

December 14, 2012
Sustainability Culture

Greening the Momosphere: Modern Motherhood, Blogging for Social Change, and Environmental Citizenship

November 5, 2012. On the eve of Election Day, Rebecca Woolf sits down to her computer and types. “Faith, 2012.” It is a title foreshadowing a conversation she’ll have with thousands from the privacy of her empty living room. Or kitchen. Or bedroom.

After her four children are tucked in and dreaming, Rebecca writes about politics and parenting. In the morning, 41 people will leave comments. They will tell her she “changed their minds,” and offered the “best argument” they’d heard in favor of re-electing President Obama. A world-famous “mommy blogger,” Rebecca (better known as “Girl’s Gone Child” or GGC,) has written a book and made it into the *The New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, *Huffington Post*, and *NPR*. Boldly writing since 2003 when gave birth to her first child, Woolf has navigated the virtual blogosphere for nearly ten years. She is a celebrity—risen to fame for being relatable, yet out of the box. On November 5th, Rebecca writes about hope and voting. She draws out lines about women’s rights, gay marriage, and national pride—explaining her vote and knowingly contradicting herself along the way. As she types, she pastes hyperlinks to political agenda articles from national newspapers. She unearths the hyperlinked versions of herself buried deep in her 2008 blog archives. Rebecca traces the progress of the United States as she traces her own transformation as a woman and as a mother.¹ Drawing comparisons to her roller coaster marriage and the daily uncertainty of childrearing, Woolf is one of 3,900,000 “Mommy Bloggers” in North America. She belongs to a cohort of 500 who have “considerable power and reach.”² From her mini web series to the scrolling advertisements for her iPhone app, Twitter feed and Youtube channel framed in her blog’s sidebar, Rebecca is a lifestyle brand. Supporting her family of 6

through her blogging, she is living a new kind of American dream. Her blog's web page is a crafted living space. Inviting an audience into her world, Rebecca furnishes the virtual as she would the real. In the block-lettered header of *Girl's Gone Child*, twin sets of baby blue eyes and chubby fingers extend to readers. In her headlines and streaming feeds, Rebecca tells them: these children and this mother are *real*. Commenting on why she blogs, this Girl Gone Child describes her motivation as a desire to understand: "I draw parallels to everything so that I can rationalize decisions - so that I can relate to all the things I feel detached from. So that I can relate to this election. So that I can stand firmly behind the man I will be voting for."³ Like her children, Rebecca Woolf is still growing. She is zooming in and out—the camera lens of her life panning from her wedding day to her children's faces to the Presidential election playing out on the TV screen. Both child and adult, she strives to be *complicated*. "Who am I?" she asks. The answer, "A Mom," encompasses everything.

To realize the impact Rebecca (and so many other blogging mothers,) has on communities of parents and citizens, we must understand the stage on which she plays and acts. In 2012, the state of motherhood is one rife with anxiety. As authors Hall and Bishop state in their text *Mommy Angst: Motherhood in American Popular Culture*; "American mothers are anxious about nearly every aspect of their lives. Their careers, their families, their bodies, their children, their mothering abilities... Americans want a 'mom' definition of motherhood—a nurturing, accepting, easy definition. Mothers...are the reservoir of American expectations."⁴ Through "Mommy Blogs," mothers across the country are able to grapple (on their own terms) with increasingly complicated definitions of motherhood in the modern age. In forums and comment streams they define and edit the cultural "supermom." In the archives of mommy bloggers, we find diatribes, social movements, and humorous moments frozen in time. In the

winding paragraphs and photo-montage memories of mothers who tailor their blogs to fit personalized interests and experiences (ranging from farming to fashion, environmentalism, and child loss) we see a diverse movement. Though Mommy Bloggers represent a narrow demographic of women when it comes to race, income, and social status, their stories tell us about the nature of parenting in an information age. Their far-reaching support systems redefine communication in a confusing age of multitasking and divided attention.

The impact of mothers and women as writers, advice-givers, and innovative feminists in the Mommy Blog realm is not unprecedented. Putting Mommy Blogs into historical context, the late 19th century brought a wave of feminism that did not associate with *anger*, but identified with dynamic storytelling. In many ways, this emergent feminism was a precursor to the Mommy Blog movement of the new Millennium—an unearthed opportunity for mothers to write their histories in real time. In 19th century female-centered magazines and advice books, women authored their own histories. As was true in these advice books and magazines of the 19th century, Mommy Bloggers break the mold and rewrite womanhood. In the 1800s, the publication of magazines targeted toward women spiked dramatically as “[women] became key consumers of household goods in the 19th century and gradually expanded their roles into spheres outside the family.”⁵ Similarly transforming the conversation of American womanhood in the 21st century, Mommy Bloggers take advantage of technological advances to reach female audiences of millions. In both cases, public discussion about supposedly private life is normalized. Like the writers of the 19th century, our modern blogging mothers articulate what it means to be a mother and a woman in 2012. They mold themselves into agents of social change.⁶

Analyzing *Girl's Gone Child* and her blogging peers and followers, a slice of the “Momosphere” is revealed, questions are raised, and we learn how a new medium might be used

to shape parenting practices in the US. This includes working together as a population of parents to reduce the carbon footprints that plague our children's generation, and molding the minds and ethical understanding of children who will become future global citizens.

Climbing the multitasking rungs of social media and afterschool hierarchy, the “Momosphere” asks questions big and small: What substance lies behind filled calendars and the constant effort to “have it all?” What happens when the little girl whose parents told her she could do anything grows up and has a family of her own? Does she leave her powerful business career behind, or compromise a between-the-lines kind of feminism? What about all of the fear-addled headlines? The seeping toxins and destructive hurricanes and situations parents cannot control? What about the bullies and the ten million monthly newsletters designed to reveal “all you need to know” to be a “good” mother?

It's easy to feel helpless in the slew. But these Moms can *write*. Transferring the power of the 1950s coffee clutch to the 13” lap top screen, blogging moms form networks. In turn, these networks have the scope to create dramatic change (if they choose.) Bridging entertainment and information in the same genius way *Oprah* did for television, Mommy bloggers reveal what matters to a powerful demographic of American women.

Blurring the lines of virtual and the real, the online activity of Mommy Bloggers is positioned to become a viable form of activism. The best blogging Moms balance the simple with the deep —juggling questions of backyard sandbox shenanigans with climate change and overconsumption. They also learn to conquer multiple mediums, brand themselves, and build communities. Rebecca Woolf is one such example. In a follow-up to her November 5th thoughts, Rebecca wrote a post called “Politics & Friends” —expressing the complexity of a motherhood citizenship as she said:

“We matter and I believe with all my heart, so do our choices. As voters and parents and human beings, we can *choose* to support one side without ripping into the other. We can celebrate our wins without booing those who voted against us, speak our minds without criticizing the minds of those who think differently, hold hands without rolling our eyes. And to quote Thomas Jefferson...I believe that not only is it *possible* to stay friends with those who share a difference of politics, opinion, religion and philosophy, it is our *duty* as citizens of the world and mentors to tomorrow's leaders. Because if we can't get along as adults how can we expect our children to? They're watching us.”⁷

She is not alone. Examining a selected sample of twenty Mommy blogs, representations of motherhood are diverse and sometimes seem disconnected. When it comes to issues in the environment (arguably the biggest ongoing challenges their children will have to face,) most mention climate change or global warming or fear. Few dare to dive in over their heads. These women have the means to shift culture. In a cacophony of voices shared over cups of coffee in quiet rooms, they form families. These writers might use their wit to shift market consumerism, direct others to well-informed sources of political information, raise a generation of conscientious citizens, and inspire more eco-centric efficacy. Exploring the recorded values and messages of Mommy blogs, we find a blueprint for future generations of citizens. Critiquing and applauding the work of these writers and mothers, readers might navigate their own ethics of parenting—approaching child rearing as a political act of the greatest consequence. Until now, the “Mommy Blogger” demographic has been trivialized and pushed aside. There has been little research on the impact these women are having in communities, politics, and consumer markets—forging a digital frontier of shared space and ideals. This exploratory paper seeks to dive into the archives of these notable women and analyze their footprints (on both ecological and social scales.)

Rebecca Woolf is a wonderful entry point for the “Mommy Blogging” conversation, but this paper adds to her symbolic presence by putting her in conversation with a woman who

represents another side of the Mommy Blogging path and formula for “success.” This woman is Diane MacEachern, author of environmentally themed *Big Green Purse* blog and striking example of the “Eco Mommy Bloggers.” The method of my evaluation involves a survey of twenty blogs—the top ten most popular “general” Mommy Blogs, and the top ten “Eco” Mommy Blogs. Analyzing the most recent blog posts and comments in each of these online communities, common themes emerge. From “business” to “motherhood” to “hope,” “thrift,” and “agency,” the women of the complex “Momosphere” redefine an American vocabulary that is no longer common sense.

