THE BLOGGER FAMILY:
THE CREATION OF AN ONLINE COMMUNITY

A Thesis

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I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this thesis is suitable for shelving in the Library and credit is to be awarded for the thesis.

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Dr. Amy Liu

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This study investigates the processes that individuals go through to form online relationships that develop into an online community. I look at bloggers and the experiences that led to the creation of an online community called the “Blogger Family.” I draw on my knowledge of the blogosphere and my own inclusion into the Blogger Family. Interaction between the bloggers was accomplished through comments on blog posts and linking to other blogs. The computer “shield” provided the bloggers with a sense of extroversion that helped them feel comfortable interacting online. Facebook was found to play a significant part in providing one place for the bloggers to communicate. The bloggers built trust through constant communication. Once sufficient trust was built, the bloggers took their online relationships offline and into the “real world” through the mail. This provided tangible items for the bloggers to identify their online relationships with. Through a period of four to five years, the bloggers built online relationships where they became comfortable enough with each other to refer to the online community as a
family that provided support and was a safe place for the bloggers to get advice and share problems.

_______________________, Committee Chair
Dr. Jennifer Murphy

_______________________
Date
PREFACE

This study was inspired by my involvement with blogging. Not long after I began blogging, I became aware of bloggers building relationships with one another through their blogs. I began communicating with other bloggers through our blogs and discovered that many of the bloggers I was communicating with were communicating with each other as well. Before we knew it, we were creating a community of bloggers, sending packages and letters to each other, and planning to meet face-to-face.

I was curious as to how this phenomenon of building relationships with strangers on the internet created an online community. I wished to investigate how this process transpired, sociologically. As a result, I chose to study the online community I became a part of – the Blogger Family.

Working on this project has been immensely rewarding. Not only have I been able to find out more about a subject that I love, but I feel as though I am also adding to this field of online relationships with my research. I have been an insider researcher and have been given the opportunity to understand an intimate group on the internet from the inside-out. As I am a unique individual, my understandings of this group, the Blogger Family, is also unique.

My relationship with the blogger family has remained consistent. The bloggers I have interviewed are very excited about my research and have been awaiting its completion. They have been more than supportive through the whole process. I am excited to experience the future of the blogger family.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this study to the members of the Blogger Family. Without them, this study would not have happened.
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You got me even more excited about my study when I saw how excited you were about it.
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Media technology is all around us. It globally connects us all together. With no limits, individuals are able to send information from anywhere to anyone. Instant communication can be available for anyone. People are able to stay connected without any face-to-face interaction. In this new age of electronic communication, information about people has become more personal and more readily available. Many people list out their everyday life activities on places like Twitter and Facebook. Some individuals on these social network sites want to feel like celebrities, letting their “fans” know intimate details about their life. However, with this new form of instant communication, is there something missing with the lack of face-to-face interaction? Because of the many different ways of impersonal communication, how do people make connections and form meaningful relationships? With the rise in online communication, there has been concern that online communication has created a disconnect between people (Hodkinson 2007). Individuals no longer need to meet with a person face-to-face for instant communication, nor do they need to use verbal communication via phone. They have the option of communicating via the internet or text message. Is this causing undeveloped face-to-face relationships? What about online relationships? How are these relationships able to form and grow into something like a community without the aspect of meeting face-to-face?

Research shows that using the internet for interpersonal communication is the most important use of the internet (Cummings, Butler, and Kraut 2002). Some studies have found that online social relationships are not as valuable as offline relationships and
others have found that it depends on the individual (Cummings et al. 2002). Some people are more apt to form close online relationships because they feel like they can better express their “true selves” online instead of face-to-face (Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons 2002). Still, some individuals who form online relationships encounter relationship strain with their offline relationships (Wolak, Mitchell, and Finkelhor 2003). There are quite a few different views on online versus offline relationships. However, since a large amount of individuals are involved in online sites where they are connected with others, it is important to understand the relationships that individuals form through the social networking sites.

Blogging can be one way that people network socially, and there are several other ways in which people use blogs. A blog can be a private diary that only the author can see, an online journal that anyone can see, a social network forming site, and basically anything that a person can make a webpage become. Recently, internet users have increasingly used individual blogs for social, online communication (Hodkinson 2007). The most popular use of weblogs or “blogs” is a type of personal home page or diary set up in reverse chronological order in which individuals use to share what is going on in their lives, their thoughts, and/or anything that interests them (Chenail 2011; Larsson and Hrastinski 2011). One way blogs are different from other online social sites like Twitter or Facebook is the anonymous aspect of blogs. Because of a blog’s option of anonymity, a blogger is able to use his or her blog as a place to freely express their thoughts, and therefore a blog offers access “to the back stage thoughts and feelings of others” (Chenail 2011:252). Blogs are also more personal than other social networking sites. Since the
goal is usually not to gain “friends” or “followers,” a blogger posts whatever she or he wants. If there are followers, they go onto the blog with the sole purpose of reading what the blogger wrote. While followers are not needed to have a blog, having a large amount of followers is sometimes an important aspect for some blogs.

Blogs have increased exponentially this past decade. Online blogs have increased from 4.2 million in 2004 to 172 million in 2011, an increase of over 167 million blogs in only seven years (BlogPulse 2011; Rosenbloom 2004). That is over 23 million new blogs each year. In 2012, 40 percent of bloggers were aged 34 and younger and 66 percent of bloggers were female on a main blogging platform called Blogger (Royal Pingdom 2012). With so many people blogging, it is important to know and understand this new form of online socializing and interaction.

The majority of previous research on blogs and blogging in general has covered presentation of self (Bortree 2005; Dominick 1999; Jung, Youn, and McClung 2007; Papacharissi 2002; Trammell and Keshelashvili 2005), motivations for blogging (Jung et al. 2007; Liao, Liu, and Pi 2011; Nardi, Shiano, and Gumbrecht 2004), and the psychology of blogging (Gurak and Antonijevic 2008). Limited research has been conducted on the online communication, community building, and online social interaction aspects of blogging (Hodkinson 2007).

Blogging as a format to create an online community is a relatively new source of research. It is understood that a virtual community can be easily created since bloggers often establish links on their own blog to other bloggers’ blogs (Bortree 2005). However,
this is only a minimal step in creating community, as bloggers do not need to have any interaction with other bloggers to create links to other blogs.

I have a personal connection with blogging as I have operated my own blog since 2008. I run a personal blog in which I blog about my life and whatever I find appealing or interesting. Shortly after starting my blog, I realized the vastness of the blogging world or “blogosphere.” There was an incredible amount of bloggers interacting with each other through comments on posts, linking to one another, and networking with each other in a variety of other ways. These blogging acts established a channel to create a community in the blogosphere.

I am taking the study of a blogging community further by introducing additional aspects to the online community that I have found and become a part of. Previous research on blogging and community has studied communities of blogs where the bloggers had known each other before they started blogging. Bortree’s (2005) study, for example, focused on a community of blogs, where the bloggers who ran the blogs lived in the same community and possibly already knew each other outside of the blogosphere. Nardi et al. (2004) studied a few bloggers who came into the blogosphere after the influence of friends who were already blogging. In this study however, I examine an online community of bloggers who have never previously met face-to-face and live in different places throughout the world but have connected online. Gurak and Antonijevic (2008:62) state that “the power of online community would lead in turn to a blurring of public and private” and this can be seen as occurring in the online group that I have chosen. This idea of blurring the public and private is a unique concept and the format of
blogs is a perfect source of data as it is an online, public place that individuals use to report about their private lives.

The majority of studies on blogs, blogging, and community, focus solely on community building through online interaction and communication (Blanchard 2004, Loft 2005, Wei 2004). While this is an extremely important part of understanding the formation of a blogging community, my study goes beyond this to investigate the interaction and communication that bloggers have outside of their blogs, including offline interaction and communication. This concept creates a bridge from an online relationship to a substantial offline relationship, a situation that is rare in the research. This aspect is important because of the fact that these bloggers came to know each other through their blogs and then felt connected enough to reach out and communicate in other avenues other than the blogosphere. This study looks at why they did this and what influenced them to take their blog relationships to the next level, outside of the blogosphere.

In this study, I draw on my knowledge of the blogosphere and my own inclusion into a blogging community. I investigate presentation of self (Goffman 1995) and motivations for blogging to explain the social interaction and process of building an online community. This study asks the following question: How do individuals form online relationships, and what processes do these relationships go through to form and develop into an online community? This study explores what influences bloggers to take an online blogging friendship to a face-to-face relationship, how online relationships evolve, and what builds an online community. In the end I hope to attain a better understanding of the uniqueness of online interaction and community building through
blogs and what influences bloggers to engage in this interaction and online community building.
Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Blogs are a media form that is growing exponentially (Blogpulse 2011, Rosenbloom 2004). Since blogs give users the option of “following” and “commenting” on blog posts, this internet interaction provides the possibility for the building of relationships which can grow into little communities through the blogosphere – the large blogging community. Researchers are discovering the benefits to using blogs as a source of information about internet communication and interaction (Chenail 2011; Hookway 2008; Tremayne 2007). The research world is finding a plethora of matters to investigate through blogs that include influencers and motivators to blogging (Jung et al. 2007; Liao et al. 2011; Nardi et al. 2004), presentation of self on the internet and blogs (Bortree 2005; Dominick 1999; Hookway 2008; Jung et al. 2007; Lenhart 2005; Papacharissi 2002), the formation of online relationships (Attrill and Jalil 2011; Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons 2002, McKenna, Green, and Gleason 2002), and understanding online communities (Blood 2000; Bortree 2005; Graham 1999; Gurak and Antonijevic 2008; Hodkinson 2007; Hornsby 2001; Jansen 2010; Loft 2005; Papacharissi 2002; Trammell and Keshelashvili 2005).

Influences and Motivations

Where does it all begin? Why do people create blogs in the first place? Nardi et al. (2004), studying motivations for blogging, social interaction through blogs, and relationship to the blog’s audience, found that 20 percent of the bloggers in their study created blogs because their friends asked them to. Davis (2010) also found that friends
can have a large influence on blogging. Nardi et al. (2004) provided a list of five “objects” that motivates bloggers to blog; these include a way to update others on their life, influencing others, seeking opinions, a way to work out their thoughts, and a way to release tension.

While Nardi et al. (2004) used activity theory to explain motivations for blogging, Liao et al. (2011) found that bloggers are motivated to blog by intrinsic rewards (killing time while blogging, storing data and files, pouring out feelings by blogging, and gaining achievement through blogging) rather than extrinsic rewards (looking forward to what others have to say, discovering good topics from others, connecting with people, making friends, and learning about others’ feelings and opinions). It was not that the bloggers did not look forward to the extrinsic rewards, but rather that there was a higher probability that bloggers would experience intrinsic rewards than extrinsic rewards (Liao et al. 2011). While it is true that most bloggers do not expect close connections to their audience as Liao et al. (2011) suggests, when they do form close connections to their audience, the extrinsic rewards begin to be more important and more influential towards a continuation of blogging.

These studies show support for internal motivations for blogging. For example, Jung et al. (2007) also found motives similar to Liao’s et al. (2011). According to the study by Jung et al. (2007), bloggers were motivated most by the entertainment aspect of passing time by blogging and by the blog being a space for self-expression and personal advancement. These motives were similar to Liao’s et al. (2011) intrinsic rewards including gaining achievement, killing time, and pouring out feelings. However, after a
blogger develops connections with other bloggers and a community grows, perhaps the motivations will alter to less intrinsic motives to more extrinsic ones. Nardi et al. (2004) slightly touches on this idea. According to Nardi et al. (2004), sometimes when bloggers receive feedback from their audience through comments, they gain momentum. At times, the audience influences the blogger to continue writing posts for their blog as to not disappoint said audience when the blogger does not feel like blogging (Nardi et al. 2004). While these studies offer examples of individual bloggers’ motivations for blogging for individual bloggers, they do not focus on or suggest a look at changes in motivations based on increasing online connections and relationships forming. Perhaps blogging motivations and influences change as online communication increases and relationships form and grow.

Presentation of Self

How do communication and interaction begin in the blogosphere? Just as in interaction in regular life, to prompt interest in one’s blog, one must present themselves and their blog in a manner that is appealing to others. A large part of blogging and social interaction online is the way the blog itself looks and how the blogger presents themselves on their blog and in the blogosphere. Since there is no face-to-face interaction to gauge one another by, bloggers must rely on online self-presentation to infer who they are and to make social judgments of others.

