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An analysis of the mommy blogging phenomenon

Senni Karvonen
Master’s thesis
English Philology
Faculty of Humanities
University of Oulu
Spring 2014
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Appendix
1 INTRODUCTION

What is a mother to do when the writing she wants to read isn’t there? When the only discussion about maternal ambivalence is the one in the glossy magazine about whether to get the Bugaboo or the Frog stroller? [--] Mothers, as we know, are incredibly resourceful. So mothers who do not find themselves in what they read have begun to create their own narrative and to publish it in a place where anyone with access to a computer can find it: the internet. (Buchanan, 2004, p. 2)

From its first forms as a marginal activity of the 1990’s, blogging has become a mainstream phenomenon. One of the common ways for women to establish their footprint in the blogosphere has been to write about their own children (Lopez, 2009, p. 734). This phenomenon, known as mommy blogging\(^1\), is currently attracting vast numbers of authors and readers. Mommy blogs consist of everyday experiences written up by people for whom parenthood is a key identity component, and then published online via a content-management system (CMS) technology that provides for interaction and feedback (Morrison, 2010, p. 1).

According to Morrison (2010, p. 12), mommy bloggers are “rewriting the public script of motherhood” and “combating the cultural ‘amnesia’ that for long tidied up the story of what it meant to mother”. As Powell (2010, p. 37) puts it, being able to witness the negotiations of motherhood is a privilege of the digital age. Looking back at history, depictions of motherhood have been imposed by experts, constructed by the media and politicians or negotiated in the private sphere of the home and playground. Mothers have seldom negotiated their own constructions of motherhood in the public eye. (Powell, 2010, p. 37) Now this widespread phenomenon enables mothers to share their views with the world. That is why I feel this topic deserves to, and has to, be studied and discussed.

\(^1\) The actual term ‘mommy blog’ has been under scrutiny and debated over especially by bloggers themselves. This is discussed in more detail in section 2.2.
1.1 Research topic and goals

In this study, I decided to focus on the American blogging culture as mommy blogging has been a major movement in the blogosphere in the United States for the past few years. The phenomenon has grown rapidly, and it is currently capturing the attention of mainstream media and is getting noticed by the market forces even to the extent that a lot of women have started to generate income when they accept advertisements on their blogs.

This thesis highlights characteristics that I consider essential in current mommy blogs. The purpose of this qualitative research is to take a closer look at the community building aspect of mommy blogs, which has been an essential feature of this genre from the start. Mommy blogging can offer replacement support for many mothers and a means to create a supportive community of peers with whom they can share their experiences of parenthood. Morrison (2010, p. 5) states that the mommy blogs women write and read, and the relationships they form in this act, supplement diminishing traditional institutional and familial supports for childrearing. However, as pointed out by Hunter (2013, p. 1), the community of blogging mothers may be threatened by commercialism that has invaded the blog world: advertisements threaten the foundation of authenticity upon which this genre rests. I am suggesting that some of the monetized mommy bloggers are trying to claim back their sense of community. They may do this by publicly reinforcing the ties between other mommy bloggers. This attempt manifested itself recently in October 2013 when thirteen bloggers jointly reacted to a picture posted by a Los Angeles based fitness expert, mother of three, Maria Kang, on her Facebook page (Image 1.1).
Kang’s picture of herself and her three little boys caused fury and was attacked by many in the social media, even outside the US. In the image, the scantily clad Kang is asking “What’s your excuse?”. With the picture, which was probably taken to promote her fitness business and attract people to her website, Kang fueled the flames of the always heated discussion of women and body image. In her image that is evidently targeted at other mothers, she is picturing herself as a fit supermom who can do it all.

Although this particular picture caused a lot of reactions on blogs and other forms of social media, I am focusing on one particular blog post, Here’s my excuse (and a bunch of others too) since you asked, Maria Kang published on 17 October, 2013 on a blog Divine secrets of a domestic diva (http://www.divinesecretsofademesticdiva.com). The blog is written by Susan McLean, also known as Domestic diva, but this particular post she co-constructed with 12 other bloggers. The blog post is attached in Appendix 1. The blog entry includes the image which led to the joined reaction, Domestic Diva’s written view on the issue, and 13 image-texts which the group of bloggers created and published of themselves with/or their family members to express their excuses, aiming to answer Kang’s question. Because one goal of this study is to characterize the
potential for community to emerge between a group of bloggers and readers, the interchanges between readers and bloggers as well as among the readers in the comments section is crucial to take into consideration in the analysis. The post generated 113 comments. The comments are published in two different settings: the Facebook comment section with 67 comments comes right after the blog post and the blog’s own comment section with 47 comments at the bottom of the page.

In prior studies, many scholars (see e.g. Hammond, 2010 and Lopez, 2009) have claimed that mommy blogging is a radical act which is shifting the ideology of the good mother with its representation of real or non-ideal motherhood. Yonker (2012, pp. 195-196), however, has come to a different conclusion in her study of the phenomenon: she saw little or no indication of explicit rejection or resistance to conventional motherhood or direct addressing of problems or the unattainability of expectations around motherhood in the blogs she studied. This duality in prior studies of mommy blogging is one of the reasons I was drawn into this particular blog entry: the bloggers who co-constructed the post actually seem to be taking a stand. They are addressing a problem they see (Kang’s aggressive approach to ideal postpartum appearance) and simultaneously address the unattainability of some expectations set for ideal motherhood (postpartum body image). The co-constructed blog entry is also something that struck me as unusual as it is not a common approach in diary style blogging. I am interested in finding out, what is the outcome of such a protest (although softened by humor) they seem to be performing that is not so common approach in this genre, and how is their act perceived by the readers of the blog. If a mommy blogging community may be established through the act of blog writing and its affirmative commenting, both performed with clearly defined codes of conduct (see Hammond, 2010, p. 87; Yonker, 2012, p. 189), what is the outcome when a blog entry is more confrontational in its approach?

Given the controversial topic, I am interested in examining this post in detail and analyzing its linguistic features, and seeing what kinds of discourses it creates and perhaps tries to replace. I am also aiming to evaluate the potential community development between the bloggers and readers by assessing how the post is perceived by the readers. The questions I am addressing within this framework are:

- What discourses the blog post creates and how are they articulated?
• How do those discourses affect the potential for a community to emerge between a group of bloggers and readers?

1.2 Previous research and sources

I am employing points of inquiry developed by critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2003, 2010). My analysis focuses on aspects that this approach lifts to the forefront. In addition to language and discourse, critical discourse analysis is interested in what is behind them: it aims to explore the opacity between discourse and society, ideology, and power. These linkages are often unclear to those involved. This methodological framework that I discuss in section 3 will help me to guide my analysis and provide me with concepts to bring understanding to the material, its representations, and the social event I am looking at. Through the analysis of micro level, i.e. language and discourse, I aim to characterize the macro level, i.e. social and cultural structures behind it.

Previous research on mommy blogging has scratched the surface of this vast phenomenon leaving plenty of room for further examination. In prior studies, North American academics (e.g. Buchanan, 2004; Chen, 2013; Friedman, 2010; Hammond, 2010; Lopez, 2009, and Morrison, 2010 and 2011) have examined this genre and its context, concentrating especially on mommy blogging and its relation to the ideological notion of motherhood. The most extensive study about a topic similar to mine I came across has been conducted by Yonker (2012). My approach to material differs from most of the prior studies. Employing CDA in the analysis and approaching mommy blogging genre through systematic analysis of one co-constructed blog post is a new approach.

What drew me to this particular topic is that I have been an active blog reader for several years following numerous blogs almost daily. When I first discovered blogs, I was in the midst of renovating my apartment and therefore I mostly visited blogs that dealt with renovation and interior design. My taste of blogs has changed radically since then and even now my list of favorite blogs keeps changing almost every month. That is partly due to the blogs’ ephemeral nature and the fact that the blogging world, also known as blogosphere, keeps changing very
rapidly. I was drawn to the topic also by my subjectivity as a mother (but not as a blogger). To this particular blog post I ran into by accident when I was browsing blogs and following links they provide one after another. Mommy blogging is a worldwide phenomenon, and Finland and Scandinavia foster many interesting mommy blogs. However, when it comes to the topic choice of my Master’s thesis, as a student of English philology, I am particularly interested in studying phenomena of the Anglophone world although I am aware that this study probably would benefit from a view point of a student with American background instead of Finnish one.

1.3 Practices and ethics in doing internet research

To quote Markham (2011, pp. 111, 124), the internet is a social phenomenon, a tool, and it can also serve as a field site for qualitative research. The study of the internet cuts across all academic disciplines. The term internet originally described a network of computers that made possible the decentralized transmission of information but now the term serves as an umbrella for various technologies, capacities, uses, and social spaces. Qualitative study of the internet will continue to shift and change as new technologies and capacities attract researchers to explore new methodological approaches to www-related interactions. (Markham, 2011, pp. 111, 124)

According to Markham (2011, p. 112), the internet tends to be studied in one or more of the following ways:

1) *The study of any social phenomenon using internet-based tools for collecting, sorting, storing and/or analyzing information gathered*

2) *The study of sociocultural phenomena that are mediated by, interwoven with, or rely on the internet for their composition or function*

3) *The study of the internet or aspects of it as phenomena in themselves*
My current research seems mostly to fall in the second category as I am studying a phenomenon that is made possible via the internet. However, as I am also using the internet as a tool for collecting information, and as an object of analysis, I notice that my research has features from all of the categories above.

Markham (2011, p. 121) argues that the internet is a context of social construction: it comprises discursive forms of presentation and interaction that can be observed and archived. The researcher is able to witness and analyze the structure of talk, the negotiation of meaning and identity, the development of communities and relationships, and the construction of social structures. Linguistic and social structures which emerge through social interaction via the internet provide the opportunity to track and analyze how language builds and sustains our social reality. (Markham, 2011, p. 121)

Researchers may use the internet as their method for collecting information because of the ease with which they can gain access to different groups, download texts and capture conversations. According to Markham (2011, p. 122) it is crucial to be aware of the basic ethical issues involved in the internet research to be able to make ethical decisions throughout the project and articulate one’s ethical choices in written form. She lists a few challenges that tend to arise in the internet research, of which the question of privacy and the question of anonymity are important in my research. Markham (2011, p. 122) also notes that many users perceive publicly accessible discourse sites and the interaction that takes place on those sites as private. Other groups may know their communication is public but nonetheless want to be studied. It is important to realize that anonymity is difficult to guarantee even with the researcher’s use of pseudonyms: search engines are often capable of finding statements used in published research reports and some users may have a style of writing that is readily identifiable in their online community. (Markham, 2011, p. 122)

According to Kuula (2006, pp. 188-189), it is not necessary to ask the author’s permission to use blogs in one’s research. However, the use of detailed references to the blogs has to be decided based on the manner of which the data is being analyzed: the research findings can be of the sort that the participants may not want to be associated with them. (Kuula, 2006, pp. 188-189) Thus, the researcher herself needs to evaluate when it is appropriate to use personal information (i.e. the blogger’s name) or when the use of pseudonyms is required. I decided to refer to the blog post
I am discussing by the authors’ names as it is quite obvious that they wanted to make a public statement with their joint action and get attention. To the readers who responded to the post I refer by their first names.

1.4 The organization of the Pro Gradu

This study is organized into six sections. After the introduction, in section 2, *The Mommy blogging phenomenon*, I will briefly outline the history of blogging, concentrating on the genre of diary style blog and explain the key concepts used in this study. I will then attempt to build an understanding of the phenomenon by introducing ideas of North American scholars that have studied mommy blogging recently. But before that, as resistance to idealized notions of good mothers is one of the most common traits among mommy bloggers (e.g. Hammond, 2010, p. 80), I will discuss thoughts of scholars who have studied motherhood myths and the ideology of the good mother, and how these impact all mothers.

I will introduce the material in section 3. I will also look at the context and medium of the blog post, i.e. the blog *Divine secrets of a domestic diva*. In section 4, I am introducing the methodological approach I am utilizing in this study to view the material. As for other kinds of texts, critical discourse analysis (CDA) also offers tools for analyzing blogging and blog posts. I am particularly interested in examining the discourses found in the data, as the focus on discourse always leads to wider issues such as language use in society and its relation to power. After that I will move on to analyze the material in section 5 and finally, summarize my findings in section 6.
2 THE MOMMY BLOGGING PHENOMENON

This section first discusses blogs and blogosphere in general and introduces some central concepts used in this study, and after that, in 2.2 briefly examines motherhood myths and the ideology of the good mother. Section 2.3 discusses the mommy blogging phenomenon in more detail concentrating on some current and relevant aspects of this genre regarding my own study.

2.1 Blogging in a nutshell

What makes a blog a blog? According to Herring, Kouper, Schneidt and Wright (2004, p. 1), blogs can be defined as online journals whose entries are displayed in reverse chronological order and updated frequently. Myers (2010, p. 15) takes this definition a step further by describing blogs as genres of texts which are defined not so much by their form and content as by the types of uses to which they are put, and the ways these uses construct social identities and communities.

The first forms of blogging were born in the 1990’s. In 1994, a college student named Justin Hall started writing his personal journal on the internet. However, it was Jorn Barger who first coined the term ‘weblog’ in 1997 (which was shortened to ‘blog’ later on) to refer to his web journal. Other authors of sites similar to his soon followed suit. A few years later, in 1999, several no-cost, easy-to-use weblog content management tools, such as Pitas®, Blogger®, and Groksoup®, were released. Before that, most bloggers had been web designers, software designers, and computer scientists: keeping a blog required knowledge of hypertext markup language (HTML) and Java® tools. The new content management systems for blogs made posting to a blog no more difficult than sending an e-mail, which allowed people at various levels of computer skill to create and maintain a blog. (Gurak, Antonijevic, Johnson, Ratliff and Reyman, 2004, p. 2)
Blogs can be dedicated to one specific topic, or they can simply reflect anything that the author is currently interested in. A blog may have one author (which in the blogosphere are known as *bloggers*) or multiple authors. What characterizes blogs is their form and function. All posts to a blog are time-stamped with the most recent post at the top, creating a structure run by spontaneity and novelty and generating expectation of updates. (Gurak et al., 2004 p. 2; Miller and Shepherd, 2004, p. 9)

Gurak et al (2004, p. 1) point out that blogs are more than mere tools for communicating online: they can provide new possibilities for the internet as a rhetorical space. Blogs have transformed the way we receive information and connect with each other in the world wide web and they offer spaces for writing that are more collaboratively constructed than other online spaces. (Gurak et al, 2004, p. 1) Hourihan (2002, as cited in Miller and Shepherd, 2004, p. 9) argues that the combination of links and accompanying comments is the distinguishing character of the blog, creating connections which can be seen binding bloggers into a community. Miller and Shepherd (2004) see blogging as social action: it serves the needs of self-expression and community development. Self-expression can be seen serving the intrinsic self-disclosure functions of self-clarification and self-validation which enhance self-awareness and confirm beliefs already held. Nonetheless, people want other people to read their blogs – the posts are intended to be read and commented on. By commenting and linking blogs create the hierarchy that structures the social networks of blogosphere. These two private and public purposes, that are self-expression and community development, co-exist in blogs, which makes a blog an intriguing genre. (Miller and Shepherd, 2004, pp. 10-12)

Blogs are an ideal medium for sharing personal narratives, and that is why they are often compared to diaries and journals. Blogs, diaries, and journals serve the function to allow the author to define an individual identity and literally write a self into being. Although they share a similar function with more traditional genres of self-expression, blogs are actually a uniquely new genre within contemporary writing. (Hammond, 2010, p. 82)

To quote Hammond (2010, p. 82), blogs’ paper and print cousins “lack the wide public access, immediacy of reaching an audience, and opportunity for an audience to participate in the narrative creation of the written self”. The creation of identity is often more fragmented and less
unified in blogs as it is in traditional written memoirs. Each blog entry seems to build on the previous ones and eventually create a portrait of the author. (Hammond, 2010, p. 82)

Hammond (2010, p. 83) argues that blogs allow for an immediate experience of community, and they can function as a foundational element for community building, and consequently, for the formation of a community identity, which is “a shared identification of the author with readers”. Most bloggers seek to expand their readership, and some employ specific features of blogging software and conventions of blog readerships to seek out readers and involve them in their communities (Hammond, 2010, p. 83).

To quote Myers (2010, p. 2), blogs are a very influential medium at the moment: newspapers have seriously discussed bloggers’ influence on political issues, and newspaper and broadcast journalists often have their own blogs. Some of the best blogs have led to book publications. Blogs change very rapidly being almost impossible to pin down. If one would draw up a list of popular, current, interesting blogs, one would probably have to update it every few months. (Myers, 2010, p. 2) Blogs as a genre are repeatedly been declared to be over. Genres rise and they fall when people no longer need them. Skeptics proclaim that blogging will soon be replaced by other forms of social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Flickr. (Myers, 2010, p. 18)

A review of concepts common to the blogging world may be helpful at this point:

- **Post** is an individual entry written and then published in a blog. Posts appear usually in reverse chronological order. Posts can include written text, photographs or other visuals and videos.

- **Linking** is the currency of the blogging world: posts often include links to other blogs, to websites, or the mainstream media (Myers 2010, pp. 30-33). Sometimes a post may include links to the author’s previous posts discussing the same or similar topic.

- **Comments** are reader’s remarks, questions, and interaction with the blogger and other readers of the blog. “Hot topics” can get dozens or even hundreds of comments. Readers of blogs participate in their sustenance by responding to, commenting on, and contributing to blog posts, and it is in this way that blogs make a significant contribution to the fostering of an online community (Gurak et al., 2004, p. 3).
The blogosphere is the community made up of all blogs. Blogs are interconnected with links and comments. Most blogs have links to other blogs and for bloggers it is a way of showing what blogs one appreciates and what kind of reference group she wants to belong to. Readers’ comments on blog entries are also an essential building block in blogs and the blogosphere. Comments and the conversations based on them are what make blogging a democratic and concerted medium. (Kilpi, 2006, p. 17)

2.2 Ideology of the good mother

As Friedman (2010, p. 199) argues, motherhood today continues to be constrained by the ideology of the good mother. This ideology sets theoretical boundaries for women’s storytelling, as it allows only good mothers’ stories to emerge and silences and limits alternative voices and discourses. (Friedman, 2010, p. 199) Given these constraints, which Hays (1998, as cited in Friedman 2010, p. 201) has termed as ‘mother myths’, the approach of mommy blogging gives a more authentic and often more unconventional view than offline narratives of motherhood imposed by e.g. child-care experts and other powerful voices in the media as the descriptions of motherhood in mommy blogs come from a variety of personal viewpoints, written by mothers themselves.

