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Bloggers: Citizen Journalists or Entrepreneurs?

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I suggest here blogging is not an extension of the journalism profession but that bloggers are entrepreneurs who wish to define their own professional identity and moral code. Blogging reflects a significant trend in the American workforce: the democratization of the professions. The rise of such influential bloggers raises questions about the meaning of good work among classes of professionals with no governance or moral norms.

Like journalists, bloggers can shape national opinion and drive public action. Unlike journalists bloggers create their own norms of ethical behavior and work product. Current literature defines filter blogging as "citizen journalism," suggesting that blogging is the next iteration of journalism and shares similar ethical norms.

I conducted interviews with 10 well-regarded American bloggers, asking them about their professional identity. I asked them to describe their code of ethics and particular safeguards to ensure they produce good work. These interviews turned up the discovery that these bloggers do not wish to enter the journalism profession, although they consider aspects of their work "journalism" and do indeed share some ethical concerns with professional journalists. They all consider themselves professional bloggers, but do not consider blogging itself to be a profession. Instead, these bloggers are entrepreneurs whose websites function as self-directed business ventures.

Introduction

Like journalists, bloggers can shape opinion and drive public action. Unlike journalists, bloggers have no governance standards, and blogging has no barriers to entry. Recent literature focuses on bloggers' motivations and personal attributes, and most often compares blogging to journalism (Lowrey, 2006; Schmidt, 2007; Singer, 2007; Stevens, 2004), even though some consider blogging a threat to the journalism profession (Lowrey, 2006). Consequently, there is much discussion of the need for a formal, "journalistic" code of ethics to control bloggers' output (Singer, 2007; Stevens, 2004), but little agreement on how to implement such a code. Blogs are heavily featured in the media and their impact is the subject of much debate (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, and Wright, 2004; Stevens, 2004). 84 percent of journalists say they would or already have used blogs as a primary or secondary source for articles (http://www.centerformediaresearch.com/cfmr_brief.cfm?fnl=071107, retrieved November 12, 2007), and some blogs traffic rivals major newspapers' (Singer, 2007).

My interest lies in examining if blogging is an extension of the journalism profession. Much work has been done on personal bloggers (Herring et al., 2004; Miura & Yamashita, 2007; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, and Swartz, 2004), but a new class of bloggers is emerging that reports stories, earns a living from blogging, and has authority. Are they journalists? Are they professionals? To explore these questions, I interviewed 10 well-known bloggers.

A blog is a personal web page or an online journal, updated easily by an author, which links outward to material on the web, and presents original content. As of April 2007 there were 70 million blogs (<http://www.sifry.com/alerts/archives/000493.html>, retrieved May 31, 2008). Blogs are updated in reverse chronological order, with the latest entries on top (Stevens, 2004). Many blogs are maintained by a single author and use a very simple publishing format. There are different types of blogs, reflecting the different motivations of their authors. Eight percent of Internet users, or 12 million adults, keep a blog; 39 percent of Internet users read blogs (Lenhart and Fox, 2006). 52% of blogs are personal journals motivated by the author's desire to have a personal forum or online diary (Lenhart and Fox, 2006). Such blogs are known as "personal blogs," and they are not the focus of this study.

The blogs in this study can be defined as *filter* (or *expert*) blogs. Unlike personal blogs, filter blogs are externally focused and aimed at a public audience (Herring et al., 2004). Some now compete with professional media outlets for audience and receive many millions of visitors per month (Stevens, 2004). Such blogs are more likely to be written by authors who consider themselves

journalists (Lenhart and Fox, 2006). Although they may have other jobs, filter bloggers are often paid for their work and derive some level of public recognition from their blogs. Many bloggers remain independent and generate significant income. However, because few earn a sustainable income from their blogs, it is important to consider their motivations to blog, and the kinds of professional or occupational identity blogging imparts (Singer, 2007). Filter blogs are assumed by American mainstream media to be more significant than the tens of millions of personal blogs (Herring et al., 2004).

