

LOOKING BEYOND: A STUDY OF BLOGGING AND WHAT IT TELLS US ABOUT
OCCUPATIONS.

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ABSTRACT

Sumita Rege: Looking beyond: a study of blogging and what it tells us about occupations.
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The growing ubiquity of the Internet has changed the way we conduct many of our meaningful activities, occupations, today. Despite the changes in technology, human needs haven't changed as radically, we still need connection, involvement, information and avenues of expression, but what has changed are the myriad ways in which we do those things. Blogging is an emergent transformative internet-mediated occupation that is used for all of these purposes and has become popular over the last two decades. As an occupational scientist I continue to be fascinated by the almost viral nature of blogging and the consequences it has on other occupations we do.

This exploratory ethnography using an occupational science perspective sought to understand the practice of blogging which is being constructed and transmitted within an essentially social setting. The participants in the study were a diverse group of 34 individuals, including Americans and Indians residing in U.S. and India. All participants engaged in general everyday activities of blogging in various capacities as bloggers, readers or commenters. Participant observation, long-term immersion, document analysis, individual and group interviews were techniques employed to gather data over a period of 15 months. Data were analyzed using multiple iterative methods and inductive coding.

The findings of this ethnography challenged many taken-for-granted assumptions in occupational science including the understanding that occupations exist in isolation as discrete acts. Three major findings discussed in the dissertation include: fluidity of occupations, participation in occupations and serendipity of change and creativity. Concepts from the occupational science literature such as co-occupation and participation are problematized and further theoretical solutions are offered using transactional perspectives to occupation. It is suggested that rather than a dichotomous view of technology and individuals as interacting with each other, these should be viewed as co-determining, co-constitutive forces of occupations. Implications and future directions for Occupational Science research are discussed in terms of internet-mediated activities.

Dedication: This dissertation is dedicated to my Family and Gurus, all who taught me so much along this journey and believed in me.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

I am fascinated by the Internet and how it mediates so many aspects of people's lives. During my time as a graduate student in a foreign country, the Internet has been my savior many times over. Having access to the Internet helps me to look for any kind of information, keep in touch with family and friends in my home country, learn about a new country and its culture, and decide where/how to shop, in addition to academic work. Such has been the dominance of the Internet in my life that not being connected to it is one of my worst nightmares. For most of us in the Internet-connected world, the Internet mediates many of our occupations (e.g., banking, socializing, shopping etc.). As humans, connectedness is one major reason for using the Internet; and the most common way to do so is through social media (i.e., Internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content). Social media include a range of applications like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and others. Web-logs, also known as blogs, were among the first social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010); as such they set trends for newer media.

Blogging is a medium for and a practice of communication that enables production of content that is accessible to anybody who happens to find it. Blogs have been variously defined by different authors, but Mortensen and Walker's (2002) definition comprehensively covers all aspects of a blog as "...frequently updated websites, usually personal with commentary and links. A blog consists of many updated, relatively short posts, usually time-

stamped and organized in reverse chronology so that the reader will always see the most recent post first” (p. 249). Blogs have been around since the 1990s and became very popular in the mid-2000s. Exact figures for the number of blogs are not available, but according to one estimate they have risen from 23 in 1998 (Dean, 2010) to 156 million as of February 2011 (Wikipedia, n.d.). The number of bloggers rose exponentially with the development of blog-hosting websites, such as Live Journal and Blogger in the 2000s (Rettberg, 2008). The blogging explosion continues to feed the trend of multiple interconnected blogs that exist in the blogosphere, today, with information that anyone can potentially find and connect with. The ubiquity of the Internet in daily activities and blogging, in particular, intrigues me as a budding occupational scientist seeking a better understanding of things people do. Occupational science emerged as a discipline more than two decades ago to study human activity in differing contexts. Occupations are meaningful activities humans do, to occupy time and space. These activities include a range from the daily mundane activities like eating, dressing, grooming to the more novel activities like kayaking or even scaling Mount Everest. For occupational scientists, the unit of analysis is occupations, the everyday and exceptional things people do. The internet and all the media it has spawned offer a fascinating avenue to understand and theorize more about human activities. The level of connectivity blogging offers is particularly fascinating. I have been able to link with people all over the world through what they write on their blogs; whether it is the blogger in Europe who shares a do-it-yourself project using melted crayon art or a cousin who writes about the financial markets in India or a blogger in New Jersey whose recipe substitution ideas bring comfort food within reach for me. The act of blogging was the primary focus of the study.

1.1. Review of Literature

In keeping with the proposed ideas of the dissertation, specifically to understand more about Internet-mediated occupations, the following brief literature review is related to the two primary topics of interest for the study, occupational science and blogging, and develops additional strands for each. The first is a critique of Occupational Science literature to situate this study while the second part of this section deals with blogging, the occupation which is the focus of the research.

1.1.1. Occupational Science.

The central concept of occupational science is occupations, yet what occupations are is hotly contested and no single definition has been unanimously accepted in the literature. A cursory review of the OS literature for a definition of occupation brings up interesting terms such as “meaning” (Hasselkus, 2002), “temporal” (Hocking, 2000), “purposeful” (Wilcock, 2006), “culturally defined” (Clark, 1991), and “occupational form and performance” (Nelson, 1988). Occupations have been variously defined as “chunks of activities that are named in the lexicon of culture” (Yerxa et al., 1989) and “occupation as doing, being and becoming” (Wilcock, 2006). Critiques of Occupational Science’s shortcomings in its view of occupations as being culturally limited and a minority world-view (Iwama, 2006) and individualistic (Dickie, Cutchin & Humphry, 2006) have previously been offered. The focus of the Occupational Science literature is heavily tilted towards a study of humans as occupational beings rather than a study of occupations only. Yet there are some scholars who have encouraged the study of occupations in their own right including Hocking (2000, 2009) and Dickie (2003, 2010). However, most studies of occupation tend to rely mainly on interviews as a way to gather data. Dickie (2010) has suggested that relying only on

interviews may prevent occupational scientists from getting a fuller picture of occupations. For blogging, however, the presence of the almost-permanent observable artifact of blogging and the connections in the blogosphere enabled me to conduct a research study that incorporated various ways to gather research data rather than an exclusive reliance on interviews.

Given that blogging is a relatively new occupation without a significant multi-generational history (unlike other commonly studied occupations such as cooking, quilting, dancing, etc.), it is a uniquely situated occupation through which to understand practices that develop in an essentially social context. Transformations that occur within an occupation are rarely touched upon in the occupational science literature, with the exception of a few studies of cooking in multiple cultures (Hocking, Wright-St. Clair, & Bunrayong, 2002) and one theoretical article (Russell, 2008) that attempted to trace historical changes in tagging. Internet-mediated occupations such as blogging are relatively novel and without a long history and tradition, so they take on an emergent form as different people engage in the activity, shaping the production, and share the content. How these changes occur or what these changes are, are not clear at this point. This is also a potential lacuna which a study of a newer occupation such as blogging, which has developed through technological advances and globalization, could contribute to and thereby broaden our understanding of changes that are occurring in other occupations.

As I have emphasized, because consensus on what occupations are is inadequate, only a few papers (Dickie, 2010; Hocking 2009) in the occupational science literature discuss how occupations can be studied. At the time I was beginning course work in occupational science, Hocking's (2009) work on parameters to study occupations had just been published. Not only

was I struck by her approach of answering questions based on the parameters, but this particular work has also continued to be influential in terms of how I began my dissertation and the questions I thought the current study could answer. In the paper, in which she described the things people do, Hocking proposed a strand of occupational science research dedicated to generating knowledge of occupation, rather than a focus on people's engagements in occupation, and suggested nine parameters for the investigation of occupations:

- capacities, knowledge and skills required for participation
- who participates and what is done
- rules, norms or processes governing participation
- where and when participation occurs and what resources are used
- regularity, duration, tempo, and steps involved
- history of an occupation
- the function and outcome of an occupation and the kinds of meanings it holds
- the sociocultural, political, economic, geographic and historical context of an occupation
- how occupations influence health

Of these, I chose to focus on who participates and what is done, where and when participation occurs and the resources that are used, and the kind of meanings the particular occupation of blogging has for the people who participate in it, the history of blogging, and the context in which it takes place. Appendix A lists the guiding questions for the current study, which are based on these parameters.

1.1.2. Research about Blogging and what it tells us about the activity.

In this sub-section, I first provide a brief history of blogging to foreground why blogging was selected as the focus of study and to set the context for the study. This history is followed by a brief section on the literature about how blogging has been thought of and researched. Although this literature review is necessarily brief, I will weave more of the literature into the dissertation text where it is relevant to the findings.

1.1.2.1. History of blogging. Numerous versions of the history of blogging are available. For the following account I referred to multiple sources (Blood, 2000; Cheever (n.d.); Dean, 2010; Myers, 2010; Rosenberg, 2009) and include widely accepted facts regarding blogging history. Blogs emerged out of the Internet environment of the late 1990s. As Dean (2010) stated, blogs at that time were more like “a special effect of software” (p. 41) that involved the networked practices of storing and linking. In 1997, Rebecca Blood (cited by Myers, 2010) traced the origin of “links with commentary, with the new stuff on top” (p. 16) to various website designers, but it was Jorn Barger (1998) who gave these the name *weblog*. Peter Merholz punned this to *we blog*, which became the term *blog*. In 1999 two small software companies, Pitas and Pyras, produced tools that made it easy for users unfamiliar with HTML (hypertext mark-up language) coding to produce such sites from their browsers. HTML inserts characters that enable users to write texts that can be read on any browser, on any machine, with the same sort of format; it doesn’t require any special software to be installed on computers. This software made blogging accessible beyond the community of systems designers and “techies”, to people who began using blogs for such purposes as special interest groups (e.g., recipe sites), personal diaries, political commentaries, movie reviews, photo sharing, and so forth.

The first blogs, which were logs of websites, functioned as signposts left by a previous navigator to those who might want to follow his or her path and trace links (Dean, 2010). The compiler of the list, the blogger, presented links to sites or articles he or she found particularly noteworthy. What made such a list most useful was the blogger's commentary, which included a description of the site or explanation as to why a given link was included. Commentary was the value-added new content that made a blog worth visiting and allowed blog readers to know if they could trust the blogger. Blogging picked up slowly over the next few years but the real explosion started in 1999 and 2000 with sites such as Live Journal and Blogger. These sites offered free blog hosting and accessible blogging technology to everyone who was interested in having their say in the blogging world. Currently many blog hosting websites are available; the most active are Wordpress and Blogger.

1.1.1.2. Research about blogging. Blogging is, first and foremost, a medium for the practice of communication. The first bloggers usually provided succinct commentaries along with hyperlinks that made it simple for readers to trace the original sources of the posts. With time, the potential for connectivity of the time stamp and permalink formats of blogging software was recognized and utilized as a means to help develop relationships and allow for human connectedness to grow and flourish (Dean, 2010).

Initial research about blogs looked at making sense of the activity such as a replacement for traditional media or as tools for teaching. Early research focused on classifying blogs into categories (Herring, Lois, Sabrina, & Elijah, 2004), discussing how blogs were similar to online diaries (Karlson, 2004; Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004), listing the features of blogging (Scoble & Israel, 2006), identifying conventions of blogging (Wakeford, 2004), identifying motivations to blog (Pedersen, 2010), identifying blogs as

educational tools (Williams & Jacobs, 2004), discussing blogs as a community of practice (Dennen, 2009), identity and self-presentation using Goffman's theories (Hogan, 2010) and analyzing blogs in terms of social networking (Schmidt, 2007), among other topics. Today, blogs are not considered to have an isolated online presence; instead, as Jurgenson (2012) proposed, the online and offline could be viewed as enmeshed. This exciting idea of the coming together of online and offline signals a significant shift in thinking about Internet-mediated activities but has not been fully explicated.

