

Utah State University

DigitalCommons@USU

All Graduate Theses and Dissertations, Spring
1920 to Summer 2023

Graduate Studies

5-2011

Mormon Mommy Blogs: "There's Gotta Be Some Women Out There Who Feel the Same Way."

Whitney L. King
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

King, Whitney L., "Mormon Mommy Blogs: "There's Gotta Be Some Women Out There Who Feel the Same Way."" (2011). *All Graduate Theses and Dissertations, Spring 1920 to Summer 2023*. 1453.
<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/1453>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Theses and Dissertations, Spring 1920 to Summer 2023 by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.



MORMON MOMMY BLOGS: "THERE'S GOTTA BE SOME WOMEN OUT THERE
WHO FEEL THE SAME WAY"

by

Whitney LaBeau King

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

American Studies

Approved:

Patricia M. Gantt
Major Professor

Lynne S. McNeill
Committee Member

Elaine Thatcher
Committee Member

Mark R. McLellan
Vice President for Research and
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2011

Copyright © Whitney L. King 2011

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

Mormon Mommy Blogs: “There’s gotta be some women out there who feel the same way.”

by

Whitney L. King, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2011

Major Professor: Dr. Patricia M. Gantt
Department: English

Communities in cyberspace have been present since the earliest days of home computers, when connecting to the web meant logging in to the WELL program. In 1994, when the Internet became more accessible to the public, and home computers were no longer considered a novelty, millions flocked to this new, virtual frontier that allowed them to connect with anyone around the globe.

Folkloristics has been largely concerned with the tangible—what we can touch, hear, taste, and see. As the frontier of the web expanded, many folklorists contracted away from using it as a means to explore a new branch of folklore: virtual communities and all of the folkloric nuances that they possess. Fortunately, in recent years, folklorists have recognized the value and validity of the Internet folklore.

This thesis is concerned with a very specific folk group, Mormon mommy bloggers, and how they function both in the blogosphere at large and the smaller niche of Mormon blogs, the bloggernacle. Mormon mommy blogs are distinctive in their vernacular, post material, and side bar badges. These blogs also provide a window not

just into Mormon life, but also ideas about how faith can interact with identity and womanhood.

Mormon mommy blogs are a vibrant genre of both Internet folklore and Mormon folklore. Mormon mommy blogs also serve as ways to undertake record-keeping for posterity and, for some, are a means of proselytizing, which are two important aspects of Mormon culture. Mormon mommy blogs also allow for frank conversations about expectations of the Mormon culture and the impossibilities of being the perfect Mormon woman. For non-Mormons, Mormon mommy blogs are a form of escapism into the lives of women who are confounding the notion that housewives and mothers are woefully unfulfilled. The fields of folkloristics, women and gender studies, and even religious studies could all benefit from examining mommy and Mormon mommy blogs.

(102 pages)

DEDICATION

This dedication is split in three ways:

The first is to my husband, Dan, who enjoyed the manifestations of the fruits of my labor with a living room covered with books and papers and dinners consisting of McDonald's finest, and when I was feeling extraordinarily domestic, something made in the crockpot. Without his support, I would never have been able to do all that was required of me these past two years.

The second is to my parents, who encouraged my studies from a young age and taught me to never accept limitations.

The third is to my future children, whose lives I will no doubt chronicle on my own blog—in a fine example of the researcher going native.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Lisa Gabbert and Dr. Patricia M. Gantt for serendipitously asking where my application to graduate school was on my last day of their respective classes, in what should have been my final semester as an Aggie. Without both of their urgings, the burning desire to receive my graduate degree would have never been sparked. For all of the excellent professors who provided any academic assistance to me over my years at USU, I am immensely indebted. I would especially like to thank my committee members, Dr. Patricia M. Gantt, Dr. Lynne S. McNeill, and Elaine Thatcher, for their support and assistance throughout the entire process. I would also like to acknowledge the scholars and resources that I used to build my argument upon.

Without each and every one of you, I could not have completed this thesis.

Whitney L. King

CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. MOMMY BLOGS.....	14
Mommy Blogs and Identity.....	16
Mommy Blogs and Community.....	26
III. MORMON MOMMY BLOGS.....	30
Record-keeping, Missionary Work, and Motherhood: The Bloggernacle Trifecta	31
Great Expectations: Mormon Mommy Blogs, Authenticity, and Perfection	37
The Lure of the Other and Etic Conceptions of the Mormon Mommy Blog.....	44
IV. EIGHT WORDS FOR EXPRESSIVE CULTURE: THE MORMON MOMMY BLOG.....	49
Genre.....	50
Group and Identity.....	53
Text and Performance	56
Tradition and Art.....	60
V. C JANE ENJOY IT: THE BLOGGING EXPERIENCE OF COURTNEY KENDRICK – WOMAN, MOTHER, AND MORMON.....	65
Motivations Behind Blogging.....	66
Identity in Blogging	74
Community in the Blogosphere	80
VI. FINAL CONCLUSIONS.....	84

REFERENCES87

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	“Slow Cooker Day”	18
2	“The Secret is in the Sauce”	27
3	“Mormon Glossary”	35
4	“9 Adorable Nursery Ideas!”	57
5	“Eternity”	58
6	“We believe”	58
7	“Mormon Fashion Blogger”	58
8	Blog Banners on the <i>NieNieDialogues</i>	62
9	Graphic Hyperlinks.....	64
10	“Angelic Blog Banner”	76

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Published in 1993, Howard Rheingold's revolutionary text *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* introduced the concept of communities in cyberspace through computer-mediated communications (CMC) and as the net being a frontier, ready for exploration to the non-academic public. Of course, this was a time when home computers were still a novelty and connecting to a WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link) may have seemed a bit cold and bloodless— notions that Rheingold himself originally held (Rheingold 2000). When the Internet became public and more accessible in 1994 and with the development of more sophisticated personal computers, the frontier of the World Wide Web seemed more navigable for someone unfamiliar with the WELL program's intricacies. The public felt as Rheingold did when he was first privately introduced to the possibilities of the World Wide Web in 1993— "the first time [we] saw the Web, [we] wanted to make communities there" (Rheingold 2000, 334).

The idea that Rheingold saw cyberspace as frontier, a terrain that could be traveled, colonized and established with communities is a fascinating perspective, in that it challenges conventional ideas about space and place. Mark Lemley says, "We speak of the Internet in spatial terms, and in certain respects users may experience some aspects of the Internet as a physical place" (Lemley 2003, 523). I would suggest that any spatial conception of the Internet relies on the notion liminal space. We are betwixt and between two worlds—the physical and the virtual. We do not leave our physical surroundings, but we certainly are entering another place. As John Perry Barlow, a pioneer in the early net,

says, "... we must remember that going to Cyberspace, unlike previous great emigrations to the frontier, hardly requires us to leave where we have been" (Barlow 1995). Users are aware as they are signing into their FaceBook accounts to visit a friend's "space" that they are really still in their library or living rooms. Yet at the same time, personal FaceBook pages and personal blogs become our virtual homes—where we *are* on the Net. Instead of leaving the porch light on, we have an "online" status that tells other travelers we are in. We post comments on blog posts or walls to let others know that we have stopped by. Even the language we use to explain our virtual activity denotes some sort of journey where we are leaving the physical behind— "going/getting online" as if the processes of accessing the Internet were a vehicle or we "visit websites or chatrooms." Thus we travel the same way in this virtual space as we do in physical places.

Building on the theme of the Internet as a space, Healy states, "the Internet represents a kind of 'middle landscape' that allows individuals to exercise their impulses for both separation and connectedness" (Healy 1996, 66). Navigating on the Internet allows for this dichotomy of separation and connection to occur at the same time. Surfing the web is largely an individual event, however the landscape of the Internet is dotted with rest stops that allow us to engage with others. Chatrooms, Multi-User Dungeons or MUDs¹, online gaming sites like World of Warcraft, MySpace, FaceBook and blogs are all available for individuals to come together and engage in a community that is not geographically tied down. It satisfies our desire to be separate and individual, but gives us a place to belong to. As geographer Yi Fu Tuan says, "Place is security, space is freedom:

¹ MUDs were originally designed to mimic physical places and face-to-face communication. By having multiple rooms or "dungeons" linked together, it creates a sense of space on the Net (Kollock and Smith 1999).

we are attached to the one and long for the other” (Tuan 1977, 3). Cyber space becomes the ultimate space, where there is ultimate freedom to travel from site to site.

This concept that Healy introduces of the Internet allowing us to find a balance between separation and connectedness is an important one for understanding the emergence of communities on the Web. Rheingold claims, “I suspect that one of the explanations for this phenomenon is the hunger for community that grows in the breasts of people around the world as more and more informal public spaces disappear from our real lives” (Rheingold 2000, 362). However, he is quick to point out that a nostalgic veneration of community is slightly unwarranted. The Internet and its various communities are a special type of community—not limited by geographical boundaries and able to reach a variety of participants. If we use the nostalgic notions of what community truly is, we fail to recognize the power of other types of communities.

Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* is clear on this point, “All communities larger than primordial villages of face to face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity or genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (Anderson 1991, 6). I would qualify Anderson’s statement, to say that the imagined communities do not necessarily mean “made up” but has more to do with the way we perceive and interpret the communities we encounter daily—somewhat similar to how many view the Internet as an actual place. Some may find community with their neighbors and work associates, while another may find it within family and church.

In “An archaeology of Cyberspaces: Virtuality, Community, Identity,” Derek Foster contests, “Community, then, is built by a sufficient flow of ‘we-relevant

information. The ‘we’ or the collective identity that results is structured around others who are seen as similar to the ‘me’” (Foster 1997, 25). If we can accept that community could now mean that we associate with people who are “like us,” rather than people who are near us, we can let go of the concept of community that means local events with local people on a front porch or in the coffee shop. As Barry Wellman, a noted community theorist, says in an email correspondence to Rheingold, “Ever since the late 1960s, I have been arguing that community does not equal neighborhood. That is, people usually obtain support, sociability, information, and a sense of belonging from those who do not live within the same neighborhood. They have done this through phoning, writing, driving, railroading, transiting, and flying” (Wellman 2000, 360). And now they are also using the Internet to shape and participate in communities. These communities are just as viable in the 21st century as the concept of a neighborhood community was in the early and mid-20th century.

Of course, we can and do have strong connections with those that are physically present in our lives. Families, friends, and co-workers are vital to our own personal communities—we meet for dinner or a movie and have face to face interactions. But these are just one possible type of community interaction we can now have. While the traditional definition of community is restricted by geographical space, online communities are able to transcend boundaries and lines on a map to provide a space of support and belonging for those who use them. Relationships forged through virtual folk groups have a striking resemblance to relationships that physically exist in real life. In the 1997 text, *Communities in Cyberspace*, the chapter “Net Surfers Don’t Ride Alone: Virtual Communities as Communities” by Wellman and Gulia, states “the limited

evidence available suggests that the ties people develop and maintain in cyberspace are much like most of their “real life” community ties: intermittent, specialized and varying in strength” (Wellman and Gulia 1999, 186). Thirteen years after Wellman and Gulia conducted their research, there is more than enough evidence to argue that communities that exist in the virtual realm are just as influential and critical as those that exist in real life or IRL.

The terms “in real life” and “real life”—abbreviated to IRL and RL—show how Internet users differentiate their online and offline lives. This leads to the distinction of real and actual in Internet communities. Real implies the physical world—that which participants in Internet communities return to after closing their browser. Actual is synonymous with virtual, and signifies the people and relationships we’ve forged with them on the Internet. However, even if Internet users recognize the difference between the real and the actual, the lines are frequently blurred. Who we are IRL bleeds over to who we are in the virtual and those we know strictly online can become a part of our real lives as well. Demonstrating this point is blogger Leah Grammar, who when commenting on my own blog after a recent post, said:

I was actually thinking of you today. I was talking to the husband and was telling him that you hadn't blogged in a while. He said "who??" "Oh, Whitney."... "do you know her??" "Of course I know her I'm not that strange" "I mean do you know her-know her?" "well.... *not in real life but in bloggy life and it's kinda the same*" (Comment posted on www.thekingandiblog.com on January 22, 2010 [*sic*]).

This example exemplifies the liminal space that is the Internet and conveys the fact that the Internet may be considered an actual space, where strangers can become friends—much like a real meeting in a coffee shop or at a park. Andreas Kitzmann asserts, “As a result of the emphasis on community within its cultural spaces, the Web significantly

reworks the distinction between the public and the private (Kitzmann 2003, 55). This is especially true in Internet communities where participants become vested in each other, reading stories about their lives, responding to queries posted by others and offering support where needed.

Another important component of online communities is that they are inherently inclusive, due in large part to the expanse of the Internet landscape. Admittedly this was not always the case. In 1995, Barlow claims with an air of sadness that there is not much diversity on the web, only “white males under 50 with plenty of computer terminal time, great typing skills, high math SATs strongly held opinions on just about everything, and an excruciating face to face shyness, especially with the opposite sex” (Barlow 1995). However, as the landscape of the Internet expands, and digital immigrants become digital natives, the availability of online meeting places has diversified. While there are certainly places for white males under 50 to meet and demonstrate their “great typing skills,” there are also places for writers to share their newest chapter or novella, sites for those that are interested in body building or organic diets, chat rooms for women struggling with infertility. And in these virtual places, people are finding that they can receive advice and support from people who do not have an immediate physical presence in their lives. Increasingly, these communities are bridging the gap between the physical world and the liminal space of the Internet.

In this liminal space, we can become a version of ourselves that is unrestrained by the societal pressures of everyday interactions. Much like Bakhtin’s view of the carnivalesque, where participants are engaging in acts that are free from the everyday social strictures and hierarchy, participants in Internet communities experience the same

notions of a “world inside out.” Bakhtin notes that the “logic of the inside out” creates “[a] second life, a second world of folk culture that is thus constructed; it is to a certain extent a parody of the extracarnival life” (Bakhtin 1984, 11). Instead of the logic of the world inside out in terms of festivals and feast days, Internet users are finding that the logic of the Internet creates a liminal space where they can become who they need or want to be.

In the example of infertility chatrooms, women have found a safe place to “be” and share their stories with others. The user Linethlabella started a thread titled, “I feel angry, sad, and hopeless!!!” where she discussed her feelings of inadequacy as her sisters are all “fertile women” (Linethlabella, forums.fertilitycommunity.com, thread posted on September 7, 2010). In response to the advice and support offered to her, she posted:

This forum is the only place where I can vent.....only my sisters, my parents, mother in-law, and sister in-law know about our problems with infertility. I don't want nobody else to know, but I am sure most of the other family members they figured out something must be wrong after all we have been married for almost seven years. Here in the forum is the only place where I can vent and just let myself be because you girls understand what I am going through. Some days I feel so positive, and others not so much... Well, girls at least I have you guys to vent to, and of course for advice. Thank you for sharing your stories with me, and giving hope that God is great, and he is the only one that can bless me with a miracle. Thank you Ladies!!! (Linethlabella, forums.fertilitycommunity.com, commented posted on September 7, 2010, emphasis added).

This example shows all of the positive benefits of online communities—unlimited potential to surround oneself with others who share similar experiences and receiving support and feeling a sense of belonging. J.C.R. Licklider and Robert Taylor forecasted in 1968, “Life will be happier for the on-line individual because the people with whom one interacts most strongly will be selected more by commonality of interests and goals than by accidents of proximity (Licklider and Taylor 1968, 40). Strong communities of

mothers who share a common religion—in the instance of Mormon mommy bloggers posting and commenting on each other’s blogs are a testament to the reality that community is now who we surround ourselves with, due to commonality of interests and not commonality of location.

As people are on the Internet, interacting with others through emails, chatrooms and social-media sites, it seems unnecessary to argue that these people have lore as well. From the very beginning of humans interacting with each other over “the Web,” folklore was there, comfortably settling in the background of the traditions, performances and narratives that we put on the Internet. In 1993, as Rheingold worked on his influential text *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* he stated there was an intrinsic appearance of folklore on the Internet, “Right now, all we have on the Net is folklore, like the Netiquette that old-timers try to teach the flood of new arrivals...” (Rheingold 2000, 54). This folklore that Rheingold is referencing is the informal transmission of knowledge that is inherent in any human interaction and that is heavily present on the Internet. The circulation of memes, urban legends, and folk remedies are examples of the lore that Rheingold was experiencing in the chat rooms of the 1980s and early 1990s, and are still circulated currently on the web.

Of course the traditional notions of what folklore *is* are challenged if they are strictly applied to Internet lore. Concerns over the lack of physical interaction denuding the folkloric expressions on the Internet are unfounded. The largest quibble of Internet lore is that it is not orally transmitted. While there certainly is not the traditional verbal aspect to the vernacular on the web, the narratives that exist *are* transmitted within the most common context of the Internet--textually. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett believes

foisting the requirement of orality of folklore onto Internet culture is discounting the notion that the written vernacular on the web is a type of word of mouth, or rather a “word of modem” and that “computer mediated communication, at least in its present form, is *between* speech and writing . . . Electronic messages are neither a play script nor a transcript. . . They are the event” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995, 74 emphasis in original). In 1983 she made the assertion that the task of the folklorist was to “identify and illuminate the ways in which people shape their expressive behavior in relation to the conditions of their lives (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1983, 222). As so much of the condition of our lives is played out and through the Internet, it is time for folklorists to explore the various communities and folk groups that exist there. Similarly Oring asserts, “In some sense, for something to be folklore in an urban society, it must be touched and transformed by common experience—ordinary humans living their lives” (Oring 1986 16). The Internet is so much a part of the everyday common experience of human life, it is clear that the standard definition of what is folklore cannot be adhered to it. And if folkloristics is confined to rigid definitions, it appears to be substantiating the claim of Dorson and Ben-Amos that folklore is “vanishing” from the world. However, claims alluding to the disappearance of folklore fail to recognize one of the most important elements of folklore itself: its inherent ability to change and conform to new situations and experiences. If our discipline is truly dynamic, we must be able to allow aspects of this dynamism to enrich the body of folklore. As Alan Dundes states, “[F]olklore is not vanishing; on the contrary, folklore continues to be alive and well in the modern world, due in part to increased transmission via e-mail and the Internet” (Dundes 2004,406). Dynamic variation is one of the most exciting elements of folklore, and with Internet folk

groups, we are able to explore how we have moved the “common experience” from a physical to a virtual space.

