceived as relevant: Cynthia, for example, discussed the lack of recognition attributed to women bloggers, mentioning 'I have the impression that… it's often perceived as something sentimental, female blogs. […] In terms of gossip, of… somehow, it's seen as futile…' (Cynthia 2008). They nonetheless use the medium to combat invisibility and misrepresentations. Bloggers actively place their stories at the centre of a (her)story to be remembered and acknowledged as they wish them to be.

A second reason for blogging is to receive the support and recognition generated from other bloggers, ultimately providing them with validation. This comes through in comments made during the interviews as to why bloggers started to write online or why they continue writing online. Many participants underline how the recognition they receive generates pleasure and encourages them to pursue this venture:

> It was the New Year and I started to write just for fun, then I discovered the extent to which it was nice, for me, to write and with people's positive feedback, who were saying 'we can't stop waiting for you to publish another one' […]. (Shaindl 2008)

> As long as I enjoy it and… I have the impression that I still have a certain exchange, you know, with people… If, really, I never, ever had any comment, maybe… [I would stop]. (Blanche 2008)

> Yes, I would like to be read. That people tell me they read me, it makes me extremely happy. It's true. (Bonnie 2008)

> […] I have new readers who just discovered me… I don't really know how. By chance, and they liked it, they left comments saying 'hey, it's really good and it's too bad you're not writing more often.' And that, that restored my inspiration, obviously: when you get positive feedback, it makes you want to go on. (Anabel 2009)

> And, sometimes, just feeling like you have people… who would say 'we understand.' It's like, okay, it's okay: I'm not alone.

> There is someone, somewhere, who understands me. Even if it's only virtual. (Michèle 2009)

> And when you know you've touched something in people, because they reply and it… it comes back in great strength! That, that's a recognition which is… really, much stronger! And, sometimes, people are… I have comments, you know, from intelligent people, and… that's exactly it! What they said was so great. It was so exactly it… they got it all! Now, that, that's irreplaceable. (Denise 2009)

> I was so happy, you know, to be recognised for something I had written that… I gave the URL to my parents and gave it to my in-laws… So they could see it. (Julie 2009)

> I think we mostly write thinking we're not writing to be read, but… if we weren't read, we wouldn't write, you know. It's not the end we aim for, but… it's part of… the enjoyment, I think. (Lucie 2009)

Faulkner's research on gender and technology adds weight to the observation that one can get pleasure and affirmation from blogging. While focussed on academic literature on engineers, she underlines how powerlessness and pleasure in technology may be intertwined (2000: 106). Similarly and specifically in relation to women and blogs, it appears that the lack of recognition in one's everyday offline life with the related lack of power and influence may provide the very reason for women being attracted to online communication and networks on the blogosphere. This provides further insight into how, and perhaps why, women bloggers use this medium as source of empowerment and more specifically, as a source of validation, providing support and recognition from their peers.

Finally, a third reason for blogging is related to the feelings of control that women feel they exert over their representations of the self. Because women decide what information to disclose, and how to portray themselves, blogging may provide a rare space where women feel empowered and can speak for themselves. In her interview, for example, Shaindl underlines how in life, she does not feel very powerful in various circumstances:

> I talk a lot about the fact that we… like there's a lot of things that we want that we feel like we can't have or we have no control over. (Shaindl 2008)

Although data presented in the previous chapter focussed on how women used their online writings as a way of keeping track of self-improvement narratives, it may also be argued that by choosing what to reveal and what to conceal, they may be able, as suggested by Nicola Döring, who studied women and cybersex, 'to overcome feelings

of insufficiency and shame' (2000: 878). Michele White, writing on gender and webcam use, additionally underlines how, contrary to previous analysis of the male gaze and women's objectification, this technology enables control over one's representation (2003: 9, 16). She explains:

> It is always clear that the webcam is contained within the woman webcam operator's terrain and that the view may be terminated at any time. Even in cases where the technical maintenance or the economics of pay sites are managed by a boyfriend, husband, or some other person, the woman operator still largely determines the ways in which she addresses the webcam from moment to moment. Women assert control over when they are available and what can be seen, even though they may design sites in which their bodies are represented as erotic objects and allow their spectators – both male and female – to look. (White 2003: 16)

Similarly with blogging, the management women retain over the frequency of the entries they publish, the choice of topics they discuss and the overall layout of the blog, including whether or not to disclose their real identities or provide a photo of themselves, are all ways in which women exercise control on their blogs. Participants underlined the significance of this decision-making power in relation to various dimensions of blogging[72]. This includes the possibility for them to stop or abandon their blogs at any given time, if they no longer feel interested in blogging. Other expressions of control include comments, such as:

> My blog does not regulate my life. It's my life, which regulates my blog. (Virginie 2008)

> And, then, well, while reading [a female friend's] blog I was like: eh! That's really fun. I mean… I can write what I want. (Bonnie 2008)

> I do it when… I feel like it. I feel the need, but… I don't want to force myself, as I was saying earlier, if it becomes a chore, then I will close it. And that's it: I write loads of things in various other places. (Anabel 2009)

> I think there was a desire for my writing to exist on its own. Without being adapted for the screen. (Denise 2009)

> I choose to write what I want, on my blog. Nobody forces me. (Ani 2009)

> Listen, if there are things that I would prefer not to let others know, because I'm not really proud of myself, then I just won't write it [laughter]. (Mireille 2008)

---

[72] This is also further explored in the *Maîtres chez nous* chapter.

What these various quotes emphasise is the potential for women to blog in order to speak for themselves, be in control of what information they disclose, and craft how they present themselves. Instead of being spoken about, women bloggers speak for themselves, by writing their own stories.

However, as revealed by Virginia Woolf (1989 [1929]) many years ago, women need a space, a room of their own, in order to write. Thus, I was curious to look at the actual physical space they use for blogging. As explained in the methodological chapter, I conducted home visits with eight bloggers in order to observe the space they blog from, and a further seven participants sent me photos of this space after the interviews. Out of the 15 bloggers who allowed me to look at their space for blogging, it emerges that only Mireille, Ariane, Anabel, Bonnie and Michèle have access to a private space from which to blog. Whereas Mireille and Ariane both write from their desks in their bedrooms, Anabel uses her laptop anywhere in her flat, as she lives alone. Bonnie has her personal office space in the basement of the house, whereas Michèle sometimes takes her laptop to her bedroom, if she needs privacy, although she also blogs from the living room and dining area. Others who may have the opportunity to blog from a more private or secluded space are Dominique, Virginie, Ani, Simone and Lucie, as they all own laptops. However, whereas Dominique's laptop was on the dining room table, suggesting that she uses it elsewhere too, all the others have their laptops installed on small desks, either in the living room (Virginie, Simone, Lucie) or in a shared home office (Ani). Ghislaine and Elizabeth use a desktop computer in a shared home office, whereas Éloïse's desktop is in the family's unfinished basement and is shared with other family members. Blanche and Elsa both use the family desktop, installed in the living room.

What these observations tell us is that a minority of bloggers have access to privacy when blogging (Mireille, Ariane, Anabel, Bonnie and Michèle), with the majority not having a (physical) *room of their own* (Woolf 1989 [1929]) from which to blog. In fact, they generally use their computers in a space that is shared, such as the office at home, or a space where other household activities are taking place such as the kitchen, living room, or dining areas. This not only means that they can be easily interrupted by demands of the household, but also that family members or guests can observe them, potentially placing real restrictions on their freedom to write.

CONCLUSION

This chapter explored blogging as a source of pleasure and a source of empowerment for women. However, regardless of claims made by participants of putting themselves 'out there' and putting themselves and their desires first, data from interviews, blog entries and insights from other research somewhat contradict these empowerment claims.

The first section focused on bloggers' structuring of their daily schedules to accommodate their blogs. The pleasure derived from blogging means that they tend to make time in their everyday routines to update their blogs and post new entries. Sometimes they use paid work time, as did Lynne, Michèle, Kieva and Julie, and, at other times, they incorporate it into their personal daily routines, as mentioned by Catherine and Lucie. Bloggers justify finding time, describing the blog as keeping in touch with friends and family, as a way of preserving family memories, or making a contribution to the blogosphere. These explanations tend to reveal a need in the participants to justify their time-investment on a pursuit that is clearly in their own interests and brings them pleasure.

I then characterised blogging as a pleasure-generating activity for women. Women do find pleasure in writing and engaging with the technology, exchanging views with other bloggers, friends and family, indulging in happy memories by reading earlier entries, and reading about other people's lives as a source of entertainment and pleasure. Researchers have previously argued that escapism from the demands of everyday life is part of the enjoyment of 'engaging in activities that are absorbing' (Mathwick, Malhotra and Rigdon 2001: 44), which is reflected in comments from participants who explained the time spent on their blog as a way of taking a break. Just as Ching-Jui Keng and Hui-Ying Ting's participants linked reading blogs to escapism (2009: 484), participants use blogging in similar ways:

> It's just nice, sometimes… to take a break. (Ariane 2008)

> […] you know, it's a time for a break, for me, in the home whirlpool. (Catherine 2008)

> But, yes, it happened that I wrote from work, because I felt an emergency and said to myself: well, I'm taking my break now and I am writing. (Michèle 2009)

> I worked at a place and I had no work… I had nothing to do [laughter], so I read blogs. And, at some point, I started to write my own and… at work. I'm not proud [laughter], but that's how it happened. (Kieva 2009)

In the third section, I focused on how, by blogging, women gain visibility as well as recognition. Visibility is achieved not only by 'self-branding' (Hearn 2008), as explained in the previous chapter, but also by writing their own life stories and, as such, validating their experiences. Giving themselves visibility, bloggers also reflect on their identities and, as illustrated by Cynthia's comment comparing blogging to having her name in the phone book, bloggers *mark* their existence. As discussed above, participants appreciate having the possibility of speaking for themselves and telling their stories as they want them told. In doing so, they place themselves at the centre of a narrative and cease being the 'other' (Arditi 1996). Additionally, recognition is achieved by receiving comments from visitors and other bloggers who provide encouragement for writing, support in relation to life's challenges and, perhaps more importantly, provide external proof of their existence. Finally, by 'putting oneself out there' women are able to demonstrate that they are in control of the representations they make, and this control over decision-making further empowers and gives pleasure.

It becomes apparent in this chapter that previous research relating pleasure and popular culture to ideologies of femininity come up short in providing a full account of women's engagement with new media technologies and more specifically with blogging. Women do feel empowered by making time in their everyday lives to indulge in a practice they enjoy, or by engaging with the technology itself, or from exercising some control over their presentations of themselves, or by simply connecting with and gaining support from others. Empowerment, from a feminist perspective, consists of 'an individual learning process as well as a political emancipation process' (Döring 2000: 873). Women have learned more about the daily constraints on their lives through blogging. They have to confront the daily demands on their time, by others, through the struggle to make time to maintain their blogs. Furthermore, through their involvement in blogging, participants have gained awareness of discourses connecting women to the social world and disconnecting them from new media technologies. Although this awareness has not motivated any of the participants to become involved in defending women's equality at a macro level, it appears that they nonetheless have taken steps towards finding ways to have their own needs met at a micro level. This approach may be linked to the discussion of late modernity, briefly tackled in the previous chapter, where the increased individualisation of society forces people to take responsibility for themselves, rather than questioning structural inequalities (McRobbie 2007).

CONCLUSION: SPEAKING OF ONESELF ONLINE IS A RISKY ENDEAVOUR

This research was inspired by an opportunity to explore and engage with feminist blogging as an undergraduate research assistant within the *Observatoire sur le développement régional et l'analyse différenciée selon les sexes* (ORÉGAND). This work, and pleasure, sparked a desire within me to better understand blogging as a new way of sharing thoughts and ideas with others, so I created a number of blogs myself. I began reading other women's blogs and, as I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, I fell upon the blog of a French woman who detailed her extramarital adventures. Thinking about this blogger, who shared personal details of her life on such a public platform, her blog, raised some questions for me: Why was I surprised by it? What did it say about women's relationship, both as authors and consumers, to this new technological and cultural form? What could women potentially voice in this new space?

This curiosity grew into this doctoral research on women's blogging in Québec. Preliminary readings led to a number of findings. For example, one demonstrates that despite widespread optimism about the emancipatory potential of the technology (Bartow 2006), in reality, to date, women's involvement with the internet has generally received little attention by academics. Another finding suggests that women researchers are 'less likely to produce scholarly research in these areas' as well as being 'less likely to be the focus of the research itself' (Pierce 2005: 175).

When scholars have studied women's blogging, specifically, they have written about the tendency to associate it with the practice of *diary* writing and to categorise it as another form of 'women's writings'. Categorising women's blogs as such has related consequences, in that it reinforces their association with the private sphere (Giles 2004) thereby to the perception that these blogs are not *important*, since they are perceived as non-political in nature. This leads some scholars, media and much of the general public to either downplay their contributions or to simply ignore them (Bartow 2006, Hvizdak 2008, Karlsson 2007, Smith 2006, Wilson 2005). Furthermore, it suggests that women bloggers remain within their 'traditional gender roles' when writing about their everyday lives and hence, without question, sustain gender stereotypes (Lovász 2007: 165-166, also Winker 2005).

WOMEN BLOGGING IN QUÉBEC: BRIDGING THE GAP

As I began this research, I hoped to gain insight into how women, who did not necessarily identify as, or blog as, feminists, used the technology to portray femininities that may not conform to mainstream gender discourses in Québec. As a Québécoise myself, I believed women's blogs in Québec to be a good starting point, since writing about the self is linked to self-identity (Giddens 1991, Paasonen 2002, Thornham 2000). Blogging is also recognised as a space in which to assess personal experiences (Serfaty 2004) and to 'contrast [personal] experiences of femininity with mainstream representations thereof' (Lovász 2007: 3). My focus on women bloggers aimed to explore women's blogs within the Québécois context, which brought forward themes such as the domestic, issues regarding self-presentation, improvement narratives as well as discussions of pleasure. Approached from a feminist qualitative research perspective, my research does not make claims towards generalisation of results to all women's blogs. This approach, that consciously avoids generalisation, is also a characteristic of ethnographies, as discussed above and bears repeating here. Just as stated by Cohen and Court (2003), ethnographies are inward looking, and in this research that inward look aims to describe how Québécoises make use of blogging and to identify some of their beliefs in relation to blogs.

