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Mom bloggers as self-enterprising individuals. Exploring 'new' forms of fragile identity work being carried out across the Finnish blogosphere

Abstract

Despite an ever-growing interest in digital labour and 'digital-materialisms', the research fields of mom blogging, mumpreneurship and self-employed motherhood remain narrow in the field of management and organizational studies. This paper delves into the communicative practices of mom blogging as a multiple and intriguing site for performative identity work. Building on the literatures on digital labour, blogging and mumpreneurship combined with insights from the more critical literature on identity work in organizational studies, we empirically explore how six popular Finnish mom bloggers seek to construct, communicate and navigate their fleeting and fragile identities as mumpreneurs – mothers and (micro-)entrepreneurs – in and through their personal blogs. Specifically, by conducting critical media analysis, we focus on the co-creation and re-creation of identities, as well as the insecurities, tensions and complexities involved in mom blogging as seemingly flexible and fun yet exhausting and boundaryless realm of identity work that brings the spheres of motherhood, self-entrepreneurship and lifestyle intimately together. This paper develops a dynamic understanding of how digital technologies, dominant expectations and normative idea(l)s relating to both (self-)entrepreneurship and motherhood come to shape, discipline and construct contemporary maternal entrepreneurial subjectivities. Finally, we argue for the need to further study precarious and intimate forms of identity work in the digital sphere from more diverse and intersectional perspectives.

Key words: *mom blogging*, *motherhood*, self-*entrepreneurship, mumpreneurship, digital labour, intimate labour, neoliberal femininity*

Introduction

"…previously, I thought I have to reach a specific position. I was horribly ambitious, and education was important to me, as I believe is the case for Finnish women, more broadly. But the blog's entrepreneurial character has made me realize that a specific position is not what I aim for. I've come to realize that I might create my own position, where I can do whatever I want. I don't have to work for someone else, but I might create my own work, if I have the courage to be an entrepreneur".

"The essence of my happiness is that I have everything of everything. If I only were into motherhood, difficult moments would be more difficult. In that case I'd feel like I have nothing else. Now I get to enjoy motherhood, femininity and being a wife. By femininity I refer to having my own job, my own things. Often these spheres are subject to guilt. At work, one feels guilty for not being with the children, and while spending time with the kids, one feels guilty for not developing a career. That is just the way it is. I get to do everything."

"When I work, I close out everything else around me. If all three children are around, working is impossible. I work whenever it's possible. Of course, I sometimes feel the urge to relax and take it easy, but it is not possible when my 'me-time' is the only time available for work."

Let the three empirical extracts above, illustrating how Hanna, a popular 34-year-old Finnish mom- and lifestyle blogger, articulates her thoughts around blogging as seemingly all-encompassing, demanding and precarious work, serve as an opening to this paper. Above, Hanna indicates that she is – despite experiencing challenges relating to maintaining a decent work-life balance – currently in a desirable position pursuing her career as a professional blogger in the Finnish sociocultural context. Against the backdrop of a hyped and dazzling creative economy characterized by the ideals of do-it-yourself individualism, flexibility, availability, entrepreneurialism, precarity, play and 'fun' (see e.g. McRobbie, 2009; Hjorth, Strati, Drakopoulou Dodd and Weik, 2018; Sørensen and Spoelstra, 2012), it seems to us that blogging – and various

other "new" kinds of digital labour (such as vlogging or youtubing) – are being treated as the latest springboards to exciting, rewarding and potentially successful careers. In the extracts above, blogging is constructed in line with these ideals as self-regulated, self-generated and assumedly 'cool' work that is part of an individual's 'entrepreneurial lifestyle'. In this case, the spheres of *lifestyle* and *work* have, it seems, already become blurred, intertwined or inseparable (Mäkinen, 2018). Moreover, the concern about the 'right' kind of 'presentation of the self' as introduced by Goffman (1959), appears to matter to Hanna in this particular digital context.

