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Into the Blogosphere: Using Poetic Inquiry to Examine Women's Identities in "Mommy Blogs"

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**Into the Blogosphere: Using Poetic
Inquiry to Examine Women's
Identities in "Mommy Blogs".**

Spring 2022

BGSU MA Project

Plan II

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Rationale

Introduction

Motherhood has been a dominant identity for women, a common discourse surrounding motherhood is the thought that mothers have a “biological instinct to mother and are often said to have this nurture-based instinct from birth. Though despite this nature feeling towards motherhood, many struggle with achieving the type of mothering they idealize. (Ulrich & Weatherall, 2000, p. 330) As families grow and time passes, some women’s identities transition to exist outside the realm of motherhood; they push away the mother identity claiming that it diminishes other aspects of the self or identities they desire. For others, motherhood holds a lot of power over their daily activities, and it is an embraced identity. We need to validate those who may be experiencing uncertainty surrounding their role as a mother. These uncertainties can pertain to first time pregnancy concerns, how to navigate the role of motherhood, and how to balance their other identities with that of being a mother. Some commonly used resources prior to the establishment of online communities range from traditional text written by experienced women such as the “Mayo Clinic Guide to Healthy Pregnancy” by Dr. Myra J. Wick, which is currently ranked 9th on Amazon’s book storefront in books about motherhood or even classes to help eliminate the uncertainty that motherhood brings.

Computer mediated communication has diversified the ways we gather information, not just from written text translated to a digital access point, but from people themselves, such as with blogging. Lopez (2009) sees blogs as an online diary and examined how “mommy blogs” fit into the community of online space. A “mommy blog” is an online website, or web log, that focuses on topics of motherhood, pregnancy, and all aspects of a mother’s life. Blogs are either written in for discussion purposes or in a narrative style. The blogs featured in this study use a

mixture of both formatting styles. There are various reasons a user would create and maintain a blogsite. In addition to Lopez's idea of an online diary, uncertainty can be reduced through confirmation of other's uncertainties, along with a desire to connect to a community of likeminded people of a shared identity, find social support systems through local readers, or as seen in a lot of blog writers, create an additional form of income to support their family's growth. Within this study I aim to analyze how women's identities are presented in online communities. Using communication theory of identity and the understanding that identity is a performance I've focused on "mommy blogs" and how they showcase those identities and which ones are most prevalent among mothers.

The literature on the portrayal of motherhood in the blogosphere highlights the role of emerging media. The interest into the media portrayal of motherhood has been rapidly increasing, with mother specific online spaces expanding every day. (Mackenzie & Zhao, 2021) This form of media has existed for over a decade, but as with all forms continues to adapt to our needs. For example, Mommy blogs have changed over time and content creators are adapting to their needs and uses. In my literature review, I found that mothers had very strong feelings and opinions about the work they do as a mother and way they present that work on their blog sites. While some researchers have investigated how mothers use the blogosphere to express the feelings in their own life (Abetz & Moore, 2018; Lehto, 2020; Lopez, 2009) I extend this work by examining what feelings mothers are expressing and what this says about their identity. These women feel conflicted about different things, such as the way they should share their child's life (Blum-Ross and Livingston, 2017) or how they should handle their own insecurities about the abilities to mother. (Lehto, 2020) I looked for themes that challenge my perception of motherhood identities, as a researcher who does not adopt the identity of "mother", such as how

these women view themselves as mothers in relation to other identities, how they handle their own mental health concerns as well their children's, and if women are consciously aware of their own identities outside of their role as a mother. While the identities of mothers have been covered extensively, the type of studies done with mothers in online spaces remains the same. Most of these studies are conducted by interviewing women bloggers and looking for commonalities and differences in their experiences.

In this study, I use poetic inquiry to examine how mothers' identities are presented in online spaces, using "mommy blogs" as the basis of the sample population. This allowed me to gather data observationally and use the published work that mothers post on their blog sites to analyze the portrayal of mother's identities. I selected blogs by searching what the most popular "mommy blogs" were of the past couple years because I wanted them to be relevant to and reflective of the population that was engaging with them. This was achieved by choosing up-to-date blog sites. I examined a combination of postings and messages from commentators and created erasure poems by highlighting the words that evoke an emotional response, either in the tone they are written in or mention of the own writers' feelings. I present the erasure poetry to highlight the mothers' own words when communicating and giving advice about being a mother in a digital age.

As a researcher I understand that I am not in a position of belonging to this community, I do not identify as a mother nor do I engage with the style of blog sites in any capacity outside of the research presented here. For this I am simply observing this community of women from the outside looking in and my analysis of these women and their interactions are based off of my own lived experiences regarding motherhood and those who identify as mothers, including the relationship and communication I have with the mothers in my social circle. Through this study I

use the word motherhood to define the act of a woman being a primary caregiver or guardian to a child. This is defined as so to understand that mothers may not physically given birth to the child they care for but still take on the role as mother.

Literature Review

Mothers in The Blogosphere

As access to the internet has increased, individuals have used it for communication, education, and more recently seeking social support online. This can be seen in the proliferation of “mommy blogs,” the content of which is at least partially based upon or influenced through the engagement bloggers receive from their readers. Motherhood as an identity is seemingly dependent on not only the relationship mothers have with their offspring, but also the relationship they have with their communities of mothers, which can be seen in the comment section on a blog post. While analyzing literature, it is important to note that in order to connect to my study, I must acknowledge cultural differences that exist in motherhood and identity.

