The Secret Life of Online Moms: Anonymity and Disinhibition on YouBeMom.com

Sarita Yardi Schoenebeck

School of Information, University of Michigan

yardi@umich.edu

Abstract

Moms are one of the fastest growing demographics online. While much is known about where they spend their time, little is known about how they spend it. Using a dataset of over 51 million posts and comments from the website YouBeMom.com, this paper explores what kinds of topics moms talk about when they are not constrained by norms and expectations of face-to-face culture. Results show that almost 5% of posts are about *dh*, or "dear husband," but these posts tend to express more negative emotion than other posts. The average post is only 124 characters long and family and daily life are common categories of posting. This suggests that YouBeMom is used as a fast-paced social outlet that may not be available to moms in other parts of their lives. This work concludes with a discussion of anonymity and disinhibition and puts forth a new provocation that moms, too, spend time online "for the lulz."

Introduction

Theories about "mother blaming" have persisted in a variety of forms, where mothers are expected to self-sacrificingly attend to their primary roles as childrearers. For example, maternal deprivation argued that a child could be damaged if it was removed from a mother's care for the first three years of life (Bowlby 1974). In the 21st century, domestic ideologies and norms persist and motherhood continues to be a complex, heavily debated and sometimes stressful process (Chua 2011; Druckerman 2012; Nelson 2010). This paper presents the first study of an anonymous online forum for moms called YouBeMom (YBM), a distinct and captivating subculture of the Internet. Using a dataset of over 51 million posts and comments from YBM, this paper explores what kinds of topics moms talk about when they are not constrained by social mores and expectations of face-to-face parenting culture (Cherlin 2009; Nelson 2010; Stearns 2004).

Prior work has examined how moms seek health information and social support online (Plantin and Daneback 2009; Sarkadi and Bremberg 2005). Related work has also studied the role of the Internet in family life (Boneva et al. 2004; Kraut et al. 2002; Mesch 2006). Though motherhood and the culture of information sharing has been studied extensively in offline settings (e.g. Scott, Brady, and Glynn 2001), less work has focused on how moms spend their time online. This is an important demographic to study. One-third of all bloggers are moms, older moms are one of the fastest growing demographics on Facebook, and younger moms are 85% more likely to visit Facebook than the average user (Nielsen 2009).

On a theoretical level, YBM exposes the intersection of two distinct cultures: the empathetic culture of largely supportive parenting sites like iVillage.com or babycenter.com (Mickelson 1997; Plantin and Daneback 2009; Rheingold 1993; Sarkadi and Bremberg 2005) versus the culture of more degrading sites like 4chan, an anonymous and inhospitable discussion board best known for its pranks and inappropriate content (Bernstein et al. 2011; Coleman 2012b, 2012c). Somewhat paradoxically, YBM traverses both cultures, presenting a new context for examining how anonymity and disinhibition impact online behavior.

Drawing on a combination of qualitative observations and computational techniques, this work analyzes site participation using topic detection and frequency, sentiment analysis, and phrase net pattern matching. This paper concludes with a discussion of disinhibition online and how social norms and expectations shape online mom culture. Understanding the myriad ways moms participate online could help us to develop new social support mechanisms that offer outlets for talking, venting, and sharing.

Related Work

YBM is unique because it violates many accepted norms of what we currently know about online parenting sites. This section introduces these norms then frames the narrative around anonymity and disinhibition, two characteristics that vividly impact the nature of interactions on the site.

Motherhood and Online Parenting

Howard Rheingold's seminal narrative, *"The Virtual Community,"* begins with an account of his young daughter's illness (Rheingold 1993). He describes how he received help for her illness on the online community, The WELL, before his wife received a call back from the doctor's office. Rheingold's report of the Parenting Conference on The WELL depicted what he called:

> "the warmly human corner of cyberspace… It was also the immense inner sense of security that comes with discovering that real people—most of them parents, some of them nurses, doctors, and midwives—are available, around the clock, if you need them."

Early studies of parenting boards showed that they were a place where parents could go to find support about parenting related topics (Mickelson 1997). Gender differences are evident in some of these boards. Prior work suggests that women are emotionally-oriented online (Kraut et al. 2002), and that female-dominated sites are more likely to be supportive (Korenman and Wyatt 1996; Sharf 1997). Women are more likely than men to react aversively to aggression in online interaction, including ceasing contributing or visiting a service (Herring 1993a).