Another intriguing concept proposed by Toffler (as cited by Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), prosumption, is finding increasing support among Internet researchers (because the participatory nature of the Internet has translated into opportunities for the consumer to also become a producer of content, the term "prosumption" is favored over "consumption"). In addition, Web 2.0 is considered to be one of the most participatory inventions of recent times. Its implication for blogging is that individuals can now not just read (consume) blogs but can also contribute to their production (producers) through technology that enables comments and linking. These ideas of the enmeshing of the online-offline and producer-consumer made the idea of studying blogging as an occupation fascinating as they provided a distinctive opportunity to study an occupation which straddled the online and offline in unique ways.

1.1.3. Some Conclusions from This Literature Review.

Occupations like blogging that are relatively new and do not have a long history attached to them provide a unique avenue to study occupations. Studying human doing as restricted to a particular medium or as a difference between production and consumption are dichotomous ways of thinking which may limit how action can be studied. Blogging which is

a relatively new and emergent occupation is not limited by how scholars have theorized it and thus provides an avenue to explore and understand the relatively under-theorized and under-studied internet occupations.

This study was partly prompted by Dickie's (2003) call for studying occupations in their entirety rather than only as individuals' experience of them. Studying blogging from the perspective of mediation of technology and socio-historical contexts brought a novel perspective to my research and will help expand the occupational science literature. Furthermore, this project is among the first in-depth studies to be conducted about the Internet through an occupational lens, which potentially provides an avenue for further studies of a medium that is here to stay and through which people conduct a growing number of activities. The approach to the study of blogging as proposed in this dissertation will generate significant understandings about occupations and the linkages of occupations between online and offline while also helping us to look beyond what is traditionally accepted about occupations.

1.2. Purpose of Study

The reason for conducting this study was to develop a nuanced understanding of the situational nature of occupations that interpenetrate the online and offline. The findings from this study add to the growing discourse about theories of occupations and develop further understandings about occupations by studying blogging, which is a relatively new occupation and can be considered an exemplar of the participatory Internet-mediated occupations. The primary purpose of this proposed exploratory study was to understand the practice of blogging from an occupational perspective and to explicate some popular occupational science concepts.

1.3. Conclusion

As a practicing occupational therapist, I was often asked, “What do you do?” Any answer I gave seemed inadequate, because I never felt as if I could do justice to the term “occupation.” This uncertainty was part of what pushed me to pursue my doctoral project to understand the complexity of occupations. In addition, almost everyone I know has used social media in some form; this growing popularity of social media further inspired me to take on the challenge of studying an occupation that I think plays an important role in the lives of people who are connected by the Internet. As previously mentioned blogging is a popular online activity and has been credited with popularizing many characteristics of social media (e.g., posts that are visible in reverse chronology, back-tracks and links, etc.). Blogs can be used by anyone with an Internet connection and they are inherently interactive. This interactive nature of the blogosphere and the practices and procedures surrounding blogging constitute a fascinating avenue by which to explore many underdeveloped concepts in occupational science, including participation, change in occupations, and more.

The ideas with which I began this research have undergone numerous changes; these were driven mainly by the differences between what I expected and what I found, as well as the literature about blogging and occupations. My ideas about occupations and how occupational scientists conceive them underwent dramatic changes that made this journey of “dissertating” exciting albeit challenging.

1.4. Organization of Chapters

In the next chapter, I provide a description of the theoretical perspectives that framed this study. In the third chapter, I describe my selection of the methodology and a brief outline of the pilot study that preceded the full dissertation research. In Chapter 3 I also talk about

the ethnographic approach used in the study and the concerns that arose in terms of the study questions and methods, and provide an overview of the analysis process. In Chapter 4, I describe the individuals who participated in the study to provide a context for the findings. In Chapter 5, I present the major findings from the study and also situate the findings in the OS literature to problematize commonly-used OS concepts. In Chapter 6, I discuss the findings in terms of the transactional perspective. In Chapter 7, I conclude with the implications and limitations of the current study.

Chapter 2

Theoretical orientation

Like all research, this study is structured in terms of theoretical constructs. In my case, in addition to my disciplinary background of occupational science, these theoretical constructs are influenced by the sensibilities I have developed through being an occupational therapist. The first signs of this influence became obvious when I stepped into the blogosphere wearing a researcher's hat; I was intrigued by blogs that were about "doing" everyday activities, not others with clearly defined topics (e.g., politics, information, finance, etc.). As I reflected on this preference, I realized that my interest in blogs about daily, mundane activities was connected with being an occupational therapist. However, it took me a while to understand this slant on how I think of occupations; when I did understand it, I realized that my particular viewpoint about research was significantly a product of my training both as an occupational therapist and an occupational scientist.

The purpose of this chapter is to delineate the theoretical underpinnings for this research and how they developed (a more detailed application of these concepts will be presented in the Chapter 6). As previously mentioned, blogging has been studied in numerous disciplines, through a variety of theoretical lenses, but my unique approach meant that I had an opportunity to contribute a previously unexplored way of thinking about it. My perspective was one that focused on the act of blogging, including but not limited to what the blogger or reader does and the artifact of the occupation (i.e., the blog itself). In this chapter,

descriptions of my understanding of occupation and the occupational lens are followed by a brief description of the transactional perspectives as related to this study on blogging.

2.1. What is occupation?

As an occupational therapist, I am fascinated by activities of daily living—those routine activities we perform daily. It has not ceased to amaze me that activities like blogging, of whose existence people were unaware until about two decades ago, are today firmly entrenched as a part of these routines. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, there is no clear consensus even among occupational therapists and scientists about a definition for occupation. Therefore, I must now discuss what I mean when I use the word occupation, in order to provide an understanding of this concept before proceeding with details of my research.

During the time that I was training to become an occupational therapist in India, my colleagues and I relied on the available Western literature, in the form of American and British textbooks. The conflict between the individualistic theories of occupation promulgated by these books and the collectivistic culture I grew up in became obvious as I began my occupational therapy practice. For instance, when thinking of activities meaningful to clients, no activity ever occurred in isolation without the involvement of others or as a continuation of another activity. This struggle to reconcile what I was taught about occupations and how I experienced occupations led me to view the traditional, individualistic occupational science/occupational therapy theories of occupation with skepticism. Therefore, when I came across Dickie, Cutchin and Humphry's (2006) conceptualization of "occupation as extending beyond a single person's experience to encompass others and the social,

physical and cultural context” (p. 85), I felt an immediate sense of connection with that understanding.

To elaborate on how I see this conceptualization as fitting with my thinking about occupation, I offer the well-known example from the occupational science literature about occupations as personally meaningful (Pierce, 2001), which implies that such meanings are static as well as individualistic. While I agree that any occupation has to be meaningful to an individual to engage in, my understanding of this meaning is that it neither resides in the individual nor remains unchanged. Instead, it evolves over time and is negotiated through participation in the act. This participation is in turn shaped by and shapes the socio-cultural forces involved in the occupation; thus, occupation is rarely, if ever, individual in nature (Humphry, 2005; Dickie, et al 2006). The meaning of occupation develops through “doing” and, as Cutchin (2004) observed, doing the occupation can itself be the “end” of the occupation rather than there being separate means and ends. Thus, for this study I came to rely on Cutchin, Aldrich, Bailliard, and Coppola’s (2008) definition of occupation as “a type of relational action through which habit, context, and creativity are coordinated toward a provisional yet particular meaningful outcome that is always in process” (p. 164).

2.2. The Occupational Lens

Occupational scientists are largely concerned with studying the occupations of the everyday; yet, the focus of much of the research in occupational science has been on the human as an occupational being. As I mentioned Chapter 1, Hocking (2009) and Dickie (2003, 2010) have been leaders of the recent movement in which occupational scientists are encouraged to conduct studies of occupation rather than to focus on the human as an occupational being; in addition, they have provided examples of how to conduct this type of

research. The approaches they advocate suggest that, in contrast to a focus on the individual or the context in which the individual acts, the occupational lens will enable a look at the “doing of occupation.”

Although Laliberte Rudman, Hebert, and Reid (2005) stated that “a comprehensive understanding of occupation and its enablement demands that we take on the responsibility of conducting research framed within an occupational perspective” (p. 150), no consensus has been reached among occupational scientists about what the occupational perspective is. Recently, Njelsani, Tang, Jonsson, and Polatajko (2012) conducted a review of how the occupational perspective has been defined in the occupational science literature; after pointing out that there was no one universally accepted way to define the occupational perspective, they offered a new definition of the occupational perspective as “a way of looking at or thinking about human doing” (p. 8).

I will expand on the work of these researchers to more comprehensively describe the occupational lens. For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to describe the occupational lens as one that enabled me to look at the occupation itself: its requirements and demands, the available resources to support individuals or groups who engage in it, the context in which it occurs, and the factors that prompt engagement in it. A study of occupation however, is not possible without the people who participate in the occupation. Therefore, the occupational lens I am using does not emphasize or dismiss either the individuals involved in the occupation or the doing of it but provides equal weight to both. In a sense, this study is co-constitutive of the doing as well as the humans who do and what is being achieved through that doing.

Having realized that to study an occupation meant I would have to “embrace occupation in all its rich, situated messy complexity” (Hocking, 2012, p. 62), I began to be assailed by doubts about how I was going to do that and what did it really mean to do that. I wondered whether it was just the doing that should be the main focus or whether the study should include the factors that go into the doing, as well as how I could do justice to a study of blogging that focused on the individuals who engaged in the occupation and the context in which it occurred. These thoughts and reflections pushed me to look for a theoretical perspective that took them into consideration not as separate entities but as a whole—not as an aggregate of discrete elements but rather as an unorganized and self-organizing system of parts in which each part is defined by its relations to other parts and to the whole (Overton, 2006).

Therefore, to avoid overlooking these various concepts and ideas, I searched for theoretical perspectives that would enable me to study the complexities of the occupation while allowing for a suspension of judgment on various forms of boundaries and engagement with the situations that would arise. At the time I conceived of this study, I was using a socio-historical perspective to study occupations; aside from the transactional perspective that helped me to define occupations, I was also influenced by communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and mediated action theories (Wertsch, 1998). However, as the study progressed, my reliance on the latter perspectives gradually diminished, as I will discuss in Chapter 6, and I came to think of the study as mostly dominated by the transactional perspective. In other words, after deep reflections and debriefing with my advisor and other committee members, I have returned to an almost exclusive reliance on the transactional perspective (Dickie,

Cutchin, & Humphry, 2006). I use this perspective to define occupation; moreover, it is the foundational theoretical idea on which this study is based.

2.3. Transactional Perspectives of Occupation

This perspective was proposed by Dickie, Cutchin, and Humphry (2006) as a way to think about occupations. It is a relational theory that highlights occupation as a functional relationship that joins the individual and the environment (Cutchin & Dickie, 2013) and views the organism in environment as whole, thereby overcoming the dualism of separation between person and environment (Dickie et al.2006). Accordingly, analyses of individual occupational engagement can never be conducted in isolation from the situational elements within which an individual transacts. In terms of blogging and the complex interconnected elements involved in that process, this approach suggests a focus on the relationship between these elements and offers a holistic view that emphasizes the study of that relationship.

Focusing on the singular aspect of a situation means that the complex whole—including the richness, multiplicity and complexity of influential factors that shape activity—is likely to be covered (Dickie et al.2006). If research remains focused on just the blog or the individual who blogs, this line of thinking will not provide both an in-depth and broad understanding of the process; the transactional perspective warns us of the pitfalls of such a dualistic approach. Blogging originates “from the constantly emerging relations that bind person and world” (Cutchin, Dickie, & Humphry, 2006, p. 98). Therefore, a transactional perspective allows for an embedded view of human action that also considers the dynamic relationships of the blogging process, as situated in context.

