

GENDERED SCHOLARSHIP: AN EXAMINATION OF GENDER  
IDENTITY IN ACADEMIC WEBLOGS

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of  
Texas State University-San Marcos  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of ARTS

by

Collette R. Caton, B.A.

San Marcos, Texas  
May 2008

**COPYRIGHT**

by

Collette R. Caton

2008

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my three committee members, Rebecca Jackson, Deb Morton, and Vicki Smith for their insightful commentary. I appreciate them taking time out of their busy lives to review draft after draft of this project. I am especially thankful that they were willing to do so within the short amount of time I allotted to complete this work. Without their advice and support, the quality of this scholarship would have greatly suffered.

I would also like to acknowledge the six participants of this study. Though these individuals remain unaware that their blogs were analyzed, their willingness to discuss their work and their lives in a public forum allowed me to reach compelling conclusions regarding the intersections of academic and gender identity. I hope that more scholars choose to explore this avenue of “publication.”

I would also like to thank Mary Rist and Brother John Perron, faculty at St. Edward’s University, for encouraging me to pursue a graduate degree. Their support and unwavering confidence in my abilities helped me to overcome many academic obstacles, including the completion of this thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank the employees of Mochas and Javas for keeping me well-cafeinated as I sat in their coffee shop for hours upon hours working furiously to complete this project.

This manuscript was submitted March 21, 2008.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                                                                     | Page |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....                                                                                                               | iv   |
| <br>CHAPTER                                                                                                                         |      |
| I. LAYING THE FOUNDATION: A DISCUSSION OF BLOGGING,<br>IDENTITY, AND METHODOLOGY .....                                              | 1    |
| RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....                                                                                                            | 4    |
| BLOG BASICS .....                                                                                                                   | 4    |
| BLOGGER IDENTITY .....                                                                                                              | 7    |
| BLOG SELECTION .....                                                                                                                | 10   |
| PROCESS OF ANALYSIS .....                                                                                                           | 15   |
| <br>II. EXAMINING THE INTERSECTIONS: TECHNOLOGY, GENDER,<br>IDENTITY, COMPOSITION, AND THE NEED FOR ACADEMIC<br>BLOG ANALYSIS ..... | 16   |
| GENDER AND COMPOSITION.....                                                                                                         | 16   |
| GENDER IDENTITY .....                                                                                                               | 16   |
| GENDER AND COMMUNICATION .....                                                                                                      | 23   |
| GENDER AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY .....                                                                                              | 29   |
| GENDER AND TECHNOLOGY.....                                                                                                          | 34   |
| ONLINE IDENTITY .....                                                                                                               | 34   |
| WOMEN ONLINE .....                                                                                                                  | 39   |
| BLOGS AND IDENTITY .....                                                                                                            | 43   |
| ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK.....                                                                                                             | 46   |
| <br>III. WALKING THE TIGHTROPE: BLOGGERS' NEGOTIATION<br>BETWEEN ACADEMIC AND GENDERED IDENTITY.....                                | 48   |
| READING THE FEMININE .....                                                                                                          | 49   |
| CHANGELOG@TENGRRRL.COM .....                                                                                                        | 49   |
| THE THINKERY .....                                                                                                                  | 53   |
| CULTURECAT: RHETORIC AND FEMINISM .....                                                                                             | 56   |
| EMBODIMENT, CREDIBILITY, SUBVERSION, AND<br>SUPPORT: A SYNTHESIS OF FEMALE BLOGS.....                                               | 58   |
| READING THE MASCULINE .....                                                                                                         | 68   |
| RUINED BY BOOKS .....                                                                                                               | 68   |

|     |                                                                                                                                     |    |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
|     | EARTH WIDE MOTH.....                                                                                                                | 73 |
|     | THE CHUTRY EXPERIMENT.....                                                                                                          | 78 |
|     | INDIVIDUATION, AUTHORITY, CONFIDENCE, AND<br>PROFESSIONALISM: A SYNTHESIS OF MALE BLOGS.....                                        | 81 |
|     | GENDERED NOTIONS OF EMBODIMENT, CREDENTIALS,<br>CONFIDENCE, AND INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY .....                                        | 84 |
| IV. | IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH: EXPANDING OUR CONCEPTIONS<br>OF ACADEMIC IDENTITY, GENDER, AND METHODOLOGY<br>MOVING BEYOND THE DATA..... | 90 |
|     | CONCEPTUALIZING ACADEMIC IDENTITY .....                                                                                             | 90 |
|     | UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTS OF GENDER .....                                                                                           | 93 |
|     | CONDUCTING FUTURE RESEARCH .....                                                                                                    | 95 |
|     | THE GENDERED BLOGOSPHERE .....                                                                                                      | 97 |
|     | WORKS CITED .....                                                                                                                   | 99 |

## **CHAPTER I**

### **LAYING THE FOUNDATION: A DISCUSSION OF BLOGGING, IDENTITY, AND METHODOLOGY**

When I was thirteen, I began using the Internet. I remember being excited about the opportunity to be whoever I wanted to be online. It was at a time in my life when I was starting to become conscious of myself as a woman rather than a girl. But others still labeled me as a girl, which I greatly resented—both because it denied the maturity I felt I had and because it was often used in a derogatory way to discount my ideas. So in chatrooms, I crafted an older female identity to try to gain the respect for my intelligence that I felt I deserved. I quickly discovered, however, that my ideas as a woman were discounted just as easily as my ideas as a girl. Others (usually self-identified as male) used my gender to undermine my ideas, dismissing them as nothing more than the emotional responses of a woman or refusing to engage me as anything other than a sexual object.

In these first forays online, I began to understand that men were more easily given authority and did not struggle as much as women to have their voices heard. In the chatrooms I entered, other users sexualized my online identity. I'd offer my opinion on the topic of discussion, and the only response I would get was "a/s/l?" (age/sex/location).

After revealing my gender, I was immediately bombarded with offers to chat privately. I knew enough about chatrooms to know that these invitations were sexual in nature, so I declined. I'd reiterate my opinions within the communal chatroom, and my points would get ignored. I specifically remember one such instance occurring in a *Dawson's Creek* chatroom when I was around the age of 13 (although I was performing the identity of a 20 year old female). I had been repeatedly ignoring private chat offers, and the issues I was putting forward were not getting taken up for discussion. Several times I tried to make my point about the characters' unrealistic speech in the show: the dialogue seemed too contrived, and the vocabulary and tone seemed inappropriate for normal teenagers. Of the few responses I received, all employed graphic sexual imagery in an attempt to silence me, explicitly referring to sexual activities that would inhibit *my* ability to speak.

I noticed other women in the chatroom suffered much the same treatment: self-identifying male participants ignored and silenced them and sexualized their comments and their identities. So I became a ghost in chat rooms, saying very little for fear of males attacking me. Every once in awhile I built a connection with a (self-identifying) female user, and we engaged in a mutually-supportive conversation amid the din of male voices attempting to silence and degrade us. But these kinds of connections rarely occurred. Female users seemed wary, afraid to present themselves in any way that would draw the attention of others.

I began to notice, too, that these gendered experiences occurred outside of online spaces. In my own classes at school, some teachers (both male and female) seemed to value the opinions of male students over female students, and I witnessed male students silencing female students without the teacher stepping in and recognizing the female

students' right to speak. As I saw my online struggles with finding voice replicated in academic spaces, I began to understand that gender marks both our online and our academic identities.

As I became a scholar of rhetoric and composition, these early experiences with gender and technology influenced my research interests. I became especially interested in how gender affects the way we construct ourselves in online spaces. My own experiences as a student within the academy also encouraged me to see traditional conceptions of academic identity as being more in line with what are thought of as masculine behaviors. That is, these traditional conceptions taught me to expect academics to be rational rather than emotional, detached rather than connected, assertive rather than reserved, confident rather than diffident, proud rather than humble, individualistic rather than collaborative. I began to consider how these "masculine" characteristics associated with academic identity influence (and perhaps restrict) the expression of scholars' gender identity. Thus, this project looks at how identity, specifically gender identity, affects online communication within the academy.

As computer technology continues to influence how college educators conduct their research and teach their students, many academics, especially those in the field of rhetoric and composition, have begun to publish scholarship in computer-mediated forums. Some scholars have turned to weblogs (blogs) as ways to both disseminate their research as well as build community with other colleagues in the field. Thus, blogs offer academics a new medium for establishing credentials and making a name for themselves in the field. Yet, little research has been conducted on academic blogs, a particular subgenre of blogs, or on gendered identity in academic blogs in particular. This project



seeks to remedy this oversight by expanding our understanding of how academics construct their identities in the new medium.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

As blogs become an important part of the way academics exhibit knowledge, get feedback on their research, and make connections in their fields, it becomes important to understand how academic identity gets enacted through blogs. Thus, the overarching research question this project will explore is “how do academic bloggers perform identity?” The more specific questions I investigate are the following:

- How is identity revealed through:
  - visual space of blogs?
  - topic choice?
  - construction of profiles?
  - the manner in which academics discuss their scholarship?
  - their incorporation of hypertext?
  - their demonstration of academic expertise?
  - the ways in which they build community with other academic bloggers?
  - their responses to blog comments?
- How, if at all, is gender represented in particular?
- How does the audience receive gender (as revealed through blog comments)?

By analyzing blogs according to the aspects described above, I begin to discover the identity/ies that academics enact online. Specifically, I ascertain how gender may influence the way academics portray themselves and their work. By doing so, I hope to be able to construct a better understanding of the multiple considerations academics must contemplate when presenting themselves and their scholarship in online spaces.

## **BLOG BASICS**

There has been a bit of debate over what constitutes a blog, but essentially blogs can be thought of as online journals, web logs, with dated entries in reverse chronological order (Ewins 369). Blogs originated as a form of online diary writing in which each

blogger had a stand-alone page (not linked to other bloggers' pages) in which they could make their private life public. Many bloggers still utilize them in this way to chronicle their daily life and explore their "private" thoughts; however, blogs have since become sites for social networking. Bloggers can link to each other's sites, and readers can subscribe to blogs so that they are notified when the sites are updated. Blogs also generally include a comment feature, which allows readers to respond to blog entries. In this manner, blogs constitute a form of conversation and collaborative knowledge-making and can be used as a tool to build community online. More recent uses of blogs, including the academic blogging phenomenon, are more oriented toward making connections between knowledge and knowledge-makers. As such, the trend now is for blogs to be combinations of author commentary and web links, using hypertext to connect the blogger's knowledge and experience to existing knowledge and experiences on the web (often that of fellow bloggers). In this manner, blogs are doing at least some of the work of print academic journals (connecting people and ideas) but in a much more efficient and interactive manner, though admittedly the information in blogs has not been vetted through a formal peer review process.

Blogs, in general, have proliferated in recent years, with over 112.8 million blogs currently in existence ("About"). One reason blogs are popular is that they offer an opportunity for everyone to have a voice: anyone who wants to publish their thoughts can reach a potentially global audience by starting a blog. This is important for academics because it allows both newcomers and veteran scholars to have equal weight given to their voices. In print journals, which tend to publish the big names in the field and may be resistant to new ideas, PhD candidates, adjuncts, and recent graduates have less

opportunity to publish their scholarship. In blogs, however, there is the potential for these individuals to reach the same audience that other more experienced scholars have access to. Additionally, blogs are more fluid and dynamic than print journals because readers can begin a dialogue immediately with authors by responding to them in their designated comment boxes. Blog authors and blog readers can engage in debate and explore issues together in a more timely manner than could be done within the pages of a print journal. In this way, blogs allow knowledge to be presented individually *and* discovered collaboratively in conversation with readers.

For these reasons, blogging has become especially popular among academics. Academics have begun incorporating them into their classes as a teaching tool as well as using them as a place to showcase and get feedback on their research from a greater audience than they would otherwise have access to (Ewins 368). In this manner, scholarship can be influenced by those outside the academy, and scholarship can break outside the ivory tower and assist those who reside outside the academic sphere.

Blogs can also help scholars to gain more widespread prestige. They are especially appealing to academics because they provide a space for them to stockpile their knowledge, helping them to enhance their reputation in the field while also allowing them to make intellectual connections with others' works (through hypertext links) and respond more immediately to critique (through comment boxes) (369). Others value the greater freedom blogs provide to engage in serious discussions with those both inside and outside the academy, free from the surveillance of academic referees (Farrell). One academic blogger argues that academic blogs "provide a carnival of ideas, a lively and exciting interchange of argument and debate that makes many scholarly conversations

seem drab and desiccated in comparison” (Farrell) In this same manner, blogging is more immediate than print scholarship, allowing authors to comment on current events as they occur and to amend previous posts as their understandings of issues change (Glenn).

A final advantage of blogging for academics is that it allows them to craft public personas for themselves online that often depart significantly from traditional institutional representation (Glenn). Many academics feel as though their institutions define them in ways that are quite restrictive. They are expected to construct their identities in institutionally-sanctioned ways, ways which emphasize their intelligence, their objectivity, and their dedication to scholarship. But many feel that there is more to their academic identities than institutions allow them to express. Blogs, then, offer a space where academics can choose to break the institutional mold and play with how different aspects of their identity are represented, including gender.

### **BLOGGER IDENTITY**

My early experiences with how my gender was received online sparked my interest in investigating how identity is constructed in online communication. Because of the lack of visual cues in online communication, online communicators can choose to keep certain aspects of their identity hidden and can even assume alternate identities. On the Internet, no one knows what race, gender, class, religion, or age a given user is, unless s/he chooses to somehow communicate that information. This ability for users to take control over their digital identities leads Sherry Turkle to argue in *Life on the Screen Identity in the Age of the Internet* that “computer-mediated communication can serve as a place for construction and reconstruction of identity” (14). Turkle conceives of identity as multiple and flexible. Thus, identity becomes “a set of roles that can be mixed

and matched, whose diverse demands need to be negotiated” (180). In this manner, users can become fully in charge of their self-representations. The audience is completely dependent on the user for details of the user’s identity. As such, users can craft themselves in different ways, presenting themselves as one way to a particular audience and in a completely different way to another, by picking and choosing which aspects of their identities to divulge, emphasize, or alter.

Blogs capitalize on this ability to craft identity, as authors can disseminate their thoughts without providing credentials. Individuals who would never be able to publish in print can do so online. They can mold their identity to suit their individual purposes and allow their writing and thinking to be judged on quality alone. That is, bloggers can pick and choose which aspects of their identity to disclose to the reader. So, if a female blogger feels that her gender might negatively affect how her readers perceive her ideas, she may choose not to identify as one gender or the other. If we believe bloggers can and do utilize this ability to construct their identities, then blogs have the potential to be gender-neutral spaces because they provide an environment in which people can represent themselves in whatever manner they see fit. In fact, it is fairly common for bloggers who write the online journal style of blogs to either withhold identifying features of themselves or to construct alternative personas so that they feel more comfortable disclosing their private feelings.

However, I chose not to craft a different gender identity for myself in my online experiences, even after it became clear that my gender was being used against me. My experience indicated to me that perhaps online communicators are not always willing or able to fully separate themselves from their physical identities. This conclusion is

supported by Mia Consalvo and Susanna Paasonen, who note in “On the Internet, Women Matter” that “the Internet has changed from a place where identities were joyfully discarded, experimented with, or reconfigured, to a medium (discussed in spatial terms) where identity seems to be a driving force for involvement, and an aspect of embodiment that few users actually want to leave behind” (4). Despite users’ abilities to mask or switch genders, many still choose to craft their online identities in gendered ways.

Paasonen uses Judith Butler’s theory of identity construction to explain in “Gender, Identity, and (the Limits of) Play on the Internet” why users are hesitant or simply unable to distance themselves from their “true” identities:

Gender (as well as the category thought of as ‘sex’) is constituted as the ritualized reiteration of norms that govern cultural intelligibility, as compulsive repetition. This ‘doing gender’ is far from voluntary activity, it is performativity that concerns the very sense of the self...Since being gendered (raced, classed) is a precondition for thinking, living, and making sense of the world, the individual cannot take up any identity position s/he pleases. (25)

In other words, our identity is so shaped by cultural factors, such as gender, race, and class, that is impossible for us to ever truly distance ourselves from them.

Researchers find users’ reluctance (or inability) to misrepresent their identities to be especially true of blog authors. They note that the discussions that occur on blogs are intimately tied to our personal and/or professional selves (Paasonen 30). As thinking is influenced by how individuals live their lives and the way they live their lives is affected

by cultural factors such as gender, it is difficult for blog authors to accurately represent their thoughts while at the same time inaccurately representing their identities.

In addition to Paasonen's argument that cultural factors influence thinking, it is also important to note that the digital world is not always separate and distinct from the physical world. The blogs of academics are representative of their work in the real world. These authors have preexisting reputations in the field that they cannot completely separate from the digital incarnations of themselves and their work. However, though unable to completely distance themselves from their "true" identity, the authors are able to exert some control over how they are represented online.

Blogs offer a unique opportunity for academics to craft public identities that extend beyond their academic credentials and areas of specialization, which is how their identities are normally constructed by academic institutions. In other words, in creating their blog identities, academics have the opportunity to expand their institutionally-sanctioned identities—to resist the institution's efforts to contain identity (or define it exclusively in terms of academic credentials) and to perform multiple identities that might traditionally have been seen as irrelevant or irreverent. Thus, this thesis seeks to determine how gender is negotiated by professional blog authors in the construction of their blog identity.