Friedan wrote about "the problem that has no name" in 1963, which she identified as the unhappiness of middle-class, educated, suburban housewives who were pressured into their maternal role and, thus, felt unfulfilled and discontented (Friedan 1963). Simone Beauvoir, Friedan's predecessor, said: "I do not reject motherhood… I'm against circumstances under which mothers have to have their children" (Schwarzer 1984). Mothers, in particular, are now tasked with balancing expectations and social pressures that can surface both online and offline; YBM is a place where many of these pressures are surfaced.

Anonymity and Disinhibition

On real name sites like Facebook[1], like in many face to face conversations, people may be loath to admit failures and weaknesses to a broad audience (Marwick 2012). We may admit our failures to our closest friends, but we are unlikely to broadcast them to our wider networks. This behavior, known as "face saving," depicts our desire to pre-

sent an image of self in terms of approved social attributes" (Goffman 1956; Goffman 1955). Anonymity takes away the need for face saving; taken literally, when the face is removed there is no longer a need to preserve it. Anonymity also enables a process of disinhibition whereby people have the ability to separate their actions online from their face-to-face identity. By doing so, they may feel less vulnerable about self-disclosing or acting out (Joinson 2001).

Anonymity leads to the *disinhibition* effect, where online actions are separated from offline ones (Siegel et al. 1986; Suler 2004). These kinds of behaviors can be explained through a process of *dissociation*, whereby individuals compartmentalize the part of themselves that they exhibit in an anonymous online setting (Suler 2004). Some early Internet sites were anonymous or pseudonymous because it was easier to architect an anonymous site than ones that required usernames and logins. In other cases, anonymity was designed into newsgroups where topics were particularly volatile, sensitive, controversial, or personal, such as alt.sex.bondage (Jekyll 2008). The psychology of early anonymous role playing, fantasy, and make-believe play worlds was well-documented by Sherry Turkle and others in the early days of MUDS and MOOS (Curtis 1992; Turkle 1995). Today, most parenting sites are not anonymous. On sites like iVillage, babycenter.com, and babble.com users share some amount of personally identifiable information over time such that their identity could be discovered. However, there is also an active subculture of anonymous online parenting sites, like YBM, UrbanBaby.com, and scarymommy.com. This paper explores anonymity and disinhibition on these kinds of sites.

About YouBeMom

YBM is an anonymous message board for parents. Originally targeted towards moms, YBM is now branded broadly as a parenting forum and community but its user base appears to remain largely moms. YBM is purely text-based and its simple interface may be surprising to a newcomer. There are no images, advertisements, usernames, or profiles and anyone can view content anonymously. Users who want to post content are required to create an account with an email and password. When they log in they can view and manage their own history but they are not able to see other users' accounts or history. Conversations on YBM are short and abrupt. Like with many fast-paced discussion boards, such as Reddit or 4chan, YBM users can hit refresh persistently on the home page and watch conversations unfold real-time.

Because everything is anonymous, there is no way of knowing YBM demographics with certainty. My observa-

---

[1] https://www.facebook.com/help/292517374180078/

tions on the site suggest that most posters are moms but some are also dads (or choose to self-identify as such). Evidence for this is the mom-centered nature of topics, such as breastfeeding, stay at home moms, nannies, choosing schools, and meal preparation. There are also many references to *dh*, or dear husband, which is the lingo used by moms when discussing their husbands. There is a class of "fakes" and trolls on YBM that the community looks to identify and "out" when possible. Though YBM ostensibly could be all young males, it is unlikely that such a community would sustain itself about mom-related topics for over five years the way it has. YBM does not provide traffic stats but it does provide number of logged in users which is usually in the 100's at any given time. The site appears to be mostly U.S.-based, though users from other countries could be lurking. My observations suggest that YBM has a large community of active members who live in or around New York City and who might be middle to upper class (based on discussion about nannies, private schools, etc.)

YBM was started on in 2008 to provide an alternative to UrbanBaby.com (which users refer to as "UB"), a site which was started in 1999 and purchased by CNET in early 2006. UB was profiled in a 2006 New York Magazine article called "Mothers Anonymous" which highlighted the irony many mothers experience of desperately wanting children, then having to face the many challenges and pressures of motherhood (Nussbaum 2006). CNET redesigned the interface in 2008 and put advertisements on the site, provoking a revolt by many of its users. Some of these former users started a rival site called YouBeMom that looked similar to UB but had some added privacy features and no advertisements (and a clever and subtle riff on the name). The snafu was documented in a New York Time's article, "Urban Baby's Lesson: Don't Mess with Mom's Chat" (Kaufman 2008) which described mom's' deep discontent with the changes.