But where do these prejudiced, stereotypical and often false or too narrow conceptions of motherhood that prevail in the Western world come from? One can look at this issue by asking a simple question: who benefits from such myths? To understand this we must acknowledge the mechanism of hegemonic discourse of ideal motherhood that for long has suggested what motherhood should be like. The unrealistic expectations for mothers come from a place Rich (1981, pp. 13, 42-43) calls institutionalized motherhood. The expectations for motherhood are very powerful as they are able to dictate one’s identity and one’s role as a mother.

2 I will discuss the concept of ideology in more detail in section 4 where I introduce Fairclough’s (2010) notions on language, discourse, and power.
Institutionalized motherhood emphasizes maternal instinct rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self. Good mothers should fully devote themselves to the nurturing of their offspring. What is noteworthy is that the experience of maternity has actually been channeled to serve male interests. The expectations that create the prescriptions and the conditions for motherhood come down to the hegemony of patriarchy which needs motherhood to be “natural” in order to sustain itself. (Rich, 1981, pp. 13, 42-43)

According to Fiske (1990, p. 88), a myth is a story by which a culture understands or explains an aspect of reality or nature. Primitive myths are about life and death, men and gods, good and evil whereas our sophisticated myths are about masculinity and femininity, about family, about science and so on. Myths are actually the product of a social class that has achieved dominance by a particular history. The meanings that its myths circulate must carry this history with them. However, their operation as myths makes them try to deny it and present their meanings as natural – not social or historical. Myths tend to mystify or obscure their origins hiding their political or social dimension. (Fiske, 1990, pp. 88-89)

Fiske (1990, p. 89) goes on to explain how the myth surrounding motherhood was created. There is a myth that women are naturally more caring and nurturing than men and that is why their natural place is in the home raising the family while men play the role of breadwinner. These roles structure the most natural social unit of all – the family. Myth disguises their historical origin by presenting these meanings as part of nature, which in turn universalizes them and makes them appear unchangeable and fair. It makes these meanings to appear to serve the interests of men and women equally. (Fiske, 1990, p. 89)

However, as Fiske (1990, pp. 89-90) points out, the meanings of masculinity and femininity were developed to serve the interests of the economic system and the class which it advantaged, that being the middle-class men. The nineteenth-century industrialization required people to leave their traditional rural communities and move to new cities. The extended family was left behind and the nuclear family of husband, wife and the children was born. The conditions of factory work meant that women had to stay at home taking care of the children while their husbands did the ‘real’ work outside the home earning the money to support their families. In this newly created system, femininity was given the so-called natural meanings of sensitivity, domesticity, nurturing,
and of the need for protection, while masculinity was required to obtain meanings of strength, independence, assertiveness, and the ability to operate in public. It seems natural, but is actually historical that men occupy an enormously disproportionate number of public positions in modern societies. (Fiske, 1990, pp. 89-90)

According to Barthes (1973, p. 143), the way a myth functions is to talk about things simply, purifying them, making them innocent, and giving them a natural and eternal justification. It gives them clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact. Myth organizes a world without contradictions, establishing a blissful clarity: things look as if they mean something by themselves. (Barthes, 1973, p. 143)

Fiske (1990, p. 90) argues that myths can most effectively naturalize meanings by relating them to some aspect of nature itself. The fact that only women give birth is used to naturalize the meanings of nurturing and domesticity, and similarly men’s larger and more muscular bodies are being used to naturalize men’s political and social power. The changing role of women in society and the changing structure of the family mean that these myths are being challenged. New gender myths have been developed to accommodate the career woman, the single parent, and the new sensitive man. These new myths do not reject the old ones entirely, but drop some concepts off and add others. Change in myths is a long process, resembling an evolution rather than a revolution. (Fiske, 1990, p. 90)

Douglas and Michaels (2004, pp. 11-12) argue that cultural narratives of the media portray a dichotomous representation of maternal roles, pulling mothers who are affected by these narratives in two opposite directions. Mothers should stay home and dedicate themselves fully to their children and at the same time, they should pursue their own goals outside the home. With these unrealistic expectations, both working mothers and stay-at-home mothers are always failures. Motherhood today is seemingly more allowing but actually it seems to be more demanding than ever. (Douglas and Michaels, 2004, pp. 11-12)

Douglas and Michaels (2004, pp. 4-5) refer to this paradox of motherhood discussed above as ‘new momism’. The media convey this new ideal to women first of all by suggesting that women are only real women if they are mothers. In addition, according to new momism, women are the
preferred caretakers of children and they have to be exceptionally devoted to their children’s development in order to be good mothers. (Douglas and Michaels, 2004, pp. 4-5)

Friedman (2010, p. 202) has noticed mothers’ self-censoring efforts to fit within hegemonic views of motherhood. Douglas and Michaels (2004, pp. 6-13) introduce a similar idea, referring to it as intensive mothering which means that contemporary mothering is performed self-consciously under inspection of other mothers and childhood experts: “With intensive mothering, everyone watches us, we watch ourselves and other mothers, and we watch ourselves watching ourselves”. However, this modern good mother myth, or new momism, that has its roots in the 1950’s maternal ideals has started to shift: for instance, in the mainstream media some television shows have started to represent rebellious mothering as resistance to new momism and intensive mothering. (Douglas and Michaels, 2004, pp. 6-13) In addition to mainstream media, mommy blogs can be viewed as trying to shift the good mother myths of today as their popularity suggests that their often non-conventional approach to motherhood resonates with a large audience.

Friedman’s (2010, p. 201) view is similar to that of Douglas and Michaels’s (2004) above as she points out, that the expectations of mothers in the contemporary Western world are continuously growing more extreme. Given this context, “decrying motherhood, exposing it as thankless and sexist labour, can be incredibly difficult”. Women are often reluctant to expose modern motherhood as it is in reality. Thus, the anonymity that many mommy bloggers take advantage of can provide one of the few contexts in which a more realistic maternal voice can emerge uncontested. (Friedman, 2010, p. 201) This transparency, as Friedman (2010) calls it, can cause discomfort: impertinent mommy bloggers are often scrutinized and criticized when they are taking part in the process of revealing what motherhood really is. However, these “controversial” mommy bloggers are often the most popular (which means that they find resonance in the society), many of whom have abandoned anonymity and started to use their own name instead. (Friedman, 2010, p. 201)
2.3 Motherhood online

My study will concentrate on one genre of the blogosphere that has rapidly risen to prominence: the mommy blog. In this subsection, I am presenting a review of previous takes on mommy blogging by North American scholars who have approached this topic from multiple perspectives. What is this phenomenon all about?

2.3.1 Mommy blogging as a genre

Morrison (2010, pp. 1-2) describes mommy blogging as “a form of autobiography in real time” which is

purposive and deliberate social engagement, a creative as well as interpersonal practice that mitigates the assorted ills (physical isolation, role confusion, lack of realistic role models, etc.) and celebrates the particular joys of contemporary mothering, especially in the earliest years of parenting.

Lopez (2009, p. 744) argues for mommy blogs’ potential to build communities and to challenge dominant representations of motherhood. She sees mommy blogging as a phenomenon that can change the discourse surrounding motherhood. The unique fragmented format that blogs foster has the ability to capture the multifaceted portrait of motherhood and to highlight the everyday repetition of the role of the mother in a way that no other medium has been able to achieve before. These writings are given new power when they are published on the internet for viewing and discussion. She believes that in time, as the conversation on motherhood expands beyond the limits of mommy blogging communities, and the community of blogging mothers will grow and organize themselves, this will eventually result in addressing the political issues mothers face in their day to day lives. (Lopez, 2009, p. 744)

The actual term ‘mommy blog’ has been under scrutiny and caused debate between readers and especially bloggers themselves, many of who do not want to be called ‘mommy bloggers’. Two very influential bloggers, Heather Armstrong of Dooce and Jenny Lawson of The Bloggess articulated what many bloggers had been thinking all along when they announced on two major
news networks in April 2012 that they actually hate the term ‘mommy blogger’. Lawson expressed her dislike of the term by stating no one should call her a ‘mommy’ unless they were her kids. (Kellogg, 2012, p. 1) As a blogger Cecily Kellogg of Uppercase woman puts it:

[--] calling us “mommy” is diminutive, and quite dismissive. When you call us a “mommy” there’s an implied “just a” in there. As if we stop being grown women with full, well-rounded lives full of quirks and skills and experiences once we’ve “pushed someone out our lady garden”. (Kellogg, 2012, p. 1)

This debate has been noted by scholars as well. Chen (2013, p. 510) approaches the term critically and argues that the use of the term ‘mommy blogger’ carries on the culturally ingrained performance of motherhood and holds women captive in this subjective norm that may not fit them. The use of the word ‘mommy’ instead of ‘mother’ highlights the nurturing aspect of motherhood and calls up a prototype of the ideal mother, marginalizing women even further by concentrating on one attribute that cannot be applied to all women, not even to all mothers. (Chen, 2013, p. 510) Although Chen (2013, p. 510) argues that the act of mommy blogging may be empowering, she feels that the term itself reinforces women’s hegemonic normative roles, and thrusts women who blog about their children into a form of digital domesticity in the blogosphere.

Chen (2013, pp. 527-528) does not suggest that the term should be banished as it has already become ingrained through use: the whole mechanism of the internet relies on the use of this type of keywords which are useful to readers and bloggers themselves. However, she wants to help women to understand themselves and each other through creating awareness of the fact that terms such as mommy blogger are not neutral and arise from multiple discourses. (Chen, 2013, p. 527-528) On the other hand, Chen (2013, p. 513) notes that the use of this term implies that the mommy blog, as such, has reached a status in the blogosphere that other niches of blogs have failed to achieve: this blog type has its own name, its own genre. According to Myers (2010, pp. 15-16), genres can be understood as types of texts that share characteristics because their users share similar purposes – the texts answer to certain user-needs. Texts in genres are similar because people have the need to do same sorts of things over and over again. (Myers, 2010, pp. 15-16). Myers (2010, p. 26) also notes that communities have names for the genres they use, and the fact that they have such names may be part of what essentially make them a community.
It has to be noted here that this American phenomenon mainly consists of middle-class white women who write about their children and family lives. Many of them are stay-at-home mothers but also working mothers are writing about their parental issues. Friedman (2010, p. 203) argues that non-normative experiences of motherhood are underrepresented in this genre, as people with disabilities, people of color, and people of developed countries are hardly represented at all. It is crucial to acknowledge that their absence actually supports a dominant view that good mothers are white, married and middle- or upper-class women. (Friedman, 2010, p. 203)

2.3.2 The radical act of mommy blogging?

Some scholars argue that the mommy blogging phenomenon is radical and it has already started to redefine the concept of motherhood. According to Hammond (2010, p. 84), women who blog about motherhood and those who read these narratives contribute to the multiplicity of voices that develop new cultural definitions of motherhood. These definitions are individual but also communal in nature, forming a collective memory through which women rewrite the roles of mothering in contemporary culture.

Hammond (2010, pp. 79-80) argues that blogging offers a venue for mothers to represent their own experiences of mothering and it offers a means of constructing a more realistic vision of maternal roles, one that battles against assigning judgments and feeding the guilt that has permeated the literature of mothering from the beginnings of the twentieth century. Resistance to idealized notions of perfect mothers is a common trait among mommy bloggers. Women write in a quest for authentic maternal narratives and refuse to accept simplifying or stereotypical notions of mothering and thus create more complex representations of motherhood. (Hammond, 2010, pp. 79-80) Lopez (2009, pp. 743-744) similarly concludes that [m]ommy bloggers are developing their own voice for discussing motherhood, and it is distinctly different from the radiant image of the good mother that has dominated our media, with its impossible demands and assumptions about women. Women who blog about their children are transforming their personal narratives of struggle and challenge into interactive conversations with other mothers, and in doing so, are beginning to
expand our notion of motherhood, women bloggers and the mother’s place within the public sphere. In this sense, showing the ugly side of motherhood has the potential to be liberating and beneficial for all women. (Lopez, 2009, pp. 743-744)

Showing the “ugly side of motherhood”, whatever that may be, is helping to expand our notion of what motherhood can be and helping to acknowledge that the demands surrounding “good” motherhood often cast a heavy burden on women.

Mommy blogging is seen as an empowering act by scholars. Friedman (2010, pp. 200-205) notes that women have, in some respects, a total authority over the writings they publish on their blog, and this feature has the potential to be extremely empowering in many ways for a class of people whose authority has been constantly judged and critiqued by “motherhood experts”. When the set story of motherhood relies on expert discourse which announces “this is how you should do it”, mommy blogs, by contrast, state “this is what I have done”. In blogs, mothers get to speak their mind and having an experience what is perhaps unusual to them – people are listening. In mommy blogging, writings of often quite unglamorous day-to-day life of a mother have an audience, resonance, and are building community. (Friedman, 2010, pp. 200-205) Buchanan (2004, p. 2) also sees mommy blogging as an empowering performance:

Blogs in their individuality – the way they are dominated by a single voice, the way they enforce a lack of community or consensus as they are focused on the experience of one person – might seem to undermine the work of creating a unified experience of feminism. But in fact, in allowing marginalized voices to have a presence, to be heard – or, in this case, read – I believe they function in the exact opposite way. Mothers who go online are finding a multiplicity of viewpoints, a real and humanized investigation of the complex and varied ways in which we mother, and mothers who recognize themselves in the writings of these mother-bloggers feel valid. They feel heard. And they feel empowered. (Buchanan, 2004, p. 2)

Yonker (2012, pp. 179-182) presents a more critical viewpoint to mommy blogging. While she admits that these bloggers are “broadcasting unconventional non-ideal representations of motherhood”, their act by no means is radical as one the strongest force to shape these mothers’ writing might actually be the hegemony of the “good mother” ideal itself that these mothers have internalized. Mommy bloggers create their own images of motherhood but actually by illustrating what they are not according to conventional expectations set by the society and culture. (Yonker, 2012, pp. 179-182) Yonker (2012, p. 192-195) also concluded in her analysis of mommy blogs that
mommy bloggers only rarely address problems that emerge from the unrealistic expectations placed on mothers but they are eager to participate in a discussion of how they cannot meet the expectations of ideal motherhood.

Yonker (2012, pp. 180-182) has identified two rhetorical devices that often emerge in women’s blog writing: confession and humor. The women of her study used confession to construct narratives of their experiences instead of launching protest against unattainable ideals. The act of confessions signified incompetence in parenting, responsibility for unsuitable behavior, and at times signified that they feel guilty and ashamed. The act of confession also implied that mommy bloggers expect their actions to cause judgment, recognizing their actions as somewhat “wrong” and by confessing their inadequacy they may hope their readers to be more accepting and more forgiving. (Yonker, 2012, pp. 180-182) The humor that mommy bloggers often employ in their narratives might be seen as subtly shifting what is considered acceptable for mothers to discuss in public. Humor often softens the narrative of imperfect parenting making readers more often react with affirmation instead of judgment. (Yonker, 2012, pp. 187-188)

Yonker (2012, pp. 187-189), rather surprisingly, concludes that the use of these rhetorical devices of confession and humor, manages to keep these women inside the ideology of conventional motherhood. While they may attempt to address problems of maternal ideals, the rhetoric they employ actually reinforces the hegemonic narratives of motherhood. Although mommy bloggers try to resist or replace the discourses of conventional motherhood, they fail to do that due to the nature of those extraordinarily powerful conventions. (Yonker, 2012, pp. 187-189)

Yonker’s (2012) view of mommy blogging phenomenon and its abilities to shift conventional maternal representations differs from many prior studies. I found her views particularly interesting regarding my own study, and I am returning to her findings later in my analysis, in section 5. In the next section, I will discuss mommy blogs in relation to community building efforts which is one of the central features of this phenomenon.
2.3.3 A community of the isolated contemporary mothers

Mothers today cannot rely on their extended family or relatives as much as they have in earlier days as modern Western societies are largely built on the existence of nuclear families. From my own point of view as a young mother, living in a city far away from my family of origin, I claim that mommy blogs offer an easily accessible reference group for young mothers living the same phase in their lives.

Morrison (2010, p. 2) argues that mommy blogs are not mere online diaries or trivial manifestations of widespread blog-format online publishing. She sees this phenomenon being more complex than that, suggesting that personal mommy blogs are best understood as motivated by a widespread need expressed by blogging mothers to create communities and texts to address and understand the subjective experience of their daily lives. (Morrison, 2010, p. 2)

Mommy blogs are creating meaningful communities that resemble a kind of support group: mothers share and read narratives of other mothers and that way they often begin to understand mothering from a larger perspective (Morrison, 2010, p. 2). Referring to Miller’s (1984) genre theory in which a genre is seen as a rhetorical means of mediating individual’s private intention and social demands, Morrison (2010, p. 5) states that for personal mommy bloggers, communities built around writing and reading interlinked long-format Internet texts supplement diminishing traditional institutional and familial supports for childrearing: this is the exigence answered by blogging practices.

Contemporary mothers often find themselves in a situation where they feel physically or emotionally isolated. According to Morrison (2010, p. 7), women of today are approaching motherhood from a radically different position than the preceding generations ever have, where they are not finding the support they may need. Mothers with young children are often physically isolated, raising their progenies in the privacy of the nuclear family. Work- and education-related migration far from their families of origin also adds to this isolation leaving some of the women without any social networks and contexts. Mommy blogging can offer replacement support for
many mothers and a means to create a supportive community of peers with whom they can share their experiences of parenthood:

By writing, women redevelop both their ‘adult’ voices and develop new, ‘mother’ ones; by reading others, they come to see their own experiences as taking place in a broader social context and to understand their fit within that context; by writing and reading each other reciprocally, bloggers develop a stable community of trusted friends with whom to share experiences and trace out and critique or celebrate recurrent patterns of modern motherhood. (Morrison, 2010, p. 7)

Hammond (2010, p. 85) uses the term ‘discourse community’ by Swales (1990) to define the way bloggers create their communities. These discourse communities not only have common public goals but also participatory mechanisms designed for community exchange. Hammond (2010, p. 85) also notes that

mothers in blog discourse communities must have not only the desire and ability to create a blog, link to others, and engage in an interchange with other mothers/readers, they must also have the desire to explore their identities as women and as mothers and have some sense of the community of mothers to which they wish to belong.