## **BLOG SELECTION**

As this project is primarily concerned with discovering how identity influences the way academics represent themselves and their work through blogs, it was important to ensure the blogs being analyzed were in fact academic blogs. That is, rather than simply choosing personal blogs written by those in the academy, I wanted to choose

blogs by academics whose primary purpose appeared to be the discussion of their scholarly activity. Inevitably, these blogs will include details about their personal lives as it is difficult for individuals to entirely divorce their academic self from their private self; however, the focus of these blogs is related to the authors' academic pursuits.

Academics from all over the country maintain blogs, linking them to their academic institutions or to their personal webpages. Finding these blogs without the help of a compiled list would create a biased sampling because I would only be able to locate the blogs of prominent academics, the big names in the field of which I was already aware. Sampling the blogs in this way would reinforce the hierarchy among academics and would not give an accurate understanding of the larger field of academics who negotiate their identity in online spaces. I located four compiled lists of academic blogs: one compiled by a professor (Cline), one listed on the Academic Blog Portal (*The Academic*), one associated with BlogScholar (Brauer), and one maintained by *Kairosnews* ("Weblogs"). Because different academic disciplines have different writing conventions that may affect how blogs are constructed, it was important that all of the blogs chosen for analysis came out of the same discipline and that it was a discipline whose conventions I was familiar with. For this reason, I wanted to choose blogs from the field of rhetoric and composition, the field of which I am currently a student. The only compiled list which clearly delineated blogs by rhetoric and composition scholars was the list maintained by *Kairosnews*, so I used that list as the source from which to draw the blogs for analysis.

*Kairosnews* is an online forum created for the readers of the online journal *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology and Pedagogy*. All of the blogs on the list are



authored by scholars (students, teachers, and professionals) in the field of rhetoric and composition generally and the subfield of computers and writing more specifically.

Because all of the bloggers on the list are part of the same field and subfield, variations in writing based on academic interest should be somewhat controlled. Admission of blogs to the list seems to be fairly open, but blogs are reviewed by the *Kairosnews* editor, Charlie Lowe, to ensure the blog is in line with the interests of the journal's readers before being added to the list.

The list maintained by *Kairosnews* currently features thirty-nine blogs. Of these thirty-nine, three belong to organizations, twenty-five belong to men, and eleven belong to women. Due to the scope of this project, I could not analyze all of these blogs. Two of the blogs on the *Kairosnews* list were no longer in operation and could not be included in this analysis. Additionally, as this project is concerned with investigating how individual academics perform their identities through their blogs, I excluded all of the blogs that belonged to organizations and Carl Whithaus' blog *Writing Assessment* which is co-authored with his students, as they have multiple authors and it would be difficult to discern how the individual authors contributed to the collective identity being presented. I also wanted to ensure that I was examining up-to-date information, so I excluded eleven blogs (three male and eight female) that had not been posted to regularly in the last six months. After excluding these blogs, three female blogs and eighteen male blogs remained.

In this analysis, I examine three female blogs from the list:

*changelog@tengrrl.com*, written by Traci Gardner, an Online Content Developer for the National Council of Teachers of English who does not hold a PhD; *Arête* (which has

since been retitled *Thinkery*), written by Krista Kennedy, a PhD candidate at the University of Minnesota; and *CultureCat: Rhetoric and Feminism*, written by Clancy Ratliff, an Assistant Professor at University of Louisiana at Lafayette. I felt that it was important to examine an equal number of female and male blogs, even though the *Kairosnews* list features more male blogs, because I did not want the voices of the males to eclipse those of the females. Too often in our society, the male is assumed to be the standard, which does not communicate the idea that women have different but equally valuable experiences. For example, much of the early research regarding cognitive and psychological development has come under attack by feminist scholars because the researchers focused almost exclusively on male behavior, resulting in females who did not conform to their behaviors being labeled as deficient rather than different. I wanted to ensure that my own study would not be vulnerable to such criticism. As such, the remaining eighteen male blogs needed to be further reduced.

I wanted to control as much as possible for external factors, other things that might influence the construction of identity, so that I could get as clear a picture as possible of how gender influences identity construction online. Henry Farrell, an academic blogger, indicates that academic position greatly influences the way scholars blog, with tenured professors having the job security to make riskier statements and students and non-tenured professionals needing to establish reputations for themselves (Farrell). Thus, in order for me to determine that my findings were the result of gender rather than of position within the academy, I needed to select male blogs whose authors were in similar academic positions to the three female blogs. In other words, I needed to select one blog by a male without a PhD, one by a male PhD student, and one by a male

Assistant Professor. Removing the blogs by authors who did not fit into these categories reduced the list of male blogs to ten: two bloggers without PhDs, three PhD candidates, and five assistant professors. One blog was chosen randomly from each of these categories so that the analysis included the following blogs: *Ruined by Books*, written by Gary S. Enns, a professor of English at Cerro Coso Community College who holds only an M.F.A.; *Earth Wide Moth*, written by Derek Mueller, a PhD candidate at Syracuse University; and *The Chutry Experiment*, written by Chuck Tryon, an assistant professor at Fayetteville State University.

It is important to note that that these male bloggers when combined with the female bloggers create a fairly homogenous group. All of the bloggers clearly identify within the gender binary of male and female (none are representing an other or third gender), they all are highly educated (as their profession requires) and are part of an elite group of intellectuals; they also all appear Anglo (according to photos linked to their blogs), and none of the bloggers identify as homosexual or bisexual (four clearly identify as heterosexual, two do not identify a sexuality). This homogeneity was not deliberate, but rather was a result of the demographics of the individuals appearing on the *Kairosnews* list, which primarily features blogs of Anglo heterosexuals. Those individuals of different races and sexualities (none on the list represented an other gender or social/intellectual class) had not kept their sites up-to-date and were excluded in the interest of establishing an understanding of the academic blogging phenomenon as it exists *now*. Though this lack of diversity among participants does limit my ability to generalize my findings, it helps to control for outside factors that might also influence how identity is constructed online. That is, because the group of participants is fairly

homogenous I can say with more certainty that the characteristics I find are the result of gender rather than of race, class, sexual orientation, etc.

### **PROCESS OF ANALYSIS**

For each blogger, I wanted to examine roughly equal amounts of data. Because the frequency in which the bloggers posted varied, it was important to examine the blogs based on the same number of posts rather than looking at the blogs they posted within a specific timeframe. For this reason, I analyzed the twenty most current posts (using February 15, 2008 as the cut-off date) from each blogger, for a total of 120 blog posts. To ensure that these posts were indicative of each academic's blogging practices as a whole, I also randomly sampled three previous blog posts from each blogger. These randomly sampled posts are not discussed further in this project because the findings supported the findings from the most recent posts.

I begin my analysis by discussing each blog individually. It is important to do so to avoid giving the impression that all men and all women blog in the same ways. Analyzing each blog individually will allow me to contextualize the findings and themes later discussed. Then, I will discuss the blogs by gender categories, identifying common themes exhibited in the blogs of both men and women. Finally, I compare these themes across gender. Ultimately, I will argue that it is likely that academics construct their online identities in gendered ways. I find that women's online identities are more tied to their bodies, that women put more emphasis on external credentials, that men speak more confidently, and that male identities are more in line with traditional notions of academic identity.

## CHAPTER II

### EXAMINING THE INTERSECTIONS: TECHNOLOGY, GENDER, IDENTITY, COMPOSITION, AND THE NEED FOR ACADEMIC BLOG ANALYSIS

In the last chapter I laid out the basic research questions of this study. In this chapter I discuss existing research this project draws upon, as well as outline the analytical framework I use to read the academic blogs. This project lies at the intersections of technology, gender, identity, professional communication, and composition. Because this project draws from several different subjects, the literature review would perhaps be best constructed as a hypertext, letting the connections and overlaps between research become clear to the reader. However, as this linear form is the only one available to me, I discuss past research under the somewhat artificial divisions of “Gender and Composition” and “Gender and Technology,” with research related to identity and professional communication being discussed under both headings.

#### GENDER AND COMPOSITION

##### *Gender Identity*

Much of the research in the subfield of gender and composition draws upon work investigating gender identity in the field of psychology, such as Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*. Gilligan’s research is

motivated by flaws in previous research on psychological development, such as that by Freud and Kohlberg, which were based mainly on males' experiences and did not consider the possibility that females' experiences would be markedly different. She believes these theories attempt to interpret female ways of knowing through a construct only capable of explaining male understanding, resulting in women being deemed cognitively deficient (1-2). Gilligan argues, however, that "the failure of women to fit existing models of human growth may point to a problem in the representation, a limitation in the conception of human condition, an omission of certain truths about life" (2).

Gilligan attempts to remedy this omission by conducting three separate studies to discover how women's experience may differ from men's. In the college student study Gilligan interviewed 25 college seniors who had taken a course on moral and political choice as sophomores. She also conducted a follow-up interview five years later. In the abortion decision study Gilligan interviewed 29 pregnant women who were considering getting an abortion. All of the women were between the ages of 15 and 33, and they were from various ethnicities and social classes. She conducted a follow-up interview one year later. In the rights and responsibilities study Gilligan interviewed 144 men and women from nine different age groups (6-9, 11, 15, 19, 22, 25-27, 35, 45, and 60). She interviewed 8 men and 8 women from each age group, and the men and women were of similar education, intelligence, and social class. The interview questions for all three of these studies concerned "conceptions of self and morality, experiences of moral conflict and choice, and judgments of hypothetical moral dilemmas" (3). Gilligan uses these studies to establish a better model of women's development so a more thorough

understanding of how women form identity and engage in moral reasoning can be achieved.

Based on these research findings, Gilligan details the differences between male and female experience. Gilligan finds men view the world as a linear hierarchy whereas women view the world as a web of relationships (32). She also finds men think of moral dilemmas as if they are equations, while women think of them as connections between people. Thus, when it comes to moral reasoning, men make decisions based on logic and law, but women make decisions based on how relationships will be affected (29).

Gilligan also discovered differences in how the two genders defined themselves. She finds males define themselves through separation and measure their worth against an abstract ideal of perfection. Women, on the other hand, define themselves through connection and assess their worth through activities of care (35). These findings indicate men's identity stems from their ability to differentiate themselves from others, but women's identity stems from their ability to maintain interpersonal relationships (48). If this is true, it is likely that the men and women in this analysis will identify in similarly gendered ways. Gilligan uses the results of these studies to theorize women's morality as one based on "an ethic of care." In other words, their morality concerns honoring relationships and taking care of others. Her study indicates women's conception of morality makes the essential moral conflict for women between self and others (70-71).

Gilligan's research has implications for my study because it indicates that men and women experience the world differently. More specifically, she finds that men and women construct their identities in markedly different ways: male identity is based on separation, while female identity is based on connection with others (8). If men and

women construct their identities differently within the context of Gilligan's study, it is likely that they will also do so in academic blogs as well. Gilligan's research indicates, then, that the way men create their blogs may be motivated by their desire for individuation, in the same manner that the way women construct their blogs may be motivated by their desire for interconnection. Or, if the women feel that the only way to be successful is to communicate like a man (since the male is often the standard in our society), they might make attempts to differentiate themselves in order to achieve success, but their gendered desire for connectivity may leak through this masculine attempt at communication.

Gilligan's research, while valuable, has been faulted for essentializing, for implying that there is one way of being male and one way of being female. Such essentialism seems to indicate biological determinism; that is, we are born with gendered behaviors inherently inscribed in our beings, and we are unable to act in any other manner. However, most theories of gender identity reject the idea that gender is the same thing as biological sex. While there are numerous theories regarding gender identity, most view gender as a construction, a code of behaviors prescribed by society that individuals learn and become more adept at as they mature. The two theories regarding gender identity that this project draws upon, those by Erving Goffman and Judith Butler, both view gender as a kind of performance.

Goffman asserts that identity is established through interactions with others, but these interactions are dramatic in nature, between an actor and his/her audience. He argues that every individual is essentially an actor who constructs different performances of identity depending on who the audience is and what the actor's goals are. Thus, for



Goffman, life is a theater, and as actors we perform differently when we are “frontstage” and when we are “backstage.” Frontstage behavior is staged behavior: It is a public persona designed to convince the audience that the actor is credible. It is an idealized self, characterized by the adherence to social norms and moral codes (35). Backstage is where we prepare our frontstage behavior, where we manage the information about ourselves so that we appear to be acceptable when we step on stage (112). Any information about ourselves that runs counter to social expectations is concealed from the audience in a process of “mystification,” which involves placing emphasis on those aspects of our self that are socially sanctioned, thereby legitimizing both our public performance and our private selves (67). Because my project uses a public space as a site for analysis, I expect to find the bloggers primarily engaging in frontstage behavior; however, because of blogs association with diary writing, a private activity, I may be able to observe some of the bloggers’ backstage preparation.

Despite our careful construction of our identity performances, there are still some aspects of ourselves that are communicated involuntarily. Goffman draws a distinction between the information that is “given” (our carefully constructed performance) and that which is “given off” (the characteristics that leak through without intention) (51). This analysis primarily looks at the information that is “given,” at the public persona the blogger is attempting to construct for the reader. But it also explores the juxtaposition of elements within the blogs and the topics that do not get picked up for discussion. In other words, the analysis looks for the story behind the story being foregrounded, for the information “given off,” so that we might come to identify the elements of academics’ identities they are choosing to suppress and why they might be choosing to do so.

Goffman tells us that individuals desire to minimize accidental communication, adhere to social norms, and maintain an acceptable self due to fear of embarrassment. He argues that when our performances fail, it is embarrassing and uncomfortable for both the actor and the audience. In this manner, the audience often acts in conspiracy with the actors to make everything appear pleasant and acceptable, even when that is not the case (231). It will be important to examine, then, the aspects of bloggers' identities that the audience responds to as well as those they ignore.

Butler similarly adopts a drama-based theory, which she terms "performativity." For Butler,

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender...must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (519)

In other words, gender is synonymous with action. It is not inherently inscribed in our bodies at birth; it is learned through our interactions with society and then compulsively enacted. Thus, individuals are always performing gender—we are acting gendered when we write, when we dress ourselves, and when we interact with others. Accordingly, all of the elements of the academic blogs I examine can be said to be gendered.

Though gender is not embodied in individuals, our bodies do restrict the genders that are culturally acceptable to perform. That is, our bodies communicate social expectations for behavior. There are social definitions of what it means to act like a man

and what it means to act like a woman. Thus, “to be a woman is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman,’ to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project” (Butler 522). To fail to adhere to historical notions of womanhood (or manhood) is to risk ostracism. In this manner, “gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo” (520). Butler, thus, agrees with Goffman when he states that gender performance is motivated by individuals’ desire to avoid embarrassment. Butler takes this idea further to argue that social expectations of gender are so pervasive that individuals come to think of them as being tied to physiology rather than as performance (522). Thus, socially-acceptable gendered behavior comes to be seen as natural and necessary to its actors.

Butler argues that gender performance reifies “the natural configuration of bodies into sexes which exist in a binary relation to one another” because individuals are unaware that gender identity is nothing more than a “cultural fiction” (524, 522). However, individuals *do* perform gender in different ways, interpreting and flirting with social sanctions and taboos in different ways. If individuals become aware of themselves as *actors performing* gender, then they will become aware that there are multiple, alternative, and subversive possibilities for gender. This leads Butler to conclude that “gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds” (531). If individuals are willing to face ostracism and embarrassment (to

use Goffman's term) we can potentially break our society of the perception that gender is a binary category synonymous with biological sex. Furthermore, if we believe what Butler says to be true, the extent to which the academics in this study subvert traditional notions of gender identity likely depends on the extent to which they recognize gender as performance rather than physiology.

Goffman's and Butler's theories both discuss gender (and identity in general) as performance. This idea is imperative to my study because similar research on men's and women's differences has been criticized as essentialist, for implying that all men act in one way and one all women act in another (see Gilligan). Goffman's and Butler's theories indicate that while everyone does not perform gender in the same way, there are cultural expectations for what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. These expectations interact with expectations related to individuals' often competing multiple identities as well as their own desires, producing variations in gender performance. Thus, this study will not seek to define what men do and what women do, but rather it will attempt to discover the ways in which individuals pick up and enact gender norms and the ways in which they subvert them in ostensibly professional performances.

### *Gender and Communication*

Research regarding how gender affects communication draws upon notions of gender, similar to those of Butler and Goffman, that maintain that gender is socially constructed. Julia T. Wood's argues in *Gendered Lives* that gender "is acquired through interaction in a social world, and it changes over time" (22). Thus, gender refers to learned attitudes and behaviors—we learn from society what it means to be masculine or

feminine. Wood maintains that American social conventions currently dictate the following conceptions of gender: “To be masculine is to be strong, ambitious, successful, rational, and emotionally controlled ... To be feminine is to be attractive, deferential, unaggressive, emotional, nurturing, and concerned with people and relationships” (22). Wood indicates these socially-prescribed expectations affect men’s and women’s behaviors and may also affect the way they communicate. Thus, these gendered characteristics are also likely to be evidenced in the way academics utilize their blogs to communicate.

It is important to note that Wood is not attempting to state these gendered characteristics are true of all men and women (18). Wood notes, as do Goffman and Butler, that these characteristics are what society prescribes to be appropriate for each sex. The characteristics deemed to be appropriate change over time and vary by culture. People do not have to adhere to these characteristics, but they are generally the characteristics that are culturally expected. Wood indicates gender “is a complex set of interrelated cultural ideas that stipulate the social *meaning* of sex ... When the practices and structures that make up social life constantly represent women and men in particular ways, it is difficult to imagine that masculinity and femininity could be defined differently” (23-25). Accordingly, Wood warns against essentializing. She states we distort gender when we assume all men are alike and all women are alike (18).