Methods

I have been observing YBM since 2010 and crawled the site in 2012. This resulted in a capture of over 4.8 million posts and 47 million comments covering the period from May 15, 2008 through September 2, 2012 plus observation of additional posts through May 2013. Unlike ephemeral sites like 4chan (Bernstein et al. 2011), content on YBM is permanent and archived and it is possible to crawl content from the site since its inception. I used Perl word frequency counter scripts on the dataset to capture how often moms talked about different topics. This involved removing stopwords and setting aside words with little relevance for analytical purposes like "anything" I used LIWC to capture sentiment of types of posts, such as frequency of

positive or negative emotion used when talking about *ds* (dear daughter) or *dh* (dear husband). Major YBM language on the site was translated into language LIWC understands. I used Word Tree visualizations in Many Eyes[2] to display clusters of words that branch off from or branch into key phrases. Specifically, the phrase net tool helps to visually convey the different contexts in which the phrase *dh* appears. Phrase Net uses pattern matching to locate which words co-occur with a given word. The size of a word is proportional to the number of times it occurs in a match and the color of the word indicates whether it is more likely to be found in the first or second position of the pattern.

Results

The Origin and Evolution of YBM

The dataset spans 4 years, 3 months, and 18 days (a total of 1,571 days). There are about 3,074 posts per day and 30,394 comments per day (see Table 1). This is smaller than Usenet's 25,000 posts per day, and 4chan /b/'s 35,000 threads per day (Bernstein et al. 2011) but still active. The average number of comments per post is 9.9 and the median is 7. The mean post length is 124 characters and the median is 94 characters, which is slightly higher than Twitter's mean of 67.9 and median of 60[3]. This may be partly explained by Twitter's large mobile user base which promotes shorter posts[4].

Popular Topics among Anonymous Moms

Table 2 shows word frequencies for the most commonly used words in YBM posts, after removing stopwords (e.g. I, to, a, and), grammatical persons (they, he, she), and modal verbs (would, could, will). Column A shows the top terms (omitting stopwords) as they occur in order of frequency. I iteratively coded the top 200 most frequent words (only the first 45 are shown in Column A) into topical categories. After two rounds of iteration, codes were refined down to 14 unique codes, such as family, work, home, etc. Column B highlights the two most populated codes—family and time—and a subset of the words that fell into them.

The first word to appear after stopwords are removed is *dh* which is the 48th most frequent word among posts. *dh* is the lingua franca across a broad array of parenting boards (pregnancy, ttc or "trying to conceive", Christian, diabetic, etc.) In fact, *dh* is just one instance of a much larger and

---

Num Posts: 4,828,815

Num Comments: 47,748,793

Mean Comments/Posts: 9.9

Median Comments/Post: 7

Mean Post Length (chars): 124

Median Post Length (chars): 94

Table 1: YBM dataset descriptive statistics.

	Column A		Column B
dh	last	something	*Family*
think	night	baby	dh
want	right	home	dd
time	work	see	ds
good	over	first	db
dd	said	help	kids
need	love	dc	baby
day	take	posted	girl
here	only	house	child
people	yo	pg	
today	off	school	*Time*
feel	tia	long	day
kids	after	someone	today
old	never	name	summer
ds	then	bad	week
mom	week	year	night

Table 2: Col. A shows sampling of term frequency. Col. B shows subset of two most popular categories of terms.

sometimes overwhelming glossary of phrases, including bf (breast fed), ita (I totally agree), MIL (mother in law), ftm (first time mom), mc (miscarriage), sahm (stay at home mom), wohm (work out of home mom), etc (Table 3 shows some of the more commonly used YBM language). Some boards, like YBM, have a terminology page to guide new users; others simply leave newcomers to figure it out.