To quote Hammond (2010, p. 87), some mommy bloggers argue that in their personal acts of blogging, women are writing a larger community. This community (or perhaps communities) is one that not only provides personal friendships but also one that serves a political function when the women collaboratively redefine the roles of mothering. However, as Hammond (2010, p. 87) notes, regardless of the intimacy of these communities, still some uneasiness occurs in the redefinition of personal identity into community identities. This discomfort comes largely from attempts by outsiders to disrupt these communities by commenting negatively or trolling. Mommy blogs (as well as many other genres) often have clearly defined codes of conduct. A blogger may choose to permit all comments, or more commonly, comments may also be mediated in various ways: a process requiring site administrators to approve comments before they appear on the site is a common way to control the discussion that takes place in the comments section. (Hammond, 2010, p. 87)

According to Yonker (2012, p. 189), the readers’ comments in mommy blogs often serve the following purposes: they provide the author with support, approval or affirmation, they present
similar experiences, and they sympathize with the blogger. Comments also extend the original discussion of the post by interrogating the author’s opinion or offering different viewpoints which are generally softened with rhetorical devices such as affirmation or diplomacy. In blogging, commenting is vital: comments show the author that she is not alone. Comments create alliance with the blogger or demonstrate identification with the blogger. The purpose of commenting can be understood as an act of creating a sense of belonging for themselves, other readers and the blogger. (Yonker, 2012, p. 189)

Yonker (2012, p. 191) has noticed that the mimetic nature of the readers’ comments, i.e. the readers reflect the values of the bloggers’ in the comments section, help a discourse community to emerge between the blogger and readers. The mimetic nature is apparent when readers’ comments match a blogger’s rhetorical act: humour is matched with humour, confession is matched with confession, and a personal anecdote is matched with a related personal anecdote. (Yonker, 2012, p. 191) Based on this, after analysing how well the comments mimic the author’s values, one might have some means to evaluate whether a discourse community emerges between participants. This is also something I shall return to in my analysis later on. In the next section, I will discuss monetization of mommy blogs, which can be seen both as a threat or a possibility regarding this genre.

2.4 The monetized mommy

While the blogs of this genre are often criticized in the media, their popularity manages to grow. Given their growing popularity, some mommy blogs have become a platform for advertising by companies that sell parent-centered products. As a result of this course of development, there is a growing trend toward monetization of mommy blogs. This has resulted in a rift to emerge between bloggers committed to raw authenticity and bloggers who think they deserve revenue for their writing or even primarily approach blogging as a source of extra income. (Friedman, 2010, p. 200)
Morrison (2011, pp. 38-39) has also noted this rift and wants to redefine the concept of mommy blogging. She sees a clear distinction between mommy blogs and personal mommy blogs arguing that personal mommy blogs form a distinct genre within the broader corpus of blogs about parenting. According to her, the difference between personal mommy blogs and other mommy blogs is significant. Personal mommy blogs operate as intimate publics. They are set apart by twin and equal motivations of personal self-expression and community development, and also by a limited audience size and by a limited participation in blogging practices such as advertising and sponsorship. (Morrison, 2011, pp. 38-39) It could be argued that personal mommy bloggers write under different circumstances and for different reasons, i.e. in a different genre, than their colleagues who run commercial enterprises with thousands of readers (Morrison, 2010, p. 3). Friedman (2010, p. 200) has also noticed a division within the genre as it has marked some blogs as ‘authentic’ and others as ‘inauthentic’.

I argue that blogging can hardly be separated from commercialism anymore. A blog may be born out of the need for community development but if the audience grows in time and the blog finally receives wider public recognition (only some of them do), the motives behind it may shift, perhaps toward monetizing the blog. As was noted earlier (see Hammond, 2010, p. 83), most bloggers seek to expand their readership. In addition, I think it has to be taken into account that sometimes a blog may receive a wider public recognition almost accidentally. As the author of a popular blog People I want to punch in the throat claims in her blog’s self-description, her breakthrough in the blogosphere happened overnight:

I started this blog in April 2011 and in a few months’ time I grew to 70 regular readers. In December 2011, I wrote a post called "Overachieving Elf on the Shelf Mommies." It sat dormant for a week and then suddenly out of nowhere it went viral. Overnight I gained 26,000 followers on Facebook. Since then I’ve worked really hard to grow my readership every day and to keep people coming back for more. (Jen of People I want to punch in the throat)

This quote from Jen epitomizes some aspects that I consider essential in current mommy blogging. First of all, she admits that after her blog gained success she has been working to grow her readership more. She can do that by following what posts attract readers and focusing on similar topics to make sure people come back for more. She is also very open about the number of
followers she has. She is starting to see her blog as a commodity and sees nothing wrong with 

that.

Similarly to what Jen’s anecdote above reveals, Hunter (2013, p. 1) argues that blogging has 

become more self-conscious and calculated as it has become a moneymaking venture. She sees 

blogging as a performance, rather than a window on real life and argues that when mommy 

bloggers are monetizing their blogs, they are actually monetizing motherhood. It has become 

almost a norm for mommy bloggers to court advertisers, and conferences focusing largely on how 

to monetize a blog, are organized yearly. (Hunter, 2013, p. 1)

Hunter (2013, p. 1) sees the negative side in this course of development, claiming that “accepting 

advertising on these types of blogs threatens the foundation of authenticity upon which this genre 
of social media rests”. The reason some mommy blogs become popular is because a sense of 

connection and community emerge between readers and the blogger. The readers identify with 

the blogger and feel like they are part of a community. The authenticity and honesty of these 

relationships and communities is harmed especially by the new type of advertising, the sponsored 

post. (Hunter, 2013, p. 1)

Hunter (2013, p. 1) gives an example on how the situation has changed over the past eight years. 

In 2005, a blogger named Heather Armstrong announced to her readers that she will be accepting 

advertisements to her blog *Dooce*. She promised not to “sell out”, even though she was 

monetizing her blogging from that point on. Today, *Dooce* is probably one of those “commercial 

enterprises” that were mentioned by Morrison (2010) earlier. Has advertising affected 

Armstrong’s blog content, and has she eventually “sold out”, are questions Hunter (2013, p. 1) 
does not answer but nonetheless states that advertising has become so common that most 

bloggers do not feel the need for this type of proclamations any more. She suggests that there 

should be a shift in how we theorize about mommy blogs, and also blogs of other genres. Rather 

than viewing them as something democratizing, they should be approached from a political 

economic perspective. (Hunter, 2013, p. 1)

This section aimed to bring understanding to the phenomenon I am looking at in my Master’s 

thesis by introducing some aspects of blogging I consider relevant regarding my own topic which 

aims to examine the community development efforts of a monetized mommy blog and the
discourses that are drawn from a blog post that seems to be addressing the unattainability of some expectations set for conventional motherhood. In the next section, I will introduce the material and discuss the context and medium of the blog post, concentrating on the multiple articulations through which the blog makes meaning.
3 DATA AND ITS CONTEXT

In this section, I will introduce the data as well as provide understanding to its context and medium. The material consists of the blog post *Here’s my excuse (and a bunch of others too) since you asked, Maria Kang* written on October 17, 2013 by Susan McLean, also known as Domestic diva, of *Divine secrets of a domestic diva*. It includes a text written by Domestic diva, the picture of Maria Kang and the 13 image-texts the group of bloggers created in return. In addition, the material includes the 113 comments this blog post generated, including comments from readers and from the bloggers themselves as they take part in the discussion that took place for the most part on the day the post was published. Comments are playing a crucial role in blogs, and given the blogs’ interactive nature, it would be clearly wrong to examine the blog posts in isolation (Myers, 2010, p. 29).

It is important to take into account that blog posts cannot be treated the same way as more traditional, clearly defined texts, as Myers (2010) suggests. Blogs are hard to pin down as a blog post may have several links to other blogs and webpages which also contain links. Furthermore, sometimes the text can be understood only when one clicks on these links. A practical problem for an analyst is to decide whether or not to include these linked texts as part of the data. Given the blogs interactive nature, it would be erroneous to treat the individual blog posts as if they were collected in a bound paper volume. (Myers, 2010, p. 28) Imposing limits to collect material proved to be problematic also regarding this study. The blog post I examined contained several links, and the comments also had links to readers’ blogs. However, I decided not to include the linked texts as part of the material as the text itself made sense without the inclusion of these linked texts. Linked texts often add extra value to the topic under discussion but in this case and due to the scope of this Master’s thesis (some links led to texts that had thousands of comments) I feel that the limits I imposed on the material are well-grounded. This kind of focus on an individual blog post imposes neat limits on this vast phenomenon although it has to be admitted that these boundaries are rather artificial, too.
Kress and van Leeuwen (2001, p. 4) list four domains of practice in which meanings of a multimodal medium are dominantly made: discourse, design, production and distribution. This section, however, will concentrate on the aspect of design (or format), i.e. on features that essentially constitute a mommy blog. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001, p. 5) propose that design is something that is located between content and expression. Design realizes the communication situation which changes socially constructed knowledge into social (inter-) action.

A blog is a multimodal medium usually employing a text and image interaction. In addition to texts and images, page layout, typography, and other visual aids form the blog’s design and affect the way the blog is perceived and what kind of audience it attracts. Mommy blogs share the same technical affordances as blogs of other genres. Posts appear in chronological order, the landing space typically has a masthead and the site is arranged into frames.

This particular blog is arranged into four frames: horizontal frames at the top and bottom of the blog, and two vertical frames in the middle. The top horizontal frame (see image 3.1) features the masthead and on top of that a row of stable links (Home, About, Press/Media, Featured Sponsors, Other Stuff I’m Into and Promotions). The archive for previous blog posts is found at the bottom of the site. Blog posts are archived and listed by the month and year of publishing. The larger vertical frame (post frame) holds the blog posts and the smaller frame on the right (right border frame), is filled with boxes of text and links (About Me, Join me on Facebook!, Subscription Options, Search this site, Popular Posts, amazon.com advert, Blog Awards, Best Blog Award, and four boxes that have more advertisements).
It is common for bloggers, not just mommy bloggers but of all genres, to provide a list of links to blogs they are reading, or rather want to be associated with, on their landing page. However, the blogger of Divine secrets of a domestic diva does not keep a list like that. She refers to other bloggers in her blog posts and posts links to them.

What is very important to take into account in examining mommy blogs, is the bloggers’ own written biographies or self-descriptions (see e.g. Powell, 2010, pp. 45-46) that can usually be found on stable pages behind a link on the main page of the site, typically under a heading named ‘About’. It is interesting to examine what kind of information bloggers want to share and what kind of image or brand they are constructing with these introductory texts. Susan, or Domestic diva, introduces herself on the right frame, in the first box, under the heading “About me”. Under an image where she is pictured wearing hair rollers on her hair and holding a mug with a text “WORLD’S OKAYEST MOM” she writes:

Somewhere between love & madness lies... Motherhood.

I'm a 30 something Mom to three small children, and I'll be the first to admit that it's not all Hallmark Moments. Nonetheless, I'm celebrating all that being a stay at home, sleep deprived, non-exercising, carb-eating, wine-loving, married, 30-something woman has to offer. Looking at the lighter side of life and trying to rock what I've got left.
The self-description is carefully constructed. She admits that being a mother is somewhat worse than she had expected as she states that “it’s not all Hallmark moments” but still she is “celebrating” everything in her current life announcing she is “trying to rock what I’ve got left”. After that she adds a link to read more about her. Behind the link, on a stable page, she offers another version of her self-description:

Hi, I’m Susan, and I used to be a successful young professional in the corporate sector who had friends and a social life. One night, I went to bed a fit and fabulous 25 year old bride, and I woke up one day a frizzy and frazzled 33 year old stay at home mother of three. Although I wouldn’t trade it for the world, I learned pretty early on that motherhood is not all Hallmark moments... [-]

The author articulates a clear distinction between her life before and after marriage and motherhood. She has moved from a state of being “fit and fabulous” to a state of being “frizzy and frazzled”. Marriage and kids have changed her life drastically and she sees that she has sacrificed her professional life (“I used to be a successful young professional”) and social life (“who had friends”) for the sake of her children’s well-being. After admitting this, almost as to redeem herself, she writes at the end of the paragraph: “I wouldn’t trade it for the world”. She also uses the same metaphor as in the earlier introduction (“not all Hallmark moments”) for saying motherhood is not always what she had expected (“learned pretty early on”).

In her self-descriptions, Domestic diva can be seen using both confession and humor as her rhetorical devices which are typical features in this genre (see Yonker, 2012, pp. 180-182). The act of confession implies that she expects her action to cause judgment and recognizes her revelation (admitting that motherhood is not always so great) as somewhat wrong. The humor she is employing in her introduction and throughout her blog enables her to speak her mind more freely, at least to some extent and cause less judgment by the audience.

After the text, she has added links to other forms of social media and suggests the reader to subscribe on Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest or Youtube. After that she announces her interest towards advertising on her blog by asking merchants who are potentially interested in becoming sponsors to get in touch with her or “check out my Pr Info Page”. On that page she proclaims herself being “PR friendly”. It is obvious she is taking the monetizing potential of her blog
seriously, and leaves the reader breathless with listing all the promotional opportunities she is offering, including “Reviews, Features, Giveaways, Brand Ambassadorships, Ad Space, Social Media Postings, Holiday Shopping Guides, Guest Posts and more”.

*Divine secrets of a domestic diva* and the other twelve blogs in this sample have advertisements. To quote Powell (2010, p. 45), advertisements may mark blogs as commodified spaces. To keep the readers’ focus on the blog entries, the bloggers of my sample have regulated advertising to the border of the site and not feature advertisements within the posts. As a result of the bloggers’ monetizing efforts, I refer to their authors as mommy bloggers, not as personal mommy bloggers (see Morrison 2010 and 2011) but that is not to hint that the topics they discuss on their blogs are not personal. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that these bloggers are writing for a large audience and receive money for allowing advertisements on their pages. These two aspects may affect their choice of topics or the way they write.

Susan has been writing her blog since 2010. During that time she has published dozens or even hundreds of posts. The blog entries are thoughtfully structured, well-written, and the photographs and other images attached to the posts are of generally good quality. The blog is updated frequently, it attracts a diverse readership, and involves an active audience. Although parenthood is a key identity component for the author (as the self-descriptions discussed above suggest), motherhood is not by far the only topic on her blog. The choice of topics ranges from popular culture and shopping to the narratives of her personal family life. This approach may help the blog to address different audiences, not just parents interested in child-rearing. What probably draws the audience to her blog is the humor and sarcastic remarks she makes about herself and the world around her. The blogger’s posts usually generate comments but some of the posts have not been commented at all.

Domestic diva has added a link to Facebook on the right border frame of her blog. Her blog is relatively popular in the blogosphere. The Facebook link shows that she has gained over 70,000 likes on Facebook which means that all of these people are able to follow her updates on Facebook. According to Morrison (2010, p. 4), mommy blogs that are aiming to maximize audience share and aggressively promoted through social media (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) resemble syndicated newspaper columns. She argues that blogs of this type “skew more toward professional (remunerative) word craft and less toward the development of personal friendships
and a bounded but intimate community of support”. Her argument is well in tune to what I first saw in my sample blog: it seemed clear that the author aims to attract more followers and advertisers and focuses less on developing an intimate community of mothers. However, the co-constructed blog post *Here’s my excuse (and a bunch of others too) since you asked*, Maria Kang made me question my presupposition. I claim that the blog post manifests the bloggers’ effort to reinforce their sense of community that may be harmed by the commodification of their blogs. This is something I will return to in my analysis in section 5. But before that, section 4 introduces the methodological framework I am utilizing in my analysis.
4 APPLYING ASPECTS OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS TO BLOGS

I have chosen critical discourse analysis (CDA) by Fairclough (2003, 2010) as the methodological framework of my research. I am also utilizing Myers’ (2010) ideas on how to approach language and discourses specifically in the blogosphere.

Blogs are ephemeral in nature, but as Myers (2010, p. 5) notes, “it is good enough reason to try and take a snapshot of them as they flash by, and look closely at it”. Blogs can be examined from multiple angles, but I am particularly interested in studying the language and discourses of blogs. According to Myers (2010, p. 4), there is a tendency in studies of new media to emphasize the visual and aural elements and treat writing as outdated. Writing, however, is central to most blogs and even the main attraction of many popular blogs. Myers (2010, p. ix) sees two motives to study the language of blogs. First, the innovations of the rapidly developing genre can help us focus on aspects of language people may take for granted in more stable forms of media such as newspaper articles or literature. Second, a focus on details of language use of blogs may help us see aspects of blogging that other researchers that focus more on the technical affordances may miss. Studying discourses of blogs means studying the language as social practice, the way people use it in interaction. (Myers, 2010, p. ix).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is based upon the notion that language is an irreducible part of social life and dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life. Discourses can be seen as ways of representing aspects of the material, mental or social world. These particular aspects of the world may be represented differently, and we have to consider relationships between these different discourses when trying to bring understanding of the world. There are alternative and often competing discourses which are associated with different groups of people in different social positions. (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 2, 17, 124) It is important to note here that there are actually several versions of discourse analysis. One major division is between approaches that use detailed analysis of texts and approaches which do not. Fairclough’s (2003, pp. 2-3) approach is what he calls a “textually oriented discourse analysis”. He notes, however, that although textual analysis is an essential part of discourse analysis, it is not merely the linguistic
analysis of texts: he sees text in terms of the different discourses, genres and styles from which they draw upon and articulate simultaneously. (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 2-3) Fairclough (2003, p. 3) uses the term text in a broad sense: written and printed texts such as shopping lists and newspaper articles are texts, but so are transcripts of conversations and interviews, as well as products of multimodal media such as television programs and webpages. I am assuming this approach may be applied to blogs as well and being broad enough to include the analysis of image-texts of my material as well.

