



Resilience and vulnerability: Emotional and affective labour in mom blogging

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Abstract

This article investigates the empirical case of commercial mom blogging as indicative of the particular ways in which the digital economy invites and exploits women's affective and emotional labour. Based on Finnish mom bloggers' interviews, the article explores the ways in which emotional labour is needed to tackle the mean and degrading comments that most bloggers have to come to terms with, and the ways in which their affective involvement is an inseparable part of their work as mom bloggers. Looking at vulnerability, control and emotional resilience as sites of emotional and affective labour in blogging, the article shows how gendered and embodied burdens are carried on to the digital realm, and how new vulnerabilities and forms of affective labour are formed and normalized.

Keywords

Affective labour, blogging, digital economy, digital labour, emotional labour, mom blogging, resilience, vulnerability

Introduction

What can be described as 'the staggering ascent of digital and social media over the last decade' (Duffy and Schwartz, 2018: 2973) has led to an emergence of new forms of marketing and promotion in the digital sphere. Among these new forms, 'influencer marketing' has become a buzzword that describes the status of bloggers, YouTubers, Instagrammers and other content producers who have now become sought-after marketers. A prominent group within these influencers consists of mom bloggers: mothers who write blogs about their everyday lives.

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Mom blogging originally emerged as an important form of communication and emotional support for mothers of young children (Petersen, 2015: 24) and this is still one of the most central aspects of mom blogs. The commercialization of the ‘mamasphere’ and the rise of influencer marketing, however, has meant that mom blogging can now be considered, not merely a hobby, but also a form of entrepreneurial or freelancer work operating within the digital economy. While in the United States, for instance, commercialized mom blogging has already been established and readily recognizable for some time, in Finland, where my research is situated, the commercialization of the blogosphere is a more recent event and still ongoing. Following this development, mom blogging has surfaced as a prospect or potentiality that many new mothers find alluring: a form of work that seems to allow combining devoted or intensive practices of mothering to equally devoted practices of working.

The allure of mom blogging as a form of work becomes understandable in the context of the Finnish labour market that is increasingly precarious especially for mothers of young children (Julkunen, 2010: 128, 130). Changes in media industries have rendered the terms of media employment or freelancer work more and more precarious (Deuze, 2009: 153): smaller paychecks and less demand for freelancers’ labour, as one of my interviewees put it (Raisa). For those seeking to make a living within the media or creative sector, especially mothers of young children, the opportunities have thus diminished. In addition to these very concrete conditions, it is also worth considering a wider development of intensification that concerns both the sphere of parenting and the sphere of work in general (Jokinen, 2005: 104).¹

Recent studies in parenting cultures have pointed not only to the continuing influence of various ideologies that advocate time-consuming and devoted practices of mothering, such as attachment parenting (Faircloth, 2014) or the importance given to breast-feeding (Faircloth, 2014; Jung, 2015), but also to the importance of informed decision-making that is now demanded from parents (Lee, 2014). While previously it has been the experts who have been considered responsible for giving advice and information to parents, it is now increasingly considered one’s own responsibility to become as informed as possible about even the minor decisions that involve small children. This connects to a determinism that stresses the first few years of a human’s life as the most important and determining period (Faircloth, 2014; Furedi, 2014: 26). The intensification of parenting is then not only a question of subscribing to certain ideologies of parenting or mothering (although many new mothers do), but also a question of increased responsibility in terms of the choices one makes as a parent and the following imperative to gather as much knowledge as possible. While practices of knowledge-intensive parenting occasionally involve fathers too, it is still mainly mothers who are responsible both for caring for small children and for making the right decisions (Hays, 1996). The way in which parenting decisions and responsibilities remain highly gendered is visible, for instance, in the so-called mommy wars discourse (Hays, 1996; Faircloth, 2014: 28; Wilson and Yochim, 2017: 11).

While mothering has become increasingly intensive and time-consuming, a similar development of intensification has taken place in working life. As empirical research has shown, jobs in general nowadays demand more from workers than they have in the past (Dejours et al., 2018: 46). Work, then, now requires more effort, it has a higher pace,

deadlines are tighter, and there is often less autonomy than before, which increases the stressfulness of work (Dejours et al., 2018). Another aspect that plays into the intensification of work is the increasing emphasis on devotion to work: workers are selected and evaluated not merely based on their skills but rather based on their attitudes, motivation and behaviour (Weeks, 2011: 70–71). In this way, overwork is not only a requirement presented by the employer, but it can also become an indication of commitment, a sign of worker's capacities (Weeks, 2011).