This paper takes the changing nature of 'new' forms of identity work in the digital sphere as its point of departure and focuses on the critical case of mom blogging. Mom blogging, here conceptualized as the communicative and performative self-narrating of ordinary family life from the perspective of the mother (Lopez, 2009; Mäkinen, 2018; Petersen, 2015; Kääriäinen and Mäkinen, 2017) constitutes an intriguing and scholarly overlooked context for the study of digital, life-style-oriented and entrepreneurial identity work in late capitalism. Here, we set out to explore how Finnish mom bloggers performatively engage in identity work in and through their public mom- or 'mommy blogs'[1], and how the bloggers themselves seek to negotiate, cope with as well as at times resist the hegemonic socio-cultural norms governing their multiple identities as mothers, bloggers and self-employed entrepreneurs. As researchers interested in micro-level embodied experiences and 'digital-material' identity work in precarious times, we are curious about blogging as a relatively new site for identity work being *staged* and *performed* in and through the blog – a textual, visual and communicative social media platform in late capitalism (e.g. Fricker, 2015). To us, mom blogging brings together the domains of motherhood, entrepreneurship, consumerism and life-style in intriguing ways. As publicly exposed yet intimately personalised life-writing, then, mom blogging could tell us something interesting about how lived maternal experiences are communicated within a larger macro-level context of neoliberalism, capitalism and potentially 'glossy' (or critical) consumerism. In other words, we believe that mom blogging could tell us something interesting about the negotiating of the self in relation to dominant representations, cultural expectations and norms attached to the practices of *both* motherhood and entrepreneurship within a specific *digital* sociocultural context.

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[1] Language is no neutral medium. In line with Ekinsmyth (2014) and Mäkinen (2018), we refer to mom blogs instead of mommy blogs, which has a slightly negative and denigrating tone ascribed to it.

The empirical study for this paper is part of a larger research project on the interrelations between the spheres of parenthood, work and commerce in late capitalism. Drawing on empirical insights from our ongoing nethnographic study carried out in the contemporary Finnish mom- and lifestyle blogosphere, we here seek to critically analyse how six popular Finnish mom bloggers construct, communicate and navigate their multiple identities as mothers, professional bloggers and entrepreneurs in and through their blogs. We ask: *How do mom bloggers negotiate their multiple identities – as mothers, entrepreneurs and consumers on their blogs? What kind of (resistant) practices do the mom bloggers use to cope with the hegemonic socio-cultural norms surrounding both motherhood and entrepreneurship? What kind of possible tensions, contradictions and complexities related to motherhood and self-entrepreneurship do the bloggers write about in the context of 'new' and emerging digital work, and how are these matters dealt with or communicated on the blog? Finally, how does the blog influence and eventually discipline the blogger's ongoing identity construction- and articulation across the digital sphere?*

Going back to the introductory extracts as presented above, blogger Hanna indicates that her current life situation – despite being hectic with three small children at home – actually allows her to 'have it all' as a wife, a mother and a career woman. To us, this is a fairly interesting saying that reflects 'current discourses on lifestyle entrepreneurship and a new approach to 'having it all' (Duberley and Carrigan, 2012: 629). Specifically, the saying above seems to some extent underpinned by postfeminist ideals (see e.g. Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009) and the neoliberal discourse of enterprise, where 'successful' femininities manage to seamlessly combine rewarding careers with a highly satisfying family life. Although a somewhat odd link is made between the spheres of femininity and work, Hanna portrays blogging as flexible and thus desirable work. At the same time, she constructs blogging as all-encompassing and boundary-less work, at least compared to more 'traditional' nine-to-five labour. This construction implies that blogging is – contrary to its shallow, denigrating and superficial image – 'real', effortful and exhausting work. However, especially in the first extract as portrayed in the beginning of this paper, Hanna seems to want to convince her readers about her 'unconventional' career choice as a well-educated, middle-class and equal Finnish woman. Perhaps this extract reproduces an understanding of the blogger – a stay-at-home mother and freelance worker – as no marginalized, othered or disadvantaged individual outside the labour market, but as a deliberately well-educated, talented and resourceful

person strategically pursuing her career in a direction of her own choosing (compare Just and Remke, 2019).

This paper is structured as follows. First, we turn to the emerging literatures on mumpreneurship and blogging as an intriguing context for multifaceted identity work. Second, we discuss the methodology of the paper, including critical reflection on the nethnographic research approach and blogs as research material. In the subsequent analysis, our empirical material is structured around specific narratives, episodes and blog contents illustrating the plurality and precarity of the Finnish mom bloggers' identity construction. We here focus on the following aspects in particular: blogging as exhausting and 'real' (identity) work, as well as blogging as intimately 'fleshy' and personal identity work that challenges the 'unfleshy' image of digital entrepreneurship, more broadly. Throughout, we discuss the blurred boundaries of mom blogging as a particular form of identity work carried out in the digital sphere. We conclude the paper by illustrating how insights from blogging as a dynamic and fragile site of identity work could further problematise masculinist, success-oriented and disembodied approaches to entrepreneurship. Finally, we discuss the wider implications of our study.

