Gender Differences in British Blogging

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This article asks whether blogging in the United Kingdom, which started later than in the United States, reproduces the gender differences in blogging behavior and the gender inequalities in recognition that have been observed in studies based largely on U.S. bloggers. A sample of 48 female and male British bloggers answered a questionnaire about their blogging practices and attitudes; data were also collected from their blogs and by means of online tools. For both sexes, blogging is mainly a leisure activity, and men and women find the same range of satisfactions in blogging. However, more women use blogging as an outlet for creative work, whether as a hobby or as a livelihood. The results support several reasons advanced in previous research for the lower public profile of women bloggers.

Introduction

In September 2006, the monthly issue of the U.K. *Observer Woman* magazine (a supplement to the *Observer* Sunday newspaper) ran an article entitled, "Confessional bloggers—the women whose sexploits reached thousands of readers" (Behr, 2006). The article identified five female bloggers, two of whom were British, including the anonymous London call-girl Belle de Jour. The article focused solely on sex-confessional blogging by women and made no mention of male bloggers. In its focus on women bloggers, the *Observer* article took a markedly different approach to the phenomenon of blogging than that taken by the majority of the British media, which has tended to focus on male bloggers. This is reflected in an article on *The Guardian*'s Women page focusing on the perceived lack of women political bloggers, entitled "Is blog a masculine noun?" (Taylor, 2004).

British women bloggers do exist, even though they have a low profile in mass media representations of the British blogosphere. This article asks whether blogging in the U.K., which started later than in the U.S., reproduces the gender differences in blogging behavior and the gender inequalities in recognition that have been observed in studies based largely on U.S. bloggers. A sample of 24 female and 24 male British

bloggers answered a questionnaire about their blogging practices and attitudes. Data were also collected directly from their blogs and through the use of online tools. A comparison of male and female bloggers' stated motivations for blogging, blogging practices, and technical ability was then undertaken. Overall, our findings agree with North American research that suggests that women bloggers' motivations for blogging, subjects covered, and technical proficiency may be at the root of their lower profile in public representations of the blogosphere.

Background

Unequal Recognition

North American studies report that more than half of all blog authors are women, that they persevere longer and write more (Perseus, 2003), and that at least 50% of journal bloggers in particular are female (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, & Wright, 2004). However, the most influential bloggers are Internet veterans who tend to be white American males. This has led in recent years to fervent discussion among bloggers about the relative position of male and female bloggers and suggestions (accusations?) that the blogosphere is inherently sexist. Some suggest that, as long as quality is measured in terms of popularity, women bloggers will never achieve equal recognition.

Blogging is not the first form of computer-mediated communication (CMC) to be accused of sexism. While research into CMC dates back to the 1970s, it was not until the 1990s that researchers turned their attention to the issue of gender. Despite earlier suggestions that online communities were gender-blind, democratic places where all were offered an equal opportunity to participate anonymously, researchers such as Herring (1993, 1996), Kramarae and Taylor (1993), Hall (1996), and Gurak (1999) claimed that rather than neutralizing gender, the electronic medium in fact encouraged its intensification, and that participants in online communities were likely to bring with them pre-existing patterns of hierarchy and male domination conditioned into them early in life. In this, gender and CMC scholars built on the work of researchers in the field of face-to-face communication, such as Lakoff (1975), Tannen (1991), and Coates (1993).

Herring (1993, 1996), for example, investigated electronic discussion lists and suggested that men and women constituted different discourse communities in cyberspace and that such communities were different but not equal. She proposed that women and men have different online styles, with the male-gendered style being more adversarial, including strong assertions, self-promotion, lengthy posts, put-downs, and sarcasm aimed at others. In contrast, the female-gendered style was characterized by supportiveness and attenuation, including appreciation and community-based activities, thanks, apologies, and questions. In direct contrast to a democratic, gender-blind utopia, Herring suggested, other users were regularly able to infer the gender of posters on the basis of features of these styles and therefore react to posters on the basis of their presumed gender (Herring, 1993, 1996).

In discussion lists in the 1990s, men typically outnumbered women (Herring, 1996). Yet such is not the case with respect to blogs. If there are equal numbers of male and female bloggers, in what sense can it be claimed that the blogosphere is sexist? In the blogosphere, popularity is measured in terms of links. It has been remarked that men tend to receive more links to their blogs from other bloggers than do women. (For references to the extensive online debate, see Garfunkel, 2005; Pollard, 2003; Ratliff, 2004a, 2004b.) Having more links places a blog higher in the popularity ranks; this effect is amplified by blog-monitoring sites such as Technorati, which use page-ranking algorithms that give greater weight to links from blogs that are themselves highly ranked. Ratliff (2006) produced evidence that men's postings also receive more comments than women's. It has also been claimed, in the North American context, that a greater amount of attention is accorded in the mass media to male bloggers (Herring, Kouper, et al., 2004).

