Why We Blog: Homeschooling Mothers of Gifted Children

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Blogs have become a go-to information resource for members of online communities. In this qualitative study we applied uses and gratifications theory (U&GT) to analyze the experiences and perceptions of four mothers of gifted children who maintain blogs about their home-schooling experiences. Data suggest that this novel context and population did not yield different categories of gratification; however, not all prior categories were represented among this relatively narrow sample. Results support findings from prior research in other contexts suggesting that bloggers find gratification from self-expression, social interaction, information exchange, maintaining community, and recording life events.

Keywords: blogging, blogs, gifted children, gifted education, homeschooling

The Internet's exponential growth has dramatically changed the way individuals and societies communicate and share information and experiences. In 2010, the Internet had 361 million users (Chiang, Chiang, & Lin, 2013). By 2015, the number of users had increased to nearly 2 billion people worldwide. People are motivated to use the Internet for nearly as many reasons as there are users.

One central mode of online sharing is the weblog (see definition later). In this exploratory study we examine one narrowly defined subpopulation of web users, mothers who use weblogs to share information and their personal experiences in the process of homeschooling gifted children. There has been relatively little research about this population, so these weblogs provide an opportunity to investigate a group of gifted students and their parents who are difficult to access via more traditional research settings.

Students who are homeschooled do not attend traditional brick and mortar schools and are not typically required to participate in state testing (Murphy, 2012). The exact number of students who participate in homeschooling is difficult to establish based on the wide variation in state homeschool legislation (Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2013; Olmsted, 2015). Research on gifted homeschoolers is still in the early stages of development, so these mothers' experiences with blogging provide a window into the what, how, when, and where of this particular group of students and their families.

BLOGGING

A weblog or blog is a type of web-based publishing that provides a format for anyone to post content online (Gurzick & Lutters, 2006). The weblog, a term coined in 1997 by Jorn Berger (Miller & Shepherd, 2004), is a phenomenon that has grown exponentially over the past decade. In 2006, 36 million blogs were published, and by 2012 there were approximately 230 million blogs (Jung, Song, & Vorderer, 2012; Nielsen, 2012). Blogging quickly became an integral part of online culture (Hsu & Lin, 2008).

Blogs' potential to distribute information and influence society is evident in a number of areas. For example, blogs have altered the course of political contests, raised anonymous online diarists to mainstream popularity, and received recognition as a democratic process for distributing information. However, the majority of blogs and their authors do not have a broad impact (Trammell, Tarkowski, & Sapp, 2006). For example, among the approximately 4 million mothers in the United States who classify themselves as bloggers (Laird, 2012), only around 500 have been distinguished as being influential. To complicate the medium further, an estimated one half to two thirds of newly initiated blogs are abandoned by their authors within 2 months of their creation (Gurzick & Lutters, 2006). Still, some bloggers do persist despite their limited audience and influence, which suggests the question of why so many people continue to blog. Research to date (Chiang, Chiang, & Lin, 2013; Ekdale, Namkoong, Fung, & Perlmutter, 2010; Hollenbaugh, 2011; Pettigrew, Archer, & Harrigan, 2016; Xiaohui & Lei, 2010) suggests that bloggers persist due to a variety of reasons that include feeling

connected to others, finding information, sharing ideas and feelings, and passing time.

MOMMYBLOGGING

Mommyblogging is a popular blogging subcategory. These are blogs that entail "everyday experiences written up by people—women, generally—for who parenthood is a key identity component [that] provide[s] interaction and feedback" (Morrison, 2010, ¶1). Mommyblogs are "a distinct genre within the broader corpus of blogs about parenting" (Morrison, 2011, p. 38). These blogs are characterized by topics of motherhood, parenting, self-expression, and community development. Mommyblogs tend to have limited audiences, in the range of approximately 5–100 readers, with relatively few of these bloggers receiving any monetary benefits from their efforts (Morrison, 2011). Despite their relatively small readership, this group has created their own norms and culture, including their own writing style, range of acceptable content, and norms regarding the quality and quantity of posts (Baumer, Sueyoshi, & Tomlinson, 2008).

