

# Negotiating the intimate and the professional in mom blogging

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Mom bloggers<sup>1</sup> are mothers who write online blogs about their everyday lives and in doing so, create interactive collectivities. Contemporary mom blogging is thus a digital practice of 'networked life writing' (Friedman, 2013, p. 9) that concentrates on the intimate and the personal and allows for a sense of congruency and community. While blogging is simply a hobby for many, the commercialisation of the lifestyle blogosphere means that blogging has also become increasingly monetised and can be recognised as a form of micro-entrepreneurship and freelance work. Blogging, then, has become a field of work in which the telling of intimate lives and personal narratives in the 'publicized private' sphere of the internet is an indispensable part of becoming successful, and in which forms of peer support and building a community are also forms of creating networks of sociality centred around products that can be delivered to companies and advertisers (Taylor, 2016). In this way, mom blogging combines the intimate with the professional in a way that challenges the assumed boundaries between paid work and leisure as well as between paid work and mothering.

In the Finnish language blogosphere, the emergence of mom blogging at a large scale around the turn of the decade coincided with the launch and development of commercial product-placement services targeted at bloggers and owned by big media houses. These services

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<sup>1</sup> These blogs are usually called 'mommy blogs', but it is a contested concept (Friedman, 2013, pp. 9–10; Rogers and Green 2015, p. 34). I think 'mom blogs' best captures the common characteristics of the blogs that I am researching. Many of the bloggers themselves also embrace the terms mom or mommy ('mamma' in Finnish), often with some irony. This, however, does not mean that the blogs would be solely concerned with mothering and family issues, but rather that the bloggers themselves are claiming and reflecting on the identity of 'mother' as a more or less significant part of their blogging. Many of the blogs' names bear some reference to either mothers or babies.

provide easy-access platforms and communities for bloggers concentrating on issues of lifestyle and parenting. Bloggers, most of whom are women, provide content for the platforms. Some of them have an agreement with the commercial service and receive a small monthly compensation for updating their blog. Most professional or semi-professional bloggers, however, gain money through the (more or less) frequent cooperation with business companies. Many have also established their own sites independently of the large commercial services, as this independence is often more profitable for the more popular bloggers. Recently, the emergence of blogging agencies has also provided bloggers with the option to sign up with an agency who acts as a go-between between the bloggers and commercial companies<sup>2</sup>. Although the work of blogging can be profitable and the most successful lifestyle bloggers earn well, the contracts and agreements are often temporary and there are no fixed pay rates, so every deal must be negotiated, either by the blogger herself or by an agency. Income from blogging is thus constantly dependent on varying cooperation opportunities and negotiating power, which in turn is dependent on the popularity of the blog. For the mom bloggers, blogging is often tied to family life, not only in terms of the content of the blog but also in a very concrete sense, as many of them work at home and their work tends to be organised according to the rhythms of everyday family life: blogs are updated when children are sleeping.

Mom blogging in Finland has emerged at a moment in which the mothers of small children, in mainstream political rhetoric, are expected to participate in the labour market, but they are also in a precarious or weak position to do so (Julkunen, 2010, pp. 127–128); the

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<sup>2</sup> These agencies take care of the practical aspects of making marketing agreements with commercial companies while allowing the bloggers independence in deciding which companies to work with, but they of course also charge a certain percentage for their work (e.g. 50 %). Moreover, the agencies also indirectly affect the ways in which the bloggers perceive themselves and others. For example, one of the bloggers I interviewed described how the agency's practices of openly sharing statistical information reflecting the popularity of the blog means that she could not help comparing her site's statistics to those of other mom blogs. For her, the agency's practices have led to a heightened sense of being in a 'popularity' competition with others.

tendencies towards neofamilism (Jallinoja, 2006) and intensive parenting (Faircloth, 2014) put pressure on women to take care of small children at home. Although ‘temporary at-home mothering’ (staying at home while children are small) has been a prevalent feature of the Finnish women’s employment model since the 1990s (Julkunen, 2010, pp. 127–128), the recent introduction of strict austerity measures in Finland has led, for instance, to the dismantling of the universal right to public childcare (Salmi, et al., 2015) and also to welfare cuts targeted at public childcare services. This development serves to intensify the tension between the call to participate in paid employment, the possibilities of doing so, and the incentives to stay at home. The emergence of freelance writing in the blogosphere can thus be seen to reflect a situation that has become the new normal for mothers of small children: negotiating between these contradicting ideals and demands in the practices of their everyday life, and ‘making do’ by combining different kinds of precarious part-time jobs and forms of micro-entrepreneurship with varying childcare arrangements.