Four objectives guided this project: first, I wished to further advance the understanding and the legitimacy of women's writings by featuring them as an appropriate subject for academic scholarship. Second, I wanted to demonstrate some of the ways that women negotiate and make use of digital technologies. Third, I aimed to widen the scope of exploration of women's blogging, to examine it as a gender-*ambiguous* or even a gender-*subverting* writing practice even though, as a cultural form, it is often associated with women writing about themselves and is linked to diary writing. Finally, locating this project in my home province fulfilled my fourth objective, by allowing me to enter into contemporary sociological debates in Québec and, by applying of a gender lens to my work, to make a contribution to a better understanding of how Québécoises use the new technologies.

Given these objectives, a number of research questions were formulated at the beginning of the project: What are the discourses found in women's blogs, more precisely within women's blogging in Québec? In considering this primary question, a number of sub-questions arise, which this research also aimed to address: Why have some women turned to blogging? Could women's online writings shed light on discourses of femininity? Could women bloggers use this medium not only as a way to

record their personal memoirs into history, but also as a tool to reflect upon their futures and on their own selves, as traditional autobiographies have been shown to do (Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield 2000: 4-6)? What is the space that blogging occupies in their lives (physical, temporal, emotional, relational, etc.)? How is blogging adding pleasure to women's lives? Could blogging be a source of empowerment for women? Finally, how do all of the above contribute to an understanding of women's place in Québec?

My approach to studying women's blogs was to situate blogging on the continuum of women's genres, which include soap operas, women's magazines, romance novels and letter writing, and to look at it as embedded in so-called *masculine* technologies. In *Situating Women's Blogs: When Masculine Technologies and Women's Genres Meet*, I suggest that, in spite of making use of current *masculine* technologies, women's blogging remains strongly linked to cultural women's genres and to general discourses of femininity. I advance that this combining of masculine technology and women's genres may be demonstrative of changing notions and practices of femininity. This approach to women's blogging raises a fourth perspective, which to my knowledge, has not been thoroughly explored in the literature. Instead of considering this use of internet as masculine, feminine, or beyond gender (as explained by van Zoonen 2002), my approach suggests that women's blogging is illustrative of *shifting* understandings of gender and technology.

I drew on feminist research approaches, in particular feminist standpoint, post-modern feminism and feminist critical discourse analysis, to conceptualise the empirical dimension of this project. The online ethnography involved 23 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with women bloggers in Québec, some home visits (as did Bakardjieva, 2005) and an analysis of participants' blogs. By approaching the research in this manner, I placed priority on bloggers' own renditions of their experiences of blogging, by first analysing interview transcripts to identify emerging themes, and then proceeding to search participants' blogs for further details related to these themes. This approach aims at deconstructing the *knowing feminist* and giving voice to participants themselves, as *experts* of their own experiences (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002), two objectives namely associated with feminist standpoint epistemology. One difficulty, encountered while conducting the research, arose out of the data collection sequencing, as I wanted to obtain bloggers' consent before saving a copy of their blogs onto my computer. This ended up delaying the downloading step and consequently I lost access to entries published by Julie, who had deleted many entries from her blog

before I went to save them. Approaching women's blogging from a variety of perspectives is a strength of this project, as I gained access to information and details, such as participants' reasons for blogging, their appreciation for the appearance of their blogs, the physical spaces used for blogging, etc., which may not have become apparent through only reading their blogs. I also believe that by meeting face to face with each participant, and having the opportunity to explain all aspects of the research, I was able to obtain informed consent for participation and possibly gain their confidence, which allowed them to be candid in interviews.

WOMEN'S BLOGGING: IDEALS AND TENSIONS

Through closely examining research participants' renditions of their blogging, coupled with studying their blogs, four key themes emerged from this research: the use of a domestic metaphor in approaching their (idealised) blog; the desire to present themselves in the best possible light; bloggers' investment in self-improvement narratives; and, blogging as a pleasure-laden activity.

The first theme, the domestic metaphor, was found in a number of interviews, with bloggers directly comparing the blog to a home, considering that, as with home ownership, they had freedom over decorating it and controlling its environment. Using feminist literature on the home and online spaces (including Hochschild 2003 [1983], Johnson and Lloyd 2004, Miller 2008, Turkle 1995, Woolf 1989 [1929]), I suggest in *Maîtres chez nous* that, through a variety of blogging practices used, participants are *making home*. That is, through the act of blogging they are attempting to reproduce feelings associated with the idealised home. Throughout both their interview transcripts and the narratives on their blogs, participants emphasise feelings of and yearnings for comfort, safety and control. As such, my approach (and that of Karlsson, 2007) of linking women's blogs to other cultural productions identified as women's genres appears to be justified. Just as observed in soap operas (Geraghty 1999 [1991]: 312), the use of a domestic metaphor on women's blogs suggests the blurring of the public and private spheres. Furthermore, just as romance fiction has been credited with enabling women to gain feelings of empowerment (Radway 1983), by representing a place where feelings of insecurity are replaced by those of security (Light 1999 [1984]: 390), blogs are seen as a way of making home and controlling what happens in their virtual space. This perception of the blog as home prompted participants to express their desires for it to be a safe haven and to share their feelings of empowerment, achieved by finding a *room of their own* online. These feelings were strongly expressed, despite the contradictions pointed out below.

The second theme, self-presentation, draws on selected classical literature in sociology, including Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1990 [1959]) and Pierre Bourdieu's 'The Forms of Capital' (1986), as well as relevant texts on homepages (such as Cheung 2004). Combining theoretical concepts from the literature with participants' renditions of blogging and their blog entries, I tried to better understand the ways in which participants project who they are, online. Having established that bloggers do actively work towards achieving online personas that are perceived as highly educated, respectful, well-networked and amicable, I argue, in *Être ou paraître*, that they work to amass significant social and cultural capital in order to be perceived as popular, interesting and worth getting to know. In doing so they hope to attract a large audience in order to connect with others, engage in dialogue, and share their life experiences. This later point also links blogs to romance fiction, which according to Light (1999 [1984]) enabled women to engage in a positive subculture. Although their experiences are not always *positive*, as tensions do arise on their blogs (and sometimes offline, because of their blogs entries), participants expressed satisfaction at being able to connect with others via their blogs, as expressed by the two homemakers, Lucie and Catherine, who at times felt isolated in their new homemaking role. This concept of forming a subculture is supported by the blog cloud in figure 5, which demonstrated that the vast majority of the blogs listed on participants' blogrolls are authored by other women, and by other Québec-based bloggers.

The *Je me souviens* chapter, organised around self-improvement narratives of participants, is grounded in academic contributions on self-identity, which include Dominick (1999), Giddens (1991), Hearn (2008), Lacan (2006 [2002]) and McRobbie (2007). In projecting thoughts and everyday experiences onto their blogs, bloggers acknowledge that they aim to improve who they are and their abilities, a phenomenon Anthony Giddens refers to as the 'reflexive project of the self' (1991). Blogging contributed to self-improvement for participants in many different ways. It allowed them to develop their thoughts and opinions as well as their writing skills. It facilitated an exchange of how-to tips with their readers, both in professional and homemaking skill development. They were able, though their blogs, to share their emotional states of mind, garner support from their readership in hard times, and hold themselves to account when they declared to readers their self-improvement goals and plans. In these ways, bloggers not only use this online platform as a space on which to record everyday events, present and past, thereby inscribing their lives into history, but they also use this platform to engage in self-improvement, to reflect on their futures and on

their own selfhoods, as suggested by Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield in relation to autobiographies (2000).

Finally, in *Une révolution tranquille*, I use participants' descriptions of their feelings towards blogging to focus on the emotional responses associated with this practice, including feelings of pleasure and empowerment. Informed by key texts in feminist cultural studies, such as Ien Ang (1985) and Janice Radway (1984), I approach blogging by looking at what it contributes to the women themselves. I contend that through their blogging, participants not only find pleasure in the crafting of the message and in the exchanges with readers, but they also gain a sense of empowerment through making space for their own activities in the midst of a myriad of obligations to others and for speaking up, or maybe even speaking out, for themselves. As suggested by Lindemann (2010) and Lovász (2007) respectively, they may be 'talking back' to representations that are not doing them justice (Lindemann 2010: 210), thus engaging in a 'form of cultural resistance' (Lovász 2007: 174-175). For example, this was clear in Kieva's comment about women's magazines not being representative of either her reality or of her outlook on life, hence providing her with motivation to blog; this speaking up was especially true for Kieva, but was also echoed by others, and illustrates the use of blogging as a strategy to deal with gender constructions in mainstream media.

These observations appear to confirm both Sadie Plant's (1997) and Dale Spender's (1995) perspectives on internet technologies, where they see them as enabling a more egalitarian participation of women, albeit mostly online with little or no impact on women's equal participation offline. These perspectives are strengthened by the contradictions that arise from discourses of femininity embedded in participants' blogs. While participants frequently spoke of blogs as the quintessential *ideal* home, this comparison may be more reflective of participants' *desires* than of their actual blogging experiences. Let us look at a few of the contradictions that point to this tension between hope and reality.

The home is generally idealised as a place that offers protection and safety to children and other family members; yet, participants shared their fears of posting pictures of their children on their blogs lest doing so could put the children at risk. The *ideal* home is imagined as the safest of all possible places to air their views without facing repercussions; yet participants reported receiving abusive comments after having shared their views on various topics, such as feminism (Kieva), hobbies (Elsa) and mothering (Simone, Éloïse). It is widely believed that the ideal home can be decorated

and used according to one's own tastes; yet changing the look or focus of their blogs was met with negative criticism from readers (Elsa, Anabel). Home is associated with the moral economy; yet, participants were confronted with unwanted commercial interests, in the form of advertising, on their blogs. These experiences seem to conform more with the *reality* of the medium and with offline social realities than with the ideal of home. It appears that neither their offline homes nor their online homes protect women from risks, abuse, and intrusion. The idealised home remains a myth in either space. Home may be spoken of as a safe space, but the reality of it raises a number of concerns for women's safety (Star 1999 [1996]).

In order to present themselves in the best possible light, as suggested in *Être ou paraître*, bloggers need to exert control over their self-presentations. When looking at the characteristics of blogging, we discover a number of limitations regarding preferred self-presentation. To begin with, the commercial nature of blog hosts limits the freedom of expression of bloggers with most blog hosts providing guidelines as to what content is allowed and deleting blogs that do not conform to these guidelines (Cheung 2004). Although this was not raised as a specific problem during interviews, other challenges to presenting the self were raised. Participants spoke of the impossibility of meeting expectations of segregated audiences (confirming results by Jill Walker Rettberg, 2008). The prospect of writing for anonymous and heterogeneous audiences confined participants to presenting a self that would be acceptable to any audience member, since the audience might include a person or people that the bloggers know offline. Another problem raised is the pervasive presence of gender ideologies that force judgment or backlash on bloggers who step outside the boundaries and understandings of gender, as experienced by Julie, which led her to stop blogging. This suggests that the optimism about bloggers' actualising their desires to portray themselves as they wish others to know them is somewhat misplaced. Their scope in painting an image of self is limited by commercial interests, potentially non-receptive and non-supportive audiences, and the knowledge that they could face backlash, either online or offline.

In approaching bloggers' investment in self-improvement, I underline how interviewees' narratives may be linked to Giddens' 'reflexive project of the self' (1991) and consequently to a desire for increasing social mobility. This desire is reflected in bloggers' attention to using high quality written French, as did Sarah to enhance her professional opportunities. More generally, the areas targeted for improvement were: professional and homemaking skills, body size and image, personalities, values and

views, and emotional health. I suggest that this range of topics, rather than being emancipatory, legitimises and reinforces norms of idealised femininity. Furthermore, going back to Korobov's definition of emphasised femininity, it appears that bloggers tend to invest in this 'culturally valued form of femininity' (Kelly, Pomerantz and Currie 2005: 129). Key signifiers of Korobov's description of emphasised femininity are indeed found in participants' self-improvement targets:

> […] a range of traditional femininity norms that encourage women to accommodate men's desires for sex, attractive female bodies, power, and control. Broadly, traditional or "emphasized femininity" norms encourage female passivity, compliance with men's sexual advances, an unremitting desire to have a romantic partner, a pressure to be sentimental and emotionally committed and caring, a pressure to attract the gaze of men, and a pressure to manufacture romantic feelings and to mitigate unhappiness and abuse […]. (Korobov 2011: 53)

Finally, *Une révolution tranquille* illustrates the pleasures that bloggers draw from setting aside time to engage in an activity that they enjoy, and the possible empowerment derived from speaking for themselves and having others take note of their lives. The testimony of participants supports cyberfeminist claims that 'women should take control of and appropriate the use of Internet technologies in an attempt to empower themselves' (Gajjala and Mamidipudi 2005 [1999]: 547). However, because the value of women's blogs is generally diminished, as noted above, cast by much of the public as dismissible, focused *only* on the personal and on the author's everyday, thus seen as having no impact on public life, the possibility of speaking for oneself on the blog appears quite limited. Women's speaking of their own lives, even on the blogosphere, does not seem to count much despite feminist work that demonstrates how the personal *is* political and thus, worthy of attention (see for example Kennedy 2007). Consequently, even when women claim a public platform online, hoping to have their blogs bear public testimony to their worth, they may feel empowered, but, by and large, they remain generally ignored in the public realm.