“General” Mommy blogs (those without one clear niche,) do not *explicitly* raise ecological citizens.⁸ However, their parenting styles reflect themes of Ecological Citizenship. These include storytelling, instilling care for future generations, and teaching their children to ask questions. As Rebecca Woolf (a representation of generalist Mommy Blogging) claims, mothers have the responsibility to be “mentors to tomorrow’s leaders.” In the other branch of Mommy Bloggers explored in this paper, “Eco Mommy Bloggers” write openly about creating ecologically minded citizens in their children. However, these activist mothers run the risk of assuming that their children will take action by default. As exemplary Eco Blogger Diane MacEachern stresses, “We need to protect our health and the health of our kids and grand kids, and laws and regulations can't do it alone.”⁹

Focusing on one representative blog in each category of general and “Eco” writing mothers, the *Girls Gone Child* and Diane MacEachern’s *Big Green Purse* sites become “dense facts.” Through the voices of both bloggers, (supplemented with the dialogue of eighteen other noted bloggers,) we read a national conversation that shows the state of the world in the early 21st century. Juxtaposing these diary-like entries, questions, and lengthy comments on

citizenship, we re-assess the values of parenting in the United States. The “Momosphere” tells us what concerns and dreams we¹⁰ hold for future generations. Recognizing the expressed values of the “Momosphere,” this paper examines how we might make the leap to *operative* values in parenting—combining “best practices” of parenting from general and environmental spheres, leading by example, and energizing a population of future activists and feminists (freed from the modern stigma.)

The Top Ten Generalist Mommy Bloggers: Shallow Consumers, or Priceless Agents of Social Change?

There is a small girl standing at the top of the web page—her “back to school” bangs fall across her forehead, an *American Girl Doll* swings from the crook of her elbow—dressed in leopard print to match the “real-girl” sized dress. Splashed down the screen in 44 separate scenes, this four-year old is famous. Her name is *Fable*. A little girl living in Los Angeles, the stories of Fable’s life unfold for millions. We see Fable playing dress up, Fable caught mid-scream, Fable running miniature fingers along piano keys. Fable is a “real girl,” but she is also an actress in her own fairy-tale. Daughter of top-ten “Mommy Blogger” Rebecca Woolf, Fable is an artifact of her mediated generation—a cohort of kids growing up alongside Disney child stars and directed by Googling mommies. With Facebook and Twitter at their fingertips from grade school on, “all the world’s a stage” becomes a virtual reality.¹¹ The script Fable will write for her own life and for her generation is still in its first scene. The possibilities are endless.

From birth, Fable’s sense of self has been archived in shots framed by her mother—setting up a mediated existence that may help or hinder her future sense of self and view of what it means to be a “good citizen.” As the years unfold before her in birthday candles and princess parties and rites of passage, Fable will move beyond the realm of romanticized childhood on her mother’s blog to the landscapes of High School, College, and beyond. She will learn how to live

what poet Mary Oliver calls “[her] one wild and precious life”¹² She will be the product of a generation of Brave New Blogging Mothers. She will become a Mother influenced by the words of her own Mother—preserved forever in cyberspace. In this sense, Rebecca’s thoughtful threads of sentences and streaming lines of photographs will mold generation after generation of Woolf children and their circles of friends who ask to see the “family pictures.” Through the documentation of her own children’s lives, and the responses/readership of so many other mothers, Rebecca Woolf impacts the views of countless future American citizens. Rebecca Woolf is an expert, but not in the conventional sense. Her interests and scope are broad—derived largely from anecdotal evidence. She is part of a very large cohort, but her voice stands out.

In one 2009 social media study, it was found that the “Mommy Blogger” online population reaches *42 million* readers.¹³ These Moms are 52% more likely to have completed a college degree than non-bloggers, and they make an average of \$84,000/year. In North America alone, there are 3.9 million mommy bloggers. In fact, “14% of all American moms are mommy bloggers.”¹⁴ Becoming a mommy blogger is a slice of the new American Dream—providing a venue for a variety of parenting styles.

Like all parents, Rebecca Woolf gave birth to children, but she also gave birth to consumers. On *Girl’s Gone Child*, she has designed and built the spaces they grow up in (both virtual and real) and introduced the products and ideas that will spur lifetime loyalties. Woolf is remarkably conscious and conscientious when it comes to these daily decisions that will change the fabric of her children’s lives and the larger climate of American and global society. Isolating Rebecca’s triumphs and the sell-outs that come with success, putting her in conversation with 9 other “top” Mommy Bloggers, and thinking about what the common values of motherhood *could* be, we might improve the physical and social environment for children of the new Millenium.

Through Rebecca Woolf and *Girl's Gone Child*, we see the far-reaching blogging possibilities that come with conquering multiple mediums, building community, and creating a virtual personal “brand name.” As an unlikely expert on mothering, Rebecca Woolf makes parenting refreshingly political and uses her children to explore American parenting and life in the 21st century without exploiting them—equipped to change expectations for modern parenting and citizenship.

Conquering Mediums and Building a Brand Name

As she tells the stories of her life in Los Angeles, Rebecca Woolf is more than a hip music-loving diaper-toting mother. She is an authority. She does not treat her blog as a journal, but as a source of income. Rebecca’s name has made its way to the margins of *The New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, *Huffington Post*, and the airwaves of *Angeleno* and NPR. She’s been named Blog of the Year by mother-centered blogger hub Babble.com. Woolf is a well-respected panelist at *Momversation*, *Kin Community*, *Babble.com*, and *HGTV.com*. She even hosts *ChildStyle: with Rebecca Woolf*, a web series about childhood decor. In this segment, she teaches mothers how to surround their children with “things” that will shape their consumer loyalties (though she doesn’t frame the episodes with this in mind.) In sum, Woolf is a multitasking queen. Like so many of the bloggers ranked beside her in the “top ten,” she has conquered multiple platforms. She has written a book (titled *Rockabye: From Wild to Child*.) In the “about” section of her blog, Rebecca lists a trendy and innovative resume. She tells her readers of her “former life” as a contributor to short story anthologies and *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*.¹⁵

In her unconventional resume, Woolf is echoed by fellow mommy bloggers.¹⁶ These star-studded resumes in disguise are a common thread among the top ten “mommy bloggers” I’ve examined. Their Curriculum Vitae include the poetry of epidurals, supermarket semiotics, and

the pain of political elections (of both student council and presidential varieties.) Each “about” page of these blogs reads like a fairy tale with a twist—images, short sentences, abbreviated plotlines, and cultural commentary all wrapped into one. In this world of the blogging “Momosphere,”¹⁷ motherhood is seen by *everyone* with just one click. Mothers and readers judge and are judged. But in many ways, communities come together too—relating to one another in self-deprecating paragraphs and unfiltered musings about the ethics of parenting. In the long lists of accomplishments and anecdotes present in every one of the “top ten” generalist blogs, a form for “success” emerges. Each blogger is in control—capable of changing societal definitions and perceptions of what it means to do well.

When it comes to building her own personal brand name and redefining “success” through her own life’s plotline, Rebecca Woolf has conquered the art of the shared narrative. At 23, she blogged to find peace. As is the case with so many blogging mothers, writing online became therapy. Woolf was a writer first and a blogger second—her cozy cyber home a casual platform for thoughts not formally bound. Rebecca began as a new mother growing up alongside her child, and she eventually became a lifestyle brand. This year, Woolf celebrated *Girl’s Gone Child’s* 7th Birthday. To commemorate the anniversary, she linked back to her first ever post.¹⁸ In her first year of blogging, Rebecca used outings with her son to talk about the greater questions of breastfeeding stereotypes, the unrealistic tabloid portrayal of post-baby moms, and navigating the holiday season with an “anticonsumer” husband by her side. In this sense, Rebecca Woolf has always used her kids to represent her politics, her “hipness,” and her purpose. In 2006, Rebecca Woolf says; “Becoming a parent has turned me into a somewhat of a misanthrope, mainly because so many people subscribe to by-the-book parenting, by-the-book living, by-the-Book EVERYTHING.” In the contents of her blog, Rebecca Woolf *becomes* the

book. She questions doctors and in-laws and trends. She merges the academic with pop culture, and develops a set of impressive accomplishments and established values. Her work becomes a manifesto—ready to be shared.

Building Community

The next important key to Woolf’s “success” is her ability to engage the group of women nodding along as they scroll through pages of her family memories and parental musings and changing expectations. To build a community that could eventually take action and change the face of American parenting, Rebecca Woolf has become an expert in “systems thinking.” She possesses the impressive ability of taking a moment in time and expanding it to represent questions of ethics, politics, stigma, and societal constructs. When she presents these connections, she does not sound like a nasally academic, but a fresh young voice. She is confident in her network of branching thoughts, but humble too. Most importantly, she is *relatable*.