Presentation of self in real life has a face-to-face aspect to it. Online, the face-to-face aspect is replaced by a web page and the audience. However, presentation of self through blogs can still be observed through the different aspects of the blog. While
studying presentation of self through personal home pages, Papacharissi (2002),
discovered that listing links on a blog and posting about things that the blogger likes, can
show what a blog author enjoys; this is one of the first things people exchange when first
meeting. While links are an important part of presenting oneself to the blogosphere, it is
only the beginning. Child et al. (2011) found that some bloggers care about what they put
on their blog and regularly assess the impressions made to those who visit their blog.

Goffman (1959), in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, utilizes theatrical
terms to describe the social aspects of life. An actor puts on a performance for an
audience in the same way a person acts a certain way in front of others. In the same way,
some researchers have used Goffman (1959) to explain the way others present themselves
online (Bortree 2005; Dominick 1999; Papacharissi 2002). For blogs, presentation of self
is very important because the blogger is ever-changing their blog, adding new entries or
posts, sometimes every day. Therefore, the blogger is in a constant state of self-
presentation. According to Hookway (2008), bloggers may work to present themselves in
the best way possible by choosing to reveal only the qualities and aspects of themselves
that will portray themselves in a positive light. Hookway (2008:96) sees blogging as “just
another ‘stage’” where, according to Goffman (1959:244), “the very obligation and
profitability of appearing always in a steady moral light” is the goal.

Jones (1990), as cited by Dominick (1999), Bortree (2005), and Trammell and
Keshelashvili (2005), gives a summary of five strategies of self-presentation construction.
Both Dominick (1999) and Bortree (2005) use these strategies to explain the online
presentation of self on individual blogs. Jones’ (1990) five strategies of self-presentation
include ingratiation, competence, intimidation, exemplification, and supplication. Someone who uses the ingratiation strategy wants to be liked by everyone and therefore compliments others, adds to their modesty by revealing slightly negative things about themselves, and uses humor and familiarity in order to be liked. In the competence strategy, one wants others to recognize their skills, qualifications, abilities, and accomplishments, and thus makes these kinds of claims. Those who use the intimidation strategy want power and attempt to gain it through threats, unpleasantness, and other forms of intimidation. The goal of exemplification as a strategy is for others to perceive you as having high moral standards, and this is reached through displays of self-discipline and self-sacrifice. Supplication is the last strategy, and it is accomplished by self-deprecation and appearing helpless so others will try to help you and nurture you. Through these five strategies, Jones (1990) provides a structure in which self-presentation is constructed.

Dominick (1999) studied 319 personal home pages to determine the degree to which they employed Jones’ (1990) five strategies of self-presentation. Dominick (1999) found that ingratiation was utilized the most, as is true with face-to-face interactions as well. Jones (1990:184-185) states that “ingratiation is the most ubiquitous – and perhaps the most fundamental – of all the strategies” and with a bit of ingratiation, the other strategies are “more firmly secured.” Bortree (2005) also used Jones’ (1990) self-presentation strategies as part of an ethnographic study of 40 teenage girls’ blogs. Ingratiation and competence were the most significant strategies followed by supplication. Teenage girl bloggers were seen as using ingratiation by listing on
their blogs and linking to who they were with that day or references to others that they mentioned on their blog. Bortree (2005:35) concluded from this that “by mentioning individuals by name, they were probably attempting to be liked more by those individuals.” The girls would also reveal slightly negative things about themselves or silly things that they had recently done which is another ingratiation strategy. Some girls would list more negative things about themselves in attempt to perhaps gain sympathy from readers, thus displaying use of the supplication strategy. Through linking to many friends in their posts, the girls also showed their use of the competence strategy. Bortree (2005:38) ends by saying, “blogging about one’s life strikes me as narcissistic in the sense that these girls believe others will want to come to their site and read about their lives,” and then adds, “however, judging by the number of comments the … users receive, it appears that people are reading them.”

Comments and followers on blogs show that people do read blogs. However, there are some blogs that do not get any traffic at all. What makes readers want to read certain blogs? In a study of the popular A-list blogs with large audiences, Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) found that while popular blogs display ingratiation and competences of Jones’ (1990:975) self-presentation strategies, a large part of the A-list blogs was their “high level of self-revelation in regards to their identity.” If this is so, then maybe the more a blogger reveals about themselves, the more the audiences would want to interact with that blogger. Perhaps using Jones’ (1990) five self-presentation strategies do make blogs seem more interesting and the bloggers who run them more appealing to the readers.
and followers. Possibly the way bloggers present themselves on their blogs influences others to comment and later connect to form an online relationship.

*Online Relationship Formation*

Even though some bloggers blog only for themselves and have no intention of building online relationships, online relationships do form, but in different ways compared to face-to-face relationships (Attrill and Jalil 2011). Attrill and Jalil (2011) found that when an individual is more open to forming online relationships, they will reveal more about themselves online. This is called online self-disclosure (Attrill and Jalil 2011). Interactions and online relationship forming are different than face-to-face relationship developing (Attrill and Jalil 2011). For example, individuals in online relationships disclose information that they would not disclose in face-to-face relationships and at a higher rate than face-to-face interactions (Attrill and Jalil 2011, McKenna et al. 2002).

McKenna et al. (2002:28) found that “real, deep, and meaningful relationships do form on the internet.” Online relationships can be stable and long-lasting (McKenna et al. 2002). Since the internet provides more of a shield (hidden physical appearance, ability to ignore individuals who contact you online, etc.), “those who are socially anxious and lonely are somewhat more likely to feel that they can better express their real selves with others on the internet than they can with those they know off-line” (McKenna et al. 2002:28). McKenna et al. (2002) also found that when individuals better expressed their real selves online, they were more likely to develop close online relationships. These online relationships were then moved to become face-to-face relationships that were
more appealing to the individuals than if they had met and formed these relationships face-to-face first (McKenna et al. 2002).

**Online Communities**

A blogger’s and audience’s relationship can be closely connected. Bloggers blog what audiences choose to read. Without an audience, it is only the blogger and their thoughts. For social interaction, a blogger needs their audience and the audience connects to what the blogger creates. Sometimes an audience’s influence over a blog is so strong that some bloggers change what they blog about in response to feedback from those that read their blog (Nardi et al. 2004). As Nardi et al. (2004:224) puts it, “blogs create the audience, but the audience also creates the blog” and the “blogger and audience are intimately related through the writing and reading of blogs.” While the audience is important to a blog, it is other bloggers who are part of the audience whom interact through a network with their own blogs.

Recently, blogging has become the popular online form of social networking (Liao et al. 2011). Blogging communities emerge through the use of linking, commenting, and other created norms (Blood 2000, Gurak and Antonijevic 2008, Wei 2004). Researchers have noted that commonalities and shared interests bring individuals together to start blogs and internet communities (Hodkinson 2007, Loft 2005, Wei 2004). Many times with these kinds of blogging communities, the focus is a shared interest. In Hodkinson’s (2007) study of Goth online journals, Goths utilized “friend lists” to store links to other journals that they liked. Through this they formed their own social network friendships with a select group of people and thus encouraged “intimate ‘strong ties’”
between the bloggers who chose to link to each other (Hodkinson 2007:639). Hodkinson (2007) concluded from this that the individual defined the social network rather than the group. Wei (2004) studied a knitting blog community and discovered that each blogging community has specific norms that are created through each community’s culture. Loft (2005) similarly found that blog group cohesion derived from shared ideas and interests.

Blanchard (2004) used McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) conceptualization of a face-to-face sense of community in her study of a popular blog. Blanchard (2004) describes sense of community as containing feelings of membership within and to the community, feelings of influence on and by the community, integration and fulfillment of needs by support from the community, and a shared emotional connection through relationships and shared experiences. Blanchard (2004) concludes that the blog she studied achieved only a moderate sense of community. However, her idea to use a face-to-face definition of sense of community is interesting and begs the question of the strength of relationships and community when they are not face-to-face.

Just as face-to-face relationships grow more meaningful through different aspects, so too do online relationships within online communities. What the research fails to give is an understanding of the individual and internal building process of relationships within blogging communities. What is covered by these studies gives insight to understanding the basic formation of blogging communities and the framework needed to be considered a community, but there is no indication of an evolution of a community.
Community Creation Process

The current research on blogging varies widely. This study focuses on online relationship formation and the building of an online community where bloggers are emotionally and socially connected, have a sense of camaraderie, and are supportive of one another. The blogging research topics in this review were chosen for a foundation in understanding the building process of online relationships and communities. What influences individuals to blog is the first step in this process. Presentation of self shows the way a blogger presents themselves online. After a connection is established with members of a blog’s audience through comments and links, a community may begin to develop.

This study will show the building process of an online blogging community and the processes that individual members of the community went through to create it. Though the research on blogging focuses on a particular aspects of blogging, this study gives a more personal and in depth understanding to the makings of a blogging community. Since I am a blogger and have experienced the creation of a blogging community, I have acquired inside knowledge that other researchers may not have.
Chapter 3

METHODS

The arrival of the internet brought a new level of communication and social interaction. With it, an overabundance of social networks was born over time. Blogs, usually used as online journals, can also potentially be utilized as a foundation for a social network through a blog’s format. A blog contains the ability for its audience members to respond to posts through comments. In this way, there is interaction which provides the basis for social networking and a possibility for community building. Although blogging is relatively new, the use of blogs for research has been recently increasing (Blood 2000, Larsson and Hrastinski 2011). Blogs are a rich source for qualitative data because they “provide a publicly available, low-cost and instantaneous technique for collecting substantial amounts of data” (Hookway 2008:93). Since blogs are an online source of information, they provide access to data that may normally be unattainable geographically. Blogs contain archives of the blogger’s past; therefore they are useful in researching things over time. Because of a blogs’ usual anonymity, a blogger uses his or her blog as a place to freely express their thoughts; therefore it offers access “to the back stage thoughts and feelings of others” (Chenail 2011:252).

This study sought to answer the question: How do individuals form online relationships, and what processes do these relationships go through to form and develop into an online community? While working to answer this question, I worked with an interpretive paradigm in mind where I focused “on social relationships, as well as the mechanisms and processes through which members in a setting navigate and create their
social worlds” (Bailey 2007:53). I chose this paradigm because I realized that in order to understand social relationships, I must understand that there is no right or wrong answer, and I am not an objective researcher. This does not mean that I have ignored my own biases and influences.

In alliance with an interpretive paradigm, I believe that “understanding how people live and interpret their lives requires that researchers move, often literally, out of their own worlds and into the setting of the participants” (Bailey 2007:54). My developed insider status through blogging was an important factor in this study. I entered the blogosphere in 2008 with my own personal blog. A few months after starting the blog, I discovered that through the use of comments and links, a network of blogs existed. Soon, I began to develop connections with other bloggers. I began to realize that the same connections I had, other bloggers had as well. Through continued communication, these online relationships with other bloggers morphed into a community of bloggers. Eventually, this community of bloggers established a realization of connections by naming the community the “Blogger Family.” With this study, I hoped to understand this phenomenon of strangers on the internet connecting and building a community through online social interactions.

Recruitment

In the early planning stages of the Blogger Family meet-up, I presented the idea of conducting interviews for my thesis during the meet-up to those who were confirmed attendees through a secret group on Facebook. My proposal was met with praise and
resounding approval from each of the bloggers attending the meet-up. The other bloggers in the Blogger Family were not told of this study and they are still unaware of it.

I debated whether or not I should interview some of the bloggers who did not go to the meet-up. Ultimately, I decided that I would only interview those blogger who chose to attend the meet-up, thus meeting face-to-face. I wanted the result of face-to-face meeting to be a part of this study.

The Bloggers

Although the Blogger Family has grown to about 37 members, this study focuses on the seven bloggers who attended a meet-up in the northwestern United States in the summer of 2012. The meet-up was the idea of several bloggers who worked together make it a reality. All of the 37 bloggers were invited to attend, however only eight bloggers, including me, attended the meet-up. While the sample size is slightly small, I believe that in qualitative research it is often necessary to sacrifice the uniformity and larger sample size typically used in quantitative studies in order to gain a fuller development and understanding of the experiences (Weiss 1994).

The sample for this study consists of the seven bloggers who attended the Blogger Family meet-up. The bloggers are 18-26 years old, and there are six females and one male. Six live across the United States and one lives in England. For the bloggers who live in the United States, each live in a different state. Six are white and one is Chicana. Between the bloggers, there are two personal blogs, two journaling blogs, two lifestyle blogs, and one lifestyle and fashion blog.
Data Collection

In order to get a fuller understanding of the process of building a blogging community, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the bloggers. I hoped this would contribute richness to the study by drawing on the different perspectives and experiences the individual bloggers of the Blogger Family. Marshall and Rossman (2011) voice possible ethical concerns with using blogs or other internet information for analysis. Many times the researcher can be seen as a lurker, using personal thoughts such as posts on blogs for research. While there is literature that focuses only on blogs as data for study, I went to the source of the data in order to understand how the Blogger Family developed. So, in this research study, I interviewed members of the Blogger Family – the authors of the blogs – as I believe that they are the source of the creation of the Blogger Family.