Fairclough (2003, p. 8) sees texts as parts of social events. They have causal effects and they bring about changes, most immediately in our knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and values. Texts may also have long-term causal effects and for instance shape one’s identity. (Fairclough, 2003, p. 8) Fairclough’s (2003, pp. 10-11) approach is not only concerned with the texts as such, but also the interactive processes of meaning-making. There are three analytically separable elements in the process of meaning-making: the production of the text, the text itself, and its reception. First of these puts the focus on the producers (i.e. writers, speakers), and the reception of the texts puts the focus on the interpretation (i.e. interpreters, readers and listeners). It is also clear that meaning-making depends upon not only what is explicit in a text but has to take into account of what is implicit, i.e. what is assumed. It is important to pay attention to what is taken for granted in texts and thus left unsaid. (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 10-11)

Fairclough (2003, p. 11) sees interpretation as a complex process with various different aspects. Firstly, it is a matter of understanding: understanding what words, sentences or longer stretches of text mean and understanding what writers and speakers mean. Secondly, it is partly a matter of judgment and evaluation – judging whether people are saying something sincerely or not, or seriously or not, judging whether the claims explicitly or implicitly made are true, and judging whether people are writing or speaking in accordance with the social and institutional relations within which the event takes place. Also, there is an explanatory aspect to interpretation as we often try to understand why people are writing or speaking the way they do. Fairclough (2003, p. 11) emphasizes that “the social effects of texts depend upon processes of meaning-making”. The social effects of texts are mediated by meaning-making or to put it more simply, it is meanings which have social effects, not texts as such.
According to Fairclough (2003, p. 206), “discourses are diverse representations of social life which are inherently positioned – differently positioned social actors ‘see’ and represent social life in different ways, different discourses”. Social practices that are networked in a particular way constitute a social order, and the discourse aspect of a social order is in CDA called an order of discourse. It means the ways different genres, discourses and styles are in contact with one another. Given that some ways of making meaning are dominant or mainstream in a particular order of discourse means that others are marginal, oppositional or alternative. (Fairclough, 2003, p. 206) According to Fairclough (2003, p. 207), “a particular social structuring of semiotic difference may become hegemonic, become part of the legitimizing common sense which sustains relations of domination”. However, an order of discourse is never a closed system which means that hegemony will always be contested to some extent in hegemonic struggle. The concept of hegemony is important also when examining the mommy blogging phenomenon and discourses and meaning-making within it. Hegemonic discourses of motherhood often rely on stereotypical and ideological views that the society has regarding femininity and motherhood but mommy bloggers are often seen contesting these dominant discourses.

In his discussion power and language Fairclough (1994, p. 2) emphasizes so called common-sense assumptions hidden in the conventions according to which people interact linguistically and of which people tend not to be consciously aware. These kinds of assumptions are ideologies. Ideologies are closely linked to power: the nature of the assumptions embedded in particular conventions, and so the nature of those conventions themselves, depends on the underlying power relations. Ideologies are also closely linked to language, because using language is the form of social behavior which relies most on common-sense assumptions. (Fairclough, 1994, p. 2)

4.1 CDA and its view on discourse, analysis, and critique

Now I will discuss in more detail what discourse is, what CDA should be analysis of, what should count as an analysis, and what the critical aspect means.
According to Fairclough (2010, p. 3), CDA has three basic properties which are its relational, dialectical and transdisciplinary characters. CDA is a relational form of research as its primary focus is not on entities or individuals but on social relations. Social relations are complex and layered, including relations between relations. Discourse is not an entity or object but a complex set of relations including relations of communication between people and also relations between concrete communicative events and more abstract and enduring complex discursive objects such as languages, discourses, and genres. There are also relations between discourse and other such complex objects in the physical world, such as persons, power relations and institutions, which are interconnected elements in social activity or praxis. (Fairclough, 2010, p. 3) The term discourse cannot be explained except in terms of both its internal relations and its external relations with such other objects:

Discourse is not simply an entity we can define independently: we can only arrive at an understanding of it by analysing sets of relations. Having said that, we can say what it is in particular that discourse brings into the complex relations which constitute social life: meaning, and making meaning. (Fairclough, 2010, p. 3)

CDA is not analysis of discourse in itself but analysis of dialectical relations between discourse and other objects, elements and moments, as well as analysis of ‘internal relations’ of discourse. Analysis of these relations cuts across disciplines (linguistics, politics, sociology etc.) and therefore makes CDA a transdisciplinary form of analysis. Given that transdisciplinary nature, CDA should have a transdisciplinary methodology. (Fairclough, 2010, pp. 4-5). Fairclough (2010, p. 5) sees analysis as not just the selection and application of pre-established methods but a theory-driven process of constructing objects of research for research topics, i.e. research themes as they present themselves to us and coming up with cogent, coherent and researchable research questions. Objects of research are constructed in a transdisciplinary way on the basis of theorizing research topics in terms of the categories and relations of a theory of discourse (such as CDA) and other relevant theories, such as sociological, political, media, and other theories. (Fairclough, 2010, p. 5) The object of my research, the language, discourse and community building in mommy blogs is based upon the theorizations of academics who have approached blogging from different viewpoints, usually cutting across conventional boundaries between several disciplines. As Fairclough (2010, p. 5) notes, objects of research that are constructed in transdisciplinary way
allow for various points of entry for different disciplines. The discourse analyst will focus on discourse but not in isolation as one has to take into account its relations with other elements of the world. (Fairclough, 2010, p. 5)

What is meant by the critical aspect of this approach? According to Fairclough (2010, p. 7), critique brings a normative element into analysis – it focuses on what is wrong with a society or institution or organization, and how these social wrongs could be righted or mitigated from a normative viewpoint. This critique is based on values, particularly on views of the good society and of human well-being, on the basis of which it evaluates existing societies and potential ways of changing them. Critical social research is involved in debates over the meaning of justice, freedom, need, and other value related concepts. Critique evaluates what exists, what might exist and what should exist on the basis of a coherent set of values. (Fairclough, 2010, p. 7) As Fairclough (2010, p. 93) puts it, critical discourse analysis

aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony.

By opacity Fairclough (2010, p. 93) means that linkages between discourse, ideology, and power are often unclear to those involved, and our social practice is bound up with causes and effects which may not be apparent.

CDA aims to produce interpretations and explanations of social life. It is important to realize that these interpretations and explanations already exist. A crucial part of living and acting in social circumstances is interpreting and explaining them. Critical researchers will not find only these discourses but also prior interpretations and explanations of social researchers, historians, and philosophers. Also, the critical analyst is producing discourse when she produces different interpretations and explanations of a particular area of social life. (Fairclough, 2010, p. 8)

In the next subsection, I am aiming to sketch a more detailed methodological approach that I am utilizing in the analysis in section 5.
4.2 How to identify and characterize discourses?

Discourses are means of representing aspects of the world. Those aspects include the processes, relations, and structures of the material world, as well as the mental world of thoughts, beliefs, and feelings, and finally the social world. To put more simply, different discourses are different perspectives on the world. Discourses not only represent the world as it is or as it is seen to be – discourses can also represent possible worlds which differ from the actual world. Discourses may complement one another, compete with one another, or dominate others. Discourses are part of the ways people use language in relating to one another, such as cooperating, competing, or dominating. Discourses may sometimes be seen as combinations of other discourses that are articulated together. This work of combining of existing discourses is interestingly the way new discourses emerge. (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 124-127)

Then how to approach a text and identify and characterize different discourses within it? According to Fairclough (2003, p. 129), when conducting textual analysis, one can

1) identify the main parts of the world represented within text (themes)

and

2) identify the particular perspective from which they are represented.

As was mentioned above, different discourses are different viewpoints on the world. After one has identified discourses within a text, how to describe them? The most obvious distinguishing features of a discourse are often features of **vocabulary** as discourses lexicalize the world differently (Fairclough, 2003, p. 129). However, as Fairclough (2003, p. 129) points out, is more productive to focus on **semantic relationships** (synonymy, hyponymy, antonymy) between words i.e. how different discourses structure the world differently. The vocabularies of different discourses are likely to overlap, using same lexemes differently, and it is only through semantic relations that one can identify these differences. One way of getting at this relational difference is through finding **collocations**, i.e. patterns of co-occurrence of words in texts. Discourses are also differentiated by the use of **metaphor** as metaphor is one possibility for producing distinct
representations of the world. (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 131-132) In addition, assumptions, i.e. implicit meaning of texts, (existential, propositional and value assumptions) can be seen as potentially tied to particular discourses, and also as variable between different discourses. Assumptions are crucial to take into account in textual analysis, as no form of social communication is conceivable without a common ground people share. Community and solidarity also depend upon meanings that are shared or can be taken as given. Existential assumptions are assumptions about what exist. Propositional assumptions discuss what is or can be or will be the case. Value assumptions are assumptions about what is good or desirable. Discourses are also characterized and differentiated by grammatical features, e.g. grammatical differences between generic and specific noun phrases or between transitive and intransitive verbs. (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 55, 132-133, 212)

Fairclough (2003, pp. 191-202) has introduced analytical categories and perspectives which one can utilize in analyzing a text. The form of language analysis he presents has a consistently social perspective. He has summarized the main issues of textual analysis of CDA in the form of questions one can ask of a text. I found some of them highly useful regarding my current topic and the material I am looking at. Regarding my focus on discourse, I have chosen questions in terms of what I consider relevant to my research. The issues I am focusing on in the analysis are discourses and the way they are drawn upon in the text. I am examining how they are textured together and examine some of the features that characterize the discourses (semantic relations between words, collocations, metaphors, assumptions, grammatical features). (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 191-202) To quote Fairclough (2010, pp. 10-11), CDA is not just analysis of discourse, it is part of some form of systematic transdisciplinary analysis of relations between discourse and other elements of the social process. In addition, it is normative in its approach as it addresses social wrongs in their discursive aspects and aims to find possible ways of righting or mitigating them. (Fairclough 2010, pp. 10-11)

I will analyze the material in the next section. The questions and the concepts I presented above provide points of entry to the text and guide me to single out the significant features of the research material. The scope of the categorization for the most obvious distinguishing features of a discourse suffices for the purposes of this study as I believe that a more detailed grammatical analysis of the material would not add much more value to the descriptive analysis where I am looking at discourses and community building in this particular blog context.
5 CASE MARIA KANG AND THE PROTEST BY MOMMY BLOGGERS

In this section, I will examine the co-constructed blog post *Here’s my excuse (and a bunch of others too) since you asked, Maria Kang* which manifests the action thirteen mommy bloggers took to react to one of the latest debates in the blogosphere. As was mentioned in section 4, I am utilizing CDA (Fairclough 2003, 2010) and focusing on some aspects it lifts to the forefront. CDA also provides me with concepts I will use in the analysis. I will analyze the blog post and image-texts as well as the comments. My aim is to identify discourses, study the ways by which meaning is articulated in them and examine how they relate to other elements of the social process. My research approach is also aiming to provide insight into blogs as a means of building community. As CDA is normative and also rather ideological in its approach, I am also aiming to address social wrongs and possible ways of righting or mitigating them regarding this particular case.

5.1 What is this protest all about?

The blog post *Here’s my excuse (and a bunch of others too) since you asked, Maria Kang* (see Appendix 1) is designed to capture attention as the relatively large picture of scantily clad Kang is attached to the beginning of the post. Domestic diva is participating in this widely spread online conversation about Kang and wants to make it clear. The headline “Here’s my excuse (and a bunch of others too) since you asked, Maria Kang” is leaving no room for doubt what debate the author is dealing with in her entry.

The author of the blog entry is the blogger herself, and she is using first-person narrative throughout the text, which is indicated through repeated use of expressions such as “I”, “my”. In addition to her own sarcastic reproduction of Kang’s image, she has included image-texts created
by 12 fellow bloggers in the post which she comments above each image. The co-construction aspect of the post is indicated by the use of phrases such as “my friends and I”, “my excuse-ridden friends”, and by linking to the 12 blogs at the end of the post and above each image-text. To my understanding, the image-texts were created only to be attached to this particular blog entry and posted only in this particular entry and not for instance on their own blogs. Only one of the bloggers, Karen of Baby Sideburns, had discussed the debate on her own blog. As a matter of fact, Domestic diva notes in the text that she first saw the photo of Kang on her friend’s blog Baby Sideburns.

When examining a blog post, the mode of writing first sets the tone and indicates how these images and this action are to be read and understood. Domestic diva has constructed the post with informality and humor, using phrases and lexemes, such as interjections and conversational particles typical for spoken language (“psssssst”, “ahem”, “oh”, “duh”), and cussing (“she’s being sort of a dick about it”, “the hell with her”). The reaction to Kang’s picture in my sample blog is very humoristic compared to many other mommy blogs, for example People I want to punch in the throat by Jen where the author in her rather harsh critique posted on 20 October, 2013 describes Kang a “fame whore”. These thirteen mothers are presenting their excuses for not having the perfect postpartum body with a humorous and sarcastic tone. The comedy they all employ is softening the message they are sending. This is implying that this is actually a sensitive topic to be criticized.

As Palmer (1994, p. 60) notes, one of the functions commonly ascribed to humor is that it allows the mention of sensitive, even taboo subjects. To quote Bilger (2002, cited in Yonker, 2012, p. 183), “comedy can serve as an excellent vehicle for making radical ideas palatable to an audience that might otherwise be offended by them”. According to Yonker (2012, pp. 182-183), humor is a rhetorical device that produces distance that offers safety to approach potentially controversial topics. In mommy blogs, while the joking style invites readers to laugh along with the author, the humor might also distance the author and reader from the reality of hardships that mothering brings about. On the other hand, the humor mommy bloggers often employ could be interpreted as an explicitly critical act as women writers have used humor for centuries to ease their critique of culture and society. (Yonker, 2012, pp. 182-183)
Although the entry’s caption would suggest that the author is addressing a problem and stating her opinion on the matter in this blog post, I think it is rather interesting that the author does not want to share her opinion with the readers. Given that the topic is controversial, and the fact that the discussion surrounding it heats up easily may have affected her decision to try to remain unbiased. Another question entirely is if she succeeded in that as the discussion in the comments section made the author repeatedly defend and refine her stance. Myers (2010, p. 95) points out, that bloggers are often very careful about how they present their opinions to an audience. Bloggers adjust the ways they express opinions to interact with the audience and carry the complexity, novelty, and interest of the views they are expressing. (Myers, 2010, p. 95) Although the audience might expect the blogger to share her opinion, Domestic diva does not express hers very clearly. She is indicating, however, that she has drawn an opinion (“which I plan on keeping to myself”):

(1) I will say this though, I think that we should remember Maria is in the business of fitness. I haven’t met any personal trainers or fitness folks that have ever said, “Well, Susan, you’re perfect the way you are, and if you’re happy on the inside that’s all that counts even if you’re squishy on the outside…” Psssssst – There’s no money in that!

Although she is unwilling to present her opinion, she implies with the use of conjunction “though” that she is about to reveal her stance, stating that she feels sympathy for Kang or at least understands her motives (“we should remember Maria is in the business of fitness”). Domestic diva seems to think people have been too harsh to her and wants them to consider what Kang’s initial motives might have been. She sees Kang’s attempts from the point of view of a business owner, bolding the lexeme “business”. The interjection “Psssssst” indicates that she is about to reveal a secret: it is a personal trainer’s job to inspire and make people want to get fit, as supporting people in staying “squishy” will not bring money to the table (“There’s no money in that!”). Domestic diva mentions Kang’s “method”, i.e. how her image-text was constructed, and again is very careful about how she presents her opinion:

(2) […] whether or not I agree with her method,[…] I’m still not going to judge her for her rock hard abs any more than I would judge anyone else for being “overweight.”
Even though she does not express her opinion on Kang’s method very clearly in (2) (“whether or not I agree”), she states that she is “still” not judging Kang. The use of the hedge “still” asserts that she wants to switch to another topic, and slightly indicates that she might not agree with Kang’s method, i.e. her aggressive approach on postpartum body image. When Domestic diva presents the picture of Kang with an introduction “Here’s her picture which some accuse her of bordering on fat shaming”, there is an assertion that she is not one of those who are accusing Kang of “bordering on fat shaming” although “some” people are. Domestic diva also does not agree with many who claim that Kang is creating unattainable ideals for postpartum appearance (“Because that was the other part of the firestorm – Maria is creating an unrealistic image of a woman’s body after motherhood! She is?”). The disagreement comes across in the use of interrogative clause “She is?”. This indirectly implies that she does not agree with the claim, and she goes on to explain:

(3) [...] maybe she’s being sort of a dick about it (at least that’s how I felt about the apology she gave), but why can’t women be fit after motherhood?

Here Domestic diva is referring to the apology Kang posted on her Facebook page saying she is not responsible for the fact that people interpreted her message in a negative way. Domestic diva does not see that Kang is wrong with her message, it is the way she delivered it (“maybe she’s being sort of a dick about it”). Here the hedge, i.e. the use of lexeme “maybe” softens her stance taking. Again, she is very careful with how she expresses her view or, perhaps, how she does not express one.

While Domestic diva’s question “Why can’t women be fit after motherhood?” might first suggest that the images that are to follow are representing fit mothers, the images that are containing bad food choices and excuses for lack of exercise mostly represent explanations why the participants have not achieved Kang’s level of postpartum fitness (see image-texts 1-13). This is also implied in Domestic diva’s statement: “I know plenty of Moms that are in better shape now than they were before they had kids…and plenty who aren’t (ahem, like me)”. The cursive lexemes inside the brackets and the interjection “ahem” refer to author’s slight embarrassment over the fact that she is not in better shape now that she was before having children.
How did this debate start in the first place and what made it so heated? It is worth noting that there is nothing new in the portrayal of postpartum body ideal itself, as the American media is often presenting celebrities who have gotten their pre-pregnancy body back in no time or assigning judgment on those who have not performed so well. The performance of ideal postpartum body image accompanied with the somewhat accusing tone of the text (“What’s your excuse?”) is probably what made many people angry or caused the “firestorm” as Domestic diva calls it. Struggle with postpartum body image and appearance is a common topic discussed on mommy blogs (e.g. noted by Yonker 2012, p. 116), which makes it easy to understand why bloggers wanted to take part in this debate in the first place.

5.2 Themes and discourses

As was discussed earlier in section 4, discourses can be seen as ways of representing aspects of the material world, mental world, or social world. These particular aspects of the world may be represented differently, and one has to consider relationships between these different discourses when trying to understand a particular phenomenon of the world. (see Fairclough, 2003, p. 124) In this section, I aim to identify some central themes and discourses within those themes that are drawn upon in the text. I will examine how the discourses are textured together and see if a significant mixing of discourses exists. Then I will try to point out features that characterize the discourses which are drawn upon.

Fairclough’s (2003) insight into how to identify a discourse in a text proved to be very helpful: first, I identified the main themes represented within the text and then identified the particular perspectives from which they are represented (see Fairclough, 2003, p. 129). The material comprises several, partly overlapping discourses, which means that the boundaries between these discourses are not always well defined. I identified different perspectives and representations, i.e. discourses to these major four themes that I named as views of maternal roles, views of (female)
social behavior, views of health, and views of postpartum body image and appearance. I will discuss these themes and the discourses within them in the next five sections.

5.2.1 Views of maternal roles

One of the key themes in this text I identified was views of maternal roles. The theme is open to a variety of different viewpoints but in this text maternal roles are mainly represented as idealistic motherhood and as realistic (or non-ideal) motherhood. The discourses are used to construct social conceptions of mothers’ and women’s roles by the participants.