Demographics of this group also are relatively specific. Mommybloggers are more likely to be well educated and of middle income or higher in comparison to the overall population. The mean household income for mommybloggers was $84,000 (in comparison to the U.S. national average of $53,000), and 52% of these mothers reported having a college or graduate degree. The average mommyblogger is 37 and White (Laird, 2012).

In terms of content, some mommy blogs are focused on these mothers' educational goals, successes, and challenges in raising their children. Also included in these narrative online diaries are advocacy efforts on behalf of their children who have faced educational and/or behavioral difficulties (Zenman, Swanke, & Doktor, 2011). Drilling down further, subcategories within mommyblogging can be defined based on the characteristics of the child or children being described and on the context in which they are being raised or educated. In this manner, we have defined a very specific subpopulation of mommybloggers for the present study by including the mothers who homeschool their gifted child (or children) and whose blogs share information such as their child's educational progress, homeschooling resources, and the mother's own personal interests. Our intent in the current study was to focus on describing and understanding the motivations of this specific, narrowly defined population of mommybloggers.

HOMESCHOOLING

In the United States, homeschooling is a growing alternative to traditional school for many families and specifically for those families of gifted children whose educational and affective needs remain unmet in more traditional school settings (Jolly et al., 2013). A combination of factors has driven the growth and expansion of homeschooling. These include dissatisfaction with traditional learning environments and their associated curricula (Jolly et al., 2013), resistance to the increasing emphasis on high-stakes testing in public schools in the United States, and the proliferation of permissive state policies that allow homeschooling and other alternatives to the traditional public school setting. Gifted homeschoolers are just one exemplar of the growth and diversification of participants in homeschooling over the past 2 decades, since the origins of the modern homeschooling movement among fundamentalist Christian, politically conservative families.

Because homeschooling policies do vary widely by state across the United States, only approximations can be made of the total population engaging in this practice, with estimates ranging from 1 to 2 million children. Gifted children make up 6% to 10% of the total school population, according to the National Association for Gifted Children, so if gifted students were proportionally represented among the ranks of homeschooled youth, this would equate to approximately 60,000–200,000 gifted students who are being homeschooled.

At the intersection of mommybloggers, gifted education, and homeschooling we find a group of homeschool mothers of gifted children who blog about their experiences. To understand these mothers' writings, we examined various characterizations in the literature about motivations for blogging and have chosen in this study to adopt the perspective offered by uses and gratification theory (U> Ruggerio, 2000) to better understand the motivations for blogging among this population. Through this approach, we hope to offer a more complete interpretation as to the personal satisfaction and connection these homeschool mothers obtain by means of their blogging and its associated online interactions.

MOTIVATIONS FOR BLOGGING

A growing corpus of research has emerged to explain users' motivations for blogging. These studies include a wide swath of bloggers from different cultures, all of whom report being driven by both internal and external motivational forces (Ekdale et al., 2010). One of the earliest studies, by Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, and Swartz (2004), interviewed a group of American bloggers. The authors identified five key reasons why the participants blogged, including recording life events, providing a platform to express their opinions, expressing deeply felt emotions, articulating ideas through writing, and forming and maintaining a community online.

Hsu and Lin (2008), using the theory of reasoned action, found that bloggers participated in blogs for similar reasons as above and that their reasons also included a perceived intrinsic reward from contributing to the knowledge base. Other specific motivations included the desire to create an online diary, to share personal experiences, and to connect with others of similar interests. Using factor analysis, Ma

and Lei (2010) found that Chinese bloggers expressed five motivations to explain their efforts: the need for affection, the need to express one's thoughts, the desire to obtain some benefit, the drive to share knowledge and information, and the desire to communicate with others.