Most of the successful mom bloggers are highly educated and they often have prior professional experience in journalism, communications, or marketing. Some are on maternity leave or home care allowance<sup>3</sup> and take care of their children at home while working on their blog. Others combine part-time public or private daycare with part-time or full-time freelancer work, and some are working full-time in paid employment or as entrepreneurs. Sometimes a blogger’s partner is at home with the children. Some bloggers have permanent jobs they can return to after taking childcare leave, whereas others are on

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<sup>3</sup> Finnish law has provided home care allowance for the care of children under three years of age since 1985. In 2013, the proportion of children aged nine to 24 months taken care of at home and supported by the home care allowance was 49 % (Salmi et al., 2015). Home care allowance, though also available for men, has for its whole existence been used almost entirely by women, especially women in precarious labour-market positions (Anttonen, 2003; Salmi et al., 2015). Subsidised at-home mothering (and also at-home grand-mothering) until the child is three years old differentiates Finland from other European countries (Anttonen, 2003). It is, however, important to note that home care allowance is not tied to the mother’s labour-market position, and thus it is possible to combine part-time or freelance work with receiving home care subsidy.

childcare leave because there either is no job to which they can return, or they do not want to continue in that job and are looking for other options. Some have already made blogging a part of their 'entrepreneurial lifestyle', in which *lifestyle* and *work* have become inseparable. Indeed, a recurring theme both in the mom blogosphere and in the interviews I have conducted with bloggers is a need to find alternatives to 'life organised by paid employment' through different arrangements of micro-entrepreneurship or freelancer work. This search for alternatives is motivated by the hope that these arrangements will provide a chance to live a more fulfilling life, both professionally and personally (Rokkonen, 2015). Similar to other forms of women's digital micro-entrepreneurship (Luckman, 2015), mom blogging can thus be seen to happen at a crossroads, where the concrete realities of precarity and austerity that make digital micro-entrepreneurship or freelancing a viable option for many (highly educated) women, come together with the aspirations and hopes of escaping paid employment and living an alternative way of life.

It is my intention here to begin to unwrap the 'new normals' of this alternative life as it is made possible through practices of blogging. I will do so by thinking through the characteristics of blogging as work: what it demands from the bloggers and what kind of occupational identities it brings into being. The analysis builds on both interviews with Finnish mom bloggers<sup>4</sup> and the insight I have gained from following the Finnish 'mom blogosphere' closely for several years. In what follows, I will trace some of the complexities and contradictions that mom bloggers encounter in this emerging field of work, and the ways in which they negotiate these complexities as they construct their lives and occupational identities around and through the practices of blogging.

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<sup>4</sup> I conducted these eight interviews in 2015 and 2016 as a part of a still ongoing research project. They were semi-structured and each lasted approximately an hour. The interviewees were bloggers who themselves viewed blogging as work and who had received some monetary compensation for their blog. The quotations from interviews were translated from Finnish to English by me.

## Being Professional

Most of the bloggers that I interviewed spend several hours a day writing blog posts, responding to comments, managing the discussion in the comments section and doing other blog-related work, such as Google optimisation, or photo editing, or negotiating commercial campaigns. Writing a blog post usually takes a couple of hours, and the editing and optimising of posts is also time-consuming. Many of the bloggers answer comments throughout the day, often via their mobile phone. Many have Instagram and Snapchat accounts that they update regularly, sometimes several times a day. Some of the interviewees describe being unable to ‘block’ thoughts related to blogging, and so their ‘editorial mind’ constantly surveils the everyday happenings and notices which ones would make great posts. Blogging, then, is not something that is done only in that specific two-hour time slot when children are sleeping; rather, it is something that does demand undisturbed attention for a certain while, but also, as is typical for women’s home working (Luckman, 2015; Taylor, 2015), leaks into the everyday and demands almost-constant digital presence as well as continual reflecting and planning.