While the rising intensification of work is recognizable as a general trend, it is especially affecting jobs in the public sector, and importantly, jobs done by women (Dejours et al., 2018: 46). There is thus a gendered aspect to the intensification of work, as there is a gendered aspect to the intensification of parenting.

Against this background of simultaneous intensification, it becomes possible to understand why many mothers are finding it increasingly hard to combine mothering with paid employment. Commercial mom blogging, then, promises to allow working from home with a flexible, autonomous schedule, while also offering the possibility for professional recognition and economic rewards. In this scenario, staying at home with children and being a devoted, 'present' parent can be combined with meaningful work.

While some mom bloggers are seeking to create what they consider as alternative lifestyles as a solution to the near-impossible combination of paid work and parenting, some are in a bleaker situation: mom blogging might be an alternative not only for traditional working life, but also for unemployment. In Finland, taking care of small children at home gives right to a home care allowance of few hundred euros a month. This allowance is generally used by mothers, and it often becomes the choice of especially those women whose possibilities for finding work are limited (Lammi-Taskula and Salmi, 2016). In these situations, blogging might constitute a significant source of income, even if the monetary rewards were relatively small.

Seen in the context of experiences of precarity in the labour market and the simultaneous intensification of both work and parenting, the emergence and increasing allure of mom blogging as a new form of women's work is not surprising. What becomes important, then, is to consider the implications of this emerging field of digital labour, both in terms of how it shapes mothers' everyday lives and in terms of how the digital economy invites as well as exploits gendered work. In this article, it is my aim to begin mapping these implications by focussing on a particular aspect of mom blogging, namely the requirement for emotional and affective involvement and labour.

Emotional and affective labour in the context of women's digital work

Duffy and Schwartz (2018), in their analysis of the field of social media employment, argue that digital labour has an increasingly feminized nature. For them, the feminization of digital labour is manifest in its invisibility, lower pay and marginal status as well as in expectations of flexibility, passion and emotional labour (Duffy and Schwartz, 2018; also Arcy, 2016). While Duffy and Schwartz (2018) concentrate on aspects of employment, there is also labour involved in the field of social media that remains both unpaid

and unrecognized, and which blurs the boundaries between consuming and producing (Duffy, 2017; Terranova, 2000; Kolehmainen and Mäkinen, 2019). In her interrogation of this free labour, Kylie Jarrett (2016) identifies *the Digital Housewife* as a figure that ‘manifests the kinds of immaterial and material practices that are integral to the digital media economy and has the same complex relationship to capital accumulation that feminist theorization has attributed to the unpaid domestic worker’ (p. 17). Jarrett (2016) thus draws comparisons between the unpaid work of housewives and the unpaid work of social media consumers, emphasizing that in both cases the work that is done is both exploited by capital and socially meaningful: it is producing economic value through social, emotional and affective ties, and it also has inalienable social value and meaning (p. 17). This comparison describes well the case of mom bloggers, who through their blogging build and maintain socially valuable connections and affective ties with their readers, while simultaneously these affective and social connections also become profitable and monetized.

The figure of the digital housewife, as introduced by Jarrett, also calls attention precisely to the gender dynamic that Duffy and Schwartz (2018, also Duffy, 2017: 8–9) identify in their analysis. The often-unpaid or underpaid work that profits the digital economy of social media is not only similar to domestic work in terms of value production, but also in terms of a gender division of labour: it is more often than not women’s work. The work that the digital housewife is doing online can then be seen on a continuum with other forms of feminized work that have been characterized by flexibility and lower pay, and that, importantly, have demanded emotional and affective labour.

While the concepts of emotional and affective labour are often used interchangeably or in parallel, they derive from rather different theoretical frameworks. Although in this article, I will employ both concepts, it is worthwhile to recognize distinctions between them.