Motherhood Identity

“Mother” is a powerful identity that many women take on, and it is one that is culturally shared, though the specifics may differ depending on which culture we are examining. Looking at mothers from western individualistic cultures, we see that this identity holds a lot of influence in how mothers live daily due to the roles they take on. I found a common theme in the literature I examined; mothers created blogs similar to a diary entry, due in part to the personal nature of their content (Lopez, 2009, p. 738). This allowed a connection to form between private relationship struggles and a public audience. Often, the way that mothers portray their identities can be seen as “fragmented” through their use of “tags”, which are indicators on their site to lead their readers to specific postings. These tags give insight into the other identities these mother’s

hold, including their interests, careers, or relationships outside of their connection with their children. They continue to fragment their identity in such a way based on the responses their readers give them. The interactions connect with the content they post.

I frame this research using Michel Hecht's *Communication Theory of Identity* (CTI), which states that communication and identity are interrelated and dependent on each other. Our identities are based on the way we interact with our surroundings, and also on how our surroundings interact with ourselves (Hecht, 2015, p. 77). Using this theoretical framework, I aim to understand the maternal identity of the mothers who run the selected blog sites. I use CTI to frame transitional times for women who are mothers, from the act of becoming pregnant or finding out they were to be a mother, to the baby entering their lives, and the stages of the child's development.

Following the idea that identity is a performance, Blum-Ross and Livingston (2017) examine not only how a mommy blog effects the identity of the mother, but also how it effects the identity of the child, as their life is broadcasted on the web from such an early age. They state that blogging "transforms 'identity' from a 'given' into a 'task' – and changing the actors with the responsibility for performing that task for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance" (p. 120). Identity overall is a performance of the self, and when the self is seemingly showcased for all to see online, that performance always remains active. There is a need for mothers who blog about their own and their children's lives to know "the blog was source of motivation but also a stress as bloggers struggled to produce content" (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017, p. 117). Blogging adds stress on these mothers if they alter their performances of themselves, because it shifts audience members perceptions about them.

These transitional moments influence mother's identity, either reaffirming them or challenging what the mothers know and believe about themselves. If we understand that identity is "actively and creatively made and that it is always a process which would confirm an existential view of self," we can see how mothers adapt their perceptions based on interaction with their audiences (Baker, 2019, p. 271).

Public Perception of the Self through Blogs

The reason that blog sites are successful for mommy bloggers is because of the audiences they reach with their content. Most of the bloggers end their posts with some request for a response from their readers, either a comment box or email link plastered around their sites to ensure that contact is easily achievable. Audience members with different perceptions of a mother's identity can share their thoughts and opinions in the blog postings comment sections. Because of the open communication and diversity of audiences, mommy bloggers may feel as if they must present themselves as a certain type of mother, despite identities they hold of themselves.

This tension highlights the debate between the "good" mothers and the "bad" mothers. Mothers that embrace the title of "bad" mother show the often-unseen parts of motherhood, which most mothers are hesitant to share because of fear of judgement. Audience members label bloggers "bad" based on stereotypical understandings of motherhood. As stated above, some mothers embrace their preferred identities, as seen in Mari Lehto's (2020) piece on Finnish mommy blogs. Lehto argues that "bad is the new good" and looks into mommy bloggers who are reclaiming their identities regardless of what the audience thinks. The mothers who relish the bad mother label are doing so under the pretense that this label does not speak to their ability to care for their children appropriately, but rather they emphasize their other identities, supporting the

concept of fragmented and multiple identities. One of the mommy bloggers that Lehto analyzed said “I would like to be a better mother. I don’t want to lower the bar in other fields of my life either: as a girlfriend, friend, sister, daughter, and entrepreneur or for example as a blogger” (Lehto, 2020, p. 665). Mothers who share this belief do not wish to sacrifice the self in order to appease the other. This does not sit well with certain audience members, many of whom become confrontational, as noted in the comment section of the Finnish blogs (Lehto, 2020)

A Mother’s Multifaceted Identity

In the literature, I repeatedly saw the concept of fragmented or multi-faceted identities. Identities are complex and an individual takes on multiple identities (Ladge & Greenberg, 2015; Hecht, 2015; Rittenour & Colaner, 2012) When analyzing the identity of motherhood, we must also analyze how their other identities interact or influence the mothering persona. Those other identities may be the more dominant identities for mothers, such as putting a lot of effort in your identity as a wife or as an employee. We must also acknowledge that the identity of mother does not mean the same for everyone; the identity and the emphasis on it are a fluid performance, and when a mother changes their priority on one identity the performance of the others shifts with it.

Knowing that identities are multifaceted, we should investigate other components of women blogger’s identities, or the female identity overall, as some hold the view that female identity is signified by its relation to traditionally female roles such as a caregiver (Ireland, 1993, p. 9). One of the most common discussions in the identity of a mother is her other roles as a working woman (Dow, 2016; Ladge & Greenberg, 2015) A mother’s return to work or lack thereof, especially in the mommy blog community, brings about a lot of voices and opinions from content consumers. For some women this decision does not come easily considering the scrutiny that surrounds the topic, some may go back to work after spending their leave with their

child, some take an extended absence from the field, and some never return at all. Ladge & Greenberg (2015) looked at how women were re-socialized back into the professional world after maternity leave and found continuing evidence that mothers experienced an increase in job related insecurities. They state that mothers “recognized that they had changed as a result of the birth of their child and that this change led them to feel uncertain about their identity as they attempted to resocialize into an organization where colleagues were not cognizant of their evolving sense of self” (Ladge & Greenberg, 2015, p. 986). They are navigating an environment where their performance of their identity as a mother is implicit, but still impacts their overall identity as a working professional.