In a study conducted to help marketers develop "proactive utilization of blogs" to better place of advertisements, Huang, Shen, Lin, and Chang (2007, p. 480) studied the motivation of bloggers and their subsequent behaviors. They found that bloggers were again motivated by self-expression, the desire to record life events, and interaction with others online. Additionally, these authors reported that the quality of interactions these bloggers experienced influenced the frequency and range of their online presence.

Studies looking at other subgroups of bloggers have revealed similar findings, with external forces often having a greater influence than internal motivations. Kjellberg (2010) documented academic researchers' motivations for blogging. She described motivation, function, and audience and their interactions as factors motivating scholarly blog generation and maintenance. In a study of elite American political bloggers, Ekdale et al. (2010) found that their motivation to blog increased over time. Though bloggers' initial motivations for blogging were internally driven by the "desire to let off steam, organize their thoughts, and express their ideas," later blogging behavior was influenced by its demonstrated influence on politics (Ekdale et al., 2010, p. 231). Chiang et al. (2013) used factor analysis to examine social motivations, goal orientation, and entertainment orientation as antecedents to the blogging behaviors of basic journaling, more advanced publishing, and interactive feedback. These authors also concluded that regardless of a blogger's other motivations, interactive feedback was the key motivation fostering blog participation.

USES AND GRATIFICATION THEORY

For the current study we used the framework of U&GT to explore media users' motivations and the fulfillment or satisfaction of their social or psychological needs. The U&GT was first used to explain why people used books, radio, television, and movies and what types of satisfaction they received from engaging with these types of media (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; Trammell et al., 2006). More recently, U&GT has been extended to understand Internet use (Ruggerio, 2000). Lin argued that the theory's greatest asset is its capacity to "med[iate] communication situations via a single or multiple sets of psychological needs, psychological motivations, communication channels, communication content, and psychological gratifications within a particular or cross-cultural context" (as cited in Ruggiero, 2000, p. 28), because scholars believe that users consider each of these areas in determining the best match between available media types and their needs (Sepp, Liljander, & Gummerus, 2011).

Research using U&GT can take either an inductive or deductive approach, as explained by Katz et al. (1973), "by specifying needs and then attempt[ing] to trace the extent to which they are gratified by the media or other sources. Others take observed gratifications as starting points and attempt to reconstruct the needs that are being gratified" (p. 510). Due to the observational and post hoc nature of our data sources, in the present study we have taken the latter approach.

The utility of U&GT in studying Internet use, and blogging in particular, lies in the guidance that this theory provides regarding which areas of bloggers' motivations to examine. Various studies have used U&GT to interpret the motivations of diverse groups of people who engage in creating and reading blogs. The majority of previous studies have been quantitative in nature. For example, Trammell et al. (2006) identified self-expression as the central motivation among the largely female Polish bloggers in their study.

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

Blogs rank as the top five most "trustworthy" sources on the Internet and are considered more influential than Twitter. They are also the third most shared Internet content (Technorati. com, 2013). Because of their trustworthiness and potential impact, it is important to study blogging in various contexts. By examining their posts and via interviews with selected participants, we explore why mothers of homeschooled gifted children blog, and we characterize the discursive dynamics of this particular medium. To accomplish this, we apply qualitative methodology and U&GT to delve into the categories of self-expression, social interaction, information exchange, maintaining community, and recording life events, which have been identified by previous research as being among users' primary motivations for blogging. The purposes of the study were to (a) look for evidence of the motivations previously identified in the research, (b) understand any additional motivations that may be evident using U&GT, and (c) consider any implications for gifted education that may be evident among this population of bloggers.

METHOD

Participants

We used a combination of web searching and purposeful sampling to identify study participants. Identified blogs incorporated links out to other blogs, which we also examined for potential inclusion into the sample. Selection criteria included blogs written by mothers, living in the United States, who had been homeschooling and maintaining a blog about parenting a gifted child. Additionally, the blog had to have been maintained for at least a year and had to still be ongoing at the time of the interview.