However, the idea of “transaction” is somewhat amorphous because it contains no clear description of where and how transactions begin and end. Although this amorphousness facilitates analysis of transactions at multiple levels, it becomes problematic for the construction of any graphical representations or models to map out the process of an occupation (Aldrich, 2008). Despite these limitations, the transactional perspective offers a way to conceptualize occupations that could bring new understandings to the study of the occupation of blogging. In keeping with the transactional perspective, occupations can be construed as being a set of relational acts by an individual through which he or she is connected to the environment. It naturally follows from this construction that occupation is not a solo act.

The theoretical perspectives I have chosen to guide this research requires being mindful of the virtually unlimited array of contexts in which people find themselves in everyday lives. My position as a researcher is similar to a pragmatist’s position in that it is relativist, pluralist, and developmental in its emphasis (Prus & Puddephat, 2009). As a result, the knowledge generated from this research will simultaneously be a product of the past, an enabling device in the present, and an ever-emergent set of comprehensions aimed toward the future. My choice of methodology is clearly derived from this understanding of knowledge.

Given the potential of an occupation-focused inquiry to generate new knowledge about blogging, the first step of this study required casting a wide-enough net to determine the relevant elements and processes and places for the inquiry. Thus, this justified the exploratory view I adopted for this research. Occupation is often studied from a close-up perspective, at the level of the here-and-now activity, whereas other aspects of the occupational situation are unacknowledged or out of focus. The transactional perspective

allowed my questions to be fixed to the occupation, flexible enough to not delimit potential situations and areas of study, and flexible enough to account for the unpredictable (Bailliard, Aldrich, & Dickie, 2013).

2.4. Conclusion

How this research unfolded was more an outcome of the construction of this project as a social process than a concrete, preconceived notion of what I would find. The research process was continually negotiated by my engagement with multiple aspects of the project, including the disciplinary lens of occupational science, the transactional perspective, the many research encounters, the Internet, and the supervisory input I have received. In particular, the employment of ethnography as an adaptive methodological approach drove this project in the direction it took, as I will describe in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Methods

This study is designed to understand blogging from an occupational perspective. The theoretical orientation and methodological predilections of the transactional perspectives particularly inform the way I think about occupations. In addition, my proclivities as a researcher connected to my past and present and to where I envisioned this research going, have strongly influenced my choices throughout this study, including who to talk to, which blogs to focus on, and where to go through the research. All of this meant that my personal understandings about the occupation, who I am in relation to the occupation, and how the study unfolded came to be a major part of this research.

In this chapter I provide a view of how these decisions were made and how they influenced the findings. I first present a rationale for the use of ethnographic methods, followed by a brief review of a pilot study that includes a section on lessons learned, how these were applied, what was done to collect data (participant observation, interviews, document reviews, focus groups), the challenges and difficulties I faced, and how these were surmounted. I end the chapter by summarizing the data analysis procedures.

3.1. Why ethnography?

Blogging is a popular cultural practice and has been studied by many disciplines; however, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, it has never been studied as an occupation through an occupational lens. So I began this research, optimistically intending to study the complete occupation of blogging. My approach to this research was from an exploratory

viewpoint based on the understanding that everything I was studying was of relatively equal importance and could lead me in directions that were, at best, unclear. The study's initial findings would then determine what direction the research would take. Thus I needed to employ a research strategy that would enable me to move from as wide-angled a view as needed to as narrow-angled a view as needed, all while retaining the ability to move anywhere along this spectrum of research as the situation warranted.

Another consideration was the fact that the research field, blogging, is close to my heart. Since I moved away from my home country a little more than four years ago, the Internet has been my primary medium of maintaining communication with those I left behind. I am a regular reader of blogs and a somewhat proficient user of other social media that are similar to blogging. Because my familiarity with the medium made it difficult for me to approach the culture as a total newcomer, I became aware that who and where I am would play a major role in determining the focus and the path of the study. This realization meant that the methodological approach I chose would have to let my voice be a part of the findings.

The flexible nature of the study demanded a methodology that could account for all of the above considerations while at the same time providing adequate scientific rigor: ethnography fulfilled all of the necessary criteria (Schwandt, 2007). Within ethnography, the commitment to ongoing methodological flexibility and adaptation of methods to the circumstances in which ethnographers find themselves produces the particular consciousness that research design is an ongoing concern, so what counts as data has to be constantly re-evaluated (Hine, 2009). Thus, the emergent nature of ethnography accommodated the complexity and heterogeneity I expected from my findings without forcing me to narrowly

demarcate the field of study. The various modalities that could be employed in ethnography (e.g., participant observation, interviews, focus groups, document reviews, etc.) meant that I could employ a wider variety of techniques rather than rely solely on interviews.

Embracing the transactional perspective implied that I should adopt a method that focused on the experience and dynamics of the research situation. Ethnography has been used to study culture; taking a cue from Kumar (2011) that “culture emerges through occupation” (p. 46), it appears well suited to the study of occupations. In addition, ethnography promised to accommodate experience as it unfolded while also providing structure and rigor to the research process (Schwandt, 2007; Whyte, 1984). A method that would enable me to study the occupation of blogging in its entirety while also providing the flexibility required for this study, I felt, could prove to be a great advantage in this process of research.

As Bailliard, Aldrich, and Dickie (2013) stated, “an ethnographic study reveals the transactional nature of occupation because it looks at whole situations” (p. 158). Ethnographic methods are therefore complementary to both the transactional perspective and my reluctance to delimit the scope of inquiry to a predetermined focus. Another challenging aspect of this study in keeping with the transactional perspective was how I conceptualized blogging. It would have been easy to assume that a study of blogging would be limited to the Internet; however, in my view that would not be fair. Recent literature (Jurgenson, 2012) has agreed with this view. I think of blogging as occurring in the liminal space between the online and offline, which means that it is reflected in both online and offline activities. This idea made the ethnography more precarious than it would be in traditional environments; yet, this very difference underlined the conventional necessity for spending time within the setting (Orgad, 2005). As Hine (2009) suggested, “The key is immersion, not necessarily

through being in a particular field site, but by engaging in relevant practices wherever they might be found” (p. 12). Therefore, even before I began a formal study of blogging, I spent a lot of time reading blogs, trying to make connections between various blogs as well as among blogs and other social media, and thinking about how blogs influenced what I did when not online.

I have also been guided by the principles of collaborative ethnography (Lassiter, 2005), which I believe best enable the reciprocal involvement that is necessary for eliciting participants’ perspectives. The basic beliefs that underlie collaborative ethnography are that research understandings would be impossible without the input and guidance of willing consultants and that, therefore, their active and influential contribution to the knowledge gained through research should be acknowledged. Enacting this belief meant that I would have to be responsible to the participants in ways I hadn’t considered. In keeping with the principles of collaborative ethnography, from the beginning of the study I invited participants to shape the findings of this ethnography. However, I didn’t think anybody took this invitation seriously until I put up my first blog post and one of the participants commented on it. My repetition of this invitation to participate in shaping the study’s findings, at multiple points during the research has been met with varying responses, from subtle ways of changing directions of the questions I was asking to overt comments on the blog to the occasional emailed questions about how the research was progressing.

In a departure from the stated principles of collaborative ethnography, I made a unilateral decision about how to refer to the people involved in the research: I decided to call all of them, and myself, “participants,” rather than making distinctions between researcher and consultant. I made this decision because I believe that, in multiple ways, the people who

participated in the study have shaped its findings and the directions it has taken. Although the levels of contribution have differed, we have all participated in the creation of this ethnography. In the rest of this chapter I describe what I did and how the flexible nature of ethnography allowed me to adapt to the challenges that arose while also providing rigor to the study and maintaining its research orientation.

3.2. What I Did

This research began with small steps into the world of the Internet in general and the blogosphere in particular. My first steps are best captured in boyd's (2008) words: "I searched, I lurked, I read, I questioned, I linked and I reflected." In its earliest stages, the tentative project I had undertaken alternated between exploring and reining in. I took small steps in one direction, only to step back and find myself on a completely different track—a pattern that reiterated the necessity of being open and flexible in my approach to research. During all of these steps I made a conscious decision to study non-professional bloggers (i.e., bloggers who wrote about general, everyday activities). This selection was deliberate because activities of daily living interest me as an occupational therapist and blogs about mundane routine tasks particularly intrigued me. I began a pilot study in October 2011 after obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The orientation of this pilot study was clearly exploratory. It was guided primarily by the transactional perspective (Dickie, Cutchin, & Humphry, 2006), communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), and theory of mediated action (Wertsch, 1998). I have described the transactional perspective in detail in the previous chapters and will focus on the latter two in the findings chapter.

3.2.1. Pilot study.

I recruited three bloggers: Riha, Pranjal, and Abha. Pranjal and Riha are individuals in my social network; Abha is Pranjal's co-blogger. Riha is a graduate student in Chapel Hill who loves to cook. When I received IRB approval for this pilot study, she had just begun blogging after first declaring on Facebook that she thought she could blog about cooking. Pranjal is a professional working in Mumbai who had been blogging for almost three years when he agreed to participate in the pilot study. Abha, also a professional based in Mumbai, joined Pranjal's blog a year before she agreed to participate in the pilot study. Unlike Riha's blog, Pranjal and Abha's blog does not have a specific theme; they characterize their blogs as "writing what we feel strongly about." After obtaining their consent, I began to review their blogs and make field notes about them. These field notes included general comments as well as comments on their choice of particular pictures and topics for blogging, when they blogged, and so forth. These were used during the interviews, which were guided by questions about their blogging practices. In addition to face-to-face interviews, emails, chat conversations, and video chats were all employed for conducting interviews. In this section I discuss some of the challenges I encountered while conducting this pilot study and how these further shaped what I did.

The first challenge concerned participants' communication preferences. Although I communicated with all three via chats and instant messaging, their preferences were significantly different. Riha preferred face-to-face communication and instant messaging, Abha emailed, and Pranjal and I also exchanged emails but he preferred instant messaging. The use of instant messaging presented a challenge for me because of what my "presence" on them meant during the initial data collection period. Both Pranjal and Riha were on my

contacts list for Facebook and Gmail, so every time we were logged into these sites, we would chat. I had known them for some time before they agreed to formally participate in the research. As the content of conversation became more focused on the research project and how things were progressing, I began to feel uneasy and wondered if they felt I was being intrusive. A conversation with Pranjal allayed my doubts and we soon began to converse as before (i.e., about other things in addition to the research).

I also struggled with how to stay immersed in the culture I was studying when my presence on blogging sites was intermittent, at best. A key assumption of ethnography is that by entering into close and relatively prolonged interaction with people in their everyday lives, ethnographers can better understand the beliefs, motivations, and behaviors of their subjects than through any other approach (Tedlock, 2003). I wondered how I could ensure that I was adequately present in the culture and also doing justice to the methodological approach I had decided to use. Compounding the first challenge was the second methodological issue that arose through my decision to be a participant observer in the study.

Eventually I suggested spending time with Riha as she blogged. She may have been confused by this suggestion but agreed nonetheless. We decided to meet in a coffee shop at a pre-determined time. Over a cup of coffee and some conversation, she created her blog post. She typed as we talked about what she was typing and about the people in the coffee shop. When she pulled up some pictures from a folder especially designated for her blog, we talked about which pictures looked better as well as about cameras we have used and how batteries run out when we most need them. At the end of almost 90 minutes, she had her post on her blog; we chatted some more and left the coffee shop.

In a later conversation, Riha casually remarked that this is not how she ever blogs. As a newcomer to ethnographic research she had decided to go along when I asked if I could observe her blogging, probably because she assumed that as an “expert researcher” I knew what I was doing. Her remark sowed the first seeds of doubt regarding my role as a participant observer; by the time I first met Abha they had become a sapling. Abha and I had been engaging in a slow-paced email exchange for a few months, followed by a telephone conversation when I was in Mumbai. I then met her and Pranjal in a coffee shop; it was during this meeting that I asked Abha if I could observe her blogging. Looking at me strangely, she asked, “How do you mean?” and went on to explain that she blogged in different places, using different computers at, at different times, basically “...whenever the fancy takes me.” Her explanation further confused me about how I was going to be a true participant observer in the culture.