One of the dominant themes I found in the blog posts were mother’s discussions of their own struggles with mental health concerns for themselves and their children. Lanctot and Turcotte (2017) discuss the “good mother” discourse about what traits a good mother would have, and how one is labeled a bad mother if they happen to not hold those traits. They give an example of a women placed in residential care as adolescents, and the negative experiences of children in those systems. These mothers all express insecurities about their own childhood and their concerns of passing along those negative experiences to their children. While most mother’s experience some level of insecurity of their ability as a mother, the women in this study used their experiences to be a “good mother.” However, they couldn’t specify traits of a good mother, and focused on being present for their children. “Interviewees set themselves standards of good mothering that resulted in a general belief that limitation of their own personal freedom is the only way to “break the cycle” (Lanctot & Turcotte, 2017, p. 85). The women put a lot of their time into the performance of their mothering identity, because it was a performance that they did

not see often in their upbringing. In this case we see mother's channeling their insecurities into positive actions for their children, while others deflect their feelings onto other mothers.

Combative Mother's on Mommy Blogs

There is such diversity in the identity of mothers. As with any identity, motherhood is a singular experience with no two people experiencing their identity in the same way. Literature about motherhood argues that the tension between mothers is due in part to each mothers' own perceptions of their shortcomings such as what their idea of motherhood is like, how do they characterize what a good mother is and how they communicate when they do not meet those traits. Abetz and Moore (2018) investigate how combative mothers exists within mommy blogs; "bloggers explain that the judgement of other mothers comes in large part because mothers feel insecure about their own imperfect mothering." (p. 272). This act of mothers placing judgement on other bloggers is seen throughout the literature and through the statements made by the mothers on the blogs analyzed There seems to have always been some level of tension between mothers prior to the popularization of mommy blogs. Blum-Ross and Livingston (2017) claim that this tension arises due to conflicts between mothers' own identities and how they are shared online. While focusing on the idea of "sharenting" they continue to examine how the online mommy bloggers can profit from their children's lives, which some audience members say is not their story to tell (Blum-Ross & Livingston, 2017, p. 112). Their opinions on whether a mother should stay home and assume the role as sole caretaker as a stay-at-home mom (SAHM). Paired with this already tense narrative, those who wish to profit off their blogsites are also seen as competition to other mothers who are doing the same type of content creation. These mothers must handle combative mothers, those who vocalize their dislike or disagreement of a mother and her parenting tactic. This is due to them also meeting with mothers who have different

parenting styles than their own. Within the literature examined, motherhood identity is shown to be complex and no two mothers experience motherhood the same way, as no two people experience their identity the same way. It is a singular experience.

Method: Poetic Inquiry

Methodological Approach

Through this research I aimed to understand how women's identities are performed in online spaces, specifically on mommy blogs. I examined 26 different blog postings in order to see the main conversations these women were having with their audience members and how those conversations compared to existing motherhood discourses. In order to explore the identity performances, I used a qualitative approach to focus on lived human experiences. I used digital ethnography and poetic inquiry to go deeper into the understanding of these women's lived experiences, beliefs, and morals. The women who use these blogsites are placing themselves in an online community and interact with other members every time they read, share, or engage in any capacity with those posts. As a non-member of these communities, I engaged in public observation of their blogs to avoid any interference into their daily interactions. Poetic inquiry is a form of qualitative research that uses poetry as a form of investigation, through either interviews, narrative analysis, observations, or personal experiences (Faulkner, 2020, p. 13) The use of poetic inquiry allowed me to re-present these women's lives through a creative lens. Faulkner (2020) describes how poetic inquiry can be used specifically with identity work, citing that it allows the audience to feel an emotional connection to the lives of participants. "Poetry may resonate with readers to have them experience the poetry as 'evocative mediators' of painful relation experiences and to recognize and tell their own stories" (Faulkner, 2020, p. 25)

Sample Selection

Examining blog postings allowed me to see actual conversations and discussions mommy bloggers had in digital communities without needing to be a member as these blogsites are a part of the public domain. I analyzed blogs centered on motherhood or family life. Wanting to find the most popular blog sites in order to give myself a wider sample to work with, I looked through various website of active blogs that listed the most popular mommy blogs of the past couple years or took them directly from references or recommendations of other blog posts. Through these means I gathered a total of 10 family based, mother run blog sites: “At Home with Natalie”, “Love Taza”, “Mommy Shorts”, “Rage Against the Minivan”, “Foster the Family”, “Smart Mom Ideas”, “Pregnant Chicken”, “Jacqui Saldana”, “Real Mom Recs” and “Confessions of Parenting.” I went through and noted how active the sites were, the last publication date of a posting, the ability to comment on those postings, and whether they had a dedicated tag devoted to their blog postings about motherhood for ease of navigation. This was crucial as some of the blogs feature a more lifestyle section that showcases the mothers’ favorite recipes, outfit of the day, and career-based updates. While these things are important to the overall identity of the individual, I wanted to see how they worked with their identity as a mother.