We began by compiling a list of gifted homeschool parents who blog using an Internet search. We derived the search terms "homeschooling," "blog," "blogging," "gifted," "twice-exceptional," "asynchronous," "high ability," and "talent" from our knowledge of the literature and our experience as scholars who work in gifted education. A total of 15 bloggers initially were contacted, either through their blog or by e-mail, with a request to participate in the study. Four bloggers responded (27%), all of whom were mothers. Though we have few comparative data from other studies, this response rate seems reasonable, given the numerous other demands on these individuals' time.

Individual interviews were conducted over the phone from May to June 2014. Each interview lasted on average 75 min and was recorded using the Call Recorder app. The recording of the interview was downloaded as a file from Call Recorder and transcribed. To help establish trustworthiness, each participant's transcript was sent back to her for review (i.e., member checking) to solicit changes or clarifications (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). None of the participants made clarifications or requested changes in their transcripts.

Three of the mothers were White and one mother was Asian. All but one mother were native English speakers and born in the United States. Their children ranged in age from 10 to 17. All mothers held a bachelor's degree, and three of the four mothers held graduate degrees. Two of the four mothers indicated that their child had a learning exceptionality in addition to giftedness; these included dyslexia and Asperger's syndrome. A school district or a private psychologist had identified their children's giftedness and other diagnoses before the child departed formal school for homeschooling. Tables 1 and 2 summarize participant characteristics.

Analysis

We coded all four transcripts using qualitative data analysis methods. Using a deductive approach, the a priori constructs of self-expression, social interaction, information exchange, maintaining community, and recording life events were found to be salient in interpreting the content of these interviews (Miles et al., 2014). The two researchers read the transcripts to gain an initial understanding of the content. Next, each researcher independently coded all transcripts and tagged sections that pertained to the identified categories. To establish reliability and consistency in our coding, we used check-coding (deWet & Erasmus, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). After the initial coding, researchers also compared and discussed tagged sections of transcription in order to ascertain their relationship to the a priori categories. A graduate student trained in qualitative data analysis checked the coding. The check-coding process yielded an overall reliability coefficient of 0.83. Individual code reliabilities ranged from 0.72 to 0.93, which are considered acceptable levels in most situations (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

TABLE 1
Bloggers

Bloggers	Education/ Occupation	Marital Status	Years Homeschooling	Years Blogging
Simone	BA/writer	Married	8	7
Florence	MS/writing coach	Single	7	8
Zoe	MS/not employed	Married	6	5
Marion	MEd/part-time physician's assistant	Married	4	2

TABLE 2
Children of Bloggers

Bloggers	Number of Children	Gender	Gifted or Twice-Exceptional
Simone	1	Male	All children gifted
Florence	2	2 Male	Both males twice-exceptional
Zoe	4	3 Male, 1 Female	All children gifted
Marion	2	2 Male	Both males twice-exceptional

RESULTS

The gratification that users reported achieving through the act of blogging is reflected in the interview data. Existing research had identified the 13 gratification categories of self-expression, entertainment, identity as a parent, social interaction, passing time, information exchange, professional advancement, goals for children, recording life events, maintaining community, intrinsic/extrinsic rewards, written expression, and need for affection. However, among this particular population of bloggers, the five categories of self-expression, social interaction, information exchange, maintaining community, and recording life events were the most salient. These mothers also established their own internal norms by evaluating and mimicking other blogs they admired and by seeking out and interacting with feedback from blog readers (Baumer et al., 2008). In the sections that follow, we examine each of these five salient categories in the words of our participants.

Self-Expression

Self-expression was the initial motivator that led these mothers to begin blogging. Two of the four mothers indicated that they had been writers as a profession or had enjoyed writing at previous stages in their lives. Three of the four mothers previously had established blogs that were not centered on homeschooling. These other blogs were no longer actively maintained, mirroring the statistics regarding the relatively short life span of blogs in general. Interestingly, these mothers

had been engaged in blogging for a relatively long overall period of time (2 to 8 years, mean 6.25 years) given the relatively short time since the blog format was invented and the often-short life span of individual blogs.