Lore on the Internet takes many forms. It can be found in email forwards reminiscent of chain letters, urging the reader to “send this to as many people as possible in order to achieve un-told amounts of luck” or in the jokes that also circulate from inbox to inbox. Folk speech is in chatrooms and discussion boards, with abbreviations and acronyms, such as LOL and BTW. MySpace and FaceBook accounts of those that pass on become places of remembrance and mourning, similar to roadside memorials (Dobler 2009). Lore on the Internet shows that it is not a cold and bloodless space, but is very much alive with human presence.

If one of the most distinctly human characteristics is sharing and listening to narratives, the web-log, or blog carries on this tradition in the virtual world. Dan Burstein, in the introduction to his work *blog!*, states:

Over the years, philosophers, anthropologists, and scientists have tried to define what makes Homo sapiens uniquely Homo sapiens. We are tool makers, some experts tells us. We possess the capacity for complex language others point out. . . We experience wonder and curiosity and we have the ability to contemplate why we exist and what the meaning of our lives may be. All of these statements are arguably true. But there is another distinguishing characteristic of human beings that has been unknown or underestimated until recently: *We blog* (Burstein 2005 *xi-i*, emphasis added).

Of course blogging is easily translated into telling stories, one of the most defining characteristics of the human experience. The only change to this art of narration is that blogging is an easily accessible and public forum that gives a voice to people who historically may not have had a voice, for example, housewives. The stories of mothers which were largely unchronicled, except perhaps in works of fiction or analysis such as

The Feminine Mystique by Betty Friedan, are now being recorded and shared with the world.

The blog showcases vernacular and expressive culture—tradition, belief, performance and identity are woven into the narratives of bloggers and the blogging community has a very real and large presence on the web, and covers nearly any topic—gay life, politics, athletics, cars, fashion. Even the term given to the larger body of blogs, the blogosphere, resonates with the idea of Internet as landscape and the blogosphere simply being one of the many features of it. I echo the statement of Aaron Barlow, author of *Bloggign America: The New Public Sphere*, when he says, “It is impossible to cover all of the blogosphere. It is too big, too dynamic . . . for even a brief survey in any one book” or in this case thesis (Barlow 2008, *ix*). At the time of writing this thesis, blogpluse.com has counted nearly 160 million public blogs on the blogosphere (blogpluse.com 2011). Clearly, the blogosphere is a dynamic and booming community, with many subsets and genres. I have chosen to focus on one genre of the blogosphere, that of the Bloggernacle². Winnowing the subject even further, I will focus on a particular genre of expressive culture in the Bloggernacle—the Mormon mommy blog. The Mormon mommy blog is rife with codes, art, text, performance and identity. In other words—it is a veritable folk group with unexplored lore.

Bloggign has become an informal part of the Mormon culture, particularly for young women and mothers. Women new to a ward³ are frequently asked, —”Do you

² The Bloggernacle is a portmanteau of blogosphere and tabernacle, referencing the growing number of members of The Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints, hereafter referred to as Mormons, who blog. It also lends to the idea that the Blogosphere is a world, and that the Bloggernacle is a space within it.

³ Ward is a reference to the geographical boundaries that make up a congregation in the LDS (Mormon) church. Wards have anywhere from 100-500 members and can often serve as much as a social circle, in addition to a spiritual one.

have a blog?” Considering Wilson’s idea that those who study Mormon folklore should, “...at last to look at what they themselves choose to talk about” (Wilson 2001, 19) I will be as faithful to the material I find, and refrain from the problem that Wilson identified as, “I, and others like me, who know what Mormons really do talk about, have played too willingly to the expectations of outsiders and have thus reinforced their misconceptions” (Wilson 2001, 20).

Chapter II of this thesis explores the characteristics of the general mommy blog as a genre and the implications it has for mommy bloggers in terms of identity—both as mothers and women—and how community is built through reciprocity and support.

Chapter III analyzes the Mormon experience in the mommy blog genre and the emergence of the bloggernacle. I will look at the impetus for Mormon women to blog as a form of record-keeping and missionary work, and identity and community within the genre. The blog *Seriously, so blessed*, a parody of the Mormon mommy blog genre, will be presented to demonstrate how it exemplifies the lore found on genuine blogs. I will also cover the “outsiders” conception of the Mormon mommy blog, as there has recently been an online confessional of non-Mormon women admitting their love of the genre and how stereotypes affect the reading of Mormon mommy blogs.

Chapter IV is a more in-depth look at Mormon mommy blogs by way of using the foundation of Burt Feintuch’s text *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture*. I will use the eight words—group, art, text, genre, performance, context, tradition, and identity to see how this genre fits into the larger body of Internet folklore as a whole.

Chapter V discusses the experiences of Stephanie Nielsen and her sister Courtney Kendrick, and the subsequent response from the virtual community in August 2008 when

Stephanie was critically burned in a private plane crash. This chapter will illustrate the collective power behind folk groups on the Internet and how truly the lines of the physical and virtual are crossed.

Chapter VI, summarizes and concludes the thesis with the implications of the research of this thesis on the draw and power of the Internet community, and the vitality of the narratives and lore that appear there and the impact to the study of folklore. If the conclusions in this study are proven, the ethnography and collection of Internet folklore is a boon to folkloristics, and allows the discipline to continue exploring the everyday, common experiences of the folk.

CHAPTER II

MOMMY BLOGS

Traditionally, the narratives and experiences about motherhood and a woman's place within it were largely kept within close-knit geographical communities. Today, however, many women are finding that they are not as geographically close to their families or friends as women in the past had been. As Amiee Morrison states in "Autobiography in Real Time: A Genre Analysis of Personal Mommy Blogging," there is a "widespread distribution of nuclear families into geographical disparate suburban communities . . . isolated from their existing social networks and contexts. . . [and] young families settling in communities far from their families of origin" (Morrison 2010). Due to this geographical spread, women find themselves without the "essential supports" that were traditionally in place—mothers, sisters and other female family members—who would help with the transition into and daily experience of motherhood (Morrison 2010). However, blogging cuts the distances between women, and becomes a viable means by which women can share their stories and receive care from family, friends, and those that they meet in the blogosphere through the form of personal "mommy blogs."

The definitions of the mommy blog vary, although mommy blogs are generally considered to be blogs written by mothers (either stay-at-home or working) where they document the day-to-day occurrences of their families, with close attention paid to their children, and usually the humorous things they do. However, mommy blogs do not need to solely focus on their children. Lido Kido Lopez asserts in her article, 'The Radical Act of 'Mommy Blogging': Redefining Motherhood Through the Blogosphere,' "However, for the most part, women categorized as 'mommy bloggers' are simply women who are

mothers and occasionally write about their own children” (Lopez 2009, 734). Mommy blogs can include posts on crafting, cooking, design, fashion, religion; solicit or share advice, or personal musings about their life and thoughts, in addition to nearly any topic that interests the blogger.

The mommy blog as a genre of blog is receiving more and more credence as viable form of autobiographical expression and a place of community for women. Technorati, the foremost archivist in the blogosphere, gave mommy blogs a special section in their annual “State of the Blogosphere” report in 2010. In detailing their reasons for doing so, they listed the mommy blog’s influence on brands and products, although the impact of the mommy blog is more than writing about which laundry detergent is best.

Blogging enables women from around the country and world to share those stories of laughter, hope, and even annoyance with all of the aspects of motherhood. It also allows mothers to embrace and be embraced by a community of like-minded individuals who can cheer at the success, laugh at the inane, and commiserate with the difficult aspects of motherhood. Writing on a mommy blog gives women the ability to develop a strong sense of self in their roles as mothers and women, and a creative and social outlet.

For mothers to experience a feeling of connectedness and support they are turning to blogging and forging connections with mothers who they feel are like them. It is truly as Licklider and Taylor noted, life for the online individual becomes happier due to close connections with those who are like them. Women are able to develop an identity as both a woman and a mother, generate reciprocity and community, and receive support from

the blogging community in times of need.

Mommy Blogs and Identity

Terry Arendall, a sociologist, notes, “[e]specially since the 19th century, mothering has been presumed to be a primary identity for most adult women. That is, womanhood and motherhood are treated as synonymous identities and categories of experience” (Arendell 2000, 1192). The role and identity of motherhood is very much thought of as occurring only in the private sphere, inside the home, where mothers were not able to access other mothers, except for the arranged play-date where the children could play, but more importantly, mothers could have interaction with each other.

Another footnote on the definition of motherhood is the homogenized myth of the mother who is perfectly in order in the housework, her appearance, and her role as a mother. In essence, the archetype of motherhood identity is June Cleaver. Arendell says of the conceptions of motherhood, “Motherhood ideology is entwined with idealized notions of the family, presuming the institution and image of the idealized White, middle-class heterosexual couple with its children in a self-contained family unit” (Arendell 2000, 1194). The issue with this conception, aside from it being untrue and unfair, is that today’s mothers do not relate to it. As Amiee Morrison notes, “there is a widespread feeling that most popular representations of parenting—in parenting or women’s magazines, in television shows, in advertisements—do not reflect the experiences of real families” (Morrison 2010). Mommy bloggers are altering the construction of motherhood by taking advantage of a public forum that was historically unavailable to mothers in the past, and by writing about subjects that matter to them as mothers and as women.

Alice Bradley, the author of the blog *FinSlippy*, writes on her blog:

We're redefining the roles with our blogs. The messages we get about motherhood typically either comes [sic] to us in sanitized or idealized form (television shows, magazine articles) or sensationalized (newspapers). There's nothing in the in-between because the in-between doesn't have a hook, an angle; it doesn't sell. So that's what we're dealing in here. The unexciting, every day, in between stuff. But in doing that, we're also delving into new territory. Into radical territory, I think (Bradley 2005).

Mommy bloggers are showing that the act of mothering is not a sacred experience that needs to be cloistered away in the home and wallpapered over with the homogenized image of June Cleaver, Ghost of Motherhood Past. What is important to the mommy bloggers is that they are capturing their day to day life—be it motherhood or personal musings—and rediscovering the significance that it has for themselves and other people. As Adri, a commenter on the blog post, “The Art of Blogging” on Segullah.org says, “Before blogging, I would often journal the small epiphanies of my life, stashing them away to re-read and rediscover as time passed. Now, I put those small moments on my blog (unless they are too personal...I still have a journal), and enjoy reflecting on how the small moments add up to the whole of my life” (Adri 2008). Another commenter, Leslie R. writes, “I also blog for voice. To give public voice to my life and how I spend my days. To show the fulfillment I find in my life. To give motherhood a deserved good name in all it's [sic] complexity and lights and darks of growth. I talk about what matters to me, I find humor and meaning in everyday... oh and to occasionally tell people how to make fancy cupcakes” (Leslie R. 2008, ellipses in original). Mommy bloggers are changing the very concept of the identity of motherhood by showing and how they approach the very act of mothering.



Figure 1. Stephanie Nielson, "Slow Cooker Day," 2008

One blogger, Stephanie Nielson⁴ of the "NieNie Dialogues" wrote the following post on February 21, 2008:

It has been a slow-cooker day. You know one of those days where you just cant [sic] quite get started. My breakfast dishes are just now loaded. My children were just served lunch. So....[sic] In the midst of not getting anything done and frustrated, I locked the children out. Then after an hour or so of "I don't care what you do out there" I let them all in. (tears and all) Hopefully by bedtime, I will have gotten in the shower, exercised and ready to spend time with Mr. Nielson" (Nielson 2008a).

She accompanied the post with photos of her kissing the sliding glass door (Figure 1), while her children cried. While those who subscribe to the ideology of the perfect mother are undoubtedly horrified at this post, most of Stephanie's readers enjoy her true depiction of what some days of motherhood actually look like. One fellow blogger, Carli Jeffery, writes of Stephanie and this post:

You know why I love this woman?? She is **down-to-earth real**. The title of this post says it all - those days you just can't get ahead on anything, and every time you try to start the to-do-list a nappy needs changing or the coco-pops spill on the floor. It's reassuring and comforting to know another mother of young children on the other side of the world feels like I do too. I just LOVE that Nienie shares the

⁴ Stephanie Nielson and her impact on the blogosphere will be covered at length in subsequent chapters. She is truly the *du jour* "mommy blogger."

days where things aren't working out the way she wanted, and she sees the funny side in it all (Carli Jeffrey 2008, emphasis in original).

Stephanie, and many other mommy bloggers, are writing on what their experiences as a mother are *truly like*. Yes, many of the posts may be a saccharine tribute to their husbands or children, but just as many are about the hard or exasperating parts of motherhood—be it toilet-training, irritating antics of children, or even depression.

Jennie W., blogger of *Beehive and Bird's Nest* writes of her toilet-trained four year-old son, Finn, peeing all over his room. Upon discovering what Finn is up to, Jennie purchases a black light in order to see the urine stains to know where exactly to clean. To her surprise, she finds that the patterns of urine seem to be decorative and done with conscious thought—not simply a four year old wetting himself, it “was recreational urination, pure and simple” (Jennie 2010). When she asks why he is doing this, he replies, “Satan told me to.” Jennie makes the conclusion that demonic instructions aside, he should be moved to his older brother’s room, as older brother would not tolerate urinating in his bedroom. She concludes that aside from two instances of Finn pooping in the cat’s litter box and the playhouse, his “fascination with all potty-related things was over. Or maybe Satan just moved on to another four-year-old” (Jennie 2010). Heather Armstrong, the popular author of *dooce* also writes of the odd and frustrating things her children do and usually ends it with a humorous slant. Many other mommy bloggers use humor to express their frustrations with their children. This is indicative of how humor is used to approach taboo topics, such as moments of a mother not liking (but certainly still loving) her children and the things they do. Comments from readers usually affirm that they have experienced their own children doing something exasperating and that now they can look at it with a measure of humor.

In the example of writing on depression, Alice Bradley's post on July 13, 2006, titled, "A Long Post About My Brains" where she details her long struggle with depression and the treatment of it. She received 185 comments from readers wishing her well and supporting her—many sharing their own experiences with depression and offering her advice. One commenter, Elleana, so astutely put it, "Whatever help perfect strangers on the internet can provide, just ask, and we shall provide. Maybe all we can do is say, like many previous commenters already did, that we're rooting for you. Because we are" (Elleana 2006). When a blogger is willing to put herself "all out there" on the blogosphere, her audience is, usually, benevolent in their responses to her. It is as Lopez states:

Mommy bloggers are creating a different picture of motherhood to what we see in the mainstream media. Instead of the vision of the loving mother, we see women who are frazzled by the demands of their newborn baby, who have no clue what to do when their child gets sick, who suffer from postpartum depression and whose hormones rage uncontrollably. These are women with immense fan bases, who are critiqued by outsiders but *sustained and supported by other women just like them*. At the same time, mommy bloggers themselves struggle to embrace this act, and in their struggle expose these myths of motherhood even more starkly (Lopez 2009, 732, emphasis added).

When another blogger, or participating voyeur, reads a post about the trials of being a woman and mother they are able to empathize and give as much support as possible. The blogger is seen as a person that the commenter knows and feels for deeply, a woman that has shared herself openly with her textual narratives.

As the text is what the writer is presenting her audience, it is the strongest indicator of her identity. As text is the virtual substitute for speaking, it is literally the voice of the blog and what shapes the blogger's identity—a marker that stands in place for the woman who writes it. Oral transmission becomes textual transmission, and carries

the same weight as orally conversing in the physical world. The narratives that bloggers share become word of blog, instead of word of mouth. In a subsequent chapter detailing the blogosphere's outreach to Stephanie Nielson, the power of word of blog is evident. Noted narrative theorist Paul Ricoeur writes, "The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character" (Ricoeur 1992, 147-8). And it is through the narrative that the blogger gives her identity authenticity. The stories that she weaves, aided by personal photographs or other visual aids such as clips from YouTube or photographs from photo-sharing sites such as Flickr, give the reader context for establishing who the blogger is in her everyday life. While there is clearly some selectiveness in writing topics—many bloggers abstain from discussing their sex life, for example—the content that is shared about daily life, motherhood, personal triumphs or struggles are viewed as being authentic.

Many bloggers strive to be faithful in their depictions of themselves, hence Stephanie's posting of locking her children out in the backyard, and Alice's posts about her depression. Jennie, who commented on "The Art of Blogging" post said, "I try to be very honest on my blog. Not in a mean way, I just want it to be a real reflection of what I think and do. I'm not afraid to talk about what I'm bad at (housekeeping. With pictures!), or what I'm good at (although sometimes it feels braggy [*sic*]. But it's the truth—I make fantastic biscuits!)" (Jennie 2008). Mommy bloggers recognize that in order to receive the most out of their blogging experience, they must have their virtual selves be as true and authentic to their physical selves as possible.

However, that is not to say that issues with authenticity will never occur on the Internet. There are certainly those that can and do create a false self on their blogs. One famous example is of Kaycee Nicole—thought to have been a 19 year old suffering from leukemia, who ultimately died from her illness. Thousands read her blog, “Living Colors,” (which is now removed) and offered support as she posted about her pain. Kaycee’s mother, Debbie Swenson, even started her own blog about dealing with the issues of a child with cancer. Kaycee’s online friends were devastated when Debbie posted that Kaycee had passed away.

Not long after, however, readers of Kaycee’s blog noticed inconsistencies on her blog and in the handling of her death. Readers began to wonder why there were no pictures on Kaycee’s blog, except for one that appeared to be from a newspaper. Debbie refused to give the location of the funeral, post an obituary, or provide an address where flowers could be sent. Eventually Debbie admitted that the whole blog had been a hoax. In an attempt to explain herself she wrote, “Her name was not Kaycee and she was not my daughter. [the diary] was about the lives of three people who suffered with cancer. I am to blame for wanting to tell their stories. I am to blame for weaving the lives of all three together” (qtd. in Johnson 2001).

When the readers discovered what Debbie had done, their reactions were incredulous fury directed towards the woman who was willing to present a package of lies as truth on her and her “daughter’s” blog. They found it inconceivable that a person would so falsely represent themselves to the blogging community. “Skintrade,” a commenter, on the metafilter forum dedicated to the question “Is it possible that Kaycee did not exist?” writes in response to Debbie’s apology, “Debbie, what kind of person are

you? What kind of woman does this? What kind of woman outright lies to people about their nonexistent child having a disease like AML” (Skintrade 2001)? Readers of her blog could not conceive that a person that shared so much and needed such support could be duplicitous—even if it was on the Internet, the great medium of anonymous communications.

For this reason, women who are writing and reading blogs to feel a part of a community have little to gain by representing themselves falsely. Whenever a woman starts blogging and replying to other bloggers’ posts, in an attempt to truly foster online *communitas*, where reciprocity is built upon mutual understanding of the bloggers’ identity and experiences, she has no motive—ulterior or otherwise—to be conniving and deceptive. Women who do not post their names, pictures, and other detailed pieces of information are generally met with skepticism in their posts, as is the case for the now defunct blog “Violent Acres” where the writer, “V” is branded everything from a “coward” to a “hypocrite” for writing harsh posts about mommy bloggers sharing personal information, while she shares nearly no personal information. Bloggers feel that if their identities are accurate, then others should be as well.