In these 10 blogs, I selected between 1-3 blog postings to use as a base for my analysis. I chose 1-3 to be as succinct as possible, as these blogs were analyzed observationally. The ones I analyzed were found through navigating through each blogs webpage, looking through their sections labeled “motherhood” “pregnancy” or “parenting”. I then went through and read those postings and selected the ones that most aligned with the themes found in the literature or posts that discusses major transitory times as those are the times where an identity may shift. As stated, some of these blogs featured postings outside of motherhood, so some filtering was utilized in

order to find the postings that concerned mother identity. To do this, I first looked through their tag on motherhood and skimmed the most recent posts, as well as their comments. If that did not garner enough results for me to use, I then filtered more to look for postings that dealt with the emotional side of being a mother, using tags such as “anxiety”, “happiness”, “insecurity”, and “transition.” The words that garnered the most results from this method were “transition” and “happiness,” while the other two produced less results I was still able to use the content that I found. Since poetic inquiry evokes emotional reactions in readers, I needed a sample that had emotional tones already present, something a post about a recipe may be unable to do.

Analysis

Using the Communication Theory of Identity as a theoretical framework, I analyzed the blogs with the understanding that identity is a performance based on the communication interactions we have with the world around us. CTI argues that our identity and our communication are interactive with another, meaning not only does our communication impact our identity but our identity impacts how we communicate. “When we talk, we are our identities” (Hecht, 2015, p. 180). For the mothers featured in this study, I viewed them through the posts they shared publicly. This of course takes into consideration the nuance of online communication, which some may argue is a less natural and more edited version of women’s identities. I however want to challenge this perspective by looking for evidence that shows the mothers are honest in their postings through emotional openness with their audiences.

I used poetic inquiry to center the voices of mommy bloggers. For this specific study, I used erasure poetry, which is done by blocking out certain words or phrases in an already written piece to create a poem. I did not adjust, add, or switch words for poetic purposes, rather using the women’s own words to create a poetic moment and honor their voices. I then analyzed how the

poems I created spoke to the theme of motherhood identity. For the purpose of cohesiveness in the poems, I have adapted the online form of the poems to appear on one sheet, removing videos, adds, or interactive web elements. These poems were created with a visual perspective in mind, I utilized the web app “Canva” to create the poems used for analysis. The aim to create a “refrigerator door” series to showcase how the identities of these women are impacted by their role as a mother. I wanted to illustrate these poems as if they were to places on a refrigerator door, there is a harsh juxtaposition between the solid, blacked out lines of the poem, and the soft crayon or marker strokes found in various positions around them. They are meant to connect to the idea that despite what the mother is feeling about her identity as a mother, she truly loves her children, even if they scribble on an important document. That document comes important to that child, it is their art, something to be pinned to the refrigerator door. Using different creative elements that juxtapose the harshness of the mothers’ words about her own identity and the drawings from some child shows how mothers perception of their own identity revolves around their children at all time. They place this perception of their identity with their children’s identity integrated into it by placing the poems on the refrigerator door, seemingly the highest place of honor given to children from their parents.

Poems

Based on the experiences and interactions I observed, I found that most women are less likely to share the negative aspects surrounding motherhood, as they usually want to portray themselves as ‘good’ mothers to their audiences. Of the 10 blog sites used for sampling purposes a total of 26 blog posts were compiled and read through, averaging around 3-5 blog posts per site. The first poem (Figure 1) is taken from a post from the blog “Pregnant Chicken”, this post was specifically looking into the idea of “mom shaming,” and goes along with the idea that the

community of mothers online can be combative causing bloggers to question their identity based on the responses they get from things they communicate with their audiences.