In Woolf’s company, the 9 other top mommy bloggers practice similar patterns of “systems thinking” that define lifestyles and value sets built post by post and photo by photo. For example, Catherine Connors (*HerBadMother*,) writes about her daughter’s run for Class Secretary in the context of the 2012 presidential campaign.¹⁹ Just as Rebecca Woolf did in her 2012 November 6th blog post, Connors causes change by calling her readers to vote. Mormon-raised artsy mother and blogger *Dooce* (Heather Armstrong) began her blog as a “place to write about pop culture, music, and...life as a single woman.”²⁰ Another top blogger, Katherine Stone fills the same postpartum niche--authoring postpartumprogress.com, “the most widely-read blog on postpartum depression and all other mental illnesses related to pregnancy and childbirth.”²¹

Sprinkled on the homecreens of the top ten “mommy bloggers” is a diverse set of identities. Monica Bielanko (*thegirlwho*) is a “recovering mormon” (and mother) who “still likes to lumber atop her Soap Box now and again and ballyhoo, but says she's not half as angry about things as she used to be.”²² Ree Drummond (*thepioneerwoman*,) braves the frontier of rural life and offers up “cowboy friendly recipes” and tales of the transition from city to country.²³ Kate Inglis (*sweetsalty*) lives in Canada and began to blog after one of infants died. She writes and illustrates books--her perspective (and her purpose) colored by her loss.²⁴

In each of these cases, blogging mothers become the voice of a greater community. This relationship is vital for tapping into the potential for social change and inspiration for a future generation of citizens. After Mommy Bloggers instill trust through impressive storytelling, humor, and piling “credentials,” their audiences listen from behind their computer screens. They tell friends. They change behaviors (or at least think about changing them.) For the trusted advice-giver and successful Mommy Blogger, there is great power and responsibility. As Rebecca Woolf says in the introduction to her online space, “If you’re new to [the blog,] welcome, if you’ve been here from the beginning, thank you.” Devoted to Rebecca Woolf’s writing on multiple levels (from those who check her page daily, to those who stumble upon a post in random Google searches,) *Girl’s Gone Child’s* followers become a hierarchy of friends with varied passions and pull. Casual readers enter as individuals and become an “invested community” as they return to the same blog home page day after day. Together, these invested women might spark a movement—backing a bill, fundraising for a cause, or protesting an injustice (in their communities or across the ocean.)

In 2012, 7 years after penning her first post, Rebecca tailors each freshly typed line to various subgroups. She has the power to appeal to the 20-something young mothers who seek the

advice of a woman who has weathered the storm of giving birth, the experienced mothers who still question what it means to be a “good parent,” and the people like *me*—college students on the brink of the “future” and dreaming of a modern motherhood that won’t involve compromising the feminism, independence, and “systems thinking” of my generation.

Finding the Politics in Parenting and Corporate Blogging

Beyond building their own brand names and communities, Rebecca Woolf and her highly successful “top mommy blogger” peers channel their passions into progressive new careers—sponsored by companies and corporations willing to make an investment in large “invested” readership bases with a clear set of interests. Blogging for a living, these women have the time, talent, and energy to make waves. They only need to be willing to take the risk and experiment with methods of engagement. With sponsors filling up their sidebars and searching for innovative ways to offer support, Mommy Bloggers everywhere have the capacity to carefully choose their advertisers and product placements in a way that fits larger values and citizenly agendas. In this light, women like Rebecca Woolf have significant sway when it comes to changing consumer habits and the market they stand for. Learning to balance storytelling with activism and sponsorship, bloggers gain trust and followers—building networks and clout.

Rebecca Woolf fulfills this sort of trajectory—bridging the strong-headed values of young first time parenthood with her current more experienced perspective and conscious selection of advertisers. In her early years, Rebecca Woolf alternated anecdotes with politics. She pounded out a paragraph about her son’s boogers and followed up the next day with a short (and heartwarmingly hilarious) essay about her choice not to breastfeed. *Girl’s Gone Child* understood that readers would be lost if Woolf constantly played the part of mommy activist and woman with strong opinions demanding to be heard. The most successful and relatable bloggers

tread this same line--using playground antics and kitchen mishaps to get at something more problematic and obscure. However, as each blogger makes her way to the top of the social blogosphere, gaining followers and comment streams, she must make sacrifices to appease her advertisers.²⁵ Sponsored by several highly visible corporations like Hewlett Packard, Target, and Babble.com,²⁶ Rebecca juggles her advice about organic alternatives with orchestrated posts centered on *products* (thus perpetuating a consumer culture she once despised.) Earning a living via corporate giants and small business start-up support, Rebecca Woolf (and her professional mommy blogging peers,) begin to shape mothering experiences to fit corporate brand names and sculpt their own personal labels. These writing mothers no longer have the luxury of writing about what happens to them, but instead construct experiences to showcase logos. Endorsements from corporate power are both a burden and an opportunity. The corporate games Mommy Bloggers play impact the psyche not only of their immediate families, but the consumer families who read about them.

For example, on November 27th *Girl's Gone Child* featured a post and photo essay recounting the joys of a weekend afternoon spent playing video games on a Nintendo Wii gaming console together as a family. Attempting to offset the blatant product placement and endorsement, Rebecca integrated parenting politics—explaining her videogame ground rules (i.e. no violence, only played when game brings family members *together*.) She also took this opportunity to give her children a little creative freedom (along with a lesson in budgeting.) Supplying her two eldest children with \$15 each, Rebecca snapped photos as they roamed the dollar store and planned the decoration scheme for their own mini gaming party. After listing the endearing set of rules her kids came up with for Family Game Night (which included “glow sticks are for everybody except the babies because they will try to eat them,” and “have fun and

share,”) Rebecca made her obligatory plug: “My ad network, Federated Media is sponsoring a pretty amazing sweepstakes to go along with this campaign. To participate, Pin your Family Game Night photos with a comment that links to this_promotion. Prizes include a WiiU deluxe set and \$5,000.00 to take your fam on vacation.”²⁷ With three simple sentences, Rebecca Woolf changes history—affecting the way families spend a Sunday evening, and influencing the market economy. She becomes a saleswoman and a sweepstakes host. It all feels shallow, but the ramifications are complex. What if the persuasive powers of mommy bloggers were all used to change market behavior in this way--shifting American consumption toward more socially responsible choices? What might have happened if Rebecca had not replied to this sponsorship deal, but written about taking her family for a jaunt in the park instead? She would be lighter in the pocket book, but would she be better off as a mother and an ecological citizen? Or is she to be applauded for finding a way to conscientiously use a piece of modern technology in a way that brings her family together and feeds them too? Surely it’s preferable to have consumers choosing a toy to bring home for the holidays on the basis of its ability to inspire togetherness and nonviolence, rather than a choice made based on the bright-colored appeal of the device broadcast across a television screen... These questions are convoluted, but it’s important that we ask them (and answer them too.)

Through Rebecca Woolf and *Girl’s Gone Child*, we see that even in the virtual realm of the “Momosphere,” corporate powers dominate. And yet, they can be controlled in unprecedented ways. Scanning advertising caches of the top ten “mommy blogs,” airbrushed half-naked women glare with smoldering eyes and sell “*Socially Responsible, Eco Friendly, Real Gemesis Lab-Created Diamonds.*” Scrolling down, long-haired ivory skinned beauties wear designer shades and are obscured by bright pink font that reads; “The Guise Archives Eyewear.”

These ads bookend a slew of images reminding readers that there is a mobile phone “app” for the blog’s content, a spin off web-based TV show, and a separate blog dedicated entirely to clothing your child, mastering your kitchen, or furnishing your home. The women of the Momosphere observe, define, and eventually *sell* and advertise lifestyles. Acknowledging this power, the next step is using it to educate and change expectations along the way. Rebecca Woolf and her work on *Girl’s Gone Child* does this in several places—moving from product placement captions and footnotes to entire series of posts arguing the benefits of having a “family brand.”