The third major challenge I grappled with concerned ethical issues, which I basically understood as an integral part of any research study; still, just how much of a challenge they would pose was something I found out only after I began the research. In accordance with conventional ideas about ethics as well as established research protocol, I had obtained permission from the IRB to conduct the study after also obtaining informed consent from the participants. However, ethical considerations did not end after obtaining IRB approval. For example, before I began to formally study blogs I had viewed many blogs as a researcher, with the intention of studying them. Did this mean that it would be ethical to study bloggers who were not aware of my presence as a researcher? Also, if comments on the blogs were part of my study but I did not get permission from the commenters, was that ethical? These questions, which I had not considered when I submitted my IRB application, were prompted

by my dissertation committee's questions as well as by my own reflections. These questions and many similar ones have given me some sleepless nights and some answers—but not all. My response to these particular ethical situations follows.

I decided that abiding by the rules and regulations laid down by the IRB, while necessary, was also insufficient; therefore, I decided to follow Markham's (2005) suggestion to be mindful. I also kept in mind McKee and Porter's (2009) observation that "Pursuing ethical research practices involves a continuous process of inquiry, interaction and revision throughout the entire research study, one involving and inviting regular critique, interaction and communication with various communities, heuristic self-introspection challenging one's assumptions, theories, designs and practices" (p. 28). Taking this observation seriously has meant questioning every step I was taking, whether it was reading blogs, talking with bloggers, identifying myself as a researcher and a blogger, and also questioning whether these steps were in alignment with my theoretical orientation. Guided by Lassiter's (2005) collaborative method of ethnography, I employed a dialogic process with all three participants; this process is reflected in the challenges I foresaw and how these were overcome. In addition, because this was a study of people and their actions and not just a study of texts, I was compelled to take a different kind of ethical position—one in which the ethical decision making was driven by the needs, expectations, and wishes of the participants. Viewing my ethical decision-making in this way was in alignment with McKee and Porter's suggestion to invest with the views of participants in order to identify what could be considered sensitive. As I employed a dialogic, reflective, and interactive approach to this endeavor, one of the first things that emerged was that, for these participants, their blogs were a hybrid entity of personal and public spheres in which individual monologues were

exposed under the gazes of anonymous comrades and critics. They did not want any sort of anonymity but instead wanted their names and blog URLs (uniform resource locators) to be shared as part of the research.

I also had to consider that people have a right to know that they are participating in a research situation. In my various roles as a researcher, participant observer, lurker, and follower, I had to be both visible and honest. Although the blogosphere does not always allow for visibility, I strove for honesty. Because people have a right to know that they are participating in a research situation, I wrote to the bloggers whose blogs I viewed as ‘probables’ for this research and invited them to participate in the study. I didn’t always get responses to these emails; perhaps these bloggers had abandoned their blogs or didn’t consider them a big priority anymore. A lack of response, however, did not necessarily mean that a blogger had stopped blogging.

These challenges and issues gave rise to the following questions, which have guided subsequent stages of the research:

- How can you follow interactions when they occur seamlessly between media?
- How did the media for interviews influence the responses and further shape this study?
- What is the role of observation when the occupation itself is so fluidly dispersed, both spatially and temporally?
- What are the issues about privacy as related to this study?
- My lens as a researcher influenced my interactions but it was easy for me to disguise my identity online: what were the implications of that contradiction?

- My position was that of an almost-insider in this world of blogging: was neutrality necessary or even a goal for this enquiry?

Although I do not have all of the answers to all of these questions, they have critically framed this project at every turn. So instead of trying to offer answers, I will repeat the questions as this dissertation unfolds. I will also highlight some of the ways that I managed or mismanaged them, and the lessons I learned from trying.

3.2.2. Dissertation research.

Six months into the pilot study, I resubmitted an IRB application to expand the pilot study for my dissertation. The inclusion criteria were:

- Adult bloggers who had blogged anytime in the past two years. This duration was selected primarily to provide a wide range of participants.
- The blogs were written primarily in English, but could contain posts written in other languages (e.g., Hindi or Marathi—Indian languages in which I have adequate literacy skills and therefore could analyze the collected data).
- The blogs primarily addressed topics about general life activities but were not limited by the topics the bloggers chose to blog about.

There were no significant exclusion criteria for this study.

A purposive sampling strategy (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was employed to recruit participants. I continued to recruit bloggers through snowballing techniques (Marshall & Rossman, 2010) used by the original participants. From my initial forays into the blogosphere when I spent a lot of time lurking, I also identified other general-activities bloggers and contacted them via email. I didn't always receive responses; when I did, they weren't always positive. Some said they thought this seemed like a great project but they

didn't want to be invested in it because it seemed too demanding, while others politely thanked me for reading their blogs and declined to participate in research. Such responses dampened my enthusiasm for recruitment at times, but the positive replies helped to keep the enthusiasm alive. I have continued to read and comment on some of the blogs whose authors declined to participate in the study; they seem happy to have me as a reader-commenter. This step of emailing bloggers helped by allowing me to continue reading blogs, while at the same time, it helped me to be honest about my role as a researcher while continuing to pursue an activity I enjoy.

Using these multiple recruitment methods, I was able to recruit a total of 11 bloggers (5 males and 6 females). All the bloggers were in their mid-20s to mid-30s with at least a bachelor's degree. All of them were fluent in English. Four wrote in multiple languages; the rest wrote only in English. In keeping with the previously mentioned ethical dilemmas, I asked the participants if they would prefer to be known by their names or their pseudonyms. Only one, Sara, chose to use a pseudonym. In addition, all of the participants except Sara were using Blogger.com; she used Wordpress. Pranjal and Abha's blog was initially hosted on Wordpress but crashed during the course of this study; Pranjal then moved it to Blogger.com. I mention this situation because I revisit it in more detail in the findings chapter.

During my initial interviews with participant bloggers, I was struck by the importance they placed on their readers. Most of the bloggers shared their Blogger dashboards with me and discussed the map feature in considerable detail. The idea that readers were an important aspect of participants' blogging became stronger as I talked to more bloggers; eventually, I modified the original IRB application to include readers of blogs. After receiving approval

for this modification, I asked the participant bloggers if they would be willing to share my contact details on their blogs so potential readers could contact me. Most of the participants who were enrolled in the study at that time either did not respond to this request or promised to add my details to their site but failed to do so. This was a disquieting experience for me, when on the one hand they were happy to participate in the study but on the other they were unwilling to acknowledge their participation. One of my committee members, Dr. Hinson (personal communication, September 2012), helped to put this contradiction in perspective when he pointed out that the nature of these participants' blogging was personal, which meant that revealing they were in a research situation would probably also mean a change in the dynamics between them and their readers; because they were writing for a particular audience, they may not have wanted to change the status quo.

I then decided to try another approach. I asked some of the participants to introduce me to a few of their readers privately via email. The participant bloggers' responses to this request varied. Some didn't feel comfortable sharing their readers' email IDs, while others gave me names and email IDs of their readers and one, Riha, even wrote to a couple of her readers on my behalf. I contacted the readers whose information I had gathered and got consent from four to participate. Of these four, two stopped responding to my emails after sending me the consent form. I continued my attempts to recruit in this fashion until two readers told me that talking about their friends' blogs felt like passing judgment on their blogging. Despite my many reassurances that this was not the case, they were reluctant to participate in the study.

These refusals meant that I had to look for readers in other ways, which I did by employing snowballing techniques with the readers who had agreed to be part of this study. I

also changed the manner in which I talked to reader participants and decided to employ focus groups, because these were likely to reduce the feeling of “passing judgment.” In this way I was able to recruit a total of 24 readers. Their demographics were similar to the bloggers in that they all had at least bachelor’s degrees and lived in the same geographical areas. Of the 24, 5 were males; 7 lived in the U.S while the rest lived in India; 7 were students; 2 were unemployed; and the rest worked as professionals in various fields. The participants decided how they would be interviewed: 11 were interviewed individually and the rest were interviewed in focus groups of 2, 3 or 4. In the next section I describe in detail the modalities I employed to study blogging. These included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and the use of blogging as a method for participant collaboration.

3.2.2.1. Participant observer. In keeping with the general principles of ethnography, my role when I began this study was that of a participant observer (DeWalt, 2011). Because cyberspace lends itself to hanging around in situations where any given person’s presence is normally brief, I had to find ways of immersing myself in blogging both as it is conducted online and as it connects to offline social spheres. Hine (2000) and Constable (2003) both discussed how participation in online communities, not only as lurkers but also as participants in listservs, newsgroups, chat rooms, and so forth, allowed them to appreciate participants’ points of view as they pioneered computer-mediated communication research. So, despite the negative connotation of the word “lurker,” I have been guilty of lurking as a way to gain an understanding of the kinds of bloggers I would like to work with for this research. The time I spent immersed in the blogosphere was divided between lurking, commenting, browsing, and identifying links among blogs.

As a participating observer in the initial days of this research and even before, I sought opportunities to spend time and carry out activities with members of the blogosphere. I would post an occasional comment to blogs, send emails to bloggers, and talk to blogger friends about their blogs. These activities helped me become a participant in the blogging culture. Because enculturation takes place at the same time as participation (Schensul et al., 1999), I was also developing a tacit understanding of the experience of blogging. In addition to reading blog posts, I explored blogrolls¹ and would often end up reading blog posts by random individuals through backlinks and blogroll options. This direct experience soon enhanced my understanding of what was meant by the immersive nature of the Internet letting me get as much information as I liked about anything I cared to (Rose, 2011). I would lose track of time and end up spending way more time in the blogosphere than I had anticipated. However, my assumption that being able to hang out in the blogosphere would translate into becoming a fully immersed participant observer did not work out as I had conceptualized. Mann (2000) warned Internet researchers that the online world has its quirks and hidden areas: I came face-to-face with some of these in the early days of this research. As previously mentioned, in the first few days of research I discarded the idea that I could observe the “doing” of blogging. So, to better understand the “doing,” I took up blogging. This blog, which I still maintain, has served many functions for this research that I discuss in detail in this and other chapters.

Traditionally, keeping field notes means that the researcher adequately distances him- or herself from the field prior to writing these (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). But in my case, because the field resided in part on my computer, I could not get an adequate sense of

¹ All terms related to blogging have been defined in Appendix C

distance from blogging and therefore had difficulties with typing up my field notes. The field, blogging, was always right there for me to look at—even when I was typing up field notes. As a result, many times I did not write field notes in the prescribed traditional form but instead covered the walls of my room with random jottings and post-it notes. After being repeatedly cautioned against this informal manner of keeping field notes, I took to writing them in a book after spending a reasonable amount of time away from my computer. Often this approach meant that I wrote my field notes sitting at my dining table after eating a dinner that had been prepared from a recipe I found on a blog. The blogosphere was drawing me in through invisible webs, influencing what I did even when my computer was switched off. This notion of inter-relatedness complemented many of the study's findings, as I shall discuss in the findings chapter.

3.2.2.2 *Semi-structured interviews.* The original plan was to conduct extensive semi-structured interviews using different modalities including emails, instant messaging, chats, and voice chats in addition to face-to-face interviews. This seemed simple enough to accomplish, only I hadn't sufficiently considered the logistics of the situation. Many of the participants were in India; this meant that if I was to chat with them at a time convenient to them, it would probably be the middle of the night for me. As a result, some of my intense text-based chat conversations have occurred when I would normally have been asleep. I employed text-based media in order to open up the possibility of gaining a reflexive understanding of what it is to be a part of the Internet (Hine, 2000). The text-based conversations between the other participants and me comprised a mixture of the synchronous (chat) and asynchronous (email). The type of media influenced the kind of conversation that ensued. At times, chat was used only to say, "I got your email and will respond later, I am

busy,” whereas synchronous chats often consisted of unstructured conversations directed mainly by the participants. Responses during these chats were usually short; however, according to Hine (2000) it is not the length of the response that is important but rather the repeated nature of the communication. In any case, these conversations helped keep the thoughts going. Synchronous, text-based responses allowed for rapid exchanges of information that I often used, to develop quick connections with individuals.