The discourse of idealistic motherhood can be seen as somewhat hegemonic, reinforcing the normative role of a good mother. The discourse of realistic or non-ideal maternal roles can be seen to some extent as its opposite, aiming to question the ideals. As was noted earlier, resistance to idealized notions of perfect mothers is the most common trait among mommy bloggers (see Hammond, 2010, p. 80). Already in some of the names of blogs that participated in this protest one can see resistance to motherhood ideals: Honest Mom, Moms who drink and swear, and Bad parenting moments. Especially in the last of these, the assertion of abandoning the good mother ideology becomes apparent. The act of naming oneself a “bad” mother is actually quite common in mommy blogs, even to the extent that one could argue bad being the new good. However, the blog’s name Bad parenting moments could be also read borrowing Yonker’s (2012) reasoning (see Yonker, 2012, p. 181): the blogger may use the rhetoric device of confession, i.e. naming oneself as a bad parent, because it will lead to less criticism and create more supportive responses. Perhaps the blogger has not fully abandoned the ideology of good mother; she only realizes that she is not capable of fulfilling the expectations the society has set for her as she is asserting she is doing something “wrong”. The other two blog names Honest Mom and Moms who drink and swear indicate fitting in to the same discourse of realistic or non-ideal maternal roles: the first by asserting honesty (“honest mom” could be read as an antonym for ideal good mothers who never get to express their honest thoughts on motherhood) and the other by asserting behavior (drinking and swearing) not typically attributed to good mothers.
Non-ideal and non-conventional representations of motherhood are articulated especially by image-texts created by bloggers of *HouseTalkN* and *Bad parenting moments*. These representations rely on rhetoric devices of humor and confession (see also Yonker, p. 180). These two image-texts represent a rather rebellious take on motherhood.

Image-text 1.

Image-text 2.
Both bloggers refer to alcohol consumption in the images they have created. The first one (image-text 1) shows Kerry, the blogger of *HouseTalkN*, sitting on a sofa in her pajamas, drinking vodka straight from the bottle and holding a remote control on her other hand. She has a box of breakfast cereal next to her. The caption reads: “My excuse? Duh... Parenthood!” The image (image-text 2) created by Bethany, the blogger of *Bad parenting moments*, is the only one in the sample not trying to present an excuse. Domestic diva remarks: “And hey, not all my friends make excuses – Bad Parenting Moments doesn’t! She’s an inspiration!” The blogger is pictured sitting in a chair outside her house holding two wine bottles in a way it resembles weight training exercise. A child is standing next to her, and it looks like she is asking her mom to play with her toys. The text reads: “What’s my excuse? NO excuses! I always find to work in my daily reps”.

As was mentioned earlier (see Yonker, 2012, pp. 180-182), mommy bloggers may create their own images of motherhood but often do so by illustrating what they are not according to conventional expectations set by the society. Two rhetorical devices that often emerge in mommy blogs are confession and humor, and both of them are illustrated in image-texts 1 and 2 above. The humor they employ works as a façade which allows the reference of sensitive, even taboo subjects (see e.g. Palmer 1994, p. 60) which in this case are the use of alcohol and somewhat neglectful behavior. Both of them are generally regarded inappropriate and unconventional for good mothers. The act of confession (see Yonker, pp. 180-182) in these images indicates that the bloggers acknowledge their incompetence in parenting. By admitting that they are doing something wrong, i.e. against expectations, they take responsibility for their unsuitable behavior. The bloggers expect their actions to cause judgment and by confessing their inadequacy they may hope their readers to be more forgiving.

The humor that the bloggers use in image-texts 1 and 2 softens the narrative of imperfect parenting making readers more likely to react with affirmation instead of judgment (see Yonker, 2012, pp. 187-188). Following Yonker’s (2012, pp. 187-189) logic, I claim that the use of humor, is actually able to keep these mommy bloggers inside the ideology of conventional motherhood. While they may attempt to address problems of maternal ideals, the rhetoric they employ actually reinforces the hegemonic narratives of motherhood. Although mommy bloggers try to resist or replace the discourses of conventional motherhood, they fail to do that due to the nature of those extraordinarily powerful conventions. The humor functions as a façade which ables the bloggers to
present their protest without being overtly judged and critiqued by the readers. However, the use of comedy also lessens the power of their message.

Although it may seem like Kang is representing the institutionalized good mother role in her picture (see image-text 1.1), she does not, for instance, perform self-sacrifice (see e.g. Rich, 1981, pp. 42-43), which can be attributed to hegemonic good mothers who always should put their own aspirations aside and focus completely on their children’s needs. Kang can be seen representing a new kind of idealistic maternal role, which could be referred to as ‘new momism’ (see Douglas and Michaels, 2004, p. 4-5). Yet, this role is by no means less demanding than the previous idealistic role set for women. She is sending a message saying she is “doing it all” and even managing to make it look good. She is portrayed as some kind of a superwoman that other women and especially other mothers can look up to.

What about the readers’ comments? Where do they fall regarding these two opposing discourses? The response the bloggers got from the readers was mostly supportive which implies they also are supportive of the non-conventional maternal image these bloggers for most part convey (or at least aim to convey). Many commenters imitated the bloggers’ excuses and revealed their own reasons for not striving for postpartum fitness, as this one example shows:

(4) My excuse is that on my current personal hierarchy of needs, exercise comes pretty much the last (that is, the kind that you do outside of chasing around/or wearing three babes under three years old, and dressing, bathing, feeding, changing, and otherwise micromanaging every aspect of their care nearly 24/7). I can’t even keep my house clean. Exercise? Ain’t nobody got time for that! (Sharon)

Comment (4) above is employing the same rhetorical devices the bloggers use as she sarcastically confesses: “I can’t even keep my house clean”. I found a few other likeminded comments, such as this:

(5) I agree with the ice cream cone mama......if I spent all of my time working out I couldn’t do anything with my kids. I guess I’d rather be fluffy and go see a movie, or to the museum, zoo, etc. than have rock hard abs. [--] (Jennifer)
Comments (4) and (5) reveal that some mothers’ excuses for not exercising and taking care of their health is not about pure laziness or lack of interest on the matter. On the contrary, it is the fact that they announce putting their children’s needs first. In comment (4), the author states that she has no time for exercise as she is “dressing, bathing, feeding, changing, and otherwise micromanaging every aspect of their care nearly 24/7”. The comment (5) also reveals a value assumption that kids’ needs should come first: “If I spent all of my time working out I couldn’t do anything with my kids”. Interestingly, these examples which at first seem to be supporting the bloggers’ unconventional maternal roles, actually articulate one aspect of the discourse of idealistic motherhood: children’s needs should always be put first. The commenters’ focus on children is used to explain why they are not striving towards fitness. Although Kang sets the example of “doing it all”, many of the bloggers and readers claim that both the state of being fit and taking care of your children are impossible to achieve at once. That is why a good mother should choose the children.

5.2.2 Views of (female) social behavior

Within the theme views of (female) social behavior, I found two rather opposing discourses, female solidarity and female disunity. These discourses reflect types of social behavior and traits attributed to women and mothers.

First of all, the aspect of solidarity is represented quite clearly in the blog entry’s collaborative nature: the women took action together and made their message stronger by supporting one another. 13 images have a different level of impact than an individual image would have had. As was noted previously in 4.3., community and solidarity also depend upon meanings that are shared or can be taken as given. Assumptions are crucial to take into account in textual analysis, as no form of social communication is conceivable without a common ground people share. (see Fairclough, 2003, pp. 55, 132-133, 212). Although the bloggers share a common ground upon which they have built their protest, the images that the bloggers created are different, even to the extent that the viewer does not necessarily see a connection between some of them. It is emphasized through the use of links and blog names that the images in this post are made by
individual bloggers. Thus, I argue that the 13 images do not form a coherent whole, and that may diminish the impact of their message. A more cohesive, shared style in the images possibly would have helped them getting their message understood better (their action was misunderstood by some readers which I will discuss later on).

After the images Domestic diva discusses the national It’s okay to be okay -week that had taken place earlier, demonstrating a message of solidarity and self-acceptance:

(6) Remember, the whole it’s okay to be okay week? Let’s try to keep that rolling. Let’s not try to make other people feel bad about themselves (no matter the motive or reason even if it’s helping people get healthy), and let’s all try to be okay with what we’ve got.

(7) The hell with her or anyone else that’s trying to make you feel bad about yourself is what I’m trying to say! Rock what you got, Mamas!

Then she goes on to list 12 links to her friends’ blogs that participated in this protest. I am not including material behind those links in my current study as they did not provide any additional value to the theme. As was mentioned earlier, the bloggers did not publish these image-texts on their own blogs and only one of the bloggers, Karen of Baby Sideburns, discussed the theme on her own blog. Then why did Domestic diva list those links? What is their purpose and what do they represent? The linking in this context and in general may be understood as an act of solidarity: these are the blogs she wants to be associated with and also the ones she wants her readers to visit.

Some commenters did not like the fact that they saw Kang being attacked or bashed and were hoping that women would approach these issues differently, perhaps more sensitively. The discourse of female solidarity was clearly articulated in some of the comments left by the readers:

(8) I say moms need to support moms. We’re all doing our best. [---](Jennifer)

Domestic diva replied to the comment above:

(9) I agree – and the point of this post was to say just that – we’re all doing our best and at the end of the day we need to be okay with ourselves. Period.
Female disunity discourse is represented especially in the discussions after the blog entry whereas it is clear that also the very act of this debate reflects disunity between women as 13 bloggers team up against one woman. As was noted in section 2.3.3, outsiders may attempt to disrupt blogging communities by commenting negatively or trolling (see Hammond, 2010, p. 87). Mommy blogs often have clearly defined codes of conduct. The discussion got uglier at points, and the bloggers received hostile comments from the readers. One of the reasons behind this may be that the post attracted a lot of readers, many of whom, I assume, were not familiar with the mommy blogging world. The readers and commenters that are not part of the mommy blogging community do not necessarily share their view and values and do not have to be diplomatic or express their unflinching support. This articulates when the protest was interpreted by some readers to be born out of jealousy:

(10) I think it is really sad that this woman has been attacked so hard by other females. Jealous perhaps? Yea, when I look at her I wish I had her physique. [--] (Suzanne)

(11) What a bunch of jealous women we have here. It’s funny how you make all these excuses about why you can’t do the things it takes to have the body Maria has, yet you all stand in front of a mirror and wish you didn’t look the way you do. Probably afraid to been seen by your husbands with the light on, too. [--] (Mark)

The use of generic (“other females”) and specific noun phrases (“this woman”, “a bunch of jealous women”), in the excerpts above is noteworthy. Jealousy is here, and also often elsewhere, attributed to women, as a trait that women share in common, and could be named here a phenomenon of woman-on-woman jealousy. One could ask what is behind these accusations as the “women are jealous” -mantra comes up time and time again when women are being critical about other women. Is it really about women’s general disunity and negativity towards one another or is this a fundamental attempt to try to keep women in their place? The comment (10) asserts that women in general have attacked Kang fiercely (“attacked so hard by other females”). The second comment (11) was one of the most negative that this entry generated, and it also created further discussion and comments from the bloggers and readers who were defending and redefining their view. For instance, Domestic diva replies to these commenters trying to elaborate her point of view:
If you read the post, I don’t think that you’ll find I’m attacking anyone. And I also don’t recall saying she doesn’t work hard or isn’t a devoted mother. Good for her for being in great physical shape... but maybe the way she’s trying to motivate others could be improved upon. I feel bad for people who struggle with weight loss, and feel put down by her picture. I feel bad for young girls who struggle with self esteem and see this image and think that if they’re anything less that they must be "making excuses."

Here again the use of hedge “maybe” is used to soften her critique toward Kang (“but maybe the way she’s trying to motivate others could be improved upon”). Interestingly in (12), Domestic diva states that young girls should not feel they need to make excuses if they do not look like Kang. That is quite contradictory to the action they personally took that was actually based on those excuses. The discourse of solidarity is articulated when the author states that she feels bad for people who struggle with weight problems and self-esteem. Domestic diva wants to steer clear of attacking Kang she and her fellow bloggers were accused of in the comments (“make excuses and be angry”, “lazy and quick to ridicule others”, “something to bitch about”) and tries to rephrase her message in the comments section:

Before you claim that I’m “angry” or feel like I’m “calling her out” maybe you should READ the post. [--] -- I think we all need to be okay with who we are whether it’s someone who has achieved a superior level of fitness [--] or if you don’t.

Capitalizing the lexeme “read” implies that the author believes her view was not understood because the text was not properly read through.

The resentment against Kang is clearly articulated for instance in image-text 3 (see below), which shows the annoyed blogger, Nicole of Ninja mom blog, who has raised her hand which could be interpreted as a gesture representing her anger towards Kang. The upper caption reads: “My excuse?” and the text, which is placed on her palm reads: “Busy being pissed off reading about Maria Kang online.” The use of swearing (“pissed off”) emphasizes her resentment. The text above the image, which is written by Domestic diva, reads “I wonder if Nicole Leigh Shaw, Tyop Aretist knows that irony is high in calories?”. Domestic Diva’s note is elaborating that the image-text is meant to be sarcastic.
Also Natalie of Frugalista blog replied:

(14) Hey, she asked a question- we answered. And if she wants to come work out with me, I would love it! [---] Really people, get a sense of humor. If Jimmy Kimmel did this- the world would be laughing. But we are just jealous women who give our husbands blow jobs in the dark because we’re too ashamed to put the lights on. [---]

It is evident that the humor that the bloggers employed was not understood by all the commenters. The topic was probably aimed to be treated in a light, sarcastic manner, but perhaps it still remained partly unpalatable as the bloggers felt they needed to be explaining themselves in the comments section. In excerpt (14) the blogger of Frugalista blog is suggesting that readers should “get a sense of humor” and implying that the bloggers are being attacked because they are “just jealous women” and not “Jimmy Kimmel”, using the name of a popular American comedian metaphorically to stand for someone whose humor is always accepted and understood (“the world would be laughing”). A few other bloggers that participated in the protest were also defending their approach by emphasizing the humor they employed:

(15) This is a light-hearted post. (JD of Honest Mom)

(16) It was more a tongue-in-cheek portrayal of making yourself feel good by making others feel bad [...]. (Ellen of Sisterhood of the sensible moms)

(17) Mark. The photos are supposed to be humorous. Lighten up, man. (JD of Honest Mom)
(18) We’re trying to bring a little humor to the situation. [...] I’m poking fun at the picture, and obviously myself [...]. (Domestic diva)

Authors use different lexemes to emphasize their humoristic take on the issue (“light-hearted”, “tongue-in-cheek”, “poking fun”). They try to clarify that they did not mean to bash Kang. One of the readers supported their view, explaining:

(19) They answered her question, in the best way possible – with HUMOR. They are HUMORISTS. [...] (Jen)

After reading the explanations above it becomes clear that the bloggers felt they were misunderstood. The humor the post employed was not understood by all the readers. The bloggers were criticizing one woman in the blog entry and reciprocally they were being criticized for it by several readers.

5.2.3 Views of health

The text written by Domestic diva does not specifically address health issues, but the image-texts for large part represent the participants’ views on diet and exercise. Although the images seem to be advocating an unhealthy lifestyle, the humor and the explanations many of them later gave in the comments would suggest that their aim was not to promote unhealthy habits.

The images which I am discussing next seem to be portraying a rather permissive view of health. The other discourse I identified within the theme I named strict view of health which was articulated for the most part on readers’ behalf as a reaction and critique to these images.

Image-text 4 represents one of the excuses dealing with food. The blogger of Baby Sideburns is pictured with a large bottle of bacon flakes that she is pouring to her mouth. The textual element on top of the image reads: “WHAT’S MY EXCUSE? Sometimes I need a snack while I’m cooking dinner”.

In image-text 4, the blogger of 649.133: Girls, the Care and Maintenance of is pictured on a setting that appears to be her work place. She is holding an open soda bottle on her hand next to her cheek in a manner she would be holding a phone. The text reads: “My excuse? I drink soda like It’s my job... AT MY JOB.”

In image-text 5, the blogger of 649.133: Girls, the Care and Maintenance of is pictured on a setting that appears to be her work place. She is holding an open soda bottle on her hand next to her cheek in a manner she would be holding a phone. The text reads: “My excuse? I drink soda like It’s my job... AT MY JOB.”
The image by *Binkies and briefcases* (image-text 6) seems to borrow its imagery from the 1950’s advertisements. The typography of text “Because she worked too hard on these cupcakes for me not to eat one (or three).” is also borrowing elements from the 1950’s. Here, instead of showing the blogger herself, the image shows a little girl, perhaps the blogger’s daughter, behind a table loaded with cupcakes. The picture represents a rather idealistic setting but the caption “for me not to eat one (or three)” represents slightly non-conventional approach although the rebellion in this image is almost nonexistent. The next picture (image-text 7) shows Kathy of *Kissing the frog* holding a small child, feeding him ice cream. The caption reads: “My excuse? I don’t want to miss this... not for all the size 2’s in the world”. The blogger implies that she would rather eat what she desires with her children than be skinny (“the size 2’s”). The assumption is that being fit as Kang requires a strict diet.
In the next three images, the bloggers are referring to their lack of exercise and giving their excuses for that. The first of these by Honest Mom (image-text 8) is the only one in this sample that is not picturing a person in the image she has created. She has taken a picture of a treadmill that is covered with “sleeping” dolls, their small beds and other gear needed when children play with dolls. The text reads: “My excuse? Everyone knows you never wake a sleeping baby.”
In her picture (image-text 9), Ellen from the blog *Sisterhood of the sensible moms* is sitting on a stationary bike unable to exercise as the bike is covered with laundry. She looks very tired and the text reads similarly: “My excuse? Laundry. Because who has the time and energy to clear the stationary bike?”.

![Image-text 9.](image)

In image-text 10 the blogger of *Suburban snapshots* is pictured sleeping on the sofa with her dog. The caption reads: “My dog really, REALLY likes to nap”. The humor arises from the realization that the only one sleeping in this picture is the woman.
Some readers brought the issue of health to the discussion, which was a topic for most part left out the blog entry’s discussion. It is quite typical that readers broaden the conversation in the comments section (as noted by e.g. Yonker, 2012, p. 189). Often these new viewpoints are softened with rhetorical devices such as affirmation or diplomacy.