Echoing this position that the level of authenticity in virtual communities is high, Jonathan Paul Marshall in his work *Living on Cybermind*, discusses the notion of authenticity in virtual settings, “authentic behavior is often portrayed as therapeutic, as it reveals hidden, truthful, and therefore genuine parts of the self.” From a letter sent to Marshall by one of his informants she says, “Why do we call cspace [cyberspace] virtual if we find ourselves in it more truthful sounding to ourselves than we usually are at work or at home” (Marshall 2007, 105)? This illustrates the essence of Bakhtinian liminal

space where bloggers feel that they are free from the usual social strictures and that audiences will be more receptive to their musings online.

There are of course parody bloggers, TAMN of *seriously, so blessed* for example, who are quite clear about their pseudo-blogging identity and intentions. One hallmark of parody blogs is the inherent lack of consistent photos of the blogger, as was seen with the fraudulent Kaycee Nicole's blog and in TAMN's blog where not one picture of "her" is posted. Ultimately, readers of blogs—unless it is specifically a parody—will begin to distrust the author if there are glaring inconsistencies in the information they post.

In comparison to Charlotte Perkin Gilman's character in the short story "The Yellow Paper" who believes that writing will keep her sane, many mommy bloggers note that "escaping" and posting on their own blogs and reading the blogs of others staves off feelings of isolation and possible insanity in the daily life of a mother. Many mommy bloggers use blogging as a way to cultivate their identity as a woman with talents, thoughts, and feelings that expand beyond that of their children and home life. Kathy, posting on "The Art of Blogging" marvels at how powerful blogging can be, "Wow — and all this time I thought blogging was just another form of creative avoidance — a way to get out of doing the dishes or laundry. What ever [*sic*] the reason, it helps keep me sane" (Kathy 2008). Another commenter on the post, Leslie R., writes of both the ability for writing to keep women sane, as well as create a forum for good discussion, said, "Along with the aspect of how words and blogging have the ability to keep us sane, the respect that is present in the Segullah forum is remarkable" (Leslie R. 2008). Both of these women illustrate the inherent need that women have for belonging to a community

where they can revel in or rail against (or somewhere in between) their lives as women and mothers.

Building on the concept of blogging as keeping women “sane,” Amanda, the blogger of “Serenity Now—A Mommy’s Solution to Staying Sane” says on her “About the Blog” page: “This blog is my happy place. Staying home all day with two kids is enough to up anyone’s crazy quota. *Blogging is my attempt to branch out a little before insanity takes over.* I started writing again to exercise my rusty skills; and even though I might not be examining the works of Milton or Dickens, I’m having fun sharing my experiences with everyone who is so kind to stop by and read (Amanda 2008, emphasis added). Amanda illustrates that although many mommy bloggers note they are not what one would consider literary writers, the writing that occurs on their blogs is meaningful to them and their readers. The ability to express themselves through writing allows them to explore their identities as mothers and women.

Gabrielle Blair, the creator and writer for the blog “Design Mom” is a prime example of a woman who blogs to continue an identity that is both separate and intertwined with her mothering. When Gabrielle made the decision to remain at home after giving birth to her fifth child, she started “Design Mom” as a way to still indulge her sensibilities as a woman who has a professional background and interest in design. She notes on her profile that her blog is “where design and motherhood intersect” (Blair 2008). To her surprise, her blog took off quickly, and she found that she could have a career with her blogging. Gabrielle’s posts range from highlighting interior, print and textile design, crafts, fashion, and nearly anything that weaves together her identity as a designer and mother. Her children do appear on the blog, but generally with posts that

have something to do with design. While Gabrielle has not expressively declared that her blog keeps her “sane,” it is certainly a fulfilling experience for her and one that allows her to express her identity as both a designer and mother.

Mommy Blogs and Community

Mommy blogs are spaces where participants can engage in positive interactions that provide support, and share informal knowledge and narratives. As Leslie., the author of *Heaven's Outlook* says in a guest post, “The Art of Blogging” on Segullah.org, “We simply click, type, and publish, and a community is holding out their hands ready to embrace us” (Leslie 2008). The blogging community is strongly centered on like-interests or experiences and reciprocity. The highlight of nearly any blogger’s experience is seeing that a new comment was made on one of her posts. Commenting is the strongest way in which community and relationships are built between other bloggers. Ironically, new comments can be prefaced with phrases such as, “You don’t know me, so I hope it’s not weird I’m commenting on your blog.” Even though it is expected that at some point a woman will make a comment on a blog of someone she does not know personally, there seems to be the idea that even though the blog is public, she is intruding on the blogger’s personal space by making comments⁵. However, commenting is how bloggers strive for reciprocity.

⁵ Of course, some women do get startled by the concept that *anyone* can see and post their blog. If they become worried enough, they announce that they are making their blogs private, in order to control who has access to their content. These particular types of mommy bloggers are more interested in maintaining contact with friends and family and not extending their community online.

Start Here

Welcome to the SITStahood! We are a group of more than 8,000 women bloggers dedicated to supporting one another by leaving comments. Lots and lots of comments.

Whether you are new to blogging and looking for blogs to read, or a veteran blogger interested in expanding your readership, the SITS community is for you!

Figure 2. “The Secret Is in The Sauce: Start Here,” 2011

<http://www.thesitsgirls.com/start-here/>

Technorati’s 2010 “State of the Blogosphere” surveyed a sampling of mommy bloggers, and the number one answer for the question, “Which of the following activities do you participate in to attract visitors to your blog” was “comment on other blogs and hope for reciprocity.” One popular blogging website, “The Secret is in the Sauce” (SITS), brands itself with the idea that “the secret to success is support” and support equates to commenting on other blogs (Figure 2). SITS is one way that a woman can expand her community, under the guise of knowing that other women are hoping for comments from other bloggers. SITS also features bloggers daily, as a way for the featured blogger to gain readership. Of course, many bloggers simply engage in “blog-hopping” where you jump from a friend’s⁶ blog-roll⁷ to meet new bloggers. Others will blog-hop from a comment on one blogger’s post to meet other bloggers. Regardless of how one forms her community, the friendships she forms there are vital to her experience in the blogosphere and in real life.

Commenters on the post “The Art of Blogging” share their feelings of creating friendships online. “b.” writes:

I started [blogging] as a way to get my thoughts out of my head *with the hope* that I could make better sense and therefore better choices in my life. . . I decided at the beginning I would be open and real in sharing my thoughts. I needed to “say”

⁶ Friends in the blogging community can be interpreted as “friends in real life” or “friends only on blogs.”

⁷ A list of blogs that a blogger reads, on the either the left or right side of her blog.

the good and the bad. I had no idea anyone would be interested in what I had to “say”. What happened in the process is that I found out I wasn’t as weird as I thought I was. Sharing some of my story actually helped some people *worldwide!* That something I wrote was meaningful to someone else is truly amazing to me! (b. 2008, emphasis in the original).

Michelle L. expresses similar thoughts to “b.:

” “For me, the most sublime side effect of blogging is the people I meet. I now have blogging friends all over the country. People that I was MEANT to know. Like many others, I have also reunited with old friends and disconnected family members” (Michelle L 2008). Michelle L. and b.’s experiences are comparable to those of many other mommy bloggers like them. Mommy bloggers form a cadre of other bloggers that reflect their own mothering sensibilities. While these women may never actually meet in real life, they establish friendships via the blogosphere. And while many of these friendships are cultivated and remain solely in the blogosphere, it is not unheard of for blogging friends to meet up informally if they live close to each other or travel, formally at blogging conferences, or to collaborate on work outside of their blogs. One such example is of Alice Bradley and Eden M. Kennedy who met through blogging and have co-authored the satirical parenting guide *Let’s Panic About Babies!* published in March 2011.

Returning to the previously mentioned post by Alice Bradley called, “A Long Post About My Brains,” on her struggles with depression, it is clear the amount of support a blogger can receive from her audience. Bradley’s post received 185 comments filled with empathy for her situation. The large amount of comments she received is indicative of both her large readership and that bloggers want to help each other. Wellman and Gulia say of comment reciprocity that, “the process of providing support and information on the Net is a means of expressing one’s identity, particularly if

technical expertise or supportive behavior is perceived as an integral part of one's self-identity. Helping others can increase self-esteem, respect from others, and status attainment" (Wellman and Gulia 1999, 177). Leaving supportive comments is an integral part of the group-identity of mommy bloggers. At some point a blogger will need support of her own, and recognizing this, she comes to the aid of those bloggers that she associates with.

One of the most powerful examples of the blogging community, Stephanie Nielson, a mommy blogger who survived a plane crash after sustaining burns over 80% of her body, will be discussed in a later chapter. The amount of support that she and her family received after her accident is staggering, and she has indicated that she feels as though she will never be able to pay it all back. Nonetheless, as she hears of stories of burn victims or other women who need support, she will post information and hyper-text links on her blog, so her vast audience can help her pay it forward.

Blogging is allowing women to share the narratives of the common and informal, but important, experiences in their lives—the very essence of what makes them women and mothers. Through their writing—both in their own posts and comments they make to others—they are establishing their identity as women and mothers and receive support, in varying degrees, from the other bloggers that they meet in the blogosphere. The genre of the mommy blog is robust and full of enchanting writers who show the power of recording the narratives that make up their everyday experiences.

CHAPTER III

MORMON MOMMY BLOGS

On January 15, 2011 Emily Matchar, a self-described “standard-issue late 20-something childless overeducated atheist feminist, penned an editorial on Salon.com entitled, “Why I can’t stop reading Mormon housewife blogs” (Matchar 2011). Amongst her musings, Matchar noted that “these blogs are weirdly ‘uplifting,’” “[i]ndeed, Mormon bloggers like Holbrook [blogger of *Nat the Fat Rat*] make marriage and motherhood seem, well, fun. Easy. Joyful. These women seem relaxed and untouched by cynicism,” and “Mormon blogs are an escapist fantasy, a way to imagine a sweeter, simpler life.” The bloggernacle has grown exponentially since appearing on the blogosphere a decade ago, and the greatest growth has come from the shiny, effervescent genre of the Mormon mommy blog. While the genre of mommy blogs is characteristically effulgent of children, Mormon mommy blogs are even more so. Mormon mommy blogs are noted as being, for the most part, a glowing report of life as a mother and wife, delighting in crafts, featuring colorful photographs and posts filled with cute children and handsome husbands. However, Mormon Mommy blogs are more than a window into the lives of young mothers, they are a new form of Mormon folklore, which allows Mormon women to fulfill the role as record keeper, Mormon, and mother simultaneously, give women a powerful forum to discuss expectations in the culture, draw in etic perceptions from non-Mormons, and sometimes a chance to monetarily profit.

Record-keeping, Missionary work, and Motherhood:
The Bloggernacle Trifecta

Mormons are instructed to be a record-keeping people, to write their impressions and the occurrences that shape their life. A search on lds.org, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' official website, lists nearly 4,000 hits for the term "record keeping." Many LDS church leaders, at various times, have noted the importance of personal record-keeping, from the earliest of the LDS church's formation to current day. Wilford Woodruff, president of the LDS church from 1887-1898, noted to members that journal keeping was a way to benefit themselves, their posterity and the church (Woodruff 1853). In 1978, Ezra Taft Benson, a prophet in the LDS church said, "Our responsibility to keep a journal and to write our own personal histories and those of our ancestors...has not changed" (Benson 1978). Neither Woodruff nor Benson would likely have imagined a setting where Mormon faithful would take their journals as public and far-reaching as the Internet, but Mormon bloggers are merely a manifestation of fulfilling a commandment and molding to the zeitgeist of the digital age.

Blogging is a logical extension of personal journal writing, and many of the Mormon mommy bloggers note that blogging is one of the best ways to continue journaling. Shawni Pothier writes on her blog *71 Toes*, "I like to keep records. I've always been a journal keeper. I have about 25 of them chock-full of all the details of my life up 'til a few years ago. And from there I have a blog" (Pothier 2011). Commentators on the blog post, "The Art of Blogging" also wrote how blogging has become a form of journaling, "Before blogging, I would often journal the small epiphanies of my life, stashing them away to re-read and rediscover as time passed. Now, I put those small

moments on my blog” and “Like most mommy bloggers I started mine as a journal of sorts and it has now progressed into this lovely place where I connect with many of my favorite people” (Adri 2008; Michelle L. 2008). The ease and convenience that blogging provides for journaling has been capitalized by Mormon Mommy bloggers.

Another aspect of Mormon Mommy blogs that is not necessarily present in standard Mommy blogs is the idea of using blogs as a proselytizing tool. One of the greatest conceptions of the LDS church—both from emic and etic perspectives—is the idea of “every member a missionary” where members are encouraged to share the gospel with nonmember friends and family. The LDS church, ever mindful of changes in technology and how it affects their members has streamlined its official websites—lds.org and mormon.org—and has provided media rich resources to members and investigators alike.

One such page is the “Sharing via Blogs,” one of three webpages that center around the concept of “sharing the gospel online.” With the headings “What do I Share,” “Where Can I Blog? How can I read Blogs,” and “How Do I Promote My Blog,” the webpage gives suggestions for members on how to be member missionaries. The following is from the section “What Do I Share:”

Missionary work can be as simple as living the way a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is expected to live. Telling your friends you went to church on Sunday, for instance, lets them know you participate actively in the gospel. By your everyday actions, others can also know that Mormons neither smoke nor drink alcohol, coffee, or tea. With a blog, you have an even greater opportunity to share your beliefs. Talk about your day-to-day life. Remember that some who read your blog may not understand traditional “Mormon jargon”; be careful to be clear in your writing. Share what you learn when you go to Church. Share your family home evening experiences. Share how the Lord has blessed you. Bear your testimony where appropriate and if you are prompted by the Spirit. (lds.org 2011)

The suggestions listed fit into many of the postings that Mormon mommy bloggers post, and which undoubtedly cues readers that the blogger is a member of the LDS church.

Perhaps no other Mormon mommy blogger has such a high profile as Stephanie Nielson, author of the *nienie dialogues*. While Nielson's blog was popular prior to the private plane crash that nearly took her life in August 2008, this is what brought her blog to the consciousness of mommy bloggers—Mormon or not. While Nielson lay in a medically induced coma to heal from the burns that covered 80% of her body, the story of the vivacious young housewife fighting for her life circulated through the blogosphere at a rapid pace. She resumed posting on her blog in January 2009, and while some of her posts deal with recuperating from her accident, they largely possess the same *joie de vivre* that was present prior to the crash. The overriding themes of many of her posts are that things may not be perfect, but she and her family are happy.

Perhaps the largest change is that Nielson is much more vocal about her membership in the LDS church. While her posts prior to January 2009 did feature aspects of Mormon life—discussing General Conference, Family Home Evening, the Proclamation to the World, etc.—she now incorporates more of her beliefs into her posts by sharing her testimony of God's power or the restored gospel of Jesus Christ,⁸ and by providing hyperlinks to “spiritual enlightenment” which often go to pages on the lds.org website. She also provides links on her sidebar that guide readers to the Mormon Channel, a YouTube channel with LDS sponsored videos, her own Mormon Message video filmed for the Mormon Channel, a link to mormon.org—the website for church investigators, and a page where readers can give their address so Nielson can send her

⁸ LDS members often refer to their church as “the restored gospel of Jesus Christ” indicating the belief that their church is patterned after the church that Christ set up in his ministry.

favorite book, the *Book of Mormon*, with a personal letter from her. Nielson's dedication to the LDS church on her blog was even noted in the September 2010 *Ensign*⁹ in the article, "Role of Members Important in Sharing the Gospel Online," which stressed the significance the Internet has in sharing the messages of the LDS church.

In an interview with Nielson's sister, Courtney Kendrick, the popular blogger of *cjane enjoy it*, stated that for her, blogging is both a calling and an extension of her ecclesiastical mission that she went on in her early twenties. She states that all of her "[writing] is prayerful" and even if she is not blogging explicitly about her church that "there is something in there that expresses some aspect of being a Mormon. Whether it's finances or motherhood, or you know, marriage" (Kendrick 2010). Indeed, both Kendrick and Nielson blog frequently about aspects of Mormon life and are aware of the impact that has on their readers. Kendrick noted that she has sent missionaries to readers, that Nielson has received emails and letters of readers that have joined the LDS church, investigating its message after reading her blog.

While many Mormon bloggers would not necessarily consider their blog a missionary tool as much as Nielson and Kendrick do, they are acutely aware that many of their readers may not be Mormon, and that the lure of "the other," in this case, happy Mormon mothers, draws readers to their blogs. Naomi Davis, a popular Mormon blogger who recently gave birth to her first child, wrote a post about how grateful she was to be "sealed" to her family. When readers posted queries in the comments section about what "sealed" meant, she updated the post with a hyperlink to mormon.org that explains the concept of sealings and having a family into the eternities. Other bloggers will explain

⁹ The *Ensign* is a monthly magazine that LDS members subscribe to that has talks and uplifting stories, in addition to news about the church.

MORMON GLOSSARY

Since I'm Mormon and church stuff comes up frequently, I thought I would provide a little glossary for terms you may not know:

First of all church is three hours long on Sunday. Whew! It's divided into three meetings:

Sacrament Meeting-the main church meeting, like Mass. The speakers are almost always members of the congregation. Anyone over the age of 12 can be asked to speak.

Sunday School-divided up by age (adults all go together) about 45 min long.

Relief Society-women's meeting, about 45 min.(the kids go to **Primary**, Men go to **Priesthood** meeting, teenage girls go to **Young Womens**). There is also a once a month "casual, fun" meeting. I'm in charge of helping plan those meetings.

Celestial Kingdom-Heaven

Bishop-the leader of the congregation

Visiting teachers-all Mormon women are given a partner and assigned 2-4 women that they visit, call, give baked goods to every month.

Ward-the local congregation. It's all arranged geographically, so where you live determines where (and when) you go to church.

Figure 3. Jennie W, "Mormon Glossary,"

2011.

<http://beehiveandbirdsnest.blogspot.com/>

Mormon jargon in their posts, and some even post a glossary in their blog's sidebar. Jennie W., the author of *Beehive & Bird's Nest* is one such Mormon mommy blogger who utilizes a glossary (see Figure 3).