Family is the most common topic on YBM and includes terms like *dh*, *dd*, *ds*, *db*, child, mom, etc. Though *dh* is the most common term, combining child-related terms like *dd*, *ds*, *dc*, and *db* would amount to more references than *dh*. Many posts about children are questions of other moms asking if a certain kind of behavior is normal or acceptable. For example, one mom says, "*if dd and I wear matching halloween costumes (hosting a big party) will it be cute or will I look pathetic?*" Another mom asks, "*What's the oldest you'd keep db in a crib? DS turns 3 this weekend and LOVES his crib and honestly, I love the convenience.*" In both of these examples, moms are posing questions about social and behavioral norms. While children are young, moms often refer to them by their age, especially if they have an age-specific question. In Column B, for example,

yo does not refer to a greeting but instead the term "year old" and is usually preceded by an age, as in "today my 2 yo..." The number 2 is the 93rd most frequent term, followed by 3 at 123rd then 5 at 157th and 4 at 172nd. Though many of the moms do appear to be moms of very young children, it also appears that when their children get older, they refer to the children more generally as *dd*, *ds*, or *dc*.

Time is the second most populated category, which includes words like time, day, today, old, last [+ night], week, year, etc. Much of YBM's regular content is quotidian—everyday reflections from moms on the life of a mom. For example, one mom writes: *"Dh works insane hours. he also travels 2+ weeks every 3 mos. i work full time. i must say, as hectic as our life seems when he is home, whenever he is out of [town], i become a whole new level of busy. my hats are off to full-time working single moms. you ladies rock!"* Many moms post about making dinner, childcare duties, and balancing roles with their husbands. Some posts of this nature are questions about norms and appropriate behavior while others are rants about what their children or husband have or have not done. Moms also post about their own careers though these posts occur less frequently than family posts (naturally, since all moms on YBM are moms but only some of them are wohms [work out of the home moms]). One mom says: *"Applied for my first teacher job today and will be checking my email every 5 minutes for the next few week. So nerve wracking."* Finding a job or pondering whether to leave a current job is a common source of discussion and dissatisfaction among moms.

The Emotional Work of Moms

To further focus on the family category, this section investigates whether the kinds of things moms say about their family exhibit any kind of meaningful patterns. I focus on

code	meaning	code	meaning
dh	dear husband	ita	I totally agree
dd	dear daughter	itda	I totally disagree
ds	dear son	fb	Facebook
dc(s)	dear child(ren)	imo	in my opinion
db	dear baby	iirc	if I recall correctly
pg	pregnant	tmi	too much information
wohm	work at home mom	op	original poster
sahm	stay at home mom	np	new poster
ybm	youbemom	or	original replier
ub	urbanbaby	nr	new replier

Table 3: A subset of common language used on YBM.

	dh	dd	ds	YBM
positive emotion	2.64	2.76	2.73	2.90
negative emotion	2.51	2.23	2.28	2.36
anxiety	0.45	0.44	0.45	0.38
anger	1.01	0.69	0.70	0.86
work	1.51	1.55	1.60	1.80
money	0.86	0.50	0.44	0.94
time	6.38	6.39	6.53	6.11

Table 4: Sentiment analysis of YBM posts containing *dh*, *dd* and *ds* and comparison to baseline (n=1000).

the three most frequent family topics: *dh*, *dd*, and *ds*. Based on my observations and using LIWC categories as a guideline, I developed hypotheses about which social and psychological linguistic processes might be relevant to postings about family. I decided to focus on seven categories: positive emotion, negative emotion, anxiety, anger, personal concerns, work, money, and time. The results are shown in Table 4, which also contains a baseline column for all posts not containing the targeted key terms.

Using a Bonferroni correction, I set α = 0.05/7 (number of LIWC categories) = 0.007. Results show that none of the columns (*dh*, *dd*, *ds*) are statistically different to the YBM baseline in each of the LIWC categories. However, when comparing *dh* to *dd* or *ds*, two categories are significant. Anger yields a significant result where *dh* is higher than both *dd* χ^2(1,N=1000) = 14.84, p=0.0001 and *ds* χ^2(1,N=1000) = 13.72, p=0.0001. Money also is non-random, where *dh* is significantly higher than *ds* χ^2(1,N=1000) = 25.92, p<0.0001 and significantly higher than *dd* χ^2(1,N=1000) = 40.09, p<0.0001. Money is often thought to be the biggest cause of divorce among couples (Cherlin 2009). This result suggests that anonymous sites like YBM provide a unique lens into life stresses experienced by moms—more work should be done to explore these stressors. Though not significant, other trends are worthy of further exploration, such as the increase in positive emotion from *dh* to *dd* and *ds*.