Taking into account tensions between women's desires in blogging and the realities they are confronted with, both within the medium itself and in social life, I argue that bloggers do break out of normative femininities perhaps, by engaging with 'masculine technologies' and claiming space and time for oneself, confirming findings of van Doorn, van Zoonen and Wyatt (2007). As such, they may well be creating a new 'women's world', through the networking potential enabled by blogging, as illustrated in *Être ou paraître*, and through speaking for themselves which offers possibilities for social change, as underlined in *Une révolution tranquille*. However, at the same time, it

appears that their uses of blogging may reinstate and produce conservative forms of self-management, as suggested in the ways participants aim for self-improvement (*Je me souviens* chapter) and also when considering the information they choose to disclose or to conceal (*Être ou paraître* chapter). In the end, what emerges from this research is an overall sense of contradiction embedded in Québec women's blogs – and to a larger extent, in Québécoises' lives. Despite feeling like they exist, have a public life and make a contribution via blogging, they also exhibit a sense of compulsion and self-regulation.

These findings were surprising in a number of ways. First, the domestic metaphor used by participants in describing or approaching their blogs was unexpected, even given my understanding of blogging as part of the continuum of women's genres, many of which were linked to the private sphere of the home. This was similar to my own puzzlement when reading entries authored by the French blogger who detailed her private life (her extramarital affair) on her public and searchable blog. Second, the emerging realities are somewhat disappointing when comparing the hopes bestowed on the technology and the realities described by bloggers. It appears that feminist critique for the most part has not infused participants' approaches, since feminist thought is not reflected strongly in their blogs or in their everyday lives. It appears difficult for bloggers to adopt a feminist stance, since participants who did so directly, were met with flaming and criticism, leading them to later avoid such topics (Kieva) or to simply stop blogging altogether (Julie). Thus, blogging cannot be linked to women's voices being heard and being taken into account, or to women's emancipation in any straightforward way. This is further illustrated by the fact that very few participants *owned* their blogs, in the sense that they would have ownership and freedom to do with it as they wish, even though some had bought their own domain names. Women's participation in the technical aspects of the blog was limited, with most of the setting up and programming being done by someone else, often men in their lives. Bloggers generally did not benefit nor profit from their blogs financially. Furthermore, while participants feel that they are gaining a '*room of one's own*' through their blogs, many of them did not have a *room of their own* from which to blog; few enjoyed a dedicated, private, personal space to do so. Third, the impact of late modernity, by which individuals are made solely responsible of the 'success' (and 'failure') of their lives (McRobbie 2007) seems to have brought most bloggers to work on self-improvement instead of questioning wider systemic or structural inequalities or engaging in political debate or activism.

In relation to my fourth objective, knowing more about the lives of Québécoises through their blogging, one weakness of my adopted methods is that they did not produce an in-depth understanding of the specificity of (online) femininities in the province of Québec. A number of factors may explain this, beyond the empirical approach adopted. Little research exists regarding Québécoises and blogging, and not much focused on women in relation to femininity in Québec. What does exist is statistical gender-based analysis. Clearly, more has to be done on this topic; perhaps a longitudinal study in order to map a deeper and clearer understanding of femininities in Québec. Such a study should also include women who are not (or are no longer) blogging, as this might be more representative of the diversity of the population in Québec, taking into account the effects of the digital divide, as addressed in the first chapters of this thesis. The findings motivate me, and hopefully others, to work within academic and policy institutions in Québec to raise awareness of what remains to be done. I believe that my stated objective of engaging in current social debates in Québec remains worthy, as it contributes to a discussion of women and the internet and femininities within Québec.

Even though my research has not fully responded to my fourth objective, as the results may not be specific enough to Québécoises, my data does shed some light on femininities in Québec, which also may be applicable to Canada, North America or the Western world more generally. One finding that may be worth pursuing further is participants' embeddedness in a homosocial environment (as shown by Karlsson, 2007, who researched blog readers), as explained above. This tendency by blog readers to seek out bloggers who share a cultural identity (women and other Québécois or Québécoises) may also be applicable to blog authors.

One final observation, as I am completing my research and finishing this thesis: I notice that twelve bloggers no longer use the initial blog URL where I found them, having either abandoned the blog (Ghislaine, Dominique, Ariane, Anabel, Lynne, Blanche and Bonnie) or deleted it all together (Cynthia, Elizabeth, Virginie, Julie, Michèle). Another three bloggers (Shaindl, Lucie, Simone) restricted access to the blog and as I only have access to Lucie's blog through her invitation to me, I cannot say whether the other two update their blogs as frequently as they initially did. For the eight bloggers remaining, four do not seem to update their blogs as often as when I met them (Mireille, Denise, Sarah, Kieva), having posted fewer entries in 2011, as compared to previous years. In fact, when looking at their blogs in August 2011, the following data emerges: Denise published eight messages since January 2011, Mireille and Kieva

published one, and Sarah none, as her last entry dates September 2010. Looking at the blog entries published in 2010, Mireille had posted 16, Denise 40, Sarah 30 and Kieva one. In 2009, all four bloggers were more active on their blog, as Mireille published 45 entries; whereas Denise's blog contains 138, Sarah 87 and Kieva 28. Finally, a similar level of involvement with the blog was apparent in 2008, when Mireille published 44 entries, Denise 254, Sarah 101 and Kieva 7. However, the remaining four participants (Eloïse, Elsa, Ani, and Catherine) appear to blog as often as they did at the time of the interviews, as does Lucie (despite restricting the access to her blog).

These results are no different from those gathered by other scholars: publishing in 2003, Henning wrote that out of 3,634 blogs surveyed (on eight different platforms) by his organisation, 66% had been abandoned, meaning they were not updated in the past two months.

However, the reasons identified by participants as to why they engaged in blogging, would lead one to believe that this would be an ongoing endeavour in their lives. Julie echoed a common thought when she mentioned 'I don't see why I would stop' (Julie 2009). Reasons for blogging, mentioned at the outset of the interviews, included: the sheer pleasure found in writing and blogging; occupying free time; sharing thoughts, memories, and keeping in touch with others; gaining visibility and recognition; improving writing skills; discussing alternative views; and helping others as a way of making sense of life's challenges and difficulties by offering and receiving support. Common to all these reasons is the positive feeling accomplished through blogging, and also a desire to share with others and thereby occupy some space in the public sphere. I would suggest that abandonment, as well as bloggers' decreased involvement with the medium, might be explained by the limits imposed on their freedom. Online discouragements include criticism, backlash (be it flaming or harsh feedback), fear for safety of self or one's family, the need to self-censure to avoid implicating family members and friends in blog entries, or to suffer consequences offline or online. Offline, the pressures of real life, filled with personal and professional commitments may squeeze out that 'time for oneself' and deprive women of the pleasure of blogging.

Perhaps not fully aware of the limitations pressing in on their expectations of the blog – not really owning the space, not really having freedom of expression, sometimes disappointing loved ones in what they write, feeling vulnerable on their own blog, having to account to others for the time they spend blogging – might discourage them from the practice. Confronted with unforeseen consequences of blogging, actions by

others that confine them to expressing 'acceptable' desires, thoughts and behaviours, reinforcing mainstream discourses of femininity, may constrain bloggers in exploring their own gender identities and lead them to realise that blogging, despite enabling them to engage with so-called masculine technologies, does not live up to the utopian dreams initially bestowed on internet communication technologies (Bartow 2006). Simone's experience, acknowledging in her interview how she missed writing on some of the topics she discussed in her manuscript diary but would not dare to express online, exemplifies this. Furthermore, women may even fear publicly acknowledging their failures when self-improvement goals are not met.

All these hypotheses could be tested by doing further research. However, in the meantime, I propose that social expectations in Québec, and perhaps in other societies as well, regarding acceptable femininity performed in the public eye, challenge and limit the extent to which participants feel free and safe to express non-conforming desires and to project different self-identities. This, I believe, explains not only the high blogging abandonment rates, but also the numerous tensions and contradictions found in participants' discussions and practices of blogging. Femininities, as they are expressed online, may be changing, but they appear to remain highly influenced by traditional discourses.

Even in light of all the contradictions discussed above, participants in this study, and other women bloggers, are making significant contributions to the transformation in both the uses and the perceptions of the technology (just as did women using the telephone before them (van Zoonen 2002)). They believe that they have something significant to add to the blogosphere. Even in face of derision and marginalisation of their entries, they have the courage to post their thoughts and everyday stories onto a public platform. By doing so they assert women's right to exist in a domain that is often interpreted to be a male preserve. As with other women pioneers in other male-identified fields, women bloggers pay a price for stepping out from the private onto the public, often facing pressures to conform to traditional femininities, sometimes through very harsh treatment. But their very acts of stepping forth and speaking up bring changes to internet technologies and as long as they participate, it cannot be claimed as a *male* technology. By deepening our understanding of their experiences, and carefully listening to what they are saying, we may just learn what is needed to come closer to the utopian vision that promises a free and egalitarian space for women to express themselves and to reach their full creative potential, online.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbott, Pamela and Claire Wallace (1997), *An Introduction to Sociology. Feminist Perspectives* (Second edition). London, New York: Routledge. 334 p.

Acker, Sandra (2000), 'In/Out/Side. Positioning the Researcher in Feminist Qualitative Research', in *Documentation sur la recherche féministe*, 28 (1-2), pp. 189-208

Allard, Caroline (n.d.) *Chroniques d'une mère indigne* [Online], Available at: http://www.mereindigne.com/ , accessed 14th June 2008

Ang, Ien (1985), *Watching Dallas: Soap Operas and the Melodramatic Imagination*. New York, London: Routledge, 148 p.

Arditi, Jorge (1996), 'The Feminization of Etiquette Literature: Foucault, Mechanism of Social Change, and the Paradoxes of Empowerment'. in *Sociological Perspectives*, 39 (3), pp. 417-434

Atkins website (2010), Homepage [Online], available at: http://www.atkins.com, accessed 9th November 2010

Attwood, Feona (2009), 'Intimate Adventures: Sex blogs, sex 'blooks' and women's sexual narration'. in *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 12 (1), pp. 5-20

Bakardjieva, Maria (2005), *Internet Society. The Internet in Everyday Life*, London, Thousand Oak, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 220 p.

Ballaster, Ros, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer and Sandra Hebron (1991), *Women's Worlds. Ideology, Femininity and the Woman's Magazine*, London: MacMillan Education Ltd, Women in Society Series, 196 p.

Balter Blume, Libby and Thomas W. Blume (2003), 'Toward a Dialectical Model of Family Gender Discourse: Body, Identity and Sexuality', in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64 (4), pp. 785-794

Barlow, Aaron (2008), *Blogging America. The New Public Sphere*. Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger, 183 p.

Barry-Kessler, Liza (2009), 'LesbianFamily.org: Expanding the Understanding of Motherhood and Visibility, or "Um. If You Don't Mind Me Asking… How Does a Lesbian Get Pregnant?"'. in Friedman, May and Shana L. Calixte (eds), *Mothering and Blogging. The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter Press, pp. 141-150

Bartow, Ann (2006), 'Copyright norms of the blogosphere: Linking, Quoting, copying, and self-help'. Paper presented at the 6th *Annual Intellectual Property Scholars Conference*, Berkeley CA., August 10, 2006, 18 pages, [online]: available at: http://www.law.berkeley.edu/institutes/bclt/ipsc/papers2/Bartow.doc, accessed 23rd February 2008

Baym, Nancy K. (2010), *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 184 p.

Beattie, Heather Robin (2007), *The Texture of the Everyday: Appraising the Values of Women's Diaries and Weblogs*. Masters' thesis, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba/University of Winnipeg, 136 p.

Beaulieu, Ann (2004), 'Mediating Ethnography: Objectivity and the Making of Ethnographies of the Internet'. in *Social Epistemology*, 18 (2-3), pp. 139-163

Bélanger, Damien-Claude (2000), *Lionel Groulx et la Franco-Américanie*. Masters' Dissertation, Montréal: Université de Montréal, 184 p.

Benjamin, James (2012), 'Tweets, Blogs, Facebook and the Ethics of 21st-Century Communication Technology' in Noor Al-Deen, Hana S. and John Allen Hendricks (eds.), *Social Media: Usage and Impacts*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth (UK): Lexington Books, pp. 271-287

Ben-Ze'ev, Aaron (2004), *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 289 p.

Bissonnette, Sophie (producer) (2010), *Être ou paraître: Les jeunes face aux stéréotypes sexuels* [film], Montréal: Office National du Film (ONF), 25 minutes

Blogger (n.d.) [online], available at: www.blogger.com, accessed 8th February 2008

Blogonautes (n.d.) [online], available at: http://blogonautes.blogomaniac.fr/, accessed 4th March 2008

Blogue.ca(n.d.) [online], available at: http://blogue.ca/, accessed 4th March 2008

Blommaert, Jan and Chris Bulcaen (2000), 'Critical Discourse Analysis', in *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 29, pp. 447-466

Blood, Sylvia K. (2005), *Body Work. The Social Construction of Women's Body Image*. London, New York: Routledge, 149 p.

Bordo, Susan (2003 [1993]), *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body.* Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 361 p.

Bortree, Denise Sevick (2005), 'Presentation of Self on the Web: an ethnographic study of teenage girls' weblogs'. in *Education, Communication & Information*, 5 (1), pp. 25-39

Bourdieu, Pierre (1986), 'The Forms of Capital', in Richardson, John G. (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York, Westport (Connecticut), London: Greenwood Press, pp. 241-258

Brickell, Chris (2005), 'Masculinities, Performativity, and Subversion. A Sociological Reappraisal'. in *Men and Masculinities*, 8 (1), pp. 24-43

Bruns, Axel and Joanne Jacobs (2007), 'Introduction' in (eds.) *Uses of Blogs*. New York: Peter Lang, pp.1-8

Bruns, Axel (2009), *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life and Beyond. From Production to Produsage*. New York: Peter Lang, 418 pp.

Brunsdon, Charlotte (1999 [1991]), 'Pedagogies of the Feminine. Feminist Teaching and Women's Genres'. in Shiach, Morag (ed), *Feminism & Cultural Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 343-367

Brunsdon, Charlotte (2000), *The Feminist, the Housewife, and the Soap Opera*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 253 p.