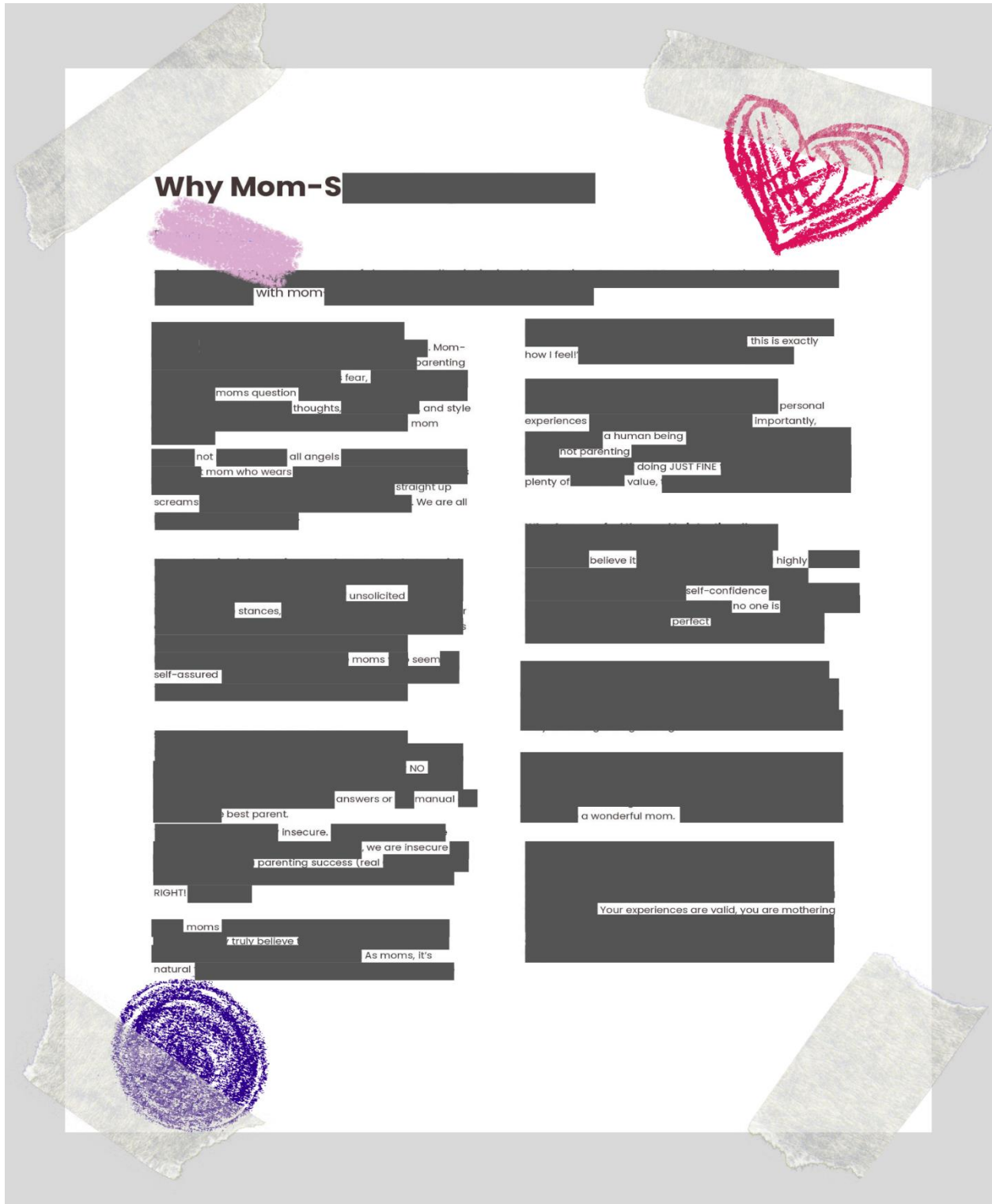


Figure 1. *Why Moms*

I've titled this poem (see figure 1) "Why Moms," which is a play on the original titled found in the post. Within this poem the biggest take away was the feelings that mothers get from their experiences and interactions with the people in their communities. Since our identity is interactive with our communication, it may have a negative impact on the mothers' identities. This mother here urges her audiences and her community to take that negative feedback and transform it into self-encouragement. This also supports the idea of multifaceted identities; while their identity as a mom is important and central, their identity as a human or as a wife or as friend is also central. The mother here wants to express that while she acknowledges that 'mother' is the dominant identity, the other parts of her identity make up who she is as well.

This next poem (see figure 2) comes from the blog "Mommy Shorts," and discusses the relationship between mother's role as a caregiver and their role as a professional in the working world. This one examines how mothers feel when they embrace their identities in other aspects of their lives other than motherhood, a topic that may not be as widely discussed in public, as the author of this post notes in her writing.

I've titled this poem "maternity leave" to show a woman going through the emotions of leaving her newborn baby for the working world. The community of SAHM's is massive and many mothers who choose to return to work are often faced with questions about why they would choose that or how they feel about leaving their baby, with little regard to the women who do not have the financial capabilities to stop working after the birth of a child. Which brings us to the next poem within our study, seemingly the opposite of the one presented here.