Dear Husbands

Because *dh* is a central topic on YBM, this section takes a closer look at how and why moms use the term. The origins of *dh* notation are difficult to trace, but go back at least 10 years, before YBM, when *dh* was documented in urbandictionary.com as "*My dh lets me buy all the scrapbooking stuff I want to and I don't even have to wear black pantyhose!*" In YBM, *dh* showed up just under 5% (4.963%) of posts on YBM (n=239,672). This is a conservative estimate that omits some variations like *exdh* [ex dear husband], *ex-dh*, *dh-*, etc.

There are only 48 references to "dear husband" across all of YBM posts compared to over 270,000 references to *dh*. This extreme disproportion suggests that newcomers appear to learn the YBM language and culture quickly, though this difference could also be explained by a high oldtimer-newcomer ratio and lurking among newcomers (meaning that active members are primarily return participants rather than new participants (Kim 2000)). Users occasionally reflect on the notation, such as this comment: "*i hate all this dh dd dc stuff, especially when the story is about how terrible the 'dear husband' is for whatever reason.*" Her post was met with quick derision:
"*you must hate the internet then*"
"*try typing husband husband husband all day. PITA [Pain in the Ass]*"
"*just substitute despicable for dear*"
"*welcome to the interwebz*"
"*OH HAI I DIDN'T C U DERE*"
Self-reflective questions and comments about YBM are often met with trolling, such as "You're here from Facebook aren't you." YBM, like 4chan (Bernstein et al. 2011), maintains a strong sense of self-identity and likes to differentiate itself from its "mainstream" counterparts like iVillage or Facebook. This kind of trolling is consistent with site culture; regulars expect to see trolling between community members and it is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the site.

In some posts, *dh* is used in an affectionate way that implies that the husband is in fact dear to the poster. For others, *dh* is used cynically, often in the context of a deeply sarcastic or angry post: "*If your dh treated you badly during your high risk pg [pregnancy], and got into a fight at the hospital after db was born, didn't show up the next day, would that be enough for you to divorce?*" Many posts about *dh* on YBM are like this one, asking questions of community members and posting short vignettes about an private event in their life that is likely to elicit a response.

Figure 1 shows words that are connected to *dh* in a phrase of the form "*dh* and X." I ran a variety of connection words like "to" and "for" for comparison and observed similar results. While some phrases are common in the English language and thus likely to exist, such as "cats and dogs" or "salt and pepper", *dh* has no such natural pairing and we can thus learn a lot from co-occurrences. Using ManyEyes, the largest three co-occurrences with *dh* are *kids*, *dcs* [dear children], and *home* suggesting that moms with young children are in fact the core population on the site (as opposed to married women without children or with grown children who have left the home). For example, "kids" is very dark indicating "kids and *dh*" is commonly used
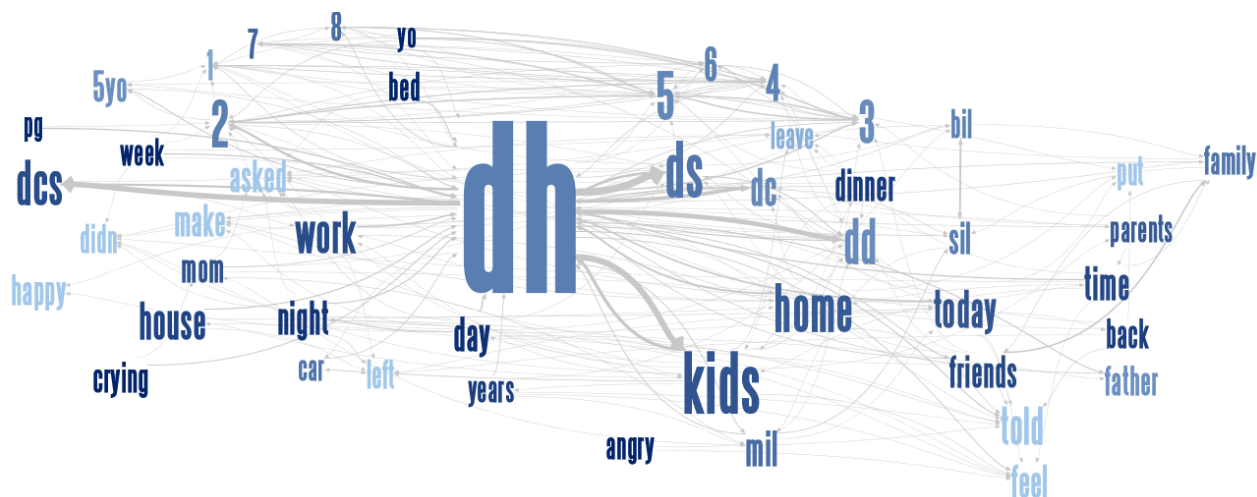
Figure 1: Phrase net of "dh AND [X]" where the size of a word is proportional to the number of times it occurs in a match and the color of the word indicates whether it is more likely to be found in the first (dark) or second (light) position of the pattern.