Bloggging is often cited as a new, grassroots form of journalism and a democratic alternative to the mass, corporate media (Nardi et al., 2004); it is rarely considered a profession in its own right. Like powerful journalists, elite bloggers pursue the outward trappings of professional status: conferences, TV appearances, financial rewards, university courses, and intermittently, codes of ethics (Lowrey, 2006). The literature acknowledges that successful filter blogging contains some professional attributes, but concludes that bloggers' lack of a normative behavior code prevents them from joining the ranks of professional journalists (Singer, 2007).

Many scholars argue that blogs illustrate the "adaptation of journalism to a new context," (Matheson, 2004, p. 445). This new context, often referred to as "citizen journalism," (<http://www.ojr.org/ojr/workplace/1060218311.php>, retrieved Nov. 29, 2007) inspires claims that journalism as we know it has changed forever (http://tomglocer.com/blogs/sample_weblog/archive/2006/12/12/142.aspx, retrieved Nov. 29, 2007). These scholars argue the very epistemology of

journalism, the way journalism operates as a knowledge-producing practice, is being changed by blogs (Alterman, 2003; Matheson, 2004).

When viewed separately from journalism and as a domain in its own right, blogging shares only some of the professions' conceits as defined in the sociology literature. The professional represents occupational rather than consumer or managerial control, inhabits an occupationally controlled labor market requiring training credentials for entry and mobility, and participates in an occupationally controlled training program and special schooling; the professional also possesses an ideology serving some transcendent value and asserting a greater devotion to doing good work than economic reward (Friedson, 2001, p. 180). However, Kornhauser (Klegon, 1978, p. 261) states all that is necessary in the professions is the autonomy to exercise the competence of having a specialized intellectual content. Goode suggests trust is a dominant factor in determining professional behavior (Klegon, 1978). But a challenge to a profession's leaders is integrating learned competence with *educated conscience* (Sullivan, 2004); professionals must be ethical. Usually, their ethics are not self-directed, but prescribed by a universal code of conduct in their domain.

The definition of a profession is changing. As professions become more democratized (Sullivan, 2004) workers are more skeptical of the value of professional organization in work. Prevailing attitudes assume that the market is self-regulating and morally self-sufficient and thus why would anyone go to the hassle of lengthy professional training and association? The notion of being a professional has lost luster (Sullivan, 2004), and the introduction of domains such

as blogging invites reinterpretation of professional norms, especially in journalism (Singer, 2007).

Two key normative tenets of professional journalism, voluntary commitment to truth and to transparency and accountability to the public, are equally important to journalists and bloggers (Singer, 2007). Both cite a responsibility to the truth and, often, responsibility to an imagined reader or viewer (Singer, 2007). Journalists enforce such norms within the boundaries of their profession, while bloggers often act as watchdogs over political institutions, journalists, and corporate media outlets (MacDougall, 2005). Many blog in reaction to compromised work in mainstream journalism (Stevens, 2004). Compromised work is not excellent or ethical, nor is it illegal (Gardner, 2004); it is a threat to the moral authority of the professions. Good work, the bedrock of professional work, is excellent, ethical, and engaged (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, and Damon, 2001). In this study, I consider whether good work by bloggers can be self-defined and self-regulated, or whether it must be observed within the constraints of a professional association.

Like blogging, journalism exploded in the late 19th century as a means for those without access to power to speak (Stevens, 2004). In its first century of American practice, journalism had no code of ethics. It evolved as a business, and its code of ethics emerged from practical considerations (Barber, 1963; Stevens, 2004). Establishing professional norms helped establish social control (Stevens, 2004), and the introduction of a code of ethics forced journalists to conform if they wished to become both renowned and decently paid. Unlike the

journalist, the blogger is usually a self-regulated cottage industry, with only herself to edit, and only herself to laud or blame; as one blogger noted, “If I break a rule of ethics, what do I do, fire myself?” (Perlmutter and Schoen, 2007). Bloggers will not face professional consequences if they violate ethical codes; they can still blog tomorrow if they wish (Singer, 2007). Blogging is symptomatic of the democratization of the professions (Gardner, 2007), but just as journalists did in the 20th century, autonomous, agentic bloggers choose to regulate themselves because their identity and success as the new generation of media depends on it (Singer, 2007).