The concept of emotional labour, introduced by Arlie Hochschild in her now classic study on *The Managed Heart* (Hochschild, 2012 [1983]), refers to forms of labour that require that the worker ‘induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others’ (p. 7). This is labour, then, that requires one to express or display in a sincere fashion feelings and emotions that might be very different from what one is actually feeling. Emotional labour, for Hochschild, is something that takes place in the context of waged employment (she differentiates ‘emotion work’ as the management of emotions that happens in private settings), and most recognizably in service work. This concept, then, has been extremely important for feminist research in showing how the emotional involvement and performances of workers in the service as well as care sector, often women, is actually at the heart of their work, even though it often remains invisible and unrecognized.

The concept of affective labour derives from post-Marxist theorizations of immaterial labour as the paradigmatic mode of labour in the current form of capitalism (Hardt, 1999; Hardt and Negri, 2000; Lazzarato, 2004). Hardt and Negri (2000) describe affective labour as ‘labour in a bodily mode’ that involves human contact and interaction and, crucially, the creation, production and manipulation of affect (p. 292). While Hardt and Negri’s description of affective labour relies on feminist analyses of embodied domestic

and service work, and as such comes close to accounts of emotional labour, their theoretical framework of biopolitical production positions affective labour as producing not only good feelings or proper states of minds in others, but social networks, forms of community and biopower (Hardt, 1999: 96). As Coté and Pybus (2007) note, affective labour is telling of how ‘capital has taken a cultural and subjective turn on the edges of its expanding borders’ (p. 89). What is important in the concept of affective labour, then, is that it allows the recognition of how capital harnesses social relations and affective intensities also outside or beyond the context of waged employment.

Affective labour as a subcategory of immaterial labour has been the object of feminist interrogation and critique (e.g. Bolton, 2009; Federici, 2008; Fortunati, 2007; Jarrett 2016.; Oksala, 2016: 65). Jarrett (2016: 65), in her account of the digital housewife, emphasizes the continuities in the exploitation of gendered immaterial labour; as she notes, the Marxist feminist tradition of theorizing domestic labour, though often bypassed, points to how immaterial and affective processes have always had a central place in capitalism. Contrary to Hardt and Negri’s thesis, then, she claims that affective labour is not a novelty of labour exploitation but rather demonstrates the ‘remarkable continuity of capitalist socioeconomics’ (Jarrett, 2016: 65).

For my own approach to understanding the affective and emotional labour of mom bloggers, I find important to account both for continuities within capitalism and for the ways in which capital in the context of the digital economy finds novel ways of inviting and harnessing forms of sociality and affect through women’s labour. As Coté and Pybus (2007) state in their analysis of MySpace as a space of immaterial labour, capital relations are always social relations, and the networks of social media have enabled ‘an exponential explosion of such economic and social relations’ (p. 95). Central to these relations, they claim, is the production of affect (Coté and Pybus, 2007). If we take seriously the notion that affect is central to digital economies, we have to ask what this centrality of affect – manifest in forms of emotional and affective labour – might mean for those whose lives – both personal and professional – as well as livelihoods are inextricably tied with these economies. In what follows, I will turn to the accounts of mom bloggers to begin to answer this question.

In particular, I will look at the ways in which emotional labour is needed to tackle the mean and degrading comments that most bloggers have to come to terms with, and the ways in which their affective involvement is an inseparable part of their work as mom bloggers. In what follows, I will look at vulnerability, control and emotional resilience as sites of emotional and affective labour in blogging.

Methodology

My research is based on 17 interviews with Finnish mom or family bloggers whose blogs have a commercial or aspiring aspect to them. All the interviewees are mothers of under-age children. They all have done collaboration with commercial agents, but the extent of their monetary rewards from blogging varies. Some still consider blogging as more of a hobby or a source of small extra income, some work as freelancers with blog as one of their main sources of income. Some are entrepreneurs whose business is centred on their blog and social media accounts. To understand the dynamics and affective circuits of the

commercial mamasphere in Finland, I have followed it closely for several years, and have taken part in public or commercial events that relate to blogging.

The bloggers' interviews were semi-structured: the questions followed a predesigned structure, but the interviewees were encouraged to talk about everything they thought important. The themes of the interviews ranged from bloggers' everyday work practices and time schedules to motivations, good and bad experiences, contracts and paychecks as well as to future hopes and expectations. I also specifically asked the interviewees to tell me about the feelings that are involved in or produced by blogging for living. The interviews lasted for approximately an hour.