In one example of socially responsible family buy-in, Rebecca Woolf wrote on October 30, 2012 the first part of a series in her blog titled “Why We Shop *Honest*.” Recounting her journey with a company that features “biodegradable, non-toxic, natural diapers...as cute as they [are] absorbent [and] functional,” Rebecca sang the praises of the monthly subscription *Honest* diapers has supplied her twin baby girls. She put the diapers in the context of the ethical decisions she’s faced as a young parent when she revealed; “Clearly there was concern over the double diaper duty equating to double the landfill [use,] which I understand and felt similarly guilty about. Having four children meant I would have to work that much harder reducing our carbon footprint as a family. I made it my mission to waste less, buy resale when possible and drive my car only when absolutely necessary.” Buying *Honest* diapers became part of Rebecca’s carbon footprint reduction goal. Unlike the Wii U console her family used and endorsed at the suggestion of the sponsoring company, Rebecca used *Honest* diapers before they ever offered to sponsor her writing. To add to the multi-level conversation Rebecca has with herself (and her thousands of readers,) Woolf links within her post about *Honest* diapers to a post written by an earlier version of herself titled “Says the Hummer in the Land of the Hybrid.” In her November 2011 post, Rebecca Woolf discussed the stereotypes that come along with having 4 children in a

country where the two-child family is quickly becoming the norm. She played with the idea of “maximum capacity for local city-dwelling parents” and ultimately rejected the judgment of others about her family size while recognizing that she too judges other families. Deliberately putting two of her blog posts in conversation with each other, Rebecca shows how her consumer decisions have developed to reflect her values.²⁸ Because she has chosen to have a larger family but recognizes the environmental crisis of our modern age, Rebecca works hard to reduce her ecological impact. Explaining the process of a diaper subscription program and providing plenty of beautiful photos featuring two beautiful twin baby girls giggling in pink patterned diapers, Woolf urges her readers to follow her purchasing priorities. This post depicts the power blogging moms have when it comes to influencing positive market change. Identifying the demographic and values of their readers, Mommy Bloggers might use their “filter bubbles”²⁹ to shift consumption habits. Because the majority of sponsored Mommy Bloggers are supported by companies that rely upon consumption to survive, it is unlikely that this shift would involve a *reduction* in consumption, but it could include buying more consciously and responsibly.³⁰

Shaping Consumption Habits

Taking a user survey developed by *Girl's Gone Child's* sponsor network, I was filled with Utopian notions of what a Mommy Blog-inspired consumer shift might look like. In the opening questions of the survey, I was asked about the texture, style, and color treatment of my hair. I was then required to fill in multiple-choice bubbles listing the degree of my devotion to online shopping, my preferences of where and when I perform my holiday shopping (on or offline,) and my household income and demographics. This survey assumed I would be spending money this holiday season. The intricacies and stresses of shopping for the holidays (especially for an intended audience of mothers) were easy targets. I could almost hear the authors of the

questions whisper; “*We will make your life easier. We will give you what you want and we will get it to you quickly. There will be no shipping or handling fee.*”

Tweaking the goals of this user survey, what if one were developed to understand the *values* of consumers rather than the appearances? Instead of compiling the fact that my hair is curly into a massive database, what if my digital demographic slot noted that I am worried about the negative effects hair products have on the ozone layer and the environment? What if each mommy blog had a user survey that got at the core values of motherhood? What if the blogging author then tailored her posts to fit *these* demands (instead of projected consumer product appeals?)

The eco-centered industry attempts to appeal to user values to some extent—selling “socially responsible” diamond rings and expensive “eco-friendly” materials for every need. However, these products are often “greenwashed” and reserved for those with income to spare. What if the advertising in mommy blogs took on the format of Rebecca Woolf’s *Honest* diaper series—framing consumer choice as a family activity that subscribes not only to a brand name, but to a lifestyle consistent in values and consumption? Bloggers like Rebecca Woolf have undeniably “branded” themselves. When it is informed and well-rounded, this self-branding can be a positive agent of social change—influencing markets and building meaningful communities poised to act.

For the Eco-Mommy Bloggers of the Momosphere, harnessing the strength of communities of women and leading social change is an outward goal. However, we might ask; Is a community of bloggers dedicated specifically to one category of causes (i.e. the environmental focus of the “Eco Mommy”) *more* or *less* effective than a generalized group of women writing to occasionally influence family purchases and express political views?

The Top Ten Eco-Mommy Bloggers: Greenwashed Mothers, or Critical Hope?

On November 2nd, Diane MacEachern wrote a blog post titled “I am Voting for Barack Obama Because We are Greener Than We were Four Years Ago.” Like Rebecca Woolf, Diane used her blog soapbox to encourage voting and political thought. Mirroring *Girl’s Gone Child’s* November 5 post “Faith, 2012,” MacEachern said of Obama’s presidency; “Is his job done? Not by a long shot. But are we making progress? Definitely. I’m supporting the President for a second term because I think he offers our best hope in this election to continue to make progress in the future.” As she wrote, Diane took note of the “terrifying wind and torrential rain” that pelted the walls of her home. Hurricane Sandy was knocking hard—threatening to come in. Diane worried about the catastrophic consequences of the storm extending far beyond this 2-day stretch. She grew angry—not about the costs of the damage for her own family, but about the countless reasons the storm struck at all. Recognizing the dire ramifications of climate change and explaining further her faith in Obama, Diane stated;

“Meteorologists, scientists, environmentalists, public health professionals, concerned citizens, and yes, President Obama, have all made the link between burning fossil fuels like coal and oil and extreme weather events like Sandy, let alone Hurricane Katrina and many others. And they’ve tried to throw the weight of their various offices behind solutions that would help wean us from fossil fuels...As Sandy has shown, the planet very much faces a climate change tipping point. Obama is on one side, Romney on the other. For me, siding with Obama is a no brainer.”³¹

As Rebecca Woolf did with her own blogged political commentary, Diane MacEachern uses anecdotes and facts to back her opinions. She begs her readers to vote, and provides an overview of Obama’s environmental platform (with Romney’s side of the story typed in red lettering.) Unlike Woolf, MacEachern makes clear that she cares which political candidate her readers vote for as they make their way to the poll. The important point to Diane MacEachern is not merely the civic duty of voting, but what’s at stake if we do not elect the *right side*.

In her writing, Diane's perspective as a mother is second to her perspective as an Environmentalist. MacEachern takes care to be an Ecological Citizen, but the Ecological Citizenship of her children is less clear. Though her voice is markedly different, Diane's blog *Big Green Purse* is undoubtedly in conversation with Rebecca Woolf's *Girl's Gone Child*. A "best-selling author, successful entrepreneur, sought-after public speaker, long-time conservationist, [and CEO of] the only company in the U.S. dedicated specifically to transforming women's environmental concerns into measurable improvements in our quality of life," Diane MaEachern is a representation of the highest quality blogging in the "Eco-Mommy" sector of the blogging "Momosphere."³² In the depths of her *Big Green Purse*, we see how advertising, continued environmental themes and political posts represent a unique niche. Extending beyond the "green" product-centered voices of many other "Eco Mommy Bloggers"³³ Diane MaEachern depicts the intersection of mothering advice, specialized environmental interest, activism, and advocacy. She is also devoted to a very specific kind of environmental activism—imploping her female readers to harness their immense purchasing power as a means of environmental advocacy. In the *Why Big Green Purse?* section of her web space (a blog that also reads as an organization,) Diane states a clear mission:

"Global warming has become an international crisis. The places we treasure and the wildlife we love are threatened. We need to protect our health and the health of our kids and grand kids, and laws and regulations can't do it alone. That's where Big Green Purse comes in. We're unique in our focus on women because **women spend \$.85 of every dollar in the marketplace**. That's a lot of power packed in a purse...but only if it's used in a way that can't be ignored. That's why Big Green Purse is encouraging A MILLION WOMEN to shift at least \$1,000 of money they already spend for an initial \$1 billion Big Green Purse impact."³⁴

In this appeal to an audience of mothers and consumers, Machechern's writing is overtly political. She alerts us to the ramifications of our actions, and reminds us how we might change them in the name of shifting a paradigm of spending (and perhaps parenting as well.)

MacEachern's understanding of her audience's wants, needs, values, and desires is evidenced in her blog's slogan: "Save Time, Shift Money, Make a Difference."³⁵ She appeals to and raises conversations about the cultures of convenience, time poverty, and concerns about fair labor and the environment that consume female minds in the 21st century. Through her effective use of advertising, political parenting, and self-branding, MacEachern is an effective Eco-Mommy blogger with an audience ready to ignite. As we explored what Rebecca Woolf did well as a "general" Mommy Blogger, examining Diane's triumphs sheds light on how Mommy Bloggers might effect social change and engage communities in months, years, and generations to come.

Advertising and Value Consistency

Diane and her team work hard to find goods that are "really green" and affordable-- attempting to conquer the seemingly impossible feat of balancing consumption with values. Appealing to the consumer identities in all of her readers, the advertising side bars of Diane's site are filled with headlines for "100% Green Housecleaning," "Luminaire Environmental," "Ecocentricmom.com" and "Free Green Living Tips Delivered Directly to Your Mailbox." *Big Green Purse* feels at first glance like an online shopping space. In some ways, it is. However, Diane Machechern uses her lengthy blog posts to explain the reasons behind each proposed green purchase. She writes about why buying locally reduces climate change impact, and then follows up with links to websites that help any reader find the small local businesses in her area. She writes about eco-friendly and empowering *I Know Jane* shoes, offering a context of slave labor that sells millions of brand name shoes in the United States for a cheap cost that is nowhere near the full "price." ³⁶ Throughout her work, Machechern encourages readers to see the environmental in the everyday. She moves beyond the majority of the Eco Mommy Blogosphere, and offers a more complex approach to "green" consumer advice. Appealing to parenting desires

for thrift and “feel good” purchases, MacEachern uses the familiar aisles of public shopping space as a gateway to a discussion of market ethics and incorporating environmental values into the realm of parenting.