As Marion (all names are pseudonyms) recalled, "I've always enjoyed the writing aspect of things. I enjoy reading the blogs of other people who were homeschooling and thought I would have something to add." Florence shared that "[The blog] became an outlet for me. … So it's been very much medicinal, therapeutic writing. … As it went on, I played more with essay structure, read other essayists, and tried new things." Simone reiterated Marion's need and enjoyment of writing, "The blog was very good for me personally. For one thing, I hadn't been writing as much as I used to once I started homeschooling … so having the blog was an avenue for me to write."

Each of these three mothers indicated that the act of writing allowed her to express ideas and feelings that previously had found no other outlet. Though most feelings these mothers expressed were related to writing as a form of personal fulfillment, writing also sometimes served as a way to vent frustrations. For example, Florence also lamented, "I can't believe how many posts I have about being angry, which I hope doesn't say that I'm angry all the time. I hope it says this is an issue and I'm wrestling with it." The sense of purpose that their blogging provided sustained these mothers in continuing to blog in the face of other competing demands on their time and energy.

Social Interaction

Previous research has indicated that mothers homeschooling gifted children can feel very isolated even within established homeschooling communities (Jolly et al., 2013). Their blogs provided these mothers with much-needed social interaction, which they seemed to find fulfilling even though it primarily was mediated by the Internet rather than taking place in a face-to-face context.

Florence remarked, "Because I don't write a lot about what's easy, I don't like reading blogs about how everything is wonderful … so I think [my blog is] helping people not feel alone in their ambiguity." In a related vein, Simone indicated that the blog had helped to combat her own loneliness: "It's very hard to find kindred spirits that have similar personalities but are going through exactly the same things. It's just very hard to find." She continued, "I have so many virtual friends through blogs. … I found my best friend through the blog. She lives in Australia … and I definitely credit the blog for that." Despite these blogs being individual efforts, they provided a way for these mothers to interact socially and fulfilled a need to connect with others who are experiencing similar situations.

Information Exchange

In homeschooling, the act of schooling takes place outside of a centrally designated setting and without a preset curriculum or traditionally trained teachers. Due to this nature, blogs have become instrumental for many homeschooling families in the review and exchange of curriculum materials and content activities. At various points in their work as bloggers, these mothers reported both seeking information from others' blogs and the sense of fulfillment they received from sharing their own information and experiences with others.

As Marion explained,

I share things that will give other people ideas … encourage people who were homeschooling to include science because so many feel like science is a difficult topic and I wanted people to see that it could be a part of your everyday life.

She further described the information that she sought out in reading others' blogs:

I read Angelic Scaliwags. She's in the UK and has kids similar in age to us and they do a lot of project based learning so I really like reading her posts and they focus more on history which is an area where I need inspiration.

Florence reflected that her information needs have changed over time as she has become more comfortable with homeschooling and understanding her boys' educational needs. She remarked,

I don't tend to read right now for utilitarian purposes. I did earlier in my writing. I was reading and looking for information about how to homeschool my kids. … I'm [now] drawn to longer, more complex issues and don't necessarily come to an answer.

Florence also touched on the irony that homeschooling sometimes presents. Families often turn to homeschooling to escape the rigidity or lack of appropriate learning environments in traditional schooling but soon find that this leads to schooling that has too little structure. In recognition of this tension, she tried to offer information that "help[ed] people not feel alone in that ambiguity."

The interactive and supportive nature of the blog community kept Simone blogging. She recalled, "I asked a question and everyone was so willing to help, so supportive." Simone also reported sharing updates about instructional materials: "[I will say,] I tried this for a awhile and I was very excited about it but 3 months down the road I found something better or found that doesn't work after all, and I explain why." She also addressed how her child's needs have changed over time: "Right now we are outsourcing so much. How I transitioned. I talk about [moving from] he was dependent on me to becoming less dependent, independent enough to email his instructors himself now."