Buckley, Cheryl and Hilary Fawcett (2002). *Fashioning the Feminine: Representation and Women's Fashion from the Fin de Siècle to the Present*. London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 164 pp.

Butler, Judith (1990), *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 192 p.

Butler, Judith (1993), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York: Routledge, 288 p.

Calixte, Shana L. and Jillian Johnson (2009), 'Marginality in the Mamasphere: Queers Racializing the Family Tree'. in Friedman, May and Shana L. Calixte (eds.), *Mothering and Blogging. The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter Press, pp. 74-90

Campbell, Rebecca and Sharon M. Wasco (2000), 'Feminist Approaches to Social Sciences: Epistemological and Methodological Tenets'. in *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 28 (6), pp. 773-791

Canalblog (n.d.), [online], available from: www.canalblog.com, accessed 8th February 2008

Caron, Caroline (2004), *La presse féminine pour adolescentes: une analyse de contenu*, Québec : Cahier de recherche du GREMF, 157 p.

Carter, Stacey M. and Miles Little (2007), 'Justifying Knowledge, Justifying Method, Taking Action: Epistemologies, Methodologies, and Methods in Qualitative Research'. in *Qualitative Health Research*, 17 (10), pp. 1316-1328

CEFRIO [Centre francophone d'informatisation des organisations] (n.d.), [online], available from www.cefrio.qc.ca/, accessed 21st February 2011

CEFRIO (2008), *NeTendances 2007: Évolution de l'utilisation d'internet au Québec depuis 1999*. Québec : CEFRIO, 118 p., available from https://extranet.cefrio.qc.ca/indexWeb.cfm?type=produits, accessed 21st February 2011

Charman, Sue (2006), 'Blogs in Business: Using Blogs behind the Firewall', in Bruns, Axel and Joanne Jacobs (eds.), *Uses of Blogs*. New York, Washington: Peter Lang, pp.57-66

Chasnoff, Salome (1996), 'Performing Teen Motherhood on Video: Autoethnography as Counterdiscourse', in Smith, Sidonie et Julia Watson, *Getting a Life. Everyday Uses of Autobiography*, London, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp.108-133

Cheung, Charles (2004), 'Identity Construction and Self-Presentation on Personal Homepages: Emancipatory Potentials and Reality Constraints'. in Gauntlett, David and Ross Horsley (eds.), *Web.Studies* (Second Edition). London: Hodder Arnold, pp. 53-67

Chroniques Gourmandes (Les) (n.d.), [Online], available at: http://chroniquesgourmandes.blogspot.com/, accessed 9th November 2010

Cohen, Arie and Deborah Court (2003), 'Ethnography and Case Study: A Comparative Analysis'. in *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, 7 (3), pp. 283-287

Cole, Barbara Ann (2009), 'Gender, Narratives and Intersectionality: Can Personal Experiences to Research Contribute to "Undoing Gender"?', in *International Review of Education*, 55, pp.561-578

Coleman, Linda S. (ed) (1997), 'Introduction'. in *Women's Life Writing: Finding Voice / Building Community*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, pp.1-7

Collins, Patricia Hill (1990), *Black Feminist thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 283 p.

Collins, Patricia Hill (1991), 'Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought', in Hartman, Joan E. and Ellen Messer-Davidow (eds.) *(En)Gendering Knowledge: Feminists in Academe*, Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, pp. 40-65

Connell, Robert W. (1987), *Gender and Power: Society, the person and sexual politics*, Cambridge: Polity, 352 p.

Connell, Robert W. and James W. Messerschmidt (2005), 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept'. in *Gender & Society*, 19 (6), pp. 829-859

Connors, Catherine (2009), '*Meter Politikon*: On the "Politics" of Mommyblogging'. in Friedman, May and Shana L. Calixte (eds.), *Mothering and Blogging. The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter Press, pp. 91-111

Consalvo, Mia and Susanna Paasonen (2002) 'Introduction. On the Internet, Women Matter'. in (eds.), *Women & Everyday Uses of the Internet. Agency & Identity*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 1-18

Conseil du statut de la femme (2011), *Portrait des Québécoises en 8 temps*. Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 28 p. [online], available from: http://www.csf.gouv.qc.ca/modules/fichierspublications/fichier-37-1325.pdf (accessed 24th August 2011)

Cooks, Leda, Mari Castañeda Paredes and Erica Scharrer (2002), '"There's 'O Place' Like Home": Searching for Community on Oprah.com'. in Consalvo, Mia and Susanna Paasonen (eds.), *Women & Everyday Uses of the Internet: Agency & Identity*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 139-161

Corbeil, Jean-Pierre, Brigitte Chavez and Daniel Pereira (2010), *Portrait des minorités de langue officielle au Canada: les Anglophones du Québec*. Ottawa: Statistique Canada, Division de la statistique sociale et autochtone, 122 pp.

Corneliussen, Hilde (2005), 'Women's Pleasure in computing'. in Archibald, Jacqueline, Judy Emms, Frances Grundy, Janet Payne and Eva Turney (eds.), *The Gender Politics of ICT*. Middlesex: Middlesex University Press, pp. 237-249

Cosslett, Tess, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield (2000), 'Introduction', in (eds.) *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, London: Routledge, pp. 1-21

Croteau, David and William Hoynes (2003), *Media Society. Industries, Images and Audiences* (3rd edition). Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Pine Forge Press, 409 p.

Crystal, David (2004), *A Glossary of Netspeak and Textspeak*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 197 p.

Cummings, Jonathon C. and Robert Kraut (2002), 'Domesticating Computers and the Internet'. in *The Information Society*, 18, pp. 221-231

Curthoys, Ann (2000), 'Adventures of Feminism: Simone de Beauvoir's Autobiographies, Women's Liberation and Self-Fashioning', in *Feminist Review*, (64), pp. 3-18

de Castell, Suzanne and Mary Bryson (1999), 'Retooling Play: Dystopia, Dysphoria, and Difference'. in Cassell, Justine and Henry Jenkins (eds.) *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat. Gender and Computer Games.* Cambridge (Massachusetts), London: MIT Press, pp.232-261

Daniels, Jessie (2009), 'Rethinking Cyberfeminism(s): Race, Gender, and Embodiment', in *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 37 (1-2), pp. 101-124

Dean, Jodi (2010), *Blog Theory. Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive*. Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 153 pp.

Deliovsky, Katerina (2010), *White Femininity. Race, Gender and Power*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 136 p.

Dominick, Joseph R. (1999) 'Who do you think you are? Personal home pages and self-presentation on the World Wide Web', in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 76(4), pp. 646–658

Dorer, Johanna (2002), 'Internet and the Construction of Gender: Female Professionals and the Process of Doing Gender'. in Consalvo, Mia and Susanna Paasonen (eds.), *Women & Everyday Uses of the Internet: Agency & Identity*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 62-87

Döring, Nicola (2000), 'Feminist Views of Cybersex: Victimization, Liberation, and Empowerment'. in *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 3 (5), pp. 863-884

Douglas, Ann (2009), 'Web 2.0, Meet the Mommyblogger'. in Friedman, May and Shana L. Calixte (eds.), *Mothering and Blogging. The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter Press, pp. 112-127

Drewry, Julie A., Penny L. Burge and Lisa G. Driscoll (2010), 'A Tripartite Perspective on Social Capital and Its Access by High School Dropouts'. in *Education and Urban Society*, 42 (5), pp. 499-521

Dumont, Micheline and Louise Toupin (2003), *La pensée féministe au Québec : Anthologie [1900-1985]*. Montréal: Les éditions du remue-ménage, 750 p.

Elliott, Anthony (2008), *Concepts of the Self* (2nd edition). Cambridge, Malden (MA): Polity Press, 185 p.

Ess, Charles and the Association of Internet Researchers Ethics Working Committee (2002), 'Ethical decision-making and Internet research: Recommendations from the aoir ethics working committee' (approved by AoIR, November 27, 2002), [online], available from: www.aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf, accessed 5th March 2008

Estalella, Adolfo (2007), 'Media as Practice: Introducing Symmetry on the Ethnographies of the Internet', handout prepared on the occasion of the *Digital Media: European Perspective Conference of the European Communication, Research and Education Association*, held November 1st-3rd 2007, Brighton: University of Sussex

Evans, Ellis D., Judith Rutberg, Carmela Sather and Charli Turner (1991), 'Content Analysis of Contemporary Teen Magazines for Adolescent Females', in *Youth & Society*, 23 (1), p. 99-120

Facebook (2010), [Online], available from http://www.facebook.com, accessed 1st November 2010

Faulkner, Wendy (2000), 'The Power and the Pleasure? A Research Agenda for "Making Gender Stick" to Engineers'. in *Science Technology Human Values*, 25 (1), pp. 87-119

Fédération des CÉGEPs (2007), 1967-2007: *Le cégep a 40 ans cette année* [press release], 14th August 2007, [online], Montréal: Fédération des CÉGEPS, available from http://www.cegepinternational.qc.ca/fichiers/40_ans_du_cegep_14_aout_2007_Comm unique_de_presse.pdf, accessed 7th August 2011

Fenton, Natalie (2000), 'The problematics of postmodernism for feminist media studies'. in *Media, Culture & Society*. 22 (6), pp. 723-741

Fernández Martínez, Dolores (2007), 'From Theory to Method: A methodological approach within critical discourse analysis'. in *Critical Discourse Studies*, 4 (2), pp. 125-140

Ferrao, Vincent and Cara Williams (2010), 'Femmes au Canada: Rapport statistique fondé sur le sexe'. Ottawa: Statistique Canada, [online], available from: http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/89-503-x2010001-fra.htm, accessed 24th August 2011

Ferrero (2010), *Nutella* [Online], Available from http://www.ferrero.com, accessed 15th November 2010

Ferris, Lisa (2009), 'Kindred Keyboard Connections: How Blogging Helped a Deafblind Mother Find a Living, Breathing Community'. in Friedman, May and Shana L. Calixte (eds.), *Mothering and Blogging. The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter Press, pp. 67-73

Fielding, Helen (1996), *Bridget Jone's Diary*. London: Picador, 310 p.

Fitzpatrick, Kathleen (2006), 'The Pleasure of the Blog: The Early Novel, The Serial, and the Narrative Archive'. in Burg, Thomas N. and Jan Schmidt (eds.), *BlogTalks Reloaded*. Norderstedt: Books on Demand, pp. 167-186 [Online], available from: http://machines.pomona.edu/dossier/files/2009/10/fitzpatrick-blogtalk.pdf, accessed 9th February 2011

Foucault, Michel (1975), *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard, 318 p.

Fournier, Marcel, Michael Rosenberg and Deena White (1997), 'Introduction', in (eds.), *Quebec Society: Critical Issues*. Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall, pp. 1-16

Freake, Rachelle, Guillaume Gentil and Jaffer Sheyholislami (2011), 'A bilingual corpus-assisted discourse study of the construction of nationhood and belonging in Quebec'. in *Discourse & Society*, 22(1), pp. 21-47

Frey Pereyra, Maria Luisa Helen (2006), 'El discurso autobiográfico en el blog personal: características de un género hibrido', in *Revista Electrónica*, 3 [online], available from: http://www.culturaspopulares.org/textos3/articulos/frey.pdf, accessed 10th May 2009

Friedman, Dawn (2009), 'Someone Else's Shoes: How On-Blog Discourse Changed a Real Life Adoption'. in Friedman, May and Shana L. Calixte (eds.), *Mothering and Blogging. The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter Press, pp. 37-44

Friedman, May (2009), 'Schadenfreude for Mittelschmerz? Or, Why I Read Infertility Blogs'. in Friedman, May and Shana L. Calixte (eds.), *Mothering and Blogging. The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter Press, pp. 171-181

Friedman, May and Shana L. Calixte (eds.) (2009), *Mothering and Blogging. The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter Press, 204 p.

Gajjala, Radhika and Annapurna Mamidipudi (2005 [1999]), 'Cyberfeminism, Technology, and International "Development"'. in Zinn, Maxine Baca, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Michael A. Messner (eds.), *Gender Through the Prism of Difference* (third edition). New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 547-554

Gauntlett, David (2004), 'Web Studies: What's New'. in Gauntlett, David and Ross Horsley (eds.), *Web.Studies* (Second Edition). London: Hodder Arnold, pp. 3-23

Genz, Stéphanie (2009), '"I Am Not a Housewife, But…": Postfeminism and the Revival of Domesticity'. in Gillis, Stacy and Joanne Hollows (eds.), *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture*. New York, London: Routledge, pp. 49-52

Georgakopoulou, Alexandra and Dionysis Goutsos (2004 [1997]), *Discourse Analysis. An Introduction* (Second Edition). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 215 p.

Geraghty, Christine (1999 [1991]), 'Women and Soap Opera: A Woman's Space'. in Shiach, Morag (ed), *Feminism & Cultural Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 297-318

Giddens, Anthony (1991), *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press, 256 p.

Gilbert, Jennifer (2009), 'I Kid You Not: How the Internet Talked Me Out of Traditional Mommyhood'. in Friedman, May and Shana L. Calixte (eds.), *Mothering and Blogging. The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter Press, pp. 57-66

Giles, Judy (2004), *The Parlour and the Suburb. Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity*. Oxford, New York: Berg, 197 p.

Goffman, Erving (1973), *La mise en scène de la vie quotidienne. Volume 1: La présentation de soi* (translation of *The presentation of self in everyday life*, by Alain Accardo), Paris : Les éditions de Minuit, 255 p.

Goffman, Erving (1990 [1959]), *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday, 259 p.

Goffman, Erving (2005 [1967]), *Interaction Rituals. Essays in face-to-face behavior* (with a new introduction by Joel Best), New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 271 pp.