Since it is now possible to make money from blogging by selling advertising space on one's blog, the perception that women's blogs are less popular than men's puts women bloggers at an economic, as well as a social, disadvantage. Considerations such as these have led to the establishment of the BlogHer movement in the U.S. (http://blogher.org/), with the mission to create opportunities for women bloggers to gain exposure, pursue education, and create community.

North American commentators have proposed a variety of explanations for the imbalance in the portrayal of the U.S. blogosphere and in popularity rankings. Blogs about technology and politics, which are popular subjects throughout the Internet, are more likely to be authored by men. It is suggested that men are more likely to blog about external events, rather than personal ones (Herring, Kouper, et al., 2004), and are therefore more likely to be found by prospective readers when using a search engine (Pollard, 2003). Men are more likely to market their blogs aggressively to other bloggers and thus get them incorporated into a blogroll (lists of other recommended blogs, which most blogs have) (Pollard, 2003). Meanwhile, women's blogs make up only 15% of all blogrolls (Perseus, 2003). The "A-list" (top 100 blogs) is dominated by men and, as Pollard (2003, n.p.) suggests, such a power curve tends to be self-perpetuating: "To break into the A-list you usually need to get noticed and linked to by an A-lister. Guess which gender is more likely to benefit from that?"

The British Blogosphere

The vast majority of academic investigation that has so far been carried out on the blogging phenomenon has focused on the U.S. This imbalance is now being redressed in relation to non-English language blogging, for example, by Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmokl, and Sapp's (2006) examination of the state of the Polish blogosphere. As yet, however, few studies have specifically investigated the British blogosphere (see, e.g., Auty, 2005; Pedersen & Macafee, 2006; Thelwall, 2006). In certain respects, British bloggers of both sexes are in a similar position to American women bloggers—less noticed and less commented upon.

What follows is a snapshot of the British blogosphere based on a pilot study of 48 British bloggers undertaken in the winter and spring of 2005–2006. We were interested to see whether blogging in the U.K., which in general started somewhat later than in North America, is reproducing the gender differences in blogging behavior and the gender inequalities in recognition that have been observed in studies based largely on U.S. bloggers (e.g., Fallows, 2005; Herring, Kouper, et al., 2004; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Schwartz, 2004; Ratliff, 2004a, b). Our goal was to shed light, from a different direction, on some of the reasons that have been advanced for women having less influence and less popular success in this CMC domain.

In addition to discussing the different online styles of men and women, Herring and her colleagues (Herring Kouper, et al., 2004; Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004) have emphasized the growing number of personal journal blogs in the blogosphere. They investigated the media representation of weblogs, finding that it focuses on filter-type blogs produced mainly by adult males. They claim that this misrepresents the fundamental nature of the weblog phenomenon and indirectly reproduces societal sexism and ageism.

The research of Nardi and her colleagues (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004) into personal journal blogs (which are more likely than filter blogs to be written by women) found that most blogs had a fairly small set of regular readers and that bloggers received feedback on their blogs not just from such commentators but also off-line. While "A-list" blogs may receive hundreds of comments a day, Nardi and her colleagues suggest that most personal blogs will receive comments and be read by only a few friends, and that bloggers have "regulars" who they know are reading their posts. They also found that people typically encounter blogs through other blogs that they are reading.

Fallows (2005) has suggested that men are "more avid consumers than women of online information," while women are more enthusiastic online communicators (p. ii). Her report also suggested that, as of April 2005, men were more likely than women to create blogs. Ratliff (2004a, 2004b, 2006) has focused on the "where are the women" debate, particularly in political blogging, and the explanations that are advanced by both male and female bloggers for the gender gap (Ratliff, 2004a, 2004b, 2006).

We first set out to determine whether the same gender imbalances in popular recognition are also found in relation to British blogging. A quick survey of some of the sources that offer to identify "top" blogs suggests that British male bloggers are more visible than British female bloggers—although neither group scores highly as far as international visibility is concerned. Technorati's "top 100" sites, also known as the "A-list," included two British blogs on March 21, 2006 (a better showing than Canada or Australia, with one each); both bloggers were male.