In contrast to Duffy (2017), I did not detect in my interviewees any desire to promote themselves through my research, though some were clearly used to giving interviews on their work (p. 238). This sense of sincerity has guided my analysis in the sense that I have wanted to take the interviewees' perspectives as cues for my own reading. I have thus sought to be affirmative in my interpretations, while also of course maintaining critical perspective. In analysing the interviews, my attention has been drawn to descriptions of managing one's own and others' emotions, as well as to the ways in which different kinds of affective intensities become part of blogging as a form of work – and thus a profitable part of the digital economy.

In particular, what drew my attention in the interviews were the ways in which the bloggers described online bullying and negative comments as an inevitable part of the affective intensities involved in blogging. When I asked for the negative experiences or feelings related to blogging, most interviewees brought up online bullying, or 'Internet mud' as one the interviewees put it. Some of them had become targets of malicious following, which means that a number of people keep following the blog not because they like what they read but because they find the blogger and her blog so annoying. Others described getting occasional 'mud', for example, when they post on a sensitive topic. In the interviewees, there were a couple of bloggers who said that they did not really receive mean comments or did not mind them. The overwhelming majority, however, recognized the phenomenon and found it taxing.

Having followed the blogosphere for years, I was aware of the amount of negative comments that are targeted at bloggers, and I was thus also prepared to ask the bloggers how they cope with these comments. Nevertheless, going back to the interviews, I have been surprised and taken aback by the ways in which online bullying is described as an unavoidable part of blogging, and the personal consequences of this. What gradually emerged from the accounts of Internet mud through my reading are patterns of vulnerability, control and resilience: becoming vulnerable through blogging, trying to control the mud, and the need for individual emotional resilience.

Internet mud and online bullying are phenomena whose significance can only be thoroughly understood through careful analysis of detailed empirical accounts coming from the digital labourers themselves. It is their experiences and their emotional and affective labour that is at the heart of the digital or 'immaterial' economy. In what follows, I will thus explore the patterns of vulnerability, control and resilience as accounted for by the bloggers. My aim is to detail how the affective labour involved in blogging not only intensifies and feeds into existing forms of gendered exploitation, but also brings into being new forms of vulnerability and precarity.

Internet mud as a site of emotional and affective labour

Vulnerability

Mom blogging as a genre presumes a certain kind of intimacy and the sharing of details of one's family life. Even though the bloggers are not sharing the whole of their life but rather, curated and carefully chosen fragments of life, what attracts audience to blogs is precisely the idea of getting a glimpse of someone's personal life and feelings, and having a sense of knowing the blogger as one might know a friend. This presumed intimacy, even if partly illusory, is precisely the affective 'glue' that builds the virtual networks and connections that allow blogging to become a meaningful way of connecting to the world – and that can then be monetized in commercial blogging. Intimacy as a demand and necessity of blogging, however, is not without unintended consequences. Sharing detailed accounts of one's personal life, social relations and family members as well as emotional hardships means that all this information is also at hand for those who wish to use it for malign ends. This includes the commentators who want to 'hit below the belt' as one of the bloggers put it. The most intimate is often also the most hurtful, and intimacy and openness thus feed into vulnerability.

The vulnerability that is brought to light due to online bullying is mostly described in the interviews as affective or emotional, as leading to feelings of intense anxiety, agitation and shame. Here, Heli² describes how she felt when she received a lot of negative feedback following a post that she thought was misunderstood:

One weekend, I keep coming back to this, [small laugh] shit storm post, but it gave me huge anxiety, so much so that I couldn't sleep at night because it was so distressing that there were some . . . It was this post [. . .] and there were over 20 000 people visiting the post and I felt that 98 percent missed the whole point and somehow they just thought that I was a mean person [. . .]. I had a kind of fear that I could not go to any [. . .] anymore because many people sent me these comments via email [. . .]. (Heli)

The bloggers often have their own online communities or blogging friends from whom they might seek support in the event of 'shit storms'. In some cases, the community of blog followers might defend the blogger in the comment section. Most often, however, it remains the individual's responsibility to come to terms with bullying and to manage the 'huge anxiety' and other feelings that follow.