Wood indicates language itself can marginalize women. Her theory is in line with anthropologists’ beliefs that “all language is the language of the dominant order,” which results in minority groups feeling “muted,” with one of those muted minority groups being women (Stranger 34). Feminist scholars theorize that language can never be

gender-neutral. They assert, “Discourse—linear, logical, and theoretical—is masculine. When women speak, therefore, they cannot help but enter a male-dominated discourse; speaking women are silent as women” (Stranger 32-33). Wood indicates this marginalization stems from the structure of language. Wood states, “In Western society, our language negates women’s experience by denying and dismissing women’s importance and sometimes their very existence. In so doing, it represents men and their experiences as the norm and women and their ways as deviant” (109). Wood indicates this denial of women’s experience can be seen in how generic language often assumes the male form, in words such as “firemen” and “mankind” (109). Women are also often demeaned by language that refers to them in terms of their appearance while men are more often referred to in terms of their accomplishments (111).

Wood further theorizes that we demonstrate our gender through language and that there are discernable differences in the way men and women communicate. She indicates women primarily use language to create interpersonal relationships (125). Wood also finds women to have a more personal style; they are more willing to divulge private details about their lives and emotions (127). On the other hand, she finds men often use communication to assert independence and gain prestige. As such, men’s communication is generally characterized by exhibition of knowledge, lack of emotion, and an assertive style. Such findings call to mind Gilligan’s assertion that women define themselves by connection while men define themselves by individuation.

Wood’s research is particularly relevant to this project because it provides a clear picture of what the perceived differences between men’s and women’s behaviors are. Though her findings cannot be taken to represent all men and women, they are useful for

extrapolating possible differences that may manifest themselves in academic blogs. If academics perform their gender in socially expected ways, then I may find that male bloggers are ambitious and rational while female bloggers are deferential and emotional.

While Wood discusses communication broadly, research in composition, such as that conducted by Elizabeth Flynn, investigates writing in particular to discover if there are similar gendered differences in the way men and women compose. In her article, “Composing as Woman,” Flynn draws upon Gilligan’s research to raise the question of whether composition studies has adequately considered how women compose. Flynn argues compositionists need to more critically examine their research methods to see if they contain a male bias. She also argues for a more in-depth study of the ways individuals compose to see if there are identifiable gender differences.

Flynn works from the idea that developmental gender differences, such as those discussed by Gilligan, will manifest themselves in student writing. Thus, in her study, Flynn analyzes narratives about learning experiences from four first-year undergraduate students (two male, two female) to see if their compositions exhibit gendered styles. Flynn identifies gendered themes in the students’ narratives. Flynn indicates the first female student, Kim, communicates in a gendered way by creating an identity for herself as a member of a group. Thus, Kim indicates she is defined by her relationships to other people, a characteristic that Gilligan states is typical of women (Flynn 248, Gilligan 35). The story of the other female student, Kathy, is considered gendered because it discusses her fear of separation from a group. This indicates Kathy has “strong need for connection, for affiliation,” which again is typical of the women in Gilligan’s study as well (Flynn 249, Gilligan 35). Flynn utilizes these two women’s narratives to theorize that women

tend to write about collaboration and relationships. Conversely, the first male, Jim, writes a narrative about solitary adventure and demonstrates his skills as a way of proving his abilities. Thus, Jim creates an identity for himself as a person capable of completing a difficult task. Joe, the other male participant in the study, tells a story of “frustrated achievement” emphasizing hard work and competition. These male narratives lead Flynn to theorize that men tend to write stories focusing on accomplishment and individual success, which echoes the male concern for individuation Gilligan discusses (Flynn 250, Gilligan 48).

The analysis of these narratives leads Flynn to conclude women and men likely value different things; women value being part of a community while men prefer to be differentiated from others (247-248). Such findings almost directly mirror the findings of Gilligan. The narratives also indicate there may be male and female ways of writing. Although Flynn does identify gendered themes in the students’ narratives, she avoids generalizations. Flynn recognizes a sampling of four students’ essays is not large enough to support any definitive conclusions. However, Flynn does indicate there were several other student essays conveying gendered themes. Flynn states the following:

We ought not assume that males and females use language in identical ways or represent the world in a similar fashion ... Ignoring [gender] differences almost certainly means a suppression of women’s separate ways of thinking and writing. Our models of the composing process are quite possibly better suited to describing men’s ways of composing than to describing women’s. (251)



Flynn also mentions that much more could be said about the narratives she examined. In other words, her analysis was just a surface examination that served to indicate the issue of gender and composition requires further pursuit. As a result, Flynn argues instructors should have students investigate the relationship between gender and language in their composition courses (251).

Flynn's research thus indicates that gender norms inscribed in individuals at a young age can manifest themselves through writing. Though the sample size of Flynn's study is not nearly large enough to draw general conclusions, her findings do indicate that it is likely that men and women compose in different ways. As such, the blogs being analyzed for this project are likely to exhibit similar gendered characteristics.

These gendered ways of communicating seem to occur even within professional environments, as Wood discusses in *Gendered Lives*. She argues that women are often disadvantaged in work environments because "masculine forms of communication are the standard in most work environments" (252). She notes that as men have historically governed the public sphere while women have been relegated to the private sphere, men have been able to shape institutions so that only their forms of communication are valued. Thus, Wood argues that the characteristics required for success in professional environments are "linked with masculine modes of communication—assertion, independence, competitiveness, and confidence, all of which are emphasized in masculine speech communities" (254). In contrast, characteristics of women's communication, such as collaboration, deference, and inclusivity, are looked down upon in work environments. Wood finds connections between gender and communication similar to those found by Gilligan: "We are taught to communicate in different ways,

with females being encouraged to create and sustain interpersonal connections and respond to others, and males being encouraged to emphasize independence and status” (256).

Wood’s research on professional communication affirms that gender identity affects individuals even in the workplace. By drawing upon Wood’s research, I can come to a better understanding regarding why academics choose to communicate in such a way in their academic blogs. It is likely that they are unable to escape their social conditioning and will communicate in the ways Wood tells us are particular to each gender. However, as Wood indicates, professional communication is often in line with masculine ways of communicating. As such, I may find that readers judge male blogs to be more successful or that female academics may choose to adopt more masculine ways of speaking in an attempt to gain success within their profession.

### *Gender and Professional Identity*

The idea that women and men may communicate differently in professional situations is supported by research conducted by Gesa E. Kirsch. Kirsch argues in *Women Writing the Academy: Audience, Authority, and Transformation* that female academics have been marginalized within the academy (and the larger society), and this marginalization creates problems for them when attempting to establish authority and incorporate their experiences into their scholarship. Kirsch draws these conclusions from interviews with thirty-five women in different positions within the academy (undergraduate student, graduate student, pre-tenure faculty, tenured faculty) and from five different academic disciplines (anthropology, education, history, nursing, and psychology) (30). She uses qualitative research to allow the women to narrate their own

realities and provides them with a position of authority from which to speak about their own experiences.

From these women's stories, Kirsch reaches a conclusion similar to Wood's: that there is a contradiction between being a professional and being a woman (6). Kirsch finds, as does Wood, that in order to achieve success in the professional world, women must communicate as men. Many feminist scholars have argued that academic discourse is male discourse because it focuses on agonistic argument, which emphasizes competition and assertion (19). Thus, Kirsch maintains that "women have to break old norms of silence, submissiveness, and deference in order to gain an 'academic voice'" (3). These prescribed gender norms complicate women's communication because their behaviors differ markedly from those that our society has come to associate with authority. Kirsch further argues that because women have historically been excluded from positions of authority "they *cannot* transcend gender as a category of difference in the way others perceive them in positions of authority" (50). In other words, society has been conditioned to think of women as not having authority, and female academics are unable to escape this preconception of women when interacting with others. That is, their authority is always in question no matter how many years of experience they acquire. It is likely, then, that concerns with authority will manifest themselves in female academics' blogs as well

Women's struggle to achieve authority is further complicated by the fact that female academics are working to change the academic system at the same time they are attempting to succeed within it. Kirsch maintains, "These conflicting goals can strain women's sense of confidence and authority and can leave a deeply internalized self-

doubt” (4). The women in Kirsch’s study communicated again and again their concerns regarding authority; this was true even for academics who had years of experience and numerous publications proving their expertise in their respective fields (53). In fact, Kirsch found that “as women advanced along the academic ranks, issues of authority can be more—rather than less—pronounced” (127).

In examining female academics’ stories, Kirsch finds that the women she interviewed often detach themselves from their writing as a way to deal with attacks on their authority (64). The participants in Kirsch’s study create this detachment “by denying ownership of the text, by describing themselves as outsiders or ‘participant observers’ in the academic culture, by reinterpreting discouraging writing experiences as positive learning experiences, and by describing writing and research as two distinct and unrelated activities” (64). These tactics allow them to sidestep audiences that might question their right to speak, giving them a buffer between their public persona and their private integrity. She notes that female academics are faced with contradictory cultural norms: those expected of women and those expected of academics. Kirsch maintains that this uncertainty causes women to feel the need to apologize both for breaking these norms and for speaking to the interests of women in an academic forum (79-80). The participants in Kirsch’s study seem to be very cognizant of how their scholarship as women will be perceived by others, to the point where some avoid writing for general audiences because “it can easily be interpreted as women’s lack of seriousness or their inability to write academic discourse” (93).

Kirsch’s research provides some potentially important insights for my research. Her findings indicate that the female academics in my study are likely quite concerned

with establishing credibility and being respected as authorities in the field. Considering their concern over authority, I may also find that female academics distance themselves from their work in the same manner that the women in Kirsch's study did. At the same time, however, the participants in Kirsch's study were always aware of their identities *as women*. Accordingly, the women whose blogs are analyzed as part of this project may similarly be aware of the ways in which their gender marginalizes them and causes them to want to question the very institution of which they are a part. It is likely that I may discover evidence of female academics' confusion regarding how to integrate the contradictory identities of "woman" and "academic."

As my project specifically looks at how academics in the field of rhetoric and composition construct their identity in blogs, it was important to examine research, such as that conducted by Eileen Schell, regarding how female composition instructors view their academic identities. In "The Costs of Caring: 'Feminism' and Contingent Women Workers in Composition Studies," Schell argues that feminist pedagogy for composition courses needs to be further investigated because it may be reinforcing the very gender expectations that feminists are fighting against. She notes that students apply traditional gender norms to their instructors, expecting female composition instructors to "act as nurturing mother figures," even as they expect instructors to demonstrate subject expertise (78). Schell maintains that women are expected to fulfill traditional gender roles within the larger university as well: "there is sort of a subtle pressure to be compliant, to not assert themselves intellectually, to spend...more time with students than the men do, to be motherly and nurturing, to be on a million committees, not to be a power within the university but to just do the drudgery that has to be done, to be compliant in every way"

(79). In other words, women are expected to work to advance the institution and their students rather than themselves, much in the same way that mothers are traditionally expected to put the needs of their families before their own.

She notes that the majority of composition instructors are women, and most of them hold part-time, contingent labor positions—positions of marginality within the institution (80). Their marginal positions in the academy and their subsequent exclusion from important academic conversations cause many female academics to scorn the institutions of which they are a part even when they thoroughly enjoy teaching. She notes that female instructors often feel “invisible and alienated” within the institution, despite the long hours they commit to service activities (84). One female academic explains how this alienation affects her identity: “My struggle to be seen and heard in this discipline is also a struggle to have faith in myself and what I’m doing” (84). Thus, this marginalization within the academy leads to issues with authority and self-confidence for female academics, as the women in Kirsch’s study also express.

Schell’s research is significant because it illuminates another aspect of female academic identity. The female bloggers in my study may feel a disconnect between their teaching and their research, between the actions they perform for their students and the ones they perform for their institutions. Schell’s research also indicates, in a manner similar to Kirsch, that female academics occupy uncertain positions within the academy, and their uncertainty about their positions may be communicated through the identities they construct within their blogs. I will also be looking to see how the expectation of the female instructor as nurturer is negotiated by the women in the ways that they define themselves.

## GENDER AND TECHNOLOGY

Now that I've established an overview of how gender intersects with composition and how this intersection affects identity construction, it is important to also understand how gender interacts with technology to further shape how we construct our identities, specifically how we construct them within online spaces.

### *Online Identity*

Early discussions of online identity, such as the one Sherry Turkle presents in *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, are often idealistic, painting a picture of the Internet as a safe space where individuals can freely experiment with their identities. Turkle maintains that when we're online, those we are interacting with know nothing about us except for what we choose to reveal about ourselves. Free from the constraints that visual and aural cues would impose, users are able to manipulate their identities and become whomever they wish. In this manner, "The Internet has become a significant social laboratory for experimenting with the constructions and reconstructions of self that characterize postmodern life. In its virtual reality, we self-fashion and self-create" (180).

Turkle bases this theory of identity on research she conducted on MUDs (Multi-User Domains), text-based games in virtual worlds in which multiple users create characters and interact with one another in real-time. As her research site is a domain that encourages the construction of personas, she notes that "traditional ideas about identity have been tied to a notion of authenticity that such virtual experiences actively subvert. When each player can create many characters and participate in many games, the self is not only decentered but multiplied without limit" (185). However, Turkle argues that this kind of identity experimentation is not limited to MUDs. She notes that we enact

different representations of ourselves in homepages, discussion groups, and chatrooms as well. That is, we have particular purposes we are trying to achieve in these spaces, and we carefully construct our personas, sometimes masking, sometimes exaggerating, and sometimes outright fibbing as we communicate only those aspects of ourselves (or our imagined selves) to help us achieve those purposes. Though MUD users often create fantasy characters for themselves (elves, dragons, etc.) whose forms depart significantly from their physical selves, the aspects of their identity—the personalities they convey and the behaviors they engage in—are not necessarily foreign. Thus, Turkle argues, “cyberspace provides opportunities to play out aspects of oneself that are not total strangers but that may be inhibited in real life” (205). In this manner, online we can become the selves that we are too afraid to be in “the real world.” The anonymity and technological buffer from societal criticism provided by the Internet free us to expand our notions of self and engage in behaviors we feel would otherwise be inappropriate in our “real lives.” Accordingly, the academics in this study may be capitalizing on this opportunity for identity play by choosing to perform aspects of their identities that are not normally acceptable in rigid institutional spaces.

However, more recent work on online identity faults Turkle for assuming that users will be able to completely detach themselves from their embodied selves. Susanna Paasonen argues in “Gender, Identity, and (the Limits of) Play on the Internet” that we are too conditioned by our lived experiences in the real world to engage in the kind of unrestricted experimentation with identity that Turkle theorizes. She faults Turkle for underestimating the effects of our raced, classed, and sexed bodies. Paasonen invokes Butler’s theory of gender identity, specifically her idea that our sexed bodies call forth



social expectations for gender that are internalized and reenacted compulsively, to argue that we can never truly divorce ourselves from our genders or our gendered experiences (25). In other words, “we enter the virtual world laden with the psychological baggage of a lifetime and certainly don’t abandon our suitcases in the entrance lobby” (37).

Paasonen, thus, argues that “online and offline communications are not separate forms of existence, experience, or identity work” (32). Rather, the experiences we live in our bodies in the real world, those we experience based on how others perceive our raced, classed, and sexed physical selves, condition our thought processes and behaviors so completely that we can’t help but be influenced by our physical characteristics in virtual spaces (25). For example, the social expectations we’ve learned regarding what it means to be a woman—deference, nurturing, etc.—make us uncomfortable acting as men online and influence our interactions with others in a feminized way even when we are claiming male identities. In this manner, “identities are not only what we ‘decide’ or desire them to be; they are, to a high degree, decided for us” (38).

Paasonen makes specific mention of homepage identities, which are quite similar to the identities assumed by bloggers. She argues that personal homepages, especially, “are centrally about representing one’s embodied social locations” (30). Paasonen notes that the purposes of homepages, namely to establish a presence online and introduce others to who the owner of the page is, would be compromised by engaging in the kind of identity play Turkle discusses. Rather, homepage creators are limited in the types of identities they can assume because the selves they are motivated to present are intimately tied to the interests, family connections, and professional lives of their physical selves. Accordingly, the opportunities for the academics in this analysis to experiment with their

identity are limited because their writing is closely associated with their professional identities.

Turkle's and Paasonen's competing theories of online identity are both useful for my project because they help me to understand the factors that influence academics as they craft their identities online. Paasonen's theory most closely depicts the identity construction academics go through because their blog identity cannot be separated from the professional public identity that they have within the academy. In fact, the academics in this study are likely utilizing their blogs to build personas for themselves as competent people in the field, and therefore would not benefit from severing ties between their virtual and physical selves. That is, they cannot necessarily flirt with and manipulate boundaries of identity in the same way that characters in MUDs are able to, although they may certainly push at the boundaries of institutionalized identity. In fact, Turkle's theory is useful precisely for this reason—because it demonstrates the desire of online users to push the boundaries of identity and to expose aspects of their identities that they hide in real life. Thus, in my study, I am likely to find that academics are influenced and constrained by their embodied identities, but they are also likely to engage in certain behaviors that subvert and expand these identities in ways they may not be able to within institutional settings.