In the mass media, two recent items from the British press discussed the blogging phenomenon: *The Independent* on "top blogs" (Caesar, 2006), and *The Guardian* on the top British political bloggers (Burkeman, 2005). *The Independent* mentioned six bloggers, four of whom were male, while *The Guardian* mentioned seven bloggers, six of whom were male. *The Guardian* also runs an annual Best British

Blog Competition (Best British Blog Competition: Result, 2005); we examined the winners and shortlist for 2005. Out of 22 bloggers, 19 were male.

Another source is the *Britblog Round-up* (http://timworstall.typepad.com/timworstall/britblog_roundup/index.html), which is based on readers' weekly nominations of blog postings. A selection from the year 2005 was published in book form (Worstall, 2005). Out of the 119 contributors to this volume, 106 were male and only 13 were female. Finally, we considered the "British or Irish" section of the 2005 and 2006 "Bloggies" awards (http://2007.bloggies.com/ for links to awards since 2001). Out of the 22 bloggers shortlisted over both years, only seven were female.

While this is necessarily only a partial snapshot of the most visible parts of the British blogosphere, in all of these lists of "top" British bloggers there is a preponderance—sometimes an overwhelming preponderance—of men. However, this is not to say that there is no media interest in British female bloggers. As noted at the outset, the media have a prurient interest in women who blog about sex, although honorable mention should be made of *The Guardian*'s "Women" page, which has run articles about feminist bloggers in Britain, even though at least one article focused on the perceived lack of women bloggers (Taylor, 2004). Overall, however, female bloggers are usually represented as a minority in discussions of British blogging, unless the subject under discussion is sexual confession, in which case 100% of the bloggers discussed are women.

The Population of U.K. Bloggers

The growth of blogging and its expansion beyond early adopters has taken place against a background of growth in Internet access in the U.K. The U.K. was one of the first European countries to have widespread home Internet access, along with Germany and Italy (Ryan, 2002). A recent study put the percentage of U.K. households with domestic Internet subscriptions at 57% (National Statistics Omnibus Survey, 2006). Moreover, by March 2006, 69% of U.K. domestic Internet subscribers had broadband (40% of U.K. adults) (National Statistics Omnibus Survey, 2006) Middle-aged adults appear to have caught up with younger ones where Internet use is concerned, but women are still less likely than men to access the Internet (65% of men compared to 55% of women had accessed the Internet during the previous three months) (National Statistics Omnibus Survey, 2006).

How many British blogs are there? As with web pages, estimates of the numbers of blogs worldwide vary enormously and rapidly go out-of-date: On March 15, 2006, Technorati was tracking 30.6 million blogs, but by 5 July 2007 it claimed to be tracking 90 million blogs. Access to some blogs is restricted by password to a small number of readers or to an organization. Many blogs are abandoned: Sifry (2005) estimated 45% in August 2005. Huffaker (2004) likewise found that 43% of his teenage bloggers had abandoned blogs. As Perseus (2003, n.p.) puts it, "the majority of blogs started are dissolving into static, abandoned web pages." Some are never used, but are created as tests or as automatic features on social networking sites

(Perseus, 2005a). An increasing proportion—9% as of February 2006—are fake or spam (Sifry, 2006a).

Attempts to enumerate British blogs specifically encounter further difficulties, because of what Riley (2005) calls "the Anglosphere problem," i.e., the existence of a common body of service providers and readership across the English-speaking Internet. Riley estimated in July 2005 that there were 2.5 million British bloggers. This is consistent with a recent estimate that 7% of U.K. Internet users maintain a website or blog on at least a weekly basis (Office of Communications, 2006). Given that 64% of the U.K. adult population of 47.8 million is estimated to access the Internet (Internet access, 2006), this yields a figure of about 2.1 million adult content creators. This probably over-estimates the number of adults, however, by assuming that adults are as likely to create Internet content as are teenagers. In a 2005 survey, 19% of American teenage Internet users were found to have created their own blog, in contrast to only about 7% of adult Internet users (Lenhart & Madden, 2005). Whatever its exact size, however, the population of British bloggers is certainly measured in seven figures.