In this study I investigate the professional attitudes and motivations of well-known American bloggers. I found the bloggers consider themselves writers who often use journalistic tactics, but few in the study actually see their blogging work as journalism. This could be a bias in my study, but I do think it points to a weakness in the current literature, which is too eager to silo blogs into either “personal” or “filter” categories, in which “filter” connotes a new branch of journalism (Lowrey, 2006; MacDougall, 2005; Nardi et al., 2004; Stevens, 2004). My study shows that these bloggers define themselves as writers who maintain their own small businesses online. This is significant because it supports key themes in the contemporary literature of the professions: the democratization of the professions (Sullivan, 2004) and the desire personally to redefine ethical norms at work and in daily life (Singer, 2007; Wolfe, 2001).

Methods

My sample in this study consisted of 10 bloggers. I identified the bloggers

by requesting interviews with those whose blogs I admire. Although the bloggers I interviewed cover different beats, they share similar status. All are individuals who maintain and publish their own blogs, all are paid for their work, and they have all received some level of recognition, be it media attention, peer recognition, or numerous speaking engagements. Five of the bloggers are involved with a large community of women bloggers. I pointedly did not want to interview those for whom blogging is just a hobby; nor did I want to interview professional journalists who now publish online in addition to writing in offline media. All bloggers participated in recorded phone interviews of 40 minutes to one hour. The development of my interview protocol (See Appendix A) was aided by the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Katie Davis.

When interviewing the bloggers, I attempted to uncover each blogger's mission, standards and integrity (Gardner et al., 2001). I felt it was important to unpack each blogger's mission, e.g., "why should society recognize and reward the kind of work I do"? (Gardner et al., 2001, p. 10). Because I was concerned with bloggers' personal standards, I probed their own behavioral codes and feelings about the dominant ethics in the blogging field. I asked whether they identified as a "blogger," and whether this meant they were a professional blogger. They describe the personal systems they use for publishing ethical material, and they discuss the nature of their belief systems.

Each of the blogger interviews was digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. The transcribed interviews were then coded to distill common threads in bloggers' motivations, professional identities and belief systems. The

bloggers in this paper are referred to by pseudonyms.

Results

Nine of the 10 bloggers did not view their blogs as strict journalism, although most said “sometimes” they act as journalists. All referred to themselves as “writers.” All 10 of the bloggers consider themselves professionals, while at the same time most do not consider blogging itself to be a profession. Audience feedback, another concept supported by the literature (Lehnart and Fox, 2006; Schmidt, 2007), is a major motivating factor, but it has a dark side. The bloggers report that maintaining an ethical code is crucial, which corroborates findings that bloggers share with journalists a commitment to transparency, ethical behavior, and responsibility to the public (Singer, 2007).

Relationship between blogging and journalism

Most of the bloggers dismissed the label “journalist” because they prefer the autonomy of working without a firm code of conduct or socially defined role; seven of the bloggers shared this sentiment. Leah says, “We are as close to journalists as we can be without pretending to have that American journalistic style of ‘not opinion.’” By and large the bloggers try to use a “journalistic” commitment to the truth (Singer, 2007) but as Olivia notes, bloggers aren’t governed by this code:

As far as the truth of my opinion, it's ‘do I really think that? Am I trying to get a rise out of people?’...I [have to] feel strongly that it's not an urge to give in to being contrarian just for its own sake.

John, a print journalist turned blogger notes:

I've always been a little irked by the journalistic code that you're supposed to be objective in the sense that every journalist I've ever known has some

opinion. You don't cover a lawmaker for year after year without having some sort of opinion about whether they're a good guy or a bad guy.

Matt says the key difference between the content on his blog and professional institutional journalism is leeway:

I think it would be virtually impossible because of the myriad of legal issues...I can't imagine that a mainstream media publication would even entertain the thought. You can't compete in that media and I know it because they're all running around opening blogs and this is the problem they run into -- they want to add these blogs, but they are afraid to give the people their own voice.

Like journalists, these bloggers cite responsibility to an imagined reader or viewer (Singer, 2007). With bloggers, however, readers are very present because they leave comments. Successful blog content is audience-driven, and the bloggers accept their role as community moderators. Julia:

I have met writers and journalists who are extremely uncomfortable with the idea of blogging because for them writing is a craft and once those words are out they're out and you don't change them and they're not really open to public review on your own site, heaven forbid! [But] once you do that and you really start engaging an audience, then you begin to actually get what this is all about.