Work done on identities in homepages, such as that by Daniel Chandler, Hugh Miller and Jill Arnold, supports both Turkle's and Paasonen's theories of online identity. These scholars note, in a manner similar to Turkle, that personal homepages are sites where identity is continuously and consciously constructed. However, Chandler also agrees with Paasonen when he asserts that, "The social ties typically embedded in

personal homepages (without which they would hardly be recognizable as personal home pages) would tend to make assumed identities hard to sustain.” Miller and Arnold similarly argue that the self presented in homepages is likely not to depart extremely from the selves we embody in real life. After all, “The Web is not a new world, but an electronic reflection of the world we currently inhabit” (Lawley qtd in Miller 77). Thus, while homepage creators and bloggers are explicitly managing the aspects of self they present, they are limited in the kinds of identities they can assume.

Chandler also notes that homepages blur the boundaries between the personal and the public in that they offer personal information about the author in a venue open to a (potentially) global audience. In this manner, homepage creators are presenting their online identities to an unknown audience, most of whom will never encounter the creators’ “true” selves. As such, many homepage authors become hyperaware of the identities they construct and the societal expectations governing identity in order to ensure that they are presenting their “best selves.” Yet because of individuals’ multiple identities and the hybrid nature of the medium, the selves that are presented are often not either personal or public, but rather some combination of the two. It is likely, then, that the academics in this analysis will exhibit a similar fusion of their personal and public identities.

This research on identity in homepages is compelling because of the similarities it reveals between blogs and homepages—both are frequently updated and focus on the creator’s interests and ideas, the primary difference being that blogs archive previous posts while homepages overwrite them. This research suggests that the identities academics communicate through their blogs may have close ties to their true identities.

Yet, because the medium blends the personal and the public, it is likely that academics mix their professional identities with their personal, gendered identities in ways not traditionally sanctioned by the academy.

### *Women Online*

Technology has traditionally been considered a male domain. In fact, computers and the Internet both originated out of the military-industrial complex. The government used computers during WWII to optimize military operations, and the Internet was originally developed as a communication tool for the US Department of Defense (Scott 5). Even after these technologies began to be used by those outside of the military, they were predominantly used by masculine institutions such as the academy and industry. Because these technologies were first used primarily by men, men have been the ones to shape the technology. As such, it echoes their values, thought processes, and codes of behavior, which research tells us likely differ from those of women. In fact, typical Internet users during the 1990s were young white males with high incomes, which resulted in the Internet being discussed as a “white male playground” (19, 7).

Women’s use of the Internet has balanced out with men now, but research indicates that the Internet is often still a dangerous place for women where they are made to feel unwelcome. Research indicates that the web is now a new space for the victimization of women. As my own experiences in chatrooms indicate, the Internet can be a place where women are often sexually harassed, silenced, controlled, and excluded (Scott 11). In other words, the Internet is not the democratizing space people once thought it was: “rather than neutralizing gender, the electronic medium in fact encouraged its intensification, and ... participants in online communities were likely to

bring with them pre-existing patterns of hierarchy and male domination” (Pederson 1473).

That said, the Internet as a communication tool offers tremendous opportunities for women. Women have historically been confined to the private sphere, but as Chandler indicates, internet-facilitated communication blurs the boundaries between public and private, allowing women to bring the knowledge and values traditionally associated with the private sphere into the public sphere, to have public personas representing their private selves. Furthermore, as the Internet has primarily become a vehicle for interpersonal communication (which women are generally thought to be more interested in), it may become a feminized technology in much the same way that the telephone has (Herring 220). If this is true, the Internet could become a tool for fighting women’s oppression by giving women voice and helping to reshape institutions that have historically excluded women. It remains, however, that Internet-facilitated communication is still “reinforcing the very inequalities they should be combating” (Scott 6).

The failed democratizing potential of the web leads Susan Herring to argue in “Gender and Power in On-line Communication” that the same hierarchies privileging men over women are also evident online; thus, “In many respects, the Internet reproduces the larger societal gender status quo” (218). Herring points to websites that subvert women’s attempts at self-determination by demeaning women in sexual ways as evidence of this claim. In particular, she discusses *Babes on the Web*, a website created by Robert Toups in which he rates photos of women on personal homepages on a scale of “babeness.” These photos, however, are most often respectable, professional photographs

of academic women seeking to create a space for their voices online. Yet, they were co-opted by Troups, detached from their context, viewed through a male gaze, and reduced to nothing more than a sexualized image satisfying male voyeuristic desires (213). This leads Herring to conclude that “the problem of objectification of images of females on the Web exists independently of the ‘provocativeness’ of the images, recalling the wider phenomenon of objectification of females off-line” (213).

The idea that the Internet is a site for reinscribing patriarchal society is further supported by research revealing that female voices are overrun in chatrooms and discussion boards with males posting more, posting longer responses, and aggressively attacking and sexually harassing female participants in an attempt to silence them (Scott 11). Thus, “computer-mediated communication is more a male monologue than a mixed-sex conversation” (11). Despite the hostility faced by many women online, Herring finds that “users are not necessarily interested in exploiting the potential for anonymous interaction – the use of one’s real name lends accountability and seriousness of purpose to one’s words that anonymous messages lack” (206). In this manner, credibility may be of more significance to women than protection against possible attack.

This history of women’s experience with technology is imperative to my study because it reveals the cultural factors influencing academics’ identity construction. That is, the female bloggers I will be discussing have been influenced by this legacy of women’s exclusion from technology (whether or not they have personally experienced it), and this is likely to be revealed in the ways in which they construct their identities within their blogs. For example, because historically women have been denied access to technology, female academics may feel that they have to prove they have a right to be

part of the online community when constructing their blogs. Additionally, knowing that women are often victimized online, female bloggers are likely aware of their vulnerability on the Internet, and they may choose to keep certain aspects of their identity hidden for this reason.

In fact, research indicates that this history of women's oppression (both in technology and in the larger society) *does* affect the ways in which women construct identities online. Hugh Miller and Jill Arnold conduct an investigation of gender identity in female academics' homepages. This research leads them to argue that gendered concerns in the real world influence how female academics construct their identities online. They find that women utilize an expressive style in line with societal expectations of the female gender and with Gilligan's findings by focusing on emotions and interpersonal connections ("Self" 81). Additionally, female academics are cognizant of their need to demonstrate credibility and often marshal a myriad of credentials to prove that they have the authority to speak ("Gender" 337). Miller and Arnold argue that this concern over credibility stems from women's embodied experiences of times when their voices were silenced. Thus, "the vulnerability of themselves as *women* remained part of their persona as academics" ("Breaking" 101).

Awareness of this vulnerability is further evidenced by female academics' concern with audience ("Self" 81). They know that the audience has the ability to pass judgment on them; as such, they are careful not to reveal too much about themselves. Because the site for Miller's and Arnold's analysis was academic homepages, many of them reside on institutional websites, so that a misstep in identity construction could result in termination. Accordingly, the female academics in this study seemed intent on

making their research, rather than their selves, the focus of their sites (87). On the other hand, male academics, who do not have to deal with feelings of vulnerability, were more confident, speaking in an instrumental style that stresses achievements, actions, and material goods and that communicates the individuation Gilligan tells us is typical of male behavior (81, Gilligan 48).

As Miller's and Arnold's research focuses specifically on gendered academic identities, it has important implications for my study. It is likely that I will find many of the same gendered behaviors when analyzing academic blogs. However, academic blogs, though generally linked somewhere to the institution's website, are not usually sponsored by the institution. As such, the academics in my study may have a bit more freedom in which to play with and subvert their identities. Additionally, because blogs are continuously updated they likely capture a more complete and nuanced construction of the author's identity from which I am likely to discover gendered characteristics not discussed by Miller and Arnold.

### *Blogs and Identity*

Blogs are a fairly recent phenomenon. As such, there is little research about them and most of what is available is published online, in Internet journals (usually peer-reviewed), listservs, and blogs themselves. Because of the limited research on this technology, there is still much to be learned about how identity, specifically that of gender, functions in the new medium. Rory Ewins, an academic blogger in the United Kingdom, presents his tenuous theories about blogger identity in "Who are You? Weblogs and Academic Identity." His findings come not from rigorous research but rather from his five years of experience as a blogger. Ewins echoes Paasonen's idea that



online identity cannot be separated from embodied identity. He notes that the identities we present through blogs evolve as aspects of our real lives change. Thus, our physical locations, those we interact with, and the activities we engage in have profound impacts on both our physical and virtual selves (374).

Ewins goes further to theorize that the identities that get constructed through blogs may be selves of which the author is not aware. He argues, “A blog is independent of your mind and the sense of self that inhabits it, but interacts with it, revealing yourself—your selves—to you” (374). In this way, blogging changes the authors’ sense of themselves as they read over and explore their virtual incarnations and become an audience for their own blogs. Ewins also notes that bloggers become very attached to their online identities, often feeling as though they’ve lost an important part of themselves when servers crash or they decide to retire their blogs (373).

Ewins maintains that blogs are especially important for academics because the ability to archive and link to other works allows them to contribute to a body of knowledge and build reputations for themselves (369). It is a way for the academic to “define his or her self in relation to the wider environment” (373). Nevertheless, there are pitfalls of which academic bloggers must be aware. First of all, readers come to academic blogs with certain assumptions. They expect the posts to be thoughtful and intellectual and make react harshly when academics deviate from this. As such, audience expectations may constrain the identities that academics are willing/able to perform (373-374). Additionally, the institutions of which the academics are a part may serve as a censor for academic blogs. Though institutions do not generally have any direct control over blog content, academic bloggers are aware that representatives of the institution may

be part of their readership, and they may face punitive consequences for departing from identities that are deemed acceptable to the institution.

Ewins' article provides a better understanding of how academics construct their identity through blogs. His discussion of the institution's affect on academic blogs is especially important because it indicates that academic bloggers may not be entirely free to be whomever they want to be online. Ewins' article falls short, however, because it discusses bloggers as a homogenous group. Though he notes that our physical selves influence the kinds of identities we perform online, he does not discuss how things such as race, class, and gender bring with them societal expectations and constraints that also affect bloggers' construction of identity.

Research indicates, however, that gender identity does influence how blogs are constructed as well as how they are perceived by audiences. The blogosphere has been accused of being sexist, of privileging blogs by men over blogs by women (Pederson 1473). As blogs introduce the feminine act of diary writing into a masculine technology, it can be argued that "the feminine use of the weblog can be seen as 'emasculating a historically masculine technology, thereby 'regendering' the weblog" (van Doorn 147). In fact, statistically women outnumber men as bloggers, yet public discourse about blogs disproportionately highlights blogs by male authors, thereby characterizing blogs as a masculine technology. This misrepresentation of the blogging community, "implicitly evaluat[es] the activities of adult males as more interesting, important and/or newsworthy than those of other blog authors,...thereby indirectly reproducing societal sexism" (Herring, et al). The blog phenomenon, then, seems to replicate the marginalization of women evidenced in other forms of computer-mediated communication.

This marginalization of female blogs may stem from the differences between male and female blogs. Researchers have found that women tend to blog about private events while men are more likely to blog about public events (Pederson 1474). Men seem especially concerned with separating themselves from the domestic sphere and not appearing emotional, choosing to discuss issues and events external to the home in a much more formal manner (van Doorn 150). As such, women generally offer more information about themselves than men, who often discard entirely the profile or “about me” sections of blogs (Pederson 1483). Additionally, women tend to be more focused on making connections to other people while men focus more on connecting to information (1475). These findings echo those by Gilligan that women value connection while men value individuation. This leads researchers to conclude that “weblog authors present their gender identity through narratives of ‘everyday life’ that remain closely tied to the binary gender system” (van Doorn 144).

These same basic gendered characteristics may be evident in academic blogs. However, because the research is only conducted on personal blogs, it fails to account for how bloggers’ professional, academic identities shape and constrain their gendered identities and professional selves. It is possible that I will find significant differences in the blogs in my study because the purpose and context for writing are professional in nature.

#### **ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

I utilize this existing research on technology, gender, identity, composition, and professional communication to form my analytical framework for reading and interpreting academic blogs. That is, I will be drawing on Goffman’s and Butler’s

theories of gender identity to theorize the identities the bloggers are constructing as performances. In this manner, I can avoid criticism that I am essentializing, and instead portray gender identity as an array of possible characters bloggers can choose to don, discard, or exchange at any time. I will also employ Turkle's and Paasonen's theories of online identity to theorize that bloggers experience a sense of freedom about playing with their identity in online spaces but that they are constrained by their embodied selves.

I will utilize research conducted on gender differences in communication (both online and off) that seems to reinforce Gilligan's findings that men value separation while women value connection as a lens through which to view these blogs. That is, I will use Gilligan's (and others) findings as what society views as standard gender performance, and I will be investigating the ways in which academic bloggers adhere to, subvert, and transform these expectations. This framework leads me to argue that the virtual identities female academics create are closely tied to their embodied identities, that female academics offer more credentials and speak with less confidence than male academics, and that female academics are more willing to expand traditional conceptions of academic identity.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **WALKING THE TIGHTROPE: BLOGGERS' NEGOTIATION BETWEEN ACADEMIC AND GENDERED IDENTITY**

In the last chapter, I reviewed the existing research related to identity, gender, composition, professional communication, and technology and used the research findings to establish an analytical framework for this study. In this chapter, I read the six blogs selected, using the aforementioned analytical framework as my lens. For each gender category (here limited to the binary of male and female since none of the blog authors identified as other or third gender) I analyze each blog individually, then I discuss common gendered themes. I conclude by comparing the gender themes from both gender categories to argue that female bloggers' virtual identities are more closely tied to their embodied identities than are male bloggers', that they are more concerned with offering credentials than are male bloggers, that they speak with less confidence than do male bloggers, and that they are more willing to break out of traditional notions of academic identity than are male bloggers.

## READING THE FEMININE

*changelog@tengrrl.com*

The *changelog@tengrrl.com* blog is authored by Traci Gardner, an Online Content Developer for the National Council for Teachers of English who does not hold a PhD. Gardner does not list any biographical information about herself on the main page of her blog, but rather relegates all such information to a linked profile page. In this profile page, Gardner self-identifies as an educator and writer. Her profile essentially acts as a vita written in paragraph form, discussing only the professional positions she has held and the duties she has performed, with a link to her more traditional vita included. Thus, her profile page emphasizes her credentials, specifically those related to teaching, writing, and technology. The profile page excludes personal information about the blogger, though it does include a picture. Her blog also includes a link to her profile page on NCTE's website, which — like her blog profile — is limited to professional information and includes a photograph of the blogger. In this manner, the identity Gardner crafts for herself within her profile page is primarily that of an academic and a professional.

The noticeable exclusion of all personal information communicates to the reader that Gardner sees a clear definition between her private and professional lives. That is, she seems to follow traditional notions of professionalism, which dictate that those aspects of herself that make up her life outside of the academy—her hobbies, friends, and family connections—have no rightful place within an academic blog. Gardner's choice to separate her personal and professional identities in this way seems to indicate that she is trying to engage in the kind of rational and individuated communication that Wood tells us is characteristic of professional academic communication (254). Relegating this

biographical information to the linked profile page may also indicate that Gardner wishes her writing and ideas to be judged on their own merit, rather than having her readers' perceptions influenced by her biographical information.

Gardner seems to struggle with defining professionalism in her public web space, as is evidenced in the way she visually constructs her blog. The page design of the blog utilizes a blue floral wallpaper as the background with soft green frames overtop, taking up most of the space on the page. In this manner, Gardner establishes a primarily unadorned space upon which to place her text, with her decorative background only peeking out around the edges. The green frames, thus, serve to repress the more ornamental wallpaper. While the blue background with its baroque pattern of serpentine vines and delicate bouquets communicates a sense of femininity and reveals a bit about the blog author's personality, Gardner chooses to mask this background with a sanitized and impersonal overlay of green.

This design could possibly indicate that Gardner does desire to express more of herself, to become more humanized to her audience, but that she also fears that such an admittance is inappropriate within the context of an academic blog. That is, it is likely that she feels the disclosure of personal interests (even in something as seemingly innocuous as the background of a webpage) breaches traditional notions of academic professionalism, which emphasize objectivity and detachment, and she fears that a blatant breach of these standards in which she reveals her personality to her readers would cast her in an unprofessional light in the eyes of the academy. Her page design can also be read in Goffman's terms. Gardner seems to be largely concerned with performing a professional identity, and the green frames can be read as the information that is "given,"

the props that are consciously foregrounded to convey the appropriate persona. The floral wallpaper, then, becomes the information that is “given off,” part of the author’s “true” identity, an expression of her desire to be seen as more than an academic, that leaks through (or in this case, spills out behind) her carefully constructed frontstage performance.

This subtle conflict between the personal and professional also evidences itself in the topics of Gardner’s posts. Many of her posts focus on her own writing and teaching, her duties at work, and blogging, yet interspersed with these posts are ones about more personal topics such as shopping, food, and private issues. Gardner reveals the conflict she feels regarding what is appropriate to discuss in her blog in her post on May 16, 2007: “I planned to come home and write tonight, but I couldn't figure out how. The more I think about it, the more silenced I feel by my circumstances. It's been a very hard month, and I'm not sure whether the right thing to do is stand up and write the story or scrawl it away secretly.” Here, Gardner is experiencing a disconnect between her professional identity and her personal need to express a private turmoil. Because her blog identity is tied to a known professional identity within the academy, Gardner feels uncomfortable—and ultimately decides against—discussing a private concern. This once again evidences the boundary Gardner sees between the professional and the personal, but it also reveals that Gardner may be displeased by this separation. Such a disconnect between her academic identity and her personal, gendered identity may serve to support Kirsch’s conclusion that female scholars experience a conflict between their identities as women and their identities as academics (6). Gardner seems to indicate a wish to communicate in the confessional, highly personal manner that Gilligan and Flynn tell us



is characteristic of women, but is unable to do so because, as Wood indicates, successful professional communication requires individuals to be rational and detached.