Methodology

The Sample

Our sample of 24 women and 24 men was drawn from two blog rings, or directories, that allow bloggers to identify themselves as British: Globe of Blogs (http://www.globeofblogs.com/) and Britblog.com. In the case of the latter, which is organized geographically and offers the opportunity to select bloggers from a map of the U.K., care was taken to select similar numbers of bloggers from each geographical area: England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The selected bloggers had to be individuals resident in the U.K. (and not obviously transient) and contactable by email. Bloggers were selected by taking the first blog that fulfilled our age, nationality, and currency criteria from an alphabetical list from each region of the country in turn, until we had an equal number of men and women. Blogs were checked to ensure that they had posted within the previous month (in other words, that their blogs were current). The gender of the blog authors was determined through the use of names, photographs, and information included in the blog postings such as references to "my wife" or "when I gave birth" (cf. Herring, Kouper, et al., 2004). Blogs where the gender could not be ascertained were discarded.

In this study, we confined our sample to bloggers over 18 years old. In the blogosphere at large, a very large proportion of blogs is written by adolescents: Bloggers under 19 made up 58.3% in Perseus's (2005b) 2005 figures, up from 52.8% in 2003. This population of bloggers is often studied separately, as the social dynamics of communication among adolescents are different from those among adults (boyd, 2005, 2006; Huffaker, 2004; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005; Kumar, Novak, Raghavan, & Tomkins, 2004; Lenhart & Madden, 2005; Scheidt, 2006).

Data Collection and Methods of Analysis

Three methods were used to collect the data for this study:

- A questionnaire designed to explore blogging practices, attitudes, and motivations was sent to the selected bloggers via email. The questionnaire drew on previous literature, including Pedersen's (2005) content analysis of 50 women's blogs and the ethnographic research of Nardi and her colleagues (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Schwartz, 2004; Schiano et al., 2004), and included both open and closed questions.
- Characteristics of the blog that were visible to inspection were noted, following the grounded theory content analysis approach of Herring, Scheidt, et al. (2004). These included: the age of the blog (in months), based on the starting point of blog postings the archives; number of links in the blogroll, whether the links still worked, and the sex of the blogger linked to; the number and nature of enhancements to the blog, such as site meters and logos or links to other blog services; if there was a site meter, whether visitor statistics were hidden; and, where available, the average number of visitors per day.
- Data for the sampled blogs were obtained from a range of blog-monitoring sites. These included their Technorati ranking; a figure for the number of inbound links, averaged from Technorati and Blogpulse figures (over variable periods of time depending on the content of the blogs' feeds); and the number of outbound links and images in the current feed, expressed as numbers per 1000 words, based on data from SurfWax for 44 of the 48 blogs.

A classification of each blog's content was made on the basis of the 10 postings prior to the submission date of the questionnaire. Unfortunately, in the short space of time during which data collection was underway, two blogs were closed down, and the archives were cleared from two others, while another did not keep an archive. For all but one of these, we were able to base classifications instead on earlier postings (preserved in the Internet Archive and accessible via the Wayback Machine, http://www.archive.org/web/) or on later postings: We do not believe the content type changed in the interim.

The content categories that seem to represent the sampled blogs best were: personal, opinion and politics, religion, criticism, work and business, information technology, creative work (including literary writing), lesbian sexuality, and links and *trouvailles* (chance discoveries). Many blogs contain a mixture of content, but it is not difficult to identify the dominant themes, as long as allowance is made for most blogs having some personal content.

A measure of the technical sophistication of the blogs was devised in the form of an impressionistic five-point scale, with 1 indicating less sophistication and 5 greater sophistication. One blog was omitted from the classification, as no information could be found about the software it used. The scale is as follows:

1 unmodified template
2 pasting into template (Blogger), adding images (Livejournal)

3 adding artwork, deleting or modifying the "about me" section
4 redesigned template
5 custom design, unhosted blog.

The blogs were also assigned to one of three "success" levels (top, middle, or bottom) on the basis of the highest value out of the following measures:

- the figure for daily traffic, where available
- the number of inbound links
- the Technorati rank (top 10,000, top 100,000, top million, or unranked).

While we recognize that individual bloggers vary in their reasons for blogging and not all seek a wide audience or aspire to be influential, sites that offer to measure blogs' influence and popularity continue to proliferate, and advertisers seek ways of identifying blogs that reach particular readerships. It is in this competitive marketing context that American feminists have raised issues of equality and fairness. It is therefore important to consider gender differences in terms of "success" as generally understood, i.e., high viewer traffic and numerous inbound links.