Environmental Politics and Mothering

In pieces like Diane’s writings on the 2012 election, response to the Climate Reality Project’s “Dirty Weather Report,” and “Protect Us and Our Kids from Toxic Chemicals Now” (inspired by Rachel Carson,) the complexity of *Big Green Purse*’s formula for change takes center stage. In each of her overtly political environmental and strategic posts, Diane offers context, a societal problem, and clear action items for her readers. Perhaps the best example of this strategy is found within her October 15th post—connecting the work of 1970s female environmental activist Rachel Carson to the context of “Blog Action Day” and “Breast Cancer Awareness Month.” MacEachern interweaves concerns about the inevitable exposure to toxic chemicals in our daily lives (often unknowingly) with a vision of hope aligned with Rachel Carson’s—depicting a world of “beautiful sounds of children playing, birds singing and mothers and fathers breathing huge sighs of relief because they fought for [a] future that will be healthy and sustainable for our planet as well as their families.”³⁷ Diane divides the flow of her post into four sections: *Why are We Still Threatened*, *How is this Personal*, *How Can You Protect Yourself*, and *Take Action in Washington DC*. In each of her first three sections, this blogging mother puts her eco-blogging peers into conversation with one another—citing their posts on similar topics and worries and playing the role of one-woman “filter bubble.” She points her readers in all of the “right” directions, but leaves them feeling like they have a personal stake in a movement.

In *Why are We Still Threatened*, MacEachern quotes [Stephanie at Good Girl Gone Green](#): “Another way industry perpetuates our exposure to toxic chemicals: by “pinkwashing” products that still contain harmful ingredients... I can’t seem to wrap my head around...these companies promoting their products with the pink ribbon while some of their ingredients are linked to cancer.” In *How is This Personal*, there is the voice of [Janice of Momma Words](#), who says; "I’ve been fighting to get truly healthy for years. I take one step forward to find that 3 other things I’m doing may be affecting not only my health but the genetics I have passed onto my kids. I find it offensive that so many agencies created “to protect us” aren’t doing their job." And finally, in *How Can You Protect Yourself?* Diana MacEachern tells the stories of mothers who garden organically, shift spending to safer products, and sign petitions for legislation like the *Safe Chemicals Act*.³⁸ Harnessing the momentum of these personal environmental pledges, Diane reminds her readers of the need to transition from “protecting yourself at home” to working for larger policy changes. She goes through examples of “stroller brigades” organized by *Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families*, and the necessity of reintroducing the *Safe Chemicals Act* to Congress.³⁹ In the final paragraph of her vendetta against the toxic chemicals permeating our lives, MacEachern offers a one-click action item with her hyperlink to the *Safe Chemicals Act* support petition. Accordingly, her writing becomes linked to tangible political action and the potential civic and environmental engagement of mothers across the United States.

In her attempts to bridge online readership with “digital activism” and (eventually) physical action beyond the blogosphere, Diane MacEachern’s work with *Big Green Purse* is an idealistic example of the “Eco-Mommy Blog.” Unfortunately, her activist-style mantra is not the default in this sphere--attracting a reader base of women who are *already* passionate about environmental issues, rather than attracting those who have not been involved in environmental

or political action in the past. This is the danger of the “filter bubble,”⁴⁰ and the reason why I believe “general” Mommy Blogs hold more potential for political change, despite the fact that their politics are less overt. In Diane’s blog (and those she frequently cites,) it’s easy to feel isolated by a digital “perfect standard”—feeling like one slip of buying corporate or failing to research child’s playground equipment puts a reading Mom into the category of the “problem.” Each of these small “failures” becomes a nagging guilt trip as women dig through the paragraphed pockets of *The Big Green Purse*. Consequently, it makes sense that millions of women are attracted to blogs like Rebecca Woolf’s—daily accounts of life in a “typical” quirky American family with politics worked in around the edges. Woolf’s mission is not to be overtly political, but to ask the right questions. She asks; “What kind of a person will my child grow up to be?” Like *Big Green Purse*, *Girl’s Gone Child* provides action items and product suggestions. However, they are carefully placed and designed to be uncontroversial. These are the politics of “EveryMom.”

“What if...”: Conclusions Combining the Philosophies and Impact of Rebecca Woolf and Diane MacEachern to Build a Blogosphere Ripe for Social Change

Rebecca Woolf is making progress with her emphasis on sustainability as she discusses family size and “green” diaper choice, while Diane MacEachern takes things to the next level and offers a history of environmental policy and rhetoric to bring Mothers into the conversation. However, the most idealistic of Mommy Blogs might merge the notable work and honed strategies of these two women into an ultimately effective online space for social change. In this marrying of theories, the Ecological Citizen that is the Eco Mom incorporates the themes of citizenship (seen in the best “general” Mommy Blogs) explicitly into *parenting*. In the ideal Mommy Blog there are advocacy possibilities linked and explained on local and global scales,

but the blog does not assume that an activist mother will automatically turn out an activist child sensitive to the environmental and social problems of the world. Inside the Dream Mommy Blog, a balance of storytelling and politics is maintained, self and corporate branding is conscientious and consistent, and a strong community blooms. Though the “general” Momosphere may have more potential for social change due to its ability to easily relate, there is no doubt that it could be better (particularly with supplemented strengths from Eco Moms.) Throughout this Conclusion, we’ll examine how writing about natural resources and “getting outside,” systems thinking, and proposed expectations about parenting citizenship values and consumption in the new Millennium can build Mommy Blogging social capital through a unique set of tools—creating a formula for future bloggers to create change on local and global scales.

Getting Outside and Thinking in Systems

In both the Eco Mommy and “general” Mommy Blog spheres, the absence of nature and the outdoors is disturbing. Products are placed and outdoor toxins exposed, but the joys of playing in a backyard or public park rarely grace a home page. What changes take place when Rebecca Woolf writes more about the outdoor experiences of her children (incorporating facts about the environment around them,) and Diane takes the time to tell a simple story about her kids *without* an agenda?

In an anthology of essays titled *Companions in Wonder: Children and Adults Exploring Nature Together*, the responsibility of parents to expose their children to nature is defined as a must—a message that Mommy Bloggers might channel. Harnessing the wonder, joy, and curiosity present in every young child, the authors of *Companions in Wonder* argue for a dismantling of societal barriers to childhood experience in the great outdoors. In the anthology’s introduction, the *citizenship skills* promoted by childhood experiences with nature are

synthesized; “Studies suggest that much as kids need nature, nature needs kids. One U.S. survey found that hiking, camping, and playing in the woods before age eleven had a significant positive effect on attitudes and behaviors in adulthood such as recycling, pro-environment voting, and participation in Earth Day.”⁴¹ By allowing children to explore the natural world around them, we not only offer an important sense of place and get them moving (helping to combat larger societal issues like obesity,) we create expectations for their future civic engagement. Learning to care about a physical space from a very personal perspective, they are more likely to protect it as they grow older. If Mommy Bloggers were to tailor their writing and parenting philosophies with studies like these in mind, we might see a shift in parenting culture akin to the shift in parent consumption made possible through self-branding and conscious corporate sponsorship.

Nature cannot pay for the investment of time made by blogging mothers and their constructed communities, but showcasing these experiences online can move families outdoors—earning not only family memories, but health benefits and implicit values for the next generation. Dismantling the fear that saddles parents in our age of over-information, Mommy Bloggers can weigh the benefits of an afternoon hike in a way that doesn’t feel like a lesson. The toxins that exist on the playground are an important topic to cover and a grounds for political action, but Mommy Bloggers might find a way to find an equilibrium—singing the praises of outdoor work and play while exposing the dangers and environmental injustices hidden beneath the grass (one carefully timed post at a time.) This way, Mommy Bloggers might build their children’s “sense of wonder” through outdoor play and engage parenting politics at the same time.

Via Rachel Carson, an ecologist renowned for her efforts to expose the negative effects of pesticides on the environment and the human population, this childlike “sense of wonder”

could dominate Mommy blog mantra as the most important natural resource (as Carson thoroughly believed.) Bloggers might offer projects and activities to engage this sense of wonder explicitly. Though venues like *Pinterest*,⁴² and the “craft” sector of the Momosphere⁴³ have made the first steps in this direction, much more is possible when it comes to re-introducing creative freedom and natural exploration to a generation of children too confined to the indoors for fear of dangerous exposure to toxic chemicals and violence.