The bloggers usually have a ‘post calendar’ or plan made weeks ahead with sketches and ideas of possible blog posts, which makes it easier to do a post if there is little time. Blogging, then, is not necessarily—though it can be—spontaneous or tied to accounts of day-to-day life in the way a journal or an online diary would be. The possibilities for timing posts on the publishing platforms means that posts are not always published straight after they are written. A week’s worth of blog posts might be written in one day and then timed to be published in the following days or at the most optimal moment for a certain post. The bloggers whom I interviewed had expectations for themselves about how often they should publish a post (e.g. six or seven times a week), and when travelling they might also time posts to appear, so as not to ‘abandon’ the blog for a long time. This temporality, which is very much scheduled and consciously managed, means that the bloggers are keenly aware of the need to keep producing content and not to wait for inspiration, as well as of the need to stay online and alert in between publishing posts. Blogging thus implies that ‘networked

life writing' needs to follow a strict, time-bound production schedule. It is also clear that the life that is written about is not 'separate' from practices of blogging, but that these practices become an unremarkable part of everyday life, a form of work that is also life. Everyday happenings are turned into blog posts, and blog posts are written and managed as part of the everyday. The blog, then, can be simultaneously a place for support and self-expression and 'a room of one's own', and a tiring, everyday duty that also needs to be done when it doesn't feel great.

[...] <sup>5</sup> it's my most loved, my most wonderful of all jobs, it's my own place that I have created myself, and I can do what I, I can do everything my own way. But then, still sometimes it just feels like work, you have to write them, probably my background as a journalist helps there, if I think of today for example, today I will write at night when the children have gone to sleep. I might be really tired, and I would rather do something else. I have that kind of feeling, the nights have not been so good lately. But then I sit down by the computer and I know what I will write about because of course I have my plan for posts, for a week ahead, weeks ahead, there's room for adjustment of course but I have a tentative plan. And then you sit down and you write.

The bloggers, then, are often managing their writing in a highly organised way. They think of their blogs not only in terms of self-expression or creativity, but also in terms of publishing schedules and site views.<sup>6</sup> This is telling of professionalised blogging, which is oriented

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<sup>5</sup> Transcription style: ... indicates words have been omitted in a sentence, often just the repetition or a word or two; [...] indicates a sentence or an aside has been omitted; [words in brackets] are inserted to clarify meaning.

<sup>6</sup> In some of the interviews, the bloggers noted that they were not really doing as well as they could—for instance, they could be posting more often or putting more hours towards the blog if they just had the time. This feeling of inadequacy was nothing dramatic, but rather, an everyday experience (Purokuru & Paakkari 2015), accepted as part of the job. Although I cannot here reflect properly on this, it is worth mentioning as an

towards calculable 'output' that can be used to manage the work flow, but also exchanged for money through commercial cooperation. Digital media technologies allow for the gathering of exact data for different aspects of blogging, such as the number of unique visitors, site views, and shares in social media in any given time. Although the networks of sociality created in blogging can be seen as examples of how the digital economy privileges affective relationships and produces processes rather than finished products (Banet-Weiser, 2012, pp. 71–72), it is important to recognise that these processes, rather than being beyond measure or non-quantifiable, are actually organised and exchanged in a numerical form. The bloggers and blogging sites or agencies offer to commercial agents very precise calculable and comparable information of who has viewed a certain campaign post or clicked a certain link, and when. All of the bloggers I interviewed could instantly give me a statistic that represents the popularity of their blog.