Results

Characteristics of the Sample

There was one group blog in our sample, owned by a male; otherwise the blogs were all those of individuals. As can be seen from Figure 1, the male and female sub-samples were well matched for age. One woman declined to give her exact age, even after a follow-up email, but was "over 50." Disregarding this response, there was an even spread of ages, with an average age of 34 for women and 35 for men. Three women and three men in the sample identified themselves in their blogs as homosexual or bisexual. The sexes were also fairly well matched for educational
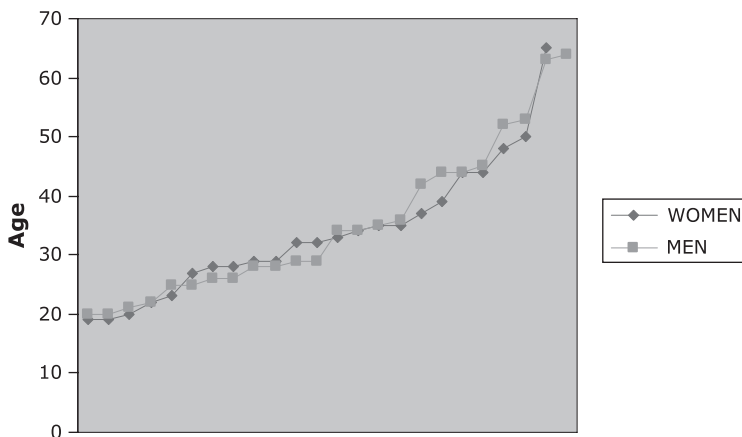
Figure 1 Distribution of bloggers by age

attainment, with 19 female and 18 male university graduates. The high number of graduates and university students in the sample echoes North American studies of the characteristics of adult bloggers (Herring, Scheidt, et al., 2004; Schiano et al., 2004). Similar numbers of men and women had employment (21 men and 19 women). However, a higher number of the women (six women as compared to three men) worked from home. The men in the sample tended to have been blogging longer than the women, with 16 men as compared to eight women having blogged for more than two years.

The spread of our sample across the Technorati ranking bands was fairly even (see Table 1), but with 40% of the sample ranked, there is a skew toward the more "successful" end of the blogosphere (cf. Mayaud, 2005; Shirky, 2003; Sifry, 2006b). Interestingly, there were slightly more women bloggers with high rankings in our sample than male, although not enough to be statistically significant. There were also more unranked women bloggers.

Similarities Between Men and Women Bloggers

The survey asked each blogger to select from four definitions of blogging: journalism, publishing, diary-keeping, and creative writing. (Respondents could select none, one, or more than one of the definitions.) There was little difference between men and women in their choice of blogging definitions (see Table 2). Men and women also agreed that the role of blogging in their own lives was mainly as a leisure activity (see Table 3), although there were a few of each sex (six women and two men) for whom it was a source of income, and two women who were blogging full-time who regarded it as a serious activity. For both men and women, activities that they might be doing instead of blogging included looking for or doing paid work, watching TV, and reading.

Men and women found the same range of satisfactions in blogging, particularly in exercising their talents and clarifying their thinking (see Table 4). The majority of both sexes (16 women and 17 men) also agreed that they used blogging to vent their emotions or frustrations. They valued feedback largely for the same range of reasons, with the men being unexpectedly appreciative of the emotionally supportive aspects (clarifying one's feelings, gaining reassurance or approval, coming to terms with trauma, and putting one's life in perspective) (see Table 5).

Table 1 Technorati ranks, by sex

	Women	Men	All
10,000	1	0	1
100,000	5	4	9
1,000,000	2	7	9
unranked	16	13	29
TOTAL	24	24	48

Table 2 Definitions of blogging (pre-set answers), by sex

	Women n = 24	Men n = 24	All n = 48
Journalism	13	15	28
Publishing	15	14	29
diary-keeping	18	16	34
creative writing	19	17	36
Other	11	11	22

Table 3 The role of blogging in the respondent's life, by sex

	Women	Men	All
leisure	15	13	28
serious	2	4	6
mix	7	7	14
TOTAL	24	24	48

Note: "Leisure" includes all of the following responses: a leisure time activity, a welcome distraction, a quick break from work or studying. "Serious" is taken to be an adjunct to work or studying.

Table 4 The satisfactions of blogging (pre-set answers), by sex

	Women n = 24	Men n = 24	All n = 48
you are exercising your talents	16	19	35
you are displaying your talents	12	8	20
you are obtaining recognition of your talents	10	9	19
you are sharing your expertise	8	9	17
you are sharing your specialist knowledge	8	10	18
you are sharing your wisdom	11	12	23
writing helps you clarify your thinking	18	21	39
you are participating in a democratic movement	7	8	15
you are helping to redress the distortions and inaccuracies of the mainstream news media	4	8	12
other reason	12	7	19
no satisfaction	0	0	0

Differences Between Male and Female Bloggers
Differences between the sexes were found largely in three areas:

- In their responses to the survey, women tended to describe themselves as more interested in the social aspects of blogging, while men tended to be more interested in information and opinion.