For example, in addition to her legendary 1962 text *Silent Spring*, Carson penned several lesser-known titles focused on the incredible strength of childhood curiousness. In one of these texts, a photograph-filled storybook titled *Sense of Wonder*, Carson chronicles the outdoor experiences shared with her grand-nephew Roger in a way that uses the important practice of “systems thinking” alongside projected values of natural capital. In one poignant scene, Carson acknowledges the present-day barriers to childhood time spent in nature and offers her own set of priorities:

“We have let Roger share our enjoyment of things people ordinarily deny children because they are inconvenient, interfering with bedtime, or involving wet clothing that has to be changed or mud that has to be cleaned off the rug. We have let him join us in the dark living room before the big picture window to watch the full moon riding lower and lower toward the far shore of the bay, setting all the water ablaze with silver flames...I think we have felt that the memory of such a scene, photographed year after year by his child’s mind, would mean more to him in manhood than the sleep he was losing.”⁴⁴

Amidst musings about the culture of convenience we live in (i.e. tips for “time saving” and stories about “being late,”) systems-thinking bloggers could share moments like this one—captivating portraits of the hours that go against accepted parenting advice (i.e. getting the kids to bed early and keeping the house clean.) These are the minutes and days that say the most about parenting philosophy. They are also the most relatable for mothers put off by the “perfect standard” of the “supermom.” Through Rachel Carson and Roger, we see how parenting values of “systems thinking” and “getting outside” combine in one poignant paragraph that sets the

scene for dynamic Mommy Blogs of the future. Carson teaches us that we do not need to be “supermoms,” but parents willing to trust themselves and their instincts and go against the grain and raise children in ways that connect them to the world around them.

Shifting the Market

Beyond “systems thinking” and “getting outside,” the ideal Mommy Blog channels a new kind of parenting citizenship and family “brand” inspired by Ecological Citizen theory. This citizenship and branding might one day redefine consumer systems and thinking. Though Mommy Bloggers have been analyzed at the surface level as self-absorbed, stupid, and motivated by consumerism, my exploration and journey into the Momosphere has led to the conviction that these women are incredibly political. Straying from traditional definitions of “political,” Mommy Bloggers at their most effective work to inform themselves, explore questions, and engage readers. Offering accessible expertise, informed consumer choice, and parenting politics (ranging from discussion of family voting practices and Nintendo game console use, to the lines typed by mothers who become human filters of “green” information,) blogging Moms brand themselves in a way that is *good for politics*. The best of the bloggers charts her sponsoring advertisers carefully. She chooses the images broadcast in her sidebar—writing about the decisions to sign on with the organic baby food company or the research she’s done about an organization whose proceeds are donated to a charity. She makes consumption *conscious*, and she reigns over her own corner of the economic and social market.

Across their home screens, these women become entrepreneurs. From their grooved niches in the virtual realm, they create change in the “real world.” In the most transformative scenarios, these women are paid enough to comfortably support their families. Women like Rebecca Woolf become surveyors of selected investment funds housed in square inches of ad

space and blog post endorsement. In an existence of endless advertising, confounding circles of conflicting opinion, and the constant worry about “who to trust,” the most effective blogging Moms have the ability to unearth the politics of parenting without scaring off audiences. Lisa Belkin of the *New York Times* showcases this political power in her 2011 piece on Mommy Bloggers as she quotes Elisa Camahort Page, a co-founder of ad placement company BlogHer: “[In blogging] at its best we are seeing the empowerment of women... They can turn something they love into something that brings income into their household. But that has to be done with care.”⁴⁵ Beyond the potential Mommy Bloggers hold to turn passion into income, marketers have the ability to play a *conscientious* role in the revenue gain of the Momosphere. Wondering about the untapped potential of the *personalities* of the Mommy Blogging sphere, an article for *Appinion* (an organization centered on free advice for marketing,) stated; “Women bloggers are building incredibly strong platforms and communities but are still not universally respected by brands, PR people and marketers as the marketing partners they often are. Why do PR people...insist on targeting this group as a monolithic whole, rather than as dynamic individuals? And how can brands make better connections to benefit both the brand and the blogger?”⁴⁶ *Appinion*’s staff responded to these questions by developing a guide for Mommy and Parenting Bloggers—recognizing the false stereotype of these writers that often occurs in various forms of media and society at large. As *Appinion* points out, the Momosphere is capable of shifting the market (and perhaps obligated to as well.) These women have demonstrated that they can take a form of media and make it their own. They might do the same with a consumer economy by shaping it to fit their values.

Faced with a constant flood of information and fear fed through news reports, TV interviews, media, and parenting literature, the priorities of parenting are increasingly obscure.

Mommy Bloggers offer understanding perspective to these conundrums, and thus gain the trust of consumers. Parenthood has become (and perhaps it always was) an overwhelming series of serious decisions that come with deceptively simple labels like “lunch,” “playground structure,” “pajamas,” “kitchen floors,” and “good schools.” Being a Super Mom or Dad in a country of convoluted systems, consumer culture, and confusing regulations should be given the same prestige as conducting brain surgery daily. Ideal Mommy bloggers like Rebecca Woolf and Diane MacEachern know this, and they use it to decrease stress, increase systems thinking, and change consumption habits in the lives of their readers.

Putting the Pieces Together

Assembling the “tool box” of great Mommy Blogging we’ve outlined throughout this paper, we turn to another inspirational author—Rachel Carson disciple, Ecological Citizen, and mother Sandra Steingraber. Acknowledging parents’ conflicted flurry of emotions and unwavering duty to serve as advocates for their kids, environmental author Sandra Steingraber published in 2011 an inspiring book of anecdotes, carefully compiled research, and relatable cultural analyses titled *Raising Elijah: Protecting Our Children in an Age of Environmental Crisis*. In her environmentally themed memoir, Steingraber artfully explores staples of American childhood—unpacking the invisible and harrowing consequences of milk, pizza, playgrounds, laundry, and homework. With poetic descriptions of her own journey through motherhood, Sandra Steingraber takes her reader from familiar personal vignettes to the details of phthalate plasticizer and ethylene dichloride production. Steingraber leaves her readers sweating for a dozen pages at a time—realizing the countless carcinogens she has been exposed to in childhood. Steingraber’s rhetoric and message are an extended version of so many of the blog posts in the Momosphere. Pulling the reader in with her relatable (and wonderfully crafted)

storytelling, well-researched facts, and arching convictions, Steingraber's chapters could be blogs with a bit of fine tuning.⁴⁷

Like Steingraber, Mommy Bloggers are reference librarians for the masses as they hyperlink to articles and studies and pieces of pop culture that supplement parenting decisions. Placing the seemingly mundane experiences and physical surfaces of her children's days into the context of larger systems, Steingraber leaves her readers thinking about the unending compromises of parenthood. In this systems-thinking approach to parenting, Steingraber's analyses of playgrounds, grocery lists, and the classroom dynamics inspired by neurotoxicology unveil the complexity of parenting. In each of her accounts, readers are overwhelmed with information, left helpless, and then reeled back into pseudo-comfort with creative solutions invented by Steingraber for her own quirky family. This same trajectory of social change and consciousness is even more possible through the Mommy blog—using the disheartening (and often terrifying) scientific studies that are cited throughout Steingraber's text sparingly, and honing in on the power of telling a great story as a way to establish what makes a "good citizen."

In the Momosphere, the anecdotes and solutions come first—supplemented with photos, humor, and witty turns of phrase. In the Mommy blogs un-devoted to specific issues like environmental activism, the shocking information and social commentary only show up every once in awhile. The systems thinking about sweatshops and equal pay and the future of your children's country is woven between posts that end with smiling birthday party faces and stupid stories about the family dog. And when these issues do show up, they aren't a guilt-trip call to action. Every day, a new post equals a new beginning. Readers are not trapped in the never-ending chapters that remind them just how horrible the world is. Instead, readers of blogging Moms tune in to listen to the hosts they choose in the "Momosphere"—the women they trust to

make them laugh, cry, and find ways to advocate for real issues with just one click or credit card swipe. There are blogging hubs devoted entirely to political action,⁴⁸ and there are bloggers who accidentally invoke a movement.⁴⁹

When Mommy bloggers recognize their position as political parents and storytellers, they create a brand name that incites change without condescending overtones. The mothers who read these Mommy Blogs begin to subtly shift their parenting choices—becoming more conscious of consumer choices, speaking with their children about a pertinent topic, or changing the way they spend “family time.” They buy into a brand without ties to sweatshops or swagger, and they balance hope and fear.

Hope in the Momosphere

Sometimes, realizing the whole picture of the world we inhabit is followed with a feeling of breath-catching helplessness. Defined as “well-informed futility,” Gerhart Wiebe came up with the term for this learned helplessness in 1973 when “television had brought war into the living rooms of Americans for the first time.”⁵⁰ When we are bombarded with depressing statistics and images of our world’s cruelty day in and day out (and our cruelty toward the world,) we become inured. We focus on the simple pleasures and the things we *can* control. We become a society of individuals and nuclear family units. And yet, one woman at a time Mommy Blogs are bringing us together again.

According to risk expert Peter Sandman, “we all instinctively avoid information that triggers intolerable emotions.”⁵¹ We avoid this information, but we need it in order to make decisions that will better the world. Mommy bloggers have the ability to introduce necessary information (particularly about the environment during this age of environmental crisis) in a way that does not result in well-informed futility or “shutting down.” These blogging moms know

they can't be perfect, and this is their appeal. They pick their battles and encourage their readers to do the same. The "Momosphere" makes parenting political because it sparks reflection and reassessment and a desire to *act*. The posts and comments and images depict a new kind of mothering movement that will shape the face of childhood and parenthood for generations to come. Perhaps in the future, the blogosphere of Mothers will develop their own tables of parenting for the common good—moving from the first of the following tables (where I believe "Mommy Blogs" currently stand) to the last (an idealized depiction of what they *could* be.)