Goodman, Dena (2005), 'Letter Writing and the Emergence of Gendered Subjectivity in Eighteenth-Century France', in *Journal of Women's History*, 17 (2), pp. 9-37

Google Blog Search (n.d.) [online], available from http://blogsearch.google.com/, accessed 4th March 2008

Goulding, Anne and Rachel Spacey (2003), 'Women and the Information Society: barriers and participation', in *IFLA Journal* (29), pp. 33-39

Gourmandises d'Isa (Les) (n.d.), [Online], available from http://lesgourmandisesdisa.blogspot.com/, accessed 9th November 2010

Gouvernement du Québec (2011), Portal of the Government of Québec: Portrait of Québec [online], available from http://www.gouv.qc.ca/portail/quebec/pgs/commun/?lang=en, accessed 20th June 2011

Grande Dame (n.d.), [online], available from: http://grande-dame.blogspot.com/, accessed 4th August 2010

Gray, Ann (2003), *Research practice for cultural studies*. London, Thousand Oak, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 207 p.

Gregg, Melissa (2006), 'Posting with Passion: Blogs and the Politics of Gender'. in Bruns, Axel and Joanne Jacobs (eds.), *Uses of Blogs*. Brisbane: Peter Lang. pp. 151-160

Gross, Larry (1991), 'Out of the mainstream: sexual minorities and the mass media', in Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutner and Eva Maria Warth (eds.) *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power*. London: Routledge, pp. 130-149

Haas, Tanni (2005), 'From "Public Journalism" to the "Public's Journalism"? Rhetoric and reality in the discourse of weblogs', in *Journalism Studies*, 6(3), pp. 387-396

Hacker, Sally (1989), *Pleasure, Power & Technology. Some tales of Gender, Engineering, and the Cooperative Workplace*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 188 p.

Hamel, Jacques (2004), 'Qu'ont à dire les sociologues sur l'organisation des sociétés? Remarques sur la sociologie québécoise contemporaine'. in *The Canadian Journal of Sociology*. 29 (3), pp. 451-456

Haraway, Donna (1988), 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', in *Feminist Studies*, 14 (3), pp. 575-599

Haraway, Donna (2000 [1990]), 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s'. in Kirkup, Gill, Linda Janes, Kathryn Woodward and Fiona Hovenden (eds.), *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*. London, New York: Routledge, pp.50-57

Haraway, Donna (2004), 'Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', in Harding, Sandra (ed), *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader. Intellectual & Political Controversies*. New York, London: Routledge, pp. 81-101

Harcourt, Wendy (2004), 'World Wide Women and the Web'. in Gauntlett, David and Ross Horsley (eds.), *Web.Studies* (Second Edition). London: Hodder Arnold, pp. 243-253

Hardey, Michael (2009 [2004]), 'Digital Life Stories: Auto/Biography in the Information Age'. in Harrison, Barbara (ed.), *Life History Research* (volume 1). London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage. pp.191-207

Harding, Sandra (1983), The instability of the analytical categories of feminist theory. in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 11 (4), pp. 645-664

Harding, Sandra (1986), *The science question in feminism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 271 p.

Harding, Sandra (1987). 'Introduction: is there a feminist method?' in (ed.), *Feminism and methodology: Social science issues*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 1-14

Haut et fort (n.d.), [online], available from http://www.hautetfort.com/, accessed 4th March 2008

Hearn, Alison (2008), 'Meat, Mask, Burden'. Probing the contours of the branded 'self'. in *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 8 (2), pp. 197-217

Helle-Valle, Jo and Dag Slettemeas (2008), 'ICTs, domestication and language-games: a Wittgensteinian approach to media uses', in *New Media & Society*, 10 (1), pp. 45-66

Helsper, Ellen Johanna (2010), 'Gendered Internet Use Across Generations and Life Stages', in *Communication Research*, 37 (3), pp. 352-374

Henning, Jeffrey (2003). *The Blogging Iceberg. Of 4,12 Million Hosted Weblogs, Most Little Seen and Quickly Abandoned*. Braintree, MA: Perseus S. Solutions. 6 p.

Hermes, Joke (1995), *Reading women's magazines: Analyses of everyday use*. Cambridge, Politicy Press, 240 p.

Herring, Susan C., Inna Kouper, Lois Ann Scheidt and Elijah L. Wright (2004), 'Women and Children Last: The Discursive Construction of Weblogs'. in *Into the Blogosphere* [online], available from: http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/, accessed 13th February 2008

Herring, Susan C., Lois Ann Scheidt, Elijah L. Wright and Sabrina Bonus (2005), 'Weblog as Bridging Genre', in *Information Technology & People*, 18 (2), pp. 142-171

Herring, Susan C. and John C. Paolillo (2006), 'Gender and genre variation in

weblogs', in *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 10(4), pp. 439-459

Hockschild, Arlie Russell (2003 [1983]), *The Managed Heart. Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkely, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 327 p.

Hodkinson, Paul (2007), 'Interactive Online Journals and Individualization', in *New Media & Society*, 9(4), pp. 625-650

Hollows, Joanne (2000), *Feminism, femininity and popular culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 229 p.

Horsley, Ross (2004), 'Masculinities on the Web'. in Gauntlett, David and Ross Horsley (eds.), *Web.Studies* (Second Edition). London: Hodder Arnold, pp. 69-79

Huffaker, David A. and Sandra L. Calvert (2005). 'Gender, Identity, and Language Use in Teenage Blogs'. in *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 10(2), [online], available from: http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol10/issue2/huffaker.html, accessed 13th February 2008

Hvizdak, Erin (2008), 'Creating a Web of Attribution in the Feminist Blogosphere', in *International Journal of Internet Research Ethics*, 1(1), pp. 115-134

Institut de la statistique du Québec (2011*), Utilisation d'Internet à des fins personnelles par les individus, à partir de n'importe quel endroit, selon différents facteurs socioéconomiques, Québec, Ontario et Canada, 2009*. Québec : Gouvernement du Québec [online], available from http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/savoir/indicateurs/tic/individus/tic_acces3_2009.htm, accessed 31 March 2011

Institut de la statistique du Québec (2003*), Répartition de la population de 15 ans et plus selon le niveau de scolarité, le sexe et le groupe d'âge, Québec, 2001*. Québec : Gouvernement du Québec [online], available from http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/donstat/societe/education/etat_scolr/4gr_age_scol_qc.htm, accessed 24 February 2010

Jäger, Siegfried (2001), 'Discourse and Knowledge: Theoretical and methodological aspects of a critical discourse and dispositive analysis', in Wodak, Ruth and Michael Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourses Analysis*. London, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, pp. 32-62

Jenkins, Henry (2006a), *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers. Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 279 pp.

Jenkins, Henry (2006b), *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press, 353 pp.

Johnson, Lesley and Justine Lloyd (2004), *Sentenced to Everyday Life. Feminism and the Housewife*. Oxford, New York: Berg, 182 p.

Juste un peu frustrée (n.d.), [online], available from: http://justeunpeufrustree.wordpress.com/, accessed 4th August 2010

Karlsson, Lena (2007), 'Desperately Seeking Sameness. The Processes and Pleasures of Identification in Women's Diary Blog Reading', in *Feminist Media Studies*, 7(2), pp. 137-153

Keller, Jessalynn (2001), 'Feminist editors and the new girl glossies: Fashionable feminism or just another sexist rag?' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, 34, pp. 1-12

Kelly, Deirdre M. Shauna Pomerantz and Dawn Currie (2005), 'Skater girlhood and emphasized femininity: 'you can't land an ollie properly on heels''. in *Gender and Education*, 17 (3), pp. 129-148

Kendall, Lori (2000), '"Oh no! I'm a nerd!" Hegemonic Masculinity in an Online Forum'. in *Gender & Society*, 14 (2), pp. 256-274

Keng, Ching-Jui and Hui-Ying Ting (2009), 'The acceptance of blogs: using a customer experiential value perspective'. in *Internet Research*, 19 (5), pp. 479-495

Kennedy, Tracy L. M. (2007), 'The Personal is Political: Feminist Blogging and Virtual Consciousness-Raising'. in *The Scholar & Feminist Online*, 5 (2), Special Issue: Blogging Feminism: (Web)Site of Resistance, [online], available from: http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/blogs/printtke.htm, accessed 5th December 2010

Kerebel, Anne (2006), '"Claviers intimes": les journaux en ligne comme nouvel espace d'intimité?'. in *Revue des littératures européennes* (5), pp.107-120

Kimmel, Michael S. (2004), *The Gendered Society* (Second Edition). New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 344 p.

Kleif, Tine and Wendy Faulkner (2003), '"I'm No Athlete [but] I Can Make This Thing Dance!" – Men's Pleasures in Technology'. in *Science Technology Human Values*, 28 (2), pp. 296-325

Korobov, Neill (2011), 'Young Men's Vulnerability in Relation to Women's Resistance to Emphasized Femininity'. in *Men and Masculinities*, 14 (1), pp. 51-75

Kraft Foods Canada (2010), Official website [Online], available at: http://www.kraftcanada.com, accessed 15th November 2010

Kramer, Jana and Cheris Kramarae (2000), 'Women's Political Webs: Global Electronic Networks'. in Sreberny, Annabelle and Liesbet van Zoonen (eds.) (2000), *Gender, Politics and Communication*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, pp. 205-222

Krane, Vikki, Precilla Y.L. Choi, Shannon M. Baird, Christine M. Aimar and Kerrie J. Kauer (2004), 'Living the Paradox: Female Athletes Negotiate Femininity and Muscularity', in *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 50 (5-6), pp. 315-329

Lacan, Jacques (2006 [2002]), 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', in *Écrit. The First Complete Edition in English*. Translated from French by B. Fink. London, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, pp. 75-81

Lacoursière, Jacques (translation Robin Philpot) (2009 [original French text, 2002]), *A People's History of Quebec*. Montréal: Baraka Books; Silery: Les éditions du Septentrion. 208 p.

Laforest, Guy (1995), 'Identité et pluralisme libéral au Québec', in Gagnon, Alain G. and Alain Noël (eds.), *L'espace québécois,* Montréal: Les Éditions Québec/Amérique, pp. 293-305

Laurie, Nina, Claire Dwyer, Sarah Holloway and Fiona Smith (1999), *Geographies of new femininities*. Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 225 p.

Laurin, Alexandre (2010), 'Par-delà le bottin téléphonique', in *COMMposite*, 13 (2), pp. 163-180

Lawrence, Jen (2009), 'Blog for Rent: How Marketing Is Changing Our Mothering Conversations'. in Friedman, May and Shana L. Calixte (eds.), *Mothering and Blogging. The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter Press, pp. 128-140

Lazar, Michelle M. (2005 [2007]), 'Politicizing Gender in Discourse: Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis as Political Perspective and Praxis'. in (ed), *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis. Gender, Power and Ideology in Discourse*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan pp. 1-28

L'Écuyer, René (1990), "Chapitre 2: Étapes de l'analyse de contenu, modèle général". in *Méthodologie de l'analyse développementale de contenu. Méthode GPS et conception de soi.* Québec: Presses universitaires du Québec, pp. 51-123

Leander, Keven, M. and Kelly K. McKim (2003), 'Tracing the Everyday 'Sittings' of Adolescents on the Internet: a strategic adaptation of ethnography across online and offline spaces', in *Education, Communication & Information*. 3 (2), pp. 211-240

LeBlanc, Julie (2008). *Genèses de soi. L'écriture du sujet féminin dans quelques journaux d'écrivaines*. Montréal: Les éditions du remue-ménage. 238 p.

Leblanc, Lauraine (1999), *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boy's Subculture*, Chapel Hill, NC: Rutgers University Press, 286 p.

Lejeune, Philippe et Catherine Bogaert (2006), *Le journal intime. Histoire et anthologie*. Paris: Éditions Textuel, 506 p.

Le secret est dans la sauce (n.d.), [online], available from: http://saucesecrete.blogspot.com/, accessed 4th August 2010

Lévesque, Andrée (1995), *Résistance et transgression. Études en histoire des femmes au Québec*. Montréal: Les editions du remue-ménage, 157 p.

Li, Dan and Gina Walejko (2008). 'Splogs and Abandoned Blogs: The Perils of Sampling Bloggers and their Blogs'. in *Information, Communication & Society* 11(2), pp. 279-296

Light, Alison (1999 [1984]), ''Returning to Manderley'. Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality, and Class'. in Shiach, Morag (ed), *Feminism & Cultural Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.371-394

Lindemann, Marilee (2010), 'The Madwoman with a Laptop. Notes Toward a Literary Prehistory of Academic Fem Blogging'. in *Journal of Women's History*, 22 (4), pp. 209-219

Live Journal (n.d.), [online], available from: www.livejournal.com, accessed 8th February 2008

Long, Tony (2004, August 16), 'It's Just the 'internet' Now', in *Wired* [online], available from http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2004/08/64596, accessed 12th December 2012

Lopez, Nancy (2005 [2002]), 'Homegrown: How the Family Does Gender'. in Zinn, Maxine Baca, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Michael A. Messner (eds.) *Gender Through the Prism of Difference* (third edition). New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 465-480

Lovász, Katalin (2007), 'Technologies of Self-Presentation: Women's Engagement with Mediated Representation from the Era of Silent Film to the Internet Age'. PhD Dissertation, Pinceton, NJ: Princeton University, 208 p.

Lupton, Deborah (1999), *Risk*. New York, London: Routledge, 201 p.

Ma Bulle (n.d.), [online], available from www.mabulle.com, accessed 5th February 2008

Macdonald, Myra (1995), *Representing Women. Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media*. London, New York, Sydney, Auckland: Edward Arnold, 250 p.

Machin, David (2002), *Ethnographic Research for Media Studies*. London: Arnold, 181 p.

Madame Cornus (2009), « Mon petit Benjamin est décédé », on *La famille Cornus*, available from http://mafamilia.wordpress.com/2009/02/04/mon-petit-benjamin-est-decede/, accessed 27th October 2009

Martey, Rosa Mikeal (2010), 'Find More, Do More, Reveal Less. Women's strategies for navigating gendered contexts online', in *Information, Communication & Society*, 13 (8), pp. 1207-1229

Marwick, Alice E. and danah boyd (2011), 'I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience', in *New Media & Society*, 13 (1), pp. 114-133

Massoni, Kelley (2004), 'Modeling Work. Occupational Messages in Seventeen Magazine', in *Gender & Society*, 18 (1), pp. 47-65

Mathwick, Charla, Malhotra, Naresh and Rigdon, Edward (2001), 'Experiential value: conceptualization, measurement and application in the catalog and internet shopping', in *Journal of Retailing*, 77, pp. 39-56.