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the seven bloggers, as is generally used in interpretive paradigm research (Bailey 2007). These interviews were conducted throughout the meet-up at convenient times for the bloggers, as I did not want to interfere with the meet-up’s schedule of events. Each blogger signed a letter of consent (see Appendix A) before the interview. Appendix B contains a list of the questions divided by topic that I asked each blogger. These questions were developed in consistency with this study’s research question, and therefore there is an important connection between research questions and interview questions (Bailey 2007). I gathered the bloggers’ demographics of name, gender, race, age, social class, education level, occupation, length
of time blogging with personal blog, and location. Interviews ranged from about 20 to 60 minutes in length. They were conducted in July of 2012 at the planned blogger meet-up in the northwest United States. All interviews were audio recorded and self-transcribed for analysis.

For these interviews, I kept various aspects of interviewing in mind. First, I understood that qualitative interviews are like a “living conversation” and should flow like one as well (Kvale 1996, Rubin and Rubin 2005). It is also important to encourage the conversational aspect of the interview, therefore some flexibility in the questions is encouraged (Bailey 2007). As interviews are different and are invented anew each time they happen, I also took what was learned from each interview and adapted subsequent interviews. I also kept in mind Rubin and Rubin’s (2005:14) guide that “qualitative interviewing requires more intense listening than normal conversations, a respect for and curiosity about what people say, a willingness to acknowledge what is not understood, and the ability to ask about what is not yet known.”

*Being an Insider*

As I am part of the Blogger Family, I had to be self-aware of my own biases while interviewing and analyzing the data. I understood that my own expectations may not be what was actually revealed and kept those expectations in check as they had the potential to influence the interviews (Rubin and Rubin 2005).

Defining the researcher-interviewee relationship was important to the research (Weiss 1994). Researcher positionality was also important in the study as a “researcher’s positionality affects all aspects of the research process – from the articulation of a
research question to the analysis and presentation of the data” (McCorkel and Myers 2003:199). Holding the position of an insider status in the Blogger Family had many strengths as well as challenges. The insider-outsider debate is a complex one that many researchers have covered (De Andrade 2000, McCorkel and Myers 2003, Rubin and Rubin 2005). In conducting my research and gathering data, I had to be aware that a “researchers status as both an outsider and insider is constantly shifting as relationships are continually negotiated” (McCorkel and Myers 2003:204).

Rapport and trust are strengths in this study because of my insider status as a fellow blogger. Marshall and Rossman (2011) describe trust as a main factor in interviewing. Without trust, the interviewee may not share all that is hoped to gain from the interview. Trust is often a limitation in interviewing as it takes time to build (Marshall and Rossman 2011). However, in this study, I held an insider status to the community being studied and therefore had been building trust with these bloggers for the past four to five years. This insider status was a great asset to the study, not only in building trust, but also since I have been involved in and have experienced the whole process of the Blogger Family evolution and know the language that these bloggers use.

As I am a part of the Blogger Family, I was open to contribute to the interviews by not only asking questions, but also sharing as reciprocity advises (Rubin and Rubin 2005). This was seen as a learning experience for both the interviewee and me as the interviewer. I hope that the bloggers felt as though they would be contributing to the understanding of the developing blogosphere through their participation.
Analysis

I analyzed the data collected from the interviews with the purpose of answering the research question: How do individuals form online relationships, and what process do these relationships go through to form and develop into an online community? I transcribed each interview with special attention to laughter, pauses, as well as any other important verbal cues. I read through the interviews several times before beginning to code. I developed interview summaries of each interview and kept a “notable quote file” as suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2005:205). I also used Seidman’s (2006) steps to crafting profiles for the bloggers for use in analysis and steps to creating a working pseudonym for each blogger to ensure confidentiality of names and blog names.

While coding the interview transcripts, I used Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) advice on where to find concepts and themes. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest looking for concepts and themes from your interview questions, frequently mentioned in interviews, in shifts in interviews, when comparing interviews, and from the concepts and themes already decided upon. Although I may have had preconceived ideas as to what I would find in my research, I kept in mind what Marshall and Rossman (2011:219) warn: “Whatever system the researcher plans to use, he should know that the scheme will undergo changes – coding is not a merely technical task. As the researcher codes the data, new understandings may well emerge, necessitating changes in the original plan.” So, as a part of inductive analysis, I began coding with certain themes in mind, but also stayed open to others that may be revealed (Bailey 2007). I searched the interview transcriptions to better understand the uniqueness of online interaction and community
building through blogs, and what influences bloggers to engage in this interaction and the online building of a Blogger Family.
Chapter 4

ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I discuss how the Blogger Family formed, the benefits of communicating online, how communication was important in creating and sustaining the Blogger Family, building trust with in the Blogger Family, gender within the Blogger Family, and the “core group” that resulted in the creation of the Blogger Family. Each of these parts played an important role in the creation of the Blogger Family. I go into detail, using the interviews from the Blogger Family meet-up, to show each blogger’s individual experience, piecing them together to show the formation of the Blogger Family.

Beginning of Blogger Family

According to many bloggers in the Blogger Family, the Blogger Family “just kind of happened.” Most of the bloggers were not sure how the Blogger Family began. It just did. Amanda, a 21-year-old white student who runs a lifestyle blog, explained how the Blogger Family began:

Amanda: Blogger Family… it just kind of happened… we all found, you know each other’s blogs you know just clickin’ through you know blogs’ links and stuff and we all found each other and started reading each other’s blogs and commenting. And eventually people added each other on Facebook. Eventually phone numbers were exchanged and you know, Colleen created that – the Blogger Family Facebook group and I think that really helped us become closer a lot. Umm and so it’s just kinda become like this support system of people that we hadn’t met until, you know two days ago ((laughing)). Umm yeah so it’s just kind of like a group of bloggers that you know read each other’s blogs and like each other a lot ((laughing)).

Here, Amanda explained the different steps she saw the Blogger Family go through to eventually become the Blogger Family. First, by clicking on the various links incorporated throughout the blogs, one finds other blogs to read and comment on. Once
becoming comfortable enough, more personal information is exchanged through phone numbers and friending each other on Facebook. After the Blogger Family Facebook group was created, Amanda noted that the group had become closer and is now a support system. The Facebook group was created by Colleen, a 20-year-old white abstractor and student who runs a lifestyle blog. She shared her experience of the Blogger Family beginnings:

**Colleen:** I actually started the group on Facebook so I don’t wanna be like I’m the mother. I mean that sounds a little… ((laughing)) that’s a little conceited I feel like ((laughing)) umm…I don’t know I guess like there was a group of us that kinda started talking first and like from us other people branched around so I started it ‘cause I became friends with Amanda and Elizabeth and Sarah. You know like, and then the four of us kind of like branched out and that’s I mean I guess that how it works? You know you meet someone and then you’re all in a big group. That’s how it works.

Colleen described the formation of the Blogger Family through networking. She started talking to three other bloggers and then all four of them began talking to other bloggers, branching out until they created a big group. Once there was a big group of bloggers, she created the Blogger Family Facebook group. However, Colleen did not go into detail here about the processes that the members of the Blogger Family went through. This was something that was apparent throughout the interviews.

*From Strangers to Family*

How did the Blogger Family become the Blogger Family? Some of the bloggers belong to other blogging “groups” or have other bloggers that they communicate regularly with, but the Blogger Family is the only group that these bloggers regard as a “family” of bloggers. The use of the word “family” to describe this blogging group could be the result of the closeness felt between the members of the Blogger Family. So how
did strangers on the internet become so close that they would call each other family?

Relationship building in the Blogger Family was different than relationship building face-to-face because it was started and done online. Of course, the relationship building was sometimes moved offline in the form of sending mail, phone calls, and texting; but for the most part, the interactions were done online. Elizabeth, a 21-year-old white student and part-time retail associate who runs a personal blog, confirmed this occurrence in the Blogger Family:

**Elizabeth:** Obviously in this case, because it’s a blog family, the first interaction is always online. It’s either through a comment or someone sending you an email or something. And…but I think it kind of varies… I mean some people never sent me anything… I guess it just depends on how – I suppose it’s like any friendship, really though. Because you’re not going to do the same things with all the friends you have. And you don’t make friends the same way with each individual, so…

Elizabeth compared the Blogger Family relationships to any kind of friendship where you do not “do the same things with all the friends you have and don’t make friends the same way with each individual.” Although relationship building in the Blogger Family is different than in face-to-face relationships, there are many parts of it that are the same. Bloggers are drawn to other bloggers with common interests just like individuals with common interests are drawn together. Bloggers begin to communicate with other bloggers to get to know them better via the internet in the same manner that individuals get to know each other and communicate face-to-face. Amanda made a similar comparison:

**Amanda:** I was always just very like – it was like strictly like just blogging. You know just commenting on like what they say, them commenting on what I post, and umm just about our blogs. And then we would come to each other and just like you know – just talk to each other or just you know, ask each other you know about our problems or you know sometimes I see things and I’m like “oh – you know – this reminds me of Elizabeth or
this reminds me of, you know, Melissa or something like that and like just sharing and like taking picture and like texting it to them. And so like you know it eventually like grew from just like talking about like our blogs to talking about like, you know, everything like your friend would.

Amanda showed a typical kind of progression to relationship building in the Blogger Family. First, bloggers started off by commenting back and forth on each other’s blogs. After communicating in that aspect for a while, they felt comfortable enough to open up a bit more and began thinking about the other bloggers as their friends. Amanda shared a point of the relationship building where she began seeing something that reminded her of one blogger and sharing something that another blogger would like. These are things that friends often do in face-to-face relationships. Amanda even realized this, comparing the way she talks to other bloggers to the way she talks to her face-to-face friends.

Although these Blogger Family relationships are similar to face-to-face relationships, there is uniqueness to Blogger Family relationships. Colleen touched on this uniqueness:

**Colleen:** I feel like relationships can continue to grow and evolve even if you’re not in the same place. Umm…but…I feel like if we did see each other every day it would kind of lose its appeal. You know? Eventually it would, you know? The Blogger Family is supposed to be about traveling, you know, meeting each other, and you know hanging out with people you don’t see other day - every day, and that’s, that’s a special feature and I don’t, I can’t say it would, you know, I’d hate every one if I saw them every day, but it would definitely would lose its appeal.

There is something unique about the Blogger Family that Colleen was trying to express. It is a uniqueness because it is unlike other face-to-face relationships. Since the bloggers do not see each other every day and have their own distinguishing factor of being bloggers, there is an appeal because the relationships in the Blogger Family are different than any other relationships.
Andrea, an 18-year-old white student who runs a personal blog, revealed another uniqueness to the Blogger Family, not just compared to face-to-face relationships, but to other online relationships members of the Blogger Family may have outside of the Blogger Family:

**Andrea:** I mean lots of people they make a blog, keep it for a couple of months and then it’s just history and they move on to something else and forget about it. But we’ve all kept up with it for so many years. So, it was inevitable that we would want to meet these people that we’ve been keeping with for so long. I think that is basically the big part of it.

The Blogger Family was consistent in blogging and their online communication which built strong online relationships. Most of the bloggers have been blogging for about four to five years. Over that time, they have been building these online relationships with others in the Blogger Family. It starts off slow though, according to Matthew, a 20-year-old white student who runs a fashion and lifestyle blog. He described his experience in building relationships online:

**Matthew:** It’s gone from like something that didn’t really mean a lot to me to something that I kind of cherish. Like at the beginning, it was – I don’t know, I didn’t feel like it was really, like it wasn’t really heartfelt, which sounds awful. Like, “I don’t care.” But like they didn’t need to care because they didn’t know who I was. Um, but like over time them reading about what’s going on in your life and you reading about what’s going on in their life, kind of makes you grow and like think about the other person. And eventually you just start to realize that what you’re writing on their posts and what they’re writing on your posts is like they mean it. Um, yeah because at the beginning it was just like really basic stuff like, “I love those pictures” and stuff, and now it’s like you – they’re commenting because they’re interested in what you’re saying and they care about what you’re saying. Um, then putting it on Facebook, let’s go back to that, as a social networking site has really brought it from these like medial comments to like “I actually care” comments to “we’re so close now that we can be friends on Facebook”. Um, at least that’s what it means to me.

When Matthew was first making connections with other bloggers online, it felt almost like they were being polite without much feeling or meaning behind the comments left on
his blog. Over time though, he began to see growth in the comments and the way he felt about the other bloggers he was in communication with. He discovered that these other bloggers were genuinely interested in his life and what he had to say and that he felt the same way about them. It was a progress over time, though; as he explicitly noted that it was not the same in the beginning of communicating as it is now. Also, he credited Facebook to being key in the progress of building these online relationships within the Blogger Family.