Mean or degrading comments regarding one's family and children are often mentioned as the worst kind of bullying and a certain cause of anxiety. Laura Friman, a journalist and one-time mom blogger, describes this kind of bullying in a magazine article. Her post on children's clothing created a storm in the comment section:

The most provocative part of the post was a picture of my toddler in his pink-striped leggings. A big crowd of readers wanted to tell me that my boy child looked like a girl – and that he looked awful. Anonymous commentators mocked every possible thing: my child's cherry-patterned booties, his fringe, my parenting philosophy. [. . .] I read offending comments with my heart beating and cheek muscles twitching. (Friman, 2019)

Similarly, when I asked Ronja if there was something about blogging that scares her or makes her worry, she talked about situations in which someone scolds her motherhood or her ways of being a mother:

Once I got this email which said that I am precisely the kind of mother that makes other mothers kill their children. That I have the kind of opinions that make other mothers feel guilty and [my opinions] cause familicides. It was at that time when there were some [familicides in Finland] so for a long time I felt that I cannot say anything, even with friends. I mean the kind of [comments] that go over the top I might fear the comments that I cannot handle somehow and then it is too much for me. (Ronja)

The vulnerability attached to mean and degrading comments concerning children relates of course to the wish to protect one's child, and the sense that one has failed in this task. Further on, motherhood is of course often the source of many kind of insecurities which are only intensified due to the intensification of the parenting culture. The comments targeting one's children or one's fitness as a mother thus take advantage of this affective load or vulnerability that is specific to being a mother.

Not everyone, however, feels equally vulnerable. Some of the interviewees mention their own sense of certainty in regard to their choices in life and choices as a mother as one of the reasons why they feel the mean comments do not get 'under their skin'. However, some mention personal insecurities and are worried of how they will survive the bad comments without consequences for their mental well-being. In particular, past experiences of being the target of bullying at school and having suffered from eating disorders are mentioned as reasons for a heightened sense of vulnerability for online bullying. One can thus detect continuities in the ways in which this kind of emotional and embodied experiences translate or take new shapes in the online context. Presumptions of intimacy in commercial blogging mean that even those who have an added sense of insecurity in terms of their embodiment, their personal life and family life feel pressured to make themselves available for potential bullying. Blogging truly is 'labour in a bodily mode' also in this sense.

Further on, the pressure to make oneself available for bullying is tied to the commercial aspirations of the bloggers. Part of what the bloggers are selling is thus their vulnerability, the opportunity for the followers to harass them, even though this is certainly not something that the digital labourers would necessarily be aware of from the start. Laura Friman, the journalist cited above, states this explicitly in her recent Instagram post that discusses the monetary rewards for social media work:

The company [paying for advertising work] therefore pays also for the enormous amount of personalized crap that always follows when one is doing public work, crap that me, you and everyone else doing this work has to read, experience and receive. It is mentally consuming as hell. (Friman, 3 March 2020, cited with permission)

It should also be noted that not all vulnerability that follows from blogging is 'merely' emotional or affective. Online bullying takes advantage of tactics of intimidation that are often used against women (Sobieraj, 2018). Some of the interviewees describe, for instance, being stalked or fearing stalkers. Comments that let one know that the blogger

or their child have been seen on street or elsewhere create a sense of not being safe. Yet another way to induce fear is to threaten to involve child welfare services in response to bloggers' perceived unfitness as a mother:

That basic family blogger's nightmare, that a reader gets in their head to notify the child welfare inspector, and then social services will call that they will visit us. Well, welcome, but it isn't nice. And these [visits] always leave a record even if everything is ok. Well that is maybe one [fear]. I have received only threats but there has never been [actual notification]. (Ronja)

The insecurities, hurts and dangers of the mamasphere are thus not contained in the digital realm. On the contrary, they are tied to the personal histories and family situations of the bloggers, and they continue to leak into the everyday, making everyday life more precarious.

Control

There are many ways in which online bullying or Internet mud is at its core uncontrollable: even if one deletes certain comments from one's blog, these comments can appear later in a different forum. Recently, I have followed events in which discussion threads containing malicious discussion on certain bloggers have been taken down from a forum (apparently from the request of the bloggers themselves), but have then reappeared in another forum where such removal is much harder to achieve. This logic of uncontrollability that is typical to the digital realm, however, does not mean that the bloggers would not attempt to control online bullying. On the contrary, the work of managing and controlling Internet mud is described in nearly every interview, and it often takes the form of emotional and affective control.