Another important facet behind Mormon mommy blogs is both the religious and cultural pull to be a mother. Motherhood is frequently lauded in *Ensign* articles and in General Conference¹⁰ talks. In the 1995 General Relief Society¹¹ meeting, President Gordon B. Hinckley read "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" which states, "Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children" (lds.org 1995). Another search on lds.org, this time using the term "motherhood" brings up over 500 articles or references. Indeed, within the LDS church and culture, motherhood is often considered one of the most important roles a Mormon woman can have. Lessons and activities in Young Women, the youth program for girls ages 12-18, are often geared towards preparing girls to be a mother. Relief Society, the auxiliary program for women

¹⁰ General Conference is the largest meeting held by the LDS Church. It is held semiannually in April and October. The leadership of the church prepares messages that they feel are pertinent for the wellbeing of the church, its members, and the world. General Conference is broadcasted in English and internationally in over 40 languages.

¹¹ Relief Society is the organization for LDS women over the age of 18. During the General Conference in October, a special General Relief Society meeting is held where the Relief Society presidency and the general presidency of the church prepare messages that they feel are pertinent for the wellbeing of the church and its female membership.

also features lessons and activities that stress the importance of motherhood, particularly in wards¹² that have a high concentration of young, newly married women. Recently, a Mormon Messages video paid tribute to mothering with a video featuring Elder Jeffery R. Holland, one of the church's Apostles, that affirms that "motherhood [is] an eternal partnership with God" (Holland 2010). The importance of motherhood that is emphasized from the top on down in the LDS church gives mothers support, vindication and honor for their work, and at times, mounting pressure to be perfect, the last of which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Mormon mommy bloggers will often post on their roles as mothers, as it is largely one of the most significant aspects of their lives. Nielson and Pothier are two examples of Mormon mommy bloggers affirming their role as "mother" on their blogs. From Nielson's 2008 collection of posts titled, "A Mother Heart, essays on Motherhood:"

I had given birth and had prepared a home for these precious spirits that surround me and consume my every thought and action. Proudly I can proclaim that I am a Mother. . . I love, respect, defend and sustain every Mother everywhere for their service, sleepless nights, homemade meals, infinite tasks, laundry loads, tears wiped, beds made, diapers changed, clean homes, and red lipstick efforts!
(Nielson 2008b)

Pothier echoes many of the same facets of being a mother that Nielson discusses on the post "Clarification:"

To me, motherhood is beautiful. A mother with a toddler on her hip, or a pacifier slung around her finger as a ring *speaks* to me. A mother who, tired from a day of working at an office, still comes home and puts on a puppet show with her children, or that mother who is willing to stop what she's doing and stoop down to look into the eyes of a worried child as she balances a load of laundry on her hip and lets the swirl of activity just be, even for a split second...those mothers know the art of motherhood. And I want to be like them. (Pothier 2010b)

¹² A ward is a congregation of LDS church members that is based on geographical location. Wards can range from 100-500 members.

For these two women, and the thousands of Mormon mommy bloggers in the bloggernacle, they recognize that motherhood may be a thankless job many days, but it is also a role where they find divinity and beauty, and blogging allows them to capture that.

That Mormon women exercise record-keeping online and chronicle the lives of their children is not surprising, given the religious impetus to do so. Andreas Kitzmann writes, “Diaries are also important as sites of memory, essential for constructing and preserving both individual and cultural identity (Kitzmann 2003, 53). Kitzmann’s assertion is especially true for Mormon mommy bloggers. Few religions place such an emphasis on motherhood as the LDS church. Mormon mommy blogs allow women to fulfill their roles as record keepers and rejoice in the role of motherhood at the same time.

Great Expectations: Authenticity, Mormon Mommy Blogs, and Perfection.

Mormon women have great expectations to live up to, as the stereotypical view of their roles essentially requires that they do all things perfectly and happily. Vickie Gunther, a Mormon author penned the poem, “The Girl in a Whirl” that illustrates the ethos of the perfect Mormon woman. It was posted on the blog *Feminist Mormon Housewives* in October 2007 and generated comments about the mythical Mormon woman and all that she accomplishes. It is so representative of what the cultural expectations are, that I would like to quote it in its entirety:

“The Girl in a Whirl.”

"Look at me, look at me, look at me now!
 You could do what I do if you only knew how.
 I study the scriptures one hour each day.
 I bake and I garden. I scrub and I pray.

I always keep all the commandments completely.

I speak to my little ones gently and sweetly.
 I help in their classrooms! I sew all they wear!
 I drive them to practice! I cut all their hair!

I memorize talks by the General Authorities¹³.
 I focus on things to be done by priorities.
 I keep our home organized, clean and attractive.
 I drop by with goodies and see the less active¹⁴.

I play the piano! I bless with my talents!
 My toilets all sparkle! My checkbooks all balance!
 Each week every child gets a one-on-one date.
 I attend all my meetings (on time! Never late!)

I'm taking a class on the teachings of Paul,
 But that is not all! Oh, no. That is not all. . .

I track my bad habits 'til each is abolished.
 I floss everyday! And my toenails are polished!
 Our family home evenings¹⁵ are always delightful.
 The lessons I give are both fun and insightful.

I do genealogy faithfully, too.
 It's easy to do all the things that I do!
 I rise each day early, refreshed and awake.
 I've learned all the names of the youth in my stake¹⁶!

I read to my children! I help all my neighbors!
 I bless the community, too, with my labors.
 I write in my journal! I sing in the choir!
 Each day, I write "thank you" to those I admire.

I exercise daily! My cooking's gourmet!
 My visiting teaching¹⁷ is done the first day!
 (I also go do it for someone who missed hers.)

¹³ The General Authorities make up the governing body of the church, and are comprised of the First Presidency (the prophet and his two counselors), the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, the Seventy (men that are called as "special witnesses of Jesus Christ" and are responsible for building up and regulating the affairs of the church in all nations), and the Presiding Bishopric (men who are responsible for watching over the physical affairs of the church).

¹⁴ The term "less active" refers to members of the LDS church who do not regularly attend meetings and may or may not keep the standards outlined by the church.

¹⁵ Family Home Evening is a night, usually Monday, for families to study church doctrine together and do other activities that unite the family spiritually and increase familial love.

¹⁶ A stake is a grouping of wards and is based on geographical location. Much of the leadership that exists in wards, the Relief Society, for example, exists at the stake level.

¹⁷ Visiting teaching is a calling that is generally extended to every Relief Society sister. The women are put in partnerships and are charged with caring for assigned sisters.

I love filling in for my cherished ward sisters.)

I chart resolutions and check off each goal.
I seek each "lost lamb" on my Primary roll.
I bottle our produce each summer and fall.
But that is not all! Oh, no. That is not all. . .

I went back to school to update my degree.
My studying earned me a new Ph.D...
I split with the Sisters¹⁸ who cover our ward
To spread the glad news that the gospel's restored.

I go to the temple at least once a week.
I make my girls' prom dresses--modest, yet chic.
My sons were all Eagles when they were fourteen!
My kids get straight A's!
And their bedrooms are clean!

I have my own business to help earn some money.
I always look beautifully groomed for my honey.
I grind my own wheat and I bake all our bread.
I plan our nutritious meals six months ahead.

I make sure I rotate our two-year's supply¹⁹.
My shopping for Christmas is done by July!
(It's out of the way early on for a reason.
I then can prepare for the real Christmas season.)

These things are not hard. It's good if you do them.
You can if you try! Just set goals and pursue them!
It's easy to do all the things that I do!
If you plan and work smart, you can do them all too!

It's easy!" she said.....

.....and then, she dropped dead (Gunther 2007).

Undoubtedly, one of the largest stereotypes which plagues the genre of Mormon mommy blogs is the idea that the women who are writing are "too perfect" and "too

¹⁸ The term of "split with the Sisters" refers to working with Sister (female) missionaries. As missionaries are in companionships of two, LDS members can volunteer to act was one member of the companionship and be partnered with missionaries to help instruct possible converts. Splitting allows missionaries to meet with more church investigators and is considered an extension of the idea of "every member a missionary."

¹⁹ LDS church members are instructed to have storage of food, water and other goods in case of an emergency or loss of income. A "two-year's supply" would refer to having enough food, water, clothing, and money to last for two years.

positive.” Matchar, justifying her love of Mormon mommy bloggers wrote, “Well, to use a word that makes me cringe, these blogs are weirdly "uplifting." To read Mormon lifestyle blogs is to peer into a strange and fascinating world where the most fraught issues of modern living -- marriage and child rearing -- appear completely unproblematic” (Matchar 2011). Indeed, many Mormon mommy bloggers *do* have blogs that feature themselves and their lives in a seemingly overbearing positive light.

In 2008, responding to the deluge of chipper and cheerful blogs, an anonymous blogger created *Seriously, so blessed!*, originally as a joke for a few of her friends, but it quickly snowballed around the bloggernacle. *Seriously, so blessed!* is a parody of the harmonious (and oftentimes self-centered) life that a young, cute, newly-married (or newly-mother) Mormon woman leads. TAMN, the “author,” fills her posts with her blissfully uncomplicated life, how much she loves diet Cokes, enjoys “mani-pedis,” and how she is singlehandedly the most righteous and gorgeous woman in her ward. TAMN resonated²⁰ with LDS women and non-members alike—with many commenting that they know someone just like TAMN. While the author does admit that she “cull[s] material from all over,” she also notes:

Of course I don’t think all Mormon women are like TAMN. In fact, I’d say most Mormon women are wonderfully far from TAMN. I know and respect tons of smart, capable, thoughtful, sharp, strong, non-materialistic, substantive, self-aware, kind, righteous, talented women who are nothing like TAMN. Except maybe with their Diet Coke addictions and their love of reality TV. (TAMN 2010)

However, the perennially positive musings of a young Mormon woman who, in her own opinion at least, is perfectly executing all areas of her life does hint at something deeper in the culture that spills over into the bloggernacle. Mormon women hold themselves to

²⁰ I use past tense as TAMN’s last blog post occurred on January 21, 2011, where is announced that JJWT, her husband, wants her to end the blog because he does not want his potential employers finding it.

an impossible and impractical measuring stick, as the humorous poem by Victoria Gunther illustrates. Between serving in the LDS church, taking care of their families, careers (if they are not stay-at-home-mothers), maintaining themselves and the house, it appears that their work is never done, and if the work is done, there is a sneaking suspicion that it was not done well enough.

In 2001, on the website Mormonmomma.com, a query by “an anonymous sister” asked, “There is such pressure to be perfect Mormon women, but how do we even begin a discussion on that topic? Will you mostly just discuss the usual angst over trying to be perfect” (Smith and Vincent 2001)? Alison Moore Smith and Jeannie Vincent, two of the site administrators each took time to write a response, and the subsequent post that featured the question and their thoughts garnered 65 comments. Perfection is a weighty issue among LDS women, and was even addressed in a General Conference talk by Elaine L. Jack, the twelfth general president of the Relief Society. President Jack’s conclusion is that the paragon of a perfect LDS woman does not exist, but that the “woman who is quietly doing her part. Generally unsung. . .” is real and is in the heart of each woman (Jack 1990). That the strivings to be perfect within such a homogenous culture spills over into the bloggernacle demonstrates how accurate these bloggers are being to their sense of self within the larger Mormon culture. Not only this, but the bloggernacle is giving Mormon women a chance to air their grievances with this mythical Mormon supermom, and come to terms with their own capabilities.

Pothier writes on a blog post telling titled “The real story.” In the post, Pothier notes that there are days where she struggles to be the “perfect mom,” but ultimately

comes to the conclusion that the “perfect mom” does not exist and the goal should be to be the perfect mother for your children:

But I'm a firm believer that although no mother can be "perfect" in the sense that she does everything right, every mother can be the perfect mother for her particular kids. I firmly believe that the "perfect mother" for our kids is a mother who tries her best to get help from up above, still makes lots of mistakes, learns from them, and helps her kids learn from what she learns along the way. In my mind a perfect mother is a very imperfect mom just trying her best. (Pothier 2009)

The comments on this post by other mothers expressed gratitude that Pothier could acknowledge the days that she falls apart, when the kitchen is a mess, and she “lost it with the kids” (Pothier 2009). Many commented that this post is exactly what they needed to hear and have a reminder that no mother is or *can* be perfect.

Echoing Pothier’s cry to forsake the ideal of perfection, mother of three Carolyn, the blogger of *teamBoo* says,

And please for the love of emotional eaters all over the world, let's all stop comparing ourselves to this mothering standard! With our negative inner dialogue, she often rears her ugly (but really stylish and smiley) head as we scour the blog world. It is a self imposed and complete fictional character. You have strengths that will carve out your own mothering niche. First be totally honest with yourself, then cut yourself a little more slack! Motherhood has so many variables, so there really is no magic formula that will ever prepare you for it. Making goals gives you direction, but clear your mind of expectation. Just like the rest of life, it rarely goes as planned. (Carolyn 2011, emphasis in original)

While hearing this information from the hierarchy in the LDS church can somewhat assuage feelings of guilt or incompetence, it is the words from women that are in the same stages of life that truly help women not become hard on themselves.

While there are certainly blogs that only highlight the positive aspects in their lives, by the same token, there are just as many blogs where the writers address their concerns, failings, and struggles—albeit just not in every post. It is important to note and

remember, that Mormon mommy blogs are virtual journals and scrapbooks, and that many are viewed by distant family and friends in order to stay aware of the blogger and her family. One of the main reasons behind the LDS church's edict to record life is the intent that posterity will read and learn from the lives of their forerunners. Continuing in this vein, many bloggers also note that one day they will turn their blog into a book for their children, via websites that cater to that desire such as Blurb.com. For these reasons, it clear to see why Mormon mommy blogs are not filled with more posts discussing the storm clouds in their life, and portray families that genuinely seem to be happy, which may come off as too "Pollyanna-ish." Perhaps more interesting is that Mormon mommy bloggers are aware of how rose-colored their lives can sound.

Pothier, in particular, writes several posts where she assures her readers that her life is not always what appears on the blog. From "Confessions," "I get the nicest comments on this blog. But sometimes, although I really do try to "keep it real" on here, those super nice comments make me think that maybe I'm not portraying the real me. The one who flies by the seat of her pants most days . . . and slams doors and is always running late. I'm a mess" (Pothier 2010a). While Pothier in many ways embodies the stereotype that has been foisted on the Mormon mommy blog, it is due to posts like these that the vibrancy and dynamic variation of the genre shine through, and that while perfection may not be attainable, happiness always is. Perhaps the most unique aspect of Mormon mommy blogs is that happiness for the life the writers are living comes through, and these beacons of happiness in the bloggernacle attract attention from those outside it.

The Lure of the Other and Etic Conceptions of the Mormon Mommy Blog

Matchar's Salon.com confessional about her obsession with Mormon mommy blogs is an examination of why she logs on daily to read the lives of women that she has never met nor does she have anything in common with them. She notes she likes the seemingly unfettered life of the Mormon mommy bloggers and how positive their lives appear. Matchar does touch on the concept of "the New Domesticity," a trend where today's women are becoming interested in "traditionally female tasks like sewing, crafts and jam making," and that Mormon mommy blogs offer a perspective of what a cheerful domestic life can look like (Matchar 2011). She concludes that while the life of a Mormon wife may not be "all crafts and cupcakes" the essential messages behind the blogs are "family is wonderful, life is meant to be enjoyed, celebrate the small things are still lovely" (Matchar 2011). While her article is an honest reflection on her enjoyment of Mormon mommy blogs, the people and lives they portray, the 464 comments generated by the article ran the gamut from non-Mormons either accusing the blogs of sinister ulterior motives, ridiculing LDS beliefs, commending them or confessing to the same obsession as Matchar, and Mormons typing frantically away trying to dispel any misconceptions expressed by other commenters.

Comments deriding the lifestyle of Mormons allude to the LDS church as some sort of nefarious cult that apparently is "aligned with the John Burch [*sic*] society" (Jamie01 2011). Jbrockd comes to the conclusion that all Mormon mommy blogs are "clearly produced" in a lurid marketing scheme (Jbrockd 2011). JCourt continues on the same vein, "It's totally manufactured propaganda to make Mormonism look like it's just great" (JCourt 2011). Interestingly, many of the non-Mormon comments focus on how

the *happiness* expressed in the blogs cannot be real. They do not express that the lifestyle is a paragon of perfection, which is how the blogs are often viewed by Mormon readers. This lends to the idea that Mormon readers of Mormon mommy blogs are not surprised that the blogger relates a *happy* life, and instead focus on the idea that the blogs show a *perfect* life. That a Mormon woman would be able to recognize the happiness expressed by Mormon mommy bloggers is attainable, but the perfection exuded is not, is another testament to the cultural strivings of perfection. That a non-Mormon woman would read the same Mormon mommy blogs and not see perfection, but only happiness and doubt that such happiness exists, is perhaps the product of “the modern world [that] doesn’t offer much of a roadmap” to “fulfilling, happy domestic lives” (Matchar 2011). Whatever the reason, the happiness that is palpable on the blogs attracts admirers and detractors. Many of the commenters state the cliché, “if it looks too good to be true, then it probably is” coupled with jabs at the women who chose to be at home.

On the other end of the spectrum, a convert responding to the “too good to be true” and “they’re too happy” comments states:

I joined the LDS church more than 10 years ago when I was 18. At the time, I remember telling my non-LDS mother all about how happy everyone was. Especially my boyfriend's parents, who had been married 35 years and seemed so fantastic to me. My mother was very cynical, and urged me to remember everyone had skeletons in their closet, no one was that happy in a marriage for 35 years (she's been married multiple times), etc, etc. I can honestly say, now with 9 years for them as my in-laws and 1.5 years living with them, they ARE THAT HAPPY. They are not hiding anything. Their church is also not forcing them to be happy. Their church simply teaches them to have the right priorities - God and Family - not Money and Selfishness. Sure, these bloggers lives are not perfect. I don't read all of them but if you read Stephanie for one day you know she had a horrible, life-altering plane crash and hello - her life is not perfect! But I do believe as a church we have something special that makes us happy. I've lived on both sides of the fence, and I am much happier now. It is not always too good to be true. (SoCal951 2011)

Other women chimed in stating that they also had advanced postgraduate degrees and careers while also being actively Mormon, a direct blow to comments that allude to the stereotype that *all* Mormon women have no education and stay home to have children. Many wrote that ideas similar to those expressed by “Mormonmom-forreal:” “No one tells me what I can or cannot write. My life is wonderful, not perfect though. I choose to write about the positive however, because I’ve learned that the more you focus on good, the more good you find” (“Mormonmom-forreal” 2011). While most Mormon mommy bloggers would likely agree with “Mormonmom-forreal’s” assertions, they would also note that there are people they’ve never met reading their blogs, and undoubtedly many of them are not Mormon.