whereas "told" and "feel" are both light indicating that "*dh and told*" and "*dh and feel*" are common.

The words trailing "*dh and*" are mostly verbs including "told", "feel", "leave", and "asked." For example, "*i love my dh and feel badly bc i feel like i snap at him so much more than i ever did now that we have a db [dear baby]. she is already 11 weeks but i feel like i'm short with him when he does something careless with db*." Lee's study of the transition to motherhood describes how "cultural expectations that family caring is naturally women's work, and that it is easy and stress free, mean that many mothers suffer a combination of work overload and guilt" (Lee 1997). This mom is expressing a sense of weakness and guilt at not being able to balance her husband and her new baby the way she wants to. Her post also highlights the challenges and expectations she faces, and the implied expectation that she *should* be able to manage motherhood without compromising her marital relationship.

Discussion

This work shows how anonymity and disinhibition create a culture where moms discuss their lives in ways that they may not in other settings (Plantin and Daneback 2009; Sarkadi and Bremberg 2005; Scott et al. 2001). Some questions emerge from these results: namely, 1) do moms really mean what they say? and 2) given the many online parenting support communities available, why do they keep returning to this site?

Disinhibition and Conventional Signals

While moms might be posting how they truly feel, their posts may also be performative (Goffman 1956; Goffman 1963), revealing signals they want to share based on how they're feeling, regardless of the underlying truth of the statement. For example, one mom asks: "*do you ever think dh is just plain nuts*?" Another says: "*Has anyone tried light, sensual dominance and submission. I'd love to be tied up by DH but that ain't gonna happen.*" These posts could be genuine or hyperbolic, or a blend of both. Donath's signaling theory helps us to frame anonymity and disinhibition on YBM. Anonymity enables *conventional signals* (Donath 2007), signals which are unreliable or cannot necessarily be believed to be true. YBM contains only conventional signals, where we cannot know if users are telling the truth or not. On YBM, a mom can pretend to be pregnant, or divorced, or having an affair, and can even pretend to be a mom. In contrast, Donath's *assessment signals* are those that are inherently reliable. Running into a woman on the street who is eight months pregnant is likely to be a reliable signal.

This culture of disinhibition and conventional signaling creates a safe space online for moms to explore their own roles and identity and a variety of other topics, such as the mom who asks about sexual dominance and submission. Moms who want to discuss such a topic, or any other ostracized topic like divorce, single parenting, abortion, or bottle feeding—despite their prevalence today (Cherlin 2009)—are presented with a social outlet online that they may not have regular access to otherwise. Whether or not moms mean what they say may not be the most important part of this site; that it provides them a social outlet for exploring their identities—real or performed—is critical to its success.

Doing it for the 'Lulz'

YBM culture can be harsh and antagonistic, and a reasonable question would be, why do moms keep coming to the site? One hypothesis is that it offers a social outlet for violating norms and expectations that moms face in other parts of their lives—in other words, they do it for the 'lulz.' In 2010, Christopher Poole, the founder of 4chan, pronounced that "the cost of failure is really high when you're contributing as yourself" (Ha 2011). His context was 4chan, where he argues that "nobody will give you a hard time at 30 years old about something you said or did when you were 8 years old. Online, you have all these social networks that are moving to a state of persistent identity, and in turn, we're sacrificing the ability to be youthful" (Bilton 2010). Sites like YBM suggest that Poole's perspective is short-sighted; anonymity is not about youth but is instead about providing a forum for trespassing social norms and expectations, including ones that a particular demographic of users may find repressive. The heavy use of codes like *dh*, *dd*, etc. signal in-group and out-group membership (Brewer 1979) that may encourage the persistence of norms and culture of the site.