Biosphere	Momosphere
Ecosystems	Family Unit/ messy living room
Ecosystem Services	Time Poverty Services, Convenience Services
Organisms	Children (sometimes)
A small world, after all	An endless cyber community, after all
Environments intact	Will the environment exist for my children?
Evolution, Natural Selection	Looking-glass self, survival of the mom who wins over the most advertisers
Life	"the busy life" "the chaotic life" "the happy life" "the bittersweet life"
Waste=food	Waste= A moment uncaptured by camera or computer
Natural cycles= "progress"	Natural cycles=Laundry
Solar Powered	Thinking about solar powered. With an audience.
Self-sustaining	Sustained by commercial culture

Pleasures of Parenting:	
Intensive	Extensive
Storytelling	Telling the story of the world and why/how your child fits in it
Surprise	Reflection and Action
Connection	Inter-connection
Filling a Gap	Fulfilling future hopes
Growth	Direction, Exploration, Purpose

Blogged Values	
Common Sense	Uncommon Sense (What bloggers could be/are at our best)
Family-ism	Activism
Materialism	Market-shifting consumerism
Anthropocentrism	Ecocentrism
Cheapness	Purposeful thrift
Me, the people	We, the citizens (and our citizen children)
Culture of Distraction	Culture of attention (pick one issue, write a series. Expand. Ignite)
Pride	Critical Hope
Humor	Wit and Cultural Satire
Efficiency	Efficacy
Community	A network for agency
Change	Change
Female Voice	A New Feminism (without hatred and stigma)

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End Notes

¹ Woolf, Rebecca. 2012a. "Girl's Gone Child". Blog. *Girl's Gone Child*. Accessed November 14. <http://www.girlsgonechild.net/>.

² Laird, Sam. 2012. "The Rise of the Mommy Blogger [INFOGRAPHIC]." *Mashable*. <http://mashable.com/2012/05/08/mommy-blogger-infographic/>.

³ Woolf, Rebecca. 2012a.

⁴ Hall, Ann, and Mardia Bishop. 2009. *Mommy Angst: Motherhood in American Popular Culture*. Praeger, ix.

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⁶ Throughout this paper, "social change" does not necessarily refer to traditional connotations of Civil Rights movements and large-scale protest/political organization. Rather, it refers to changes in social practices—in both form and content. "Social change" in this sense ranges from daily habit changes to the political action of signing a petition.

⁷ Woolf, Rebecca. 2012c. "Girl's Gone Child: Morning Afterthoughts". Blog. *Girl's Gone Child*. <http://www.girlsgonechild.net/2012/11/morning-afterthoughts.html>.

⁸ "Ecological citizenship deals in the currency of non-contractual responsibility, it inhabits the private as well as the public sphere, it refers to the source rather than the nature of responsibility to determine what count as citizenship virtues, it works with the language of virtue" Dobson, Andrew. *Citizenship and the Environment*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003, 89. For Ecological mothers and children in this paper, this citizenship includes a sense of stewardship for the natural world, conscious consumption habits, and a dedication to marrying expressed and operative values.

⁹ MacEachern, Diane. 2012c. "Environment, Organics, Fair Trade & Recycling at Big Green Purse - Why Big Green Purse." *Why Big Green Purse?* Accessed December 6. http://www.biggreenpurse.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=43#remove.

¹⁰ Throughout this paper, *we* refers to my generation of future parents, mentors, and active citizens. By using *we*, I hope to give my readers a stake in my arguments and exploration—channeling the same "relatability" that makes Mommy Bloggers so powerful.

¹¹ Woolf, Rebecca. 2012a.

¹² "Mary Oliver : The Poetry Foundation." 2010. *Poetry Foundation*. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/mary-oliver>.

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¹⁵ Woolf, Rebecca. 2012a.

¹⁶ Connors, Catherine. 2012. "Her Bad Mother — Bad Is The New Good". Blog. *Her Bad Mother*. Accessed December 8. <http://herbadmother.com/>.

These bloggers include women like Catherine Connors—authoress of HerBadMother.com. Catherine is Editor of Chief at Babble, and approaches motherhood through the eyes of an academic. Within Connors' "about" section, it is revealed that "She writes, sometimes, about surviving motherhood, sometimes about surviving womanhood, sometimes about trying to make the world a better place, and more often than not about her belief that bad is, really, the new good." Like Woolf, Connors is careful about the way she crafts her online identity of expertise. She begins her constructed profile with her intentions of positive change and community-building. She tells her story as a woman and a mother, and utilizes the blog format as a sort of manifesto. However, despite her varied intro, Connors goes on to tell her readers that her name also graced the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star, the American Prospect, and the London Times. Connors was even ranked among Babbles "Funniest," "Most Controversial," "Most Confessional," and "Most Popular" blogs on Babble.

¹⁷ The sector of the blogosphere devoted to the diverse voices of Mothers and their many passions and insights.

¹⁸ Woolf, Rebecca. 2012a. The lengthy text of that first entry recounts an adventure with her 4-month old son to a record store. Rebecca deems herself a "hip" mom and takes pride in her "punk rock baby." She dresses her son in clothes consistent with her sculpted persona, and she gives him an identity. When he pukes on the records, she doesn't clean it up. The little guy is integrated into the entertaining narrative as a baby standing up to "the man."

¹⁹ Connors, Catherine. 2012. From the Elementary classroom to the adult responsibility of voting in the adult world of democracy, Connors urges her readers to think in concentric circles. Making these leaps and using her blog as an expertly crafted op-ed piece, Connors discusses her daughter's responsibility as she says; "[My daughter] wants to be Class Secretary because she says, she wants to help...That's no small thing. And it applies as much to voting as it does to running for office: voting is how we, as citizens, contribute to the work of public decision-making. It's how we help democratic government run the way that it's supposed to...It's how we make a difference...[voting] is the core. It's our right – but it's also our responsibility. It's how we keep democracy alive."

²⁰ Armstrong, Heather. 2012. "Dooce® | I'm Heather B. Armstrong. This Is My Website." Blog. *Dooce*. Accessed December 9. <http://dooce.com/>.

Across years and archived entries, *Dooce* grew up. She traced the jumps from web design and single apartment life to becoming a wife and experiencing the first bout of morning sickness.

After giving birth to her first child, she wrote openly about postpartum depression. She found her niche. Her audience grew, and her advertisements sold like wildfire. Her husband became her manager. *Dooce* supported her family by blogging. Virtual and real worlds blurred, this was new terrain. She became a *professional*, and claims that the Internet (and blogging) completely changed her life. Maybe even saved it.

²¹ Stone, Catherine. 2012. "Postpartum Depression | Postpartum Progress | the Best Help & Hope for Moms". Blog. *Postpartum Progress*. Accessed December 9. <http://www.postpartumprogress.com/>.

²² Bielanko, Monica. 2012. "The Girl Who - She Said..." Blog. *The Girl Who*. Accessed December 9. <http://thegirlwho.net/>.

²³ Drummond, Ree. 2012. "The Pioneer Woman | Ree Drummond." *The Pioneer Woman*. Accessed December 9. <http://thepioneerwoman.com/>. Drummond also offers advice and perspective in categories like Homeschooling, Entertainment, Home & Garden, Cooking, and Confessions. Her blog is an instruction manual to the ideal rural lifestyle.

²⁴ Inglis, Kate. 2012. "Kate Inglis - Sweet | Salty". Blog. *Sweet Salty*. Accessed December 9. <http://www.kateinglis.com/>.

Inglis defines herself as a "storyteller" and "portraitist." Her writing plays on stream of consciousness and is often self-deprecating. She is a mother with scribbled journals, thousands of photographs, and a children's book called *The Dead Crew: Pirates of the Backwoods*.

²⁵ Today, Rebecca Woolf has an entire section of her blog category "Politics & Parenting." In these archives are the posts she has written with "tags" ranging from "feminism" to "bullying," "violence," and "population control." She continues to make complexity and the citizenship of parenthood a priority, but is wooed by corporate dollars too. For example, Chase Banking sponsored Woolf's post on bullying. Woolf, Rebecca. 2012a.

²⁶ "Babble.com - For a New Generation of Parents." 2012. *Babble*. Accessed November 28. <http://www.babble.com/>.

A multimedia "platform dedicated to honest, engaged, informed, intelligent and open conversation about parenting." This blogger hub and marketing superpower is owned by *Disney*.

²⁷ Woolf, Rebecca. 2012b. "Girl's Gone Child: Game Night! Prep Squad (Sponsored + Sweepstakes)". Blog. *Girl's Gone Child*. Accessed November 28. <http://www.girlsgonechild.net/2012/11/game-night-prep-squad-sponsored.html>.