**Facebook**

Facebook played a big role in bringing the bloggers together. Emily, a 26-year-old white retail sales assistant who runs a journaling blog, also credited Facebook to being a key element in building relationships in the Blogger Family:

**Emily**: You would read certain blogs that you really liked and you knew those people always comment back on your blog because you were kind of like friends. But you weren’t really friends because you don’t know each other. But as soon as it’s goin’ to Facebook and you can actually see someone’s Facebook page, their family, their friend—I mean normally on their blog you’d see that, but you’d see their friends writin’ to them, you’d see other people talkin’ to them so you could see them a bit more in detail and a bit more personal than what they’d choose to put on their blog. So it’s kinda like you were friends, but a bit more friends with them.

As Emily expressed, Facebook opens bloggers to another, more intimate side of their lives that is not always shared on blogs. This made the bloggers seem more real to each other since they were not able to see each other face-to-face. The bloggers were able to see not only each other’s daily life on their blogs, but also a deeper, more personal level through Facebook. This brought them closer together and helped build online relationships between them.
In addition to bringing members of the Blogger Family closer by sharing personal information from Facebook profiles, the Facebook group also allowed easier communication between the bloggers:

Andrea: Once the like Facebook group happened, that changed a lot. Since before all you would really do was just comment on the blogs back and forth. So with the Facebook group, that has added a lot more interaction with people. And I think that’s helped get people closer too.

Interviewer: So how did the blog family become the blog family?
Matthew: I think Facebook is credited to that.
Interviewer: Yeah?
Matthew: I think Facebook is the sole source of that. Um, ‘cause everyone like knew each other, followed each other’s blogs and stuff. But I don’t think it was ‘till the Facebook group that it really became a thing. It was like one place for everybody to be. It was a hub. It was no longer an individual on another individual. It was one person and anybody else can also be there too.

Andrea and Matthew both observed the difference in communication that the Facebook group created. Instead of the usual communication between bloggers of commenting on each other’s blogs, the bloggers were now able to communicate to all of the bloggers at once through the Blogger Family Facebook group. The element that the Facebook group added was increased and easier communication. Communication was key in the process of creating the Blogger Family.

More communication contributed to bringing the bloggers closer. Andrea and Amanda described the Facebook group bringing the bloggers closer:

Andrea: Once we started adding people on Facebook and everything, and – I mean once we made the actual Blogger Family group, that definitely felt way more – like if an escalated version of us being closer? I don’t know if that even makes sense.

Amanda: I think what really helped us all get a lot closer is when Colleen made the Facebook like “Blogger Family” group. ‘Cause we would like – we would have a place to go and like to talk to everybody and like to tell – like share things with everybody and I think that really made us closer…
The act of creating a place where all the bloggers are grouped together in one place, gave
the bloggers a sense of being closer to each other.

*Privacy through the Blogger Family*

Privacy is important online. Elizabeth pointed out this element that the Blogger
Family Facebook group also provides:

**Elizabeth**: I think we wanted a place where we could talk on Facebook without making it
too public because I know a lot of people’s Facebook friends don’t necessarily know
about their blogs and stuff. Like most people I know don’t know I have a blog at all.
Umm… and it’s not because I try to keep it quiet, it’s just it doesn’t really come up. And
so I think maybe in an interest to keep things private, we started the group. And we kind
of just named it the blog family and it caught on! ((laughing))

The bloggers wanted someplace to be able to talk freely amongst themselves. So, the
Facebook group was created as a “secret group” where only members can see what is
posted, who is in the group, and the group itself. As Elizabeth mentioned, not all of the
bloggers’ blogs were common knowledge amongst their “real life” friends and family. So
having the private Facebook group provided the privacy the bloggers wanted.

Since the Blogger Family Facebook group is a private place where the bloggers
can talk to each other, the blogging relationships became closer and more real by
allowing the bloggers to openly share things. Emily described the Facebook Blogger
Family group as a place where the bloggers shared things or asked for advice like “real
friends”:

**Emily**: I think it’s because obviously the Facebook page, like we ask – we ask to share
problems, like we ask, “Oh this happened,” um “This has happened,” or “I need help with
this.” And people give advice, they, they can tell you things that worry you, you can do
this you can do that. So it’s acting like a – like a real friend friend – like a real friend. But
then also, um just closer because the relationship is built up. You feel like you really
know these people. You’re really interested in the same things, so you just feel closer
them, even though you don’t know them. Oh I don’t know if that makes sense.

Emily felt closer to the bloggers in the Blogger Family because she was building a
relationship with the back and forth communication in the Facebook Blogger Family
group. Even though she did not know the bloggers in a face-to-face manner, she still felt
like she knew them because of the things that they shared with each other as “real
friends” do.

*Communicating via the Internet versus Face-to-face*

Each of the bloggers revealed that the fact that these relationships are not face-to-
face and instead are over the internet, provides several benefits, especially for self-
proclaimed, introverted individuals.

*Easier*

One benefit is that it was easier for the bloggers to get what they are thinking across to
their audience than talking face-to-face. Andrea and Matthew described this occurrence:

**Andrea:** I mean whenever you’re on the internet and you’re basically writing everything,
you can get a lot more like straight to the point of what you want to say without having to
deal with searching for your words — which I — is probably hard for more introverted
people or at least for me since I am more introverted. So, you can just easily talk to
someone and you don’t have to like search for your words as I am doing right now
((laughing)). So, it’s more direct. Like it’s weird because it’s kind of more direct through
the internet even though you’re not in person, just because of that.

**Matthew:** I think online offers me a little security. Um, as in like kind of instead of
stewing inside of me that I normally wouldn’t spew out verbally. But putting them into
words is much easier.

Andrea revealed that for introverted people like herself, writing out your words online is
easier than talking in person because of the fact she does not have to search for the right
words to say what she wants to say. Matthew was in agreement, saying that talking on the
internet has given him the chance to get out what he wants to say rather than keeping everything “stewing inside” of him. Blogging is an outlet for those who have trouble getting their thoughts across in face-to-face settings and perhaps a place where they can express what they really want to say.

Security for Thoughts

Cali, a 20-year-old Chicana student who runs a personal blog, also voiced that it was easier writing online because she did not have to deal with people’s reactions to what she said as she did when she talked to people face-to-face:

Cali: It’s easier to like write about stuff and like not have to be like face-to-face…‘Cause I don’t have to see people like’s reactions to when they first read it, like I just read their comments and it’s not like “((gasps)) You’re doing this?” or stuff like that.

To Cali, the computer screen seemed to provide some sort of security to her thoughts. She could be honest and did not have to worry about what other people thought about what she said on her blog. The audience could leave comments, but that was the extent of their power in the situation. Cali has the power to ignore and even delete whatever the audience says in the comments. Cali is in control of her blog and can say whatever she wants on it. In this way, Cali’s blog provides a secure place where she has control over what gets posted and has the power to do what she wants with the comments she receives.

As previously mentioned, Matthew expressed how the internet gave him security for his thoughts. This may be because he was also most likely not going to see the individuals who were reading his thoughts. Amanda and Colleen validated this concept:

Amanda: I guess it’s just like you know that they’re never gonna see them. You’re, you know, probably never gonna meet them. You know, and so it’s like they’re not gonna
like, you know, go tell them or they’re – it’s like never gonna be awkward with them and you can just say, you know, like “this has been happening and like I don’t know what to do.”

Colleen: It’s your whether or not you want to ever meet them or if you want to talk to them ever again it’s not like you’re gonna run into them at the grocery store, you know it’s a…it’s like a…risk free socially – socialization group.

The fact that it is the blogger’s choice whether he or she meets people in their audience, again gives them the power in the situation. Like Colleen said, it is a risk free, socialization group, and the fact that there was a computer screen between the blogger and the audience, gave the blogger a sense of power and made them feel more at ease to share things.

Boost of Confidence

Elizabeth, Cali, and Andrea have experienced this feeling of ease and it has helped them feel more confident about sharing things. They have also recognized that the internet is often a place that can cause introverted individuals as themselves to feel self-assured and unintimidated:

Elizabeth: Oddly enough, the internet seems to bring out like extroversion in people even if they’re not extroverted. Or at least I’ve seen that. I don’t know if it’s necessarily actually the case, but it seems like people are more willing to share themselves. Even if they know people will see it and that they might have a problem without talking about it.

Cali: People that I’ve met throughout the internet that aren’t as intimidating as like people that I meet in real life.

Andrea: I think that’s really true that my online persona is more confident and like would talk more than ((laughing)) my real self. I don’t know. I think that’s – ‘cause like the internet is kind of like a place for introverted people… I guess ‘cause there’s not like the pressure of like one-on-one, face-to-face social interaction. Like right on the spot you have to answer, question, or respond. But whenever you have the internet, you can like take your time to think out things and present yourself I guess the way that you want to present yourself and not the way that you’ll actually come across.
Elizabeth brought to light the fact that the internet seems to make people more extroverted than they are offline. In her experience, she found that people were more willing to share themselves. Although Elizabeth did not give a reason why this is so, Cali stated that people online are less intimidating than those offline. Perhaps introverted individuals seem to be more extroverted online because others online seem less intimidating. Interestingly, Andrea brought the thought together and made a distinction between her “online persona” and her “real self”, saying that she felt that she was more confident online than in face-to-face interactions. There is a pressure to immediately think of something to say in face-to-face interactions; while online, an individual has time to think things through. This gives confidence to bloggers, like Andrea, when they are online, therefore encouraging openness and a sense of extroversion.

**Beware of Impersonators**

The power given to the bloggers by the security of the computer screen was also something bloggers had to be wary about:

**Emily**: Online, you *can* hide things if you wanted to. You don’t have to be your true self.

This fact brought up by Emily is very true. The individuals in the audience of these bloggers could be anyone and could pretend to be anyone. The security of blogging can also be seen as not secure at all. While the bloggers were viewing blogging as a place of security where they can express themselves in a way that works for them, there is always a risk from the audience. Sometimes there are “lurkers” that read a blog but never comment. The blogger would never know that these individuals read their blog. Also, there is always the chance that the other bloggers may not be who they say they are, since...
the shield of the computer screen can also work as a shield for impersonators as well. This is something that the bloggers were faced with whenever they communicated with each other.

Constant Communication

One key element of the creation of the Blogger Family was the constant communication between the members, not only through their blogs, but also through other social networking sites and offline as well. With constant communication, trust is one product that may be built. With today’s technology there are so many possibilities of communication and the Blogger Family took advantage of that fact. Colleen described the evolution of the Blogger Family in respects to the consistent communication:

Colleen: When you start a blog and then people comment on it and it could be random people that you never talked to again or whatever, but with the blogging family, you know, we’re consistently in communication with each other, I mean you know it’s, it’s more of a, it’s more of a feedback board now than it used to be. So I guess just the communication, I mean the consistent socialization with other people you otherwise wouldn’t talk to who you relate to really well…We were just always in consistent communication, like with comments on our blogs or you know eventually we started texting and calling each other on the phone and Skyping and umm…we all know that we had community, we just decided we were going to name it.

First, Colleen talked about how the Blogger Family was more than just commenting on each other’s blogs. With the Facebook Blogger Family group, the bloggers were brought together in one place to make communication and socialization simpler. Eventually, the bloggers brought communication offline through texting and calling each other. Andrea showed that it was more than just the Facebook group and offline communication:

Andrea: I think once people started getting more like social networking sites, because then it wasn’t just on blogs. It was like blog, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and then like Skype, so…it was less like you were just reading someone’s blog and more like you were completely following their life…’cause if it’s just blogging, like yes that is a way to keep
up with that person, but it’s – yeah once you add all the other things, it makes them seem like more of a real person. So, you can’t help but grow closer to them.

Andrea expressed that being in the Blogger Family is more than just blogging. It is connecting and communicating on many different levels in many different ways. It is feeling like you are completely following the lives of the other Blogger Family members. This makes them seem more like a real person and the bloggers grow closer by following their life via the various social networks. Eventually, the bloggers brought the Blogger Family into real life by taking their interactions and communication offline through swaps, package exchanges, letter writing.

*Bilding Trust*

When the bloggers wanted to take their online blogging relationships offline by sending mail to each other or calling each other, they have to feel comfortable enough with each other to trust each other with intimate contact information. The bloggers found that the rewards of building trust were a great experience in the end, getting tangible items from other bloggers, making them more “real” was worth building the trust between them.