Although text-based media are considered to be deprived of many of the cues present in face-to-face interactions, such media have proven to be valid and reliable in research (Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2010). Whereas some of the participants wrote very carefully-thought-out reflections, others seemed uncomfortable replying to my emails and generally wrote brief, to-the- point responses. My field notes about these emails provide an interesting account in which I repeatedly wrote about my own shortcomings about interviewing via email and also marveled at how some participants had provided deep reflections to questions that others had answered in a single line. When I asked one of the participants about the time he spent on blogging, he simply replied: “Can’t say much.” The same question elicited a totally different response from another participant, who wrote that reading blogs was a total “time-suck” but was also “so much fun” and provided a list of her favorites.

Over time, the email interview turned into a reflexive process. Exchanging emails allowed us to be flexible, not only in practical terms (i.e., replying to messages) but also in terms of taking time for reflection before expressing questions and/or answers. Sometimes I received replies within the day; sometimes replies were delayed for a week or more; and sometimes there were no replies at all.

I met the participants in India on multiple visits to Mumbai and met those in North Carolina many times over the year. I have had numerous in-person conversations with the blogger participants; although not all of these were audio-recorded, I maintained detailed field notes and confirmed via emails that I would not misrepresent them and their ideas. With the readers it was a completely different story, because only two (Dipti and Rachita) were initially enthusiastic participants. Nonetheless, I have had repeated email exchanges with them in addition to in-person conversations. With the other reader participants who preferred individual interviews, I have had only one face-to-face conversation and a maximum of two email exchanges. I deemed that these were enough, however, because my preliminary analysis of these exchanges and the related field notes did not seem to bring out any new ideas. I had a synchronous text-based conversation with one reader participant (Aditya), who preferred to talk to me only on the phone (because he lived in a different city from where I was) prior to our telephone interview.

3.2.2.3 Group interviews. Given the difficulties with recruiting readers, in concert with my advisor, I finally decided to conduct group interviews. The flexibility of the ethnography (Whyte, 1984), my chosen methodology, once again played a big role in enabling this decision. As Agar (2002) observed, “Methodologically speaking, a study always develops in ways unforeseen at the beginning” (p. 19). Because this case required a change in both the ways I recruited participant readers and the ways data were collected, I obtained IRB approval for the necessary modifications. Ultimately, new participants were recruited through a process of snowballing by participants already involved in the study. New potential participants were initially contacted via email and provided with a brief overview of the study, including the kinds of topics that would be discussed. I conducted five such

interviews. The first two were conducted in Raleigh and Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and three were conducted in Mumbai. In Raleigh I interviewed four individuals who were familiar with each other, but not with me. The next interview, in Chapel Hill, was with two individuals who were friends and known to me as well. In Mumbai I conducted two group interviews using conference calling. Again, the individuals were familiar with each other but not with me. The last group interview was conducted in my house with three individuals, two of whom knew each other; the third was an acquaintance, whom the other two didn't know. Interview duration ranged from a maximum of one hour for the first and last interviews to a minimum of 45 minutes. The interviews were transcribed and field notes maintained. Follow-up emails were sent only to one group, with whom I had a telephone conversation to clarify some parts of the interview.

3.2.2.4 Blogging as an alternative to focus group. Considering that ethnography is multi-vocal and co-authored, Lassiter (2005) suggested that focus groups in which researchers and consultants talk about and debate the nature of findings could make an ethnography more comprehensive. Here the Internet, and especially blogging, offered a great advantage in terms of enabling me to become even more involved as a participant observer. In November 2012, I created a blog on Blogger.com (<http://bloggingstudy.blogspot.com/>) and have published a few posts on it. This blog has served manifold purposes. It has helped me to become a more involved participant observer while also allowing me to fulfill my responsibility to all participants; it let me share my preliminary ideas about findings while providing a platform for the participants to collaborate in the development of understandings based on this research. It allows all of the participants in this research to look at what I have been thinking, which offers still further opportunity for collaboration by providing a

possibility for deliberations. Last, it provides a way to increase the depth of findings that emerge from this study.

After writing my first two posts, I sent emails to all of the participants indicating that this blog had been created for the purpose of encouraging them to help shape the findings of the ethnography. Responses have varied; although there have been some comments, most of the readers have lurked. I expected as much and so am not disappointed; the purpose of starting the blog was for me to maintain fidelity to the principles of collaborative ethnography by inviting participants to share in the making of this ethnography. My experiences with this blog are detailed in the next chapter.

3.3. Understanding Data

This study generated various types of data including interviews, online texts (blogs and their linkages) and an extensive review of literature about blogging and related activities. The collected data were analyzed through a process that was both recursive and iterative (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) through the collection phase until I began to see similar patterns. After this I immersed myself in the data using inductive coding and thematic analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In order to maintain the collaborative nature of this study, I involved consultants as much as possible in data analysis (Lassiter, 2005). The blog I created as part of this study provided additional opportunities for the involvement of consultants as it also created an opportunity for the development of a multi-vocal ethnography. Following LeCompte, Schensul, and Schensul's (1999) suggested strategies, data were analyzed in the following manner.

Informal data analysis began as soon as I entered the field, through writing field notes, and has continued through the formal writing process. For instance, one of my initial

guiding questions was about ‘the blogging routine’ but as the study proceeded this question was not a primary one, because of participants’ differing attitudes towards when blogging occurred. The move away from this question emerged from the initial analysis as well as conversations both with the participants and my advisor. To become more familiar with the data, I personally transcribed each interview. I highlighted and wrote notes at points that seemed interesting, thus creating rich data points (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). The more I listened to the recorded interviews, the more I realized that many times their focus changed halfway through and became directed by what the participants thought. Although this type of change is normal during ethnography, the changes that resulted from these interviews sometimes proved to be dramatic (for example, the map and site-views tools of blogging led me to a greater understanding of the social nature of technology). These changes will be further discussed in the findings chapter; for now, let it suffice to say that my carefully-thought-out strategies and questions often changed in ways I hadn’t anticipated—all of which made this project just that much more interesting and challenging. At the same time, conversations with my advisor helped me to keep these ideas going.

Along with transcribing the data, I also began “tidying up” by combining my field notes, random jottings, and transcriptions. This process, which involved hours of reading and reviewing the data, was repeated multiple times because only by putting the data together in a designated manner was I able to put some sort of an order into my otherwise seemingly haphazard manner of approaching it; in a way, tidying up allowed me to become more intimate with the data. This process of becoming intimate with the data and developing understandings about them was very useful. For instance I began to see a pattern about the use of Google and its influence on both creating blog posts and reading blogs. After

discussing this with my advisor, I reviewed the data again to gain a better understanding of this aspect.

Through discussions with my advisor and some of the participants in the study, as well as through careful reflection, I began to group the codes into thematic families. This work of developing final themes was augmented through multiple iterations rather than a single, linear process. To continue synthesizing the data, I began to link the quotations with codes to the various themes that had been generated. The fact that some quotes and notes were linked to multiple codes allowed me to look at these data through different thematic lenses, which in turn enabled me to link the various themes with each other. Table 1 lists the family of codes along with the individual codes that were part of each one.

Table 3.1 *Codes Used to Describe the Findings*

Family of codes	Individual codes
Thinking as doing	Reflections, thinking, cathartic, reflect on things in my life, the blog as reflective, understanding of private and public
It's just time	Me time, fulfilling, enjoyable, fun & not so fun
Life events and the blog	Emotional, blog in the front seat/ blog in the background
Objects	What prompts the blogging?, No Internet, no blogging interface
Other media	Other experiences of writing, Facebook and other social media
Who participates	Who is my audience?, What readers mean to bloggers, not a community

Tool affordances	Store and share, unequal participation, tool-Google-habit, Google this & google that, knowing who reads, permanence of blog posts
Invite into blog	How to reach readers, when don't you comment, connect with blogger
Why participate	Need to connect, needs-based reading, hobby, as a means of expression
Change	Change in life situation, dynamic nature, it just happened
Creativity	Creative outlet, when to hit publish?, actual doing, esthetics

3.4. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter detailed the methods I employed for this ethnographic research and the analysis procedures I followed. I have highlighted some of the dilemmas I faced in conducting the study, along with my attempts to resolve them. I have also touched upon some of what formed a major chunk of the study's findings and will revisit these points in the next chapters. All of this was done with the idea of "sharing the magic" (Dickie, 2003) so that the reader will be better able to understand how the research changed directions and meandered to this particular conclusion at this point in time. In the next chapter, I introduce the study participants.

Chapter 4

Setting the Stage

The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on the study's participants in terms of who they are and what their blogging practices involve. A total of 36 individuals participated in the study. Some were bloggers—that is, individuals (11) who maintained their own blogs—while others (25) were readers and commenters. Although I have referred to the individuals who maintain their own blogs as “bloggers,” this was done only for the sake of expedience; in practice, they are also active in other parts of the blogosphere as readers and commenters. I have chosen to foreground some participants as the main cast and others as the supporting ensemble, because not all participants played equal roles in the shaping of this study. This does not imply that their contributions were insignificant, however. Instead, this choice was made only for the purpose of clarity.

The descriptions that follow vary in terms of what I have chosen to focus on; at some points there is an emphasis on the description of the blogs and at others the emphasis is upon the blogging and the bloggers or readers. I preface each section with a schematic to enable the reader to follow the cast easily; this is followed by a brief description of the bloggers according to when they were recruited into the study (by months). In Table 2, in addition to a brief description of the participants' names and locations, information also appears about how often the bloggers blog, when they joined a particular blog-hosting website, and for how long they have been posting. This information is provided to enable the reader to have an

initial guide on which to base his or her understanding about the participants' blogging practices.

4.1. Main cast

Table 4.1 *Participant Profiles*

Month (s) into the study	Name	Gender	Location	What they do	Blogging frequency	Characterize blog as about	Joined blogging website	First post
1–6	Riha	F	Chapel Hill	Graduate student	Once a month	Cooking	2007	9/13/11
	Pranjal	F	Mumbai	Professional	Random	What takes my fancy	2008	11/30/2008
	Abha	F	Mumbai	Professional	Random (has not blogged since July 2012)	What takes my fancy	2009	2009
6–8	Akshay	M	Mumbai	Professional	Random	Sarcastic take on life	2008	4/9/2008
	Sara	F	Chapel Hill	Graduate student	Random (2–3 per month)	Sustainability, but varies	2010	August 2010
	Sai	M	Chapel Hill	Graduate student	Random (some peaks, then plateaus)	What my heart beats for	2007	5/30/2010
	Lalit	M	Raleigh	Professional	Only 2 posts in 2011	Personal	2007	10/18/2011
	Rachita	F	Chapel	Graduate	Reader	N/A	N/A	N/

	*		<i>Hill</i>	<i>student</i>				A
	<i>Dipti</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Mumbai</i>	<i>Professional</i>	<i>Reader</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A
8–12	Suruchi	F	Mumbai	Professional	4–5 times per week	Personal	2012	June 2012
	Suman	F	Mumbai	Professional	Random (2–3 per month)	My blog is called Roving Eye because I blog about whatever catches my eye and fascination.	2009	8/8/2009
	Atamaj	M	Mumbai	Professional	Once a month (last post 9/12/12)	My thoughts	2011	4/16/2011
	<i>Aditya</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Chennai</i>	<i>Professional</i>	<i>Reader</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A
	<i>Smita</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Mumbai</i>	<i>Unemployed</i>	<i>Reader</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A
	<i>Namrata</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Mumbai</i>	<i>Homemaker</i>	<i>Reader</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Ashley	F	Chapel Hill	Graduate student	Random	Reflection	2009	9/9/09
	Sumita	F	Chapel Hill/ Mumbai	Graduate student	Random (1–2 per month)	Reflections on this study	2012	11/2012

*The use of italic type in this table indicates that these individuals are readers and do not

maintain their blogs.