Despite the division Gardner feels between these identities, evidence of Gardner's private identity can be seen within Gardner's professional posts, as her writing often reveals a sense of insecurity about her own talent. Gardner adopts varying degrees of confidence in her writing, speaking assuredly at times and at other times doubting her abilities. For example, in her post on November 2, 2007, she discusses reviewing the copyeditor's markup of the manuscript of her book and even finding a mistake made by the copyeditor. But then, she states, "I'm not sure that I will believe I have written a book till I have it in my hands." This comment regarding her disbelief in herself as an author undermines the earlier confidence she exhibits. This kind of demonstration of her accomplishments followed by some sort of qualifying statement occurs frequently throughout her blog, indicating the kind of self-doubt that Kirsch claims is common among female academics (4). Such intersections of personal concerns within professional posts also indicate that Gardner may have a more difficult time keeping the private and public aspects of her life separate than one would think from reading only her biography page.

Gardner does not receive comments on her posts that frequently, but the comments she does receive are generally those of congratulations and praise. As such, her readers reinforce Gardner's accomplishments, perhaps in an attempt to minimize the uncertainty that she often demonstrates. Despite this encouragement, Gardner seems to be marshalling all of her credentials to prove her credibility to the reader. Her choice to do so may indicate that she struggles with issues of authority in the same way that the female

academics in Kirsch's study do. As a result, she attempts to prove her expertise by primarily linking to her own published writings: entries in the NCTE newsletter, reviews of books, NCTE lesson plans, ReadWriteThink activities for NCTE, entries written for technotes, and lists of writing activities. Gardner also uses the writing of others to support her own posts by linking to other bloggers, authors, news stories, and academic publications. This kind of presentation of professional expertise may reveal that Gardner is aware that some of her personal concerns are seeping into her professional blog. She may feel that this somehow sullies her professional persona and chooses to compile these external academic resources as a way to reinforce her credibility.

### *The Thinkery*

The Thinkery is a blog belonging to Krista Kennedy, a PhD candidate at the University of Minnesota. She notes this institutional affiliation on a linked biography page rather than on the main page of the blog, indicating that perhaps this is not the primary way in which she defines herself. It is likely that Kennedy prefers to be identified (to her academic blog readers at least) with the titles she lists for herself on the main page: "Blogger. Rhetorician. Writer. Cook. Long-distance driver. Ph.D. Candidate. Dissertator." However, the content of her blog posts indicates that Kennedy may possess identities that are important to her that do not appear in the list of titles. For example, a significant portion of the blog is dedicated to investigating her interest in photography, but she does not claim the title of photographer in her list of titles. Kennedy may be omitting her interest in photography because she feels it is out of sync with the rest of her academic interests. Thus, Goffman would likely discuss Kennedy's list of titles as her "given" identity, but her identity as a photographer as that which is "given off," allowing

blog readers a peak at her backstage identity, at the multiple, competing forces that must be managed in her attempt to perform a “credible” academic identity.

This omission of her interest in photography continues on her linked biography page where she notes the specifics of her scholarly interests (“ways networked texts intersect with intellectual property law and theory”), the topic of her dissertation (“authorship and ownership in the 1728 Chambers’s Cyclopaedia and the English-language Wikipedia”), and includes a link to her professional webpage, which consists of a list of extended research interests, her dissertation abstract, and her vita. The biography page also includes personal information about Kennedy, including information about her deafness, her husband, how she became literate, and her interests (traveling, cooking, growing carnivorous plants), yet mention of her passion for photography is noticeably absent.

Though Kennedy’s profile information avoids mentioning her hobby in photography, the content of the blog readily reveals it. The blog itself features a plain white background, allowing the photos posted frequently throughout the blog to stand out. As the most common topic of her posts is photography, it is clear that this hobby is an important part of Kennedy’s identity. The fact that she avoids including this interest in the description of herself may indicate that she feels it is inappropriate to identify herself with an activity unrelated to her scholarly interests within the space of an academic blog. This explanation is supported by the fact that other common topics she discusses include her teaching and her scholarship, namely that which is related to her dissertation.

Despite this apparent focus on her scholarship, Kennedy does discuss more personal issues within her blog, including food/cooking and family issues (mostly related

to the death of her grandfather). Her posts also frequently utilize an informal style. For example, in her post on February 15, 2008 she states, “I’m still *totally* in love with this place and I still *heart* the winters (emphasis added),” and in her post on February 6, 2008 she uses the slang, “for reals.” This informal style is evidenced even when Kennedy discusses her scholarship and teaching, such as in the following post on February 1, 2008 in which she mentions having multiple technological platforms for conducting online classes: “*Shout out* to UMN for giving us a choice and equally supporting both (emphasis added).”

Such a discussion of personal topics and use of informal speech may simply be more “acceptable” within academic blogs than they are within other scholarly mediums, but they may also indicate a gendered desire on the part of the female academic to achieve connection with the audience, as it humanizes the blogger for the reader. This form of communication exemplifies women’s speech, as discussed by Wood, as it is more inclusive and emphasizes connection. It is important to note, however, that Wood points out that this kind of speech is *not* considered successful professional communication (254). Thus, Kennedy seems to be working to subvert (at least in terms of diction) traditional notions of professionalism that emphasize rationality and formality.

This conclusion is substantiated by the comments Kennedy receives in response to her posts, as they are generally those of support, agreement, empathy and encouragement. Respondents often share their own stories of times when they had experiences or thoughts similar to those Kennedy discusses. In this manner, they help to forge interpersonal connections between themselves and the blog author. Connections are also created by the blogger, as she incorporates several links throughout her posts. The

most common links go to Kennedy's flickr site hosting all her photos and to other people's blogs. She also includes links to annotated bibliographies and news articles related to her dissertation. By doing so, she ties together her personal interests, scholarly research, and the community of bloggers, indicating that she may view the world as a web of relationships, as Gilligan claims many women do (32).

*CultureCat: Rhetoric and Feminism*

The blog, *CultureCat: Rhetoric and Feminism*, is authored by Clancy Ratliff, an assistant professor at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Ratliff lists her professional designation and institutional affiliation as the first pieces of information she reveals to the reader. In this manner, she establishes her primary identification as that of her occupation. Also in her profile information, Ratliff notes her position as the Director of First-Year Writing, mentions her husband, and includes a link to her vita in the profile information included on her main page. Along with this profile information, Ratliff includes a photograph of herself from flickr, with the image changing to a different picture each time the page is refreshed. It's important to note that most of the pictures depict Ratliff's pregnant body, indicating that she is publicly claiming her gendered identity and feels comfortable juxtaposing her professional identity with her personal embodied identity. Thus, Ratliff seems to be claiming her femininity within an academic space to highlight the conflict between the identities of woman and professional, to expand traditional notions of gender that tell women to be deferential rather than intelligent while at the same time expanding traditional notions of academic identity that tell scholars to be detached rather than personally invested. Her choice to do so may

indicate that she is using her awareness of gender as performance to subvert narrow notions of gender (and academic) identity in the manner that Butler advocates.

Ratliff's claiming of gender can also be seen in the visual design of the blog, as it features a white background with lavender frames housing links on the right and left of the page. The banner at the top of the page features a photo from a book cover from a female young adult series called *Sweet Valley High*. The *Sweet Valley High* series reinforces stereotypical gender roles, emphasizing the two main characters' California good looks and their obsession over boys. Yet, Ratliff co-opts this image representative of women's "rightful" place within patriarchal society and places it within a feminist context, as her blog is self-identified as being about rhetoric and feminism. Thus, using such images that are clearly tied to girlhood along with feminine colors and images of Ratliff's clearly gendered, pregnant body is obviously a deliberate rhetorical choice for Ratliff. In this manner, she clearly genders her blog as a way of reclaiming and celebrating that which makes her female.

As such, it makes sense that the most common topic Ratliff discusses is her pregnancy and her immediate family (husband and unborn child). These topics also often appear in posts primarily about other topics. For example, her post on February 5, 2008 is ostensibly about her overwhelming workload, but mention of her pregnancy appears:

I feel like I'm in a race with my body. As I work on proposals, articles, administrative memos and other documents, teaching materials, etc., I can see, below the screen, in my peripheral vision, those little protrusions poking and shaking my abdomen. There's so much stuff I must knock out SOON, before the fetal boy gets here, even if the deadlines of these projects are a few months away.

As this post indicates, Ratliff's concerns regarding her pregnancy and her family are pervading all aspects of her life, particularly her professional life. It is rare that she is willing/able to write a post in which her husband and/or unborn child is not mentioned. Ratliff, thus, seems unwilling or unable to separate her professional identity from her gendered identity, perhaps indicating, as Paasonen argues, that embodied identity is inseparable from virtual identity (32). Nevertheless, Ratliff makes sure to establish an identity for herself as something other than just an expectant mother. She does this by demonstrating her professional expertise with posts related to her work, scholarship, and teaching and with links to academic publications and other academics' blogs. Regardless of this proof of Ratliff's professionalism, her readers focus mainly on her pregnancy, as most of the comments are of congratulations and advice, with many readers choosing to share their own experiences with pregnancy, motherhood, or child-rearing. These comments reveal that her readers are not necessarily concerned with the scholarly content of her blogs and may, in fact, see more value in the personal, gendered identity Ratliff reveals. On the other hand, it may simply indicate readers' tendency to perceive individuals according to traditional definitions of gender. That it is, it may be more comfortable for them to perceive her in a traditional female role as a nurturing mother than it is to consider her as a successful intellectual.

*Embodiment, Credibility, Subversion, and Support: A Synthesis of Female Blogs*

Three blogs is clearly not a large enough sample to generalize any findings to be true of all (or even most) women; however, the findings here can be used as a starting point for future research regarding how men and women enact their gendered identities online. From analyzing these three academic blogs, it is clear that these academic women

do not blog in the same exact manner. These bloggers possess multiple competing identities that influence the way they compose (visually and textually), and as such, they choose to identify with and represent these identities in different ways. That being said, there are some common themes that emerge from the analysis of these blogs: female academics see their virtual identities as intimately connected to their embodied identities, they intertwine the personal and the professional, and they explicitly look for support from their readers.

First of all, the three female bloggers' online identities reveal clear ties to their embodied physical identities. Their posts seem to provide support for Paasonen's claim that individuals cannot completely separate their online existence from their real world existence (32). Gardner's blog often expresses a tie to her physical well-being. She mentions sickness and depression as aspects of her embodied self that affect her online identity. Take for example her post on November 4, 2007 in which she discusses her acid reflux: "Heaven help me if this is like that sickness after the Gaming Forum at Purdue last month. I can't afford to be down tomorrow. I have to finish editing the book and write all the text for the Ideas, Announcements, and Blog for INBOX...Hoping for an overnight miracle." Thus, the professional identity Gardner is constructing for herself online – the one concerned with finishing her book and completing the NCTE newsletter – is shaped, and in this particular case hindered, by the state of her physical body. As such, Gardner's choice to reveal the state of her health to her readers (a statement that could easily be admitted) seems to indicate that she feels she needs to justify any affect the illness may have on her professionalism. That is, she realizes that the illness may affect her productivity and offers an excuse beforehand, so that readers know that this not



her normal professional behavior. The post, thus, reinforces her concern with her scholarship and occupational duties, proving to the reader that even though she is ill the author's priorities have not shifted.

Kennedy expresses her embodied identity through her blog partly through the attention she pays to food and cooking. She notes that while food serves the physical function of providing nourishment for her body, it also contributes to ensuring her emotional and psychological health. In her post on January 18, 2008, Kennedy discusses how the physical act of cooking has helped her deal with her grandfather's death:

[W]hen my parents and I finally arrived home after dealing with Grandpa's ashes, I unthinkingly wandered straight to the kitchen, did the dishes, shooed away my mother, re-organized all of her canned goods, and then whomped up a pot of cream of tomato soup and three different kinds of melty sandwiches according to everyone's specifications... Being busy in the kitchen is my way of being still. Quiet, useful motion stills the mind. And it's a way of being together, of engaging with the larger world.

Kennedy, thus, makes her physical identity and her personal family turmoil a part of her online identity. She is, as Paasonen puts it "a product of social technologies, embodied experiences, and desires" (32). In other words, the experiences Kennedy and the other bloggers endure and the methods they employ for making sense of these experiences so shape their lives that they are unable to craft online identities without acknowledging their physical experiences in some way.

It makes sense, then, that Ratliff's experience with pregnancy would mark her online identity as well as her physical body. In post after post, Ratliff provides updates

about her pregnancy, expresses her concerns, and describes how it influences the other aspects of her life. In several places throughout her blog, Ratliff posts pictures of her growing pregnant belly, and in her post on February 12, 2008 she provides specifics about the baby's development: "He has full, pillowy lips, which is a big change from his 18-week ultrasound...He is, if I remember correctly, an estimated 3.3 pounds. He's in the 76th percentile of length/weight for his gestational age." This specific information is not needed by the reader to understand that the author is pregnant and her baby is healthy, yet Ratliff chooses to include it. She also chooses to answer at length questions about her pregnancy posted by a reader. This post, which occurs on December 29, 2007, is one of the longest posts on her blog and encourages several responses from her readers.

Ratliff's choice to divulge specific details about her pregnancy and to provide exhaustive responses to her readers' questions indicates that Ratliff wishes to share her experience of pregnancy with her audience. She provides them with as much detail as possible to help the readers grasp how the author's life and identity are changing. In this manner, Ratliff consciously claims her femininity and openly shares it with her community of readers. This sort of sharing with others is in line with Gilligan's theory that female identity is based on connection with others (8). Ratliff, by sharing details and responding unreservedly to her reader's questions, creates a dialogue between the author and her readers, thereby creating interpersonal relationships between individuals who may have never met in real life.

Additionally, all the female bloggers in this study seemed to be blending their personal and professional lives, dedicating almost an equal space to both, even though the blogs they are writing are academic in nature. That is, blogs allow them to (re)integrate

multiple identities/selves ignored or obscured in traditional academic forums. It's important to note, however, that all three of the bloggers make sure to demonstrate their expertise by providing access to their professional credentials online. Establishing their credibility in such a manner supports Miller's and Arnold's finding that female academics feel they need to demonstrate expertise because authority is often denied to women. Thus, for these female bloggers, "the vulnerability of themselves as *women* remain[s] part of their persona as academics" (Miller "Breaking" 101).

The blogger most concerned with proving her right to speak is Gardner. She lists only professional information in her profile, includes links to pretty much everything she has written that is available online, and also includes links to both her vita and the organization for which she works. Kennedy seems less concerned with marshalling evidence of her right to speak, but she does claim titles for herself related to her academic position (rhetorician, writer, Ph.D. Candidate, Dissertator), list her scholarly research interests, and include a link to her professional webpage on which her vita is posted. Finally, Ratliff demonstrates her professional credibility by listing her institutional affiliation, job titles, and a link to her vita on the main page. She also frequently discusses the specifics of her work as a scholar, a teacher, and an administrator within her blog posts. In this manner, all of the female bloggers demonstrate a need to prove themselves, to justify to their audience that they are worthy of their positions of authority. Thus, these women seem to struggle with issues of authority in the same way the women in Kirsch's study did.

It is also important to note, however, that the women discussed personal issues almost as often as they discussed professional ones. These personal discussions were also

often integrated within professional discussions in ways that subvert and redefine academic identity. For example, in Kennedy's post on January 22, 2008, she moves from discussing designing a course to baking a cake to writing her thesis. Why does Kennedy choose to discuss cake baking in the middle of an otherwise academic post? Her choice to do so indicates to the reader that her identity as a cook (and cooking's association with femininity) is just as important as her identity as a teacher and as a scholar. This kind of fusion between the personal and the professional runs counter to institutionally-sanctioned constructions of academic identity. Kennedy would be unable to write a similar account for her department's website or newsletter because the personal admittance regarding her baking would undermine the social expectations for authors in that setting, thereby marring her "frontstage" identity (Goffman 35). Thus, the women use these blogs to expand their academic identities—they are able to portray themselves as academics and as *more than* academics, a luxury not generally afforded to them within institutional settings.

Finally, the female bloggers all seemed to be actively looking for encouragement and support from and to build rapport with their readers. In Gardner's blog this request for support generally came up when she was tossing around new ideas for scholarly projects. For example, in her post on November 8, 2007, when discussing her idea for a *Computers and Composition* article, she states the following:

Here's the question: Would it fit to talk about how computer interfaces are represented in children's literature? I'm not quite sure where I want to go with the idea, and I'd need to do some reading on interface design to write anything. But I'm thinking of some books that attempt to fake what IM screens and emails look

like as well as picture books that show computers with their interfaces on the screen. I'm just not certain if that's a good topic, or it's ridiculously simplistic and laughable.

In this post, Gardner not only directly asks if her idea fits the call for papers but also more indirectly asks for help with developing the idea, researching the topic, finding books to examine, and assessing the quality of her idea. This kind of request for feedback from her readers may indicate nothing more than that she may view knowledge as being socially constructed and enjoys the kind of feedback she receives from participating in a community of academics (though Gardner receives no response to this post). Yet again, this appeal for support may indicate that Gardner sees her position within the academy (both as a woman and as someone without a PhD) as tenuous. The fluctuating degrees of confidence in her writing and the marshalling forth of her academic credentials may indicate that Gardner feels, as do many female academics, that she may be exposed as a fraud, that there is nothing truly special or scholarly about her ideas. She may be seeking the help of others to fine tune her ideas before submitting them to a publication where she opens herself up to rejection and humiliation.