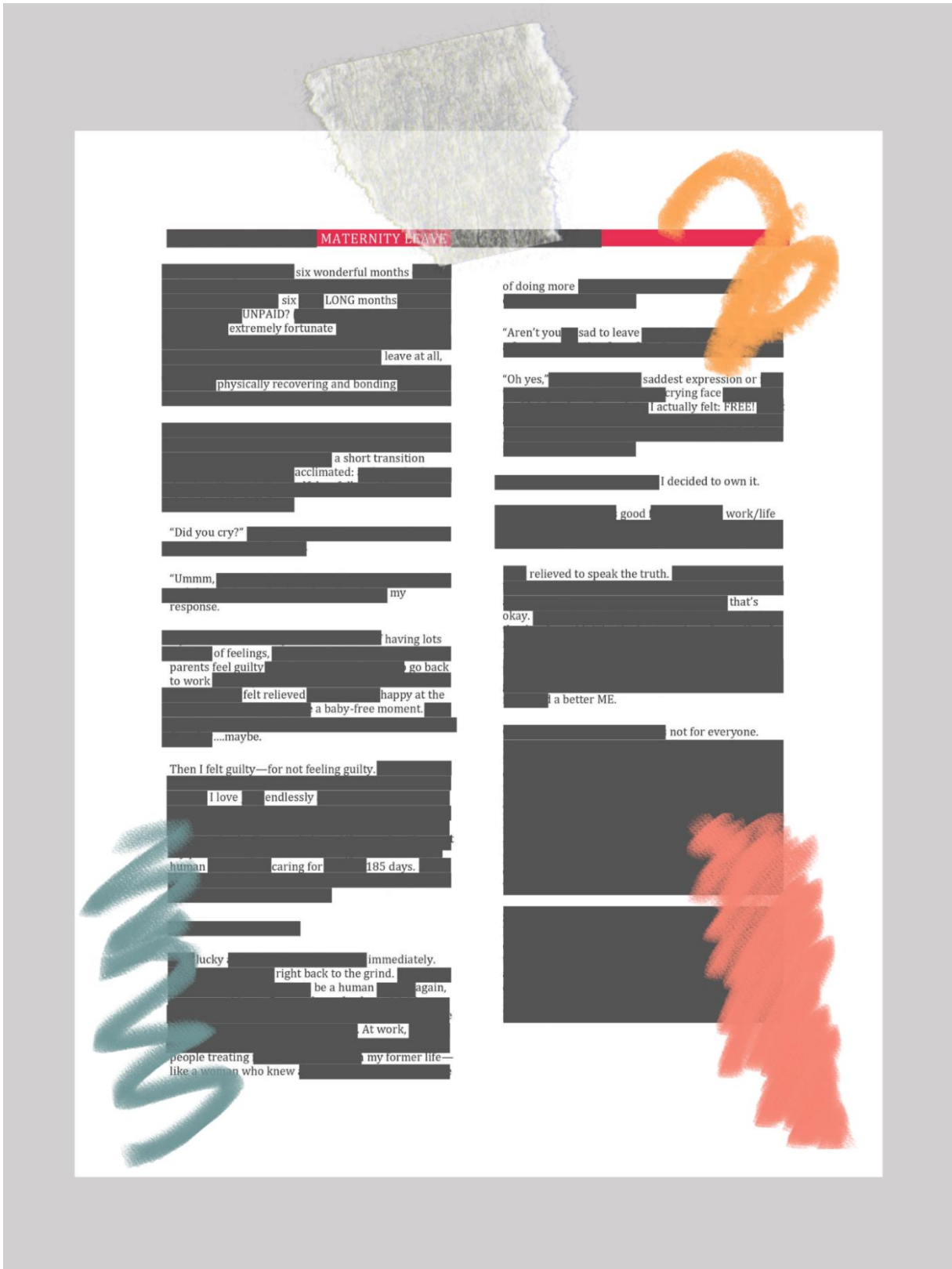


Figure 2. Maternity Leave

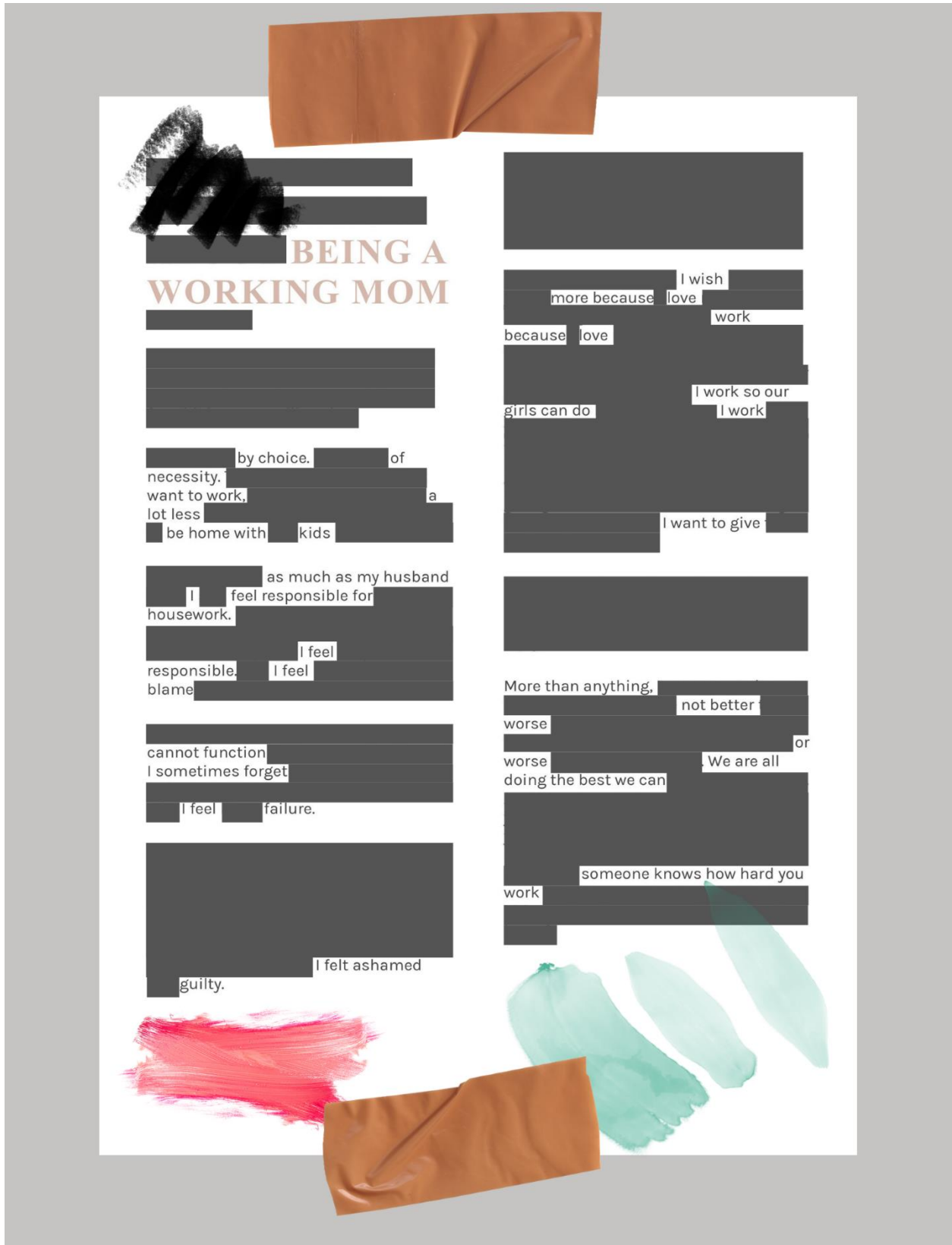


Figure 3. Being A Working Mom

Around 10 of my 26 gathered blog posts dealt with the topic of working mothers, whether they concerned the lives of stay-at-home moms, emotions surrounding leaving a child after maternity leave, or how mothers balanced work and family life. The SAHM is a popular figure ideal for mothers and many want to stay at home and solely take on the role of caregiver to their children. It is a struggle emotionally for some women who want to take on this ideal of a SAHM but realistically cannot be due to financial obligations. This next poem (see figure 3) was created from a post written by a reader of “Rage Against the Minivan”, supporting the idea that the people that read and write this type of blogs are apart of a community of mothers or mother-minded individuals.

I’ve titled this one (see figure 3) “Being A Working Mom”, this one differs a lot from the previous poem about working mothers. In the one prior to this, the mother spoke about how relieved she was to be returning to work after giving birth. While the tone of this poem is more desperate and upsetting. She speaks of her emotions about leaving her children, but understands she needs to in order to support her children. She also receives questions and comments about raising 5 children but not staying home with them, which she expresses immense guilt for. She discusses negative emotions about returning to work often throughout her posting, which were highlighted using the erasure of other words surrounding them. Something that is significant about this person’s experience documented in the post is her desire to communicate with other mothers regardless of what option they choose after they have children, to say that we are “all doing the best we can.” This gives a clear sense of the support that can be found in the community, despite having competitive and questioning mothers there as well. She states that no one know truly knows how hard a mother works, but that she will acknowledge it due to them both sharing the identity of mother.

Figure 4. Other Blog Posts Examined

Blog Post:	Theme Expressed:
“Motherhood Pep Talk” – At Home with Natalie	Encouragement/Support
“My Post-Partum Anxiety Experience” – At Home with Natalie	Mental Health/Transition
“Mama’s Losing Her Mind” – At Home with Natalie	Mental Health
“When Motherhood Leaves You Feeling Friendless” – At Home with Natalie	Mental Health/Loneliness
“On Weaning” – Love Taza	Transition
“Family Screams and Life Updates” – love Taza	Mental Health/Transitions
“Your Fertility Stories” – Love Taza	Encouragement/Support