*Exchanging Addresses*

One of the big steps to forming online blogging relationships within the Blogger Family was exchanging addresses. Bloggers exchange addresses for a chance to either write to each other or participate in swaps. Colleen and Andrea explained the process:

**Colleen:** There’s this thing called “swaps” or “giveaways” and you, if you want to, I guess like an example would be like a post card swap. So if you’re in this post card swap, you’re supposed to send five post cards out to people. Well, if you have their address, you might as well get their phone number. You know? It’s just…I mean if you’re giving your address to someone on the internet, like there must be some degree of closeness.
You know what I mean? And so… I guess it was just the next step when you’re friends with them, you want to communicate with them, you want to connect with them and… it was the next step!

**Andrea:** Once people started organizing like the package swaps, and like Christmas cards, I think that was – I think it was the Christmas card thing [that] was one of the first things that I did. Because you don’t wanna – ‘cause there’s – if someone makes the blog post and like “Oh hey I’m organizing like a package swap, Christmas card swap, CD swap, whatever” like everyone wants to get something ((smiling)) and like make something cool for someone else. And you figure if other people are doing it, like they can’t be that creepy ((laughing)). Like, they’re probably a real person. They aren’t going to come and kill you in your sleep. So that kind of prompts you to have that trust in that person I guess.

Colleen described that once a blogger reached a certain level of closeness, they felt comfortable enough to share more intimate details of their lives, like their address and phone number. Andrea used the fact that other bloggers were participating in these swaps as well as validation that it was okay to give out personal information. Andrea recognized the trust she was putting into the other bloggers when she gave out her address.

**Risk**

While Colleen had no problem giving out this information, Cali saw the risk in it:

**Colleen:** I’ve never been sketched out by anyone in the group or anything. Yeah, I’ve never felt like safety was an issue.

**Cali:** We were taking chances that like other people would be completely scared of. And like we’re taking risks, like obviously, ‘cause we don’t know like if a person’s gonna kill someone or something ((whispering and then laughing)).

Cali recognized the risks that bloggers like her have taken while building these relationships within the Blogger Family. Andrea also recognized the risk, but provided validation through the length of time that she had been talking to the other bloggers:

**Andrea:** There’s kind of a risk, but I’m pretty sure we all felt comfortable enough to give our addresses out so we figured by then that it wouldn’t be a bad idea or anything… I mean by then it was like a year – at least two years probably? And we all knew each
other like by then. So, think we figured if it was not – if there was like actually a creepy old man or something, after like two years, then they did a pretty good job of hiding it so…((laughing)) I guess there’s just – we just felt like it was comfortable enough by then.

Andrea showed that the length of time reading the other bloggers’ blogs, for at least two years, made them feel comfortable enough to give out addresses. She figured that if someone really was someone other than who they said they were, they would have made a mistake after two years. Looking back, Matthew realized just how much all of the bloggers trusted each other:

Matthew: I don’t know how many other people have met online and have made close friends that they trust. Um, I don’t know, it’s so surreal I guess… Like why did I trust these people, why do they trust me? They never met me.

Matthew was surprised at the idea of it. Many of the bloggers did not realize how much trust they were putting into the other bloggers until they were asked about it. Emily attempted to find examples of why she felt she could trust the other bloggers:

Emily: I don’t know how – I don’t know how I can think I can trust them. It’s just maybe, just readin’ – maybe from always reading their blog, but not just some random person I don’t read. I’m always reading their blog if I end up being friends in on Facebook. I feel like, well, I don’t know them all, but it feels like you know them all, so that – that can help.

Emily gave credit to continuously reading other bloggers’ blogs and being friends on Facebook to encourage trust. She felt that if she did those things, she felt as if she knew them and therefore trusted them. Since Emily was continuously reading the Blogger Family’s blogs and building trust in that way, there was a consistency of information being transferred between her and the Blogger Family. When someone is consistently communicating, some sort of relationship is developed.
The result of the bloggers sharing addresses was of course writing letters and sending things to each other. This can be seen as bringing the online to “real life” offline. Connecting offline from online is a unique concept. It is significant, given that the bloggers each have a large internet presence (in blogging and other social networks), that they feel the need to take the time to handwrite letters and send them via “snail mail” to other bloggers in the Blogger Family. Andrea and Matthew shared their insights on this unique concept and how it related to being a part of the Blogger Family:

**Andrea:** The first package I got was from Sarah again. The like first person I ever followed their blog or whatever. And um, like Colleen organized CD swap that we had the Christmas card...so um it was a neat way to learn more about people and see their creativity come in like the physical form not just online...People don’t get mail that often from people these days because of the internet, but because of the internet, we’re getting mail! So, it’s kind of awesome how that happened...kind of like a paradox...online got us to meet in real life... So even that kind of was a way to bring it into real life even though we hadn’t met each other yet.

**Matthew:** These things where we’re actually sending like thoughtful, physical objects to another person that I’ve never met before kind of puts a, like a reality to the person on the other side... It’s just kind of putting this this real life spin – like you have these people and they’re showing you these new things. Because, like when you’re with friends in real life you go and do things. Um, but I know I like to go and try new things. Like it’s like “Oh there’s a new restaurant. Let’s go try it.” And doing like a swap, package swap, it’s kind of like that. It’s kind of like going and doing something new with friends. Yeah. For me it is.

Both Andrea and Matthew commented on the fact that sending things to the other bloggers gave a real life feel to the relationships in the Blogger Family. Andrea mentioned the interesting fact that it was the internet that caused these bloggers to connect and in this technologically forward world, they have decided to send mail to each other as a form of communication. Communication over the internet was not enough for
the bloggers; they wanted to be able to have a tactile piece of their friendship represented through mail. It made the friendship more real. Matthew stated that sending and receiving mail from a blogger puts a “reality to the person on the other side.” They were exchanging real, tangible things that gave realness to the other blogger – almost authenticating and validating them. Instead of sharing moments and new things together like friends do in real life, the bloggers are sending things in the mail to each other, almost to compensate for that lost face-to-face interaction. Sending mail to each other is one aspect of the many ways these bloggers have been building relationships.

Support System

The one aspect of the Blogger Family that each of the bloggers repetitively touched on was the fact that the Blogger Family acts as a support system for the bloggers. Amanda and Colleen observed this support within the Blogger Family:

Amanda: We all support each other. You know, people go to the page all the time and, you know, say like “this has happened. I don’t know what to do”, you know like, Mandy even just this morning like, “I’m freaking out about – you know – cost of college” and like yeah “I have boy trouble,” you know etcetera. And it’s just a support system - I think that’s like what a family is, [it] is a support system.

Colleen: We communicate with each other. Everything’s always supportive. Everyone always understands. It’s not just like a “yeah ok I got it, yeah move on.” It’s a – like people want to talk to you about your issues. They don’t wanna glaze over them. They wanna talk to you about, you know, why you feel that way, how you can resolve it. And it’s not like an exhausting process. This is enjoyable, ‘cause they’re your friends!

Amanda and Colleen both expressed the Blogger Family’s willingness to give advice and the fact that the bloggers felt supported by Blogger Family. Amanda compared the Blogger Family to an actual family saying that it is a support system just like a family. Colleen expressed the fact that the bloggers in the Blogger Family actually want to help
each other with any issues or problems the bloggers may have; and it is not tiresome, but something the bloggers are happy to do.

*Part of a Family*

The bloggers compared the Blogger Family to aspects of an actual family – both good and not so good. Emily understood the importance of being considered part of a family:

**Emily:** It’s really good that someone, like I said earlier, like someone likes your blog that much and wants to – ‘cause family’s a really important thing, so to be considered part of a family is, is great. Like when you’re not related to each other, to be part of a family is great to know people care about you, people are interested in you, people want to speak to you, want to talk to you. It means a lot really to be accepted by people.

Being accepted and knowing that you are important are two important things that Emily talked about. The first one, being accepted, was something that many of the bloggers noted as important to them. No judgment is something that you sometimes cannot get from “real life” friends or even family as Colleen shared:

**Colleen:** I mean I don’t want to use the word “family” since we already used it, but I mean that’s really what we are, you know? We’re…well if I’m stressed out about school or my relationship, or whatever, like my in real life friends, I can’t – there’s some sort of – there’s a degree of like something you need to protect with those people. But with the blog family, I mean you can say whatever you want, no one’s gonna judge you… You don’t run into them every day! You know, if… they’re not gonna tell your mom’s best friend’s teacher that, you know, you said something sketchy on the internet, you know? I mean there’s – no one [is] gonna tell your secrets.

Colleen showed that since these Blogger Family relationships are online and not face-to-face, there is a certain feeling of freedom from censoring what is said. Since the bloggers do not see each other face-to-face on a regular basis, there is isn’t the pressure to appear put-together all the time:
Colleen: I think just because there’s an expectation that if you’re writing a blog, you’re gonna candy-coat everything. You know, and that’s definitely an expectation of the blogworld though. I mean it’s – it’s just like the design community, you know you want everything to be picture perfect. You want everything to be, you know, photographed in a Martha Stewart Magazine and it’s not. And that’s I think why our blogging community is so special it’s ‘cause it’s not all perfect. We’re not all middle-aged, you know, women who have everything and live in nice houses and drive nice cars. I mean we’re struggling college students and it’s nice.

Usually personal blogs share only what is wanted to be shared – the “picture perfect.” In the Blogger Family though, since there was no pressure to be perfect, bloggers felt that they were accepted as they are. Cali had a similar take to the judgment-free Blogger Family:

Cali: People that I have to like interact with every day don’t like know how I think, unless they do, they’re like sometimes they’re put off by it. But you guys ((the Blogger Family)) just take it… I feel like you guys won’t like judge me as much…

Cali felt as though the Blogger Family would not judge her like people in her face-to-face relationships may. This in turn could have caused the bloggers to be more open and perhaps be more of themselves in the Blogger Family.

*No Judgment, Unbiased, Helpful, Accepting Advisors*

Since the bloggers in the Blogger Family were less likely to judge each other, it gave the bloggers in the Blogger Family a chance to feel accepted for who they are.

Andrea put it this way:

Andrea: You kind of become reassured of your own abilities and – ‘cause you have like your own little fan base in a way. Like everyone’s on your side for things and they’re not going to be like “No, you suck.” So, you just know that you have people there for you and that – I don’t know. It just gives you some added self-esteem maybe? I don’t know if that’s the right word, but yeah.
The bloggers were rooting for each other and this made the bloggers feel good about themselves. Emily also shared what it means to her to feel accepted and cared for by the Blogger Family:

**Emily:** [It] makes me feel really happy. Um, makes me feel happy that people care about me and people want to be my friend...it just makes me feel like accepted and really happy and just, it’s just a great thing really...I think it’s [about] being accepted. Because I think it’s always hard sometimes to be friends with some people. Like to – to know that you are really friends with people, but to know that people really want to know you, want to talk to you, want to read about you, want to see what you’ve been up to, want to hear stories like they really care about you, and they’re like all ‘round the country – like different places of the world and they really want to – to be your friend like from that far away. It’s really, really good.

Having the kinds of assurances that Emily talked about – people want to know her, talk to her, read about her, see what she’s been up to – showed that they really care about her and it made her feel accepted and happy.

The Blogger Family is helpful, providing a source of advice and support to its members outside of the usual advice and opinions from face-to-face relationships. Andrea and Amanda expressed this concept:

**Andrea:** If you post in it, you know someone’s gonna see it and have some sort of advice. Kind of just like another set of friends slash family to fall back on if you don’t have anyone in your real life that you can talk to it about or if you just wanna get more opinions or just have more like love... You can form like less biased opinions and get advice from people that have an outside viewpoint. So I think that’s pretty useful... I guess for me personally, the group is people that I can talk to at any time. And if there’s something in like personally – real personal life that I don’t want to talk about, then there’s always that [the Blogger Family]... So it also is kind of reassuring also just to know that you have like those people there. So even if something shitty happens in – or sorry, something bad happens in like real life, like you always have them to count on at least even if they’re far away.

**Amanda:** It’s just like a group of friends really that just happen to be very far away from each other. You know? Umm...you know you go to them and you can ask them things, like ‘cause you know they don’t know like you’re your family or your like immediate friends, so they can kind of be like an unbiased third party. Just something you know if
you need an opinion or just like need some like support or love or anything else, you know, or just have a question about anything. So yeah it’s just like a group of friends really um that just live in different states and countries ((laughing)).

Both Andrea and Amanda talked about the unbiased advice that comes from the Blogger Family. This can be helpful when the bloggers have something in their life that they are having trouble with. Sometimes the bloggers do not have family or friends that they can turn to in certain situations, and the Blogger Family provides a place where bloggers can talk to individuals outside of their “real life” lives. It is a unique and helpful attribute to the Blogger Family that many members use. Matthew, although he does not have use of the Blogger Family in that aspect yet, had a good idea of how the problem and advice routine works:

Matthew: It makes me feel like people kind of care about things that I also care about. Um or if like I have a problem I know I can address it to them… I know like Katrina’s post you know like these problems that she’s having and the fact that she feels comfortable enough to like post these things, um I mean I don’t have the need to post these things just yet, but it’s nice… Like “You have a problem and we’re gonna listen to you talk about it. Then we’re gonna give you like feedback and encouragement.” And that kind of brings us closer.