A similar request for encouragement can be seen in Kennedy's blog as well. Her appeals are more implicit than Gardner's. Rather than directly asking for feedback as Gardner does in the aforementioned post, Kennedy simply reveals an insecurity, which insinuates to her audience that she needs encouragement and advice. Take for example her post on February 15, 2008 in which she discusses the difficulty she is having with her dissertation: "I am under the (probably mistaken) impression that Certain Other People begin at the beginning of these things, go on until the end, and then stop. I, on the other

hand, have parts of every chapter and am always and forever filling in the blanks, or piecing my quilt together, or whatever metaphor works on whatever day. Maddening.”

This post encourages the following response from one of her readers:

I wrote my dissertation in pieces no longer than two paragraphs...I had to piece the entire thing like a huge quilt, just me and a box of pieces and a lot of Kleenex. But you know what? By just calming down and doing the work of juxtaposition and succumbing to my inner completist and clearing out time to make momentum (which was the hardest thing, because I really didn't believe I would/could finish it) -- I wound up with a really good dissertation...The point is, our methods choose us sometimes rather than otherwise. Allow it to work for you and don't be surprised when your work is original and strong because of all the reinforced seams running through it.

As this response indicates, Kennedy's post reveals several insecurities she has regarding the composition of her thesis: 1) she feels like the approach she is taking is wrong, 2) she feels like the quality of the finished product will be poor because of the way she constructed it, and 3) she's worried she'll go crazy before she finishes piecing the whole thing together. Her reader's response is an attempt to reassure Kennedy about all of these issues and to encourage her to keep plugging away at a difficult task.

This kind of appeal for advice and encouragement is also seen in Ratliff's blog. Ratliff adopts a hybrid approach to seeking assistance. When looking for professional help she asks outright, as can be seen in her post from December 19, 2007: “I banged out a draft of my syllabus for the course I'm teaching next semester, which is a required composition pedagogy course. I'd like some feedback on it, especially on the following:

1) arrangement of the topics, 2) reading selections, 3) spreading out of assignments, 4) ‘uh, you are so totally not going to feel like doing that so close to delivering a baby (due May 2!).’” Here, not only does the blog author explicitly ask for feedback, but she also outlines the specific kinds of feedback she would find valuable. It’s important to note, however, that Ratliff does not receive the kind of assistance for which she directly asks. The only reader to comment on this post, suggested a way to expand an assignment, which does not fit into any of the four categories Ratliff defines. But Ratliff also requests support in implicit ways, in a manner similar to Gardner, by making public her concerns and vulnerabilities. This kind of indirect request is evidenced in Ratliff’s post from December 18, 2007 in which she details seven different concerns she has regarding her pregnancy. This post and her implicit appeal for advice and reassurance encourages thirteen responses from her readers, almost all of whom offer specific advice and share stories of their own experiences with pregnancy and parenthood to ease Ratliff’s concerns.

From this we can see that the female academic bloggers in this study seem to desire support and encouragement from their readers, regarding both their personal and professional lives. The women’s professional concerns may be related to Kirsch’s findings that female academics, no matter how many years experience they have, are uncomfortable speaking with and establishing authority because it has often been withheld from them historically (50). Kirsch argues that the contradiction women feel between being female and being in a position of authority as an academic undermines their confidence (4). As such, the women may be appealing for help because they doubt

themselves, and they need the approval of an outsider before they feel they can speak with authority.

Alternatively, the women's request for professional assistance may stem out of Goffman's idea that identity formation is motivated by fear of embarrassment (211). These women want to be accepted as serious academics; as such they want to have their ideas and methods vetted by their readers before they expose their identity to a sanctioned authority in the field. Blogs, then, may be viewed by female academics as a "backstage" space, a place where "the performer can relax; [she] can drop [her] act, forgo speaking [her] lines, and step out of character" (Goffman 112). In other words, within their respective institutions, these female academics are expected to act professionally, which Wood's research tells us means to act like men (254). Thus, these women are expected to demonstrate their expertise in their fields, to be confident in their ideas, to be assertive in the manner in which they communicate those ideas, and to compete for individual recognition within the academy.

It seems, though, that the women in this study are utilizing their blogs as a space to take off the mask of their professional identity and discuss their research in gendered ways (according to the research by Gilligan and others discussed earlier) by deferring to other's opinions and utilizing the connections they have established within a community of academics to develop and refine their academic projects. In this manner, one can argue that the women are utilizing their gendered identities to subvert their institutional identities, conducting their studies in ways that make sense to them and their experiences, and then performing their more acceptable identities within the institutional spaces of print academic journals.



The women's implicit requests for personal support may also be read as performances of gendered behavior. Gilligan's research tells us women define themselves by their connections to others and make decisions based on an ethic of care (35). As such, we can interpret these women's disclosures of personal concerns and insecurities as an invitation to build community. Because their morality is based on an ethic of care, they expect their readers to respond in kind with empathy, encouragement, and support.

The nature of the readers' comments is also related to the performance of gender. As Judith Butler tells us, our bodies act as cultural signs, communicating to others social expectations for our behavior (522). Thus, the bloggers' female bodies communicated to their readers acceptable ways for the authors to behave as well as acceptable ways for the readers to respond back them. The readers, then, read these requests for help as gendered performance, perhaps as a scenario similar to that of a damsel in distress, and in doing so they determined the appropriate response was to comfort and to rescue by offering reassurance in the manner of sharing similar experience and by offering practical advice to help the "damsel" solve her problem. Thus, even if these bloggers' posts were not meant as a request for help, but rather as an outlet for their frustration, they would still be interpreted as appeals for assistance because of the gendered expectations ingrained in us from the repeated and compulsory performance of the readers' own genders (Butler 522).

## **READING THE MASCULINE**

### *Ruined by Books*

The blog, *Ruined by Books*, is authored by Gary Enns, a professor of English at Cerro Coso Community College who does not hold a PhD. Enns lists his professional title, institutional affiliation, and the degrees he has earned within his title banner, so that

these are the first things the reader learns about him. Also within the banner, Enns self-identifies himself as a “Lover of Ruinous Books and Beautiful Post-Punk Edge,” and lists common topics of his posts (Rhetoric, Composition, Student Life, English Classes, and Popular Culture). This information is the only biographical information Enns includes within his blog, but he links to his homepage on the Cerro Coso website, which tells readers the subjects he teaches (literature, composition, and creative writing), notes his position as Region V Co-Director for the English Council of California Two Year Colleges, and lists his creative projects (writing fiction, poems, and pop music and coordinating and editing *Metamorphoses: A Journal of Literature and Art*). Enns also includes a link on his blog to his band’s, The Dalloways’, webpage. In this manner, Enns crafts an online identity for himself that is primarily a professional one, and the only deviation he makes from this is to divulge his other creative endeavors and interests. Looking at the order in which Enns chooses to reveal information about himself, the reader comes to know Enns first as a teacher and secondly as an artist.

This order of identification, foregrounding the professional over the creative, is also evidenced by the photos Enns includes on his institutional homepage. The first photograph depicts Enns as the good academic, diligently working on his laptop while the second portrays him as an artist, strumming on his guitar. Thus, Enns seems to be carefully constructing a frontstage identity using props that clearly identify him as an academic and as an artist. Because he represents both identities in the same space, we may be justified in concluding that Enns doesn’t see his creative identity as being in contrast to his professional identity. In other words, Enns has judged both of these identities to be credible personas to perform. This makes sense if we consider that Enns’

academic credentials are based in the artistic realm, as his highest degree is an MFA in Creative Writing. In this manner, Enns likely experiences healthy associations between his creative and academic identities that Kennedy does not, as she separates her scholarly interests from her interest in photography.

Despite Enns' clear interest in artistic expression, he chooses not to create a unique visual format his blog. Instead, he relies on a template furnished by his blog hosting site, Blogger. The only change Enns has made to the website's template is to remove the "About Me" textbox meant to be used to provide biographical information about the blogger. As a result, the design of Enns' blog is very clean and highly organized. His background is a soft green with a darker blue-green frame for his posts and a lighter green frame for his links. Crafting his blog in this way, Enns reveals very little about his personality and stays true to traditional notions of academic identity that emphasize rationality and detachment. In fact, the only visual clues the reader has to understanding the author come from the photos he has posted in his blog. He includes three such photo-based blogs: one of his trip to Europe on August 12, 2007, one of a hiking trip on July 31, 2007, and one of a class trip to a Shakespeare play on April 21, 2007. These photos, which focus on art (theater, architecture, paintings, sculptures, etc.) and natural beauty, serve to reinforce for the reader Enns' identity as a creative individual.

The textual content of Enns' blog posts emphasize both his professional and his creative life (which as noted before, he likely does not see as being separate). The majority of his posts are related to his administrative responsibilities as coordinator of both the literary journal *Metamorphoses* and the Creative Writing Community at Cerro

Coso Community College. By focusing on these aspects of his academic identity, Enns tells readers that what is of value to him as an academic is his ability to explore his creative interests within a scholarly setting. The links included within his blog, which Goffman would talk about as props assisting in Enns' identity performance, also convey this connection between the artistic and the academic. Along with links to his students' blogs and to educational institutions and organizations, he also includes several links to art-related sites. In this manner, Enns clearly establishes his artistic identity as part of his academic identity.

However, it seems Enns also wishes to present himself as a credible academic and teacher. This desire for professional recognition can be seen in the few posts he uses to assign work for his students. Despite the fact that these posts are primarily meant for his students, he introduces the blog to a general audience, indicating that he is aware that his communication is a kind of performance. He begins by explaining what the class is currently discussing, then lays out the guidelines of the assignment, often listing questions to guide his students in developing their written responses. Enns' decision to first provide a context for the assignment, which is obviously not needed for his students, indicates that Enns is aware of an audience broader than that of his students (though the majority of the comments he receives on his blog are from his students). In this manner, these posts can be read as a performance of teacherly identity. The construction of his assignment and the directions he provides for his students communicate to the reader his teaching pedagogy, the theories of composition that guide his teaching, and his desire to be seen as a legitimate teacher. This performance can also be read as an attempt to

individuate himself and achieve recognition for his skill as a teacher. That is, it can also be seen as being in line with Gilligan's understanding of common male behavior (35).

The tone he takes in his posts also echoes Gilligan's findings. Enns tends to speak from a position of authority, displaying his knowledge and expressing his opinions in a matter-of-fact and confident tone, as can be seen in his post on November 9, 2005: "The first few pages of a *good* novel tend to set the stage and tone of the entire piece; in these first few pages, it's the author's job to hook and intrigue readers so that they'll want to read on as well as to prepare readers for the kind of story that's to come." As Wood notes, successful professional communication is characterized by assertion and confidence, both of which Enns readily displays (254). Such a tone conveys a sense of expertise and leaves little room for readers to challenge his authority. This kind of communication exemplifies what Wood argues is considered to be successful (and male) professional communication.

The only time Enns seems to deviate from this confident tone is when discussing the formation of the journal, *Metamorphoses*. In this post, from April 27, 2006, Enns asks readers, "Is *Met* a good idea? Does it have support?" As such, this post can be read as a departure from the confident tone that characterizes the rest of the blog; however, it is more likely that adopting this strategy of questioning the audience is a rhetorical choice by Enns that serves to both inform readers of the journal's existence and invite them to support it. This explanation is supported by the fact that the same post includes a detailed list of all the features to be published (indicating that there was enough quality material to create a full issue) and a reference by Enns in which he calls the issue "excellent." Thus, Enns is not necessarily displaying lack of confidence but rather may be displaying reserve. He recognizes that his audience is more likely to explore the journal if they are

asked for their opinion and invited to become part of making the journal successful than if they are subjected to his boasts about the journal's greatness. In this manner, Enns is able to maintain his identity as a professional authority while also appearing humble.

### *Earth Wide Moth*

The *Earth Wide Moth* blog is maintained by Derek Mueller, a PhD candidate in Syracuse University's Composition and Cultural Rhetoric program. Mueller chooses not to include any biographical information on the main page of his blog, and instead lists his profile information on a linked page. On this linked page, he foregrounds his institutional affiliation and scholarly interests ("new media and digital writing activity, mapping and geographies, ecological psychology, visual modeling methods, close/distant reading as heuristic, discourse analysis, networks, and theories of composing"), notes that he is currently writing his dissertation, and includes a link to his prospectus. Also on this page, Mueller includes a list of 100 facts about himself posted on February 27, 2004. This list includes quite a bit of personal information, including discussion of his childhood, his family, and his interests, which serves to humanize the author for the reader and begins to create an identity for him as something other than an academic. However, such a self-interested list also can be read as an attempt to differentiate himself from others and highlight his achievements, to communicate in the manner that Gilligan argues is typical of men (48).

The identity Mueller constructs for himself in the content of his posts is primarily a professional one. He foregrounds his identity as a scholar, with the overwhelming majority of his posts being about his dissertation. It's important to note that his discussions of his dissertation go beyond the frustration and confusion he feels when

writing it (in other words, how Kennedy discussed her dissertation) to engage in an in-depth discussion of the scholarship he is drawing upon in an attempt to both better understand it and critique it. An example of this kind of highly sophisticated academic discussion can be seen in his January 30, 2008 post:

[Steedman] identif[ies] Derrida's tardiness to the conversation, next Steedman pairs him with Foucault and suggests that Derrida is merely winding down a path blazed by Foucault in the 1960s with *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. This all seems reasonable, except that Steedman downplays Derrida's insights on digital circulation. In twenty-first century discourse networks, an institutional (or disciplinary) memory is differently distributed (this strand of Derrida's lecture in 1994 seems to me to make him early rather than late, at least in terms of oncoming changes for archives because of digitization). As I read it, this is the point where Steedman's critique could be more lenient or forgiving than it is.

Such posts demonstrate Mueller's scholarly abilities. Not only does he demonstrate that he can understand and summarize a complex argument, but he also establishes that he can bring a critical eye to that argument and evaluate its quality. These kinds of heavily theoretical discussions occur several times throughout Mueller's blog and serve to clearly mark him as a scholar. They also serve as a form of self-aggrandizement, as a way to demonstrate his expertise and differentiate himself, as Gilligan claims men often do (48).

Mueller rarely deviates from this focus on scholarship. Even when he mentions potentially frivolous topics, such as a *Mother Goose and Grimm* comic, he ties his discussion back to scholarship when he divulges his interpretation of the comic: "I see in this a comment on lots of other stuff: the buried-ness of one's head while dissertating (to

the neglect of much too much), the plight of late-comers to Burke's parlor (those who arrive after the parlor has emptied...poor Earl!), the normative temporality of formal education (in today's market, the efficiency model must be called Toyotaist, rather than Fordist), and more.” The only times when he does not tie other topics back to his scholarship are when he discusses working at the writing center and blogging, both of which Mueller sees as being other parts of his professional identity, and when he mentions his family, which he generally mentions only as supporting characters in his stories of achievement. The design of the blog also reveals very little about the author. He chooses a plain ivory background with the only ornamentation on the page being his banner, which features a moth perched on a daisy and the Gertrude Stein quote from which he draws his blog title. This page design makes readers focus on the text, allowing Mueller's thoughts to become the most important aspect of the blog. The links he incorporates also make the reader focus on Mueller's writings, as almost all of the links he chooses to include are to his own previous blog posts. In this manner, Mueller's identity as a thinker, as a scholar, as an academic, is reinforced, and his entire site serves as a statement of his individual accomplishments. Performing his identity in this way both allows him to use his blog to gain prestige, which Wood argues is a common male behavior, and to speak with the confidence and assertiveness Wood says is necessary in successful professional communication (127, 254).

Mueller's style of writing, however, does reveal quite a bit about other aspects of his identity. The story that Mueller tells about his experience writing his “blissertation” is one of frustrated achievement. The posts can be read as a list of his accomplishments, with special attention paid to the obstacles that stood in his way and how he overcame



them. Such a discussion of surmounting the struggles regarding his dissertation can be seen in his February 7, 2008 post:

I couldn't grasp the chapter; couldn't sense it, couldn't begin it in a smart-enough place...I struggle against the need to re-explain, re-set-up, re-establish some of the conceptual bounds I introduced early on. Thank goodness, my director listened to my dilemma yesterday and told me this: "Give it a clean break." And so I have. I began again, setting aside the seven awkward, stilted, unfocused pages I cringed through Mon-Wed. Suddenly, it is much better (although the sun did not beam through the gray clouds; it is *still* Syracuse in February). I can sense the chapter, and the opening gambit is a million times (er, at least 10,000 times) better than what I tried the first go-round....What I want to note about this is that I am becoming both more humble and more mature (i.e., flexible) about my writing. I knew something was wrong; I knew a conversation in which I could unload a few of my cryptic thoughts would help. And I didn't feel so strongly about the seven pages that I was the least bit sorry about relegating them to the junk heap.

As this post indicates, rather than focusing only on the difficulties he is having composing, as the female dissertator Kennedy does, he makes the focus of the post about how he triumphed over these difficulties, ending his post by mentioning what he has learned about his abilities from this experience. Thus, the identity he constructs of himself for the reader is that of a go-getter, someone who solves problems and triumphs in the face of defeat. In this manner, the story he tells of his experience is quite similar to the male stories Flynn discovered in her research as it highlights his individual achievement (250). Such stories might appear boastful and narcissistic in another context,

but in this case they help him craft a persona that conveys the sense of confidence and assertiveness that Wood finds is necessary in successful professional communication (254). It's important to note, too, that this kind of communication is also judged as successful by his readers, as their comments often compliment him on his scholarship and continue discussing the ideas he introduces within the post.