- Men demonstrated more technical sophistication.
- Privacy was a major issue for women (and also for gay bloggers of both sexes).

All of these can be seen to be relevant, in different ways, to the lower profile of women in blogging.

Blogging as a Social Activity
North American research has suggested that men are "more avid consumers than women of online information," while women are more enthusiastic online communicators (Fallows, 2005, p. ii). Many of the differences in our findings between British male and female bloggers reflect the greater importance for women of the social aspects of blogging.

Four women, but only one man, mentioned participating in group blogs. The women also tended to belong to larger numbers of blog rings, with eight women, but only three men, displaying six or more logos of blog rings. A blog ring links themed blogs so that a reader interested in a particular subject can move from blog to blog. In this way, blog rings are intended to improve the number of visitors one's site receives. In their response to survey questions, women bloggers put more emphasis on a sense of community as an advantage of blog rings and the lack of it as a failing or disadvantage.

Women also made more mention of social interaction as something they valued about feedback from readers. For example, commenting on why she blogged, one respondent said, "There is satisfaction in knowing that others share your experiences, which I hear about through the comments they leave on my blog or by them sending an email." One of the lesbian respondents commented, "I don't have such available friends anymore due to their family commitments etc and so it's nice to be able to talk to people who ARE available any time of the night or day. Not all friends can invest that sort of time into you any more. Blogging is a very good support network if

Table 5 The value of feedback (pre-set answers), by sex

	Women n = 24	Men n = 24	All n = 48
it helps you clarify your thinking about a topic	13	14	27
it helps you clarify your feelings	9	7	16
it gives you reassurance	12	12	24
it gives you approval	11	11	22
it gives you support for your ideas	10	16	26
it helps you come to terms with traumatic life experiences	3	3	6
it helps put your life in perspective	10	11	21
it helps you with your work or studies	5	7	12
no value from feedback	2	0	2

you need it and although that isn't something I did it for originally, now I do try and cover the awkward or difficult subjects because it often helps others out there who have no one to talk to too."

In addition, more women than men respondents reported experiencing trouble with family and friends as a result of blogging, which may well be related to the personal content of their blogs. Such problems ranged from a father being hurt at discovering through his daughter's blog that she had seen a film without asking him to accompany her, to an argument in a group of mothers after one of them commented in her blog on the behavior of the others.

Related to the social aspects of blogging, men were more likely either to discard the "about me" section of a blog or to give only minimal information about themselves. More women had site meters, and about one-third of those who had them did not make the figures visible to readers, while only one man (out of 10) hid the figures (see Table 6). It would appear, then, that women, more than men, like to know how many visitors they have, and that this is for their own information.

Women tended, on average, to have more outbound links in their postings (female average: 26.25 per 1,000 words, male average 22.51). This is consistent with the finding that women tend to value the social aspects of Internet use, but contrasts with the finding of boyd (2005) that high numbers of links (in this case from "blog-rolls") are associated with political and technical subject matter, and therefore with male bloggers. A closer examination of our own results reveals that the difference lies mainly in the top success level, as measured by Technorati rankings. The six women at this level average 30 outbound links per 1,000 words, while the six men at the same level average 19.7. It has been remarked previously, in relation to the blogroll type of link, that some very successful male bloggers have few links (boyd, 2005; Ratliff, 2004a; Shirky, 2003), possibly because their blogs have become more like mass media publications, offering one-way broadcasting to an audience rather than working interactively with their readers.

Information and Opinion

North American research suggests that women bloggers are more likely to prefer personal subject matter (boyd, 2005; Herring, Kouper, et al., 2004; NITLE census news, 2003). In a recent study, Herring and Paolillo (2006) conducted a gender and genre analysis of blogs that confirmed that women write more diary-like blogs, while male bloggers write more of the opinion-focused ones. Our results also confirm this

Table 6 Site meters, by sex

	Women n = 24	Men n = 24	All n = 48
Site meter	19	10	29
hidden statistics	7	1	8
visible statistics	12	9	21

gender difference among British bloggers (see Table 7). Personal content and creative work tended to be the dominant themes of the women's blogs, while the men, more than the women, favored blogs offering opinion and politics or links to interesting Internet sites. While the more successful women bloggers had more outbound links in their postings, as noted above, their links tended to be to other blogs. In contrast, the male link-focused sites tended to link to funny or strange items on the World Wide Web and were less focused on the personal.