As a response to mean comments and bullying, mom bloggers very rarely show their anger or hurt directly. Instead, the interviewees described, for instance, how they try to keep themselves calm and respond in a matter-of-fact fashion. Some mentioned that it is good to sleep over a night before answering, as a way to calm oneself down. One of the bloggers explained the rationale behind this emotional control as follows:

But then in a way I believe that it's about how you answer these [negative] comments. If you, go mega crazy and do a post about how your commentators are this and that and if you give as good as you get then no wonder [laughs] it is obvious that they will attack you. (Sanna)

Controlling the show of one's emotions is thus perceived as a way to control the atmosphere and the actions of others in the comments section. Duffy and Schwartz (2018) similarly note how social media workers are expected to control their emotions and keep emotional distance in the face of harassment and vitriol that they may face in their work (p. 2981). This importance placed on controlling how one displays one's emotions online can clearly be seen as an example of the kind of emotional labour that is described by Hochschild. In general, mom bloggers always strive to keep up a good, pleasant atmosphere in their blog and thus they act quite alike the flight attendants studied by Hochschild (2012 [1983]) whose smiles work to 'orchestrate the mood for passengers' (p. 20), though in this case, the smiles are digital. The responsibility to 'be considerate' also towards those

who are behaving badly thus reflects this generalized responsibility towards not only managing one's own feelings but orchestrating the general mood in the digital sphere.

As explained by Hochschild (2012 [1983]), the emotional labour of orchestrating general moods and being responsible for others' feelings ties into structures of gender: doing the emotional work of caring for the well-being of others and being 'nice' and non-threatening is something that has been and continues to be expected especially from women and mothers. Furthermore, 'the absence of a social shield' (Hochschild, 2012 [1983]) against others' aggressions follows the absence of social status. It is thus not surprising that blogging mothers become targets of mud and are expected to manage their feelings when facing aggression.

The work of managing and orchestrating the show of one's emotions was described by many of the interviewees. Eeva, for example, emphasized that it was not necessarily Internet mud in itself that was most taxing for her, but rather the process of managing the comment section:

The hardest part, absolutely, it's internet mud, when it can be thrown around, it is, and there, specifically, dealing with that mud in public. It's, well, if you press delete then someone in *vauva.fi* [another discussion forum] is yelling that now she's deleting comments. [. . .] And those who do it, they do it precisely because they want to provoke, and they want to, shake that person, and then they do it. (Eeva)

The blog followers who 'want to provoke' nevertheless often seem to consider themselves entitled to nice or kind responses from the blogger. If the bloggers do not answer calmly, they might be accused of being unprofessional. Eeva who is cited above describes in the interview how she feels that 'everybody is watching' and following to see how she answers the negative comments that keep on coming. Blogs may come close to reality television in that 'intimate struggles are made sensational', and women's emotional or affective labour becomes a spectacle that is followed closely by an audience (Skeggs, 2010: 47). In this sense, this labour is not solely invisible, even if it goes unnoticed in society at large as argued by Duffy and Schwartz (2018). In the mamasphere, the emotional and affective labour of the blogger can become entertainment, a spectacle that is part of the affective circuit that draws readers to the blog.

Another form of emotional labour regarding Internet mud is the work of trying to anticipate potential bullying or negative reactions before publishing posts on the blog. Sarah Sobieraj (2018), discussing women's visibility in digital publics, describes how women learn to navigate digital publics as they would navigate other public places, avoiding high-risk areas that would make them vulnerable for attacks. Similarly, the mom bloggers make mental maps of risks to avoid becoming targets. Julia Thurén, a family blogger, describes this in her blog post as constant explaining and disclaiming while writing, trying to achieve what she names as a certain kind of 'discharge from liability' (Thurén, 2019). One of the interviewees, Varpu, similarly describes thinking very carefully about the ways in which her posts might attract negative comments and trying to modify them to avoid upsetting anyone. Her aim is to present things so that 'they could not be used against me'. This, however, is very difficult, since the topics concerning parenting, mothering or small children are so loaded both ideologically and

affectively. The posts that Varpu thought would be risky in terms of online bullying concerned what would appear to be very small everyday decisions (for instance, whether to use certain cosmetics on a child). Within the current parenting culture, however, even minor decisions concerning children can cause huge disputes (Lehto, 2019: 7), and thus, it is difficult to try to avoid becoming the target of mud.