N/A: Not Applicable for the reader participants

Months 1–6. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, who and where I am came to be integral parts of this study. I moved from Mumbai, India to Chapel Hill, North Carolina in 2009. My ethnicity, the people I know, and where I live right now (Chapel Hill) have greatly influenced which people I meet and thus also which people have participated in this study. In 2011, as I was considering how to conduct research on blogging, a Facebook newsfeed from a then-

acquaintance, Riha, stated: “I think I can blog...” This was a public admission of her interest in setting up a blog, which she did in September 2011. When I received IRB approval for this study, in October 2011, I contacted her and asked if she would be willing to participate. She was enthusiastic and became my first enrolled participant. Like me, she is also a graduate student of Indian origin at UNC-CH. Her blog, which is mainly about food and is hosted on Blogger.com and contains links to other blogs she follows. The tone is conversational; as she says, writing her blog is like discussing what she is doing with a group of friends. She publishes once a month or less on average.

The next two participants, Pranjal and Abha, have a group blog that is hosted on Wordpress. They are both professionals, working in Mumbai, who love to blog. As Pranjal writes on his blog: “blogging gives me a platform to speak up my opinions and reach out to a part of the society.” Writing to express his opinions and creative writing, in particular, are activities Pranjal has always enjoyed (he occasionally writes for news magazines as well). Abha, by contrast, likes to write about “normal things...the little things in our lives which we sometimes overlook, forget, hide or break...” I have met both Abha and Pranjal several times over the last two years, but most of our communications have been Internet-mediated. They both enjoy blogging, but for Abha it has recently become less of a priority: she has not published a post in more than a year. This kind of variation in blogging frequency was a common occurrence that I observed regularly through the data collection.

Among other interesting occurrences during the collection phase, one that strongly influenced the findings of this study was a variation of the following conversation.

Person: So you are doing a Ph.D. What are you researching?

Me: I am studying blogging. It is a qualitative study using ethnographic techniques to understand blogging.

Person: Oh, that is so interesting. Have you read _____blog? It is such a fun blog and then there is this one _____that I follow. You should read it.

Although no blogger ever came forward to talk about his or her blog in this way, numerous recommendations were provided about whose work I should read and who I should talk to. I followed up on these recommendations the next time I met these individuals. This situation also brought up an interesting idea for me about the shared nature of blogging that I discuss in the findings chapter.

Months 6–8. One recommender, Rachita, suggested that I talk to Akshay, whose blog she followed. Akshay is a professional based in India who maintains a blog on Blogger. Akshay is part of a group of bloggers who enjoy writing and find this to be an easy way to be creative and get feedback on what they care enough about to write. His blog, which is written through his alter ego's viewpoint, concerns the trials and tribulations he goes through in some humorous situations. Akshay also occasionally blogs about current events in India.

I met Sara a couple of years ago at a gathering of graduate students on the UNC-CH campus. When I mentioned blogging as my research interest, somebody pointed her out as a blogger and we began talking. Sara's blog, which is hosted on Wordpress, has the general theme of sustainability. Of all the participants involved in this study, she posts most often (an average frequency of 2–3 times per month). Sara is also the only participant who chose a pseudonym. Sara's blog posts offer variety in their content. She mostly writes about sustainability, but at times when "I may not have posted very much and feel like I have to"

she posts photos or recipes. She says her blog is the best place to store these recipes because she can always find them when she needs them.

Another participant who maintains a blog to “store” his ideas is Sai, a graduate student of Indian origin at UNC-CH. His blog, which is hosted on Blogger, has the tagline “what my heart beats for.” Sai describes his blog as “therapy” and although he doesn’t have many followers, he shares it with selected friends. Sai writes in three languages (English, Hindi, and Telugu) and sometimes asks friends to proofread his Hindi posts for grammatical issues because he is least proficient in this language. Riha and Sai know each other and follow each other’s blogs.

Lalit is similar to Sai in terms of his blog use. A professional working in Raleigh, he is also of Indian origin. Lalit has always enjoyed writing and, as he writes on his blog, “The blog is to share some personal thoughts, ideas and experiences as I go about figuring out something called ‘life.’” He has posted on his blog only twice and says he would love to write more but is unable to find the time. Lalit was instrumental in helping me talk to some blog readers who I interviewed as part of a focus group and describe further in Section 4.2 (secondary cast).

Rachita, who recommended Akshay as a potential participant, became an official participant when I began to recruit readers. Rachita, who is also of Indian origin, was at that point a UNC-CH graduate student. Along with Akshay’s blog, she also followed blogs maintained by other friends and family members, but most of her blog reading was to look up recipes because she is fond of cooking. Dipti was another reader who I knew read Abha and Pranjal’s blog. She also lived in Mumbai and was an avid blog follower, mainly of do-it-yourself and personal blogs.

Months 8–12. The next blogger I spoke to, Suruchi, lives in Mumbai. Suruchi follows multiple bloggers and was responsible for getting me in touch with Suman and Atamaj, who are fellow bloggers. Suruchi, who works as a freelance trainer, conducts corporate training workshops and similar programs. Among the participants, she was the latest one to join the blogosphere; at one time she was the most regular blog-poster. The changes in her style of blogging from long to much shorter posts were the most dramatic in this group. Initially she posted once in a fortnight but gradually began to post two or three line quotes almost daily, explaining that she felt she had so much to say and could say it much better in this fashion. I was also able to speak to two of her blog's followers, Smita and Namrata. After an initial meeting with each of them, I scheduled conversations with each them and since then we have communicated via email.

Suman, who is also a freelance communications trainer, has been blogging for almost three years about “whatever catches my eye and fascination.” She has had an interesting pattern of blogging that began regularly (two or three times per month for 18 months). Her blog posts rarely had any comments. She took a whole year (2011) off from blogging, but when she decided to rejoin the blogosphere she continued as if she had never left. The surprising part was that after her return to the blogosphere, every one of her posts has gotten at least 15–20 page views and a minimum of two to three comments. Her comment about feeling as if nobody may be reading her blog was an important gateway to some of the findings that arose from this study. In addition, she provided me with a reader's contact information. This was Aditya, a regular reader of her blog who never commented but had emailed her a couple of times about her writing.

Aditya, Smita, and Namrata were the only recommended readers/ followers who agreed to participate in this study. All three were not only readers of the recommenders' blogs but also followed other blogs for informational purposes. For example, Namrata and her family traveled to Europe and she looked at many blogs to help her plan this trip. Smita felt connected with Suruchi through reading her blog posts and felt that similar things were going on in their lives. Aditya read blogs written by his friends as well as some other blogs with which he feels a connection. Their blog reading was also influenced by specific situations, for example a popular Indian political movement in 2011 (all of them were following blogs related to that movement).

Aatmaj, the next blogger who enrolled in the study, used his blog to "share with people my experiences good and bad, both..." His blog is also hosted on Blogger; his last post was in September 2012. Blogging has lost its ranking on his list of priorities since he got a new job and became a father. Aatmaj also loves to write and posts something on either Twitter or Facebook almost every day. He was hesitant to provide me with any references for readers although he always spoke about "an audience" for his blog.

Ashley, the next blogger who enrolled in the study, was also a UNC-CH student. She had been writing her blog for three years and for her, "the blog was the most feasible way to get information to family and friends." She started her blog when she was pregnant with her first child and used it as a way to record his activities. Her blog initially had a lot of written material but over the past three years it has changed considerably; currently it contains more photographs than text. Her blog was publicly available until September 2012, when a friend pointed out that the nature of her blog meant that she needed to be aware of privacy issues; now it is private (i.e., only people she has invited to view her blog can follow it).

I am the final blogger participant in this study. After struggling with the idea of being a participant in the study where I am the principal investigator, much reflection and discussions with my advisor convinced me that because my views about the research have shaped much of the findings, I too am a participant. My introduction to blogging took place in 2008; my move to Chapel Hill made me more reliant on blogs as a way to keep connected with friends and family. But I also spent a lot of time simply reading for fun and as a way to gather information about the new place I had moved to. Throughout the time that I was collecting data, I spent a lot of time simply perusing blogs. My own blog, which I began in November 2012, is a space for me to reflect on the findings that emerged from this study.

4.2. Secondary Cast

The secondary cast of this ethnography consists of 15 members. It must be noted that the contribution of the secondary cast was important; the only reasons I have separated these participants from the primary cast are for clarity and because the secondary cast was interviewed in focus groups (not individually as the primary cast was). The length of the focus groups ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. I also had a couple of email exchanges with some of these participants to clarify the ideas that came up in the course of the focus group interviews. All of these interviews were conducted between November 2012 and January 2013, after I obtained IRB approval for this modification. As I did with the primary participants, I describe the focus groups in chronological order (by months) after a brief tabular overview. Table 3 contains the participants' names, gender, and occupations, in order to provide a sense of who they are and where they are located. The frequency of their blog reading and the number of blogs they follow are also shown, to enable the reader to get a better understanding of their blogging practices and how they have shaped the findings.

Table 4.2 Secondary Ensemble: Participant Profiles

Focus Group	Name	Gender	Occupation	Frequency of reading	Regular blogs
Focus Group I (Raleigh)	Laura	F	IT professional	Several times a day	7–10
	Mohan	M	IT professional	2–3 times a week	3–4
	Shannon	F	Teacher	Every day	5–6
	Deepa	F	Nurse	Every day	6–10
Focus Group II (Chapel Hill)	Heather	F	PhD student	Occasional	3–5
	Mackenzi	F	PhD student	Occasional	2–5
Focus Group III (India)	Parul	F	Homemaker	Several times a day	12–15
	Neeraj	M	Entrepreneur	Occasional	2–3
Focus Group III (India)	Manju	F	Trainee in Administrative position	2–3 times per week	12–15
	Rukmini	F	Managerial position	4–5 times per week	10–15
Focus Group IV (India)	Ameesha	F	Executive	Once a fortnight	4–7
	Kunjali	F	Unemployed	Every day	7–10
	Poonam	F	Homemaker	Every other week	1–2

Months 12–15. The first group interview was with four readers (Laura, Mohan, Shannon, and Deepa). After one of the blogger participants, Lalit, told me that Mohan had seen his blog, Mohan linked me with the other three and we met at a coffee shop. All four read blogs written by their friends, used blogs as a means to get information (e.g., cooking or do-it-yourself projects), and would comment on their friends’ blogs but not on blogs by people they hadn’t met in their offline lives. Shannon also shared with me pictures of an “arty” project she had undertaken and the blog post that had inspired it. I next interviewed Heather and Mackenzi, graduate students at UNC-CH who read blogs. Their take on blogging was similar to what I had gathered from the previous group.

The next set of group interviews I conducted, via conference calls, was in India. They included two groups of two each (Neeraj and Parul, Manju and Rukmini). In both cases the participants knew each other, which made these interviews very easy to conduct. Neeraj and Parul are husband and wife. Parul used to write multiple blogs, but gave up due to time constraints and the fact that “life takes precedence...” Some of this conversation was sentimental, especially when Parul spoke about how she had written a very “mushy post” and Neeraj spoke about his “embarrassment” that it was publicly available for anyone to see. During the conversation with Manju and Rukmini, which was very short, they spoke about how they read and share blogs mainly for learning about new things (e.g., communication skills). The last focus group I conducted, a face-to-face one, was especially long and laden with unexpected scenarios. Kunjal and Ameer knew each other but did not know the third participant, Poonam. As they were describing their blog-reading habits, it turned out that they had a friend in common who is based in Europe and maintains a general everyday blog. In fact this was the blog that they had spoken about before I met them, but because neither of them had given me the URL, I didn’t know. The conversation mainly focused on this friend’s blog and the pictures she had posted.