Although they may not consider themselves journalists, all the bloggers stressed the joy and passion they feel when writing their blogs. Dorothy says she feels kinship with Victorian era writers of popular magazine serials:

Blogging...has all of the same elements. They wrote for money, they wrote in installments, they got feedback from their readers before they wrote the next part. They weren't necessarily writing exactly what their readers wanted them to write but they stopped and took the temperature before they went on, and we don't have that in our other media.

Although all consider themselves good writers, several of the bloggers look to journalists as authorities, and hope that their blogging can influence professional journalists. Dorothy mentioned one of her goals was to make her

blog posts more "journalistic," which to Dorothy means "Fact-based and relevant, well-educated, important." Is she a journalist? "Sometimes. I really just consider myself a writer, like a dancer who does the salsa, and ballet and something else. I see these different forms of writing as appropriate for a different time and place, but it's always me that's doing it." In summary, although the majority of bloggers do not consider themselves journalists, they consider aspects of their work journalistic and they respect *aspects* of a traditional journalist's work.

Blogger as professional

Each blogger I spoke with considered him/herself a professional blogger, because he or she is paid for their work and strives to maintain "high quality" sites. Seven of the bloggers derive the majority of their income from their blogs or blogging-related work (either by earning advertising revenue on their websites, or being paid to blog on others' websites), and three hope that one day their blogs will be their sole source of income. As noted by the literature, all of the bloggers cited the public recognition they receive as a major motivation for blogging; for five, their blogs act as marketing tools that enhance their professional reputation and incomes. Only half the bloggers feel blogging itself is a profession, but all believe their own work is professional. All derive at least part of their professional identity from being a blogger. I believe that the status of "professional blogger" allows them to build their own personal brands in their fields of expertise, much as a sought-out lecturer, writer, or independent consultant would do.

The most striking discovery was that nine of the bloggers said they blog in part because they seek to have an autonomous, entrepreneurial professional life.

And they believe they possess the specialized intellectual content necessary to instill the autonomy that accompanies professionals (Klegon, 1978). Some have already succeeded in creating vibrant businesses from their blogs, while some hope to do so in the next few years. Blogs can make money by selling advertising space, just as newspapers and magazines do. The more visitors and public recognition a blog receives, the higher advertising rates it can charge. Julia, whose food blog earns a lot of advertising revenue because of its high traffic and popularity, takes the blog very seriously—she states her goal “for the last several years has been I want this thing to be very useful, very popular, and as cherished as something like *The Joy of Cooking*, hopefully with better recipes,” and indeed, the blog is her sole work. One blogger stated: “It’s a business and...it’s incorporated and...I want it to buy me a house and fund my retirement.”

Matt shares an entrepreneurial spirit about his blog. A fundraising professional, he began blogging in 2004 to support what he saw as an essential mission of the gay community, because “when I would talk about different things people would say, ‘You ought to talk more,’ so I really needed a platform, a place where my voice could be put out there.” Three years later, he says:

I definitely am a professional blogger. I can say that because I do make money from my web site. I’m an advertising salesman, ultimately. That’s what pays the bills. My entire career I’ve always said I’m the best networker I know but I don’t know how to make any money off of it. And now I have figured out a formula.

Several of the bloggers I spoke with are still trying to figure out the formula.

Karen, who has only been blogging for a year, states:

I'm really counting on myself to... sustain a living out of it, actually make a career out of it, and at my age, I'm 41... so I think I do it really for myself and really in the hopes of being able to make it my new career.

Dorothy started blogging as a hobby while on maternity leave: “my free time was focused on blogging, and I started realizing, this is my future, and this is where I want my writing career to go.” Like many of the bloggers interviewed, she is figuring out how to make blogging a sustainable income stream. The bloggers run their blogs like businesses, and all blog with the hope of being successfully self-employed, supporting themselves through writing. Unlike traditional professionals who rely on an association, peers, licensing, or simply well-accepted codes of conduct, the majority of the bloggers feel they can operate independently and be professionals.