## **Being Ordinary**

The idea of mom blogging as a form of community and peer support as well as a form of 'life writing' implies that the bloggers need to appear as 'one of us' and not as someone speaking from a high ground or someone who appears inauthentic. The bloggers, then, cannot be professionals in a way that would make them distinct from their readers. Indeed, some of the bloggers that I interviewed explicitly describe themselves or their blogs as 'ordinary' compared to other, 'glossy' lifestyle blogs. Whereas clearly the commercially inclined mom blogs with their displays of design clothes and eco-friendly lifestyles can be viewed as a form of middle-class femininity (cf. Taylor, 2016), for the bloggers themselves and for their readers this femininity can be characterised as ordinariness. The value of the blog and the 'personal brands' that the bloggers are building is based on being ordinary, as in being somebody the readers of the blogs can relate to. This kind of ordinariness, even if shaped by

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everyday, unnoticeable part of the type of professionalism in which success is measured by numbers, as it is in blogging.

the relatively affluent lifestyles of highly educated women, nevertheless also serves to challenge certain traditional or hegemonic ideals of femininity, motherhood, and home making that might be fortified in other types of lifestyle blogs or other media targeted at women:

It's authentic and ordinary. Often, many of my readers have told me that they love it that I am so ordinary, [they tell me that] even if you do really cool stuff, which I don't think I even do, I live a really ordinary everyday macaroni casserole life, still, that you are not like that, like really fancy, well really I am not, I don't have time to do make up, I would rather use that half an hour writing a book, life is about choices and I love that I can show these choices through my blog.

Some of the bloggers have managed to combine ordinariness and authenticity with being a professional writer. They write very openly in their blogs about how blogging as a form of work makes it possible for them to live the kind of life they are living. Many are also quite open about the commercial relationships that they have and aim to make the logic of these forms of cooperation clear for the readers. This openness in relation to which content is commercial and what exactly 'commercial' means is a topic of constant discussion in blogs and occasionally also in other media.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the general increase of commercial content in the blogosphere has prompted negative reactions from the readers of the blogs, and in response the bloggers often strive to make the point that the commercial aspects of blogging are necessary for them to be able to keep blogging as much as they do. The message is that blogging is time-consuming and, in order to be able to devote so much time to it, it is necessary to gain something from it financially. These recurring issues around

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<sup>7</sup> Recently a complaint was made to the Council of Ethics in Advertising concerning a marketing campaign involving several lifestyle and mom blogs in Finland.



commercial content contribute to the ways in which 'blogging for living' is not disguised but more or less openly discussed in the blogs.

On some occasions, the peer support that usually revolves around mothering is extended as the bloggers also become inspirational examples of a certain lifestyle in which parenting is combined with micro-entrepreneurship. One could even claim that entrepreneurship as a lifestyle or as an identity has become a part of the 'personal brands' of several mom bloggers. This is evident, for instance, in the case of two mom bloggers, Satu Rämö and Hanne Valtari (2017), who have together written a book in Finnish, called *Doing a dream job*. The book is, according to the promotion material, 'an inspiring peer support guide for all those who want to love their work' in which the bloggers give readers advice on how to find alternatives to paid employment and transform their passions into a form of entrepreneurship or freelance work. In this sense, the blogs can be seen as a place in which the 'alternative life' outside day-to-day paid employment is not only made possible but also negotiated, normalised, and championed—even idealised. The atmosphere of the mom blogs, however, and in contrast to, for instance, the digital craft economy discussed by Luckman (2015), also seems to provide a space for admitting to have failed, not only in terms of personal life and parenting, but also entrepreneurship. Thus, some of the bloggers, although not many, have written also about their failures or disappointments in micro-entrepreneurship, and about the mental and emotional cost of working at night and taking care of children during the day.