Theoretical framework: Mumpreneurship and blogging as relatively 'new' conceptual sites for identity work

Whereas entrepreneurship is arguably a largely celebrated practice, not all entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial practices have been considered worthy of scholarly attention. As domestic, reproductive and 'feminized' care work are part of mom blogging as a largely home-based business that is practiced by self-employed mothers, these work practices are easily devalued as frivolous and unimportant 'hobbies', thus not taken seriously as 'real' forms of entrepreneurship (e.g. Luomala, 2018; Ekinsmyth, 2011, 2014). This somewhat simplistic, gendered and stereotypical assumption deserves to be further problematized. In this paper, we seek to study mom bloggers' multiple identity work, as it involves balancing and negotiating different social expectations, roles and hegemonic norms tied to both entrepreneurship and motherhood. Ekinsmyth (2011: 105) defines a mumpreneur broadly as 'an individual who discovers and exploits new business opportunities within a social and geographical context that seeks to integrate the demands of

motherhood and business ownership'. Luomala (2018, 14) offers a rather similar definition: '*mumpreneur* refers to a female entrepreneur whose aim is to combine doing business and taking care of her children in the same life stage'.

Why do we choose to call the studied bloggers mumpreneurs, and why do we need the mumpreneurship concept? Don't mumpreneurs fit into the established concept of entrepreneurship? Are not mumpreneurs 'proper' entrepreneurs (Duberley and Carrigan, 2012)? Moreover, does not the mumpreneurship notion itself uphold problematic assumptions and stereotypical understandings of this form of entrepreneurship as somehow different – or devalued – compared to the dominant understandings of 'entrepreneurship' (whatever that entails)? Male entrepreneurs with families are never referred to as dadpreneurs, precisely as Kelan (2008) critically points out. Following Duberley and Carrigan (2012: 645), we notice that the mumpreneur construct 'appears to align women to the intensive mothering discourse', which we find problematic. This discourse reproduces oppressive, heteronormative and traditionalist understandings of motherhood as a domain of discipline and sacrifice (Faircloth, 2014), and it is by no means the source of identification for all mothers (Duberley and Carrigan, 2012). At the same time, existing entrepreneurship literature has failed to take care work and the nurturing entrepreneurial body into consideration. This overlooked body remains 'a site of intense affectivity in many societal and organizational contexts' (Just and Remke, 2019, 52).

Mumpreneurship has gone fairly unnoticed in the recent debates on entrepreneurship and we identify several explanations to this dominant silence. The dominant representation of the entrepreneur is still strikingly masculine, Western, male, white and middle-class. As a theoretical concept and practice, then, entrepreneurship relies heavily on the myth of the 'creative' destructor as a celebrated self-made man, the lonely rider or a risktaker driven by passion, who requires minimal support. To be knowingly stereotypical here, this figure is filled with confidence and usually succeeds in his endeavors. We might need more nuanced and diverse understandings of the various practices that fit under the umbrella term of entrepreneurship. Moreover, we notice how it is common for the scholarly literature to present entrepreneurship and the family as strikingly oppositional spheres (for a review, see for example Hamilton, 2006; see also Carrigan and Duberley, 2013). In this paper, we question this division and seek to bridge and integrate these two

spheres. In real life, the spheres of family and work interrelate, at times clash, and sometimes intensely intertwine. Following Duberley and Carrigan (2012), we think it is far too simplistic to view self-entrepreneurial and maternal identities purely as clashing or conflicting. Rather, we view these subject positions as entwined, as women entrepreneurs 'reframed the dialectic to accommodate their mother and worker identities' (Johnston and Swanson, 2007: 330). Taken together, 'questions of parenting both highlight the constant negotiation of the boundaries of the workplace and the communicative practices of affective embodiments of parents within professional settings' (Just and Remke, 2019, 52).

The practice of blogging or starting and maintaining a blog constitutes a relatively new and emerging field of creative work, where the traditional boundaries between the private/public sphere, home/work as well as work/leisure have become increasingly blurred (see Mäkinen, 2018; Just and Remke, 2019). By blogging, we here refer to a practice of networked online writing. As continuously produced online autobiographies typically authored by a single writer, mom- and lifestyle-oriented blogs have remained largely under-studied in the field of management and organizational studies. 'Along with the increase in the use of the internet and especially the social media in the 21st century, blogging has become popular within various fields of life', Schuurman (2014: 3) writes. Blogging has become a popular and communicative activity across the globe. Today, blogging is an increasingly popular activity engaging various groups from professional workers including corporate CEOs and politicians (Nilsson, 2012) to amateur hobbyists, fashionistas, travelers, opinion builders and new parents. Echoing Smith and Watson (2010, 183), we emphasize the community and *interactivity* of blogs and the importance of communication between the blogger and her or his readers. In fact, the online and interactive community could be seen as a central feature in how blogs are constructed and shaped (Schuurman, 2014), particularly as the blogger's story could reflect the lived experiences and stories of the other members of that specific community (Eakin, 1999: 58). To us, the dialogism with a wider community and the readers, the (to some extent) functioning outside of systems of legitimacy (Fricker, 2015) and the affectivity and intimacy of blogs are particularly interesting features.