²⁸ Woolf, Rebecca. 2012c. "Girl's Gone Child: Says the Hummer in the Land of the Hybrid". Blog. *Girl's Gone Child*. Accessed November 28. <http://www.girlsgonechild.net/2011/11/says-hummer-in-land-of-hybrid.html>.

²⁹ Popova, Maria. 2012. "The Filter Bubble: How the Web Gives Us What We Want, and That's Not a Good Thing | Brain Pickings." *Brain Pickings*. Accessed December 9. <http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2011/05/12/the-filter-bubble/>.

The “filter bubble” is a term coined by Eli Pariser, founder of the advocacy group MoveOn.org. Pariser defines the “bubble” as an “invisible algorithmic editing on the web, a world where we’re being shown more of what algorithms think we *want* to see and less of what we *should* see.”

³⁰ In one rare example found in the top ten “general” bloggers, one Mommy Blogger has made the decisions to go “ad-free.” *SweetSalty* (aka Kate Inglis.) On the main page of her blog there is a paragraph that reads: “Please do not email me for real estate on this website: ad space, reviews, or giveaways. I don’t do that, and never will, so don’t ask. To the wholly unconnected marketing machine: consider this the snarling dogs on my front porch. To everyone else: a smile.”

³¹ MacEachern, Diane. 2012a. “Environment, Organics, Fair Trade & Recycling at Big Green Purse.” *Big Green Purse: Environment, Organics, Fair Trade & Recycling*. Accessed December 7. <http://greenwoman.typepad.com/biggreenpurse/>.

³² MacEachern, Diane. 2012b. “Environment, Organics, Fair Trade & Recycling at Big Green Purse - About Diane.” *About Diane: Big Green Purse*. Accessed December 6. http://www.biggreenpurse.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=15&Itemid=44.

³³ Aufochs Gillespie. 2012. “Welcome to the Green Mama | The Green Mama.” *The Green Mama*. Accessed December 13. <http://www.thegreenmama.com/>.

Colwell-Lipson, Corey, and Lynn Colwell. 2012. “Celebrate Green Home”. Blog. *Celebrate Green!* Accessed December 13. <http://www.celebrategreen.net/>.

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Amongst these product-centered voices: *The Green Mama*, “a blog that helps “families and business go green, worry less, and save money” *EcoKaren*, a blog centered on “green” crafts and DIY projects that save money and reduce a family’s carbon footprint, *Groovy Green Livin*, a blog and company devoted to “eco-wellness consulting for business, schools, homes, and individuals; and inspiration for a greener lifestyle,” *Celebrate Green!*, a blog focused on making family holiday celebrations “greener,” and *Girlie Girl Army: Your Glamazon Guide to Green Living*, a blog built to show its readers all of the things a Mommy can buy and still call herself “green.”

Though several of these bloggers attempt to bring environmental ethics into the conversation, the primary focus for all is on the benefits of thrift and socially responsible identity through material goods in the “green movement.” These Mothers spend most of their space discussing premium products that are easier on a Mother’s pocketbook, and beneficial for the environment. In some ways, this is a form of “green consumerism.” The blogs are filled with advertisements, but

(sometimes) try to encourage behavior change. As was true with *Girl's Gone Child*, advertisers have the ability to skew post content. In these examples, only a handful of many, it is clear how many specialized interests make their way into one sector of the Momosphere. This paper chooses to focus on Diane MacEachern and *Big Green Purse* because she moves beyond “green consumption” to focus on the ethics of the environmental movement through the lens of parenting.

³⁴ MacEachern, Diane. 2012c. “Environment, Organics, Fair Trade & Recycling at Big Green Purse - Why Big Green Purse.” *Why Big Green Purse?* Accessed December 6. http://www.biggreenpurse.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=43#remove.

³⁵ MacEachern, Diane. 2012a. “Environment, Organics, Fair Trade & Recycling at Big Green Purse.” *Big Green Purse: Environment, Organics, Fair Trade & Recycling*. Accessed December 7. <http://greenwoman.typepad.com/biggreenpurse/>.

³⁶ MacEachern, Diane. 2012a. “Environment, Organics, Fair Trade & Recycling at Big Green Purse.” *Big Green Purse: Environment, Organics, Fair Trade & Recycling*. Accessed December 7. <http://greenwoman.typepad.com/biggreenpurse/>.

³⁷ MacEachern, Diane. 2012d. “Protect Us and Our Kids from Toxic Chemicals Now! - Environment, Organics, Fair Trade & Recycling at Big Green Purse.” *Big Green Purse: Environment, Organics, Fair Trade & Recycling*. Accessed December 7.

³⁸ MacEachern, Diane. 2012d.

³⁹ MacEachern, Diane. 2012d.

⁴¹ Dunlap, Jim. 2012. *Companions in Wonder: Children and Adults Exploring Nature Together*. MIT Press, 8.

⁴² “Pinterest / What Is Pinterest?” 2012. Accessed December 9. <http://pinterest.com/about/>.

According to Pinterest’s “About” information, the site acts as a space to “organize and share all the beautiful things you find on the web. People use pinboards to plan their weddings, decorate their homes, and organize their favorite recipes.

Best of all, you can browse pinboards created by other people. Browsing pinboards is a fun way to discover new things and get inspiration from people who share your interests.” Interestingly enough, the “etiquette” section of the information site states; “Be Authentic. Pinterest is an expression of who you are. We think being authentic to who you are is more important than getting lots of followers. Being authentic will make Pinterest a better place long-term.”

If *Pinterest* (and Mommy Blogs) took this mission of “authenticity” and ran with it, the Internet might open up even further as a space to share ideas that can change the culture of parenting and citizenship (shifting from “pins” of stylish clothes to personal photographs of “ideals.”

⁴³ “EcoKaren: Smart Green Living Tips & Sustainable Handmade Life.” 2012. Blog. *EcoKaren*.

Accessed December 9. <http://www.ecokaren.com/>.

i.e. *EcoKaren*. a blog whose author says; “My philosophy is that you don’t have to be too drastic or radical but try to do one ecologically responsible thing each day. And what’s better? You’ll save money in the long run and feel great while doing it.” *EcoKaren* features the author’s crafty work (independently sold online through *Etsy*,) Green Living Tips, DIY tutorials, and healthy recipes.

⁴⁴ Carson, Rachel. 1998. *The Sense of Wonder*. Harper, 22.

⁴⁵ Belkin, Lisa. 2011. “Heather Armstrong, Queen of the Mommy Bloggers - NYTimes.com.” *New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/27/magazine/27armstrong-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

⁴⁶ “Why Targeting Mommy Bloggers Is a Broken Outreach Model | Appinions.” 2012. *Appinions*. <http://appinions.com/whitepapers/why-targeting-mommy-bloggers-is-a-broken-outreach-model/?gclid=CMr63dq3i7QCFeZDMgodWAMA8g>.

⁴⁷ Steingraber. 2011. *Raising Elijah: An Ecologist’s Journey to Motherhood*. Da Capo Press.

⁴⁸ “Momsrising: Momsrising.” 2012. *Momsrising.org: Where Moms and People Who Love Them Go to Change Our World*. Accessed November 14. <http://www.momsrising.org/>.

For example, *Momsrising.org* acts as a shared space for concerned parents and parent bloggers. The website and blog features daily action items, information, and petitions divided into interest areas of **M**aternity and **P**aternity Leave, **O**pen Flexible Work, **T**oxins, **H**ealth Care for All, **E**arly Childhood Education, **R**ealistic Wages, and **S**ick Days, **P**aid (MOTHERS.) This online “hub” connects women and parents with similar passions—engaging them politically.

⁴⁹ Kamin, Mir. 2012. “Making Lemonade, Darn It. Tampon Lemonade! | Woulda Coulda Shoulda”. Blog. *Woulda Coulda Shoulda*. Accessed December 9. <http://wouldashoulda.com/2012/07/23/making-lemonade-darn-it-tampon-lemonade/>.

When her daughter was admitted to a mental health facility, blogger Mir Kamin wrote a series of posts about the experience from the perspective of a worried and protective Mom. When her daughter had her toiletries stolen again and again by her peers, Kamin wrote about it. When she determined that many of these troubled girls were not receiving brand name bathroom products from their own families as her daughter was (and were consequently jealous of the “special treatment” as they continued using label-less hospital products,) Kamin wrote about it. She thanked her followers and readers for their great outpouring of sympathy, and told them to channel it into something productive—shipped toiletries. Kamin made this movement easy. She pasted links from *amazon.com* to the products of choice, and set up a PO box a few blocks from her home. Hundreds of boxes came in over the next few weeks. Boxes of shampoo, deodorant, and tampons. Kamin dropped them off at the hospital’s front desk anonymously, and her daughter was no longer picked on.

In Mir Kamin's blog post, we see a proactive blogger who identified a need, called on a community to respond, and a response that created *social change*.

⁵⁰ Steingraber, Sandra. 2011, 46.

⁵¹ Steingraber, Sandra. 2011, 47.