Matthews, Carol and Marilyn Callahan (1996), 'Wilderness Stationery: Women's Letters and Women's Research', in *Affilia*, 11 (3), pp. 338-355

McNeill, Laurie (2003). 'Teaching an old genre new tricks: the diary on the Internet', in *Biography: an Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 26(1) pp. 24-47

McRobbie, Angela (1999 [1994]), 'Shut up and Dance: Youth Culture and Changing Modes of Femininity'. in Shiach, Morag (ed), *Feminism & Cultural Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 65-88

McRobbie, Angela (2004), 'Post-Feminist and Popular Culture'. in *Feminist Media Studies*, 4 (3), pp. 255-264

McRobbie, Angela (2007), 'Post-Feminist and Popular Culture. Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime', in Tasken, Yvonne and Diane Negra (eds.), *Interrogating Post-Feminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 27-39

McRobbie, Angela (2009), *The Aftermath of Feminism. Gender, Culture and Social Change*. Los Angeles, London: SAGE, 192 p.

MetaFilter (n.d), [online], available from http://www.metafilter.com/, accessed 4th March 2008

Meyer, Michael (2001), 'Between theory, method, and politics: positioning of the approaches to CDA', in Wodak, Ruth and Michael Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourses Analysis*. London, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, pp.14-31

Millen, Dianne (1997), 'Some Methodological and Epistemological Issues Raised by Doing Feminist Research on Non-Feminist Women', in *Sociological Research Online*, 2 (3), [online] available from http://www.socresonline.org.uk/2/3/3.html, accessed on 28th February 2011.

Miller, Daniel (2008), *The comfort of things*. Cambridge, Malden (MA): Polity Press, 302 p.

Mon petit nombril (n.d.), [online], available from http://monpetitnombril.wordpress.com/, accessed 4th August 2010

Moon, Junghoon, Jessica Pu Li and G. Lawrence Sanders (2006), 'The Role of Virtual Social Identity through Blog Use in Social Life'. in *American Conference on Information Systems (AMCIS) 2006 Proceedings*, [Online], pp. 4085-4096, available from http://aisel.aisnet.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2038&context=amcis2006, accessed 9th February 2011

Moszkowicz, Julia (1999), 'Chapter 10. The Girls Can't Hack It: The Changing Status of the Female Body in Representations of New Technology'. in Arthurs, Jane and Jean Grimshaw (eds), *Women's Bodies. Discipline and Transgression*. New York, London: Cassell. pp. 208-231

Naples, Nancy A. (2003), *Feminism and Method. Ethnography, Discourse Analysis and Activist Research*. London, New York: Routledge, 268 p.

Näre, Lena (2011), 'The Moral Economy of Domestic and Care Labour: Migrant Workers in Naples, Italy'. in *Sociology*, 45 (3), pp. 396-412

Nautilus Plus (n.d.), [online], available from: http://www.nautilusplus.com, accessed 13th September 2010

Nunes, Mark (1995), 'Baudrillard in Cyberspace: Internet, Virtuality, and Postmodernity'. in *Style*, 29, pp. 314-327

Ollivier, Michèle and Manon Tremblay (2000). *Questionnements féministes et méthodologie de la recherche*. Paris, Montréal, Budapest, Torino: Harmattan. 256 p.

ORÉGAND (n.d.), [online], available from www.oregand.ca, accessed 4th June 2004

Orgad, Shani (2004), 'Help Yourself: The World Wide Web as a Self-Help Agora'. in Gauntlett, David and Ross Hosley (eds.), *Web. Studies* (2nd edition). London, New York: Arnold, pp. 146-157

Orton-Johnson, Kate (2010), 'Ethics in Online Research; Evaluating the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics Categorisation of Risk', in *Sociological Research Online*, 15 (4), [online], available from http://www.socresonline.org.uk/15/4/13.html, accessed on 28th February 2011.

Overeaters Anonymous (n.d.), [Online], available from http://www.oa.org, accessed 8th November 2010

Paasonen, Susanna (2002) 'Chapter 1. Gender, Identity, and (the Limits of) Play on the Internet', in Consalvo, Mia and Susanna Paasonen (eds.), *Women & Everyday Uses of the Internet. Agency & Identity*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 21-43

Paasonen, Susanna (2011), *Carnal Resonance. Affect and Online Pornography*. Cambridge, MA, and London, UK: The MIT Press, 321 p.

Paccagnella, Luciano (1997), 'Getting the Seats of Your Pants Dirty: Strategies for Ethnographic Research on Virtual Communities', in Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 3 (1), [Online], available from http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol3/issue1/paccagnella.html, accessed 6th January 2013

Page, Ruth E. (2012), *Stories and Social Media. Identities and Interaction*. New York, London: Routledge, 240 p.

Paillé, Pierre (2007), 'La méthodologie de recherche dans un contexte de recherche professionnalisante: douze devis méthodologiques exemplaires', in *Recherches qualitatives*, 27 (2), pp. 13-151

Palmer, Julie (2009), 'Blogging Pregnancy: Ultrasonography, Connectivity and Identity Construction'. in Friedman, May and Shana L. Calixte (eds.), *Mothering and Blogging. The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter Press, pp. 45-56

Papacharissi, Zizi (2002), 'The Presentation of Self in Virtual Life: Characteristics of Personal Homepages'. in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 79 (3), pp. 643-660

Petrica, Oana (2009), 'Blogging the Romanian Mother: "Motherhood" and "Mothering" Intertwined'. in Friedman, May and Shana L. Calixte (eds.), *Mothering and Blogging. The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter Press, pp. 158-170

Pierce, Tess (2005), 'Blogging for Life. The role of cyberconduit in everyday narratives, cyberfeminism, and global social change'. in Archibald, Jacqueline, Judy Emms, Frances Grundy, Janet Payne and Eva Turner (eds.) *The Gender Politics of ICT*. Middlesex: Middlesex University Press, pp. 163-178

Pinch, Trevor (2010), 'The Invisible of Goffman's Sociology From the Merry-go-round to the Internet'. in *Technology and Culture*, 51 (2), pp. 409-424

Pitts, Victoria (2004), 'Illness and Internet Empowerment : Writing and Reading Brest Cancer in Cyberspace', in *Health*, 2 (1), pp. 33-59

Plant, Sadie (1997), *Zeros + Ones*. New York: Doubleday, 305 p.

Plummer, Ken (2003), *Intimate Citizenship. Private Decisions and Public Dialogues*. Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 187 p.

Podnieks, Elizabeth (2009), '"HEY CELEBS! QUIT THAT BEHAVING! DON'T MAKE US COME DOWN THERE!" Celebrity Moms, Babies, and Blogs'. in Friedman, May and Shana L. Calixte (eds.), *Mothering and Blogging. The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter Press, pp. 182-200

Radway, Janice (1983), 'Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context', in *Feminist Studies*, 9(1), pp. 53-78

Radway, Janice (1984), *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 276 p.

Ramazanoğlu, Caroline and Janet Holland (2002), *Feminist Methodology. Challenges and Choices*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage. 195 p.

Risman, Barbara J. (2004), 'Gender as a Social Structure: Theory Wrestling with Activism'. in *Gender & Society*, 18 (4), pp. 429-450

Rose, Damaris (2001), *Revisiting Feminist Research Methodologies: A Working Paper*. Ottawa: Government of Canada, Status of Women Canada (Research Division), 47 pp. [Online], available from http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection/SW21-142-2001E.pdf, accessed 14th August 2011

Roy, Simon N. (2009), 'L'étude de cas' in Gauthier, Benoît (dir.), *Recherche sociale: de la problématique à la collecte des données*. Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, pp. 199-225

Royal, Cindy (2008), 'Framing the Internet. A Comparison of Gendered Spaces'. in *Social Sciences Computer Review*, 26 (2), pp. 152-169

Sadowska, Noemi (2002), 'Women's Internet Sites: A Search for Design Strategies to Engage the Female Viewer'. in Consalvo, Mia and Susanna Paasonen (eds.), *Women & Everyday Uses of the Internet: Agency & Identity*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 90-105

Schau, Hope Jensen and Mary C. Gilly (2003). 'We Are What we Post? Self-Presentation in Personal Web Space'. in *Journal of Consumer Research* 30(3). pp. 385-404.

Schippers, Mimi (2007), 'Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity and Gender Hegemony', in *Theory and Society* 36(1), pp. 85-102

Scott, Ellen K. (2005), 'Beyond Tokenism: The Making of Racially Diverse Feminist Organizations', in *Social Problems*, 52 (2), pp. 232-254

Seiter, Ellen, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner and Eva-Maria Warth (1996 [1989]), ''Don't treat us like we're so stupid and naïve' – towards an ethnography of soap opera viewers'. in Baehr, Helen and Ann Gray (eds.), *Turning it On: A Reader in Women & Media*. London, New York: Arnold, pp. 138-156

Senft, Theresa M. (2008), *Camgirls. Celebrity & Community in the Age of Social*

Networks. New York: Peter Lang, 150 p.

Serfaty, Viviane (2004). *The Mirror and the Veil: An Overview of American Online Diaries and Blogs*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 144 p.

Shiach, Morag (1999), 'Introduction', in (ed), *Feminism & Cultural Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-7

Sichtermann, Barbara (1983 [English translation 1986]), *Femininity. The politics of the personal*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 132 p.

Skeggs, Beverly (1994), 'Situating the Production of Feminist Ethnography', in Maynard, Mary and June Purvis, *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*, London, Bristol, PA: Taylor and Francis Ltd, pp. 72-92

Skeggs, Beverley (1997), *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 192 p.

Smith, Caroline J. (2005), 'Living the Life of a Domestic Goddess: Chick Lit's Response to Domestic Advice Manuals'. in *Women's Studies*, 34 (8), pp. 671-699

Smith, Caroline J. (2006), 'The Personal Can be Feminist: Blogs in a Writing Course', in *Feminist Collections*, 27(2-3), pp. 17-18

Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson (1996), 'Introduction", in *Getting a Life. Everyday Uses of Autobiography*, London, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p.1-24

S.O.S Beauté (n.d.), [Online], available from http://www.sosbeaute.ca, accessed 9th November 2010

Speer, Susan A. (2007 [2005]), *Gender Talk. Feminism, Discourse and Conversation Analysis*. London, New York: Routledge, 236 p.

Spender, Dale (1995), *Nattering on the Net. Women, Power and Cyberspace*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 278 p.

Sprague Zones, J. (2005 [1997]), 'Beauty Myths and Realities and Their Impacts on Women's Health'. in Zinn, Maxine Baca, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Michael A. Messner (eds.) *Gender Through the Prism of Difference* (third edition). New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 65-80

Stadtman Tucker, Judith (2009), 'Foreword. Small World: Maternal Blogging, Virtual Friendship, and the Computer-Mediated Self'. in Friedman, May and Shana L. Calixte (eds.) *Mothering and Blogging: The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter Press, pp. 1-20

Stanley, Liz (2000), 'From "self-made women" to "women's made-selves": audit selves, simulation and surveillance in the rise of public women', in Cosslett, Tess, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield (eds), *Women's Autobiographical Selves.* London: Routledge, pp. 40–60.

Star, Susan Leigh (1999 [1996]), 'From Hestia to Home Page. Feminism and the Concept of Home in Cyberspace'. in Schiach, Morag (ed.), *Feminism & Cultural Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.517-539

Stern, Danielle M. (2011), 'You Had Me at Foucault: Living Pedagogically in the Digital Age', in *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 31 (3), pp. 249-266

Swann Fitness Centre (2006-2007), [Online], available from http://www.swann.ca, accessed 9th November 2010

Technorati (n.d.), [Online], available from http://technorati.com/, accessed 4th March 2008

Télé-Québec (2010), À la di Stasio [Online], Available from http://aladistasio.telequebec.tv/a_la_distasio/accueil.html, accessed 15th November 2010

Thornham, Sue (2000), *Feminist Theory and Cultural Studies. Stories of Unsettled Relations*. London: Arnold. 230 p.

Thornham, Sue (2007), *Women, Feminism and Media*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 176 p.

Tolman, Deborah L. (2006), 'In a Different Position: Conceptualizing Female Adolescent Sexuality Development Within Compulsory Heterosexuality', in *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development* (112), pp. 71-89

Tong, Stephanie Tom, Brandon Van Der Heide, Linssey Langwell and Joseph B. Walther (2008), 'Too Much of a Good Thing? The Relationship Between Number of Friends and Interpersonal Impressions on Facebook'. in *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13 (2008), pp. 531-549

Torsen, Molly (2005), 'The Domination of the English Language in the Global Village: Effots to Further Develop the Internet by Populating it with Non-Latin-Based Languages'. in *Richmond Journal of Law & Technology*, 7 (1), 23 pages, [Online], available from http://law.richmond.edu/jolt/v12i1/article2.pdf, accessed 4th August 2011.

Tseëlon, Efrat (1995), *The Masque of Femininity. The Presentation of Woman in Everyday Life*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 152 p.

Turkle, Sherry (1988), 'Computational reticence: why women fear the intimate machine'. in Cheris Kramarae (ed.) *Technology and Women's Voices: Keeping in Touch*. London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, pp. 41-58

Turkle, Sherry (1995), 'On the Internet', in *Life on the Screen. Identity in the Age of the Internet*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, pp. 175-269

Ussher, Jane M. (1997), *Fantasies of Femininity. Reframing the Boundaries of Sex*, London, New York, Victoria, Toronto, Auckland: Penguin Books, 519 p.