“How Do Working Parents Feel about No School This Fall” – Mommy Shorts	Working Parents/SAHM
“Best and Most Concise Advice for New Moms” – Mommy Shorts	Encouragement/Support
“Working Moms and Narrow Margins” - Rage Against the Mini Van	Working Parents/SAHM
“How to Monitor Safety Issues While Managing Your Own Parental Anxiety” – Rage Against the Minivan	Mental Health
“Mother’s Day for Foster Moms”- Foster the Family	Encouragement/Support
“Once Fears, Now Realities” – Foster the Family	Encouragement/Support
“Work From Home with Baby” – Smart Mom Ideas	Working Parents/SAHM
“How to be a Successful Stay at Home Mom” – Smart Mom Ideas	Working Parents/SAHM
“Signs of Post-Partum Depression” – Smart Mom Ideas	Mental Health/Transition
“Taking Antidepressants” – Pregnant Chicken	Mental Health
“Returning to Work After Having a Baby” – Pregnant Chick	Working Parents/SAHM
“What Inspires Me Most” – Jacqui Saldana	Encouragement/Support

“Bittersweet Taste of Parenthood” – Jacqui Saldana	Transition
“Post – Partum Recovery” – Real Mom Recs	Transition
“Fighting SAHM Depression” – Confessions of Parentings	Mental Health Working Parents/SAHM
“Uninvolved Parenting” – Confessions of Parenting	Encouragement/Support

Figure 5: Blog List

Title & Dates Active:	Description:
“At Home with Natalie” Last Post: April 11th 2022	Natalie, mother of 6. A lot of mentions of experiences of grief. A lot of emphasis on mental health, has sections based on motherhood and lifestyle. States she uses her blog as her main source of income
“Love, Taza” Last Post: June 7th 2021	Naomi, mother of 5. Blog was created in 2007. States that her full-time job is being a mother but also has income from her blog and a book she had written.
“Mommy Shorts” Last Post: April 8th 2022	Ilana, mother of 2. A wide expanse of topics covered on her blog. She focuses on her life as well as her children’s lives. Uses her blog as her main source of income since 2013.
“Rage Against the Minivan” Last Post: April 27th 2022	Kristen, mother of 4. Focuses on her children, lifestyle choices, and has a section devoted to social justice topics. She is a full-time marriage and family therapist and writes her blog in her free time.
“Foster the Family” Last Post: March 28th 2022	Jamie, mother of 5. Mixture of adoptive and biological children. Currently fostering. A nice perspective on the “definition of mother” pushing it outside of the realm that mothers are people who birth children, we know that this is no longer the commonly known truth, this blog helps push that narrative forward
“Smart Mom Ideas” Last Post: April 27th 2022	Elna, mother of 2. This blog focused a lot on the mothers support surrounding the needs of her children, only time mental health was mentioned during my search