All of the participants were enrolled in the study over a 15-month period. During this time we have connected in person, by phone, with text messages and, most often, using Facebook. This multi-modal communication has been instrumental in how the study unfolded. In the next chapter I discuss the findings of this study. In subsequent chapters I address the bloggers in the study variously, as blogger participants and study bloggers, and address the other participants as readers and study reader participants.

Chapter 5

Findings

Overview

The aim of this study was to understand the occupation of blogging, using guiding questions that were derived from an in-depth reading of how occupations are conceptualized in the OS literature. The questions with which I began the study were primarily descriptive, for example “defining the occupational domain of blogging” and “describing the changes and transformations which occur in the process of blogging.” However, similar to what Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) have suggested, the initial questions were fine-tuned as this study progressed and the emphasis became more clearly focused on a specific set of interesting concepts that emerged during the data gathering. In addition, as with all research, this project began with some foundational ideas. Some of these evolved further while others fell by the wayside but have also played an important role in shaping the outcome of this ethnography. For example, my reading of the Occupational Science and blogging literature led me to frame the study through three theoretical perspectives: transactional perspectives of occupation, communities of practice, and mediated action theories.

My initial experiences in the field and a preliminary analysis of the data led to a change in how I viewed the occupation of blogging. This shift in my thinking about occupations is reflected in my increased reliance on the transactional perspectives of occupation over the other theoretical perspectives. The process of refinement of the study’s

focus continued as I began a more formal data analysis phase and continued further as I wrote the dissertation. Thus, the outcome of this ethnography was continuously shaped by how it was conducted. This chapter details the journey of these changes and the process of refinement that led to the particular conclusions I have drawn at this point in time.

Keeping in mind the well-accepted adage of beginning to analyze data as soon as the first units are collected (Sandelowski, 1995), I began data analysis by writing memos and sustained this practice through the data-collection phase. As I made further progress, issues and ideas I hadn't considered seemed to emerge—especially when I was transcribing the data and writing up the memos. For example, the rampant mention of the influence of Google and its role in participants' use of blogging was a source of major surprise to me. I was excited to find new ideas in the data but also unclear about where and how such ideas fit in with the bigger questions I was asking; therefore, I continued to ponder the changes in direction this study was undergoing. In the middle of the data collection phase, Professor Dickie (personal communication, November 2012) encouraged me to write a focused autobiography in order to clarify the direction the research was taking in relation to the questions I was considering. Writing this biography helped me both in terms of being able to narrow the research focus and linking what I found with the questions I was considering. This focused biography also gave me a better understanding of my own biases and how these were influencing the progress of the study. Through writing these memos and the biography, I began to realize that many aspects I had taken for granted based on my initial readings of the literature and popular press had fallen by the wayside. Nonetheless, through the dissertation process the argument continued to be a transactional one about the in-dissociable complementarity of occupations and the context and social nature of human occupation.

At the end of the coding phase, my plan was to link the codes together in a coherent manner that did justice to the research, the participants, and above all to the occupation of blogging. But as with many best-laid plans, things did not quite work out as I had planned; in fact, the difficulties seemed to grow as I got into the writing phase. The study of occupation certainly seemed to be as messy as Hocking (2012) suggested. Yet continuing to write and link the data was the only way to make sense of the data. After multiple iterations of linking the codes, organizing the data and multiple conversations and debriefing sessions with my advisor, I decided to use the following structure to describe the findings. The findings were organized into 3 major themes: (a) *fluidity of occupations*, (b) *participation in occupation*, and (c) *serendipity of change and creativity*. Table 5.1 shows how the families of codes were grouped into these themes.

Table 5.1 *List of Family Coding Units Grouped into Themes*

Theme	Family of codes/ Sub-themes
Fluidity	Thinking as doing, It's just time, Life events and the blog, Objects, Other media
Participation	Who participates, Tool affordances, Invite into blog, Why participate
Serendipity	Creativity, Change

I elaborate upon each of these themes in separate sections, according to the following roadmap: the arguments for the findings, followed by some vignettes to illustrate the findings; next, a description of coding units for each, along with some of the data that led me to them; and last, I revisit some of the findings described in the literature review in order to

problematize theoretical concepts and ideas commonly used in OS in light of the findings from this study. In Chapter 6, I attempt to show how the occupational perspective and transactional lens overcome these problems and suggest different ways to conceptualize occupations.

5.1. Findings I: Fluidity of Occupations

5.1.1. Introduction and overview.

The argument for this findings section is that occupations, like blogging, are dispersed across multiple frames of time, place and activities, and blogging, for the most part, takes place within other occupations. The following vignette highlights the fluid nature of blogging. This excerpt is from a blog post ("*The road, the trees and I*", Pranjal, 10th May, 2010) which he created not just when sitting at the computer and typing, instead the blog originated when the author was engaged in a completely different occupation far, far away from his internet interface. The occupation journeyed through time, place and space before finally making its existence obvious in the form of the blog post.

This one has been generated out of a thought that took root in the soil of my mind while I was visiting the Palghar region of North Konkan – touring the Shirgaon-Mahim-Kelve forts and beaches on 28 April 2010.

It all happened when I and my friends Sanish and Manish (the names rhyme! 😊) were travelling from Mahim to Kelve through the beautiful, narrow, tree covered and tree lined roads of Konkan with tiny villages scattered here and

there. We could feel the heat but we were protected from the sun and his artillery barrage of burning sunlight by the presence of trees on the sides of the road.

It was then that a thought came to my mind!

This (Indian) road is like our life...!

This excerpt describes a trip he took with friends in the last week of April to a remote area in the rural part of Western India, with no modern communication device other than a basic cellphone. He signed off at the end of his post by dating it (28 April 2010). The discrepancy between the signing and posting dates led us to an interesting conversation that sparked the idea for this findings section. Pranjal felt that because the idea for the post and most of the construction of the post occurred on April 27, it felt only right to him to date it that way. However, while he was mentally composing this post, he didn't have access to the Internet. He returned to his computer a week later and completed the act of publishing this blog post almost two weeks after he first conceived it.

Twenty-two comments were made in response to this post. Most of them appeared in the days immediately following its publication, but the last (the author's response to a reader's comment of May 15, 2012) was made two years later. Similar in tone to the older comments, the reader's post is affirming: "Keep on writing. You have a wonderful imagination. Wish you good luck. Thank you." The author responds by expressing his gratitude: "Thank you! Keep reading and supporting us!" In addition to this kind of reader feedback, Pranjal also received an email from a friend about this post. The friend was going

through some difficult life situations and wrote to Pranjal to say he was grateful for the post. Pranjal did not share this email with me but anecdotally mentioned it in a conversation.

As can be seen from this illustration, blogging is not a simple process of “Here is what I typed and put up on a webpage and that’s done.” Instead, it is a dynamic process enabled by the interpenetration of the online and offline in ways that are not pre-defined. An activity, in this case traveling with friends, triggered an idea for a blog post. The post was created and published in the blogosphere, yet the blog post did not remain the same as it was when the author first created it. Two years after it was first published, a new comment was added to the post and the author replied. Blogger participants described to me how, time and again, they come back to their blog posts, read them and perhaps email links to the posts to their friends, then reflect on what they have written and once in a while make deletions or other edits. Thus a state of unpredictability exists about a blog post’s fate which includes the potential for blogging to happen at any time, in any place.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, some of the guiding interview questions I asked (e.g., “When do you blog?” “Where do you blog?”) were based on my understanding of occupations and also built on some of Hocking’s (2009) parameters. The participants’ responses to such questions usually began with a clarifying question, such as “what do you mean?” As I continued with the data analysis and organized my random thoughts and field notes, I began to track how my thinking had evolved over this project. Some of my initial jottings included words such as “continuous,” “embodied,” “non-separate??”, and “cannot separate??” in relation to occupation. Re-reading the transcripts, I realized that these words were all responses to participants’ responses to my questions about how they blog.

From these random jottings, one idea that became stronger through the study was about the ephemeral nature of blogging. It was difficult for the blogger participants to pinpoint the exact times they were involved in blogging (except when they were sitting at the computer to type and publish a blog post); however, there was consensus among the participants that blogging was much more than the limited time spent in front of the computer. Throughout the time I spent in this research, there were multiple such instances in which the act of blogging could not be delineated as having occurred only within a particular limited situation. Instead it seemed that blogging of even a single post occurred over multiple frames of time, space, and place.

The blogs selected for this study included mostly those with a focus on “doing.” This selection impacted the findings in a unique manner and played out in a fascinating way. There were so many instances when participants would talk about their blogging as being around, somewhere in their minds, even when they were clearly engaged in another activity. Take for example, Sai’s creation of the post “*Ghusne nahi denge tujhe*” [Won’t let anyone enter] on May 30, 2010; this post was created when he and a friend were stuck in a particularly volatile traffic jam. In the middle of that situation, Sai and his friend created a parody of a popular Bollywood song (“*Jaane nahi denge tujhe*” [Won’t let you go]). At the time, Sai had barely begun to blog and was only gradually seeing himself as a blogger—in other words, the blog was not high on his list of things to do. He was just being in the moment when the parody was created, yet the parody found its way onto the blog in a way much removed from the original situation (i.e., the traffic jam) in terms of both time and place.

Thus, based on the findings from this study, this section's purpose is to explicate the almost wispy nature of blogging intermingling with other activities and its fluidity in terms of time, place, space, and occupations. In this chapter I first discuss the families of codes that were generated through the data analysis and which I grouped together under the theme of "fluidity"; this is followed by a discussion of how I think this understanding of occupation is situated vis-à-vis current understandings of occupations in the OS literature.

5.1.2. Themes.

The crux of this theme is how blogging is meshed with multiple other occupations and thus is dispersed in terms of where it occurs, when it occurs, and what media and objects are involved in the occupation. Five sub-themes were linked in this category of "fluidity of occupations": (a) Thinking as doing, (b) It's just time, (c) Life events, (d) Objects: Internet and Internet-enabled devices, and (e) Other media.

5.1.2.1. *Thinking as doing.* As I read numerous blogs in the initial days of this study, what intrigued me was the sense I got that a lot of thought and reflection went into creating each blog post. Whether the post was about something as mundane as a day spent with friends or something as intricate as a year-long activity project (Sara's blog), it involved a tremendous amount of reflecting and thinking. These were not just two aspects of the occupation but instead were integrated into the process of blogging at all times.

As will become clear from Riha's example, thinking is an integral part of blogging. In talking about how she decided the name of her blog (Citrus and Cardamom: A grad student's culinary chronicles), Riha spoke about the time she spent thinking about what image of herself she wanted the blog to convey. Citrus and cardamom is her favorite flavor

combination for making desserts; the fact that the two words put together sounded good to her made this an easy choice. It was the other part of the title that she agonized over considerably. A lot of blogs on cooking are available, she explained, but to differentiate hers she needed something unique—a catch phrase. Ultimately she decided that the blog “would be a single girl in the city kind of blog, only instead of talking about romantic experiences, I would talk about cooking experiences.” This was a major reason she chose to forefront her identity as a graduate student in the title of her blog. This example clearly shows that “doing” blogging is integrated with reflecting about various aspects of the blog.

Suman provided another example of reflection and thinking when she said, “I think *a lot* before I post anything on the blog.” It could be easy to dismiss this idea of thinking as occurring by itself in a context removed from the original event being blogged about, but I had a different interpretation. Ashley mentioned that sometimes, when she is playing with her son, she thinks about her blog. At such moments she would take a picture or think of a write-up about the activity she was involved in. One poignant idea that came up through this conversation was that she may be constructing particular situations for the blog in a particular manner (e.g., foregrounding happy smiles rather than difficulties).