When I interviewed Courtney Kendrick, she said that she believed her blog readership was split evenly between Mormon and non-Mormon readers. She also notes that many of her “hate emails” come from non-Mormons, and that the hate emails tell her she is destroying the feminist movement by blogging about how much she enjoys being a mother who stays at home. Non-Mormons lack the cultural context and knowledge, much less understand why Mormon mommy bloggers are so delighted to be able to stay at home. They are challenged by women happily perpetuating a stereotype that should have been put to rest decades ago. While any woman, including Mormon woman, who stays at home is not tearing down the advancements that the feminist movement made, the outsider’s contextual references, that happiness for women centers on success and power outside the home, make it so. Kendrick also offered her own thoughts as to why so many non-Mormon women read Mormon mommy blogs, “[I]t just it must be something, there must be something that is in there that is truth, that makes people feel like they want to go back, and hear more. I think, it’s just light” (Kendrick 2010c). Kendrick also mentioned a

woman who emailed her that said, “I hate the things you stand for, the things you say, but I can’t get enough of you. There’s something about you, that at the end of the day, I’ve got to have more” (Kendrick 2010c).

While Kendrick and other Mormon mommy bloggers are positive and good-natured, they are also quite visible in the bloggernacle, and therefore are not immune to trolls. Naomi Davis of *the rockstar diaries* went through a period where she considered ending her blog because the barrage of troll attacks was so severe. However, despite the naysayers, the bloggernacle is continuing to expand and has a large audience of readers both within and outside the Mormon culture. Whatever the reason non-Mormons log onto read these blogs, the commenters on Matchar’s article are partially right about one thing—many popular Mormon mommy blogs utilize marketing.

Yes, there is usually a little hyper-link button with phrases such as “I believe” or “Yes, I’m LDS” that link to mormon.org, the LDS’s website for investigators. However, there is no edict from church hierarchy to post a button or link of any kind to the LDS church—similar to how readers are not obligated to click on the links to the mormon.org website. Bloggers are also not compensated by the LDS church for posting information or stories about their experiences with their faith. Kendrick states on the right sidebar of her blog: “Though I am a happy Mormon, I do not officially represent The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (Kendrick 2011). However, Mormon mommy blogs, and in many cases blogs of young, hip, married women without children, do take advantage of large hits to their site through the form of advertising for businesses.

Technorati’s “State of Blogosphere” noted that the mommy blog genre has huge potential for marketing—and advertising on Mormon blogs is no exception. Athelia Woolley, the proprietor of the online retail store *Shabby Apple* decided to forgo traditional marketing and PR when starting up her business. She sent free dress samples to prolific bloggers such as

Nielson and Natalie Hill, the single writer of *Mormon in Manhattan*. If these women liked the dress, all Woolley asked for was a link to the store website in a post saying so. At the beginning of this unconventional marketing trick, she received 12,000 links and \$3,000 in sales from *Mormon in Manhattan* alone (Traster 2010). Other blogs, like Naomi Davis' *rockstar diaries*, advertise for photographers, small business operated by other women and fellow bloggers, and even advertise for other blogs that their readers might enjoy. Bloggers who advertise call it "sponsoring," leading to the idea that the blog and blogger are supported by these businesses. And in some cases, that is certainly true. Both Nielson and Kendrick make an undisclosed income off their blogs, and it is enough that their husbands do not currently hold jobs. While most blogs are not nearly so lucrative for their bloggers, many women are able to supplement the household income simply by engaging in record keeping. They profit from recording and living their lives, which, if anything, is a credit to the mythical Mormon industriousness and the lure that Mormon culture has both for Mormons and non-Mormons.

Mormon mommy blogs do provide The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with grassroots publicity, and whether the bloggers intend to be so or not, they are "missionaries" by showing outsiders how they live their everyday lives—even if, at times, it seems too saccharine to be true. These blogs also allow Mormon women to engage in discourses that they would not have otherwise been able to have, especially on the personal expectations of perfection. And while outsiders do experience the lure of the other and read these blogs, it is within and for the culture that these Mormon mommy blogs truly serve as expressive culture.

CHAPTER IV
EIGHT WORDS FOR EXPRESSIVE CULTURE:
THE MORMON MOMMY BLOG

As folklorist John Niles has opined, the Latin term for humankind should be switched from *homo sapiens* to *homo narrens*. The fabric of the human condition is spun with narrative, and as such, narrative is a pivotal aspect of any expressive culture. Burt Feintuch edited a collection of essays on what he deemed to be “eight words that stand for much of what is good and enduring in being human. Together, they constitute a common ground for talking about expressive culture (Feintuch 2003, 1). This work, *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture* introduces the eight words—group, art, text, genre, performance, context, tradition, and identity—and asserts that they are “deeply nuanced and always inflected by the moment” (Feintuch 2003, 1). As Mormon mommy blogs are of the moment and a relatively new form of expressive culture, it is necessary to examine how these words manifest themselves within the genre.

This chapter will focus solely on how the Mormon mommy blogs function for the group members itself, and will be broken down into four sections, although several different words bleed into others: Genre; Group and Identity; Performance and Text; and Tradition and Art. As context is mentioned throughout the thesis and is inherent in any discussion of the components that make up expressive culture, I’ve opted to leave it out and focus on the remaining seven words.

Genre

Genre is perhaps the most straightforward of the eight words to confer on Mormon mommy blogs. As genre is “the basis for classifying and authenticating forms,” it relies on definitions and categories (Harris-Lopez 2003, 101). The most basic definition of the Mormon mommy blog is, “a blog where the writer is both a Mormon and a mother, and many of her posts reflect on those two positions, either concurrently or separately.” After that term, the categories of Mormon mommy blogs are wide and varied. There are blogs that feature style and design, cooking/baking, crafting, life in general, and those that incorporate all of these topics and more. The biggest challenge facing the genre of Mormon mommy blogs is that stereotypes, while perhaps accurate in some cases, are usurping the many nuances that exist within it. Any attempt to define the genre precisely by using stereotypes is akin to nailing green Jell-O with carrots to the wall.

Emily Matchar’s article discussed in the previous chapter received numerous comments, and many bloggers on the bloggernacle analyzed it, many focusing on the stereotypes that Matchar herself was reporting. She claims that all of the Mormon bloggers she reads are composite:

They have bangs like Zooey Deschanel and closets full of cool vintage dresses. Their houses look like Anthropologie catalogs. Their kids look like Baby Gap models. Their husbands look like young graphic designers, all cute lumberjack shirts and square-framed glasses. They spend their days doing fun craft projects (vintage-y owl throw pillow! Recycled button earrings! Hand-stamped linen napkins!). They spend their weekends throwing big, whimsical dinner parties for their friends, all of whom have equally adorable kids and husbands. (Matchar 2011)

Non-Mormon commentators authoritatively state that all Mormons have several children, Mormon women are uneducated, and the quality of the photographs indicate professional

photographers disseminated by the LDS church headquarters as a means of subtle religious propaganda.

Jared Stanley, the husband of one of the bloggers mentioned in the article, created an account specifically to clarify a few misconceptions about the genre. He notes that his wife has a master's degree from a prestigious university and they only have one child. The professional photographs are not plants by marketing professionals, but are the result of the couple's own SLR camera and continuing to insinuate "how professional the photography is going to Liz's head." He concludes by stating they do not even live in Utah, and if the ideal life is a "stylish home and cool bangs then you are a strange person" (jaredstanley 2011). His desire to mitigate the stereotypes and frustration about the misconceptions of the genre are clear. Other responses on different websites by LDS bloggers also noted that not *one* of the blogs that Matchar mentions fits into the tidy little box that she, and others, have compartmentalized the genre in. Natalie Holbrook, blogger of *nat the fat rat*, responded to the comments, "What is happening here? Are we all so unhappy these days that a bunch of upbeat blogs portraying the positives of domesticity are such a freak show?" (Holbrook 2011). As mentioned previously, Mormon mommy blogs toy with the idea that any woman at home with her children must be suffering from what Betty Friedan terms "the problem that has no name" (Friedan 1997, 18). These blogs, however, show anything *but* "the problem that has no name."

Yes, there are long days filled with whining children and a house that stays a mess, but Mormon mommy blogs genuinely love what they do. This seems to cause tension and break the mold of how a woman "should be" in today's world. However, perhaps the reason behind the lack of the "problem that has no name" centers on that

housewives of Friedan's time did not have such an easily and public accessible forum. Even if Mormon mommy bloggers do stay at home, they have the world at their fingertips via the Internet, and they are able to form friendships with women who are similar to them from around the globe. Or, less convincingly, perhaps Mormon women are culturally acclimated to life at home. This last suggestion seems to be swerving dangerously into stereotyping Mormon women, and again it should be noted, that there is a plethora of Mormon bloggers who do not conform to the mold of the traditional stay-at-home-mother. Courtney Kendrick is one such example, and she will be discussed more in depth in Chapter V.

Of course, Mormons are not unfamiliar with stereotypes—the proverbial “favorite” being a quip about how many “mothers they have.” Even Mormons engage in stereotyping the group. *Seriously, so blessed!* is unparalleled in its witty satire, operates exclusively on stereotypes of the standard issue Mormon mommy blogger. The successes of this blog come as women, within the group recognize, and identity these stereotypes with *other* members of the group. The author notes in an interview with Mormonwomen.com that many readers send in blogs to her to glean material from and that “it’s always their sister-in-law’s blog. People are constantly sending me their in-laws’ blogs. Isn’t that funny? It’s never their sister or their cousin or their aunt” or presumably, their own (TAMN 2010). This is largely indicative of the idea that the person that TAMN represents is “out there in the bloggernacle” but *I’m not her*. After all, no one genuinely wants to believe they *are* the stereotype, or at the very least, have survivals of the stereotype in them. This distancing of the stereotype and placing it on a “friend of a friend” is incredibly folkloric in nature, and is similar to how urban legends

operate—“it didn’t happen to me, but I know someone who knows someone that it did happen to.” Additionally, it highlights that although the stereotype is largely a fabrication of Mormon culture and the people belonging to it realize that there is some truth to the stereotypes and try to distance their personal identity away from the group identity perpetuated in the stereotype. However, that is not to say that Mormons do not enjoy belonging to Mormon culture or that they avoid grouping with other Mormons. In fact, quite the opposite is true: Mormons do seek each other out, especially in the blogosphere.

Group and Identity

Traditionally, Mormons have been in an insular people. Brigham Young brought the pioneer saints across rivers and plains to settle in the Salt Lake valley—a place where they could practice their religion without the persecution and misunderstanding they experienced in the various states they tried to settle in. Even as Utah was populated with non-Mormons and church membership grew, Mormons inherently felt that inward shift to protect the soft-underbelly of a faith they hold dear. There is comfort in belonging in a group and knowing others belong in the group too. While the governing body of the LDS church encourages members to blog as a way to share testimony of the restored gospel, it is a wide extrapolation to presume that *any* Mormon mommy blogger is solely and only blogging for nonmembers. Certainly they are aware nonmembers may be reading their blogs, but it is not primarily the focus of the blog. As Ben-Amos asserts of groups, “both the performers and the audience have to be in the same situation and be part of the same reference group” (Ben-Amos 1972, 12). Therefore, Mormon mommy bloggers are

writing for themselves and for others in their same group. Blogging allows Mormon mothers to foster their identity as Mormons and mothers, as well as establish a community of friendships.

Mormons are acutely aware of their supposed peculiarity, so much so that they are intrinsically drawn to others like them. Finding oneself in the perceived other can be a way to connect with those that share the same belief system, and in many cases in Mormon culture can be terribly exciting. Such desires to find “us” in the “other” are highlighted in the Mormon based comedy *Singles Ward*, when one character, Hyrum, solemnly declares that various celebrities are Mormons and another character, Dallin, says with astonishment, “Really?” This pays homage to the Mormon urban legend that actor and comedian Steve Martin is Mormon.

There is comfort in logging on to the blogosphere and meeting others that may not know each other personally, but largely know and understand the worldview of being a Mormon, particularly in areas where members live are few. Commenting on “The Art of Blogging” post, Andrea R writes, “I’ve also felt lonely being a SAHM²¹ with little kids — even though I have a network of friends in my ward (which is a miracle, I know), I have found a network of women on the internet that I feel close to through blogging. I haven’t met any of them in the flesh, but I feel such a personal connection with them, because we have shared our personal struggles with each other (Andrea R. 2008). Another commenter echoes these sentiments, “Andrea, I’m with you, being a lonely SAHM. The blogging world has allowed me sisterhood in an[sic] physical area sparse in sisters (Jendoop 2008). Both Andrea’s and Jendoop’s comments are indicative of wanting to expand the virtual ward circle, as they may be geographically limited from

²¹ Stay-at-home-mother

meeting with a large group of Mormon women on a regular basis. Of course, many Mormon mommy bloggers are situated in Utah, which has the largest concentration of Mormons, but they may find that they have more “commonality of interests” with other Mormon women who are located elsewhere (Licklider and Taylor 1968, 40).

Dave Healy advances, “From one perspective, the Internet represents, for community-minded citizens, an almost limitless potential for an associational life. No longer limited by geographical happenstance to the interactions that might develop in a town or neighborhood or workplace, individuals can free themselves from the accidents of physical location to create their own virtual places (Healy 1996, 57). To use a term that Mormon women would know, posting on their own and other sisters²²’ blogs is, what I would like to call, virtual visiting teaching. In fact, those duties that traditionally encompass visiting teaching translate well in the virtual sphere: “emotional supports, companionship, information, making arrangements, and providing a sense of belonging are all non-material social resources that are relatively easy to provide from the comfort of one’s computer” (Wellman and Gulia 1999, 174). The LDS church’s focus on providing for each other came into full gear when one of the bloggernacle’s own, Stephanie Nielson required all of the TLC her virtual visiting teachers could give her. Gabrielle Blair, a fellow Mormon mommy blogger, orchestrated the first of many auctions to help raise money for Nielson and her family. A further discussion of Nielson’s and her family’s experience will occur in Chapter V; however it is poignant to note how quickly the bloggernacle community mobilized to provide support, and it is

²² In LDS terminology, male members are often called “brother” and female members are often called “sister.” This increases the feelings of familiarity and reciprocity, as all members of the LDS church are viewed as being a large extended eternal family. Particularly in Relief Society there the notion of belonging to a large group of “sisters”

reminiscent of how quickly Mormons respond to crisis and emergency in the physical world.

Text and Performance

Negotiating the void of sound and all of its intonations in transmitting the expressive culture could be problematic if the text of blogs is only viewed as mere words on a screen. However, the text *is* the performance and users on the Internet have sidestepped the inaudible aspect of it. Jonathan Paul Marshall in his work *Living on Cybermind*, notes the importance of emoticons in establishing intimacy within online communities, “offline, one way we recognize intimacy is with the ease with which the other person’s gestures and physical states evoke apparently similar or complementary states in ourselves. To recover this lost gesture, people use emoticons to try and express voice tone” (Marshall 2007, 118-19).

In addition to using emoticons, designs with the text—playing with the font, coloring, and sizing all provide the reader with the same functions that Marshall gives to emoticons. By using a variety of emoticons and text stylizations in Internet communication, we are able to convey meaning to the text that is lost without the expression of the human voice. More importantly, they are substitutions for tone, nuance, and for all of the carriers that words on the page do not have. It is clearly not the same as an actual oral transmission, but as the blogosphere operates by “word of modem” participants in this medium accept these stylizations of the text as substitutes (see Figure 4).

I think it's every woman's dream to decorate and **design a beautiful nursery**. I still haven't gotten to do it yet. Sure I've thrown some decorations in my kids' room, but believe ME that is not the same thing.

I want to be pregnant when I do it (so I have a particular baby in mind), a room completely devoted to that baby and NOTHING ELSE (<--That's huge for me) and spend nine months carefully considering every item that goes in that room.

I want *wood floors* and *soft plush rugs*. I want a white arm/rocking chair, I want a *beautiful white paned windowfriendly stuffed animals* that floods in the afternoon light. I want the walls to be a soft color, the bedding to be plush and calming, and to keep my baby company at night.

Doesn't that sound great?

Figure 4. Heidi Ferguson, "9 Adorable Nursery Ideas!"

<http://www.honeybearlane.com/2011/03/9-adorable-nursery-ideas.html>

Blogger use variations in the style of the text to make up for the absence of vocal intonation.

Vernacular is one of the cues that a blog is written by another Mormon. Jan Brunvand, as quoted in Richard Bauman's article, *Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore*, says: "a . . . concept that has grown out of recent collecting is that of the theory of recognizing 'folk groups.' Rather than defining such groups in terms of social, political, or geographic factors, *they may be identified for folklore purposes first by their distinctive folk speech and other traditions—the lingo and lore which set one group apart from others. The first test of a folk group is the existence of shared folklore*; then the background of this conformity can be investigated" (Brunvard 1968, 21-22, emphasis added). The verbal cues that signal to a Mormon reader that the blogger is also Mormon can be subtle—references to "the church," "blessing days," and "Primary"—or can be dramatic with terms such as "sealed for eternity" or "General Conference" (see Figure 5). Bloggers may also incorporate quotations from church leaders and include them on the sidebars of their blogs.

skipping off to
Eternity



Figure 5.
“Eternity” Button
from
<http://www.positive-lylovelynh.blogspot.com/>

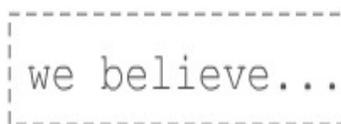


Figure 6. “We
believe” button
from [http://taza-
and-
husband.blogspot.co](http://taza-and-husband.blogspot.co)

i'm a mormon
fashion blogger

Figure 7. “Mormon
Fashion Blogger”
from
[http://www.clothed-
much.com/](http://www.clothed-much.com/)

A button with the phrase “I/We Believe” is a positive indicator that the blogger is Mormon, as is any other button with the LDS church’s official logo (see Figure 6). Such buttons will often contain a hyper link that will send the reader to the either lds.org or mormon.org. Others may place a button that not only denotes they are LDS but also where along the bloggernacle spectrum they fall (see Figure 7). The vernacular functions as a symbol to other bloggers that the blog is written by a fellow Mormon, which reinforces the idea of identity within the group.