Simone found it most helpful in her own reading online to follow bloggers who had children similar to her own:

My favorite blogs, I only link to those if I relate in some ways. For example, Tad Town, she has homeschool kids. I've been following her journal for 3 years now, one of her children sounds very asynchronous like my son … it helps me to imagine, three to 4 years from now these are things to look for.

In contrast, Zoe's initial motivation for blogging was to keep in touch with family members:

We have family all over the U.S., so I started blogging to let them know what we were doing if they were interested. I did not make the blog public at first but came to enjoy learning about other homeschoolers through their blogs. I thought my blog might be helpful if any other homeschoolers were going through similar challenges or issues. If it also provides assistance, support, or sources for another family then that would be nice.

Thus, information exchange encompassed a variety of topics. For some the blog was a journal, something for others to follow to keep up with the family's and children's activities and accomplishments. Others reported using their blog to review curriculum and share ideas for activities (much like the verbal exchanges that we have observed in teachers' lounges or during grade-level staff meetings in the schools). Reading blogs by others also helped these mothers to anticipate what the future might bring in terms of developmental challenges with their own children and to share what they had learned with others who might be reading their blog for this same purpose.

Maintaining Community

Each blogger remarked about how blogging helped her to create and maintain a sense of community and support, a finding that is consistent with both the individualized and solitary nature of homeschooling and with the ostracism felt by some homeschool mothers of the gifted in mainstream homeschool groups. Simone remarked,

I was very grateful to the veteran homeschool moms who very freely shared their resources. This is support I couldn't get from real live people, not because people weren't supportive but because people were very ignorant about homeschooling. … I understand as a newbie how lost you feel. How scared you are. I wanted it to be a place where other people found support.

Florence saw the virtual community her blogging enabled as being an integral part of her information base: "The [more] connected I get online through social networks, the more I rely on that as my first line of assistance."

Recording Life Events

The theme of recording life events encompassed a variety of topics and content areas. As mentioned previously, the ability to meet their children's learning needs without the structure of traditional school curriculum or chronologically grouped classrooms was in large part what led these families to homeschooling. However, the flip side of this extreme structural flexibility is that homeschooling often lacks the scope and sequence that curriculum and lesson plans provide to guide the progression of daily or weekly activities, making it more difficult to determine afterwards what one has accomplished. Blogging provided a way for these mothers to plan and record their curricular choices and activities for themselves and their families, while also sharing these details with the readers of the blog. Because homeschooling was such a large part of family life, blogging helped to define educational activities and to provide a record or journal of the children's accomplishments. As Marion remarked,

It's such a part of our life sometimes it can feel like, oh, we didn't do enough … it just helps to look back at the pictures and record and say, "Oh yeah, that's what we did," to look back and remember that's why we do this, when it's a rough day.

Simone found the blog offered a way to organize her thoughts:

There were always so many good ideas, so many books, so many links, and I was like, I need a place to park all of these ideas. Once I had a clear purpose, a place to park homeschooling bookmarks and ideas, it was easy to maintain the blog because there were tons of ideas.

The accelerated nature of the content and curriculum provided for their gifted children also necessitated an archive. Simone found,

The [blog] also fulfilled a need for me to have structure. I needed to make sense of all these things we were just going through so quickly and [that] always felt like we were never finished, curriculum from the first page to the last page.

Simone also recalled,

It took me 12 years to get from first grade to 12th grade, but why is it taking him 3 years to get from first grade to ninth grade? This doesn't make sense. I needed a place to put down and go back to know that I wasn't just imagining things. That we did do those things. … I can go back and see a year ago exactly what he was doing. I could see in a year, we actually achieve[d] this much.

Zoe felt that the "main goal [was] to keep a journal for my kids." She added, "I like to keep track of what the kids are doing, accomplishments. I post anything I think the kids might like to read about when they are older."