	was associated with post-partum. Similar tone to “love taza”
“Pregnant Chicken” Last Post: Posts aren’t date, but the copyright to the site was updated in 2022	Collective of mothers sharing story, Amy being the initial creator. This was a very broad scope blog, she covered a lot of bases when talking about the ways of motherhood (or parenthood), speaks on dads, mental health, gives advice for those who want to be a SAHM or those who want to return to work.
“Jacquis Saldana” Last Post: Not dated, content before Christmas	Jacqui, mother of 3, lost her oldest son when he was 3 and a half. This seems to have turned into much of a lifestyle blog, doesn’t seem to share as much about personal family stories rather than her favorite items or cooking recipes.
“Real Mom Recs” Last Post: March 2nd 2020	Caitlin, mother of 4. This one was tricky; everything was very basic. Giving advice from questions from commenters or other readers, like “how to know if your child is sleepwalking” or “how to spot an experienced dad”
“Confessions of Parenting” Last Post: January 22nd 2022	Michele, mother of 5. This blog is interesting, it covers some topics that are worth exploring but not repeatedly, she looks into different styles of parenting and uses inclusive language to cater to her different audiences (I.e using boyfriend and husband to mean the same roles but define different relationships)

Discussion

Of the dominant themes, listed above, I found in the blogs I examined was the theme of “Working Parents/SAHM” (see figure 4) within the 10 blogs that I examined (see figure 5). This was the only theme I found that related directly to identity work. While there was lot of different information about motherhood, these mothers did not seem to get into a lot of the other aspects of their identities other than being a mother or being a working professional. I did not find significant observations of the mothers writing about their relationships with their friends or with

their partners, due in part to their blog's being centered on their children. The themes did show however, the sense of community that can be found within the blogosphere. I found many posts about encouragement to mothers and support services offered to those going through some common motherhood struggles, such as dealing with post-partum depression. These were structured as "pep talks" or tips and advice on how to get through a certain thing in their life. The open talk about mental health on the blogs was something that stood out, allowing bloggers to be open about their support needs in their community. They wrote not only about their mental health but of their children's. This study supported the idea that the working or stay at home mom identity is most represented in the online world.

I did not find a lot of examples of direct combativeness when it comes to motherhood, while they surely exist, as they were mentioned in the posts themselves, I did not see comments or statements from people directly responding to topics being discussed. This could be related to a couple of reasons, that the combativeness of mothers is not widely visible, mainly occurring in private conversations or that the combativeness of mothers has decreased and instead a more support online community exists in its place. I believe that future research using interviews with mother bloggers would be helpful to speak directly to the women who read and write mommy blogs. It would be valuable to understand their interpretation of the interactions they have with their content.

Through this analysis I have found that mothers have the ability to portray a full range of identities, and at no singular time are mothers restricted to be either a "good" mom or a "mom". Ultimately, this labeling of motherhood "goodness" is given based on individual perception of what motherhood looks like. For one mother they may view certain parenting techniques in a

negative light while other mothers may think highly of those same techniques. This allows for the perception of those identities to switch overtime and within the same communities.

When considering motherhood through the theoretical framework of CTI we can look at the main features of this theory and how mothers fit into the different identity's roles. For mothers they fit well into the "communal identity" role. (Hecht, 2015, p. 181) Through this layer of identity, it is best explored through the communities' interactions. This identity is a group-based identity that adds an even further complexity to the mothers' identities on the mommy blogs, their identity is not only based on their relationship with their children but also based on the relationship they have with the members of the online communities they engage with.

Being an outsider to this community and wanting to search for an emotional connection between the parents I needed to find a way to successfully integrate myself into the community in order to comprehend the identities of these mothers. Using poetic inquiry allowed me to place myself in the mother's place and experience those emotions from a secondhand way, the creation of the poems then allows the readers to understand the women's identities from secondary position.

Gaps in Research

While the main focus of this study was to gain an understanding of how women's identities were presented online, there was not a lot of data concerning identities other than working moms. This could be because they were blogs directly focused on family orientated relationships and the women's other identities did not go along with the expected content that were published on those sites.

Another limitation of this research is the sample size and demographics. Due to the vast number of family-oriented blogs on the internet, the market is very saturated, so finding an

appropriate and equitable representation of this community would take more time and more analysis to make sure it was an accurate representation of that population.

Despite the limitations of this research study, I was able to find that women's working identity was just as strongly presented online as their identity as a mother. The working mother identity is one that is portrayed with a lot of strong emotions as seen with Ladge and Greenberg (2015), they either embrace or dismiss the ability to return to work after maternity leave. With poetic inquiry I was able to showcase that emotional element by highlight specific terms and phrases the women used themselves when describing their experiences with returning or not returning to work. Those poems featured the women's insecurities surrounding taking on another identity other than mother. This insecurity is either from the sensation of guilt that is placed on them through communication with others, asking questions such as "don't you miss your children?". This guilt stems from the mothers either agreeing that they do miss their children, or for the fact that they do not feel guilty about leaving their children and returning to the workforce.

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