Though most people would agree that anonymity is important for contexts like health information seeking or political speech, the question becomes more interesting in contexts like 4chan and YBM where a driving motivation for participation appears to be "for the lulz." Coleman argues compellingly that Anonymous (an activist offshoot of 4chan) is in it for the "lulz", employing rowdy, subversive tactics to fight for digital rights and civil liberties online (Coleman 2012a). Benkler similarly describes Anonymous as "an idea, a zeitgeist, coupled with a set of social and technical practices. Diffuse and leaderless, its driving force is 'lulz'—irreverence, playfulness, and spectacle" (Benkler 2012). Though the demographics of YBM are different than those of Anonymous and 4chan, YBM shares many of the properties Benkler describes. Stated differently, if you had to conceive of a site for moms that was diffuse and leaderless, irreverent and playful, it might end up looking a lot like YBM. Indeed, some of the posts on YBM are obviously playful and irreverent: *"I came home from work early and caught dh having sex with the Au Pair in our wine cellar. Should I be concerned?"* These kinds of posts parody the middle to upper-class woes performed by many YBM users. They also highlight a collective sense of humor and critique centered on the lives of moms.

Norms and Expectations of Motherhood

Numerous posts expressed frustration or tension at role expectations between spouses. One mother posted: *"emailed dh and asked him to pick up dc's antibiotics on his way home. his response: "when the fuck is this MY job?'"* An-

other mom similarly posted: *"Damn, just called DH and told him that kids and I wanted to order dinner and he put the kabash on it because he doesnt want to spend the $. So I told him Im not cooking and he can deal with dinner when he gets home. Now we all lose."* In both of these posts, we cannot tell if the moms are WOHMs or SAHMs, though their posts suggest they might be at home while their husbands are at work. Role theory explains how social roles are those appropriate behaviors based on social norms that guide behavior (Biddle 1979). Regardless of "breadwinner" roles, domestic roles remain complicated and moms continue to feel a burden that creates a contentious and potentially unstable distribution of labor. Much has changed since Friedan's *The Second Sex* and Beauvoir's *The Feminine Mystique* were written, yet culture wars about women's roles in the home and at work persist (Chua 2011; Nelson 2010; Stearns 2004). This research suggests new opportunities for studying and designing social spaces online for moms.

Limitations

Studying a community like YBM risks revealing their existence to a broader audience and disrupting the "safe" norms and culture of the site. This is important to keep in mind in future work; qualitative work—surveys and interviews—should be conducted but with great care. Almost all of the conversations observed were—or appeared to be—about heterosexual partnerships. It is not clear if this is because the site is primarily heterosexual couples or because only those moms are active on the site.

Conclusion

This work has shown that anonymity and disinhibition provide an environment for moms to communicate and share questions and stories. Moms talk about their husbands more than any other topic and express negative sentiment when doing so. They also talk about their families and daily lives. The purpose of this paper is to show the impact of anonymity and disinhibition in online communities with a particular focus on an emergent and fascinating phenomenon of anonymous moms online. These topics are not just of theoretical interest to anonymity researchers; they are also of practical importance to designers and policy makers looking to provide and support social and emotional outlets for moms online. These results lay the groundwork for future research on social norms and expectations among moms and for a new class of social support applications that give moms a way to safely share questions, anxieties, and perhaps even fantasies online.

Acknowledgements

References

Benkler, Yochai. 2012. "Hacks of Valor." *Foreign Affairs*.

Bernstein, Michael et al. 2011. "4chan and /b/: An Analysis of Anonymity and Ephemerality in a Large Online Community." In *Proc. ICWSM '12*.

Biddle, Bruce J. 1979. *Role theory: Expectations, identities, and behaviors*. New York: Academic Press.

Bilton, Nick. 2010. "One on One: Christopher Poole, Founder of 4chan." *NY Times Bits Blog*.

Boneva, B et al. 2004. *Teenage Communication in the Instant Messaging Era*. Oxford University Press.

Bowlby, John. 1974. *Child Care and the Growth of Love*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin.

Brewer, M B. 1979. "In-group bias in the minimal intergroup situation: A cognitive motivational analysis." *Psychological Bulletin 86*:307–324.

Cherlin, Andrew J. 2009. *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today*. Knopf.

Chua, Amy. 2011. *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. Penguin Group.

Coleman, Gabriella. 2012a. "Everything you know about Anonymous is wrong." *AlJazeera*. Retrieved January 15, 2013.