Barriers to blogging as a profession

At its best, blogging offers these writers a dynamic opportunity to influence and interact with audiences. Goode suggests trust is a dominant factor in determining professional behavior, and all the bloggers stated that they were successful because their audiences trusted their content (Klegon, 1978). At its worst, the symbiotic relationship with a blogger’s audience gets ugly and creates a barrier to professionalization. Blogging is not journalism, and its “audience is king” nature can be frustrating to those with professional intentions, as John notes:

Every once in a while I hear how blogs have liberated and brought the common man into public discussion and there are times when I feel very elitist and I think, I kinda liked it when it was all just elite and everybody was respectable to one another. On his worst day, Paul Krugman does not use the term ‘Rethuglican.’

John continues, “To make blogging a profession you have to be at the receiving end of an enormous amount of abuse. And I get this kind of stuff, and I’m like, is this how I want to spend my time”? Even non-abusive audiences have high expectations. Leah says her audiences tell her “You break it down for me. I have to check your site to see what I need to keep an eye on as a citizen.” Betty, who writes a blog about non-profits and social change, notes that her readers are very demanding. I asked her why her readers like her:

The most important thing is consistency. I hear that a lot from readers -- you're consistent, you're always right. And if I slack off, my subscriber numbers go down.

Although readers have high expectations and bloggers take their work seriously, few said blogging itself is a profession. Olivia believes professionalization hinges on money: “I don't think it'll grow as a profession anytime soon, but it depends on how much ad money [bloggers can receive].”

Matt notes a lack of alignment between many bloggers’ expectations and reality:

I have a company... that has grown, and a lot of bloggers are out there whining about how no one's paying them. First of all, what do they think they should be paid for? ... 98% of blogging is people getting up there and putting up their opinion about other people's new and creative ideas.

Julia notes that it is difficult to maintain quality when blogs grow because when they reach a certain level they compete against websites owned by media giants such as Conde Nast: “and for me it's just me.” The growth of owner-operated blogs has other downsides. Julia continues:

When real money is involved people get more defensive and my concern has to do with that our community has been founded on generosity and the sharing of ideas, of knowledge, and promoting other sites, and I would

be sad to see that go away.

The bloggers in this study see their work as professional, and they share a commitment to audience satisfaction. They do not consider the blogging community professional, largely because of unruly audiences and because of lack of financial stability. They see themselves as the elite of a group that is huge (70 million blogs!), uneasily defined, and uncontrollable, and this is a fair assumption.

Ethical standards

Because all of the bloggers maintain a professional approach to their work, they take seriously the need for ethical behavior, transparency, and truth telling. Indeed, as Singer (2007) notes, bloggers share ethical priorities with journalists. In my study, the desire to maintain ethical standards seems driven out of interest to be viewed as a professional and to provide a good product, more than as a commitment to a moral authority. What's more, the desire for ethical behavior is even more crucial for audiences than for bloggers themselves, because uncivil and nasty audience feedback seems to be a major impediment to the professionalization of blogging. Eight of the bloggers enjoy the self-regulation that blogging imparts and they prefer to create their own governance structures. The two bloggers who are professional journalists support adopting journalism's ethics codes for blogging. All the bloggers believe their work fulfills a social good.

Few of the bloggers felt that adopting a universal, industry-wide code of ethics is the strongest way to enforce ethical behavior. Matt dismisses the notion

that journalists are more ethical than he is. When I asked him about his code of ethics he responded:

It's certainly better than the *New York Times*. Or the *Atlanta Journal*. People tell me, 'Who are you to just start spilling facts? What if you get them wrong? You destroy a life.' And I say, 'You mean like if I were to put an article on my web site by say Judith Miller about weapons of mass destruction, or write about Richard Jewell, and destroy his life?'

Several of the bloggers indicated that they have personal systems for ensuring they produce ethical content. John notes that even though he is a popular conservative blogger "When Republicans screw up, my job is not to defend them." Betty is careful to state when a piece of writing is her opinion and when it is reportage. Elizabeth has a "four-part checklist. Who am I? What am I writing? What am I hoping to accomplish? And then the fourth thing, if I do the first three things right, then any reader can figure out whether or not they care to participate." Dorothy uses an internal censor because she is careful not to threaten her day job:

I've had managers call me and say, 'Be careful what you say on your blog.' It's hard to wear both hats, and I have had moments where I've asked myself, 'Would I be willing to get fired for the blog?' And I think the answer is yes.