Matthew liked how comfortable the bloggers felt with each other. The use of the Blogger Family as a place where the bloggers could bring their problems and seek advice from other bloggers, brought the bloggers closer together.

Gender in the Blogger Family

There are 37 members in the Blogger Family. Of those 37 members, 2 of them are male. Although gender was not something that I had in mind when I conducted this study, it is still a part of the Blogger Family.
The majority of the Blogger Family is female and thoughts on gender were interestingly revealed only by Matthew, one of the only males in the group:

**Interviewer:** How does the Blogger Family make you feel?

**Matthew:** Um… it kind of makes me feel like – like not like previously people didn’t care, but it makes me feel like people kind of care about things that I also care about. Um or if like I have a problem I know I can address it to them. Um… ((pauses, sighing)) I’ve also kind of feel like, being one of the only males in the group, it kind of – it’s probably a little bit of a different experience for me. Um, I’m not really sure why, but I think being a male in the group with all of these females kind of puts me on this different page a little bit.

**Interviewer:** How? What do you mean by that?

**Matthew:** I don’t know. I think maybe it’s just the fact that like I’m a minority in a group. Um, it – well I shouldn’t feel like a minority just because it’s such a welcoming, welcoming group, but like I’m gonna get really racist for a second but like if I were to walk into like a black church, I would feel like I’m out of place. Right? You would feel like you’re out of place too. Probably. Um ((laughing)), but it’s kind of like something like that too. Like I just feel like sometimes it’s like “Wait a second. What am I doing with all these girls?” I don’t know. That’s the only like kind of weird thing for me.

Matthew saw that being a different gender than the majority made him feel as if he was on a different page than the majority. I thought it was interesting that he was the only one that mentioned something about gender. Then again, he was the gender minority in the group and therefore that may be the reason he noticed it.

Matthew also felt bound by his gender in the group:

**Matthew:** As a guy in a girl’s world, I’m not – I’m seriously not someone like bound by gender. But sometimes I feel like I’m bound by gender a little bit… like sometimes I would like to blog about menswear. But then I think like almost every single one of my followers is a female. Why would I blog about menswear? Like that’s not why they started following the blog. They have no – like they can’t take really anything away from that. Um, and so like I resisted doing certain things because of that I guess. That’s one of the major things that I was thinking about recently. Like I really want to get back into menswear blogging but my audience is all female.

Matthew has felt bound by his gender because the audience of his blog is mostly female.

Matthew is a “guy in a girl’s world.” It is interesting how he is experiencing the reverse
of the traditional “a woman in a man’s world” in the “real world.” Although Matthew was only really talking about pleasing his mostly female blog audience, it is an interesting twist to the Blogger Family.

Meeting Face-to-face

When the bloggers met face-to-face for the first time, there was a lot of uncertainty of how everyone would be and how they would get along. The bloggers were unsure of what to expect. However, they found that each of the bloggers was just as expected:

Colleen: I really wanted to be the person that everyone expected me to be. And, I was relieved to find out that that’s the case. So that’s good! …people have presented themselves really well.

Cali: Everyone is exactly the way I thought they would be. Everyone.

Matthew: This weekend really kind of just – it kind of confirmed a lot of things that I’d already thought about. Um and just personality wise what I’ve taken away from the group online kind of was confirmed during this trip.

The bloggers were exactly as they appeared to be on their blogs which means they presented themselves well on their blog. The bloggers, like Matthew, had to piece together what they thought these bloggers were like from pictures, writing styles, and likes and dislikes. When the bloggers met face-to-face, it was a confirmation of what they had pieced together. The bloggers also discovered that they really felt like they knew each other, even though they had never met face-to-face before:

Colleen: We all feel like we’ve known each other for so long it’s not like – there’s no reason to catch up, ‘cause we already know. Which is the best part, you know, we’ve consistently stayed in communication so, it hasn’t been like, “How are you? How’s school?” It’s…you know we’re close.

Amanda: It doesn’t feel weird. And so it makes it even crazier that it doesn’t feel weird.

Elizabeth: [The] weirdest thing about it is that it’s not weird at all. So far I don’t think there’s been an awkward moment. And that’s – I mean [there are] people that I’ve known all my life who I consider my best friends and there’re awkward moments!
Andrea: It’s just been amazing that we got here and it wasn’t really awkward and everyone just kind of hit it off immediately and...I cannot wait for everyone to meet again. Because, I mean now we’re kind of going from just being internet friends...to being real life friends.

Colleen, Amanda, Elizabeth, and Andrea revealed that it was not weird or awkward during the Blogger Family meet-up. Colleen expressed that they all knew what was going on in everyone’s lives because they have consistently communicated with each other. Andrea pointed out that they can now be real life friends since they have met face-to-face.

The bloggers wanted to meet each other because they felt very connected and close with each other. This was the main motivating factor of why they decided to plan a meet-up. Colleen, Amanda, Elizabeth, and Andrea had similar responses to meeting some of the Blogger Family:

Colleen: I guess just generally wanting to see people that you communicate and connect with so well, in person.
Amanda: I love these people, you know? Like, I wanna actually meet them.
Elizabeth: I was incredibly excited about meeting everyone because I absolutely love everyone.
Andrea: I want to meet these people. I’ve talked with them for so long and I can’t wait to see – like see them in person because I want to be able to say that they are like my real life friend[s] and know for a fact like what they’re like in person.

These bloggers showed strong emotional ties to each other without even meeting face-to-face. They wanted to connect these emotions to a person that they can meet face-to-face. Andrea pointed out again that she would be able to call the bloggers that she meets, real life friends. Andrea presented the idea that meeting face-to-face was the final step to a true friendship:
Andrea: Once you connect it with like a real life person, that’s really like the final – even if it’s like 99% best internet friends ever, like you have to have like in the end you have to be able to get along face-to-face for it to be like a true friendship I think.

Andrea based a true friendship on being able to meeting face-to-face and being able to get along. Emily commented that being comfortable with each other and being able to be themselves with each other face-to-face during the meet-up proved that they were her close friends:

Emily: It just proves that they are my close friends. ‘Cause it just felt so comfortable. Just everyone was their self. And everyone felt like themselves, like it didn’t feel like, “Oh my goodness I’m in a room with other strangers.” Because they were the people that I felt like I knew and I do know them now. And um, it’s just – it’s quite emotional when you think about it because it was just crazy how these, how these people you don’t really know are actually your best friends. So it’s really good.

Emily felt that even though they had never met before, being together face-to-face with the bloggers felt comfortable and like she knew them. Emily even called them her best friends. It was a good connection and an emotional one for not only Emily, but the other bloggers as well.

The “Core”

The creation of the Facebook Blogger Family group gave the bloggers a place to interact as a group instead of one-on-one via blog comments. It is one place that the bloggers feel comfortable talking about problems they have and seeking advice from other bloggers as needed. Since the Blogger Family Facebook group is “secret,” only members of the group are allowed to invite other bloggers to join. Emily shared her experience being invited to join the group:

Emily: I can’t remember who set it up, if it was…don’t – I just remember getting’ a message sayin’ “Would you like to”, because obviously I send post to certain people and then been friends with them on Facebook. So, because there was friends on Facebook
who…I can’t remember if it was Colleen or Elizabeth or someone like that emailed me – or sent me a thing to join because obviously they must have wanted me to join because they must have read my blog. And in the beginning it was only a few people. It wasn’t many. So think that’s how it started to get that group.

Emily received an invite from a blogger who wanted to invite her to the Facebook group. Emily believed that she got invited to be part of the Facebook group because she had been sending mail to some of the bloggers and was already friends with some of them on Facebook. She felt they wanted her to join because they read and enjoyed her blog.

*Contribute to be Part of the Blogger Family*

In the Blogger Family Facebook group, Members can invite any bloggers they want to the group. However, this fact caused some tension with some of the Blogger Family members. Colleen explained this occurrence:

**Colleen:** We have a group on Facebook that you can invite other people to so we said you know if you want them to be a part of the blog family, go and bring them. But there’s like sixty people in the group now and no one knows who these people are. And yeah they’re in the group, but they’re not really part of the group. And it’s, I don’t know if it’s a “who decides” or if it’s just the way you connect. I mean it’s not like “ah you’re out.” It’s not that sort of situation, but there’s definitely people who are like the “core” members. And I just think it’s just relationship based.

According to Colleen, there are many members of the Facebook Blogger Family group that she did not know. She felt that they were not really in the group, giving “the way you connect” as the reason. She made note that it was not that they are not part of the group, but that they may not be part of the “core” group that is relationship based. The idea of a “core” in the Blogger Family was something that was not brought up until the bloggers met face-to-face. Colleen saw the “core” as the bloggers who had developed relationships with each other. The strength and “core” of the Blogger Family is based on the relationships within the Blogger Family. If a blogger does not build up their relationships
within the group, then they are not as a part of the Blogger Family. Andrea saw similar issues with adding people to the Facebook group:

*Andrea:* We have like that thing where you can just add if – you can add people to the Facebook group. But I think that that doesn’t really *count* as much as being really a part of it. Like you…I don’t know it’s just the same way as becoming someone’s friend in real life. You talk to them, except we comment. You show an interest in their life, I guess, and it’s not just one sided. I mean it’s pretty similar to most friendships except it all takes place online. But, I don’t know if there’s like a core group in the Blogger Family that’s more than the rest than the Blogger Family. I don’t know. It just – I don’t know. But there’s like a difference between just being added into the group and actually being part of it I guess…I mean, not trying to be elitist or whatever. I mean, if you’re just like added to the group, you don’t say anything or talk to anyone, then you’re not really *in* it. It – I mean, just like being in any friendship really, you have to actually make an effort to be in part of like the family.

Andrea also noted that any of the members can add bloggers to the Facebook group. She also stated that just being added to the group did not mean a blogger was actually a part of the group. She treated it like becoming someone’s friend in a regular face-to-face relationship. Added bloggers were expected to get to know the other bloggers in the group and become part of the family by contributing. Matthew had the same idea of bloggers being expected to contribute to the group in some way:

*Matthew:* I feel like we’re – we can be selective. Like for right now we’re trying to do a clean-up. Were you here for that? Yeah. Um, because there’s people who don’t input. Um, whose – like we would never of really heard of, whose blogs we’ve never read. Um, and I guess yes they’re technically part of the family, but they’re not. Like if you don’t contribute or anything are you part of it? I don’t know.

Matthew was basically saying the same thing as Andrea; how could someone be part of something if they did not contribute to it? Matthew brought up the fact that the bloggers at the meet-up had been talking about doing a “clean-up” of the Facebook Blogger Family group by deleting members that had not contributed at all. Amanda agreed with
Andrea and Matthew in that the members of the Facebook Blogger Family group needed to contribute if they want to be part of the group:

**Amanda:** I feel like if you’re on the Facebook group you are [in the Blogger Family], but there are like a lot of – well this is like the bitchy side of me coming out a little bit – there are like a lot of people that like aren’t even active in the group. I feel like if you’re gonna add people to the group, that you should know that they’re gonna appreciate it and gonna be active in it you know? And like actually care about it. Umm…but some people just you know add everyone, they don’t ever check it, or like do anything with it. Umm…I like I consider like the – there’s like the Blogger Family that we have on the Facebook group and then there’s like the **Blogger Family** like the original Blogger Family. And that’s everyone that’s here. And so that’s kind of like the clicky, bitchy side of me coming out. But I mean like ((laughing)) that’s just, that’s just kind of like how I think about it you know? Not everyone – like I like other people that are in the Blogger Family that aren’t here, but I think this, and I know like Colleen does too, this is like the core.

Amanda wanted the members of the Blogger Family to appreciate what the Blogger Family is and what it can do for the bloggers. She did not want just anyone to be added to the group. She wanted bloggers who are going to appreciate it, be active in it, and care about it. In this way, Amanda formed boundaries between the Blogger Family members who were truly a part of the Blogger Family and the others on the periphery. Amanda defined the “core” Blogger Family group as those who attended the meet-up. Andrea even said something similar when talking about who the “core” was:

**Andrea:** I guess I would just say that you are – if you’re part of the blog family you actually communicate with the other people and take the time to be part of the group and like – even if you’re not coming on this trip, even though we kind of say we’re like the “core” ’cause we’re elitists or whatever, I mean as long as you like participate in things and you genuinely care about the other people and don’t just lurk the group. ‘Cause, you kind of have to be part of it to be part of. So, I mean I think it’s just however much effort you put in is what – what’s gonna make you be part of the group.