On display, however, are not only aspects of peer support but also tensions relating to the need to stay ordinary and relatable. One of the bloggers I interviewed described how she does not foreground her professional experience in the blog because she is still living on a home care allowance and the blog needs to be from the perspective of an at-home mother. Of beginning her blog, she said, 'I could have asked one of my advertising agency friends to design me [a banner] but it wasn't what I wanted, what I wanted was for it to be ordinary'. Although she was rather ambitious from the beginning and wanted the blog to become popular, she figured that what would make her blog and her 'personal brand' succeed was

not professional design but rather what appears to be the opposite, being ordinary. In this sense, even if mom blogging as a form of ‘mumpreneurship’<sup>8</sup> (Ekinsmyth, 2014; 2011) combines mothering and entrepreneurship and blurs the division between everyday mothering and being a professional, the division is not completely dissolved but continues to ‘haunt’ the blogging professionals as they negotiate their occupational identities and personal brands.

Ordinariness, I suggest, defines the mom blogs in two ways. Firstly, ordinariness is made of stories of everyday ‘macaroni casserole’ life—a life that is not ‘glossy’ or ‘fancy’ and in which the house is not always clean and the children are not always happy. This is what several researchers have recognised as the radical potential of mom blogging, such everyday accounts serve to challenge and rebel against hegemonic ideals of motherhood and femininity (Lopez, 2009; Petersen, 2015). Secondly, ordinariness is out-of-focus photographs and not-so-fancy site designs, and also, I would suggest, posting photos of yourself in which you do not look your best. In this way, ordinariness is related to not taking yourself too seriously and not caring about appearances. What is important, however, is that even if the aesthetics of the blogs are sometimes ‘played down’ and the writer’s take on herself and her mothering is ironic, the writing, for instance using vivid language and telling capturing stories, is never played down. Instead, it is what the bloggers take pride in and cherish. It is then almost as if the surface of the blog can be non-professional and ordinary if the heart, or the writing, is professional and extraordinary.

Many of the bloggers, however, noted in the interviews that the aesthetics and especially the photographs published in blogs have gained a much heavier meaning in recent years, following the professionalisation and monetisation of the blogosphere. It thus seems that

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<sup>8</sup> Like ‘mommy blogging’, ‘mumpreneur’ is a contested concept (Ekinsmyth, 2014). In discussing the politics of using this concept, Carol Ekinsmyth highlights the need to investigate ‘mumpreneurship’ in terms of the meanings that individuals attach to their identities as well as to their everyday lived experience, which I find critical also in relation to mom bloggers.

there may be a current shift in emphasis away from out-of-focus photos and capturing accounts of ordinary mothers, towards a more polished and professional look and feel. The professionalisation of blogging, then, means that the tension between ordinariness and 'glossy' professionalism intensifies.

## **Being Close**

There is of course variety in the proximity of blogs to authentic or 'ordinary' life writing, and it is not something that all the bloggers would even aim for—though it is quite clear, as one of the interviewees noted, that the readers would always like to hear more about the most personal, intimate things. To capture readers, the blogger thus needs to create a sense of closeness and intimacy with them (Lopez, 2009, p. 734; Morrison, 2014). The blog, as another interviewee says, is based on a 'personal relation' between the blogger and her readers: 'It is that certain person there who writes the blog about whom people are interested in'. The mom blog as a genre thus demands that the entrepreneur is personally involved and prepared to publicly share some intimate or self-revelatory details of one's life, that one is willing to be 'that certain person there'. In the context of monetised and professionalised blogging, this display of subjectivity in the blogs is an intrinsic part of work, as it is through the sharing of intimate details and through revealing the self that networks of sociality are built and maintained. In this sense, professionalised blogging can be characterised as implying practices of self-branding; the marketisation of the self through strategies of emotional engagement and authenticity (Banet-Weiser, 2012, pp. 71–72). Indeed, the bloggers that I interviewed occasionally refer to building or maintaining their 'personal brands'.

The subjectivity that is displayed in a blog and the closeness or intimacy that is created with the readers might rely on assumed authenticity, but they are of course not simply 'authentic', if that is taken to mean access to 'essence' or 'truth' of the subject (Smith and Watson, 2013, p. 75). Rather, they are a complex combination of authenticity and performance, at the same time both real and not-real:

Our family, is a real family, and what you see in the blog is a real family but then again, in the blog, it's somehow a blog family. How could I say this? The stories that I choose to tell, they tell about these blog characters, who live in that blog, even if they are real persons and our life and they are very truthful and consistent with us, the real persons. But still, I think that in the blog there are ... caricatures of us. [...] The characters are somehow, selected. A little bit like [...] in reality television, you build a person, by choosing material, a person who is that person but isn't, so it's like that, in our blog.