If we agree with Kirshenblatt-Gimblett that texts in electronic mediums are “the event” or rather are a part of the performance online, we can see how using vernacular cues to signal to readers what group they belong to and presumably, what sort of text and performances should be expected. As asserted in chapter two, one of the defining features of the Mormon mommy blog is the transparent happiness that seems to emanate from every post. The word “performance” should be used very carefully here. In no way

should it imply that Mormon mommy bloggers are manufacturing their happiness. Granted, they are not happy *all* of the time, but when recording their lives, that seems to be the main thing that they want to record—their joys and good humor. In 1979 LDS President Spencer W. Kimball said of the future women of the church, “. . . the women of the Church are seen as distinct and different—in happy ways—from the women of the world” (Kimball 1979). Instead of branding all Mormon women bloggers as fake, it is highly worth considering that the happiness for life expressed in their blog is rooted in their culture, which as noted in Chapter III is a cultural context that other Mormon bloggers recognize and accept. Kitzmann asserts that “by writing from the heart and the home—those corporeal and cultural places where authenticity and reality are believed to reside (Kitzmann 2003, 55). If this is true, then Mormon mommy blogs could largely be considered some of the most authentic examples of Mormon culture on the Internet.

That’s not to say that *all* is cheerful in the bloggernacle. The wonderful possibility of blogging is that it is giving a voice to those that historically did not have one—in this case Mormon women are recording their experiences as what could be considered the three largest factors of their identity: mothers/wives, Mormon, and women. While there are certainly male Mormons that blog, they do not have the same sway or power as their female counterparts. In a religion that is highly patriarchal, blogging is a wonderful medium, because it allows Mormon women to express themselves and share their narratives. And while Mormons share a larger common core of belief, there are few monoliths within Mormon culture.

Blogging allows members of the LDS church to meet with others who have quibbles with certain aspects of life a Mormon woman. One forum in particular, the blog

feministmormonhousewives.org has given a voice to women who would have traditionally had to cagily express their “wild” feminist views on Sunday and at Enrichment Meetings²³. This is a popular forum for talking about inequality, grievances with the culture and sometimes even church doctrine. In the instance of Proposition 8, many bloggers on *Feminist Mormon Housewives* (FMH) responded that they were not supportive of the LDS church’s stance or involvement regarding Proposition 8. A few of the women stated that they had informed their bishop—the leader of the ward—that they would be attending other churches until after the vote was over, as they did not want to be inundated with political conversations at church. When sharing these stories on the blog, they received affirmation and support for their choices. In a religion that appears incredibly homogenized, participating in this blog is an important step for cultivating one’s individual identity within the group. This forum, as are all Mormon mommy blogs, is a boon for a culture in which men may, sometimes place women too high on a pedestal, and devalue their individual voices.

Tradition and Art

In the Internet-age time should be considered relative, especially when it comes to spaces within the Internet. While the bloggernacle has only existed in some form for the past ten years, that decade comprises several generations of websites, trends, and participants. Owing to the propensity for young, newly-weds and not so newly-wed mothers to desire an updated way to keep records and meet others, the tradition and genre of Mormon mommy blogs will be strengthened over time. Certainly not all female

²³ Enrichment Meetings are held monthly for the Relief Society, the auxiliary program of the LDS church. Meeting activities and topics vary by ward and location, and provide a way for women to socialize with each other, outside of Sunday worship meetings.

members have a blog, but with the growing numbers of blogs in the bloggernacle, it is not a stretch to state that many engage in blogging—either as a participant-observer or as an observer only.

Again, it should be mentioned that record-keeping, the most basic function of a blog, is a traditional event in the lives of Mormons. Blogging is simply taking this tradition to a different medium. Aside from blogs being thought of as virtual journals, they are often considered virtual scrapbooks—which accounts for the animated use of photographs and blog design. With the emphasis on family history in the LDS church, scrapbooks are often used to chronicle the lives of family members and are to be handed down to posterity. Blogging allows for the synchronization of journaling and scrapbooking. The tradition and art of Mormon mommy bloggers story-telling and artistic representation is as traditional as the cave paintings at Lascaux and a fine example of *homo narrens*.

Gerald L. Pocius notes, “Art is often unique, intensely personal, yet it can still relate to group concerns” (Pocius 2003, 57-8). This is especially true of the design forms that are utilized on blogs. Just as variations in text styling provides the reader with expressivity, the design forms of the blog—composition, color, and shading of letters—simultaneously, impact the text, and provide information about the blogger’s identity. While each blog has its own unique style, there are design forms that are consistent throughout—such as side bars and blog headers. Bloggers often select blog designs that reflect something about themselves and the messages they are sharing. One of these design forms is the blog header, which is what greets readers to the blog and gives a quick introduction to what the blog is about.



Figure 8. Blog banners on the *NieNieDialogues*. From top to bottom: July 2010, January 2011, February 2011, and March 2011. From: <http://nieniedialogues.blogspot.com>

Blog headers are usually colorful and have the title of the blog incorporated somewhere in its design. As most of the actual blog is made up of posts, it is one of the best ways that a blogger can succinctly express her identity to her audience is through a design form. Many of the Mormon mommy bloggers mentioned in chapter two, Courtney Kendrick, Stephanie Nielson, and Shawni Pothier all have blog headers that express their identities as a blogger. Kendrick considers herself to be amorphous in the Mormon mommy blogger genre. Reflecting this notion, her blog header states: “C JANE ENJOY IT {Writer. Blogger. Shapeshifter}” (Kendrick 2011).

Kendrick’s blog banner indicates to her readers that they should expect of variety of musings and posts. One post may feature her coming to terms with having two children and being pregnant, and another may touch on her testimony of the LDS church.

Nielson's blog banner is the most dynamic, as she changes it with each new month to reflect holidays, birthdays, and the seasons (Figure 8). The vibrant colors and elegant designs of Nielson's blog headers are a reflection of how she views life—bright, wonderful, and worth celebrating. Prior to Nielson's accident, her blog banner did not alter each month, although it did still have the blue typewriter graphic. While Nielson has not explained her motives for altering her banner each month, it serves as a constant reminder that she is still alive and doing the things that she loves doing—being a wife and mother. The varied designs also illustrate Nielson's love of beautiful things and objects with vintage lines. Pothier's banner features the title of the blog, *71 toes*, and brightly colored photographs of her family. Of the three bloggers mentioned, Pothier consistently posts about motherhood and her children. Her blog header, which shows her husband and her surrounded by their children mirrors that her blog posts are filled with photographs of her family and their experiences.

Side bars on blogs contain hyperlinks to websites that the blogger is either sponsored, enjoys visiting or has affiliations with, and messages about the blogger (the profile). Links on the sidebar to the LDS church's webpages are common, and often indicated with the coding of "I/we Believe" as mentioned in the section on text. Pothier's side bar devotes much of its space to her youngest daughter, Lucy, who has Bardet-Biedl Syndrome, a rare genetic disorder which causes blindness, obesity, and kidney failure, along with a host of other health complications. Pothier notes that raising money for blind children and research is her cause (Figure 9). Through sharing narratives about Lucy and her disorder, Pothier has raised nearly \$28,000 for Lucy and the Foundation Fighting Blindness (Pothier 2011). Through similar sidebar buttons, hundreds of thousands of

MY "CAUSE"



Figure 9. Graphic hyperlinks on Pothier's sidebar. From <http://71toes.blogspot.com/>

dollars was raised to assist Nielson after her plane crash. The charitable movement of the bloggernacle and blogosphere in regards to Nielson will be discussed more in Chapter V.

Engaging in blogging is a logical extension of traditional recording-keeping print mediums, and the design forms used on blogs allow women to refine their sense of self and group identity. Henry Glassie says this of how folk and lore bind groups together, "The group exists because its members create communications that call it together and bring it to order. Communications exist because people acting together, telling tales at the hearth or sending signals through computerized networks, develop significant forms that functions at once as signs of identity and forces for cohesion" (Glassie 2003, 182-3). Through

text, performance, and art, Mormon mommy bloggers exhibit signs of their own identity to and within Mormon culture.

CHAPTER V

C JANE ENJOY IT: THE BLOGGING EXPERIENCE OF COURTNEY KENDRICK –
WOMAN, MOTHER, AND MORMON

August 17, 2008 was an ordinary day for most people—perhaps one that they do not even remember. However, it was a day that reverberated in the blogosphere, and would prove the power of online communities. On this day readers of the *NieNie Dialogues* were logging on, expecting to find a picture-filled, whimsical post by Stephanie Nielsen. However, they found a short post from Stephanie’s sister, Courtney Kendrick. Kendrick’s post informed Stephanie’s readers that Stephanie and Christian were seriously injured in a small plane crash outside of St. Johns, Arizona. In the post, Kendrick included the link to her own blog, *c jane enjoy it*, so readers across the world could continue to get updates on the Niensens’ progress.

Kendrick, a blogger in her own right, had been elected by her family to continue Stephanie’s blog—to let her current readers (and the many more to come) be aware of what their family was experiencing and how Stephanie and Christian were healing. Kendrick quickly decided that the updates should happen on her blog, as she did not want Stephanie to return to her own blog with months of someone else’s writing.

It may seem odd to many that a family who had such a terrible ordeal to face would be so concerned about updating readers of their sister’s blog, readers that they nor Stephanie had ever met. But this is the pull of blogging and the power of the blogosphere for hundreds of thousands of people, as their blogs and the blogs of those they read distort the boundaries of geography and friendship.

Kendrick asked for prayers in her sister and brother-in-law's behalf. What she got was a virtual support group of thousands, willing to post about Stephanie's accident, auction off handmade crafts and donate money to a woman that they did not even know—at least physically, that is. Kendrick also found herself with a burgeoning readership; although she had a strong following before, it was nothing compared to what occurred in the aftermath of the August 17th post.

In an interview conducted on Monday, March 15, 2010, I was able to sit and talk with Kendrick about her blog. Through this interview, I was able to learn about the motivations behind her desire to blog, how blogging identity works for the blogger and for the reader, and the blurred lines of space and community in the blogosphere.

Motivations Behind Blogging

Kendrick's blog is cleverly titled *c jane enjoy it*—a pun on the eponymous *Dick and Jane* book series. She started blogging in September of 2005. Her first post explained her decision to blog:

'Enjoy it' she said to me, thinking as though her advice was falling on eager ears. *I will, if you will!* I thought, remembering her countless complaints. Her apathetic husband, delectant [*sic*] son and lazy five-year-old. "Enjoy it" has been offered up to me as a gift of consolation for three years of infertility. But couldn't that advice apply to just about anyone? And why can't I ever convince people enough that I already have that particular plan in motion? Now I will say to them, "Read my blog." And if they care, they will read it. And if they don't they will not. Either way, I *am* enjoying it." (Kendrick, 2005, emphasis in original)

As a young, married, Mormon woman, Kendrick was acutely aware of the absence of her own children in her life. She struggled with unexplained infertility and the inability of friends and family to understand that she *was enjoying* her life. This desire to show

family and friends that she could enjoy life without having children was the impetus behind starting her blog and its title.

Kendrick and her husband, Christopher, were blessed with a baby boy, Anson Idaho Kendrick, in May of 2008—after six years of unexplained infertility. The season of infertility was banished--a relic of the past, documented in three years' worth of posts showing the world how she did *enjoy it*. It would seem, as the reason for Kendrick to write on her blog no longer existed, that she would discontinue posting. She thought about it for quite some time. In June of 2008 she sat down to write her last blog post:

Last week I sat down to write my final post. I felt that I was standing in the crossroads of blogging and mothering without any idea how to connect the two. I wasn't crazy about my blog becoming a journal of my journey to the motherhood dimension, but I was also hard pressed to find anything else to write about. I wake-up and mother, I eat lunch and mother, I sleep and mother...

But as I wrote the promised post, I was hit hard with a writer's block which started in my head and slowly flowed to my gut wherein it manifested itself as a terrible, horrid stomachache. No matter how I fought through, the blockage remained. I was forced to admit that the time for blog-ending had not yet arrived. c jane (reluctantly) stay. . .

Maybe I do have more blogging inside my soul. Maybe I can figure out how to be a (gulp) mommy blogger. Maybe the public record of my life can serve a purpose. Even if all I do is nurse my infant, burp my infant, engage my infant and repeat. Welcome to my new life (does it sound familiar?)

So I blog on, my friends. More stories about Chup²⁴, The Chief²⁵ and me to follow. My posts from here on out might wax and wane with inconsistent droppings of literary doo-das. I ask you to please remember, I am still trying to figure it all out. (!!!)

Of course, I want to thank you for reading my stories . . . and letting me read yours." (Kendrick 2008a)

Kendrick's apparent discomfort at becoming a mommy blogger is tangible. Could she write about her experiences as a mother in a blog, and if so, would that mean that motherhood encapsulates her identity? As mentioned in previous chapters, the genre of the Mormon mommy blog suffers from the idea that the writing is mere triviality and the

²⁴ Chup is Kendrick's nickname for her husband on her blog.

²⁵ The Chief is Kendrick's nickname for her son on her blog.

experiences are not universal. Kendrick's posts before she became a mother do reflect her Mormon sensibilities, with the writing focusing on her own thoughts and experiences as she enjoys life without children. As she distances herself from the genre of "mommy blogger," much less a "Mormon mommy blogger" she is effectively distancing herself from readers' preconceived notions that her blog is "just another mommy blog." Of course, such perceptions discount the power of ordinary women engaging in autobiographical narratives about their lives as they are experiencing them, and how vital the community of mommy bloggers is. As Morrison notes,

The social exigence of personal mommy blogging serves to mitigate these dissatisfactions [of the loss of traditional supports of mothers] and resolve these contradictions [media representations of motherhood vs. the reality of motherhood] by fostering fora for adult self-expression, for the articulation of a more nuanced and rich script of mothering, and for the creation of a supportive community of peers with whom to share the full experience of parenthood. (Morrison 2010)

To the outside, the mommy blogs may appear superfluous, but for those inside the mommy blog group they are a powerful form of self-expression for mothers and women.

Only two months after Kendrick grappled with her decision to press forward in the blogosphere and bloggernacle as a Mormon mommy blogger, she was informing the blogging community about the plane crash that burned over 80% of Stephanie's body and 30% of Christian's body. Instead of writing about her slow and steady transition into motherhood, Courtney would be writing about being a mother to not one child but four, as she and her husband took in Stephanie's three oldest children while the Niensens healed in the Maricopa Medical Center. Her posts showed her doing a different type of "enjoying it." She was trying to make sense of and the best of a situation that had been thrust upon her entire family.

Kendrick's posts became medical updates, excursions with Stephanie's children, ways to help and donate to the Niensens, quiet moments of introspection and reflection, and above all else, showed faith that whatever happened would be for the best. For six long months, Courtney was vigilant in letting the world know what was happening in her life and how the life of her sister swayed precariously from uncertain survival to miraculous recovery.

This "Accident Era"²⁶ of Kendrick's blog, in her mind, contains some of the most beautiful pieces that she has written. While her writing is masterful to read at any time, her pieces during the "Accident Era" were some of her best. In particular, the post titled "Unexplained Infertility Now Explained," Kendrick reflects on how she realizes she was not able to get pregnant and have a baby until shortly before the accident because God knew that Claire, Stephanie's oldest child, would need the distraction of mothering Kendrick's baby, when Claire was without her own mother. She called it, "A tender mercy with just the right timing. Now I get it" (Kendrick 2008b). Many of Kendrick's posts at this time are distinctive in Mormon and Christian themes. Many times, Kendrick refers to that she and her family has faith in families and the plan for the hereafter, alluding to the LDS belief that families are forever. The experiences Kendrick and Nielson share on their blogs are woven with their faith and religion.

As Stephanie slowly healed from her injuries and regained her strength, Kendrick knew the time would come when her blog would return to *c jane enjoy it* and Stephanie could continue her story for herself. On January 7, 2009, Kendrick announced to the blogosphere that Stephanie would be returning to the *NieNie Dialouges* on January 16th:

²⁶ The "Accident Era" is a term I coined to describe the posts on Courtney's blog from August 2008 to January 2009.

I saw my sister completely herself with light in her eyes. So I asked her, if she were ready to take back her blog. Her loved hobby. Her public. (Which had grown immensely since sleeping.) She agreed to continue her own story (in some form or another) by January 16th (of this year)... And with two of her children, I loaded up the car and came home. *Home to see that my blog looked like me again* (with my tongue stuck permanently in my cheek . . . and wings). Which can only mean that I am about to enter into yet another phase of writing. Of what substance I cannot say, only that as I kissed my baby good night I felt like he had his mother back and with that I had my sister back. And in the near future her children will have their mother back. Which, in the end is all that matters. So let this be written. (Because it has already been done.) Amen. (Kendrick 2009)

Kendrick notes that as the “Accident Era” concludes, her blog could revert back to the stories and musings from her own life. Her blog changes, however, and she is more forthright, more willing to talk about the things that were most precious to her. She says that she found her religious voice and how it varied from what her blog may have started out as:

And so I think, I started like, “silly silly blogger” and then I found this religious voice. And I really love that. And I’ve kind of incorporated them both into my personal blog. And they kind of just combine, [and] became who I am today. Except for, now my readership is so big, that there is absolutely no way to judge how that voice comes across.” (Kendrick 2010c)

Kendrick, a devout member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, shares her testimony through her blog. She writes about aspects of her religion that are especially pertinent for the events in her life. She tries to write in such a way that those not of her faith can understand the terms and why it is important to her, but at the same time she acknowledges she cannot let her blog get turned into an online Mormon Glossary. Kendrick served a religious mission for her church as a young twenty-something and considers her blog as an extension of her mission. When someone expresses an interest in the qualities of her life and wants to know more about the church, she says that, “the purpose of my blog is being, is fulfilled” (Kendrick 2010). Kendrick takes blogging about her religion seriously, and it fits nicely into the concept of the

bloggernacle. She feels that her continued desire to blog stems from a “calling”²⁷ from God. When asked why she continues to blog, she answered:

I feel it’s a calling from God. I feel called and asked to do this from a higher source, which would be God for me. I feel that way because every time I’ve tried to quit, and I have been very passionately excited about quitting. I simply can’t do it. I can’t sleep at night. Anytime I think about quitting. There is a definite, I thought it might have been withdrawal, you know. But there is a definite feeling that I have a calling in life. And this it. And I just need to keep going (Kendrick 2010c).

As noted in a previous chapter, Mormon bloggers are characteristic in writing about their faith and sharing their involvement within it. For Kendrick to feel that her blog is an extension of her religious mission and a calling, she is undoubtedly following the call of her church leaders to engage in record-keeping and use the Internet to spread the good news of the gospel.