Andrea also stated that the “core” were the people who attended the meet-up, claiming to be elitists. She went on to say that the bloggers who participated in the Facebook group and contributed to it are part of the Blogger Family, even though they may not be
considered the “core.” So, according to Andrea, there are those who are in the Blogger Family that participate and there is also the “core” that is a step further. Emily did not explicitly use the word “core” to describe this group of bloggers, but she had similar viewpoints:

Emily: A few of us feel a lot more closer than other people. But, because it’s this Facebook group, before it – before this weekend, it was quite – you could add anyone to – any blogger could just add people to this group. That doesn’t necessarily mean they’re part of the close family. ‘Cause some people’ve been reading blogs for 4, 5 years. So they’re closer together. But, just being put in the group, I think sometimes if people thought, “Ah this person’s got a really good blog. Read them and they can read yours.” Didn’t necessarily mean that you were that close to that person or knew them even though they were put in the family, they probably weren’t really in the family...I think from this recent trip, it shows that the people who, who are really in the family because they’re the ones who you’ve been reading for a long time. Because fair enough they might be in the Fa – these other people might be in the Facebook group, but I’m – some of the people I don’t even know. I’ve never even looked on their blog so I don’t know them so I couldn’t call them myself as a family, but other people might, but I probably wouldn’t.

Although Emily did not use the term “core” to describe this group of bloggers, she had the same idea. She said that those who attended the meet-up are the bloggers who were really in the Blogger Family. She reasoned that it was because they were the bloggers who ran the blogs that she and others had been reading for four to five years. Emily also agreed that sometimes bloggers got added to the Facebook group who were not considered part of the Blogger Family.

I am Not a Part of the “Core”

Cali had a different take to the idea of the “core”:

Cali: I was talking to Amanda, or we were [all] talking and they were saying “the core group” and I was like “what’s the core group?” and it was like “the people who are here” and I was like “okay.” But I don’t really – I don’t really know if there’s like a core group or if there is, I don’t consider myself a part of it ‘cause like I don’t – I don’t blog that much and I’ve been a blogger for like three years and like people have been blogging for
like four or five or ever since they were like in middle school, which is weird, ((laughing)) but whatever…When I say “core group”, I feel like we’re the elite or something and I don’t want to be that.

Cali did not have these preconceived ideas of a “core” Blogger Family group. The idea was new to her and she did not like the way it sounded because she did not like the idea of sounding elitist. Cali also felt that if there was a “core” group, she did not feel that she was a part of it because she had been blogging for a shorter amount of time than many of the other bloggers. Matthew had similar feelings of not belonging to the “core” group:

Matthew: And I think like people started – people, I’m pointing downstairs ((downstairs were rest of the bloggers who attended the meet-up)) people – um, talk about like this core blogging group that has come with this trip. And I’m like I love this group! But I don’t know how they got the core. Like why is this the core? Um, because I don’t feel like I’m part of the core. Um, so I don’t understand what they mean when they say that really. Um…

Interviewer: Why do you feel that you aren’t part of the core?

Matthew: I think it’s ‘cause I haven’t been doing it as long maybe? Um, I guess I’ve only been personal blogging for like a year and a half maybe? And a lot of it was really sporadic. Um, and I haven’t really been following your guys’ blogs for as long either. Like I didn’t start following yours and Emily’s and ((thinking)) Cali’s and… ((thinking)) who else am I thinking? One other person downstairs, um blogs until like the Facebook group started up really. Um, and that really kind of pushed me into it; Um, pushed me into the heart of it really. Maybe it was just the fact that I was willing to try these new things? Um to go look at these new places and follow and learn, um, made me part of the core. Maybe because I comment on things? Um, but I don’t think I feel like a core because I haven’t been around as long. I’m like the baby of the group. Yeah.

Matthew did not feel like he was part of the “core,” but did try to figure out why he would be considered part of the “core.” He came to the conclusion that it may have been the fact that he was willing to try new things in the group, follow blogs, and learn from other bloggers. Things like this were what bloggers like Andrea and Amanda want from bloggers who did not contribute the Blogger Family. In order to be part of the Blogger Family, you have to be part of it.
Conclusion

The Blogger Family formed through relationship building. Although most of the bloggers were unsure of how it happened, there was a routine that the bloggers found themselves going through to form relationships through blogging. The Facebook group, created by one of the bloggers, played a large role in establishing a place where the bloggers could communicate regularly. The bloggers also acknowledged that forming relationships online has many similarities and differences to forming relationships face-to-face.

There are benefits to communicating online that the bloggers have discovered. The security of blogging and interacting behind the computer screen makes it easier for the bloggers to get what they want to say across to people online than when they communicate face-to-face. They also felt they could be more open because the pressure from face-to-face interactions was not there. This result was proven helpful to the formation of relationships through blogging, but also made some bloggers cautious towards others online.

Communication was a key element that played a part in encouraging the closeness within the Blogger Family. Since the bloggers are present in various other social networking sites, it was easy for the bloggers to keep track of each other’s daily lives, thus creating an element of a face-to-face relationship. The constant communication let the bloggers feel like they were part of each other’s lives.

Building trust between the bloggers was also a key element in creating the Blogger Family. Taking a blogging relationship from online to offline in the form of
letter writing, package sending, and swaps gave these blogging relationships an offline element and brought the trust building to another level with the sharing of home addresses. It also gave a “real life,” tangible aspect to the relationships in the Blogger Family.

The Blogger Family created the Blogger Family Facebook group that is a private, closed group, where bloggers are able to freely share what is on their minds without worry. Each of the bloggers interviewed commented on how supportive, accepting, and non-judgmental the other bloggers are. They feel safe in this Blogger Family. The bloggers also feel like they can come to the Blogger Family for support whenever and for whatever they need. The Blogger Family is also there when they may not be able to talk to anyone in “real life.”

Gender was something that made a brief appearance during interviews. Gender as a topic was not something originally planned, but it is most definitely a part of the Blogger Family. Of the 37 members, 2 of them are male which is quite unequal. One of the bloggers talked about his experience being one of the only males.

The bloggers treat their Blogger Family relationships like “real life” relationships, expecting contributions and communication to the Blogger Family group. Those bloggers who communicate regularly and show an interest in belonging to the group are called the “core group” by some bloggers, while others are not completely in agreement with the “core group” idea. Even so, each of the bloggers voiced their positivity of the Blogger Family and how they are happy that they are a part of it.
These bits and pieces are bits and pieces of these members’ experiences with the Blogger Family. Together, they give a better understanding of how the Blogger Family group evolved and developed into what the bloggers have come to call a family.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The majority of research on blogging has covered specific topics like the presentation of self (Bortree 2005; Dominick 1999; Jung, Youn, and McClung 2007; Papacharissi 2002; Trammell and Keshelashvili 2005), motivations for blogging (Jung et al. 2007; Liao, Liu, and Pi 2011; Nardi, Shiano, and Gumbrecht 2004), and the psychology of blogging (Gurak and Antonijevic 2008), with limited research on the online communication, community building, and online social interaction aspects of blogging (Hodkinson 2007). My research is unique because it studies a specific group of bloggers and discusses the processes that the bloggers went through to become a “family.” With today’s emphasis on electronic communication, new kinds of relationships are being developed. The face-to-face aspects of relationships are not always needed, or are they? Even in my study, some of the bloggers in the Blogger Family eventually met face-to-face and thus creating a “real” person to identify with. Even so, online relationships are a new area of relationship research.

In regards to previous research on blogging, my findings reflect as well as contradict some of what was found. Nardi et al. (2004) found with activity theory, that there are different “objects” that motivate bloggers to blog. A few of the bloggers mentioned how blogging made it easier for them to get out what they want to say and was a type of release for them. These were both objects of motivation that Nardi et al. (2004) found. Nardi et al. (2004) also referenced “seeking opinions” as a motivating object. Seeking opinions was definitely something that the bloggers in the Blogger Family did
through the Blogger Family Facebook group where they shared problems and sought advice. While some of Nardi’s et al. (2004) findings are reflective in my study, the findings of Liao et al. (2011) contradict what was found in my study. While Liao et al. (2011) found with exchange theory that bloggers were more motivated to blog by intrinsic rewards rather than extrinsic rewards, it seems that for the bloggers in the Blogger Family, although blogging may have started off being influenced by intrinsic rewards, blogging was motivated by extrinsic rewards like connecting with people, making friends, and learning about others’ feelings and opinions. This is the result of the Blogger Family. And the Blogger Family is partly the result of the bloggers discovering that it is easier for them to express themselves online than face-to-face. McKenna et al. (2002) had this same finding. McKenna et al. (2002) found that the “shield” created by communicating via the internet made socially anxious individuals feel more comfortable with sharing personal things and their real selves. Individuals are more likely to form close relationships online when they are more comfortable with sharing their real selves online (McKenna et al. 2002). This was a main factor to the creation of the Blogger Family.

What was interesting about the bloggers was their distinction between their “real life” and their “online life.” In the bloggers’ eyes, there are two different worlds that they belong to – the world where they interact with people face-to-face and the world where they interact with people, who they haven’t met, online. In fact, a few bloggers mentioned that since they met some of the bloggers in the blogger family face-to-face, they can finally be “real life friends.” The bloggers that they met face-to-face have
transferred over to the other world, the “real life” world. Also, since the bloggers made a distinction between their “real life” and “online life,” they also alluded to having a “real life self” and an “online self.” Andrea called this her “online persona.” Andrea, along with several of the bloggers shared how they acted more extrovertly online than they did in real life. Perhaps the bloggers would do things online, like talk to strangers, that they wouldn’t actually do in “real life.” Perhaps these two worlds and these two selves are the result of the computer screen “shield” that separates them (McKenna et al. 2002). In any case, the Blogger Family was formed in the online world, but later found its way to the real life world.

The bloggers in the Blogger Family did not realize that they were forming the Blogger Family while they were doing it. Many of them commented on how the Blogger Family and their relationships “just happened.” However, as the bloggers revealed through the interviews, this was not the case. Although the bloggers were each interviewed individually, there were several common themes that arose, pointing to how the Blogger Family developed over time and did not in fact “just happen.” The process that each blogger went through to become part of the Blogger Family was individual, but the pieces that they provided from their own experiences helped to form a consensus to the creation of the Blogger Family. Perhaps by getting a better understanding of how these bloggers formed the Blogger Family and built these important relationships, this can be helpful to others understanding the relatively new frontier of relationships via the internet.
The use of Facebook to create the Blogger Family group as one place where one blogger could express themselves to every member of the Blogger Family instead of one blogger to one blogger at a time, established a sense of community between the bloggers. The Facebook group connected all the bloggers together more easily, unlike their individual blogs where in order to communicate, they left comments on the blogs and then waited for the other bloggers to log on, read the comment, and respond. While the bloggers have to log in to both Facebook and Blogger (the blogging platform), bloggers more actively used Facebook throughout their daily lives.

There are several benefits to communicating online versus face-to-face. The “shield” of the computer screen protects socially anxious, lonely individuals and makes them feel that they can freely express their real selves online (McKenna et al. 2002). Communicating online gave the bloggers time to think out what they wanted to say instead of having to search for what they want to say on the spot. This made it feel easier for the bloggers to communicate with one another. Since the bloggers were not face-to-face, they also did not have to worry about what other people thought about what they said, and they had the choice whether or not to respond to what others said. This caused the bloggers to feel more confident about sharing their thoughts. Online communication gave the introverted bloggers a sense of power and security. The bloggers felt that they could connect on a more personal level since they felt comfortable behind the computer screen to freely express their thoughts and who they were. This may have caused some individuals to feel closer to their online relationships than their offline relationships, therefore creating a strain in offline relationships that Wolak et al. (2003) found. Even so,
online communication is an outlet for individuals who feel that they better connect with people behind a computer screen “shield.”

As with any relationship, building trust in the Blogger Family was important. In online relationships, it is a key element. Since the bloggers could not see each other face-to-face, they had to rely on other aspects of building trust in a relationship. There was risk involved when these bloggers offered up personal contact information, yet the bloggers had their own way of managing the risk. In order to get to know someone, an individual learns more about them. So, the bloggers began following each other on multiple social networking sites. The bloggers also began to be in constant communication with each other via all of the social networking sites they followed each other on. When an individual is involved in, or feels as though they are involved in, the daily events in other individuals’ lives, they begin to feel like they know that other individual. The bloggers began to feel closer to each other and more comfortable with each other. They began to trust each other.