Kathi Weeks (2011) notes how the ideal of professionalism now requires not only deep devotion to work, but also emotional or affective detachment (pp. 74–75). To be professional, then, requires that one does not take things personally but keeps affective distance. The way in which mom bloggers strive to manage online bullying can then be seen to follow this ideal of professionalism and affective distance. As one of the interviewees said, she cannot lose her temper at workplace, and ‘in the same way here I have to keep a professional attitude’ (Sanna). Similarly, following the discussions in the mamasphere, I have noted that the blog followers often expect that bloggers ‘act professional’ in controlling their emotions. Here gendered expectations of deference (Hochschild, 2012 [1983]) feed into the expectations of professional detachment. What makes the demand of professional distance and emotional deference exceptionally challenging in the case of bloggers, however, is that they do their work in a context of affective intimacy, not detachment, and thus, there is a simultaneous need to be both intimate and ‘professionally’ in control of one’s emotional and affective reactions. Furthermore, the ongoing professionalization of the mamasphere has clearly heightened the norm of emotional or affective control, while simultaneously the bloggers have noticed that online bullying has intensified and discussions in the comment section have become nastier (Thurén, 2019, interviews).

It is worth emphasizing that in the case of mom bloggers, this kind of emotional or affective labour of controlling one’s show of emotions, orchestrating moods and anticipating others’ reactions does not take place in the context of waged work but rather in a context of freelancing work, semi-professional activities and micro-entrepreneurship. It is thus not emotional labour if one follows strictly Hochschild’s definition. Rather, it is a coping strategy developed by the bloggers themselves, a strategy that arises both from the histories of gendered emotion management and from the practical needs to make their work bearable. Vulnerabilities and possible sufferings cannot be shown online, because that would only increase the likelihood of attacks. Further on, any negative feelings towards commentators or blog followers should be kept at bay to prevent the escalation of affective storms in the comment section. Orchestrating moods in the digital mamasphere is thus not necessarily just a matter of producing feel good entertainment or wanting to be kind. Rather, it is a matter of creating strategies that would protect the digital labourers from serious harm to themselves and their family. However, as shown above, these strategies have a tax of their own.

Resilience

Varpu, who describes herself as sensitive to others’ judgements, asked herself in the interview why she was blogging if it makes her vulnerable to criticism:

It’s of course, it is interesting, why am I writing this blog if I have these [insecurities], well maybe on the other hand it is so that I am desensitizing myself in exposing myself so that

someone, can then judge me, which is, I think it is good, that it would make me stronger because, all of this of course, derives from, when there was bullying at school and eating disorders and such issues. (Varpu)

Ronja, for her part, told me how she posts in her blog about her own body, trying to do this in an empowering way in the spirit of body positivity, but how she then is afraid that someone comments something very bad, because ‘then I might not be able to live with that’. She continued, ‘if someone says bad things about how I look, then it might very hard for me to go out and I’ll be ashamed, and it’ll take time for me to get over it’. After describing these anxieties, however, she noted that she does these kinds of posts precisely because she aims to build her self-esteem on a ‘healthier base’ and tries to learn not to care what others might say.

For me, it is striking how in these bloggers’ accounts the emotional burden of online bullying becomes an issue of self-betterment. Although bad comments might cause anxiety that could stop one from going outside the house for a while or that could trigger painful experiences in the past, they are – at least momentarily – turned into an opportunity of becoming a better person, becoming tougher and more resilient.

In her research on knowledge work, Melissa Gregg (2011) notes that ‘while the service worker seeks to control outwardly directed emotions for business profit, the knowledge worker’s affective labour operates in the opposite direction’, as it is directed inwards, to develop emotional resilience that could help the worker to withstand the challenges of the workday (p. 22). In the accounts of mom bloggers, it seems that *both* of these forms of affective and emotional labour are at play. Bloggers are required to control their display of emotions in a way similar to service work, as discussed above. But they also need to direct affective labour inwards, to develop reserves of emotional resilience that would help them come to terms with the affective and emotional demands of their work. As shown above, however, these affective and emotional demands differ from what is demanded, for example, of the knowledge workers in Gregg’s research. Blogging as a form of labour demands resilience for personalized attacks on oneself and one’s family, and it is these attacks that are then considered as opportunities for self-development by the bloggers. Kaisa, in her interview, described this emotional resilience as an armour that she had built over the years of blogging. I think the metaphor is apt as it points to the need of heavy protection, and I also think, based on the interviews, that no armour is completely safe.