I found that eight of the bloggers prize their autonomy above all and do not see a need for a code of ethics or industry guidelines. Kim, Matt, Betty and Julia referred to self-regulation as the most powerful force for ethical behavior on blogs. They wish to regulate ethical behavior and control it themselves. As Kim says, "I consider myself a raging individualist and to that end I think that the Internet really proves that there are all different kinds of people making life work in all kinds of different ways." I asked Kim about her ethics code and she said

I always say I blog smart... I'll do the occasional rant but I'm really careful about what I write about... I'd say my second responsibility is not to be stupid. I don't blog about work...It's always been a public space and I've always been conscious of that. I've always tried to maintain a level of ethics about it.

Dorothy continued the theme about using common sense: "I'm not anonymous; it's a public space."

At times, the blogosphere's lack of clear definitions can be problematic.

Karen recounts being attacked by a reader:

She said that mommy bloggers have to have some sort of journalistic responsibility, and I just felt like, what are you saying, that I don't have any journalistic responsibility? So I basically, part of what I wrote was 'I'm a health care blogger and I do consider myself to have journalistic responsibility and I apologize if you thought my post was alarmist but I didn't see it that way.'

Julia notes that she tries hard to create fair content but ultimately, she must be true to herself:

I have an opportunity to stick to my guns about something. So you put something out and I definitely hear from people but that just makes me, I'm not changing my view about it.

However, Julia, like all the bloggers, sees a larger purpose in her work and desires to promote the common good. She believes her work is

really about connecting with the wonderful process of home cooking and that's where I want the focus to be, even though I talk about my family a lot. It's really actually not about them; it's about all of us.

Dorothy says, "I'd like to be an opinion leader for my 'mommisphere.' I'd like to be a voice for the mommies." In summary, all the bloggers wish to convey important messages via their blogs. They see their blogging as essentially mission-driven. Matt says "The reason I do my work is for the public good. For the long-term public good because I really think about my work to be [sic] fifty or

a hundred years from now.” Bloggers aim to produce ethical work that enhances the public good but they prefer to work in a self-regulated environment.

Discussion

The bloggers in this study do not wish to belong to the journalism profession. The current literature seeks to understand filter blogging as a new branch of journalism (Lowrey, 2006; MacDougall, 2005; Nardi et al, 2004; Stevens, 2004). Gardner (2007) states that if blogging is to survive, blogs must develop staff and resources that allow them to create original journalism. The literature notes that successful filter blogging contains some professional attributes, but concludes that bloggers’ lack of a normative behavior code prevents them from joining the ranks of professional journalists (Singer, 2007). I believe these bloggers model a new, democratic form of professional aspiration, which is more self-directed and entrepreneurial than traditional models.

Most of the bloggers in my study do not want to be defined as journalists, but they all consider themselves professionals. Most do not feel the need to work under the auspices of a professional association or universal code of ethics—as do doctors, lawyers, and journalists—to consider their work professional. They believe they can function as sole proprietors or self-regulated workers and do good work.

Several of the bloggers stated serious concerns with the field’s general sense of ethics and direction, and none think blogging is currently a profession. Most bloggers see self-regulation as a means for ensuring ethics. Whether bloggers and their audiences are willing to cede some control and accede to

industry guidelines is a real barrier to traditional professionalization. The bloggers maintain their work output is professional quality but they are mostly unwilling to conform to an ethical norm. Sullivan asserts that new professionals must integrate learned competence with *educated conscience* (2004). Indeed, we see that these bloggers struggle with issues of conscience among themselves and their audiences, but only two, both former journalists, stated they desired to work under an industry-wide code of ethics. Most of the sample do not require being aligned with a well-defined profession to consider themselves professional bloggers.

Blogging, an entirely new, Internet-based domain, is symptomatic of the millennial trend towards democratization of the professions. This is a significant finding that should be explored further, because current scholarship is entrenched in a binary comparison of filter vs. personal blogs. I believe that maintaining such a comparison masks the impact of blogging as a new work domain itself and as an expression of the democratization of the professions. This makes sense when one considers that these bloggers see themselves as entrepreneurs and small business owners, rather than journalists. If they pursue their current trajectory, there is no way that bloggers can be considered traditional professionals. Bloggers are independent operators, and they like it that way. The traditional role of journalist is public servant, not entrepreneur.