Valentine, Gill (2006), 'Globalizing Intimacy: The Role of Information and Communication Technologies in Maintaining and Creating Relationships'. in *Women's Studies Quarterly*. 34 (1/2), pp. 365-393

Van Dijk, Teun A. (2001), 'Critical Discourse Analysis'. in Tannen, Deborah, Deborah Schiffrin & Heidi E. Hamilton (eds.), *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 352-371

van Doorn, Niels, Liesbet van Zoonen, and Sally Wyatt (2007), 'Writing from Experience: Presentations of Gender Identity on Weblogs'. in *European Journal of Women's Studies* 14(2), pp.143-158

van Zoonen, Liesbet (2002), 'Gendering the Internet: Claims, Controversies and Cultures'. in *European Journal of Communication*, 17 (1), pp. 5-23

Vignola, Éric (2009), 'Du blogue au livre. Réflexions sur la nature générique du blogue', Masters' Dissertation, Montréal: Université de Montréal, 114 p.

Ville de Montréal (2006), *Revenu moyen d'emploi de la population de 15 ans et plus en 2005.* Montréal: Ville de Montréal. [online], available from: http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/page/mtl_stats_fr/media/documents/16_I_RE VENU_EMPLOI.PDF, accessed 9th November 2010

Vnuk, Rebecca (2005), 'Hip Lit for Hip Chicks'. in *Library Journal*, 130 (12), pp. 42-45

Wakeford, Nina (2004), 'Developing Methodological Frameworks for Studying the World Wide Web'. in Gauntlett, David and Ross Horsley (eds.), *Web.Studies* (Second Edition). London: Hodder Arnold, pp. 24-33

Walby, Sylvie (2001), 'Against Epistemological Chasms: The Science Question in Feminism Revisited'. in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 26 (2), pp. 485-509

Walker, Keith. L. (1996), 'Mariama Bâ, Epistolarity, Menopause, and Postcoloniality'. in Mathews Green, M. J. (ed.), *Postcolonial subjects: francophone women writers*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 246-264

Walker Rettberg, Jill (2008), *Blogging*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 176 p.

Wall, Melissa (2005), 'Blogs of War'. Weblogs as News, in *Journalism*, 6(2), pp. 153-172

Ward, Katie J. (1999), 'The Cyber-Ethnographic (Re)Construction of Two Feminist Online Communities'. in *Sociological Research Online*, 4(1), [Online], available from http://www.socresonline.org.uk/4/1/ward.html, accessed 28th February 2011.

Weight Watchers Canada (2010), [Online], available from http://www.weightwatchers.ca, accessed 5th November 2010

Wengraf, Tom (2006 [2001]), *Qualitative Research Interviewing. Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Methods*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 398 p.

White, Michele (2003), 'Too close to see: men, women, and webcams'. in *New Media Society*, 5 (1), pp. 7-28

Wilkins, Melissa Camara (2009), 'Beyond Cute: A Mom, a Blog, and a Question of Content'. in Friedman, May and Shana L. Calixte (eds.), *Mothering and Blogging. The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter Press, pp. 151-157

Williams, Melissa J. and Gerald A. Mendelsohn (2008), 'Gender Clues and Cues: Online Interactions as Windows into Lay Theories about Men and Women', in *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 30, pp. 278-294

Wilson, Trish (2005), 'Women in the Blogosphere'. in *Off our Backs*, 35 (5-6), pp. 51-55

Winfield Ballentine, Leslie and Jennifer Paff Ogle (2005), 'The Making and Unmaking of Body Problems in Seventeen Magazine, 1992-2003', in *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 33 (4), pp. 281-307

Winker, Gabriele (2005), 'Internet Research from a Gender Perspective. Searching for differentiated use patterns'. in Archibald, Jacqueline, Judy Emms, Frances Grundy, Janet Payne and Eva Turner (eds.) *The Gender Politics of ICT*. Middlesex: Middlesex University Press, pp. 191-204

Winship, Janice (2000 [1987]), 'Survival Skills and Daydreams', in Marris, Paul and Sue Thornham (eds.), *Media Studies: A Reader*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 334-340

Wodak, Ruth (2001), 'What CDA is about – a summary of its history, important concepts and its developments' ", in Wodak, Ruth and Michael Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourses Analysis*. London, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, pp.1-13

Woehrling, José (1988), 'La reconnaissance du Québec comme société distincte et la dualité linguistique du Canada: conséquences juridiques et constitutionnelles'. in *Canadian Public Policy*, 14 (Supplement: The Meech Lake Accord), pp. S43-S62

Woolf, Virginia (1989 [1929]), *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 199 p.

Wordpress (n.d.) [online], available from http://wordpress.com/, accessed 8th February 2008

Yin, Robert K. (1981), 'The Case Study as a Serious Research Strategy'. in *Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, Utilization*. 3 (1), pp. 97-114

Yin, Robert K. (2009), *Case Study Research: Designs and Methods* (Fourth Edition). Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, London: SAGE Publications, 219 p.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LETTER TO BLOGGERS

Gatineau, [insert date]

Dear author of the [insert name] blog,

I am a research student in Gender Studies at the University of Sussex (Brighton, England) and I am very interested in women who write diary-type blogs. My research, which is supervised by Ms. Janice Winship and Dr. Kate O'Riordan, aims at providing a better understanding of women's diary blogging in the province of Québec. I have received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada for the duration of my studies (four years).

Your blog has been identified during the creating of my sample and I would like to know if you would be interested in participating in my research. Your participation would consist of allowing me to study your blog, as well as agreeing to meet with me for a semi-structured interview that should last between one and two hours. After the interview, which will take place in a public space, you may decide whether you wish to let me visit the place where you normally write your blog from (home, office, internet café, etc.) and take some pictures of it. Your participation is voluntary and you should feel free at all times to not answer any question or to withdraw from the study.

The questions I will ask you relate to your blog writing, namely, the context in which this writing is done, the themes you write about that refer to your daily life, your relationship with readers, etc.. There are only few risks involved in participating in this research and I will take all possible steps to diminish such risks, specifically, by not releasing any information in my research that may lead people to make a link between your responses to the interview and the blog you are writing and by keeping all data, gathered during my research, locked in my office.

If you wish to know more about my research, you are welcome to visit the URLs given below or to contact me for more information. If you decide to participate in my research, you will need to read and sign a consent form, which details the research and the related risks. You may contact me to let me know about your intention to participate (or not) in the research, but I will get back to you shortly to see whether you have further questions about my research.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

Laurence Clennett-Sirois
DPhil Candidate, Gender Studies
University of Sussex
lc206@sussex.ac.uk
[Québec mobile phone number]
University of Sussex: www.sussex.ac.uk
Department of Media and Film, University of Sussex: http://www.sussex.ac.uk/mediastudies/index.php
Laurence's Research Profile: http://www.sussex.ac.uk/gender/profile210707.html
Laurence's Research Blog: www.carnetsdelaurence.net

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE[73]

Semi-Directed Individual Interview
How May We Understand Diary Blogs Written By Women in Québec?

Date and Location of Interview: _____

First, I would like to thank you once again for allowing me to meet you. Let me assure you that I will not be asking you any question that I would not personally feel comfortable answering. Questions will focus on your experiences as an author of a diary blog. My questions might not be clear and if you have difficulty understanding what it is that I am asking, please do not hesitate to ask me to rephrase the question. As I mentioned earlier, I am interviewing you and others for my doctoral thesis. I would like to know if you feel comfortable if I digitally record our conversation. I might quote you in my thesis, but I will take all possible steps to ensure your confidentiality: I will never mention your real name in any of my documents and I will assign a code or a fictional name to identify your interview guide, the audio recording, the transcripts with a code or any other documents, which will serve to protect your identity. In my thesis, I will make sure that I do not link your answers in this interview to your blog, so that your real/daily identity is never revealed (unless you reveal it on your blog). The interview should last between one and two hours, but if you wish to terminate the interview before or pursue the interview longer, please feel comfortable to tell me. I want you to know that you also have the right not to answer any question: you only have to let me know and we will go on to the next question. If you are ready, we will now start the interview.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE: BEGINNING TO BLOG
I would like you to tell me about the time when you discovered blogs and decided to start blogging yourself.

1. How would you define a blog?

   What are the differences between diary blogs and other types of blogs, in your opinion?

2. When and how did you first discover blogs?

3. What convinced you to start blogging? What is it in blogs that catches your interest?

4. Did you read blogs before you decided to start your own blog?

5. Before you read or wrote a blog, did you read other types of writing where the authors talked about themselves (personal diaries, logbooks, autobiographies)?

6. Have you ever kept a manuscript personal diary? Do you still keep one?

7. How is the writing of your blog related (or not related) to the writing of a personal diary/logbook/autobiography, according to you?

---

[73] Inspired by Lauraine Leblanc's interview guide, in Leblanc, Lauraine (1999), « Pretty in Punk. Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture », New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 286 p.

8. When did you really start blogging/begin your first blog?

9. Did you face any difficulties when you started your first blog? How did you overcome them? Did you ask people who knew more than you did for some help or guidance?

10. Before writing your current blog, did you blog elsewhere? Are these blogs abandoned now or do you still update them?

11. When you started your current blog, did you think you would have an audience (readers)? Was the audience important for you?

THE BLOG WRITING PROCESS
Now, I would like if we could talk about the context in which you write your blog.

12. Is your blog hosted by a specialised website (blog host) or did you build your blog starting from (almost) scratch and are paying for a service? Why did you make such a choice?

13. What motivates you to post a new entry on your blog?

14. In your opinion, what is the most important thing that determines when you decide to take time to write on your blog (updating versus taking time for yourself, for example)?

15. Would you say you are rather disciplined when it is time to update your blog or are you finding it hard to update it regularly? Do you sometimes "cheat" by changing the date of an entry to pretend that you update your blog more or less regularly? Why/why not?

16. Do you mostly write your entries in one shot or do you write them when you have spare time, perhaps little by little and only publishing it after you worked on it more than once?

17. How do you insert your blog into your daily activities? Do you often think about it? Do you take pictures, videos, notes or other in order to later post them on your blog?

18. From where do you usually write entries for your blog? Do you always blog from the same place? Do you need a certain amount of privacy in order for you to be able to blog?

19. At what time … of the day? ... of the week? Do you make time in your schedule specifically for your blog (updating and writing entries)?

20. Between the time when you started blogging and today, would you say your blog has changed? In terms of the themes and subjects you write about? The type of writing? The frequency of updates? Anything else?

YOUR BLOG AS IT IS
If we could now talk about the various components of your blog: title, hyperlinks, texts and entries, appearance, components…

21. I would like for you to tell me about the title of your blog. What inspired this title? Does it have a special meaning? Do you want to share this meaning with me? Did you need to think about it for a long time before you chose it? Have you ever modified it? Etc. What about the URL?

22. How would you define the style of your blog: is it all based on lived experience? Does it have some fictional inspiration? A mix of fictional and lived experiences? Something else?

23. Has it happened that when rendering a story, you changed, amplified or diminished facts in order to make them more or less interesting, dramatic or something else?

24. What are the components of your blog (blogroll/hyperlinks, videos, comment section, forum, pictures, categorized entries, etc.)?

    i. If you have pictures on your blog, are they personal? Are there some pictures that you would not post on your blog?

25. If we now spoke about the appearance of your blog, how would you describe it to someone who would be unable to see it? Why did you make such choices? Do you often change it?

26. What are the themes that regularly come up on your blog, in your opinion? Why do you think this is so?

27. Are you very careful of spelling and grammar on your blog? Do you sometimes write in slang? Why? Why not?

28. Does it happen that you would go back and read a post written a long time ago? Why/why not?

29. Would you recommend to others that they read your blog? Would you read it yourself if you were not its author? Why (not)?

YOUR IDENTITY AS A BLOGGER

30. Do people who are close to you (partner, family, friends, colleagues) know that you blog?

    No – Why did you choose not to inform them?

    Yes – Do they know the URL of your blog? Did you choose to inform them or did they discover your blog accidentally? Why did you make this choice? Do you ever wish that you had greater anonymity on your blog?

31. Do you think that because your friends and family know that you blog, this might influence you when you write on your blog? The subjects and themes you decide to talk about (or not)? Other aspects of your blog?

32. Do you reveal a lot of information about yourself (or your family, friends, etc.) on your blog? What can we learn about you by reading your blog? Why did you make such choices?

33. Do you find that your blog enables you to explore other aspects of your personality? To really be "yourself" or to try out other aspects of one's identity that people would not normally link to you?

34. Do you think you will still blog in the future? In one year? Five years?

35. What would make you abandon your blog?

36. Did you ever receive some recognition/honour (e.g. *Blog d'Or* prize) for your blog? Had you heard about such prizes and recognition before? Would you like to receive such an honour?

A COMMUNITY OF BLOGGERS?

I would now like for you to discuss what makes up a bloggers' community, as well as telling me about the people who visit your blog, etc.

37. If you have a blogroll, what types of blogs could we find on it?

38. Do you read other blogs?

   If you do, did you discover these blogs before or after you started blogging? Are they blogs of people you personally know?

   If you don't, why not?

39. Do you sometimes ask questions directly to your audience, the people whom you know read your blog?

   If so, do you expect answers? Do you get any?

   If not, why don't you?

40. Do you normally respond to people who comment on your blog or posts?

41. Do you know if you have regular readers or some that subscribed to you blog?

42. Do you have access to the statistics on visitors of your blog?

   Is it important for you to know how many people visit your blog?

   If you do have access to the statistics, would you mind providing me with a copy for the last month?

43. Have you developed a friendship with some of your readers? Have you met some of them outside of the virtual world? Would you?

44. Do you participate in bloggers' gatherings?

45. Do you exchange gifts or private messages with other bloggers?

46. Has it happened that you participated in activities or expressions that characterise the blogging community (for example the "tag", where a blogger posts a questionnaire on their blog and asks other bloggers to provide answers to it on their blog, etc…)? Why (not)?

47. Do you think copyrights should be instituted and respected for blogs such as the one you write?

48. Is blogging for you a way to gain money? How does it work?

   If not, have you ever thought about it?

BEING A WOMAN, A BLOGGER, IN 2008-2009
I am also curious as to what it is that you think about being a woman, in this epoch, who writes blogs.