Mueller also conveys a sense of confidence by incorporating humor into his posts. He achieves this humor by weaving irreverent comments into almost all of his posts. Thus, in post on January 30, 2008 discussed earlier, in which he is explaining and critiquing a scholarly argument, he offers the following definition of "the im/permanence of material and digital substrates": "nothing *ever!* going away, except when a hard drive crashes or a thumb drive takes an accidental tumble in the clothes dryer and no data is rescued in the lint trap (emphasis original)." While there are certainly more academic ways of explaining this concept, Mueller chooses to speak colloquially with the teenager-esque use of the word "ever" followed by an exclamation point and to introduce the laughably preposterous idea of a lint trap rescuing data. Using humor in this way to explain complex academic concepts suggests to the reader Mueller's self-assuredness in his own ability to understand these concepts. That is, he understands them well enough to feel comfortable breaking out of his academic voice to speak as the everyman, to incorporate relatable imagery in humorous ways to illustrate a difficult idea. In this manner, Mueller is able to keep his scholarly identity by demonstrating knowledge of the concept while also humanizing this identity a bit so that readers can better relate to him and his ideas.

### *The Chutry Experiment*

Chuck Tryon, an assistant professor of film studies at Fayetteville State University, authors the blog *The Chutry Experiment*. He reveals this occupational information on the main page of his blog along with the length of time he's been blogging (since 2003) and his original intentions behind starting the blog: "this blog was an experiment in bringing the worlds of blogging, academia, popular culture, and politics together in new ways." This is the only biographical information Tryon reveals on the main page of his blog, but he does include a linked profile page in which he includes links to other projects he is involved with (all professional in nature), lists articles he has published, and links to photos of himself on flickr. Limiting the discussion of himself to his history as an academic, a blogger, and a writer, serves to portray a highly professional image of the author to the reader. That is, the only means Tryon provides for readers to view him as something other than an academic is the photos to which he links. Limiting the identity he crafts for himself in this manner is typical of the detached style of communication Wood says is characteristic of men and also serves to privilege his work as a scholar above all other aspects of his identity. In this way, we can clearly see that the frontstage identity Tryon is performing is that of an academic, so he does his best to remove any props that communicate the other aspects of his identity from the performance space of the blog.

The topics of Tryon's blog posts also serve to advance the persona of the dedicated academic. Tryon's blog essentially acts as a news service; he compiles relevant discussions of media, recapping others' arguments, informing readers about new films, reviewing movies and documentaries, discussing scholarly media-related issues, and

commenting on the use of media within current political campaigns. Nearly everything mentioned in Tryon's blog is related to media studies, with the only notable exception being his discussions of the state of academia, which also reinforce the professional persona he is trying to create. This limited focus reinforces Tryon's identity as a scholar and also serve to demonstrate his expertise. This kind of communication exemplifies the typical male ways of communicating identified by Gilligan and Wood, as it serves to separate Tryon from other scholars and acts as a way for him to gain prestige.

Thus, his posts illustrate that he is knowledgeable about current conversations in the field of media studies, capable of synthesizing the viewpoints of others with his own, and can bring a critical eye to scholarly issues as well as creative productions (films). Often he combines these three tactics within the space of one post, as he does in his discussion of a book about academic life on January 28, 2008:

[W]hile Bousquet is attentive to the degree to which the use of contingent, flexible labor has become a means of subsidizing "education profiteers," I was equally intrigued by his discussion of how work permeates every aspect of university life, a point Miriam raises in her discussion of "the need to conceptualize academic workers *as* workers, and not as disembodied minds engaging in some activity that has nothing to do with other forms of labor." Like Miriam, I generally find this claim convincing, especially when it comes to describing the experiences of both undergraduates and graduate students.

As this post reveals, Tryon generally offers a recap of the author's or filmmaker's argument, points his readers to the aspects he finds intriguing, incorporates the thoughts of another blogger or author, and passes judgment on the work. The fact that nearly all of

his posts take this form (or one very similar) serves to establish Tryon as an authority, as one who is knowledgeable and whose opinion should be respected. As such, the blog exhibits the confidence and assertiveness that Wood says is characteristic of successful professional communication. They also serve to characterize the blog as a whole as an academic space, with the comment spaces of the blog becoming a place for the continuation of academic debates and the sharing of ideas. The readers who respond to Tryon's blog speak only to his academic identity, asking for clarification about his points, offering further commentary on his observations, or offering their own opinions on the same subject. These kinds of responses allow the comment spaces to mirror the academic nature of the blog and to support Tryon's performance of scholarly identity.

The tone that Tryon adopts also conveys the impression of authority to the reader. He speaks in a confident tone, offering his opinions without equivocation. This can be seen in his post on January 23, 2008 in which he discusses the debates for Lieutenant Governor in North Carolina:

I was impressed with Dan Besse's emphasis on environmental stewardship and on social and economic issues. Both Walter Dalton and Hampton Dellinger seemed to stake out positions relatively consistent with the Easley/Perdue status quo, and like Smith, I found the dynamic between Dalton and Dellinger a bit frustrating. Dellinger is clearly an ambitious guy—not a bad thing in a politician—but his attempts to turn the contest into a two person race were not only too transparent but also a bit clumsy. The fourth candidate, Canton, NC, mayor Pat Smathers seemed to have quite a number of good ideas but tended to fade into teh [sic] background a bit during the debate.

Such matter-of-fact expression of his evaluations conveys a sense of surety. Tryon is confident in his opinions, which encourages the reader to trust him and award him a certain amount of authority. The links Tryon incorporates also reinforces the idea of him as an authority as the majority of them connect to other writers' arguments, demonstrating his knowledge of the field, and to his own previous posts, which emphasizes the importance of his own ideas.

*Individuation, Authority, Confidence, and Professionalism: A Synthesis of Male Blogs*

I found it interesting that the men in this study are all experts in their field, but none of them offer a vita listing all of their credentials and accomplishments. They incorporate a few elements that would appear on their vita—Enns lists his degrees, Mueller lists his research interests, and Tryon lists a few of his publications—but they seem generally uninterested in presenting to the reader a comprehensive view of their achievements. The fact that the men avoid this traditional academic way of proving expertise may indicate that they feel their words alone will demonstrate their credibility. It seems as though the men do not feel that marshalling forth their credentials is needed; rather the integrity of their ideas and the quality of their writing is enough to convince the readers that they are knowledgeable and should be trusted as an authority. Further, the fact that Enns links repeatedly to his academic projects and Mueller and Tryon link again and again to their own blog posts conveys the male academics' feeling that the author should not need an external sources to certify the authors as credible.

Such emphasis of their own writing is in line with Gilligan's finding that men tend to emphasize individual achievement (35). That is, the men in this study, like the men in Gilligan's study, wish to achieve recognition and praise based on their own

particular accomplishments. While *vitas* would list these accomplishments, *vitas* have become the standardized way of proving credibility within the academy. As such, the medium has become formalized, with each academic presenting themselves in a similar manner. Yet Gilligan asserts that male identity is based on their ability to differentiate themselves from others (48). If we follow Gilligan's line of reasoning, then, *vitas* do not allow men enough of an opportunity to differentiate themselves from other academics. A *vita* merely lists an academic's expertise rather than allowing them to enact their expertise. By choosing to forego the standardized *vita*, male academics can provide a more in-depth, detailed, and contextualized portrayal of their knowledge and abilities, distinguishing themselves from other academics in the field.

Male academics' choice not to include their *vitas* also reinforces ideas by Kirsch, Schell, Miller, and Arnold that the history of men being awarded authority within the academy affects the way male academics construct their identity. In other words, within the academy, men have historically not been required to prove their worth in the same manner that women have. These scholars argue that male academics come from a tradition in which they have been able to speak without first displaying their credentials; the fact that they were men and academics was enough to grant them authority. As women have gained prestige in the academy and the academy has become more competitive, this tradition is changing. Yet men's ability to speak in their blogs without furnishing credentials echoes Butler's idea that our bodies are cultural signs that invoke historical notions of what it means to be a man or a woman. In other words, even if contemporary practices have changed, the male academics in this study are drawing upon what it means historically to speak as a man.

Male academics' desire to build credibility through their posts alone necessitates that the men write in a confident and self-assured manner. If they are to prove their expertise to their readers, they must not appear as though they have any self-doubts. Thus, the male academics in this study communicate in ways that Wood argues define male discourse communities in that they exhibit their knowledge in an assertive manner as a way to gain prestige (127). Thus, when Enns lists resources for academic writers in his July 31, 2007 blog, he is demonstrating that his knowledge of the field surpasses that of his audience and asserting that he has the authority to prescribe sources to assistant them. This confidence can also be seen in Mueller's February 8, 2008 post:

Today someone suggested that my Friday hours were freakishly demanding, but I tend to think of it more along the lines of seven hours with an RSS reader, only the feeds are embodied differently; the writers of the works are sitting down with me and having a conversation: Writing Center work as a nine-scene Google Reader *Live* skit with a clearly defined 'Mark all as read' at the end of the day.

This post can be read as indicating that he not only knows better than the other person but also demonstrates that such work is easily handled by him, thereby asserting a confidence in his own abilities as tutor. A similar display of confidence can be seen in Tryon's critique of the youtube video "A Vision of Students Today" in his January 21, 2008 blog: "First, the mobile, disembodied camera suggests a universal image of students, one that seems to be reinforced by the students' silence during the video. Second, this image lacked virtually any students of color." Pointing out such deficiencies in the video allows Tryon to assume the role of expert, asserting that he knows more about the state of



“students today” than the creator of the video does. In this manner, the male academics performance of identity in their blogs enacts traditional definitions of professionalism, which Wood argues is characterized by assertiveness, confidence, and competitiveness (127).

Wood also notes that professional communication is defined by its omission of personal information (127). Accordingly, in the male blogs I examined for this study there are very few instances in which they deviate from professional matters to discuss personal issues. In this manner, the identities that the male academics craft for themselves in their blogs are very much in line with traditional definitions of academic professionalism. The academy traditionally dictates that academics remain objective, that they focus on their scholarship, that they engage in agonistic argument and work individually to produce knowledge. The notion of what it means to be an academic is evolving as feminist research begins to influence the practices of the academy, but for the most part the academy continues to emphasize what feminists argue is a masculine identity in which rationality and assertiveness is stressed (Kirsch 19). As such, for the men to discuss their personal lives, to expose themselves as emotional and uncertain beings, would breach traditional academic codes of behavior. It seems, then, that male academics are uninterested in questioning the academy, or at least in questioning what it means traditionally to be an academic.

#### **GENDERED NOTIONS OF EMBODIMENT, CREDENTIALS, CONFIDENCE, AND INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY**

The analysis of these six blogs reveals several contradictions between the ways the men and women in this study construct their blogs. Keep in mind that I cannot generalize or essentialize that *all* men and *all* women blog in this manner. However, it is

likely, as Butler indicates, that the performance of gender and the social expectations associated with it mark our thinking in gendered ways. Thus, women in this study are compulsively performing femaleness in their blogs in the same manner that the men in this study are compulsively performing maleness. While performances of gender vary across individuals, the common themes that this analysis has discovered are likely to be true of others as well. Accordingly, the contradictions discussed below act as a good starting point for understanding how gender affects the way academics construct themselves, their work, and their world.

The first difference in the way the male and female academics in this study construct their blogs is the extent to which they reveal connections to their physical bodies. Though neither gender is able to craft a completely separate online identity, the women in the study make more connections between their virtual identities and their embodied identities. The female academics seem to see their physical bodies as affecting their academic identities in ways that must be disclosed to their readers. As such, we get discussions of illness, emotional turmoil, and pregnancy framed within a context of how they are inhibiting or complicating their academic activities. The women may feel that they need to offer such explanations because, as Kirsch indicates, female academics are highly concerned with how their scholarship will be perceived by others (93). Kirsch notes that women's authority has often been questioned historically, and this questioning makes women become hyperaware of maintaining their identity as an authority (50). In other words, the female academics seem to feel that their audience may question their authority if their scholarship declines in any way, and as such they feel compelled to reassure their audience that their posts do not indicate their normal academic performance

but are, rather, the result of external circumstances temporarily affecting the author. The men likely do not feel the need to make similar closures because they have historically not struggled as much as women to be seen as authorities. So, if a particular post seems brief or their scholarship not as rigorous, the male academics likely take it for granted that their audience will not judge them too harshly, especially when the majority of their blog demonstrates that they are capable as scholars.

The men and women in this study also differ in the ways in which they provide credentials for demonstrating their authority to speak. The women in the study seem to put more stock in certified expertise, in credentials granted by cultural and institutional authorities. As noted earlier, the men in this study choose not to link their vitas to their blogs, but each of the women in the study chose to do so. Additionally, the women also linked to publications of theirs unrelated to their blogs: Gardner to her multiple written works for NCTE, Kennedy to annotated bibliographies for her dissertation, and Ratliff to essays and research she has conducted. Once again, this tactic could be attributed to the historical tradition of women being silenced and denied positions of authority. Thus, for the women in this study, listing their credentials in this manner may be their way of claiming of authority, of demonstrating that they have the right to speak. The male academics, because they have not traditionally needed to fight to have others think their voices are worth listening to, do not feel the need to prove that they are credentialed by external sources. Rather, they assume that their readers will grant audience to their voices and not need anything other than the quality of their ideas and the force of their argument to demonstrate their expertise. In this manner, both the males and females in this study

draw upon the historical connotations of their genders, as Butler argues we are compelled to do, when constructing their online identities (522).

The men in this study also demonstrate much more confidence in their abilities than the women do. When the men discuss their scholarship and advance their ideas, they do so self-assuredly. They are comfortable summarizing others' arguments, criticizing others' ideas, and making conjectures. The women, on the other hand, discuss their scholarship and offer criticisms much more tentatively. When the female academics discuss their professional life it is almost always done in a manner expressing self-doubt. Take for example Ratliff's January 28, 2008 post, titled "If It Kills Me":

It's a pretty sad state of affairs when the title of this post goes through my head all the time with regard to work. I have such an overwhelming amount of work to do, especially with administration but also research and teaching, that I work at a frantic pace every day. Part of this is probably my own fault; I'm doing more than the bare minimum, but I feel like the bare minimum is too risky to my career; plus, the minimum makes me feel like a gigantic loser.

Ratliff's post demonstrates her concern regarding her ability to handle her workload, her tentative position within the academy, and her feeling that she must succeed even if it kills her. It's important to note that her post stands in direct contrast to the confidence Mueller conveys in his post regarding his grueling day of work at the writing center mentioned earlier, which he minimizes as nothing more difficult than reading RSS feeds (02/08/08). As Kirsch and Schell argue, women have historically held uncertain positions of marginality in the academy – an institution created and shaped by men – and as such they have internalized feelings of self-doubt (Kirsch 4). As the blogs of the female

academics in this study indicate, these feelings of self-doubt manifest themselves in the academic identities they construct for themselves online, lending credence to Miller's and Arnold's assertion that "the vulnerability of [female academics] as *women* remained part of their persona as academics" ("Breaking" 101).

The final difference that strikes me from this analysis regards the extent to which the online identities the bloggers construct are in line with traditional notions of academic identity. The men in this study stayed within institutional guidelines for the most part, while the women engaged in performances that often subverted or expanded conventional definitions of what it means to be an academic. Traditional notions of academic identity, as indicated earlier, require the academic to be objective, rational, individualistic, and assertive; however, the identities the female bloggers construct can rarely be described in these ways. Rather, as previous discussion indicates, their identities are tied to context, driven by interpersonal connection, and full of uncertainty. The female academics conflate the personal with the academic, discussing insecurities, private family matters, and non-professional hobbies, in a way that is not generally acceptable in academic conversations. Imagine if during tenure review Ratliff discussed her unborn child's development, her concerns about motherhood, and her hopes for her son's future. She would be ridiculed. Though these aspects of her life likely affect the amount of time she dedicates to her scholarship and her ways of thinking about the world, they are not deemed to be acceptable things to discuss in an academic setting.

Gilligan, though, finds that women view the world as a web of relationships. As such, they see the aspects of their personal identity as being intimately related to their professional identity. Yet, within the academy they are generally not allowed to

acknowledge these connections, and when they do, the academy views it as a sign of weakness and deems the communication unscholarly. In this manner, the identity of woman stands in contradiction to the identity of academic. This contradiction, discussed by both Wood and Kirsch, forces women in the academy to either speak as men or be excluded from the conversation. As Kirsch argues, the contradiction female academics feel between these competing identities compels them to attempt to reform the institution (4). The academic identities the female academics perform in their blogs can be read as one such attempt at reform.

The women take advantage of a new medium that has yet to be thoroughly institutionalized and its feminized nature as a tool of connection and social networking to advance alternative notions of what it means to be an academic. They expose the traditional conception of academic identity as being nothing more than a mask, a “frontstage” performance where the aspects of self have been carefully manipulated and neutralized to portray the persona of the intelligent and rational scholar (Goffman 35). In its place they offer what they feel is a more honest view of academic identity, that of a somewhat frenzied individual who must continuously grapple with complex ideas even as they try to manage other aspects of their lives and desperately try to affirm their self-worth. In this manner, female academics are able to question institutional notions of academic identity, criticize them for not wholly encompassing their experience, and reveal how our ideas about what it means to be an academic could be expanded so that both men’s and women’s experiences can be valued.