The strict view of health discourse is articulated especially in the following six comments by readers:

(20) Here’s a reality check: you “don’t want to miss” your kid eating ice cream? How about when you wind up in an early grave because you’re sitting in bed eating cookies/bacon flakes/Froot Loops/etc? What will you miss then? [--] Please, keep the tongue-in-cheek “excuses” coming. I’m sure your kids will be SO HAPPY that you stood up for yourself to some chick on the internet when they’re arranging your funeral in their early 20s. At least you didn’t let some woman you don’t even know make you feel bad, because THAT would just be terrible. I also don’t want to see mommy bloggers who have time to sit and complain about a complete stranger say they “don’t have time”. (Ash)

(21) I applaud her for what she is doing because mothers CAN be fit and healthy after child birth. You just have to get off your ass and do it. (Kim)

(22) She has worked hard to achieve her current state of health and she should be [proud]. I’m a mom of 4 and embarked on the journey of getting healthy 2 years ago. It’s hard work and 65 pounds later I’m proud of myself too. I love to motivate other and think that is what she was trying to do. The people that are making the excuses are the ones who are all up in arms about this. They will continue to make excuses and be angry
at those who call them on it. [--] Eating crap and not exercising will likely buy you heart disease, diabetes, cancer, or stroke. [--] (Stephanie)

(23) I bust my a$$ to try to look like that and maybe I will and maybe I won’t… (Jennifer)

(24) Fat shaming is something bad? Maybe being fat isn’t good. (Damon)

(25) She has 3 gorgeous children and she was able to have enough self will to get herself back into her pre-pregnancy body. [--] (Amanda)

The first comment (20) proposes that making bad food choices and not exercising (“sitting in bed eating cookies/bacon flakes/Froot Loops/etc”) will eventually lead to sickness and early death (“you wind up in an early grave”; “arranging your funeral in their early 20s”). Similarly in comment (22), the reader states that “[e]ating crap and not exercising will likely buy you heart disease, diabetes, cancer, or stroke”. These two excerpts are propositional assumptions. In addition, the way commenter (20) describes mommy bloggers (“mommy bloggers who have time to sit and complain about a complete stranger say they “don’t have time””) implies that the commenter does not support the bloggers’ protest as they could be doing something more valuable, such as exercising, with their time. This argument has features of a value assumption, as the protest is seen somewhat undesirable and getting healthy as desirable. In comment (21), the reader assumes that “mothers CAN be fit and healthy after child birth”, and continues stating that fitness and health requires work and dedication (“You just have to get off your ass and do it”). Both of these assumptions are propositional assumptions, arguing that all mothers could be fit if they simply wanted to.

The last comment (25) reveals a few assumptions. First of all, getting back to pre-pregnancy size is seen as desirable, i.e. it is a value assumption. Secondly, Amanda implies that getting fit requires discipline as she asserts that Kang “was able to have enough self will”. In comment (22), a similar view is implied, as the commenter states that “[s]he has worked hard to achieve her current state of health” and also that she herself “embarked on the journey of getting healthy 2 years ago”, as well as in the comment (23), in which the reader states that “I bust my a$$ to try to look like that”. These quotes have qualities of a propositional assumption: getting healthy means that you need to have self-will and need to exercise goal-oriented discipline. Excerpt (23) also reveals that looking like Kang is desirable, which makes it a value assumption. In comment (24), Damon is also
making a value assumption, as he states that “[f]at shaming is something bad? Maybe being fat isn’t good.” He sees the state of being fat undesirable, which makes “fat shaming” less objectionable.

While many readers responded to the blog entry with their own “excuses”, which I am discussing later, some readers expressed their explicit view of not making excuses and taking control of one’s health. These comments also articulate the strict view of health:

(26) It’s funny how you make all these excuses about why you can’t do the things it takes to have the body Maria has, yet you all stand in front of a mirror and wish you didn’t look the way you do. (Mark)

(27) Ugh, I get so incredibly tired of hearing women complain about their weight, they are just having such a hard time losing it after the baby, and then do so many things opposite to losing the weight. Here’s my thing – don’t complain if you’re not going to do the right things to fix it! (Sandi)

(28) You are in control of how you react to this photo, you are in control of your health, your fitness level, your self esteem, your insecurities. (Lidia)

(29) I also told myself “no excuses”. I run. I lift weights. I juice. I’m doing Tough Mudder (again) in two weeks. (Kristen)

The permissive view of health discourse is articulated especially in the comments of bloggers who felt they had to defend the view expressed in the blog post as some readers took it like they were advocating an unhealthy lifestyle:

(30) So if we don’t look like her, we must be unhealthy? Because I’m actually right where I need to be with my BMI (despite the cookies in bed), I have low cholesterol, low blood pressure, and by medical standards I’m healthy. (Domestic diva)

(31) None of us are advocating being dangerously unhealthy. (JD of Honest Mom)

(32) If you take a good look at the photos, no one looks like they are teetering on morbid obesity. (Ellen of Sisterhood of sensible moms)

(33) Okay, okay, it’s my kid eating ice cream. And guess what? Today he is a healthy kindergartner who plays soccer, basketball, baseball, and rollerblades. [---] A little ice cream isn’t going to kill any of us, folks. (Kathy of Kissing the frog)

(34) You don’t have to look like Maria to be healthy. My BMI is right on, my blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels are all great. And yet, I’m right around a size 8 [---]. I just won’t be a fitness model. (Natalie of Frugalistablog)
(35) [--] I was a size 14 after I had my first of three kids, and now I’m a size 4... but I love me some cookies. I also am at the right BMI, low cholesterol, low blood pressure, etc.
[--] How do you know if I do or don’t workout? Healthy people can’t eat cookies?
(Domestic diva)

They received some supportive comments from the readers:

(36) [--] My BMI is normal, I do have my jiggly areas but am fine with it. If my doc said you are at an unhealthy weight, I’d put more focus on it. (Mariah)

I identified a few collocations i.e. patterns of co-occurrence between lexemes regarding the discourse of permissive view of health in the excerpts above. Health seems to associate strongly by the participants with “BMI”, “size”, “low blood pressure”, and other medical terms. The use of those collocations above might also imply that they feel like the medical terms strengthen their viewpoint that was misunderstood by many at first. The comments above also aim to articulate that you do not have to look like Maria Kang to be healthy. As Natalie of Frugalistablog puts it: “I’m right around a size 8 [--]. I just won’t be a fitness model”.

The permissive view of health also comes across in comments (33) and (35) in the way the bloggers critique the comments they received concerning their “bad” diets (“A little ice cream isn’t going to kill any of us, folks”; “Healthy people can’t eat cookies?”). The bloggers are implying that you do not have to have a strict diet to be healthy.

These discourses and the discourses within the views of postpartum body image and appearance I am discussing next somewhat overlap, sharing same vocabulary at least to some extent.

5.2.4 Views of postpartum body image and appearance

The two discourses I identified within the theme of postpartum body image and appearance are articulating two rather opposing perspectives: acceptance of appearance and critique of appearance.
The group of bloggers participate in the discussion of body image presenting excuses for not having the perfect body or whatever they interpret Kang’s indirect question “What’s your excuse?” to mean. Interestingly enough, all of these thirteen bloggers seem to have an excuse. They did not choose to ignore Kang and her message. They could have done so by stating that they simply do not care enough about their looks or they have different priorities in life than Kang does. On the contrary, they made a conscious decision to react to Kang’s question and present their humoristic excuses, with an explanation (“since you asked, Maria Kang”). However, some of them, especially Nikki of Mom who drink and swear imply in her picture (image-text 11) that she is too busy being bothered with Kang’s ideology in the first place.

The image-text 11 shows the blogger of Moms who drink and swear riding a unicorn. She seems to have obtained some sort of supernatural powers. Below this surrealistic image the caption reads in capital letters: “MY EXCUSE? TOO BUSY WRANGLING THIS B**CH!” She does not explicitly participate in the discussion of body image where women are presenting their excuses for not being fit - she has something else, i.e. unicorn wrangling, on her agenda.

In her image (see image 1.1), Kang never expresses directly what that matter is exactly that other mothers need an excuse for. The sole question “What’s your excuse?” could be interpreted in
many ways. What is omitted is crucial to take into account. In this context, the question needs to be complemented with the image to carry out more meanings and to be fully understood. The meaning is implied or perhaps in this case, carried very loudly by the image that uses her revealing clothing and allusive pose and her three children to supplement the clause: she is talking about her body being in a super fit shape after having children. The ages of the children are written on the image which clearly implies that is something she wants to emphasize. She has three children, all under the age of four (a 3-year-old, a 2-year-old, and an 8-month-old). What this suggests is that she obviously has “her hands full” but still manages to take care of herself. She seems to be asking: “What’s your excuse [for not having a body like this]?”. Her image seems to be making three types of assumptions. Existential assumptions include that Kang’s body *is* perfect and the body of an average mother *is not* perfect. The propositional assumption is that all mothers *can* or they *should* at least try to strive for that standard. As a value assumption, Kang is also represented as the ideal mother, a super woman, as she not only takes care of her children but also of herself, which is seen as a desirable state.

In the text, Domestic diva ponders possible excuses people have for not being fit, such as genetics or health reasons or “maybe they’re like my friends and I who are not only totally okay with having plenty of excuses, but they’re embracing them...”. The use of words such as “totally okay” and “embracing” here suggest a state of self-acceptance. The image-texts 12 and 13 represent resistance to Kang’s idea of striving for postpartum perfection all mothers must attend replacing Kang’s message with a humorous message of self-acceptance. As the headline of the blog post *Here’s my excuse (and a bunch of others too) since you asked, Maria Kang* would suggest, the first image (image-text 12) posted after the text discussed above is created by the author herself. Mimicking Kang’s pose, Domestic diva is pictured on her knees on a bed, holding a box of cookies on her left hand. She is wearing an outfit somewhat similar to Kang’s. The only thing that is missing in her reproduction of Kang’s image is the children. In her version they are replaced with three boxes of cookies. While Kang’s image had her children’s ages written next to them, Domestic diva is similarly informing how many calories these boxes contain. On top of the picture, the smaller text first reads: “What’s my excuse?” and then an answer to this is given underneath with larger, bold letters: “I love eating cookies... in bed.”
The picture by Natalie of Frugalista blog (image-text 13) has similarities to that of Domestic diva’s (image-text 12). The blogger is pictured sitting on a couch, wearing an exercise top, and eating a waffle. Her excuses are written across the picture: “A broken pinky”, “My 3rd nipple chafes in exercise tops”, “My sweet cuddly dog”, and lastly “My addiction to all things pumpkin-ey”.

Image-text 12.

Image-text 13.
The bloggers who participated in this protest also took part in the discussion after the post, elaborating their message of self-acceptance:

(37) Is “I’m actually pretty happy with my body the way it is” an excuse? Because aside from *ahem* my dog’s rigorous napping schedule, I’m okay without a 6-pack. (Brenna of Suburban snapshots)

(38) I’m actually just happy. I’ve been super-dee-dooper fit. And I’ve been super-dee-dooper flab. Now? I do like to exercise and plan in it, but I’ve been busy with other stuff. That’s life. Good in Maria for being fabulous. Just stop assuming we all want that, m’kay, Kang? (Nicole of Ninja Mom)

(39) Sometimes when my favorite Pajama Jeans get a little tight, I try not making excuses. And then I just go back to my waffles. (Natalie of Frugalista blog)

The mimetic nature of comments in mommy blogs (see Yonker 2012, p. 191) is apparent when readers’ comments match a blogger’s rhetorical act, such as when a personal anecdote is matched with a related personal anecdote. In this particular context it means that an excuse is matched with an excuse. This reflection of shared values helps a discourse community to emerge between the blogger and readers. The blog post generated 116 comments (including the bloggers’ own discussion in the comments section). Domestic diva specifically uses interactive language, as she addresses her readers at the end of the post by asking ‘How about you? Do you have excuses?’ and then suggests ‘Share them in comments! You’re among friends here!’. This is a rather direct effort to create blogger-reader interaction. This type of direct addressing of readers is often used in blogs as the comments are crucial in blogging culture, and bloggers are happy to receive them. Many of the readers showed their support through mimicking the bloggers’ approach and had written their own excuses. I counted at least 23 incidents were a reader could be interpreted to express an excuse and that way match the bloggers’ rhetorical act. Here are a few examples:

(40) My excuse? I like my boobies. I like them to feel like they have a permanent squooshy ginormous home on the top half of my body [...]. (Lorikate)

(41) My excuse is baby weight... my baby is 29 years old today. Happy Birthday Michael! (Pat)

(42) If working out was my 9 to 5 job, I’m sure I’d look amazing as well. (Tabitha)

(43) If it was my career choice, too, I’d make it a top priority as well. But it’s not. So that’s my excuse: different priorities. BOOM. (LetMeStartBySaying)
Collocations that could be found with the word ‘excuse’ in the excerpts above and many other comments in the comments section were often lack of time, love for unhealthy foods, kids, different priorities, and love for curviness.

What was mentioned several times by bloggers and readers as well was that you do not have to look like Kang to be happy with yourself:

(44) I also think that you can be healthy and in shape, but not look like her... and I think it’s important for people (especially young girls) to know that if you do that’s great and if you don’t look like her that’s okay too. (Domestic diva)

Domestic diva’s use of cognitive verb “I think” in (44) emphasizes the fact that she is now expressing her opinion although she was unwilling to do that earlier on in the blog entry.

5.2.5 Summary of discourses

The table 5.1 below will summarize my main findings I discussed in the previous four sections. The discourses to the theme of maternal roles are used to construct social conceptions of mothers’ and women’s roles by the participants. The two main discourses under the theme of views of maternal roles I named as idealistic motherhood and realistic or non-ideal motherhood. The discourses to the theme views of (female) social behavior can be seen reflecting types of social behavior and traits attributed to women and mothers. The two discourses I identified within this theme are female solidarity and female disunity. These two discourses are dominant throughout the post and its comments. The discourses to the theme views of health represent different takes on health: strict and permissive. These discourses are present especially in the discussion taking place in the comments section. The theme of views of postpartum body image and appearance is also a central one in this text. The theme includes two opposite approaches: acceptance and critique.
### Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES</th>
<th>DISCOURSES WITHIN A THEME / how they are articulated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| views of maternal roles | **IDEALISTIC MOTHERHOOD**
                          | good mother/ new momism / strive for perfection / “doing it all” |
|                         | **REALISTIC OR NON-IDEAL MOTHERHOOD**
                          | rebellious woman and mother (alcohol consumption, neglect) / self-acceptance / bad is the new good / “Bad parenting moments” / “Honest mom” / “Moms who drink and swear” |
| views of (female) social behavior | **FEMALE SOLIDARITY**
                          | understanding / accepting difference / no jealousy, just annoyance / Kang as a motivator and inspiration for other people / “moms need to support moms” |
|                         | **FEMALE DISUNITY**
                          | assigning judgments / emphasis on difference / woman-on-woman jealousy / “being a dick about it” / “something to bitch about” / “pissed off” |
| views of health         | **STRICT VIEW OF HEALTH**
                          | “hard work” / “get off your ass and do it” / bashing obese is acceptable / bloggers should not expose their bad eating habits / “you wind up in an early grave” |
|                         | **PERMISSIVE VIEW OF HEALTH**
                          | not looking like Kang but still healthy / not following a strict diet but still healthy / not exercising regularly but still healthy / bloggers better role models for little girls than Kang |
| views of postpartum body image and appearance | **ACCEPTANCE OF APPEARANCE**
                          | self-acceptance / “I do have my jiggly areas but am fine with it” / “I’m actually pretty happy with my body” / “I’m okay without a 6-pack” |
|                         | **CRITIQUE OF APPEARANCE**
                          | strive for perfection / “busting my a$$ to look like that” / “I am not happy with my body” |

Most discourses I identified above can be seen representing somewhat opposing views (e.g. idealistic motherhood vs. realistic or non-ideal motherhood and female solidarity vs. female disunity) which was more or less expected given the controversial topic of the material. The discourses categorized in the table 5.1 are not well-defined and some overlapping also occurs.
between them. For instance, Kang’s image and the comments which supported her view of striving for perfection articulate the discourse of idealistic motherhood and also critique of appearance discourse. Kang seems to represent new momism with its demands of excelling in and out of domestic sphere, and her view resonated with some of the readers. The blog post and most of the image-texts created by the group of mommy bloggers articulated the discourse of realistic or non-ideal motherhood, as well as the acceptance of appearance discourse. The bloggers represented themselves as somewhat nonconventional mothers who do not seem to care about the postpartum body image ideals of getting back in shape after pregnancy. This argument was softened by humor which probably made it more palatable with the audience. There was also a significant mixing of discourses of female solidarity and female disunity in the bloggers’ views and their action. They supported one another and reinforced their sense of community by emphasizing Kang’s difference from them, although the bloggers also articulated understanding towards Kang.

The comments that the blog post generated were varied, but mostly affirmative and diplomatic, and seemed to support the bloggers’ views for the most part. The theme of health was brought to the discussion by the readers. Some of the readers’ views represent the discourse of strict view of health as they criticized the bloggers and women in general for their bad diets and their lack of exercise. The bloggers tried to defend themselves and argued that deviating from Kang’s level of fitness does not necessarily equal as being unhealthy. Their views belong to the discourse of permissive views of health.

I was also able to identify some minor, less relevant discourses besides the ones named above but decided to rule them out of the discussion as the inclusion of those would not have added much extra value to the analysis. In the next section I will focus on the community building and aim to evaluate how the discourses I identified affect the potential for a community to emerge between a group of bloggers and readers.

I have been discussing the discourses the blog post reflects and the way they are articulated. The next section aims to examine how those discourses affect the potential for a community to emerge between a group of bloggers and readers.
5.3 Reinforcing community through sameness and support

Given the controversial topic of the blog post and the opposing discourses that were articulated in the material, do the conditions exist for a community to emerge? What can we make out of the response the blog post got? How is “us” realized in this particular blog post and the comments? Also, as CDA is normative and rather ideological in its approach, I am also aiming to address social wrongs and possible ways of righting or mitigating them regarding this particular case. What can this blog post tell us about the nature of this genre and more generally of the society, culture, and power structures that are behind it? What kind of social wrongs were addressed in the material?

Representations of motherhood are often dichotomous online and offline. Time and again, women seem to be debating over questions of parenthood, trying to win the never ending battle of who is right and who is wrong. Although this group of women is implementing a counterattack against Kang and what she stands for, they are simultaneously supporting one another and helping each other’s voices to be heard. As I claimed earlier, the 13 images do not seem to form a coherent whole, nor does their collaborative action. However, the bloggers are defining “us” by leaving Kang out by stating “she is not one of us”. Kang is an exception, the one who differs from them: Kang deviates from the norms of practice they as a group have established with this act. Making a clear distinction between their own group and Kang, they reinforce the cohesiveness of their group.

Did this group of mothers want to take a stand regarding the issue or was their intention to get attention which possibly would help them to monetize their blog writing? As I see it, possibly both. I claim that multiple motives lie behind this action. Kang got a lot of attention with her picture – perhaps this group of mothers wanted to get similarly noticed with their humoristic take on the debate. With their rhetorical act they took part in the debate over body image knowing that it would possibly help them to grow their readership and attract advertisers.