Many of the bloggers that I interviewed described themselves as persons who were open or upfront about their lives before they started blogging, and thus they felt that blogging was not such a big step towards 'public display of subjectivity' from what they had already been doing, for instance in Facebook, even if the audience was now much bigger. But for them it was also clear, as described in the quote above, that a blog self or a blog family are a consciously selected version of a life that is much richer and more complex than what is shown in the blog. In this sense, the display of subjectivity in mom blogging could be characterised as the production of staged or calculated authenticity (Pooley, 2011, cited in Smith and Watson, 2013, p. 75).

Mom blogging is a genre in which community is a built-in feature (Petersen, 2015). Blogs invite their readers to feel close to the bloggers and to relate to their lives in many ways. The combination of a sense of community and intimacy with staged authenticity can be hard to grasp for the readers. This becomes visible in the comments that the bloggers sometimes receive in which the readers make far-reaching assumptions of their family life based on what they have told in the blog. There are, for example, discussions in which the blogger tries to make explicit that she has not told everything in the blog and that writing is a practice of choosing and some aspects of life are always left outside the blogosphere. The readers, though, are often nevertheless 'playing by the rules' of assumed intimacy and authenticity, and thus they can hang on to something that was said in the blog and hold the

blogger responsible for it. The invitation to closeness and the related complexities of ordinariness and authenticity might thus prompt the readers to be suspicious (Smith and Watson, 2013, p. 75) and to monitor the consistency of the self that is displayed or narrated in the blog:

People think they know you inside out. They often talk about, I get these absurd messages sometimes, 'Hey six years ago you wrote that you hate yellow, so how come you now have a yellow shirt, did you lie to us back then?'

An important part of blogging, then, is the management of the comment section as a way of maintaining a good, close relationship with the blog's readers. Most of the bloggers I interviewed celebrated comments from readers as one of the most rewarding aspects of blogging, because of the direct feedback they got for their writing, and many also felt that the comments provide genuine support and exchange of thought, for instance in terms of parenting. Many of them, however, also talked about how time-consuming certain kinds of comments can be. Blogs often attract not only a supportive community, but also malicious comments and remarks, mostly from anonymous readers. The blog can thus be 'one's own place', a room of one's own, but it is not necessarily a safe space. Rather, it is an interface through which maliciousness, too, can leak into the intimate sphere (cf. Jokinen 2009).

The attitude of the bloggers towards negative comments varies. One of the interviewees said that she just 'fetches the popcorn' when the bad comments start coming in, and feels happy that she gets more site views and so the statistics of her blog look better. More comments and more site views mean better monetising opportunities, which is of course also an important aspect in any comment section management. Several bloggers, however, talked about how crushing the bad comments can feel, especially if they concern the blogger as a mother, or her children. The bloggers who mentioned this aspect of blogging in the interviews also described some coping strategies, such as not responding to comments straight away but giving oneself time to calm down, or moderating the readers' comments before they are published.

The bloggers also described how, despite how bad they might feel, they nevertheless need to ‘take care of the situation’ in the comment section in a thoughtful and calm manner. They feel they should keep their own emotions in check and not, for example, answer mean comments in a mean way, but rather, try to restore the ‘good spirit’ in the blog. In managing both their own as well as the readers’ emotional reactions they are thus performing emotional labour, as theorised by Arlie Hochschild (1983)<sup>9</sup>. In this way, blogging as a form of work bears a resemblance to many other forms of women’s work, in which emotional management and ‘taking care of situations’ is an intrinsic but seldom acknowledged part of the work. I would suggest, however, that in the case of mom blogs, this emotional labour has a particular weight to it, as the comments that need to be managed also ‘hit close’ (or ‘below the belt’ as one of the bloggers put it), as they relate directly to the personality and family life of the blogger. In this case, then, emotional labour needs to be performed and professionalism maintained in a context of self-revelation, assumed intimacy, and closeness.