Florence's posts, in contrast, tended to be less exacting in their purpose:

> Some posts are a [product] review or about what we are working on right now, but as it goes on, I notice that there's more of me practicing something, which I find that it's harder work, longer writing, but at the end that's what's satisfying.

Thus, though the specific focus varied somewhat from one blogger to the next, each of these mothers consistently used her blog for recording life events in some way.

DISCUSSION

The four mommybloggers who responded to our request for interviews described reasons for blogging that were consistent with those expressed by bloggers in other contexts (Hsu & Lin, 2008). Self-expression, social interaction, information exchange, maintaining community, and recording life events were the primary reasons expressed, though seven other motivations described in the research literature were not strongly evident in these individuals' responses. For example, Ma and Lei (2010) had identified the need for affection as a motivating factor, but this was not clearly a contributing factor in our participants' responses.

We found that U&GT provided some guidance regarding which areas of bloggers' motivations to examine. U&GT suggests that users consider the potential for a medium to provide gratification in multiple areas, both singly and in combination, when determining which type of media best fulfills their unique combination of psychological needs (Sepp et al., 2011). Mothers' descriptions in the current study suggest that these bloggers considered the interaction of these factors to be motivating, above and beyond the influence of each factor individually. Our respondents expressed the tension they felt, especially early in the homeschooling process, with not having sufficient resources or the time to develop and reflect on the use of the instructional resources they did have. The construction of a mommyblog allowed them to express this tension to others, while simultaneously gaining strategies for addressing it through their reading of other mothers' blogs and by receiving feedback from readers of their own posts.

In addition to the areas identified by other researchers and by U&GT, prior experience seemed to be a key contributor to these authors' decisions to construct a blog about their parenting-related experiences with their gifted child. For some this was prior experience with, or interest in, writing in other contexts, whereas for others it was experience gained by previously having blogged on a different topic.

LIMITATIONS

Any study of this nature will have several important caveats. As a pilot study, our sample size necessarily was small, which usually is considered a limitation, yet we were able to make some progress toward our initial intention of sampling this entire subpopulation of the blogosphere.

Selection bias is another clear limitation whose effects are unknown. Though we made every effort to contact all bloggers who met our selection criteria, just under three fourths of those contacted were either unwilling or unable to participate in the interview process. It is also likely that we may have missed some additional perspectives, due to the use of specific inclusion criteria and perhaps also due to the imprecision of our initial search.

Finally, our findings represent a snapshot of the phenomena of interest during a relatively brief window in time, particularly given how rapidly technology and usage of the Internet are evolving. The rapid turnover in blog publishing is another potential cause for concern; in light of the growing emphasis on replication of research (e.g., Makel & Plucker, 2014) it seems that there is ample room for additional work on this topic, yet future study may be sampling a completely different population.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Some of our study's limitations could be addressed, at least in part, through the use of different methods. Examination of user-introduced topics and content in blogs would assist in understanding the needs that blogging fulfills for the blogger and for the blog's readers. Specifically, because blogs are publicly available due to their very nature, textual analysis would seem to offer an informative approach for further investigation of content-related findings related to the blogs' avowed purpose to record and share information. Though textual analysis would not be as well suited to addressing blog writers' internal motivational states, the ability to systematically analyze a large volume of text would allow for the analysis of a larger and more representative sample, or might even make it possible to sample the entire population blogging on a narrowly defined topic such as homeschooling of gifted learners.

Twenty years ago there was not yet any such thing as a blog, and 20 years in the future the blog may be remembered as fondly as we today recall the dial-up modem. Yet despite the breakneck pace of technological change, peoples' need for psychological gratification in the form of self-expression, building social and informational connections to others with shared interests, and recording life events will remain. Parents' desires to provide the best education for their children, by whatever criteria they use to determine what this means, also will remain; only their means of achieving these goals may differ.

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