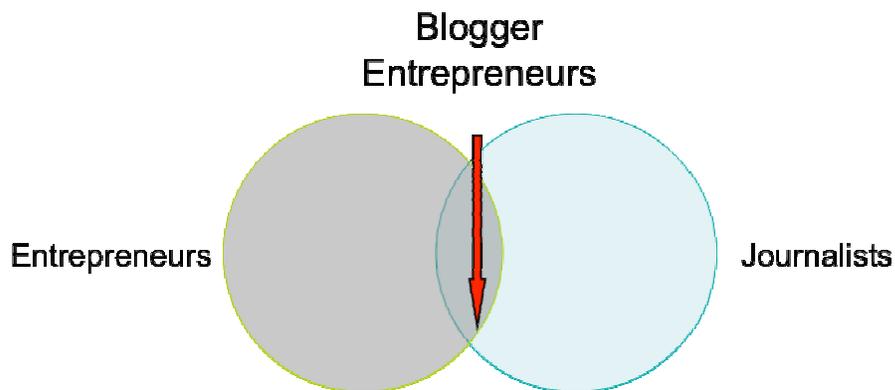
These bloggers say they are motivated by ethical goals, state they truly want to do the right thing, and think seriously about ethics and truth-telling when they publish. Although not all conform to a code of ethics, many attempt to

maintain a personal ethos that they are careful to follow each day, because they wish to be taken seriously and to thrive financially as self-employed bloggers. It is tempting to view this group of bloggers as exemplary of Wolfe's belief that for the first time in human history "significant numbers of individuals believe that people should play a role in defining their own morality" (2001, p. 172). Eight of the bloggers I spoke with prefer self-regulation. To this end, John and Elizabeth, professional journalists, disagree that self-regulation is the answer and call for professional guidelines. John says, "Only by behaving like a grown up publishing *New York Times* style medium can we get that kind of respect." While the bloggers who prefer self-regulation believe they can do good work without the controls of a professional association, the current level of discord among audiences and lack of trust among other bloggers indicates this is not a viable solution.

As the literature indicates, these filter bloggers derive professional satisfaction when they receive recognition from both readers and media elites. Indeed, they strive for this "privileged" position (Singer, 2007), just as journalists or other professionals might. Why do they do it? Unlike elite journalists, these bloggers will never win Pulitzer Prizes. Taking an etic perspective, the bloggers consider their blogs entrepreneurial endeavors. Some bloggers are selling themselves, while others simply wish to act autonomously and define their own rules. Some want to change the world. The scholarly literature does not consider three very important motivations for bloggers: an entrepreneurial spirit, a will to be taken seriously, and a desire to define one's own ethos at work. The bloggers

in this sample were united by their true passion for writing online, making their own decision, and by a desire to serve the public through their blogging.

Literature on the professions and on blogging's parallels to journalism is useful in framing the growth and challenges of blogging but fails to capture the essence of these bloggers' goals: to be self-sufficient entrepreneurs with the authority, renown and economic prosperity that accompany successful small business owners. I call them journalistic entrepreneurs.



I believe such bloggers are emblematic of a current cultural shift away from traditional professional careers and into a self-directed, entrepreneurial ideal. Our culture prizes its entrepreneurs more than its professionals; the best and the brightest who in prior generations became physicians or professors, are now tempted to earn money at hedge funds or as entrepreneurs (H. Gardner, personal communication, Oct. 15, 2007). Sullivan (2004) cites the prevailing

current of thought that doubts the value of professional organization in work. Prevailing attitudes assume that the market is self-regulating and morally self-sufficient, and this sets the stage for unbounded professions such as blogging to emerge. Sullivan questions whether we will be a society of independently affiliated knowledge workers. Wolfe (2001) introduces the idea that we will define our own moral pathways informed by existing cultural norms. The bloggers in this study pursue such goals. It is possible that the bloggers' desire to be independent, non-affiliated, morally free professionals is a harbinger of a new ideal for American workers.