Blogs combine textual and visual materials as well as the public realm (the online community and the blog's audience) with the intimately private (the blogger's personal opinions, glimpses of

everyday life, family-related topics). Interestingly, the mom blog 'demands that the entrepreneur is personally involved and prepared to publicly share some intimate or self-revelatory details of one's life', as Mäkinen (2018, 137–138) suggests. How is mom blogging practiced and 'done' across online virtual spaces (such as blogs and social media portals), then? Today's highly aesthetic and visual blogs are virtual and commercial spaces where bloggers write about various matters, engage in product marketing, promote 'glossy' (or not) lifestyles, as well as create communities. On their public blogs, mom bloggers write about mundane family-related topics, reach out to their peers, as well as negotiate boundaries between care labour/wage work, public/private spheres, as well as visibility/invisibility (Mäkinen, 2018).

In and through their blogs, mom bloggers ventilate opinions about parenting, what it is like being a mother, and discuss the joys and difficult moments in raising children. Blogs are like public diaries where mothers write about their everyday lives, and search for supportive online communities. Blogs are interdependent on a social, material and technical side, that become intertwined. More specifically, information technology is necessary for the practice of blogging. For example, the automatically generated data on the number of posts and comments that are displayed on each blog indicates how active and popular the blogger currently is (Nilsson, 2012). At the same time, technology is always socially created. As a consequence, Nilsson (2012) conceptualizes blogs as sociotechnical systems (cf., Kjellberg, 2010) that could either 'reinforce or undermine the way identities are constructed'.

Blogging as performative identity work

According to Baker (2009), online self-presentations are ''blended identities''. An identity-centered approach to blogging as work developed from organization studies (e.g. Ashcraft, 2007, 2013; Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008; Sullivan, 2012) allows us to study the dynamic and evolving interplay between the spheres of private life and work life in mom blogging as a continuous site for staged and *performative* identity work, as both work/family matters are continuously represented, articulated and negotiated on the blog. Arguably, relatively little is known of the complex and dynamic processes of blogger's identity construction in and through the mom blog (for exceptions, see Friedman, 2013; Mäkinen, 2018). The approach to mom blogging

as performative identity work opens promising possibilities for addressing lived maternal and entrepreneurial experiences, self-representations and in-depth understandings about the expectations and ideals regarding mumpreneurship in the blogosphere. This kind of multiple identity work involves both identifying with as well as sometimes resisting the particular subject positions located within the surrounding socio-cultural and dominant discourses, such as the entrepreneurship and the motherhood discourse.

To us, identities are fragmented, temporary, collective and evolving constructions and identity work requires an individual's constant effort in crafting and maintaining identity. Today, many workers are highly committed to their work and our work-life form important part of our personal identities. Researchers have argued that workers thrive for meaning and some form of balance between their self-definition and current work situation (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Muhr, Pedersen and Alvesson, 2013). Therefore, professional identities both *enable* and *constrain* workers. Based on the idea of the self as fragmented, constructing a (positive) sense of self involves active identity work around questions such as 'who am I?', 'how am I different from others?', 'how do others see me?' and 'how should I act?' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Alvesson et al., 2008; Czarniawska, 2007). Moreover, an individual's identity is based just as much (and often even more) on her/his work experiences than on her/his personal experiences outside work (Lemmergaard and Muhr, 2012; Hochschild, 1997). Therefore, how individuals make sense of themelves in relation to work, constitutes a major part of a person's overall sense of identity (Skorikov and Vondracek, 2011; Kroger, 2007). As a person's identity is a collection of his/her sense of multiple identities (Lemmergaard and Muhr, 2012) that cannot be investigated in the work setting alone. Importantly, a person's professional identity is in constant interplay with identity aspects and social roles outside work. In foregrounding the notion of identity work as key to understanding mom blogging, we acknowledge that the blogger's professional identity is in continuous interplay with multiple other identities and contextual factors outside work.