Mommy bloggers and their readers may use different ways of co-production and negotiation to create a sense of community. The bloggers of my sample have clearly applied rules of commercial world as they all are monetizing their personal blog writing, but they have not forgotten the initial purpose that mommy blogging once was answering to, that is community building. The blog post I
examined manifested the bloggers’ effort to reinforce their sense of community. Also, they used the possibilities of rhetorical space the internet offers. They wanted attention to the issue but also to themselves, and to the blogs they write. They wanted to get attention just like Kang had gotten it. However, in order to do that, they acted as a group to form a collective voice, and gained more power to their message.

Mommy blogging may offer replacement support for mothers and a means to create a supportive community of peers with whom they can share their experiences of parenthood. As the interaction between the writer and readers is a central part of blogging, paying attention to readers’ comments and discussions after the blog entry is essential. I am assuming that blog readers may also be part of the community that mommy blogging practices are developing. A great deal of the responses this blog entry received was of mimicking nature – many readers wanted to support these women by posting their own excuses.

As was noted earlier (see Gurak et al., 2004, p. 3), readers of blogs participate in their sustenance by responding to, commenting on, and contributing to blog posts, and it is in this way that blogs make a significant contribution to the fostering of an online community. In mommy blogging, the readers’ comments may provide the author with support, approval or affirmation - they present similar experiences and they sympathize with the blogger (see Yonker, 2012, p. 189). The purpose of commenting can be understood as an act of creating a sense of belonging for oneself. By leaving a comment, the commenter may feel connected to other readers and the blogger.

In this particular blog entry, the comments were published in two different settings. The Facebook comment section with 67 comments comes right after the blog post, and the blog’s own comment section with 47 comments at the bottom of the page. Interestingly, the Facebook comments did not generate further responses from the bloggers at all (although they are visible on the blog) – the bloggers only responded to the comments that were left in the blog’s own comments section. That means that most of the comments that this blog entry generated were actually ignored by the group of bloggers.

Yonker (2012, p. 191) points out that the mimetic nature of the readers’ comments, i.e. the readers reflecting the values of the bloggers’ in the comments section, help a discourse community to emerge between the blogger and readers. The mimetic nature is apparent when
readers’ comments match a blogger’s rhetorical act: humour is matched with humour, confession is matched with confession, and a personal anecdote is matched with a related personal anecdote. (Yonker, 2012, p. 191) Based on this, after analysing how well the comments mimic the author’s values, one might have some means to evaluate whether a discourse community emerges between participants. As was mentioned in section 5.2.4., I found 23 incidents in which a reader expresses an excuse and that way matches the bloggers’ rhetorical act.

Domestic diva ends her post by expressing her desire for interaction. She urges her readers to participate in this discussion by asking “How about you? Do you have excuses?”. Despite a few interruptions and hostile and dismissive attitude of a few commenters, the overall tone of the comments was positive. Of the 113 responses that this post generated from the readers, the biggest portion was affirmative, offering their support for the bloggers, for instance exclaiming through the use of capital letters:

(45) YOU LADIES MADE MY MONTH! Thank you for doing this, that was a much needed. (Sarah)

(46) I LOOOVE THIS! (Claire)

(47) OMG I love this post! [...] (Alice)

Kang’s tagline and her approach on the body image issue were not appreciated by many commenters, as these two examples reveal:

(48) YUP. Exactly. How about a sign that says "I went to college and have a job. What’s your excuse?" How would THAT go over? The judgement and lack of understanding of different peoples' struggles and issues makes me ill. (JD)

(49) What I'm personally sick of is the fact that anyone who doesn't find it motivating and doesn't instantly jump to her defense is suddenly some 'jealous hater'. The picture needs to be able to speak for itself and it doesn’t […]. (Nicola)

The comments above represent a noteworthy mixing of several discourses, especially of female solidarity and female disunity. These commenters are judging Kang for assigning judgment on other women. In (49), the critique by the commenter seems to imply that the consensus is that
everyone must support Kang’s view. If one expresses an opposite opinion, one might become labeled as a jealous hater.

Of the 113 comments, only 13 were expressing negation towards the bloggers, and a few were neutral in their stance or their stance was difficult to determine. Some readers expressed their support for Kang instead than for the bloggers. Similarly to the two comments above, (48) and (49), these comments represent discourses of female solidarity and female disunity but in an opposing manner. As the comments (50) and (51) below suggest, Kang’s act is interpreted as inspirational and the bloggers’ standpoint is seen as somewhat undesirable:

(50) I honestly felt like Maria Kang’s post was intended to be inspirational, not judgmental. As a 40 year old out of shape mother of a 14 year old and a 5 year old who is currently trying to get back in shape, that is how I took it. (Tina)

(51) I don’t think she’s done anything wrong... if you are taking offense to her well, then clearly, you aren’t happy with yourself... [---] She’s a true inspiration. I respect her for what she has done. (Amanda)

The discussion of health that took place in the comments section represented a dialogue of two different discourses: the strict view of some of the readers and the permissive view for the most part articulated by the bloggers. The accusations of jealousy also prompted bloggers to reply as they tried to defend their stand. This struggle between discourses of female solidarity and disunity as well as the heated discussion of health issues forced the bloggers to form a more cohesive front. The bloggers who participated in the discussion, kept referring to “us” and “we” which clearly manifests their sense of community. I suggest that not only are these blogging mothers trying to create a sense of community, they are naming themselves as a community. Bury (2005, as cited in Morrison 2010, p. 9) states that “any group that can successfully deploy the ‘we/us/ours’ formation is one that has established consistent and agreed upon norms of practice”.

The process of naming themselves as a community was clearly articulated through the following expressions by the bloggers:

(52) None of us are advocating being dangerously unhealthy. (JD of Honest Mom)

(53) Hey, she asked a question - we answered. (Natalie of Frugalista blog)

(54) So if we don’t look like, her we must be unhealthy? (Domestic diva)
With this rhetorical act which clearly manifests the co-production aspect of blogging that this medium facilitates, they made visible the ties that form a community between the blogging mothers. The use of lexemes “us” and “we” implies that they have established a shared set of values and common codes of conduct, and thus can speak for others’ behalf. In many blogs, supportive comments in the comments section by regular blog readers can be seen as taking part of that community the blog is creating. Although the comments this blog entry received were by large of mimicking nature or otherwise supportive, the commenters were, for the most part, left out from their action and community reinforcement efforts. However, it could be argued that all the participants managed to form a discursive community.

As was discussed previously in section 2.3.4, the intimacy and authenticity of mommy blogs can be harmed by aggressive monetizing efforts (see Hunter, 2013, p. 1). As Domestic diva aims to attract and grow her readership using Facebook and other forms of social media to promote her blog *Divine secrets of a domestic diva*, I claim that the interaction and sense of community between a blogger and her readers may be harmed. The group of bloggers has somewhat consistent norms of practice, but it becomes evident that all of the readers do not share those. In my material, this was partly due to the fact that some readers had found the blog through Facebook and not for instance via another mommy blog. As a result, many of the readers that took part by leaving comments were not “insiders”, i.e. regular mommy blog readers, and that caused several interruptions in the discussion. Some of the comments were unfriendly and clearly deviated from the common practice of diplomacy of mommy blogs.

All in all, the discussion that took place in the two comments sections was mostly based on detached commenting without real interaction between participants. This was the case especially in the Facebook comments section where the readers’ responses did not generate any comments from the bloggers. That means that most of the comments that this blog entry got were actually ignored by the group of bloggers. In the blog’s own comments section, the conversation was also for a considerable part consisting of detached comments and of reader-blogger interaction where a reader first accuses the bloggers of something and then the bloggers defend themselves, trying
to make the audience understand their point of view or their humor. Interestingly, quite a few of the bloggers felt that they needed to defend themselves in the comments section. The defensive tone of many of the comments written by the bloggers would imply that their protest was not successful and their humor not understood by many. They articulated on many occasions that their message was misunderstood.

The support for Kang, which was expressed in many comments, also implies that the message that the bloggers sent was not wholly accepted by the readers. The group of bloggers did not succeed in their rhetorical act as they may have hoped. This strongly suggests that the expectations to look good or “healthy” or at least strive towards that are deeply rooted in the Western world, and this seems to be something that cannot be easily questioned even if humor is used to soften the critique. Furthermore, some commenters did not like the fact that they saw Kang being attacked or bashed and were hoping that women would approach these issues differently, perhaps more sensitively.

I argue that this group tried to articulate that they are ignoring the pressures regarding body image women face on a daily basis, but the very act of presenting one’s excuse implies something else. Mommy bloggers may create their own constructions regarding motherhood but do so often by illustrating what they are not according to conventional expectations set by the society (see Yonker, 2012, pp. 179-182). By following Yonker’s (2012) logic above, I am arguing that by presenting excuses, these women are portraying themselves as something they are not. In doing that, they actually and presumably unwillingly reinforce the ideology that puts the unrealistic expectations upon them in the first place.
This study highlighted some characteristics that I consider essential in current mommy blogging phenomenon. I examined a blog post of *Divine secrets of a domestic diva* which manifested an action a group of mommy bloggers took to take part in one of the latest debates in the blogosphere. Given the controversial topic, I was interested in examining the blog entry in detail, analyzing its linguistic features and seeing what kind of discourses it created or tried to replace. I was also aiming to evaluate how the post was perceived by the readers and examine the potential community development between the bloggers and readers. The questions I addressed within this framework were the following: What discourses the blog post creates and how are they articulated? How do those discourses affect the potential for a community to emerge between a group of bloggers and readers? I employed points of inquiry developed by critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2003, 2010). Through the analysis of language and discourse in the blog post, I aimed to characterize the social and cultural structures behind it.

Many scholars (see e.g. Hammond, 2010 and Lopez, 2009) have claimed that mommy blogging is a radical act which is able to shift the ideology of the good mother. On the other hand, Yonker (2012, p. 195-196) has seen little or no indication of explicit rejection or resistance to conventional motherhood or direct addressing of problems or the unattainability of expectations surrounding motherhood in mommy blogs. This duality in prior studies was one of the reasons I was drawn into this particular blog entry: the bloggers seemed to be taking a stand as they were addressing a problem they see. At the same time, they seemed to be addressing the unattainability of some expectations set for ideal mothers. I was interested in finding out, what is the outcome of such protest not so common in this genre they seem to be performing, and how is their act perceived by the readers of the blog.

Firstly, I aimed to identify some central themes and discourses within those themes that are drawn upon in the text. Then I tried to point out features that characterize the discourses. I identified different perspectives and representations, i.e. discourses to these major four themes
that I named as views of maternal roles, views of (female) social behavior, views of health, and views of postpartum body image and appearance. The discourses I identified in the material represented somewhat opposing views which was more or less expected given the debated topic of the blog post. The discussions surrounding motherhood are often dichotomous and this particular case proved to be no different.

The discourses to the theme of maternal roles were used to construct social conceptions of mothers’ and women’s roles by the participants. The two main discourses under the theme of views of maternal roles I named as idealistic motherhood and realistic or non-ideal motherhood. The discourses to the theme views of (female) social behavior were reflecting types of social behavior and traits attributed to women and mothers. The two discourses I identified within this theme were female solidarity and female disunity. These two discourses were dominant throughout the post and its comments. The discourses to the theme views of health represented two rather opposing takes on health: strict and permissive. These discourses of health were present especially in the comments section. The theme of views of postpartum body image and appearance is also a central one in this text, and it included two opposite approaches which I named acceptance and critique.

The discourses I categorized in the table 5.1 were not well-defined and some overlapping also occurred between them. For instance, Kang’s image and the comments which supported her view of striving for perfection articulated the discourse of idealistic motherhood and also critique of appearance discourse. Kang seemed to represent new momism with its demands of excelling in and out of domestic sphere. The bloggers represented themselves as somewhat non-conventional mothers who do not seem to care about the postpartum body image ideals of getting back in shape after pregnancy. This argument was softened by humor which probably made it more palatable with the audience. There was also a significant mixing of discourses of female solidarity and female disunity in the bloggers’ views and their action. They supported one another and reinforced their sense of community by putting emphasis on Kang’s difference from them. Still, the bloggers managed to articulate understanding towards Kang.

The comments that the blog post generated were mostly affirmative and diplomatic and seemed to support the bloggers’ views for the most part. The theme of health was brought to the discussion by the readers. Some of the readers’ views represented the discourse of strict view of
health as they criticized the bloggers and women in general for their bad diets and their lack of exercise. The bloggers argued that deviating from Kang’s level of fitness does not equal as being unhealthy their view belonging to the discourse of permissive views of health.

Mommy blogging may offer replacement support for mothers and a means to create a supportive community of peers with whom they can share their experiences of parenthood. As the interaction between the writer and readers is a key element of blogging, paying attention to readers’ comments and discussions after the blog entry is essential. A great deal of the responses this blog entry received was of mimicking nature as several readers wanted to support these women by posting their own excuses. In this particular blog entry, the comments were published in two different settings. Interestingly, the Facebook comments did not generate further responses from the bloggers at all. The bloggers only responded to the comments that were left in the blog’s own comments section which means that most of the comments were actually ignored by the group of bloggers.

The blog post I examined manifested the bloggers’ effort to reinforce their sense of community. They made visible the ties that form a community between the blogging mothers. The use of lexemes “us” and “we” implied that they have established a shared set of values and common codes of conduct, and thus can speak for others’ behalf. They are on the same page, both literally and figuratively speaking. Although the comments this blog entry received were by large of mimicking nature or otherwise supportive, the commenters were, for the most part, left out from their action and community reinforcement efforts. It could be argued though that all the participants managed to form a discursive community.

The mommy bloggers performed comic resistance to Kang’s representation of ideal motherhood and the representation of ideal body image. The support for Kang, which was expressed in many comments, also implies that the message that the bloggers sent was not wholly accepted by the readers. The group of bloggers did not succeed in their rhetorical act as they may have hoped. This strongly suggests that the expectations to look good or “healthy” or at least strive towards that are deeply rooted in the Western world, and this seems to be something that cannot be easily questioned even if humor is used to soften the critique. I argue that this group tried to articulate that they are ignoring the pressures regarding body image women face on a daily basis, but the very act of presenting one’s excuse implies something else. I am arguing that by presenting
excuses, these women are portraying themselves as something they are not. In doing that, they actually and presumably unwillingly reinforce the ideology that puts the unrealistic expectations upon them in the first place.

The need for self-expression and community development are the two main reasons that have been motivating bloggers to write (see Morrison 2010, Miller and Shepherd 2004). The monetizing possibilities have changed the way many bloggers view their writing. The need for self-expression is often paired with the need for money. The intimacy and authenticity of mommy blogs can be harmed by aggressive monetizing efforts (see Hunter, 2013, p. 1). As Domestic diva aims to attract and grow her readership using Facebook and other forms of social media to promote her blog Divine secrets of a domestic diva, I argue that the interaction and sense of community between a blogger and her readers may be harmed. The group of bloggers that participated in the protest had somewhat consistent norms of practice, but it became evident that all of the readers did not share those. Many of the readers that took part by leaving comments were not regular mommy blog readers, and that caused several interruptions in the discussion. Some of the comments were unfriendly and clearly deviated from the common practice of diplomacy of mommy blogs. Many of the bloggers felt that they needed to defend themselves in the comments section, and they articulated on many occasions that their message was misinterpreted. Even though these bloggers did not succeed in their protest very well and had their comic resistance misunderstood by many, they managed to make the conversation on body image a bit louder and enabled different views to be heard, at least momentarily.

Some of my findings were well in tune with previous research, especially that of Yonker’s (2012). The genre in question often aims to be radical in its portrayal of motherhood but the use of rhetorical devices such as humor and confession may imply that the bloggers are only portraying something they are not and they are acknowledging that they are doing something “wrong” according to conventional expectations. The humor functioned as a façade which abled the bloggers to present their protest without being overtly judged and critiqued by the readers. However, the use of comedy also lessened the power of their message. Also, I claim that by admitting that they need an excuse for their non-ideal appearance, they actually reinforce the postpartum body ideal that Kang in this particular case and the media in general convey.
While I do not think the current mommy blogging phenomenon is able to shift the ideology of the good mother, I see mommy blogging somewhat radical in its manner of lifting matters often considered too marginal or trivial to the forefront.

It is evident that there is no such thing as an objective textual analysis. This study would probably have different results in the hands of another analyst. This study covered and discussed only a fraction of the vast phenomenon. I found this topic fascinating and came up with various potential topics for further research. I think that questions of blogs and discourse should be addressed more in future study. The study of other forms of social media such as Instagram and Twitter would also benefit from a discourse analytical approach. Humor that mommy blogs utilize was briefly examined in this study and would offer an interesting topic for further research. As the data used in this study showed, it works as a façade which makes sensitive topics easier to discuss on blogs. Also, we would surely benefit from studies discussing the commercial side of blogs in more detail and its effects on relationships and interaction between bloggers and readers.
LIST OF REFERENCES

Primary source


Secondary sources


Screen capture of the blog post Here’s my excuse (and a bunch of others too) since you asked, Maria Kang.
Here’s my excuse (and a bunch of others too) since you asked, Maria Kang.

Another day, another thing the internet is up in arms about....

This week it’s a photo of fitness expert, and 32 yr old mother of three, Maria Kang.

Maria posted a photo on Facebook that went viral, and it has since started a firestorm of controversy (because is there any other kind of controversy available on the internet?).

Here’s her picture which some accuse her of body-shaming:
I'll be honest, when I first saw this photo, I laughed.

What's so funny about it?

Well, the very first place I saw the photo was on a post by my friend Karen at Baby Sideburns, and of course it came with a hilarious retort.

Then I read several other posts on the photo, some from people that I knew and others I did not. I also read a response or two from Maria, and I let it all soak in before I drew my own opinion (which I plan on keeping to myself).

I will say this though, I think that we should remember Maria is in the business of fitness. I haven't met any personal trainers or fitness folks that have ever said, "Well, Steven, you're perfect the way you are, and if you're happy on the inside that's all that counts even if you're20 pounds on the outside...."

Passion -- There's no money in that!

Also, whether or not I agree with her methods, which truth be told I don't personally feel it's the best way to help someone achieve a healthier lifestyle, I'm still not going to judge her for her rock hard abs any more than I would judge anyone else for being "overweight."

Because that was the other part of the fireworks -- Maria is creating an unrealistic image of a woman's body after motherhood.

She is?

I mean, may be she's being a bit of a dick about it (at least that's how I felt about the apology she gave), but why can't women be fit after motherhood? I know plenty of Moms that are in better shape now then they were before they had kids...and plenty who aren't (also, like me).