The numbers are very small when content is broken down by success level, but there does seem to be a tendency for the more successful women bloggers to specialize in personal and creative content, in contrast to the men (Table 8).

In listing the satisfactions that they obtain from blogging, more men than women agreed that they were redressing the distortions of the media (Table 6), while in relation to feedback, men were more likely to attach importance to gaining support for their ideas. One male respondent, upon being asked why he blogged, replied tersely: "Rupert Murdoch." Two male bloggers used their blog mainly as a way of communicating with fellow activists in a cause. More men than women said that blogging widened the audience for their intellectual work (see Table 9).

Previous research suggests that male bloggers benefit, in terms of popular success, from their preference for political or technical subject matter. A number of surveys have confirmed that there is a significant readership in the U.S. for blogs dealing with politics and current affairs (LeMai, 2005; Rainie, 2005; Saad, 2005). Likewise, a British study found that 46% of domestic Internet subscribers, and 43% of those intending to get Internet access, gave information content as their reason for acquiring access. This was well ahead of the next most important reason, communication (28%) (Office of Communications, 2006). In addition, as Pollard (2003) points out, blogs with a narrow focus on external (as opposed to personal) events are more likely to be found by search engines.

What does not seem to have been noted previously is the tendency for more women bloggers to have creative interests. In our sample, the four bloggers whose

Table 7 Blog content, by sex

	Women	Men	All
personal	13	8	21
links	1	5	6
opinion	1	5	6
work	2	3	5
creative	4	0	4
religion	0	2	2
criticism	1	0	1
IT	1	0	1
sexuality	1	0	1
TOTAL	24	23	47

Note: N = 47

Table 8 Blog content at the top success level, by sex

	Women	Men
personal	3	1
links	0	2
opinion	0	1
work	0	1
creative	2	0
religion	0	1
criticism	1	0
TOTAL	6	6

Table 9 The usefulness of blogging (pre-set answers), by sex

	Women n = 22	Men n = 22	All n = 44
It brings custom for your business	5	2	7
It widens the audience for your intellectual work	8	13	21
It widens the audience for your creative work	12	7	19
other reason	13	9	22
no usefulness	2	2	4

content was classified as creative were all women. Six women (as against two men) indicated creative writing as a skill that they brought to blogging from their employment. In relation to the usefulness of blogging, more women than men said that blogging widened the audience for their creative work (see Table 7). Asked what they might be doing instead of blogging, women were more likely to mention creative work (including creative writing) and other (non-Internet) hobbies.

Technical Interests and Proficiency

Recent research in the U.S. suggests that women are less interested in and less knowledgeable about the technical aspects of the Internet (Fallows, 2005). Our results also reflect this. The male bloggers surveyed tended to produce more sophisticated blogs (see Table 10), and it was men who used the small number of the more technically sophisticated blog hosting services (three men each on Moveable Type and Wordpress). Moreover, while the numbers of images (per 1,000 words) were similar for the sexes over most of the range, the most prolific posters of images were male.

Privacy

There is an ongoing tension on the Internet between the need to protect one's privacy and the need to sacrifice it in order to obtain the full benefits of the medium. Boyd (2006), discussing the social networking site MySpace, argues that teens rarely

Table 10 Blog sophistication, by sex (n = 47)

Sophistication scale	Women	Men	All
1	2	1	3
2	10	6	16
3	6	10	16
4	3	1	4
5	2	6	8
TOTAL	23	24	47

Notes: The level of sophistication was not determined for one blog. Higher values = greater sophistication.

choose to go private without some particular impetus to do so: "They want to be visible to other teens, not just the people they've friended … they need youth space, a place to gather and see and be seen by peers." The same dynamic presumably applies to other groups that blog for social networking purposes: urban singles in their twenties (boyd & Heer, 2006) and members of the gay scene (Curtain, 2004). There is also a gender dimension to the tension between privacy and visibility. In particular, it has been found that women in both the U.K. and the U.S. tend to be more concerned about the negative aspects of the Internet, including criminal uses of the Internet, child pornography, terrorism, and hacking into private or governmental information (Fallows, 2005; Office of Communications, 2006).

In our sample, more women than men said they had concerns about privacy, although half of the men also had such concerns (16 women and 12 men). These were mostly related to being identified, whether by employers, colleagues, family, or friends. Concerns ranged from, "Some people at work might be a bit snarky about it if they knew I was writing it" (male blogger), to, "I've also had stalkers, people threaten me physically or to "out" me as my real life persona" (female blogger). Gay and lesbian bloggers in particular mentioned concerns about family members or co-workers discovering their blogs.