What is noteworthy here, then, is the way in which vulnerabilities in the digital realm become personal challenges and the insecurities that leak from the digital to the everyday become a matter of individual control and personal projects of building resilience. Here I want to emphasize, though, that the discourse surrounding Internet mud in the blogosphere is not merely individual, but there have also been campaigns and joined endeavours to stop online bullying. Nevertheless, mom blogging as an individualized and intensely personal labour does not really allow much leeway: one either stops blogging or one strives to develop personal emotional reserves and capacities that would help to control the extent of harm.

To be sure, my purpose here is not to criticize the individualizing discourse in the interviews. Rather, I argue for a recognition of the actual emotional, affective and embodied

precarity that is in-built in new forms of feminized labour, and the lack of any but individual means and ideals of emotional resilience in coming to terms with this precarity.

Conclusion

In this article, I have explored the empirical case of mom blogging to dissect some of the ways in which the digital economy invites and exploits women's affective and emotional labour. In discussing Internet mud and online bullying, I have traced continuities that can be recognized in capitalism, both in terms of feminized work in the service sector, the management of emotions and the affective and emotional burden of ensuring others' good mood and happiness. The work that the bloggers do online can be seen on a continuum with the work of controlling and managing emotions that women have done in the service sector and elsewhere. It can also be seen on a continuum with the work that mothers have done and continue to do unpaid at home in being responsible for the emotional well-being of others. The gendered expectations and practices concerning emotional labour and how it is capitalized that were described by Hochschild (2012 [1983]) thus continue to have traction also in the current context of digital economy.

I have also directed attention to the ways in which capital now finds novel ways of harnessing affect and forms of sociality through women's labour. Especially noteworthy here is the requirement to build and maintain emotional resilience in the face of online bullying. Building an emotional or affective 'armour' is something that is demanded from the bloggers if they intent to protect themselves against the harms caused by online mud. This process of trying to protect oneself might be interpreted by the bloggers as an opportunity for personal growth. To make this interpretation already demands notable affective capacities, as it means that emotional insecurities and real-life hazards are translated into questions of individual performance and opportunities for learning.

It is illustrative here to make a comparison with the work of content moderators that confront and manage Internet mud and online bullying across different digital platforms. While the invisibility of their labour, the amount of free labour as well as the need to manage one's feelings can be concerned similar in blogging and in content moderation, the content moderators are anonymous and they work under the guidelines and control of organizations (Gillespie, 2018). The mom bloggers are in a completely different position in terms of vulnerability, as they are putting not only themselves but also their families online. Tarleton Gillespie (2018) notes that for content moderators the troubles of work concern the precariousness of the work more than the psychological toll (p. 123). For the mom bloggers, though, these are not separate entities but rather feed into each other.

What the accounts of vulnerability, control and emotional resilience given above point to are really the ways in which precarity and insecurity leak from the digital realm to the everyday embodied lives of mothers who blog for living, and how diminished and laborious are the opportunities to fight them. If capital has 'taken a subjective turn' as theoretical accounts of affective labour imply, it is precisely the costs of such turn that can be detected in the accounts of bloggers: embodied, emotional and affective vulnerability as well as the demands of individual emotional resilience.


Blogging as a form of work is often framed, also by the bloggers themselves, as a lifestyle choice. Blogging for living, however, is often not a choice among many good

choices, but an opportunity that presents itself when other opportunities seem to be lacking, as explained in the introduction. Exploring the demands and costs of blogging as a form of work shows how gendered and embodied burdens of emotional labour are carried on to the digital realm. But it also shows how new vulnerabilities and forms of affective labour are formed and normalized in the digital. Harnessing value from women's digital labour marks the emergence of novel forms of gendered, affective and embodied precarity.

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Notes

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2. All names are pseudonyms. All interview and research material excerpts are translated from Finnish by the author.

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