Coleman, Gabriella. 2012b. "Our Weirdness Is Free, The logic of Anonymous—online army, agent of chaos, and seeker of justice." *Triple Canopy*.

Coleman, Gabriella. 2012c. "Phreaks, Hackers, and Trolls and the Politics of Transgression and Spectacle." in *The Social Media Reader*, Ed. Michael Mandiberg. New York: NYU Press.

Curtis, Pavel. 1992. "*LambdaMOO Takes a New Direction*."

Donath, J. 2007. "Signals in social supernets." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 13*(1).

Druckerman, Pamela. 2012. *Bringing Up Bebe: One American Mother Discovers the Wisdom of French Parenting*. Penguin Press HC.

Friedan, Betty. 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*. W.W. Norton and Company Inc.

Goffman, E. 1956. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Goffman, Erving. 1955. "On Face-work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements of Social Interaction." *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes 18*(3):213–231.

Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Behavior in Public Places*. NY, NY: The Free Press.

Ha, Anthony. 2011. "4chan founder: Zuckerberg is 'totally wrong' about online identity." *Venture Beat*.

Herring, S. C. 1993a. "Gender and democracy in computer-mediated communication." *Electronic Journal of Comm. 3*(2).

Jekyll, H. 2008. "*Sex Stories on the Internet: The First Twenty or so Years*." http://www.literotica.com/s/sex-stories-on-the-internet.

Joinson, Adam N. 2001. "Self-disclosure in computer-mediated communication: The role of self-awareness and visual anonymity." *European Journal of Social Psychology 31*(2):177–192.

Kaufman, Joanne. 2008. "Urban Baby's Lesson: Don't Mess With Mom's Chat." *New York Times*, May 19.

Kim, Amy. 2000. *Community Building on the Web : Secret Strategies for Successful Online Communities*. NY: Peachpit Press.

Korenman, J. and Wyatt, N. 1996. "Group dynamics in an e-mail forum." In *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, social, and cross-cultural perspectives*. Ed. Susan C Herring. John Benjamins.

Kraut, R et al. 2002. "Internet paradox revisited." *Journal of Social Issues 58*(1):49–74.

Lee, Christina. 1997. "Social context, depression, and the transition to motherhood." *Brit. J. of Health. Psych.2*(2):93–108.

Marwick, Alice E. 2012. "The Public Domain: Surveillance in Everyday Life." *Surveillance & Society 9*(4):378–393.

Mesch, Gustavo. 2006. "Family Relations and the Internet: Exploring a Family Boundaries Approach." *Journal of Family Communication 6*(2):119–138.

Mickelson, Kristin D. 1997. "Seeking social support: parents in electronic support groups." in *Culture of the Internet*, Ed. Sara Kiesler. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Nelson, Margaret K. 2010. *Parenting Out of Control: Anxious Parents in Uncertain Times*. NYU Press.

Nielsen. 2009. *Where the Moms Are: Shopping, Blogging, Networking and Strategizing Online*.

Nussbaum, Emily. 2006. "Mothers Anonymous." *New York Magazine*, July.

Plantin, Lars, and Kristian Daneback. 2009. "Parenthood, information and support on the internet. A literature review of research on parents and professionals online." *BMC Family Practice 10*(1):34.

Rheingold, Howard. 1993. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. New York: Addison-Wesley.

Sarkadi, A, and S Bremberg. 2005. "Socially unbiased parenting support on the Internet: a cross-sectional study of users of a large Swedish parenting website." *Child care health and development 31*(1):43–52.

Schwarzer, Alice. 1984. *After The second sex: conversations with Simone de Beauvoir*. Pantheon Books.

Scott, D, S Brady, and P Glynn. 2001. "New mother groups as a social network intervention: consumer and maternal and child health nurse perspectives." *Aust J Adv Nurs 18*(4).

Sharf, BF. 1997. "Communicating breast cancer on-line: support and empowerment on the Internet." *Women Health 26*(1):65–84.

Siegel, J, V Dubrovsky, S Kiesler, and T W McGuire. 1986. "Group processes in computer-mediated communication." *Org. Behavior and Human Decision Processes 37*(2):157–187.

Stearns, Peter N. 2004. *Anxious Parents: A History of Modern Childrearing in America*. NYU Press.

Suler, John. 2004. "The online disinhibition effect." *Cyberpsychology and Behavior 7*(3):321–326.

Turkle, Sherry. 1995. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. Simon & Schuster.