The bloggers began to trust each other enough to move their relationships offline. A unique aspect to the Blogger Family was the normalcy to digress from online communication to the raw form of writing letters and sending things to each other via post. In order to send packages and letters to each other or participate in giveaways and swaps, the bloggers had to exchange addresses. Sharing a personal address with someone an individual meets on the internet has a high amount of risk involved. Still, these bloggers reached a point in their relationships where they formed enough trust to outweigh the risk involved. Exchanging addresses was not the only way that the bloggers
brought their relationships offline. The exchanging of cellphone numbers gave way to calls and texting. Slowly the blogging relationships became as close as to those of the bloggers’ offline friends. McKenna et al. (2002) studied the progression of online relationships taking into account different stages or steps in a process, including chatting online, letter writing, and talking on the telephone to meeting face-to-face. McKenna et al. (2002) found that “the close relationships that are formed online tend to become integrated into one’s non-internet social life in a series of stages. With each step of the process, individuals exchange more of the control they hold over their side of the interaction in return for greater intimacy.” The same thing can be seen in the Blogger Family. In order to bring a social reality to their online relationships, the bloggers began by sending tangible things to each other. This progressed to phone calls and Skype video messaging to eventually meeting face-to-face. Each step brought the bloggers closer together.

Online relationship building is similar to offline relationship building. To develop a relationship, one has to invest themselves in it. The bloggers recognized this similarity to their offline relationships. Ways that the bloggers invested themselves in the Blogger Family relationships were by keeping in contact with them via various social networking sites, sending things to them, texting them, calling them, and actively participating in the Facebook Blogger Family group. The Facebook group was a key part of the evolution of the Blogger Family. The Facebook group created a space for the bloggers to openly share anything that was on their minds or any problems they may be having. Since the bloggers did not see the each other on a daily basis like those in their offline relationships, they felt
they could share things that they would not normally share with others offline. The bloggers were also accepting and supportive of each other. They began to feel like a family. The bloggers gave advice and tried to help each other in any way that they could. They were accepted for who they were and were not judged in the Blogger Family. The bloggers gave credit to the Blogger Family for making them happy and raising their self-esteem. In forming relationships online, the uniqueness of being able to share information with people one does not know offline, gives a certain benefit of unrestrained sharing. Since individuals do not know anyone in their circle of family and friends, they do not have to worry about information getting around to others.

These facts of the Blogger Family are in line with the description that Blanchard (2004) gives for a sense of community. According to Blanchard (2004) this criteria is containing feelings of membership within and to the community, feelings of influence on and by the community, integration and fulfillment of needs by support from the community, and a shared emotional connection through relationships and shared experiences. The Blogger Family meets all points of Blanchard’s (2004) criteria of a sense of community.

The bloggers finally meeting after four to five years of communicating was something that the bloggers really wanted to do. They had formed a lot of emotional ties with these people that they had never met before, so they felt that they had to meet face-to-face. When they did, they felt like they knew each other for a long time, and each of the bloggers were as expected. This is a result of the bloggers presenting their true selves to each other, not only on their blogs, but also throughout their everyday communication
between themselves. At the meet-up, everyone got along well and it did not feel weird to them to be meeting people who had once started off as strangers on the internet. Some of the bloggers viewed the meet-up as the inevitable final step in the process of building an important relationship. McKenna et al. (2002), incorporating the principles of the social identity and the relational-self theories, developed an important observance of online relationships:

People are motivated to make important new aspects of their identity a social reality, and if...important relationships also become aspects of one’s identity, then people should be motivated to make their important new relationships a social reality, that is, to bring them into their “real lives,” to make them public and face to face. (p.13)

Although identity was not a part of the interviews conducted in my study, this can definitely be part of the explanation of the bloggers meeting online and then taking their relationships offline through sending letters and eventually face-to-face. The bloggers wished to make their online relationships a social reality. Bargh and McKenna (2004:586-587) also found that “when these internet-formed relationships get close enough (i.e., when sufficient trust has been established), people tend to bring them into their “real world” – that is, the traditional face-to-face and telephone interaction sphere.” This was also displayed in the creation of the Blogger Family and the eventual meet-up. After enough trust was built through the many years of communication, not only online but offline too, the bloggers became part of each other’s “real worlds,” meeting face-to-face.
Although not initially a part of this study, the topic of gender came up within the interviews. The one male blogger who was interviewed was the only one who mentioned gender. He was feeling confined in a world where 60 percent of bloggers are female and a Blogger Family where about 95 percent are female. Why are the majority of bloggers female? Why is there such a high majority of females in the Blogger Family? Perhaps the online world of blogging is a place where women, coming from a society with a history of marginalized women, are able to have an equalized starting point. Also, perhaps since the majority of the bloggers in the blogger family are female, they are selective of who they add to the Blogger Family. It is also possible that they add bloggers who blog about things that they are interested in, which may be things that female bloggers blog about.

Even if the blogging world may be an equalized starting point, there is also evidence that it may not always be equal. An interesting part of the Blogger Family was an apparent hierarchy of status that seemed to be voiced, however not officially established. This was interesting as in offline life, status and class is relevant everywhere. Online, in the Blogger Family, status was based on how involved bloggers were with the group, how long they have been in the group, and how well they connected with the group. Some of the bloggers called this the “core group.” The bloggers not only saw the “core” group as a close group within the Blogger Family, but also seemed to use the idea of a “core” as a way to protect the group. If there were “lurkers” within the group who did not contribute to any of the interactions within the Blogger Family and if the bloggers did not know who they were or read their blog, the bloggers may not have felt as comfortable sharing things openly. Thus, a “clean-up” of deleting non-contributing
bloggers from the group was discussed. Just as in the offline world, the bloggers wished to remove those individuals who did not belong in the group.

These “steps” that the bloggers went through to form and become a part of the Blogger Family can be looked upon for insight into how others form relationships online. Even though the Blogger Family’s experience was unique, the different aspects and key elements can be used to understand online interactions and relationship building across the internet. This research takes a more personal approach to investigating online relationship building than most other studies on blogging. While there are other blogging groups, the Blogger Family has a distinctive story that others can learn from and apply the knowledge gained to the world.

**Strengths and Weaknesses**

My research covers the broad subject of forming internet group relationships in a unique way by focusing on a particular group of bloggers and the processes and experiences they went through to form this group. This is a strength because it is a more intimate look at blogging than what previous research has covered. These individual interviews are also intertwined because each blogger is talking about the same event – the creation of the Blogger Family – but through their own eyes, opinions, and experiences. To me, this provides a fuller and more rounded observation of the occurrence of the Blogger Family.

What also added to the strength of my research is my status as an insider. As an insider, I experienced the process and formation of the Blogger Family first hand. Since I had also experienced the Blogger Family being created, I knew its history and
background. Since I am a blogger as well, I understood the language of the bloggers while interviewing. These insights were helpful for obvious reasons, and I believe that the research would have been limiting if this previous knowledge and insider status had not been a reality.

While an insider status is absolutely a strength, it can also be seen as a weakness. Since I had previous experience with the Blogger Family, watched it grow and have been a part of it from the beginning, I naturally have my own opinions and biases to what the process of its formation was. While interviewing, I found myself wanting to prompt the bloggers to answer how I believed things happened. Before conducting this study, I saw the creation of the blog family as a pyramid of levels. At the bottom of the pyramid would be finding a blog, commenting on it, and then having the other blogger comment back; the middle would be wanting to do a swap with the blogger and mailing things to each other; and at the top would be feeling like you are real friends and perhaps meeting face-to-face. Before conducting this study, I had not really considered the trust aspect of the Blogger Family or the fact that we were constantly keeping up with each other via other social networking sites. Not prompting the bloggers while conducting the interviews led me to see other points of view and add to my own. There were quite a few parts of this study I did not expect to find and I am glad that they were revealed. Also, with the insider status, it was sometimes hard to be neutral while conducting the analysis, especially while delving into the “core” group. I felt conflicted sometimes, as I felt that it could be considered a negative side to the group and therefore, being a member of the Blogger Family, found myself not wanting to put that aspect of the Blogger Family on
display. Now, though, I see value in showing each aspect of the Blogger Family, as it can assist in understanding relationships in the internet. With that being said, I would rather be an insider doing this research than an outsider as it definitely gave me an understanding of the world of blogging and the workings of the Blogger Family.

Another possible weakness of my research is the fact that I only interviewed those bloggers who decided to come to the summer meet-up. In my mind it is these bloggers who have “come full-circle” by actually meeting face-to-face and thus would be the ones I would want to interview. However, valuable data can also come from the bloggers who did not come to the meet-up. This can be a recommendation for future research.

Future Research

While there is limited previous research on blogging and forming relationships and groups through blogging, my research provides only a small fraction of what can be discovered through the blogosphere. For my research in particular, there were a few points that I would recommend for future research.

As mentioned previously, it may be a good idea to interview more to all of the bloggers in the Blogger Family. One may be able to discover something that affected whether or not a blogger decided to “come full-circle” and meet face-to-face. Also, with more interviews, more data would be available to work with. With a larger sample, new themes may arise.

Since I was able to interview one of the males in a dominantly female blogger group, themes of gender did arise, however the themes on gender only arose with interviewing Matthew. There is only one other male in the group, and Matthew brought
up some interesting observances about gender in relation to the Blogger Family and compared to the “real world.” This is an area that I think more research could be conducted on.

There is one theme in my research that I think should be studied more thoroughly. It is the idea of a “core” group with in the Blogger Family. Since status and class is such a large part of society in the “real world” it is interesting to observe status online within the group. Perhaps a comparison of the “core” as a hierarchy in the Blogger Family with status and class in society would bring to light hidden causes.

One last suggestion for future research is to take a macrosociological approach to online blog groups as a whole. I have encountered a few other blog groups before. It would be interesting to study this growing phenomenon as well as blog groups that meet-up face-to-face. Technology provides individuals with the power to connect across oceans.

Conclusion

This research investigates a blog family. It takes a look at how the Blogger Family was created through the eyes of a few of the Blogger Family members. While the creation process “just kind of happened” according to the bloggers, the individual experiences of these bloggers describe the processes they went through to become comfortable enough with each other to refer to the group as a family that supports, cares, and is a safe place for the bloggers to get advice and share problems and opinions. I hope that this research adds insight and prompts future research in online relationship building and blogging as a platform for interaction.
APPENDIX A. Consent to Participate in Research

Dear Blogger:

My name is Angelina Gonzalez. I am a graduate student in the sociology department at California State University, Sacramento, and a fellow blogger. I am conducting a research study that is investigating the formation of the Blogger Family.

During the Blogger Family meet-up this weekend, I invite you to participate in an interview. Each individual interview will take approximately 60 minutes in total, but may be split up to fit with the schedule of this weekend’s meet-up. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes only.

All of your personal information collected for this study will be kept confidential. All personal identifiers (names, blog names, etc.) will be changed in the transcripts and written report. The interview audio recordings will be kept in a secure location and will be deleted after the interviews are transcribed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may discontinue your involvement at any time. I do not anticipate any risks associated with your participation. Some of the questions in the interview may seem personal, but you do not have to answer any question if you do not want to and may stop the interview at any time. Although you will not receive any compensation for participating in this study, you will be contributing to the understanding of the developing blogosphere.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact me by e-mail at ag2494@saclink.csus.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Jennifer Murphy, by e-mail at murphyj@csus.edu or by phone at 916-278-7578.

Thank you so much for your participation,

Angelina Gonzalez
Graduate Student in the Sociology department at California State University, Sacramento

With your signed consent, your interview will be audio recorded. By signing below, you are indicating that you agree to be audio recorded during your interview.

___________________________________
Signature of Participant
Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. By signing below, you are indicating that you have read this page and are agreeing to participate in this study. Thank you for your time.

________________________________
Printed Name

________________________________    __________________
Signature of Participant        Date
APPENDIX B. Interview Questions

**Personal Blog**
What is your blog about?
Why did you start blogging?
What motivated you to keep blogging?
How has blogging changed for you over time?
Think of your blog. How does the way you present yourself online compare to how you are offline?

**Online Community – Blog Family**
What is the “blog family”? What is it to you?
What or who decides who is a part of the “blog family”?
How did the “blog family” become the “blog family”?
What does it mean to be a part of the “blog family”?
How does the “blog family” make you feel?
In comparison to groups that interact face-to-face, what is the “blog family” like?

**Making Connections**
How did you start to become part of the “blog family”?
What influenced you to communicate with other bloggers?
How have your online relationships in the “blog family” changed over time?
In comparison to face-to-face relationships, how are your “blog family” relationships similar or different?

**Now**
Tell me about what you think about this weekend’s Blogger Family meet-up?
What made you decide to meet members of the “blog family”?

**Demographics**
Name, gender, race, age, social class, education level, amount of time blogging with personal blog, location.
REFERENCES