Limitations of this study and implications for further research

The validity of this study is affected by both a small sample size and the diverse nature of the bloggers' interests. A survey of 10 bloggers is hardly a representative sample. In further research, I would like to interview a random sample of bloggers above a certain traffic threshold, and determine their entrepreneurial goals. As the domain matures, more bloggers give up sole proprietorship to join established websites or bring on staff to help with the workload. I would also like to segment bloggers by their tenure as bloggers. In this study, I saw a clear difference of approach between novice bloggers (such as Karen, who has been blogging for a year) and veterans such as Julia, who is a nationally recognized authority in the field of blogging, in addition to being the one of most highly trafficked food bloggers in the US. Julia did not start blogging to support herself, but she has built a successful business over the past seven years. Karen, on the other hand, started blogging in search of a viable new

income stream when she was forced to end her work as a nurse. Finally, I saw a clear difference in intent between the eight bloggers who were not professional journalists and the two bloggers who were, John and Elizabeth. I would like to explore motivations of journalists who blog, versus “pure” bloggers who began their writing careers on the blogs (G. Franke-Ruta, personal communication, Nov. 30, 2007).

Conclusion

These bloggers in this study consider themselves professionals and share many concerns of professional journalists, but they do not wish to conform to the guidelines of a traditional profession. Rather, these bloggers seek to self-regulate, maintain autonomy and please their audiences. Along with the impact of democratization of the professions (Sullivan, 2004), such findings should lead gatekeepers of the established professions to think anew about rules and norms. However, we must not dismiss the importance of professional norms of good behavior, for every blogger in the survey noted a situation in which their moral compass was challenged, often by reader behavior. There is a looming problem here: the blogosphere cannot continue unregulated and ungoverned. As much as these entrepreneurs wish to work autonomously, achieving long-term professional status will require normative behavior codes, for writers as well as audiences. These bloggers may not need to adhere to the classic code of the journalism profession, but they must adopt some ethical norms. Further research must examine how to enforce normative ethical behavior while not quashing the essential spirit of independent bloggers.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Why Blog?

- 1) When did you start blogging?
- 2) Why did you start blogging?
- 3) Did you have any mentors along the way- were they bloggers, or offline?
- 4) When someone asks you what you do for a living, what do you say?
- 5) Do you remember the first time you thought of yourself as a blogger?
- 6) Is blogging your full time occupation?
- 7 Do you support yourself from blogging?
(PROMPT) If not, do you plan to?
- 8) Would you blog if no one read your blog?
- 9) Are there specific qualities that have contributed to your achievements as a blogger?
 - Qualities that make you a good blogger?
 - Qualities that hinder achievements?

Work Process

- 10) What kinds of things are you trying to accomplish in your blogging right now?
- 11) Is there a goal in your blogging that gives meaning to what you do that is essential to making your work worthwhile?
 - a) What is it?

- b) Why is this goal important?
 - c) Are there other comparable ones?
 - d) How do you know when they have been met?
- 12) In your work, to whom do you feel responsible, or loyal?
- 13) Do you consider yourself a journalist?
- 14) Do you consider yourself a professional blogger?
- 15) Do you feel your personal beliefs ever conflict with the dominant values in your area of work?
- 16) Do you ever wish you had a boss, or an editor?
- 17) Do you feel like you are part of a professional or occupational community?

Work Product

18)

- How important is creativity in your work?
 - What qualities are important in your creative process?
What role does reflection play in your creative process?
 - What role do peers play in your creative process?
 - What qualities inhibit your creative process?
 - Is it necessary to take risks?
- 19) Do you see yourself as an authority figure? (would you like to be? One day?)

Ethics

20)

- How important is a moral code, or ethics in your work?
- Do you use a code of ethics when you blog?
- Do you have a mental or literal checklist you review before you post?

- If so, whose?

21) talk a little about truth telling: how do you ensure you tell the truth when you blog?

22) Can you tell me about an incident in your area of work where you weren't sure about the right course of action?

- How did it become clear to you what to do?
- How do you deal with beliefs/practices you disagree with?
- Has it become harder to do work you consider ethical and responsible?

Social Good

23) Does your work serve the public?

24) Do you think blogging, as a new field, has a good sense of ethics and good behavior?