Aside from being more open about her religion and how it influences her life, Kendrick has taken to writing posts about womanhood and her attempts to make sense of her role as a woman and feminism. While she has written posts that received a strong reaction, three posts in particular draw the acclaim and the ire of her readers. “Orabelle Was A Minx,” “The Exercise of a Housewife,” and “I Am Not, It Turns Out” are Kendrick’s thoughts on women and what she views as her ideal for *her* life. Those are the key words: *her life*, and her own perceptions of her identity as a woman. Kendrick is aware that the identity she has for herself may clash with some of readers. In the conclusion of “I am Not, It Turns Out,” a post where she expounds on whether or not she is a feminist, she writes: “And days like today when a coughing fit in the final month of my pregnancy induced spontaneous vomiting which in turn released all contents of my

²⁷ A calling refers to any office or role that a member of the LDS church is called to perform. Most often, the member is called by local church leaders to a particular calling, and is “sustained” by the congregation by the raising their right hands.

bladder before I could make it anywhere near a toilet, I think two things: Male and female will never be equal. And, I (*me, personally, c jane as of right now, in my life*) wouldn't want it any other way” (Kendrick 2010b, emphasis added). The urgency and desire that she has to impress upon her readers that these are *her* thoughts, and not a prescription for womankind as a whole, are tangible.

This particular post elicited 679 comments—some in rapturous agreement and others not nearly so effulgent. Kendrick knows that when she writes something like this, it will get a strong reaction from both sides, but she feels that she must write what is in her heart and head. She’s prayerful about what she wants to write, but at the same time, she knows what she needs to write and she will do it:

For instance the Feminist post, I had this feeling for a long time that I needed to write it. And I just kept saying, “I know what’s going to happen.” I’m gonna write it and I know what’s going to happen. I just felt like I gotta do it, I gotta do it, And then the night that I was going to write it, I just got really tired and went to bed. And [I] woke up in the middle of the night and it was all in my head. I went to my computer and wrote it all down and pressed publish and went back to bed. And didn’t think about it after that. I just thought, ‘there it is.’ You know, it was very therapeutic. I felt the Spirit²⁸ help me write that post. (Kendrick 2010c)

Again, Kendrick strongly feels that her blogging is larger than herself, and a representation of her religion. That Kendrick feels that she is being guided by a higher power to publish particular posts both explains her hesitancy to write certain posts and her ultimate decision to publish them on her blog. Many members of the LDS church believe that when the Holy Ghost, or Spirit, gives a prompting (a call to action), the recipient should follow through, in an exercise of faith. These exercises of faith are encouraged by LDS church hierarchy. From LDS apostle Elder M. Russell Ballard:

²⁸ When members of the LDS church speak of the Spirit, they are referring to the Holy Ghost, the third member of the Godhead, who inspires feelings and thoughts to help members know what they should do or not do in their lives.

“Listen to the promptings of the Holy Ghost. . . . You’ll have a prompting to say something or to do something in relationship to those that you serve with or in your neighborhood or so forth. Do it! Trust the Lord” (Ballard 2009). Kendrick’s decisions to follow through on promptings to write specific posts, even if she knows they will generate a maelstrom of negative comments and emails, is indicative of her faith.

Just as much as Kendrick feels her blogging is a calling from God, she desires to be a “hero for the housewife,” which motivates her to write those controversial posts on womanhood:

I think I kind of feel like the Housewife doesn’t have, there’s not a lot of heroes, for the Housewife. And I don’t mean like the Orabelle type housewife. I mean the housewives of today, who are happy at home. Happy with their husbands, happy raising their children. Not that it’s easy, not that it’s the most glamorous. . . .

It just never seems like to me, maybe in the Mormon culture, definitely [there are], but not very many literate, eloquent housewives. It seems like those women who, in our church, who write about being a housewife, they are either follow the example of our Church leaders, who seem very well put together. You know. And they’re wonderful. They’re great. I look up to them. Or you’re going to get the Feminist Mormon Housewives who might be a little more like, “This sucks. And I’m going to endure to the end.”

And there’s not just like, to me, just kind of feels like there needs to be a writer who can write *about being a housewife and stick up for that. And be proud of that.* I think that drives me. When I write those posts, I think, *I think I don’t necessarily think I’ve got to write this so it’s true. You know how sometimes that happens .People feel like if they say it then it means it’s true. But I think it just, means, that I need be okay, with the fact that I’m a happy stay-at-home-white-, you know, -Mormon, you know. That’s my experience. I’ve got to own that experience. Just as much as anybody owns that experiences. You know?*

And sometimes I feel like I should feel like, I should feel bad for being upper middle class, white, stay-at-home-Mormon-Housewife. But why should I? When that is my experience? And I need to own it. I think the more I own my experiences, the more I write about these experiences, the more I own them. The more I feel like my voice is getting stronger. And then you know, I feel like, I’m representing who I really am and, you know, there is a lot of misrepresentation on blogs. My life is so perfect, so lovely.” (Kendrick 2010c, emphasis added)

Her desire to represent her own experience, and be truthful to it, reflects her awareness of her identity—both on and off the blogosphere. She also notes that she is truly writing her

experience and not trying to misrepresent any part of it as a “perfect” life, alluding to the critique of Mormon mommy blogs as only illustrating the positive.

Identity in Blogging

One of the unique parts of the interview process with Courtney was the ability to see and hear her, physically. Most of her posts have accompanying pictures of her, and her voice is certainly in her writing, but the reaction to seeing and hearing physically was something I did not anticipate. The lisp she insisted was her constant companion was only present when she got excited and consequently talked faster. Retro House, the name of her home, was even more charming in real life than the pictures she posted. Her gold walls, which she was so proud of, are not flat and one dimensional, but warm and inviting. Kendrick, somewhat nervously, apologized for her messy Green Room—a room that would surely never be photographed and posted on her blog. It was refreshing to see her in her natural environment, and out of the space of the blogosphere. During the interview I thought, “Here is a woman, whom I felt I knew from her posts, and I don’t really know her at all.”

The construction of identity on the Internet is often an abstract process. Wood and Smith state that identity in real life is a “complex personal and social construct, consisting in part of who we think ourselves to be, how we wish others to perceive us, and how they actually perceive us” (Wood and Smith 2001, 47). Identity, however, on the Internet is more a matter of self-presentation, “setting forth an image we want others to perceive us” as (Wood and Smith 2001, 47). In reading blogs, the reader will construct who this person is. This will be done most by internalizing what the blogger is sharing in their posts—regardless of whether if it is an authentic representation or not, it becomes

so. Another part of the constructing process is the reader herself. Who is she? Where does she come from? Can she relate to what the author is saying? Why or why not? All of which provide the context in reading blogs and therefore the interpretation of the blogger and messages she shares.

The first aspect of identity in blogging is, of course, how the blogger sees herself. Kendrick's early writing style is very tongue in cheek, as she recognizes that blogging is an exercise in narcissism, and wants to have some fun with her writing. During the "Accident Era," when she developed more of a following, she had to forgo her self-described snarky and witty writing for a more gentle and serious tone. Readers who had never been to her blog before, or did not explore her archives, were developing ideas of Kendrick and her blog that she was not necessarily comfortable with.

Bloggers have the ability to control what their readers see of their lives, but they do not have the ability to control *how* their readers see it. Many, not realizing that Courtney had been writing for several years, assumed that *c jane enjoy it* was created for the express purpose of updating the world on Stephanie's progress. When Kendrick would take a post to write about herself, she would receive a deluge of negative comments, asking why *she* was writing about herself when it was her *sister's* blog.

Kendrick discussed that negative ramification during our interview:

And that was really hard, because I was like no, this is something I have cultivated, and this is something that I have worked towards. And it was hard to let go of that identity. It was hard to be, you know, selfless, and say this is for my sister only. But you, know, it was also my outlet, it is also what I did to cope, and, and, to feel like I was making sense of it, so I had to, I had to write about me, and you know, us. (Kendrick 2010c)

Courtney's relinquishing of her identity on her blog during the Accident Era was difficult, and ultimately created a persona that Courtney was not comfortable with.

Comments and emails littered her blog and inbox, praising both Kendrick and her husband for being so selfless and willing to take care of three of her sister’s four children. Kendrick expresses genuine confusion about these sentiments—was not what she was doing something that any sibling would do? She felt as if her readers were placing her up on a pedestal, constructing a woman who was entirely giving and selfless, with little room for sarcasm or playfulness—in some regards, the stereotypical view of a Mormon woman.



Figure 10. “Angelic Blog Banner” that Kendrick put up in the midst of blogging about Stephanie’s accident and taking care of her children.

One day, in the midst of the “Accident Era,” Kendrick’s readers were greeted with a new blog banner and layout (Figure 10). The banner featured Courtney, radiantly glowing, with angel wings and a halo. Many of the readers laughed at it, while some wrongly interpreted it as a way to prove just how angelic she was. Her intent in putting that new banner on her blog was to show her readers a part of who she *really* was:

One day I was thinking I would love to be able to be in character in and have that be a theme on my blog. And an Angel just came to me because, people were like, so, “C jane you are such an angel for taking your sister’s kids. You’re such an

angel for this and an angel for that.” And the truth is really, I’m really not. I wouldn’t be described as angelic at all. It is kind of tongue in cheek. I was really writing about really tender and sweet things. And I had this fear all along, that these people were going to start following me, and then at some point, I wasn’t going to write about these things anymore. And they, you know, they were going to think, you know. Who is this? And a lot of them did. And once I got back to writing about me and my life again, a lot of them were extremely disappointed that I wasn’t this person. I think that putting the angel up on the title, was kind of my way of saying, “If you wanna keep going, you’re going to get more of this. I’m a little more tongue in cheek. And I’m not as sweet and saintly as you’ve seen me these past six months. If you want to keep going.” If that banner bothered you, you probably need to move on. But if you could get that banner, and it made you laugh, and you kind of got it, you could probably feel comfortable and continue on. (Kendrick 2010c)

The banner was an attempt to knock herself off the pedestal that her readers had placed her on and erase any lingering ideas that she was an angel all of the time. It is also an attempt to debunk any stereotypes of Mormon women as saintly, selfless, women.

Kendrick is bemused that many people lauded her decision to take care of her sister’s children. Caring for family in times of need is not monopolized by the Mormon culture or church, but clearly many of Kendrick’s readers believed it to be so.

Kendrick was also faced with readers wanting her to be more like her sister.

Kendrick and Stephanie’s blogs are quite different. Stephanie’s blog focuses on the everyday positives and loveliness about being a wife and a mother. Kendrick will throw in a post about how she and her husband have matching fever blisters, and is not it so “romantic!” While Stephanie and Courtney may have the same goals in being “heroines for the housewives,” they approach it drastically differently. Stephanie is “going to be your Mormon child-bride that never went to school, and never cared about expanding the mind” (Kendrick 2010c). While Stephanie may be a different type of “heroine for the housewives” than she is, Kendrick states: “And you know it’s interesting to me, because the more I’m comfortable with, with my type the more I see how beautiful her type is”

(Kendrick 2010c). Stephanie will be the one that slips easily into traditional roles while Courtney, who enjoys being a mother and wife, will try to poke the boundaries of those roles and see where she fits:

I find it interesting, interesting study to read the blogs of moms, stay-at-home moms who educated and read versus the moms that got into it, and are creating a whimsical world for them. So it seems like, there are moms who if they have 15 minutes, they are going to read and there is going to be the moms who have 15 minutes who are going to make something cute out of felt. You know what I mean? And I kind of feel like I am in the middle somewhere. . . I don't belong to either world. And there's gotta be some women out there who feel the same way. (Kendrick 2010c)

Courtney also maintains that her blogging persona is similar, if not the same, to how she is in life out of the blogosphere. However, when asked if Stephanie's blogging persona was similar to her day-to-day identity, Courtney answered, "I would say no. And I think my family would say no. But I think there are sometimes when you get those glimpses of her" (Kendrick 2010c). This raises an interesting question about how bloggers—not simply Mormon mommy bloggers—create identities on the blogosphere and how they engage in the process of self-presentation. Stephanie's blogging persona *now* is different than how it was before her crash. Prior to the accident, her posts centered on her life as a mother and wife with gorgeous photographs chronicling her day-to-day experiences. While many of Stephanie's posts fit into that mold, she now writes about her experiences with healing from her burns, and there are more traces of her dealing with her struggles in life than there were before. Despite this, Stephanie remains the quintessential Mormon mommy blogger, posting about lovely days with her husband and children, and photographs of her whimsical house and clothes.

Kendrick views her blog as a "Mormon lifestyle" blog, because she recognizes that she does not fit in with the stereotypical mommy-bloggers, but hers is not a blog

strictly devoted to philosophy and deep posts that examine the world and her place in it. She straddles the line between mommy blogger and not, and she recognizes that this ambiguity in what she “is” as a blogger may be challenging for some to reconcile with. She stated, “With a blog like mine, I think people don’t know what they are going to get, and I think sometimes it makes them feel really uncomfortable. I think that’s why I generate a lot of negative feedback, because people just are not concrete on [what my blog is and who I am]” (Kendrick 2010c). Courtney’s own perception of her blog illustrates that even the idea of genre in blogging is not as concrete as one might expect. She clearly is a Mormon mommy blogger, and she is a part of the bloggernacle, but she hesitates to define herself or her blog through those characterizations alone.

Regardless of how Courtney views herself on her blog or how others view her, she has a tremendous following. While Kendrick did not give a specific number, she noted that thousands read her blog each day. Women log on every day to see what she has to say. They become lost in her world for a moment and revel in the experiences she chooses to share with her readers. It is a surreal experience to be so concerned and devoted to a person that one has not met, but this feeling of *communitas* is strong for all bloggers. And it is this online community that came to the aid of Courtney and her family when they needed it most.

Community in the Blogosphere.

The call came out for *prayers*, not bake sales, not auctions, and certainly not donations. The outpouring of love and generosity that the Nielsen and Kendrick families received was staggering. The online handmade market, Etsy.com, organized a benefit sale with all proceeds gained from wares of various Etsy sellers going to the Niensens' recovery fund. Gabrielle Blair, of Designmom.com, dubbed August 28, 2008 "Nie Nie Day"—a day where she hosted a silent auction on her blog with over ninety bloggers donating handmade crafts (Blair 2008). Countless others posted the story of the Niensens on their own blogs and donated directly or through purchasing items in auctions or shops that designated that the proceeds would go to the recovery fund.

Kendrick posted this on her blog on August 26, 2008, a mere ten days after the word of the Niensens' crash appeared on the blogosphere:

Neighbors have showed up with food, cereal and treats (never turned away). My friends greeted me first at the Balloon Launch and cried with me amongst the crowd. Steph and Christian's friends have created websites, sent packages to the kids and stepped up efforts for donations. I have decided to turn no one away, because I want to give anyone the opportunity to feel the good that comes from the serving. It's a story of begatting [*sic*] love.

And then there is this blogging world which has overwhelmed me and my family. Strangers who e-mail the most inspiring words (forgive me, I am a couple days behind on e-mails). Your comments on this blog have made Chup cry on several occasions. When I feel my heart starting to despair I have online access to inspiration. I love hearing about how you love my sister. (How could you not?) Family members feel the same way about your responses. Thank you for praying for someone you know through a blogspot. Please know, it does make a difference. Huge. (Kendrick, 2008)

Kendrick's response shows how strong *communitas* can be on the blogosphere and it can spill into the physical world.

Blogging and bloggers represent the idea of community without place and the differences between *real and actual*. The spaces bloggers create for themselves and the relationships they form are real, but are not actual—which is to say they do not exist in a physical sense. Yet, blogging communities exist and are important in a way that community has not traditionally been viewed. We should not limit community to the realms of the physical world, nor degrade the experiences of community that occur in the online world. Wellman and Gulia note that in the virtual realm, as in the physical world, there are both weak and strong ties that are created either out of necessity, convenience or are mutually voluntary that provide distinct roles. They both assert that through their own observations they have found that, “many online interactions are intimate secondary relationships: informal, frequent and supportive community ties that nevertheless operate only in one specialized domain” (Wellman and Gulia 1999, 181). The community support that swelled around the Kendrick and Nielsen families is indicative of this. However it is worth noting that many relationships formed through blogging manifest themselves in the physical world, illustrated by the action that took place, such as organizing races and benefit concerts for Nielsen, outside of the blogosphere. On the anniversary of the accident in August 2009, Nielsen invited as many of her readers as could come to a hike up to the “Y” in Provo, which would be a chance to meet her and celebrate her year of miraculous recovery.

As the Kendrick and Nielsen families have shown, virtual communities can be tremendously vital and supportive. This sense of *communitas* that originates in the blogosphere is strong, and it is quite evident in the support that Kendrick and her family have continued to receive since August 2008. Courtney said this about keeping people

updated and welcoming the help: “I think that was a blessing too, because it helped us be more aware. People became more aware of our story. So that way when she came back to blogging she had this huge support group” (Kendrick 2010c). Stephanie was at first overwhelmed with how quickly her story spread and how people were responding to her. She wrote several posts thanking the blogging community, but expressed feelings of inadequacy to truly thank those who helped her. While the total amount of money donated was not released, new reports allude to hundreds of thousands of dollars given to the Nielsons’ recovery fund, which they were able to use to rebuild their lives.

This community that has arisen has not only come to the aid of Kendrick and her family when they were in the throes of tragedy, but also in simple everyday gestures of goodness. Kendrick posted a story of when she went to IKEA to purchase lamps, and upon arriving at the check-out counter, she realized she had left her debit card at home. The woman in line behind her offered to purchase Kendrick’s items for her. When Kendrick and the IKEA cashier looked at the woman in disbelief, she responded, “She can pay me back.” When Courtney questioned her further, the woman replied, “I know who you are. I’ve read your blog” as she proceeded to take out her credit card and give it to the cashier (Kendrick 2010a). In my interview with Courtney, she was still humbled by that experience. Courtney worried that that particular post would appear to be narcissistic to some of her readers. By writing about it on her blog, Courtney was telling that woman thank you in the grandest way at her command.

While the relationships that are formed via blogging may not necessarily have the physical components that are traditionally attributed to friendships, they are nonetheless powerful and strong, and do have the capacity to spill over into the physical world. These

relationships cultivated on the blogosphere *do* impact those that engage in them. The palpable experiences of Kendrick and Nielson are indicative of this. Kendrick's blog also exemplifies how identity works for the blogger and her audience, and how the blurred lines of space and community function in the blogosphere.

CHAPTER VI

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The preceding chapters have illustrated that communities formed online offer a way for participants to refine their identities, find camaraderie with like-minded individuals, and provide and receive support. An examination of a particular subset of online communities, the mommy and Mormon mommy blog, took place to illustrate how meaningful and powerful virtual folk groups are for members.