## CHAPTER IV

### IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH: EXPANDING OUR CONCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC IDENTITY, GENDER, AND METHODOLOGY

In the last chapter, I offered an analysis of each blog, identified gendered themes, and compared themes across gender. In this chapter, I discuss what these findings mean for conceptualizing academic identity, understanding the effects of gender, and conducting future research. This project only looked at six academic blogs, so I cannot generalize about the state of the academic blogosphere as a whole or claim that any of these findings are definitively true of all men or all women (nor would I want to). I can, however, utilize these findings as a starting point, a place from which to offer conjectures and make recommendations for how to further investigate the intersections of identity, gender, professional communication, and technology.

#### CONCEPTUALIZING ACADEMIC IDENTITY

The findings of this study suggest that male and female academics conceptualize their academic identities in different ways. Though all of these blogs were listed on *Kairosnews* as professional, academic blogs, and all are situated within the field of rhetoric and composition, each author seemed to have a different purpose in writing. For Gardner it is an attempt to see herself (and been seen) as a professional. Gardner's desire

to be seen as a professional is evidenced by her frequent posts to her publish writing and discussion of her writing activities, but her struggle to see herself in this way is clear from her tone of self-doubt and her search for encouragement from her readers. In this manner, the online space of the blog becomes the place where can she prove to herself that she should be taken seriously as a writer and a professional. Alternatively, in Kennedy's blog she seems to be focused on trying to bring the disparate aspects of her life together. As such, we get instances in which she discusses herself as a scholar and a cook within the same post, linking the personal with the academic in untraditional ways. Thus, her blog reads as an attempt to manage her competing identities as an absent-minded academic, an amateur photographer, a frustrated dissertator, an enthusiastic cook, and a mourning granddaughter. Ratliff's blog also differs, as her purpose seems to be the conscious integration of her femaleness into her academic identity. She claims her femininity in both her page design and the frequent mention of her pregnancy, yet she also claims her identity as an academic in her discussion of her teaching and administrative work. The female academics establish different purposes for their blogs, but they are all related to expanding academic identity to include the personal, to recognize themselves as academics who are, at least at times, insecure, who have other identities, and who are gendered.

The male academics, on the other hand, seem to have much different purposes in their academic blogs. In Enns' blog, we can see his attempt to gain professional recognition in the way that he focuses on his administrative responsibilities with the literary journal and writing group and in the way that he presents his assignments for his class to a general audience. As he lacks a PhD and works at a community college, he may



feel that he needs to include such information to be seen as a “real” academic. Conversely, Mueller’s blog can be seen as his attempt to prove that he is capable of participating in rigorous academic debate. As most of his posts are related to theories related to his dissertation, he foregrounds his intelligence and demonstrates his abilities as a scholar. Finally, Tryon’s blog seemed focused on demonstrating his expertise to his readers. As such, he presumes to know more than his audience by acting as a news service for his readers, recapping arguments by others, introducing his readers to new media projects, and evaluating those same projects. Thus, the male academics’ purposes, though different, are all focused on exhibiting knowledge and gaining prestige. The identities they perform are in line with traditional expectations of identities that are not that much different from the identities academics craft in print journals and on institutional websites.

The question, then, is this: are both male and female ways of crafting identity “academic” in nature? Academics often draw distinctions between their identities, creating an academic blog and a separate personal blog. Is such a distinction false? Traditional notions of what counts as academic activity would exclude discussions of personal doubts, non-professional hobbies, and bodily experiences such as sickness and pregnancy. In the same manner, they would exclude mention of sports and families (the only two personal topics that men are willing to include in their academic blogs). However, as the female academics in this project seem to suggest, perhaps our notions of what it means to be an academic are too limiting. Perhaps academics should disclose aspects of their personal life as a way of contextualizing their scholarship.

Feminist qualitative research advocates that researchers (both male and female) disclose their personal situatedness within their scholarship as a way to make their findings more honest. The argument is that “[t]he researcher’s own race, class, culture, and gender assumptions are not neutral positions from which he or she observes the world but lenses that determine how and what the researcher sees” (Sullivan 56). As such, claims of objectivity are always false. This argument may help us to reconceptualize academic identity in general. The female academics may be choosing to divulge personal details because they want to be more “honest” in the way they represent their academic identity. In other words, they feel that certain aspects of their life influence their scholarship in important and identifiable ways that should be disclosed to the reader. Feminist scholars argue, “Methods of analysis that presumably guarantee the objectivity of a researcher’s results are actually by-products of an androcentric epistemology that has historically equated subjectivity with the feminine mind” (Sullivan 55). As such, perhaps the female bloggers’ performances of academic identity are “unscholarly” at all, but are rather departures from a patriarchal notion of knowledge construction.

#### **UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTS OF GENDER**

These findings suggest that academics’ gendered identities impact the way they construct their academic identities in noticeable ways. As Judith Butler indicates, as gendered beings we are “cultural signs” (522). In other words, “the body is always an embodying *of* possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention” (521). That is, society and history teach us what is acceptable behavior for our sex, and these gendered behaviors become so ingrained in our beings that we reproduce them

compulsively. As such, female academics cannot separate themselves from societal and historical notions of what it means to be a woman in the same manner that male academics cannot separate themselves from societal and historical notions of what it means to be a man.

These gendered expectations cause men and women to define their identities in different ways. As Gilligan argues, male identity is based on individuation, while female identity is based on interpersonal connection (8). The problem for female academics is that traditional notions of academic identity and professional communication are more in line with male forms of identity. It is difficult for men and women to break out of their conditioned ways of communicating; for women this means being deferential and passive, which runs counter to academic expectations. Therefore, female academics “have to break old norms of silence, submissiveness, and deference in order to gain an ‘academic voice’” (Kirsch 3). The social expectations and histories of gender, then, limit the ways in which academic identity can be constructed.

Thus men, who historically have held positions of authority and who society expects to be independent and assertive, are able to construct their online spaces as more traditional academic spaces, as places where they can exhibit their knowledge and engage in agonistic debate. Yet women, who have historically held marginal positions in society and whom society expects to act demurely and diffident, are either unwilling or unable to turn their online spaces into reproductions of the institutional spaces that often oppress them. Women’s refusal (whether conscious or not) to create institutionally-sanctioned identities may be the reason why more male blogs than female blogs appear on the list for *Kairosnews* and why men generally continue to receive more prestige in the academy.

## CONDUCTING FUTURE RESEARCH

As noted earlier, an analysis of six blogs does not offer a large enough sample to draw upon to make any far-reaching conclusions. As such, more of this kind of research needs to be completed. The intersections between identity (specifically that of gender), professional communication, and technology have yet to be thoroughly investigated. We know very little, even after completing this project, regarding how academics construct their identities online. It is likely that our current understandings of academic identity do not adequately consider the idea that women's experiences may differ markedly from men's. As such, special interest needs to be paid to gender so as to assure that we do not allow "men's experiences to define characteristic ways of thinking and writing for both men and women" (Sullivan 52).

Furthermore, we cannot assume that all men and women are alike. Race, class, and sexual orientation also likely influence the ways academics construct their identities online. Because of the small pool of bloggers from which this study drew (only 35 single-author blogs listed on *Kairosnews*), the demographics of the academics analyzed in this project were fairly homogenous. All of the bloggers were white-appearing (as assessed from photos linked to or posted on blog), were of similar class status as they all work within the academy, and none of them labeled themselves as non-heterosexual (four of them explicitly labeled themselves as heterosexual; two did not give any indication of sexual orientation). If the sampling group of blog authors is expanded so that it is more diverse, including those belonging to non-dominant groups, it is likely that the findings of this project will be complicated by issues of marginalization that academics feel regarding their other identities.

I also believe that the findings of this study are limited by the research methodology I chose. Using rhetorical analysis to examine these blogs yielded interesting findings; however, there was much that this methodology could not tell us about the ways academics construct their identities. That is, rhetorical analysis may expose aspects of the academics' identities contained within their posts, the clues about themselves left for the reader to discover, but it could not tell us anything about the authors' intent or motivation. Additionally, what I saw within each blog was primarily determined by the interpretive framework I used to examine them. That is, the previous research guiding my investigation encouraged me to see certain things as being gendered rather than others. Admittedly, there is no research method that is comprehensive, that can account for all that can be seen, but I would like to see this study expanded to also incorporate qualitative interview research so that the participants have the chance to speak for themselves and offer interpretations that might lie outside those my analytical framework allows for.

Interviews allow individuals to "explain how they apply what they know in certain areas of their lives, how they negotiate certain issues, how they moved from one stage of their lives to another, how they interpret certain texts, and so on" (Lindlof 174). For this reason, interviews allow for a much richer set of data that when coupled with rhetorical analysis might allow the researcher to better contextualize the findings of her or his analysis as well as to ask questions regarding *why* academics chose to construct their identities in the manner they do. In this kind of research, then, "the interviewer's goal is to draw out the individual, interpersonal, or cultural logics that people employ in

their communicative performances” (174). That is, this kind of research can discover the factors that influence academics when they construct their identities online.

By incorporating a research method that allows participants to speak for themselves, researchers can answer additional questions about how academics construct their identities. Are academics conscious of gender expectations/issues when they write? Are they concerned with how the institution will view the identities they create for themselves? Are academics as aware of issues of authority and gaining prestige as the rhetorical analysis of their blogs indicates? What aspects of their identities do academics purposely omit? As I analyzed the academics’ blogs, I began to wish that I could answer these kinds of questions, that I could sit down with the author and investigate how the identity they think they are constructing compares to the one that they are *actually* constructing.

### **THE GENDERED ACADEMIC BLOGOSPHERE**

This project investigates the ways in which identity, gender, professional communication, and technology intersect. I examined the blogs of six academics (three male, three female) to explore how academics construct their identities online, with a special interest in how their gendered identities converge with, influence, shape, restrict, and expand their academic identities. Ultimately, I find that it is likely that the ways in which academics construct their identities are gendered. This analysis indicates that female academics see their online identities as more connected to their embodied identities than male academics do, that female academics feel the need to foreground their credentials in a way that male academics do not, that male academics speak with more confidence than female academics do, and that male academics define their

academic identities in institutionally-sanctioned ways while women subvert traditional notions of academic identity by conflating the personal with the professional.

These findings raise important questions regarding what it means to be an academic and what counts as scholarship. Is a blog devoted to discussing how pregnancy has affected scholarship as “scholarly” as a blog in which the author explains the nuances of his dissertation project? What are the consequences for disclosure? Is the female blogger likely to lose respect and be denied promotion because she links a feminized activity like cooking with her scholarship? And if we think that such things will occur, is that because we’ve allowed the male to act as the standard for academic performance, and should we be working to change this patriarchal conception? I believe that it is important for researchers to continue to investigate how gender identity and academic identity intertwine (both online and off) so that questions such as these can be answered. Additional research in this area needs to be expanded, with a particular focus on gathering more diverse participants and incorporating interviews into our research methods because these findings suggest to me that we need to expand our notions of what “counts” as academic identity, that academics’ nature as gendered beings cannot help but affect the ways they construct their professional identities.

## WORKS CITED

- "About Us." *Technorati*. 3 December 2007. < <http://technorati.com/about/>>.
- The Academic Blog Portal*. 25 Sept 2007. 28 Dec. 2007  
<[http://www.academicblogs.org/wiki/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://www.academicblogs.org/wiki/index.php/Main_Page)>.
- Brauer, Chris. "Blog Directory." *BlogScholar*. 28 Dec. 2007  
<[http://www.blogscholar.com/component/option,com\\_weblinks/Itemid,23/](http://www.blogscholar.com/component/option,com_weblinks/Itemid,23/)>.
- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1998): 519-531.
- Chandler, Daniel. "Personal Home Pages and the Construction of Identities on the Web." 1998. Aberystwyth University. 31 Jan. 2008  
<<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/short/webident.html>>.
- Cline, Andrew R. "Professors Who Blog." *Rhetorica*. 28 June 2006. 28 Dec 2007  
<[http://rhetorica.net/professors\\_who\\_blog.htm](http://rhetorica.net/professors_who_blog.htm)>.
- Consalvo, Mia and Susanna Paasonen. "On the Internet, Women Matter." *Women and Everyday Uses of the Internet: Agency and Identity*. Eds. Mia Consalvo and Susanna Paasonen. New York: Peter Lang, 2002. 1-18.
- Enns, Gary S. *Ruined by Books*. 20 Dec. 2007. 15 Feb. 2008.  
<<http://ruinedbybooks.blogspot.com/>>.
- Ewins, Rory. "Who Are You? Weblogs and Academic Identity." *E-Learning* 2.4 (2005): 368-377.
- Farrell, Henry. "The Blogosphere as a Carnival of Ideas." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 7 Oct. 2005. 01 Feb. 2008.  
<<http://chronicle.com/free/v52/i07/07b01401.htm>>.
- Flynn, Elizabeth A. "Composing as a Woman." *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Victor Villanueva. 2nd ed. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003. 571-585.



- Gardner, Traci. *changelog@tengrrl.com*. 09 Nov. 2007. 15 Feb. 2008  
<<http://www.tengrrl.com/blog/index.shtml>>.
- Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Glenn, David. "Scholars Who Blog." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 6 June 2003. 01 Feb 2008. <<http://chronicle.com/free/v49/i39/39a01401.htm>>.
- Goffman, Erving. *The Presentations of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959.
- Herring, Susan C. "Gender and Power in On-line Communication." *The Handbook of Language and Gender*. Eds. Janet Holmes and Miriam Meyerhoff. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003. 202-228.
- Herring, Susan C., et al. "Women and Children Last: The Discursive Construction of Weblogs." *Into the Blogosphere*. 3 December 2007.  
<[http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/women\\_and\\_children.html](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/women_and_children.html)>.
- Kennedy, Krista. *Thinkery*. 15 Feb. 2008. 15 Feb. 2008  
<<http://slimcoincidence.com/blog/>>.
- Kirsch, Gesa E. *Women Writing the Academy*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993.
- Lindlof, Thomas R. and Bryan C. Taylor. *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Sage, 2002.
- Miller, Hugh and Jill Arnold. "Breaking Away from Grounded Identity? Women Academics on the Web." *CyberPsychology and Behavior* 4.1 (2001): 95-108.
- . "Gender and Web Home Pages." *Computers and Education* 34.3 (2000): 335-339.
- . "Self in Web Home Pages: Gender, Identity, and Power in Cyberspace." *Towards CyberPsychology: Mind, Cognitions and Society in the Internet Age*. Eds. Giuseppe Riva and Carlo Galimberti. Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2001. 73-94.
- Mueller, Derek. *Earth Wide Moth*. 12 Feb. 2008. 15 Feb. 2008  
<<http://www.earthwidemoth.com/mt/>>.
- Paasonen, Susanna. "Gender, Identity, and (the Limits of) Play on the Internet." *Women and Everyday Uses of the Internet: Agency and Identity*. Eds. Mia Consalvo and Susanna Paasonen. New York: Peter Lang, 2002. 21-43.

- Pedersen, Sarah and Caroline Macafee. "Gender Differences in British Blogging." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12.4 (2007): 1472-1492.
- Ratliff, Clancy. *CultureCat: Rhetoric and Feminism*. 12 Feb. 2008. 15 Feb. 2008  
<<http://culturecat.net/>>.
- Schell, Eileen E. "The Costs of Caring: 'Feminism' and Contingent Women Workers in Composition Studies." *Feminism and Composition Studies: In Other Words*. Eds. Susan C. Jarratt and Lynn Worsham. New York: MLA, 1998.
- Scott, Anne, Lesley Semmens and Lynette Willoughby. "Women and the Internet: The Natural History of a Research Project." *Virtual Gender: Technology, Consumption and Identity*. Eds. Eileen Green and Alison Adam. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Stranger, Carol A. "The Sexual Politics of the One-To-One Tutorial Approach and Collaborative Learning." *Teaching Writing: Pedagogy, Gender, and Equity*. Eds. Cynthia L. Caywood and Gillian R. Overing. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987.
- Sullivan, Patricia A. "Feminism and Methodology in Composition Studies." *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research*. Eds. Gesa Kirsch and Patricia A. Sullivan. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1992.
- Tryon, Chuck. *The Chutry Experiment*. 15 Feb. 2008. 15 Feb. 2008  
<<http://chutry.wordherders.net/wp/>>.
- Turkle, Sherry. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.
- van Doorn, Niels, Liesbet van Zoonen and Sally Wyatt. "Writing from Experience: Presentations of Gender Identity on Weblogs." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 14.2 (2007): 143-159.
- "Weblogs by Teachers and Scholars in Composition, Rhetoric, and Literature." *Kairosnews. Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy* 10 Nov. 2007. <<http://kairosnews.org/weblogs-by-teachers-and-scholars-in-composition-rhetoric-and-literature>>.
- Wood, Julia T. *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Belmont: Wadsworth, 2001.

## VITA

Collette Renee Caton was born in Austin, Texas on April 7, 1983 to Kathleen C. Caton and Robert C. Caton. In 2001, Collette graduated from Friendswood High School; she ranked in the top ten percent of her class. Collette pursued an undergraduate degree at St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas where she double-majored in Communication and English Writing and Rhetoric. In 2005, she received her B.A., graduating *summa cum laude*. In August 2006, she was admitted into the Rhetoric and Composition graduate program at Texas State University-San Marcos. Collette will be earning her M.A. in Rhetoric and Composition in May 2008.

Permanent Address: 2001 Plantation Drive

Friendswood, TX 77546

This thesis was typed by Collette R. Caton.