

Book Reviews

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Friedman, M. (2013). Mommyblogs and the Changing Face of Motherhood. Toronto, ON:
University of Toronto Press.

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May Friedman's book, "Mommyblogs and the Changing Face of Motherhood," builds a case for mommyblogs as innovative forms of writing that are critical in the depiction of motherhood and the extremely dynamic nature of maternal life in contemporary society. First, Friedman begins with a brief and informative history of the emergence of the World Wide Web, the explosion of blogs, and how the term "mommyblog" and an online "mamasphere" came to be. Next, Friedman presents the theoretical framework for her reading and analyzing of more than two hundred mommyblogs (p. 36), which, when analyzed accordingly, result in a collective response to the dominant discourses of motherhood (p. 27). Friedman applies this framework throughout her book in discussions of the diversity of maternal stories and parenting practices, the dynamic social community of mommyblogs, and how mommyblogs are shifting the constricted perception of motherhood towards a more complex and subjective grasp of what motherhood is and can be. By engaging with a plethora of external sources, like journalists, mothers, and academics, Friedman presents back-and-forth conversation between parties of opposing views, fascinating academic insights and research, and interesting case studies of mothers in more uncommon situations.

Friedman's theoretical framework consists of three key terms that she employs throughout the book to help clarify the complex nature of agency, power, identity, and subjectivity within motherhood (p. 22). The first term, "hybrid," relates to the diversity across

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mommyblogs. The second term, “cyborg,” allows Friedman to analyze the dialogism of the Internet and the ways this medium has led to complex conversations about maternal life that are more consistent with the offline interactions between mothers that historical texts have described. Lastly, Friedman takes insights from queer theory’s resistance to any essential or natural component of identity (p. 26) – with the term “queer” representing relationships, femininity, and reproduction realities within motherhood that differ from the normative societal ideals. These three terms are seamlessly applied to several case studies of a wide and diverse range of maternal subjects introduced throughout the book – a Gaza mom, a Black mom, a Teen mom, an Asian mom, and a Transgender mom, among others -- quickly enlightening the reader to a new perspective of motherhood that is excitingly ambiguous and one that should be acknowledged in its incredible variation.

For readers who had previously never heard or been exposed to mommyblogs, “Mommyblogs and the Changing Face of Motherhood” also includes the controversy and challenges mommy-bloggers, and mommyblogs as a whole, faced in the initial rise of the online mamasphere. In one instance, Friedman explains and quotes an article from the *New York Times* written in 2005 that viewed mommyblogs as maternal solipsism, while also raising concerns about the privacy of children and the perceived boringness of maternal accounts. In response to this criticism, Friedman empowers the voices of two mommy-bloggers that both demonstrate two challenges and false perceptions mommy-bloggers are faced with: (1) moms that blog do so in order to gain as much attention towards themselves as possible; and (2) moms that blog are in need of validation of being good mothers. As one of the mothers writes, as quoted by Friedman, “I don’t think people are blogging to get validation. People are blogging to save their sanity, to give *themselves* attention and validation. In fact, I think this generation of parents is less in need

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of validation and much more willing to stand up and say, this is how it looks over here and I'm writing it down. If you're interested, come have a peek" (p. 33). The two mothers whose responses Friedman quotes in response to the *New York Times* article provide valid responses that are based on their own individual and personal perspectives and insights as mothers, further emphasizing the importance and significance of attending to the maternal interpretation and attitude when dealing with the discussion of motherhood.

In her concluding chapter, Friedman submits several conclusions, each pertaining to different aspects of motherhood and mommyblogs discussed throughout her book. However, most generally, Friedman concludes that, "in reading these mommyblogs, I noticed the confusion and slipperiness of mothering *in the world*; the imperfections and contradictions as well as the intersections between infinite points of social location that work upon any given mother to participate in her mothering practice (p. 141). In addition, Friedman eyes the future of the mamasphere and the influence it may have on the perception and understanding of motherhood moving forward, though, despite all the research she has done, admits that there may always be questions about motherhood and mommyblogs that will remain unclear.

In the introductory chapter, as previously mentioned, Friedman states that the remainder of the book will aim to suggest that diversity and dialogism are two of the major characteristics of mommyblogs and that, together, both characteristics act as an answer to dominant discourses of motherhood. Although Friedman successfully accomplished this goal by incorporating numerous resources, the most interesting and enjoyable resources that she adds, making her book all the more exceptional, are the voices of mothers around the world – via both bloggers and commenters alike. It is with all these quotes and insights from mommyblogs that, even with the

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incredible range in diversity, Friedman finds one common message, and cites a post by Bobita, a feminist academic and mommy-blogger, as a perfect encapsulation:

[When reading blogs, I find] Mothers struggling with the very same issues that I faced daily. Women searching for meaning. Women finding meaning in the singular moments of motherhood. Women slamming up against questions and uncertainty in the alternate moments of motherhood! It was one of the most validating experiences of my life. I felt understood and included in a profound way... on most days... it is my lifeline. (p. 86)

This quote provides an answer to the critical question of what makes mommyblogs worth reading – a question that the mamasphere was often criticized for during its rise in popularity in 2005. As Friedman demonstrates throughout her book, mommyblogs are special and revolutionary in the subject of maternal life in what they provide not only in terms of a seemingly infinite range of insight, but also in the ability for mothers to connect with one another, learn, and feel a sense of belonging and cultivate power with the term “motherhood.”

Friedman’s intended readership is somewhat unclear. With an excellent academic approach and execution, “Mommyblogs and the Changing Face of Motherhood” can appeal to various academic circles, like those of sociologists for instance. Although, given the very frequent quoting of and interacting with mommyblogs, Friedman’s book may also capture the interest and attention from mothers – whether fellow mommy-bloggers, expecting mothers, or simply, women interested the world of motherhood one way or another. However, ultimately, the complex theoretical nature and subsequent enhanced vocabulary, or academic vocabulary, interferes with the overall content of the book from being enjoyed as a light or casual read, thereby making Friedman’s “Mommyblogs and the Changing Face of Motherhood” a less recommendable book to the everyday, time-restricted mom.

Lastly, and merely as a side-note, I find myself left with a new perspective towards blogs as a whole. While before, though I did appreciate and respect blogs as a medium, I never quite

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perceived them as a direct source into the lives of their posters. All around the world, we have a near infinite chain of personal online journals with an infinite amount of diversity, insight, and conversation. And just like Friedman states, “blogs are *not* simply the private musings of individuals, made public. Rather, they are a form of participation in a vast and never-ending conversation” (p. 31). With this realized, I find myself with a never-ending library of human experience and emotion at my fingertips every time I open a new browser.