## **Being a Mother**

The bloggers are constantly reflecting on what they reveal in the blog, particularly about their children. Although the ethics of blogging about children have been discussed both academically (Rogers and Green, 2015) as well as in the blogosphere, it is the practical, day-to-day decisions that the bloggers need to make that demand their attention, rather than general ethical ruminations. There might be clear boundaries around, for instance, posting photographs of children (‘the kind of photos I will never put to my blog’), but most often the boundaries are a question of ‘gut feeling’ that might also change as the blog grows or the blogger becomes more experienced. A photo that once seemed suitable, or a story that once

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<sup>9</sup> Hochschild (1983) uses the term ‘emotional labour’ to refer to emotion management that has exchange value. In the case of blogging, it could be said that emotional labour has both use value and exchange value, as it is aimed to maintain a supportive and good community *but* in the context of monetisation and micro-entrepreneurship.

felt like it should be in the blog, can now feel like it reveals too much. Mostly the bloggers that I interviewed pondered on how to write about and photograph children, and they rarely had any definitive answers. Writing about being a mother implies that the children are somehow present in the text, as one of the interviewees noted:

But ok for instance if we say that I had a really hard first year with the baby, well of course everyone knows then, ok, why that was, so in a way I have to, I sometimes think really hard about how somehow, people do not maybe realise how you kind of try to hide it when it is in a way really clear, about whom you are talking about when you say the first year was really hard, but [...] I do not have photos of them and somehow trying to talk in a way that 'a kid' or somehow make it into a general category of something, of course everyone realises [that you are talking about your own children].

Rather than have any clear principles, the interviewees then came across with the feeling that there cannot be perfect solutions, and thus the constant boundary work as well as occasional bad conscience or at least a fleeting moment of doubt seem just to be an inevitable part of the work of blogging. Furthermore, the decisions that are made about children's appearance in the blog are not only about blogging, but also about parenting, and thus the occupational identity of a blogger becomes inextricably intertwined with that of mother, and the boundary work that is done bears a sense of responsibility and guilt that is tied directly to mothering.

## **Alternative Lives?**

In this chapter, I have sketched a tentative map of the complexities and contradictions that are an intrinsic part of practices of mom blogging and of bloggers' occupational identities. The characteristics of work outlined above, such as the importance of emotional labour and public displays of subjectivity, as well as the ambivalence around professionalism, can also be recognised in other feminised occupations, but I suggest that mom blogging as an emerging form of work marks the *intensification* of such characteristics. Furthermore, as an

emerging form of work, not only do aspects of intimate life (e.g., practices of mothering and relationship building) merge with the work of blogging, thus rendering the boundaries of work and life porous or even dissolved into each other (Jokinen, 2009; Jokinen et al., 2015), but also, these aspects of life are rendered highly organised and calculable, and monetised. In professional blogging, negotiating such complexities becomes an everyday part of living, working, and parenting. The ‘new normal’ that emerges here is thus one in which the monetisation of everyday life, the construction of public displays of subjectivity, and the ways in which parenting is made into work are not remarkable happenings or notable exceptions. Rather, they are just part of life that has come to organise itself around and through newly emerged practices of micro-entrepreneurship and the ‘old normal’ of women being primary carers for and of young children.

The alternative lives that emerge in this new normal are discussed, also by the bloggers themselves, as resonating with the ideals of ‘downshifting’ or escaping the demands of a hectic and precarious working life (Rokkonen, 2015). Arrangements of digital micro-entrepreneurship can often provide a more autonomous or meaningful alternative to lives organised by paid employment, especially if that paid employment is precarious, and this is precisely the experience of some of the bloggers I interviewed. It does seem, however, if one looks at the complexities that I have outlined, that these alternative lives are not ‘shifted down’ in any unambiguous sense. Instead, one might characterise them as *intensive lives*—full of negotiation, emotional as well as practical management, and boundary work, together with everyday moments of exhaustion, failures, rewards, and joy.

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