Maybe it's because of genetics...

Maybe it's because of health reasons...

Or maybe they're like my friends and I who are not only totally okay with having plenty of excesses, but they're embracing them...

I had 2 kids in just under 4 yrs, I don't make time to exercise, oh, and I love my bedtime snacks.

What's my excuse? I love eating cookies...in bed.

-90 Calories (Per Spoonful)

180 Calories (Per Spoonful)

Fragilista Blog has the perfect number of excuses, and ripoffs, depending on who you ask.
I'll have to remember this from Baby Sideburns next time I squat with dressing in my mouth.
Here's my excuse (and a bunch of others too) as you asked, Maria Kang.

It's almost like Ellen from Sisterhood of the Sensible Moms is in my house.

My Excuse?
Laundry

Because who has the time or energy to clean the stationary bike?

I'm not sure how Sebastian Stanifer could say no to that face...and I'm glad she didn't even try.

My dog really, REALLY likes to nap.  SebastianStanifer.com

Speaking of things I couldn't say no to, I wouldn't judge if Brinkes and Bradkows had four...
Okay, one more sweet one from *Kissing the Frog*. Some excuses are legit.

I don't want to miss this... not for all the size 2's in the world.

Speaking of legit, if you know Nikki from *Moms Who Drink and Swear*, you know this is 100% real.

I wonder if Nicole Leigh, *Toro Amor* knows that money is high in calories?
Here’s my excuse (and a bunch of others too) once you asked, Maria Kang

Busy being pissed off reading about Maria Kang online.

HouseTalkN said it, we were all thinking it – Duh, Maria!

And hey, not all my friends make excuses – Bad Parenting Moments does! If she’s an inspiration!

What’s my excuse? NO excuses!

I always find a way to work in my daily reps. badparentingmoments.com

I’ll end on this note:
Remember, the whole it’s okay to be okay works. Let’s try to keep that rolling. Let’s not try to make other people feel bad about themselves no matter the reason or reason even if it’s helping people get
Healthy, and let's all try to be okay with what we've got.

Because at the end of the day, it's not Maria's opinion that counts...

It's mine.

Well, not mine, I meant yours...

Your own opinion about yourself...

The hell with her or anyone else that's trying to make you feel bad about yourself is what I'm trying to say!

Back what you got, Mama!

Oh, and be sure to check out my excuse-ridden friends on their blogs here too:

Suburban Snapshots
603.13, Girls, for Care and Maintenance of,
Kissing the Frog
Raisin and Brook
Forgetting Bag
Baby Sideburns
Honest Mom
Sisters of the Sensible Moms
Bad Parenting Moments

How about you? Do you have excuses? Share them in the comments. You're among friends here!
Suburban Snapshots
October 17, 2013 at 2:39 pm

In "I'm actually pretty happy with my body the way it is" an excuse? Because aside from "them" my dog's rigorous morning schedule, I'm okay without a 6-pack.

Reply

Krista
October 19, 2013 at 9:48 pm

Down on lap = instant nap!

Reply
Lorikate  
October 17, 2013 at 02:27 PM

My excuse? I like my boobs. I like them to feel like they have a permanent spongey ginormous home on the top half of my body, even if they do look like victoria's in my belly button sometimes.

Nicoleleogghshow  
October 17, 2013 at 02:44 PM

I'm actually just happy. I've been super-deep-super fit. And I've been super-deep-super flat. Now, I do like to exercise and plan on it, but I've been busy with other stuff. That's life.

Good in Maria for being fabulous, just stop assuming we all want that, in any way, Kang.

FrugalistaBlog  
October 17, 2013 at 03:20 PM

Sometimes when my favorite Pajama Jeans get a little tight, I try not making excuses. And then I just go back to my waffles.

FrugalistaBlog recently posted...Can we all just done done? 😊

Ellen-Mary  
October 17, 2013 at 03:20 PM

Well done! Good for Maria that she's where she wants to be and you handled the being a dick about it in the perfect way. I'm quite happy with my plumply upholstered self and don't need an excuse to have chocolate for breakfast.

Sharon  
October 17, 2013 at 03:20 PM

This is the best response I've seen thus far. Love it! My excuse is that on my current personal hierarchy of needs, exercise comes pretty much last (that is, the kind that you do outside of dancing around and/or sweating through jokes under three years old, and dressing, brushing, boiling, changing, and otherwise misrepresenting every aspect of your care nearly 365). I can't even keeping house clean. Exercise? Ain't nobody got time for that.

Audra O.
Hilarious! I don't know what my excuse is. I run, but I still don't look like that. And I only have two babies.
Oh, well!

Real Life Parenting
October 17, 2013 at 11:30 pm

This post made me smile. So much.

Reply

Kristen
October 17, 2013 at 12:36 am

I also told myself "no excuses." I run. I lift weights. I juice. I'm doing Tough Mudder again in two weeks.

I think the "excuse" verdicts is directed at those who scheme about not being happy with their weight... but don't do anything about it, aka they make excuses.

On the other hand, if you're happy with how you look and feel, then just keep on rockin' it and pay no attention to that woman behind the six-pack abs. 😊

Domestic Diva
October 18, 2013 at 9:29 am

Thank you, Kristen for getting it. I'm not here to bash Maria. I think it's amazing that she's able to have the kind of stamina, knowledge, and whatever the hell else it takes to look like that... but I'm not going to look like that, I never have (before or after kids), and I'm okay with it.

With so many issues especially on the internet, people are so polarized. I feel like she's doing a job (and a good one at that) of bringing attention to her progress pg. I also think that you can be healthy and in shape, but not look like her... and I think it's important for people (especially young girls) to know that if you do that's great and if you don't look like her that's okay too.

EVERYONE needs to be happy with who they are...

And good luck in the tough mudder race!!
Domestic Diva recently posted... Here's my excuse (and a bunch of others too) since you asked.
Maria Kang. 😊

Reply

The Gifted Gabber
October 19, 2013 at 12:30 am

Haha... that is awesome! Your picture with the cookie wrappers is hysterical.
Amy
How may excuses (and a bunch of others) when you need, Maria Kang

YOU LADIES MADE MY MONTH! Thank you for doing this, that was a much needed LOL!

My excuse? Life happens a little too much around here. And I like chocolate. And wine. And saltine crackers... There is an unabridged version of that list existing somewhere on the internet.

Peggy

October 18, 2013 at 1:19 am

Well done. Love it!

Ash

October 18, 2013 at 10:02 am

Really? People are THIS butt-kissin?"
Domestic Diva
October 19, 2013 at 9:38 am

So if we don't look like her, we must be unhealthy? Because I am actually right where I need to be with my 80 despite the cookies in belly. I have low cholesterol, low blood pressure, and by medical standards I'm healthy.

And you know what she will kill you?
Stress.

If a Mommy Blogger's "tongue-in-cheek" excuses get you this riled up, exercise isn't going to cure what ails you.

Reply

HouseTalkN
October 19, 2013 at 9:38 am

I am sorry for your experience. These are funny (and healthy) women just trying to make you laugh.
Someone here is "nutty" but it isn't us.
HouseTalkN recently posted... Full Cycle... <3

Reply

JD @ Honest Mom
October 19, 2013 at 9:38 am

None of us are advocating being dangerously unhealthy. This is a light-hearted post. Deep breaths. Deep breaths.

JD @ Honest Mom recently posted... Oh, Minnie. I kind of love you. But you also got me thinking. <3

Reply

Janel
October 19, 2013 at 2:28 pm

Ask, I'll have you know that my kids hate me. waaaaay too much to spend time planning my funeral.

Reply

Julie
October 19, 2013 at 5:16 am

That was hilarious. I actually cried and saved her last year when the photos came out. I'm so glad others have caught on to the ridiculousness!
Mark
October 30, 2013 at 6:51 am

What a bunch of jealous women we have here. It's funny how you make all these excuses about why you can't do the things it takes to have the body Meliss has, yet you all stand in front of a mirror and wish you didn't look the way you do. Probably afraid to be seen by your husbands with the light on, too. I think it's sad that you all bash on someone who actually makes time to stay healthy and fit rather than make excuses. Unfortunately, most all of you with the 'excuses' fit right into what society has become — lazy and quick to criticize others. Even when those others are doing nothing but trying to improve their health and well-being.

Domestic Diva
October 30, 2013 at 9:05 am

I'm assuming you didn't actually read the post, Mark. But then again, you're fitting in nicely with what the internet commenters have become. We all have a part I suppose.

Sisterhood of the Sensible Moms
October 30, 2013 at 9:26 am

It was more a tongue-in-cheek portrayal of making yourself feel good by making others feel bad with a direct and inflammatory challenge. Picture someone looking at your back account and saying, "What's your excuse?" You reply, "I can pay my bills!" Judi replies, "But if you worked your ass off you could have a big house with a pool instead of that sad pathetic shack you live in."

If you take a good look at the photos, no one looks like they are treading on mental obesity. I was paged by the exercise bike dressed in workout gear because guess what? I was going for a run. And guess what again? I didn't even have to announce it on Facebook and it still happened.

Ellen
Sisterhood of the Sensible Moms recently posted...What Parents Can Do: Trust But Verify
&ShitMyTots!

J&D @ Honest Mom
October 30, 2013 at 9:22 am

Mark. The photos are supposed to be humorous. Lighten up, man.

J&D @ Honest Mom recently posted...Oh, Maria Kang. I kind of hate you. But you also get me
Tickles.

Jen
Mark, you have no idea what you’re even talking about and you’re talking about both sides of your ass. (If you have lazy and judgmental people then you probably shouldn’t look in the mirror, because you took 2 minutes out of your rigorous agenda to read this bit of fluff and then another 2 minutes to craft your judgmental response). I know each of those ladies and there isn’t a jealous bone in their bodies. They didn’t bash your precious Minta or call her names. They answered her question, in the best way possible — with HUMOR. They are HUMORISTS. They crack jokes and make people laugh — usually at their own expense. Don’t know where you left your sense of humor, but you should probably go find it and stop hugging around here.

Reply

Mark

October 18, 2013 at 9:52 pm

Thank you for pointing that out Jen. The reason I’m “hugging around here” is because this page blow up my Facebook page and it was hard to miss. It’s funny how you labeled me as lazy and judgmental yet you are “talking about both sides of your ass” by being judgmental about me. This post didn’t bash Minta, but says that she is maybe being a dink about it? C’mon Jen, we past the hair. But don’t worry, I’ll take your advice and stop hugging around here because some people are a little too sensitive. No need to reply, ’cause I won’t see it.

Reply

Jenel

October 18, 2013 at 3:32 pm

HAHAHAHAHAHA I MAD IRISH

Reply

Dried-on Milk

October 18, 2013 at 9:27 am

BOOM! Awesomecause! Next time I want in cause we are all clearly besties here!!

Reply

Lori

October 18, 2013 at 8:08 am

Very well said, Kerry! I’m a mom and I lost three inches... of my hair yesterday. It still counts.

Reply
Kathy at kissing the frog
October 16, 2013 at 8:50 am

Okay, okay, it's my kid eating ice cream. And guess what? Today he is a healthy kindergartner who plays soccer, basketball, baseball, and softball. With that level of activity, and me chasing him around, I doubt either of us are getting diabetes any time soon. And for the record, my hubby sees me naked all the time. He loves me and what my body has been through. A little ice cream isn't going to kill any of us, folks. Kathy at kissing the frog recently posted... Did You Ever Loose a Child?

Reply

Ryan
October 16, 2013 at 9:52 am

How can you not LOVE the domestic diva? As for Maria, I think she's kick ass. Who wouldn't be proud of that body after three kids? Of course, I'm probably a little biased as I'm a big time fitness enthusiast so I enjoy seeing photos of people looking all loved and sexy. In any case, Maria’s not creating an unrealistic image of a woman’s body after motherhood, not at all. She has just proven to be someone who is dedicated and focused on free tugging her body, in most personal trainers are. I say GO Maria!

Reply

Darcy
October 16, 2013 at 11:30 am

LOVE these photos! So funny!

Reply

Hysterical Casserole
October 16, 2013 at 1:22 pm

Oh good snap that was awesome!!! What's my excuse? Well, if I eat too healthy and have one meal that is not, fellow sisters! I call it junk food exposure therapy. So you see, I eat crappy so my pants won't be. I'm just kidding! I am pro health and all that, I just don't like putting unrealistic expectations on myself, that's my fitness trainer job.

Reply

Frugalista Blog
October 16, 2013 at 2:53 pm

Hey, she asked a question- we answered. And if she wants to come work out with me, I would love it! Who ever said the comment about Asian is dead out! Asians are tiny! Northern Europeans aren't. Yes, I'm genrefyng. Oh my god! And thank you Domestic Diva, for pointing out the fact that you don't have to look like Maria to be healthy. My BMI is right on, my blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels are all great. And yet, I'm right around a size 8 and I work hard at a lot of things. I just won't be a fitness model. Reality people, get a sense of humor. If Jimmy Kimmel did this- the world would be laughing, but we are just folks who work out to keep ourselves healthy. We don't want to be forced to put the lights on. Or whatever that shade up there said.
LetMeStartBySaying
October 18, 2013 at 2:20 pm

I believe that people love to get their panties in a twist over every frictionless possible. Hey, good for Maria for getting back in shape after all 3 kids... FOR HER JOB. If it was my career choice, too, I'd make it a top priority as well. But it's not. So that's my excuse different priorities. ROOM.

Sarah
October 18, 2013 at 2:41 pm

It is amazing that the middle child appears to be emerging from her vagina during the photo shoot. That's getting rid of the baby weight with a quickness!! For me, this ad is motivating. It says: put down your to do list and work out or that would give you joy for whatever reason. Health, better self-esteem...etc. Is it the word excuse that's so offensive? Why assume she's speaking to overweight people? Being fit doesn't mean she automatically bothers people who aren't her done.

Sarah
October 18, 2013 at 2:41 pm

As a mom of a 14-month old and a full time student...yer that is me! I am in my final year of my bachelor of fine arts and spend most of my days and nights in the studio trying to meet my deadlines. I am racked with guilt on not being on my husband and child as it is, so there's no time left to go and spend two plus hours at the gym. Let alone make a green healthy smoothie or what not. I was a gym rat before getting pregnant because I had the time, but looked nothing like her. I would love to be able to work out, but it is not part of my present reality. Thank you Sarah for posting this, but I am not happy with my body as it is but having you like Maria is not very helpful. I would also like to add that all the pics from all the other bloggers everyone looks healthy.

Kim
October 18, 2013 at 2:27 pm

I agree with Maria Kong! I am a mother of a 4 year old, you have to want it to achieve it, sounds like all of you other mothers are just looking for something to bitch about... just because she is in the fitness industry doesn't mean she has an advantage it takes maybe a half hour a day to work out. I applaud her for what she is doing because mothers CAN be fit and healthy after child birth. You just have to get off your ass and do it.

Domestic Diva
October 18, 2013 at 2:30 pm

I'm confused about where I'm bitching? Did you even read the post? I applauded her too! And I
agree and already said that Moms can be fit and healthy also. Careful - you almost sound like you agree with me.

Reply

Stephanie  
October 18, 2013 at 2:09 pm

She has worked hard to achieve her current state of health and she should be. I'm a mom of 4 and embarked on the journey of getting healthy 2 years ago. It's hard work and 65 pounds later I'm proud of myself too. I love to motivate others and think that is what she was trying to do. The people that are making the excuses are the ones who are all up in arms about this. They will continue to make excuses and be angry at those who call them out. The choice is yours. It's your life. I've been on both sides and a healthier state will make you happier. Eating crap and not exercising will likely buy you heart disease, diabetes, cancer, or stroke. In the end it's a quality of life issue and not a physical image, that's just the bonus not to mention the mental boost of self esteem. There will always be haters out there.

Reply

Domestic Diva  
October 18, 2013 at 4:27 pm

You should be proud of yourself, and if you read the post you'll know I think it's awesome what she achieved as well.

We're trying to bring a little humor to the situation. But I can tell you that I went a size 14 after I had my first of three kids, and now I'm a size 4... but I love me some cookies. Also am at the right BMI, low cholesterol, low blood pressure, etc. So before you claim that I'm "angry" or feel like I'm "attacking her"... maybe you should READ the post. Just because I'm poking fun at the picture, and obviously myself, doesn't mean I'm a hater or that I'm unhealthy. How do you know if I do or don't workout? Healthy people can't eat cookies? And if I didn't feel good about myself and have good self esteem, I never would have posted this... after posting this there are just as many people (like yourself) who are up in arms over this that are "inspired" by it. Again if you actually read the post you'll see that I think we all need to be okay with who we are whether it's someone who has achieved a superior level of fitness (like some of my friends who are also mothers which mention), or if you don't. It's not for you or me or Maria to judge. And if I want to laugh at myself, then that's my choice too... if you don't want to laugh along, move along and that's okay too.

Reply

Jennifer  
October 18, 2013 at 4:10 pm

Hi, Ha, I needed that! Now I wish I had made one of those pictures myself.

I say, Go Girl! I best my 8th to try to look like that and maybe I will and maybe I won't ... why is either one her fault? I say moms need to support moms. We're all doing our best. Period.

Reply

Domestic Diva  
October 18, 2013 at 4:23 pm

I agree - and the point of this post was to say just that - we're all doing our best and at the end of the
day we need to be okay with ourselves. Period.

Reply

Erika
October 16, 2013 at 9:19 pm

It's my dog's fault too. She prefers to nap and can't sleep without me. It sucks!

Reply

Charlene
October 16, 2013 at 9:39 pm

Hilarious! And the cookies in bed look - you are rockin' it! So happy I found this blog. (LOVE it)

Reply

mariah
October 19, 2013 at 2:30 pm

I wasn't offended by her picture, nor did I think she was thing mommies who aren't in shape. My excuse is I birthed three babies in 11 months. Yes you read that right. I had no time or energy to do naps. While I am not upset with her pic, I am jealous. She must have someone to watch her kids while she does her workouts. I always had my kids... because the people I did have to watch them thought it selfish of me to want to do anything without them. Now that they are in school, I have the time. But I find I'd rather craft and bake... make homemade costumes for the kids. My BMI is normal, I do have my jiggly areas but am fine with it. If my doc said you are at an unhealthy weight I'd put more focus on it. But I think I deserve to relax a little while they are at school, take it slow.

Reply

Trackbacks

Come at me Bro
November 1, 2013 at 1:40 pm

[... I my aversion to exercise and my bad habit of eating cookies in bed probably aren't helping...]

Reply

Speak Your Mind

Name *

Email *

Website