Building on more recent and critical perspectives on identity formation as relational, processual work of (workplace) inclusion/exclusion (Ashcraft, 2005, 2009; Ashcraft et al., 2012; Zanoni and Janssens, 2015; Janssens and Zanoni, 2014), we understand identity to represent one's perception of occupational interests, competencies, motivations, and values but also a complex and collective

structure of meanings in which an individual links her/his goals and abilities in a broader work context (Zanoni and Janssens, 2015; Kielhofner, 2007), constituting a major part of a person's overall sense of identity (Skorikov and Vondracek, 2011; Kroger, 2007). Defining identity work as a social construction process (Ashcraft, 2005, 2007; Ashcraft et al. 2012), we seek to capture how mom bloggers continuously make sense of themselves in relation to the norms, expectations and image of their blogging occupation, motherhood, everyday work, and the broader social environment (Ashcraft et al., 2012 ; Holck et al., 2016). While writing and communicating on their blogs, the mom bloggers inevitably practice identity work, which we understand here as a reflexive and on-going project (Giddens 1991; Cherrier and Murray, 2007), and its purpose is to produce a somewhat coherent narrative of the self (Ahuvia, 2005). Meanwhile, many of the studied mom bloggers have rejected the low status identity of full-time 'stay at home' mother, and instead they have chosen to set up a business around blogging 'as a means of developing a new career identity combining motherhood and work' (Duberley, 2012: 642). However, this identity seems rather fragile: typically, working from home potentially reduces the legitimacy of the entrepreneurial identity (Marlow, 2006).

Taken together, identity work refers to people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). While identity work is 'the mutually constitutive process whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity' (Watson, 2009: 129), it is characterized by self-doubt and self-openness (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), which becomes visible in the mom bloggers' writing as well. On the other hand, identity work has been described as way of narratively constructing the self (Alvesson et al., 2008: 15). In a multifaceted world, people have to achieve a degree of coherence in their conception of who they are in order to deal with the challenges and the spectrum of different opinions which they are surrounded by. Therefore, we view identity work as relational. In our view, the mom bloggers' identity is negotiated through the multiple relationships in their personal and professional life worlds, and becomes manifested in their blogs, thus also contributing to the ways they construct their entrepreneurial selves. Finally, identity work adds richness to our understanding of the dynamics, components and underlying mechanisms regarding individual and collective sense-making. In what follows, we present and discuss our methodology and empirical study.

Methodology

Netnography as a research approach

Our ongoing study is netnographic. Netnographies typically focus on communicative practices within various social media spaces and/or online communities (Costello et al., 2017). Besides text, the social media is filled with images, audiovisual materials, videos, banners, ads and/or commercial collaborations. Today, some researchers consider netnography as a relatively new research methodology, whereas others treat it as well established in the field of organization studies (Costello et al., 2017). To Kozinets (2002: 62) 'netnography adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities emerging through electronic networks'. De Valck, van Bruggen, and Wierenga (2009: 197) define netnography as 'a written account resulting from fieldwork studying the culture and communities that emerge from online, computer-mediated, or internet-based communications . . . where both the fieldwork and the textual account are informed by the qualitative methods utilized in consumer research, cultural anthropology, and cultural studies'. Following Gherardi (2018: p.) who recently introduced the notion of 'Affective Ethnography', our conceptualization of nethnography acknowledges that 'all elements—texts, actors, materialities, language, agencies—are already entangled in complex ways, and that they should be read in their intra-actions, through one another, as data in motion/data that move'.

We approach netnography as a qualitative and interpretive research method that remains somewhat insufficiently understood by us researchers (Costello et al., 2017). Although the methodological benefits of doing a netnographic study include rich material that exists independently of the researcher and emergent data, we need to be aware and reflexive about the difficulties involved in conducting netnographic fieldwork. As Tuncalp and Le (2014) and Pollok et al. (2014) noted, we need to carefully discuss, evaluate and make explicit the actual steps and processes of our netnographic study, as well as be aware of our engagement and involvement as researchers in the online communities we are studying. Furthermore, we need to reflect on our netnographic practices, our engagement with the community under study, as well as our own roles and responsibilities when it comes to the cocreation of knowledge.

Blogs as research material

Blogs are relatively new empirical materials in the field of management and organization studies. Blogs have existed for less than 20 years and provide us with an interesting context for the study of identity construction in the digital sphere. To begin with, our research material exists completely independently of us researchers, and we have not influenced the contents of the blogs that we have investigated. When we began our study, we were broadly interested in how mothers' experiences regarding work- and family-life echo through the Finnish blogosphere. We study women entrepreneurs who are mothers and have chosen to set up their own businesses in ways that (ideally) allow them to more 'flexibly' combine their businesses with a rewarding family-life. In this paper, we explore how the interrelations and possible clashes/tensions between motherhood and self-entrepreneurship are communicated or socially performed by mom bloggers through written words and images published in the social media sphere.