Some bloggers mentioned concern about being identified by unspecified but potentially ill-willed others; problems mentioned in the questionnaire responses included physical threats and people leaving aggressive or abusive comments on the blog. Half of the women and more than half of the men agreed that they had experienced feedback intended only to cut them down.

Concerns about privacy did not necessarily lead to concerns about being recognized by people the bloggers knew in "RL" or real life. In our sample, five women and two men (of whom one identified himself as gay) presented photographs of themselves on their blog but withheld their names, suggesting that they did not mind being recognized by people who already knew them, but that they were wary of being identified by strangers.

Many blogs contain a great deal of personal information, sufficient to identify individuals even when they are anonymous (Nardi et al., 2004). One female respondent reported, "I do worry that my home and my habits can be identified

from the blog—one reader (who lives nearby) worked out the building I live in." Viégas (2005) reported that 36% of her mainly American survey respondents had got into trouble of some kind as a result of blogging. A slight majority (13 men and 13 women) of both sexes in our sample had likewise experienced problems. The experiences listed by those who gave further information ranged from being teased at work or within the family, to hurting family members, partners, or friends, to being disciplined or even fired at work.

In relation to privacy concerns, numerous comments, especially from women, detailed the steps that bloggers take to protect their own and others' privacy, including, of course, blogging anonymously. For example, "I do not use my real name on my blog because I am concerned that people could find the blog by searching for me on a search engine. I also do not publish pictures of my children or wider family to respect their privacy… I am careful what I disclose on my blog about myself or anyone I know and I will often change minor details to disguise who I am writing about if needed. Everything I write about is true but only a few people know that it is me that writes it." Anonymity was also a reason mentioned by two women for keeping a second, more private, blog.

In previous research, gender differences in anonymity have been discussed mainly in relation to academic bloggers. Academics in general were slow to take up blogging (Mortensen & Walker, 2002), but it has been noted that academic women, in particular, have a lower profile than men. This is the subject of ongoing research by "Bitch PhD" (2006) and Kaufman (2006), and is discussed by Healy (2004).

Some women academics may prefer to be able to blog anonymously about relationships and working conditions, in keeping with the female emphasis on social interactions. But women also have more to fear from online stalkers and sexist abuse. Arnold and Miller (2000) argue that academic women are inhibited online because their vulnerability as women remains part of their persona as academics. They are accordingly more guarded, engaging in more self-monitoring and communicating less information on the web (Arnold & Miller, 2001). However, anonymity carries a penalty in relation to popular success, as it means losing the opportunity to transfer social and cultural capital from the blogger's real life identity to the blog (cf. comment by "aj" to Healy, 2004).

Conclusion

It is possible to obtain very rich data about blogs. As long as the blogger provides an email address, he or she can be contacted, in a secure medium, to complete a questionnaire, and information can also be obtained directly from the blog and from blog-monitoring sites. However, blogs, like other web pages, are impermanent. Even in the short space of time that we were collecting data, blogs closed and archives were deleted (not, we hope, because of us). This was a salutory lesson: to download and save all data that might be needed for the study at the outset.

Our results indicate that gender differences found in earlier, mainly U.S., studies are replicated in the British context. We have found evidence to support several of the reasons that have been advanced in the past for the lower profile of women bloggers: more personal content and orientation towards the social aspects of blogging, as opposed to a male emphasis on information; lesser technical sophistication; and a greater preference for anonymity.

The uses of blogging are growing all the time. Herring et al. (2005) unexpectedly found large networks in their snowball sample, grouped around the Catholic religion and around home schooling. Businesses are increasingly jumping onto the blogging bandwagon, seeking the same advantages blogs offer over static home pages as individuals. Although we sampled the blogs of individuals, we found that some were shop windows for small home-based businesses. There were more women than men working from home in our sample, and more women using blogging as an outlet for creative work, whether as a hobby or as a livelihood.

Despite the ways in which the British blogosphere is represented in the media and online rankings of popularity, British women bloggers are alive and well. However, the results of this study agree with North American research that suggests that women bloggers' motivations for blogging, subjects covered, and technical proficiency may be at the root of their lower profile in representations of the blogosphere. In this study, we have presented a snapshot of the motivations and habits of a group of British bloggers. Further research is needed in order to obtain a better understanding of possible gender issues for men's and women's blogging activities across a wide range of social, national, and cultural environments.

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