In this urban and digital age, online communities and the experiences that participants have there are just as relevant as traditional face-to-face interactions are. Online communities are an essential part of life for those that use them. Textual transmission should be studied and accepted as a viable means of sharing lore on the web. In fact, there is really no other option. Of course there are websites that utilize audio-visual elements, but by far most of the informal sharing that takes place on the Internet is done solely through text. That blogging relies on textual transmission in lieu of oral transmission should not exclude it from study by folklorist, but it should be accepted as one of the distinctions of the genre. Folklorists should not abstain from cultural Internet studies nor suppose that the digital age is destroying folklore, because the communities that form there and the people who populate them are rife with their own lore and performances.

The ease and convenience of publishing on the Internet also allows for ethnographies of groups that have been historically ignored and disenfranchised. Women who choose to be mothers, either the working or stay-at-home variety, are able to publish their thoughts relatively easily through the medium of blogging and find other women

who are similar to them. The writings on these blogs are indications of what the common everyday experiences of the folk are encountering in an urban society, marked by communication that occurs by word-of-mouth. Mommy blogs allow women to share their narratives of the common and informal experiences in their lives, and what gives them meaning as both women and mothers. Their personal experience narratives establish their identities as women and mothers and enable them to receive support from and make friendships with mothers around the world.

Mormon mommy blogs are a vibrant genre of both Internet folklore and Mormon folklore. While Mormon mommy blogs provide the same measure of refining of identity and formation of a community as the standard mommy blogs do, they also serve as ways to undertake record-keeping for posterity and, for some, are a means of proselytizing, which are two important aspects of Mormon culture. Mormon mommy blogs also allow for frank conversations about expectations of the Mormon culture and the impossibilities of being the perfect Mormon woman. Mormon mommy blogs exhibit each of the characteristics of Feintuch's eight words for expressive culture, which is indicative that other online folk groups would do so as well. For non-Mormons, Mormon mommy blogs are a form of escapism into the lives of women who are confounding the notion that housewives and mothers are woefully unfulfilled.

To conclude this thesis, it is important to discuss the possibilities of future studies with online communities and women bloggers. The fields of folkloristics, women and gender studies, and even religious studies could all benefit from examining mommy and Mormon mommy blogs. Folklorists who are concerned with personal narratives have a

variety of subjects to choose from and could engage in ethnography with informants whom they may have been unable to access without the Internet.

The issue of Mormon women complicating the modern day assumptions of what a mother or wife should be warrants more study, particularly within the context of the idea of the “new domesticity” juxtaposed with the expectations of the so-called modern woman. Mormon mommy blogs could readily be analyzed from the lens of how common experiences of members in the LDS church react to information from church hierarchy and church doctrine. The internalization and blogging about messages after the LDS church’s General Conferences, which occur semiannually, could be used to examine what information is most important to Mormon mothers and what spiritual advice has the most currency in today’s world.

While the blogosphere could be analyzed by many disciplines, hopefully those within the field of folklore will study and expand upon the lore. Internet culture and communities will continue to make an impact on the lore of the folk and how it is transmitted, and it falls to those within folkloristics to keep abreast of new developments. The concerns of past folklorists that folklore will fade from importance in the human experience are unfounded, due to dynamism of humankind and the lore that we need to frame our experiences in both the physical and virtual worlds.

REFERENCES

- Adri. 2008. Comment on The art of blogging. *Segullah.org*, November 8, <http://segullah.org/daily-special/the-art-of-blogging/>.
- Amanda. 2008. About me. <http://www.serenitynowblog.com/2008/01/about.html> (accessed January 20, 2011).
- Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined communities*. London: Verso.
- Andrea R. 2008. Comment on The art of blogging. *Segullah.org*, November 8, <http://segullah.org/daily-special/the-art-of-blogging/>.
- Arendell, Terry. 2000. Conceiving and investigating motherhood: The decade's scholarship. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62, no. 4 (November): 1192-1207.
- b. 2008. Comment on The art of blogging. *Segullah.org*, November 8, <http://segullah.org/daily-special/the-art-of-blogging/>.
- Ballard, M. Russell. 2009. Acting on spiritual promptings. *Lds.org*, September <http://lds.org/ensign/2009/09/acting-on-spiritual-promptings?lang=eng&query=Acting+Spirit> (accessed March 5, 2011).
- Barlow, Aaron. 2008. *Blogging America: The new public sphere*. Westport: Praeger Publishers.
- Barlow, John Perry. 1995. Is there a there in cyberspace? UTNE Reader. <http://www.utne.com/archives/IsThereaThereinCyberspace.aspx> (accessed January 20, 2011).
- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhaïlovich. 1984. *Rabelais and his world*. Bloomington: Univ. of Indiana Press.
- Ben-Amos, Dan. 1972. Toward a definition of folklore in context. In *Towards new perspectives in folklore*. Ed. Américo Paredes and Richard Bauman. 3-15. Austin : Univ. of Texas Press.
- Benson, Ezra Taft. 1978. Worthy of all acceptance. *Lds.org*, November. <http://lds.org/ensign/1978/11/worthy-of-all-acceptation?lang=eng> (accessed March 1, 2011).
- Blair, Gabrielle. 2008. Nie Nie Day. *Design Mom*, August 22. <http://www.designmom.com/2008/08/nie-nie-day/> (accessed April 28, 2010).

- Bradley, Alice. 2005. BlogHer, BlogMe, *FinSlippy*, August 4, http://finslippy.typepad.com/finslippy/2005/08/blogher_blogme.html (accessed January 15, 2011).
- Brunvard, Jan. 1968. *The study of American folklore*. New York: 21-22. Quoted in Richard Bauman. 1971. Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore. *The Journal of American Folklore* 84, no. 331 (Jan-March): 31-41.
- Burstein, Dan. 2005. Introduction. In *blog!*, ed. David Kline and Dan Burstein, xi-xii. New York: CDS Books.
- Carolyn. 2011. The last 'Don't Be a Drag Just be a Queen.' *TeamBoo*, March 24. <http://teamboo2000.blogspot.com/2011/03/mamma-mamma-bo-bomma-queen-boo-final.html>.
- Dobler, Robert. 2009. Ghosts in the machine: Mourning the MySpace dead. In *Folklore and the Internet*, ed. Trevor J. Blank, 175-93. Logan: Utah State Univ. Press.
- Dundes Alan. 2004. Folkloristics in the twenty-first century. *Journal of American Folklore* 118, no. 470 (Fall): 385-408.
- Ellenana. 2006, Comment on A long post about my brains. *FinSlippy*, July 13, <http://www.finslippy.com/blog/a-long-post-about-my-brains.html?currentPage=2#comments>.
- Feintuch, Burt. 2003. Introduction: Eight words. In *Eight words for the study of expressive culture*, ed. Burt Feintuch, 1-6. Chicago: Univ. of Illinois.
- Foster, Derek. 1997. An archaeology of Cyberspaces: Virtuality, community, identity. In *Internet culture*, ed. David Porter, 24-37. New York: Routledge.
- Friedan, Betty. 1997. *The feminine mystique*. New York: Norton.
- Glassie, Henry. 2003. Tradition. In *Eight words for the study of expressive culture*, ed. Burt Feintuch, 176-97. Chicago: Univ. of Illinois.
- Gunther, Vickie. 2007. The girl in a whirl. *Feministmormonhousewives*, October 8. <http://www.feministmormonhousewives.org/?p=1378>.
- Harris-Lopez, Trudier. 2003. Genre. In *Eight words for the study of expressive culture*, ed. Burt Feintuch, 99-120. Chicago: Univ. of Illinois.
- Healy, Dave. 1996. Cyberspace and place: The Internet as middle landscape on the electronic frontier. In *Internet culture*, ed. By David Porter, 55-68. New York: Routledge.

- Holbrook, Natalie. 2011. So, you say you like us Mormons, eh, Salon? *Blogger.com*, January 21. <http://www.blogger.com/so-you-say-you-knew-mormon-once> (accessed February 3, 2011).
- Holland, Jeffery R. 2010. Motherhood: An eternal partnership with God. LDS.org. YouTube video file. http://lds.org/ldsorg/v/index.jsp?autoplay=true&index=1&locale=0&sourceId=852721bf16a89210VgnVCM100000176f620a___&vgnextoid=bd163ca6e9aa3210VgnVCM1000003a94610aRCRD (accessed March 16, 2011).
- Jack, Elaine L. 1990. These things are manifested unto us plainly. *Lds.org*, November. <http://lds.org/ensign/1990/11/these-things-are-manifested-unto-us-plainly?lang=eng> (accessed March 1, 2011).
- Jamie01. 2011. Comment on Why I can't stop reading Mormon housewife blogs. *Salon.com*, January 15, http://www.salon.com/2011/01/15/feminist_obsessed_with_mormon_blogs/singleton/#comments.
- Jaredstanley. 2011. Comment on Why I can't stop reading Mormon housewife blogs. *Salon.com*, January 15, http://www.salon.com/2011/01/15/feminist_obsessed_with_mormon_blogs/singleton/#comments.
- Jbrockd. 2011. Comment on Why I can't stop reading Mormon housewife blogs. *Salon.com*, January 15, http://www.salon.com/2011/01/15/feminist_obsessed_with_mormon_blogs/singleton/#comments.
- Jcourt. 2011. Comment on Why I can't stop reading Mormon housewife blogs. *Salon.com*, January 15, http://www.salon.com/2011/01/15/feminist_obsessed_with_mormon_blogs/singleton/#comments.
- Jeffrey, Carlie. 2008. Re-Posted: Slow Cooker Day. *NieNieDialogues*, October 1. <http://nieniedialogues.blogspot.com/2008/10/re-posted-slow-cooker-day.html> (accessed January 8, 2011).
- Jendoop. 2008. Comment on The art of blogging. *Segullah.org*, November 8, <http://segullah.org/daily-special/the-art-of-blogging/>.
- Jennie. 2008. Comment on The art of blogging. *Segullah.org*, November 8, <http://segullah.org/daily-special/the-art-of-blogging/>.

- Jennie. 2010. Allow me to introduce the Stink-Finder. *Beehive & Bird's Nest*, January 31. <http://beehiveandbirdsnest.blogspot.com/2010/01/may-i-introduce-stink-finder.html>.
- Johnson, Bobbie. 2001. The short life of Kaycee Nicole. *The Guardian*. May 28. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2001/may/28/internetnews.mondaymediaaction> (accessed February 13, 2011).
- Kathy. 2008. Comment on The art of blogging. *Segullah.org*, November 8, <http://segullah.org/daily-special/the-art-of-blogging/>.
- Kendrick, Courtney. 2005 Peaches and Cream. *c jane enjoy it*, September 27. <http://blog.cjanerun.com/2005/09/peaches-and-cream.html> (accessed April 23, 2010).
- . 2008a Blogging: The New Commandment. *c jane enjoy it*, June 29, <http://blog.cjanerun.com/2008/06/blogging-new-commandment.html> (accessed April 23, 2010).
- . 2008b. Unexplained Infertility Now Explained. *c jane enjoy it*, September 17. <http://blog.cjanerun.com/2008/09/unexplained-infertility-now-explained.html> (accessed April 23, 2010).
- . 2009. The Ever Evolving. *c jane enjoy it*, January 7. <http://blog.cjanerun.com/2009/01/ever-evolving.html> (accessed April 27, 2010).
- . 2010a. Nice Just Doesn't Cut It. *c jane enjoy it*, January 26. <http://blog.cjanerun.com/2010/01/nice-just-doesnt-cut-it.html> (accessed April 28, 2010).
- . 2010b. I Am Not, It Turns Out. *c jane enjoy it*, March 5. <http://blog.cjanerun.com/2010/03/i-am-not-it-turns-out.html> (accessed April 27, 2010).
- . 2010c. Interview by author. Provo, UT, March 15.
- . 2011. *c jane enjoy it*. <http://blog.cjanerun.com/2010/03/i-am-not-it-turns-out.html> (accessed March 13, 2011).
- Kimball, Spencer W. 1979. The role of righteous women. *Lds.org*. October. <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1979/10/the-role-of-righteous-women?lang=eng&query=women+church+seen+distinct+different%E2%80%94in+happy+ways%E2%80%94from+women+world> (accessed March 1, 2011).

- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 1983. The future of folklore studies in America: The urban frontier. *Folklore Forum* 16:175-234.
- , 1995. The paperwork empire to the paperless office: Testing the limits of the science of tradition. In *Folklore Interpreted: Essays in Honor of Alan Dundes*, eds. Regina Bendix and Rosemary Levy Zumwalt. New York: Garland.
- Kitzmann, Andreas. 2003. That different place: documenting the self within online environments. *Biography* 26, no. 1 (Winter): 48-65.
- Kollock, Peter and Marc A. Smith. 1999. Communities in cyberspace. In *Communities in cyberspace*, ed. Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollock, 3-25. London: Routledge.
- Lds.org. 1995. The family: A proclamation to the world. <http://www.lds.org/topics/family-proclamation?lang=eng> (accessed January 8, 2011).
- Lds.org. 2011. What do I share? <http://www.lds.org/church/share/sharing-via-blogs?lang=eng> (accessed January 8, 2011).
- Lemley, Mark A. 2003. Place and cyberspace. *California Law Review* 91, no.1 (March): 521-542.
- Leslie. 2008. The art of blogging. *Segullah.org*, November 8. <http://segullah.org/daily-special/the-art-of-blogging/> (accessed January 6, 2011).
- Leslie R. 2008. Comment on The art of blogging. *Segullah.org*, November 8, <http://segullah.org/daily-special/the-art-of-blogging/>.
- Licklider, J.C.R., and Robert W. Taylor. 1968. The computer as a communication device. In *Science and Technology*, 21-41.
- Lopez, Lori Kido. 2009. The radical act of 'mommy blogging': redefining motherhood through the blogosphere. *New Media & Society* 11, no. 5 (August):729-747.
- Matchar, Emily. 2011. Why I can't stop reading Mormon housewife blogs. *Salon.com*, January 15. http://www.salon.com/life/feature/2011/01/15/feminist_obsessed_with_mormon_blogs (accessed January 16, 2011).
- Michelle L. 2008. Comment on The art of blogging. *Segullah.org*, November 8, <http://segullah.org/daily-special/the-art-of-blogging/>.

- Mormommon-forreal. 2011. Comment on Why I can't stop reading Mormon housewife blogs. *Salon.com*, January 15, http://www.salon.com/2011/01/15/feminist_obsessed_with_mormon_blogs/singleton/#comments.
- Morrison, Aimee. 2010. Autobiography in real time: A genre analysis of personal mommy blogging. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace* 4, no. 2. <http://www.cyberpsychology.eu/view.php?cisloclanku=2010120801&article=5> (accessed January 5, 2011).
- Marshall, Jonathan Paul. 2007. *Living on cybermind: Categories, communication, and control*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Nielsen, Stephanie. 2008a. Slow Cooker Day. *NieNie Dialogues*, February 21. http://nieniedialogues.blogspot.com/2008_02_01_archive.html (accessed January 8, 2011).
- Nielsen, Stephanie. 2008b. A Mother Heart, essays on Motherhood. Day 1. *NieNie Dialogues*, May 10. <http://nieniedialogues.blogspot.com/2008/05/mother-heart-essays-on-motherhood-day-1.html> (accessed January 8, 2011).
- Oring, Elliott. 1986. On the concepts of folklore. In *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*, ed. Elliott Oring. Logan: Utah State Univ. Press.
- Pocius, Gerald L. 2003. Art. In *Eight words for the study of expressive culture*, ed. Burt Feintuch. Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press.
- Pothier, Shawni, 2009. The real story. *71 Toes*, Septmeber 28. <http://www.71toes.com/2009/09/real-story.html> (accessed February 6, 2011).
- Pothier, Shawni, 2010a. Confessions. *71 Toes*, June 2. <http://www.71toes.com/2010/06/confessions.html> (accessed February 6, 2011).
- Pothier, Shawni, 2010b. Clarification. *71 Toes*, September 21. <http://www.71toes.com/2010/09/clarification.html> (accessed February 6, 2011).
- Pothier, Shawni. 2011. 2011 snapshot. *71 Toes*, January 20. <http://www.71toes.com/2011/01/2011-snapshot.html> (accessed February 6, 2011).
- Rheingold, Howard. 2000. *The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1992. *Oneself as another*. Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press.

- Skintrade. 2001. Comment on Is it possible that Kaycee did not exist? *Metafilter.com*, May 18, <http://www.metafilter.com/7819/Is-it-possible-that-Kaycee-did-not-exist>.
- Smith, Alison Moore, and Jeannie Vincent. 2001. The quest for perfection. *Mormonmomma.com*, August
2. <http://www.mormonmomma.com/index.php/2001/the-quest-for-perfection/> (accessed January 5, 2011).
- SoCal1951. 2011. Comment on Why I can't stop reading Mormon housewife blogs. *Salon.com*, January 15, [.http://www.salon.com/2011/01/15/feminist_obsessed_with_mormon_blogs/singleton/#comments](http://www.salon.com/2011/01/15/feminist_obsessed_with_mormon_blogs/singleton/#comments).
- TAMN. 2010. Seriously, so wise. *The Mormon Women Project*. September 8. <http://www.mormonwomen.com/2010/09/08/seriously-so-wise/> (accessed March 16, 2011).
- Traster, Tina. 2010. Hits & misses: Fashioning a winning strategy. *Crainsnewyork.com* December
17. <http://www.crainsnewyork.com/article/20101217/SMALLBIZ/101219876> (accessed March 20, 2011).
- Tuan, Yi Fu. 1977. *Space and place*. St. Paul: Univ. of Minnesota.
- Wellman, Barry. 2000. Email communication to with the author. Quoted in Howard Rheingold, *The virtual community*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wellman, Barry and Milena Gulia. 1999. Net surfers don't ride alone: Virtual communities as communities. In *Communities in Cyberspace*, ed. Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollock, 167-94. London: Routledge.
- Wilson, William A. 2001. "Folklore, a Mirror for What? Reflections of a Mormon Folklorist." *Western Folklore* 54, no. 1 (January): 13-21.
- Wood, Andrew F., and Matthew J. Smith. 2001. *Online communication: Linking technology, identity, and culture*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Woodruff, Wilford. 1853. Of far more worth than gold. In *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff*. http://lds.org/ldsorg/v/index.jsp?hideNav=1&locale=0&sourceId=1c35be335dc20110VgnVCM100000176f620a___&vgnextoid=198bf4b13819d110VgnVCM1000003a94610aRCRD#footnote6 (accessed March 1, 2011).