In line with the study on fatshion bloggers conducted by Harju and Huovinen (2017), the research design of the present study is data-driven. A data-driven research design allowed a reflexive process to capture the richness of qualitative data. For the purposes of this paper, we chose to focus on six popular Finnish mom blogs for in-depth analysis. The empirical materials of the present study consist of six mom- and lifestyle-oriented blogs. The blogs we studied more closely are all well-known and well-read in the Finnish blogosphere, and they 'typically' represent the broader genre of Finnish mom blogs in several ways: the bloggers' gender, age and phase of life, the general aim in keeping a blog, the type of lifestyle-oriented topics, -and the kind of events and situations recounted in the blog. All the blogs are kept by female bloggers who identify as 'mothers' as a significant part of their identities and work (see also Mäkinen, 2018). Moreover, many of the blogs' names bear some, often ironic or humoristic, reference to mothers or babies. This kind of empirical material enabled us to read years of archived material. Also, we find the very process by which bloggers craft affective prose out of everyday experiences to reveal an authoring skill that might not be apparent through more traditional ethnographic observations and interviews.

Mom blogs in a Finnish sociocultural context

Mom blogs offer intimate, insightful and revealing personal accounts of motherhood, care work and entrepreneurship. The Finnish mom blogs examined and included in this study are not solely concerned with mothering and/or family issues, but often discuss lifestyle-related topics, such as food, interior design and fashion. Most of the bloggers are in their 30s, and they have grown up in the digital age and are used to dealing with technologies. The following analysis builds on the in-depth insight we have gained from our nethnographic study by closely following the Finnish 'mom blogosphere' for many years. Empirical materials were gathered and analyzed to explore how mom bloggers represent themselves, negotiate their identities as both mothers and professional entrepreneurs in relation to the wider societal norms and expectations regarding motherhood and entrepreneurship.

Conducting critical media analysis

Blogging as exhausting self-entrepreneurial identity work –challenging the image of blogging as 'frivolous' and shallow women's work

We approach and analyse mom blogging as precarious and self-entrepreneurial identity work in the context of the creative economy where 'work', fun and 'leisure' intertwine, and where the exposure of personal opinions and intimate, embodied matters has become a dominant expectation. How are understandings of motherhood and entrepreneurship – or mumpreneurship – (re)constructed at the level of identity, then? In the following section, we discuss how the studied Finnish mom bloggers often seemed to construct devalued and 'frivolous' blogging as exhausting, effortful and 'real' work, thus deliberately challenging the shallow image attached to their work, as the blogpost of one of the mumpreneurs below illustrates. Contrary to blogging for fun, her ambition was always to blog 'seriously' and professionally.

> When I started blogging, my idea was *not* only to do this *just for fun*. Perhaps because of my professional background I thought that if I start working on something, I do it *seriously*. Well, as I had my newborn baby in my arms, my working pace was miserable. It felt like a miracle that the

crowd of readers eventually started to grow, and so did the amount of my posts. (Blog mom 1)

Given that the bloggers and mumpreneurs take care of small children at home, their work also largely happens at home. Blogging is work that could be done around the children, so the blogger could be at home and then work in the evenings or when the children were asleep. For the mumpreneurs here seem to constantly fight against the traditional idea of that work should not be fun if it was taken seriously and thus practicing constant identity work of who they are as entrepreneurs, mothers and individuals and how they wish to convey these message to people around them (and people who read their blog texts). The self-confidence and satisfaction of the blog moms towards their work derives also partly from their liberty to create and maintain their own space at work, as the following quote illustrates:

> *I know exactly* the kind of expertise, idea, story and I'm able to offer to my customers when I do the sales *by myself*. And I'm *privileged to say no* if it didn't feel ok. (Blog mom 1)

If Hanna in the introductory extracts emphasized that she has deliberately *chosen* to 'opt out' and prioritize her family over a perhaps more 'conventional' career, the presented extracts seemed underpinned by a need to emphasize that blogging or working from home could be 'just as economically and mentally rewarding as a 'normal' job' (Just and Remke, 2019: 58), as do the following two extracts:

> It was a couple of years ago when I realized that I would be able to invoice through my own trade name. In the meanwhile, I had to learn my new title: professional blogger. (Blog mom 1)

> Although I blogged seriously right from the beginning – thinking about the baby year – I could never have dared to hope that I have more than 50 000 readers today. A big thank you to all of you, my readers! You have made it possible for me to make a part of my earnings through blogging. (Blog mom 2)

Many of the studied blogs reinforce gender stereotypical understandings of women as normatively 'feminine', primary caregivers and domestic workers. Besides reproducing traditionalist and normative understandings of heterosexuality and nuclear family ideals, Hanna's initial sayings indicated that a perfectly balanced work-life might, after all, be difficult to achieve as a mom blogger. Still, her sayings seem underpinned by individualist, entrepreneurial and neoliberal ideals where women could indeed 'have it all' and create the kind of life they desire, if only they commit to the ideals of entrepreneurship, 'continuous labour and perseverance' (see Gill, 2007; Rottenberg, 2018) as well as willingness to invest in themselves and their work. These communicative practices work as strategies to legitimatize a new form of digital work where traditional boundaries have become more blurred.