49. Does being a *woman who blogs* have a particular meaning for you?

50. What does it mean to be a woman in 2008, in your opinion?

   Any gains you wish to mention?

   Struggles we are still facing?

51. What may the impact be (if there is impact) of blogs – and new technology and communication devices generally – on status of women and women's lives, in your opinion?

52. How would you define femininity?

   Do you consider yourself feminine? Is it something related to your physical self or to personality and character traits?

53. What does it mean, in your opinion, to be a feminist?

54. According to your definition, would you consider yourself a feminist?

SOME INFORMATION ABOUT YOU.
At this point, I will be asking you some question about yourself, in order to enable me to compare your responses with other participants' responses. Please remember that all you will tell me will remain confidential and that you are free not to answer any question.

55. Where were you born (city, country)?

56. In what year were you born?

57. Name of city where you live:

58. Are you:
   Tenant   Owner
   Living with a family member (or in another setting) and not paying any rent

59. Do you have access to the Internet from home?
   Yes   No
      If you do, what type of connection is it? _____

60. Society now acknowledges more and more sexual orientations, including heterosexuality and lesbianism. Do you wish to tell me whether you identify yourself more with one or the other of the following:

Heterosexual   Lesbian   Bisexual   Queer   Other (please indicate)
I don't know/ I refuse to answer

61. What is your current matrimonial situation?
Married or in a common-law relationship   Single
In a relationship but living alone / with flatmates   Separated/ divorced
In a relationship and living with my partner   Widow
Other
Comments:

62. What is the highest educational degree that you completed?

Elementary School not completed   Elementary School
High School   Professional Degree
Pre-University College   Technical College
Bachelors' Degree   Higher Education Diploma
Masters' Degree   PhD/DPhil
Postdoctoral Degree   Other
Comments:

63. If you are in a relationship, what is the highest educational degree completed by your partner?

Elementary School not completed   Elementary School
High School   Professional Degree
Pre-University College   Technical College
Bachelors' Degree   Higher Education Diploma
Masters' Degree   PhD/DPhil
Postdoctoral Degree   Other
Comments:

64. What is your current occupation?

Is a great knowledge of internet and computer technologies required for what you do?

65. What is your partner's occupation (if applicable)?

66. In what category, of the following, would you situate the income of your household?

Less than 10 000$ 10 001$ to 20 000$ 20 001$ to 30 000$
30 001$ to 40 000$ 40 001$ to 50 000$ 50 001$ to 60 000$
60 001$ to 70 000$ 70 001$ to 80 000$ 80 001$ to 90 000$
90 001$ to 100 000$ 100 001$ to 110 000$ 110 001$ to 120 000$
More than 120 001$ I don't know/I refuse to answer

67. If different, in what category, of the following, would you situate your personal income?

Less than 10 000$	10 001$ to 20 000$	20 001$ to 30 000$
30 001$ to 40 000$	40 001$ to 50 000$	50 001$ to 60 000$
60 001$ to 70 000$	70 001$ to 80 000$	80 001$ to 90 000$
90 001$ to 100 000$	100 001$ to 110 000$	110 001$ to 120 000$
More than 120 001$	I don't know/I refuse to answer	

68. What is (was) the principal occupation of your mother?

69. What is (was) the principal occupation of your father?

70. Do you have children? Yes No

How many?

Would you like to have some (more)? Yes No
                                       Unsure
How many?

71. People may have various ethnic, racial or cultural origins. For example, Vietnamese, Irish, French, Cuban, Senegalese origins… what would yours be (maximum of two answers)? _____

_____

72. What is your mother tongue? _____

_____

FINALLY, IN CONCLUSION…

73. Are there some things that you wish to tell me about your blog writing or related to this interview and that you did not have the chance to tell me during our conversation?

74. Is it fine with you if I contact you in the future, for example, if I discover components of our discussion that would be enriched by deeper exploration, either through an interview or through email exchange? Also, please note that you should feel completely comfortable to contact me again if ever you think about other things you may want to tell me, related to your blog or to my research…

Yes   No

THANK YOU!

INTERVIEWER'S NOTES

APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORM

Women's Diary Blogging in Québec: How Should It Be Understood?
CONSENT FORM - BLOGGERS

Participation

I have been invited to participate in a research project conducted by Laurence Clennett-Sirois, DPhil Candidate in Gender Studies at the University of Sussex (Brighton, UK). This research is conducted under the supervision of professors Janice Winship and Kate O'Riordan, from the Media Studies Department. Laurence has received a fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada for the duration of her program (four years).

This research aims at providing a better understanding of women's diary blogging in Québec. During an interview that should last between one and two hours, I will be asked questions regarding my blog writing, namely the context in which this writing occurs, the themes I write about in relation to my daily life, my relationship to readers, etc.. My participation in this study is voluntary and I have the right to refuse to answer any question and I may withdraw from this study at any time and for any reason. Only minimal risk is associated with participating in this research and Laurence will take all possible measures to diminish such risk.

Laurence will use the data provided on my blog (texts, links, etc.) and the interview in order to better understand the studied phenomenon, without reproducing any information that may lead people to establish a link between my blog and my responses to the interview. If I agree and the occasion arises, a home visit (or a visit to the location in which the blogging takes place) may follow the interview, to enable Laurence to see (and perhaps photograph) the space where the blogging takes place.

By participating to this research, I will help to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon of diary blogs and the motivations of their authors. My involvement in this project will help shed light on women's personal writings that are self-published and available to a wide audience, all of which is facilitated by blogging.

Confidentiality

The answers I will give to Laurence will be used in the research project and may be quoted integrally although never associated with my name. Although my blog's name and URL might appear in the research, it will not be associated with my interview responses, nor with my name (unless it is provided on the blog itself) nor to any data that might lead to my identification. If I choose to, I may also ask the researcher to keep my blog anonymous, although I understand this might not ensure that my blog may never be traced. Laurence will choose a fictional name that will serve as a code to identify my interview guide, the audio recording of my interview and its transcript. All data (including all written documents and audio recordings) will be kept locked in Laurence's office. If I express the wish to do so, I will be given a copy of the transcript of my interview and will be able to verify whether what has been written fairly represents my point of view.

Apart from the thesis, it is possible that I may be cited in other projects (articles, chapters, books or conferences), but in all circumstances, appropriate measures will be taken to protect my anonymity and the confidentiality of my interview answers.

Ethics

The School of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies Research Governance Committee has approved this research project on June 20th, 2008.

Student's Signature: _____   Date:_____

_____

I, _____ (PRINT   FIRST NAME AND SURNAME) hereby agree to participate in a semi-directed individual interview that should last between one and two hours and I confirm that I have understood the terms and conditions stated above.

Recording

  □ I agree that my interview may be recorded in audio format.
  □ I do not agree that my interview may be recorded in audio format.

Home visit

  □ I give permission for Laurence to come and visit the location where I normally write my blog.
    □ Laurence may also take pictures of that space.
  □ I do not give permission for Laurence to come and visit the location where I normally write my blog.

Data (blog, transcripts and articles)

  □ I prefer that the content of my blog be kept anonymous and that no information (URL, blog's name) about it be revealed in the research.
  □ I wish to receive a copy of the transcript of my interview to be sent to the following address: _____
  _____
  □ I would like to be informed when articles, chapters or books are published or when presentations are given in relation to this research project. Such information can be sent to the following email address: _____
  _____

Participant's Signature: _____   Date:_____

_____

** There are two copies of this consent form to be signed, one of which I may keep. **

If I have any questions regarding this research, I may contact:
Laurence Clennett-Sirois
Research Student, Gender Studies
School of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies (SocCul)
University of Sussex
l.clennett-sirois@sussex.ac.uk
[Mobile phone number in Québec]

If I wish to complain about any ethical matters related to the conducting of the interview or the research project itself, I may contact the Chair of the School of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies Research Governance Committee at the University of Sussex:

Dr. Richard Black
Chair, School of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies Research Governance
Committee
University of Sussex
R.Black@sussex.ac.uk
Telephone: +44 1273 877090

For further information, I may consult the following websites:

University of Sussex: www.sussex.ac.uk
Department of Media and Film, University of Sussex:
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/mediastudies/index.php
Laurence's Research Profile: http://www.sussex.ac.uk/gender/profile210707.html
Laurence's Research Blog: www.carnetsdelaurence.net

APPENDIX 4 : BLOGGERS' SOCIO-DEMOGAPHIC INFORMATION

	Bloggers' Pseudonym	Blog since	Year of birth	Origins	Mother tongue	Lives in (region)	Lives with	Accom-modation	Sexual Orientation	Status	Children	Educational achievement	Occupation
Heterogeneous Bloggers	Shaindl	2007	1982	Caucasian [74]	English	Outaouais	Housemate	Rented	Queer	In a (hetero-sexual) relation-ship	0 (wants 2 to 4)	Undergradua te degree	Health care practitioner
	Cynthia	2004	1981	Caucasian	French	Outaouais	Alone	Rented	Heterosexual	Single	0 (unsure)	Undergradua te degree	Public servant
	Mireille	2008	1983	Caucasian	French	Montréal	Housemate	Rented	Heterosexual	Single	0 (unsure)	College degree	Final year undergraduate student
	Ghislaine	2006	1963	Caucasian	French	Montréal	Husband and children	Owned	Heterosexual	Married	2	Master's degree	Secondary school teacher
	Ariane	2008	1988	Caucasian	French	Estrie	Housemates	Rented	Heterosexual	Single	0 (wants 1 or 2)	College degree	Undergraduate student
	Virginie	2006	1984	Caucasian (immigrate d from France)	French	Montréal	Housemate	Rented	Heterosexual	In a relation -ship	0 (does not want any)	French equivalent of Québec's undergradua te degree	Director of operation (private sector)
	Blanche	2003	1961	Caucasian	French	Montréal	Child	Rented	Heterosexual	In a relation -ship	1	University-Level Certificate	Interviewer (private sector)
	Bonnie	2006	1965	Caucasian	French	Montréal	Partner and child	Owned	Bisexual	In a (hetero sexual) relation ship	1 (wants 1 or 2 more)	University-Level Certificate	Translator and administrative clerk
	Sarah	2005	1978	Caucasian	French	Outaouais	Partner and children	Owned	Heterosexual	In a relation	2 (unsure)	Undergradua te degree	Translator

---

[74] Unless otherwise specified, Caucasian refers to White French-Canadian Ancestry.

	Name												
										ship			
	Michèle	2005	1967	Caucasian	French	Montréal	Children	Rented	Heterosexual	In a relationship	2	Undergraduate degree	Events coordinator (private sector)
	Denise	2006	1962	Caucasian (from Spain)	French	Montréal	Partner and children	Owned	Heterosexual	In a relationship	2	High school degree	Writer (arts production field)
	Ani	2006	1977	Caucasian	French	Montréal	Partner	Owned	Heterosexual	In a relationship	0 (wants at least 1)	Undergraduate degree	Translator
	Kieva	2005	1982	Caucasian and Latin-American	Spanish	Montréal	Alone	Rented	Heterosexual	Single	0 (unsure)	Undergraduate degree	Looking for work
	Julie	2007	1986	Caucasian	French	Montréal	Partner	Rented	Bisexual	In a (heterosexual) relationship	0 (unsure)	College degree	Office clerk (public sector)
	Elsa	2006	1970	Caucasian	French	Saguenay-Lac St-Jean	Husband and children	Owned	Heterosexual	Married	4	Undergraduate degree	Primary school teacher
Mummy Bloggers	Dominique	2006	1973	Caucasian	French	Québec	Partner and children	Owned	Heterosexual	In a relationship	3	Undergraduate degree	Homemaker and part-time yoga instructor
	Catherine	2006	1974	Caucasian	French	Québec	Husband and children	Owned	Heterosexual	Married	4	Doctoral degree	Homemaker
	Éloïse	2005	1978	Caucasian	French	Québec	Partner and children	Owned	Heterosexual	In a relationship	2 (wants 2 or 3 more)	Undergraduate degree	Part-time work in higher education institution
	Simone	2008	1982	Caucasian	French	Québec	Husband and child	Rented	Heterosexual	Married	1 (wants more)	Masters Degree	Doctoral candidate (on parental leave)
	Lucie	2006	1983	Caucasian (immigrated from France)	French	Estrie	Husband and children	Rented	Heterosexual	Married	2 (wants 5 more)	Québec equivalent of undergraduate degree	Homemaker
	Lynne	2005	1978	Caucasian	French	Montréal	Husband and children	Owned	Heterosexual	Married	2 (wants 1 more)	Higher education diploma	Project manager (private sector)

Creative Writing	Elizabeth	2006	1976	Caucasian	French	Québec	Partner	Owned	Heterosexual	In a relationship	0 (pregnant at time of interview)	College degree	Self-employed (on parental leave)
	Anabel	2007	1983	Caucasian	French	Montréal	Alone	Rented	Heterosexual	Single	0	Undergraduate degree	Master's degree student and part-time teaching assistant

APPENDIX 5: PARTICIPANTS' BLOGROLL

Participant's Pseudonym	Blogroll (Total Websites)	Total Blogs	Total Personal Blogs	Deleted / Private Blogs
Shaindl	0	0	0	0
Cynthia	17	13	4	0
Mireille	5	5	3	1
Ghislaine	31	28	20	2
Elizabeth	8	8	7	0
Dominique	10	1	1	2
Ariane	12	10	9	1
Virginie	38	27	19	5
Blanche	31	24	9	2
Bonnie	36	27	18	7
Catherine	37	23	22	10
Éloïse	32	21	18	5
Anabel	14	14	6	0
Sarah	31	19	16	8
Michèle	30	24	19	3
Kieva	13	11	6	1
Lynne	34	25	19	2
Denise	0	0	0	0
Ani	15	0	0	0
Julie	56	42	16	10
Simone	15	11	11	4
Elsa	48	33	23	10
Lucie	11	6	4	4
TOTAL	**524**	**372**	**251**	**77**