> I have written this blog for so long, since 2011! It feels strange to memorize my life and time without blogging. My partner hasn't read my blog at all. I bet many of you think it's weird as blogging is a key part of my everyday-life. But it's fine for us – and it's nice for me to know that my partner is not analyzing everything I am writing, and he knows everything about my life anyway. (Blog mom 6)

It seems to us that Finnish mom bloggers' identity work typically involves constructing blogging as *demanding, hard and real entrepreneurial work*. Blogging is, despite the many stereotypes attached to it, frequently by the bloggers themselves portrayed as exhausting and time-consuming work, where a blogger typically works 'all the time'. In the extract below, we see how Blog mom 1 draws on her expertise and professionalism to construct blogging as professional practice, not a hobby. Again, it is evident that the blogger is highly educated and has prior professional experience in journalism and communications.

> Sometimes it feels like you dear readers forget about me being a human. // I think few of you understand how hard I work. In no previous work _ and there are plenty of them – have I worked this much. (Blog mom 1)

The blog moms think critically about their own blogging practices and some seem conscious of the fact that everything in social media is ephemeral. Therefore, blogging can be viewed as a risky business, as one of the blog moms writes:

> It's good to acknowledge that the bubble of social media might burst at any time. Therefore, it would be good to have a second plan. On the other hand, the power of social media lies in its capacity to create new work to be done. This is what has happened to me. Social media has enabled me to meet new people and to do the work I currently do. (Blog mom 1)

Blogging as intimate and embodied identity work – problematizing hegemonic understandings of motherhood through radically' personal and intimate blog posts

With the promoting and marketing of products, the enhancement of neoliberal consumerism as well as the staging of glossy, dominantly white and middle-class lifestyles, blogging is easily viewed as an unintellectual, disturbingly commercial or unauthentic sphere. As a site of identity work, then, mom blogs could also figure as sites of resistance. In this second analytical section, we focus on the tensions in-between the private and public sphere, or on the embodied and intimate accounts of motherhood disturbing its hegemonic understandings that are still present and commonly reproduced in contemporary organisations. Some Finnish mom bloggers visibly problematize and resist stereotypical assumptions tied to motherhood and use their blogs to create 'alternative' understandings of the same. Here, we seek to go behind this surface or the staging of pretty and seemingly perfect family lives, and we believe that blogs could tell us something interesting about the embodied vulnerabilities, tensions and contradictions continuously present in the communication of private and entrepreneurial identities of the blog moms explored here. As the following blogpost illustrates, motherhood is a platform of constant identity work which some of the blog moms have not chosen consciously:

> Becoming a mother has changed me a lot. I didn't choose my motherhood consciously – things just led to another. I have never regretted my role as a mother. There have been many fragile moments filled with desperate thoughts of why I ever

put myself into this, but my love for my children never burns out. It was not before becoming a mother when I found a large part of myself. (Blogpost of blog mom 5)

If popular Finnish mom bloggers might – to some extent – disrupt oppressive understandings of neoliberal motherhood, they simultaneously perform privileged subject positions that (re)produce the ideals they seek to critique. For example, the following blogpost captures the invisible demands of a (working) mother who should always be grateful and happy around her children. Here, the blogger disrupts the image of a perfect mother by sharing her negative sentiments. However, what becomes evident is how bad she feels about failing, as maternal failure is not accepted in the intense mothering idea(l):

> There are days when I feel that I'm failing as a mother. --- I feel sad if I'm too tired of being constantly present with my kids or if I'm losing my nerves with them. Those are the moments when I think if deserve my motherhood or if being a mother is meant for me at all. (Blog mom 5)

Another example of the same aspect is the blogpost of blog mom below which captures the everydayness of being a blogging mother. It 'hiddenly' performs a hegemonic understanding of the need of the mother to stay 'imprisoned' at home for hours to perform perfect mothering, in this case because of cooking:

> I did not have time to do so much anything else today, because *I had to stay at home* keeping an eye on that roast in the oven. I realized that we didn't have any folio left, but luckily my oldest daughter went to a supermarket to buy it. We ate selfmade garlic butter and roasted vegetables with the roast – this time the kids loved the food, too. (Blog mom 6)

> When my partner is at home he even does more than what I do. He always changes the diaper *if I ask him to do it*. He also cooks and cleans up all that mess when our baby girl tries to eat by herself. (Blog mom 6)

On the other hand, the relationships of the blog moms to the outside world are highlighted in some of the blogposts. These relationships entail an embodied dimension, as well – captured in the following blogpost:

> The ones I collaborate with (*most of them I critcally skip*) in my blogs are the ones that *fit into myself.* They are products or services that I would genuinely personally use also without blogging and which I can recommend with all my heart. (Blogmom 3)

In the quote above, it becomes visible how the collaborators that the blog mom chooses to support through blogging, become, in a sense, a part of her identity. Collaboration with other trademarks and companies can be thus viewed as a constant identity work in which the mothers make sense of themselves, too. Also, bloggers self-identify with their work, which is connected to the problem of blurred boundaries between work and private sphere (Grey, 2005; Ashforth et al., 2008; Humle and Pedersen, 2010) in the sense the blog moms actively aim at fitting the collaborators in their personal selves, as the quote above also exemplifies. Furthermore, the blog moms openly discuss the problematics of their partnerships by blogging and hence render visible their vulnerability as entrepreneurs and mothers, as the following quote finely illustrates:

> "Just go now", he says to me again. I'm totally exhausted. My belly feels and I feel awful. Sitting makes me feel sick. My energy levels are zero. I know he says it to me because he loves me and because he knows me so well. He knows that if I didn't go know, I will be annoying for the rest of the evening. But if I go, I will certainly feel better.
>
> "I'm so happy you told me to leave!" I tell to my fiancé at home. He smiles. He knows me so well. He knows what is best for me even when I don't know it by myself. In my view, "just go now" is the greatest expression of love. When the partner is able to think and feel everything a hundred percent from your point of view – that is awesome. (Blog mom 3)

In the blogpost of blog mom 3 above, the relationship with the partner becomes a central force for the blog mom in constructing a sense of a coherent self amidst the demands of the surrounding world. Furthermore, the blogpost above is a nice materialization of the ways blogmoms aim at competing against the hegemonic understandings of what it is to be a good mother. In other words, blog mom 3 writes how she and how her partner pushes her to do it instead of staying at home.

However, handling the different role expectations of an active blogger and a caring mother-at-home is emotionally hard at times, as one blog mom expresses and apologizes:

> My blog has been quiet for some time now. I have had difficulties in keeping things together and especially myself. Me and my kids got the father home for Eastern, which was great, but then he had to go for work trip again. Days feel passing by so slowly.

> All of us have our own ways to react stressful and depressing things. For me, it has been losing appetite. I have been on diet. Last week I felt so bad that they took me into the hospital for drop for a day. They told me that I have two options: I will start to eat or I will need to stay at the hospital. I refused to stay there because *I wanted to stay with my kids*. (Blog mom 4)

And she continues:

> It is difficult to write about things like these. It would be much easier to explain it face-to-face. (Blog mom 4)

Discussion and conclusions

This paper included mom blogging an under researched domain into the field of organization studies. Despite the fact that mom blogging –a form of 'networked life writing' (Friedman, 2013: 9) has become a common, popular and influential practice, the research fields of self-employed motherhood and mom blogging remain under-developed in the field of organization studies (for exceptions, see Just and Reimke, 2019). Arguably, the many prejudices and gendered stereotypes attached to this 'frivolous' and seemingly superficial sphere may, indeed, explain the dominant

scholarly neglect. It is important to gain in-depth understandings of mom bloggers' identity work in a digitalized and ever-changing environment.

This paper offers the following contributions: first, it introduces mom blogging as an important, yet dominantly overlooked, topic and area of identity work in organizational research. We contribute to the discussion on blogging as relatively 'new' and gendered form of digital identity work by bringing together the perhaps controversial –embodied and virtual – as well as public and intimately private life-worlds. To us, blogging is an intriguing context for the study of intimate and 'all-encompassing' work. The increasing blurring of work/leisure in an era of 24/7 capitalism (Crary, 2014) calls for in-depth empirical studies investigating blogging as work. Second, the paper highlights the embodied, intimate and precarious implications of digital work that researchers might miss when studying work as an exclusively public realm of nine-to-five work. Finally, exploring bloggers' identity work helps to gain more nuanced, context-specific and dynamic perspective, bridging between individual perceptions and broader surrounding societal factors that influence mumpreneurs' identity work.

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