These examples suggest that reflecting is a part of what goes into creating a blog post, but there is another aspect to such thought and reflection. This aspect is demonstrated by Sara, who while being mindful of how human actions potentially damage the environment also uses her blog as a way to document what she does. For Sara, her blog has multiple purposes, from being an outlet for creative thinking to storing her recipes. But one reason she blogs is to be more reflective of what she does. As she said, “Blogging has been a way to keep it honest by reflecting on things and being honest about things.” Reflecting is an

integral part of the occupation of blogging that can occur in any of a multitude of situations (e.g., when the blogger is in the situation about which she is blogging; is involved in another activity; or even when she is typing up the blog). Due to this link between reflecting and doing, blogging is embedded within other activities and can potentially take place anywhere, at any time.

5.1.2.2. *It's just time.* Some of the questions I asked through this study were of a clearly temporal orientation, for example: “How long do you devote to blogging?”, “When do you blog?” and “How much time do you spend reading/connecting with other blogs?” Despite my repeated questioning, I never could get a sense of what the temporal aspects of the occupation were for the participants. Most responded to these questions with, “I am not sure,” but some gave me specific details (e.g., two hours per week on blogging or 30 minutes to construct a post). As the study progressed, through the conversations we had it became clear that for all the participants this occupation was extremely meaningful. In fact, this meaning was responsible for how they viewed time as just something that passed when they were blogging, not as a “big deal” to be thought about during their “me” and “creative” time.

Aatmaj’s response sums up what most of the participants felt: “I write what comes to my mind—maybe an experience which moves me and since anything extra will need extra effort to be put in,² time is not a constraint.” Unpacking this idea further during a later interaction, he told me that the way I constructed my initial question (“How much time do you put into blogging?”) had influenced his response (30–45 minutes). In reality, some of his blogs took much more time to create and some took much less. In fact he had no idea how long the process took him because blogging was an activity that creatively engaged him and

² “Anything extra will need extra effort” is a saying in India; its usage in this context implies that spending the extra time and effort on an activity that one enjoys is worth the effort.

he found to be fulfilling; therefore, the time involved never really mattered to him. A draft of a post could stay in his drafts folder for days or even weeks before he finally felt that it conveyed all he had to say. Or, as in his post titled “Rainy Day” (June 16, 2011), which he published a few hours after he experienced the incident it describes, he just typed it and put it on the blog. The post is about his experience of playing with street urchins in the rain and how that event helped him to get in touch with his inner child. He termed this his “spontaneous burst of inspiration” blog post. While he was playing in the rain with the kids, he was not thinking about his blog; instead, he was simply relishing the experience of being out there. Yet when he returned home, he continued to feel a sense of happiness that he wanted to share, so he decided to create this post.

Riha’s blog creation took place over six months. As a graduate student and also a teaching/research assistant, she has full-time work-related responsibilities; to find time to do an occupation just for the fun of it is not always a top priority. She did not work on her blog every day (or even every week, for that matter), but she estimated that the time she started to think about having her own blog until she created it spanned about six months. During this time, she tried different blog-hosting websites including Blogger and Wordpress, worked on figuring out what kind of blogger identity she wanted to portray, checked other blogs on the Internet, and, most importantly for her, figured out a name for her blog. At the same time she was also starting to put together the recipes that would later show up on her blog, which meant cooking, keeping extensive notes and taking pictures, the latter of which involved getting her camera angles and the lighting right. All of this time invested and her blog was not even visible! Riha is a very meticulous individual and everything on her blog has to be “rightly done,” so the preparation took a lot of time; yet she is invested enough in her blog

to do this as often as once a month. Thus, it became apparent that blogging rarely occurred only at one particular designated time.

5.1.2.3. *Life events and the blog!!* In terms of life events, blogging could take a back seat and the blog could remain in the blogosphere for long periods until one day something clicked and the participants would be back at it—almost as if they never left. As previously mentioned, Suman started her blog in 2010, took a break until 2011, and came back to writing. In her blog she does not refer to this break; in our interviews she spoke about how other life events, such as exams and changing jobs, pushed the blog to a much lower level on her priority list.

Where participants were in terms of their lives was reflected in their blogging. While Akshay was working in a sales job, he averaged almost one blog post every two to three months. However, when he changed his job and moved to a new city, this average fell considerably and slowly petered away to a total absence from blogging for almost eight months. During one of our conversations, when he reflected on this, he said, “I used to write more frequently when I was posted in sales! Now I do not have much material!”

Clearly, situations the participant bloggers found themselves in were related to what they blogged about. Lalit, the blogger who has published only two blog posts, wrote his first one when a close friend was struggling with moving to another town: “I have always had a way to handle such changes and so I thought I’ll write it down.” He felt that he had something to share about the situation and the blog, in a way, was his gift to her.

5.1.2.4. *Objects used: Internet and Internet-enabled devices.* One of the salient findings of this research was the number of times participants mentioned the act of blogging in the absence of Internet connectivity, which I used to think of as the most important

component of being able to blog. As mentioned earlier, what could trigger the participants' blogging varied. Sometimes it was just sitting in a coffee shop and observing others, or an idea for a post could be prompted when catching up with a friend and watching cherry blossoms falling. How and where people blogged was never restricted by the presence or absence of a particular object. To finally post the blog to the Internet, an Internet-enabled device and connectivity to the Internet were required; however, as I emphasized in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter, the process of blogging was never restricted by the absence of this object.

Abha's response to my question about observing her blogging is particularly relevant here:

Sometimes I could be typing in front of my computer and that is part of blogging, but as is the thinking (which obviously doesn't require the computer) on what I am writing about. Sometimes I start to type while I am at work or sometimes just as I am about to log out. I have also drafted a blog post on paper when I didn't have the computer in front of me and I knew if I didn't write it down, I would forget this brilliant idea I just had. And also I never pre-plan what I am going to blog about. It depends on my emotional response to a certain situation (again object not needed). All of these things go into my blogging and I would be unable to separate these apart even if you ask me to.

Thus it becomes clear that the Internet may not be the most necessary object for blogging until the final moment for publishing arrives.

5.1.2.5. Other media: internet and internet-enabled devices. The act of blogging is not limited only to the blog's interface. In multiple ways, the blog spreads fluidly to other media interfaces. Abha's post titled "A lot can happen over coffee" (April 6, 2011) is one such example. This post is about her observation of some incidents in a coffee shop and is written in a humorous style. From the comments on this blog post, it is clear that this particular write-up was also published in a local newspaper within a couple of weeks after being published as a blog post. Although the newspaper article credits the blog as the site of first publication, Abha's co-blogger, Pranjal, has had his share of blog posts circulated on the Internet, as an attachment to emails, without receiving credit for them.

In early 2010, Pranjal blogged a series of posts about the history of some forts in Maharashtra (a state in India). One of these posts has been circulated with forwarded emails since 2011. Knowing of his interest in Maratha³ history, an acquaintance who did not know that Pranjal had authored the said work emailed him the article. It was then that Pranjal realized his work was being plagiarized (i.e., distributed without his knowledge or permission, without his byline). Upset by this knowledge, he took to Facebook to express his frustration, created a Facebook page for the blog, and linked his blog to this Facebook page. Now, every update on his blog shows up as a newsfeed on Facebook too. This linkage has translated into an increase in readership for his blog but we are not aware if it has had any effect on the plagiarism that prompted his use of Facebook.

Using Facebook for linking with their blogs was very common among the study participants. For most of them, Facebook provided an easy way to popularize their blogs. As

³ The Maratha dynasty ruled over most parts of Maharashtra; the term "Maratha history" specifically refers to the period between the latter 17th century and the early 19th century.

Riha said, in a very matter-of-fact tone, “Obviously I will publicize it [my blog], I will syndicate it to my Facebook.” Almost all of the participants listed their blogs on their Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts. This use of multiple ways to syndicate their blogs brought traffic into their blogs and helped to popularize them. I will return to the idea of blog popularization in the next findings section.

Although it is easy to assume that the blog is restricted to one Internet outlet, many blog-related activities took place across multiple Internet spaces. For example, communication about blogs was occasionally conducted through an exchange of emails among readers and writers. Dipti, an avid follower of Abha’s blog posts, would write comments on her blog; for other blogs she followed, she would use email or sometimes even just talk with the bloggers. In addition, some of the blogs Dipti followed were about quilling (a paper craft); she referred to these blogs when making her own projects. In fact, for a project that was inspired by a blog post, she and the blogger exchanged multiple emails so they could work out the problems she was encountering. Thus blogging effortlessly moved between different Internet media and was rarely restricted by the blog’s interface.

5.1.3. Situating Findings in the Literature: Problems in the Occupational Science Literature.

As previously stated, my conceptualization of this study was based on my understanding of the Occupational Science literature, and about occupations, from my training as an occupational therapist. Some of the thinking that went into the questions I asked in the beginning of the study came from Hocking’s (2009) parameters of how to study occupation and Zemke and Clarke’s (1996) understanding of occupation as being chunks of

activity. As an occupational therapist, I learned that occupations were neatly divisible into categories (AOTA, 2002; Keilhofner, 2002) and although these categories varied depending on who had done the classification, the most common categories were self-care, leisure, work, and play. Critiques of these ideas are available in the literature, especially ones that label such categorization and hierarchical outlook as elitist and culture-specific (Hammell, 2009; Iwama, 2007; Paley, 2006,) and observe that they do not do justice to a broad understanding of occupations. Yet the idea that occupations are discrete units that are not only obviously visible but also occupy their own discrete chunks of time have continued to be perpetuated in the literature.

These pre-understandings about occupation were reflected also in the questions that guided my interviews with the participants (“Where do you blog?”, “When do you blog?”, and “How much time do you spend on blogging?”). Yet, consistently through the study, I kept having difficulties trying to answer these questions. Obviously, blogging involves a lot more than simply sitting down in front of a computer to type. From the data, it seemed clear that blogging is amorphous in nature, right until the time when it is captured on the blogging interface and published as a concrete entity. This form that the blog post takes can itself undergo changes, even after it is published, in ways that may not be clear when it is created. Thus, blogging spreads fluidly across time, place, and space in ways that cannot be predetermined. Two major ideas came about from this understanding of the fluidity of the occupation of blogging.

5.1.3.1. *Dispersed nature of blogging.* The first idea was that blogging is much more dispersed than I could have ever imagined. The question about how to observe blogging itself suggested that the nature of this occupation is so dispersed that being able to chunk it into

narrow periods of time, place, and space were not the way to go about thinking about the occupation. This study of occupation also revealed that blogging is not so cut-and-dried as to lend itself to the idea of a well-delineated chunk of activity. For the purposes of this study, the only time blogging became an identifiable observable entity by itself was when the participants sat in front of their screens and typed or compiled a post. Thus, blogging as an occupation appears to be more of a process rather than a discrete sequence of actions that fill a particular period. Instead, blogging dramatically erases temporal boundaries because it is not an activity with a defined end; moreover, the artifact can stay in cyberspace almost indefinitely. In theory, then, blogging is an activity whose meaningful outcome is always in process (Cutchin, Aldrich, Bailliard, & Coppola, 2008). For all of these reasons, my first view of occupation as a visible, definable, time-and- space-occupying act was negated: blogging could remain invisible for most of the process, which made its temporal and spatial aspects most challenging. I was unsure of how to define the time the occupation took when its appearance in many situations was fleeting at best.

5.1.3.2. *Integrated nature of blogging.* The second related idea is about how blogging interpenetrates into other activities. In the Occupational Science literature, the idea that occupations are enfolded or nested has been widely expounded (Bateson, 1996). This concept of nested occupations suggests that an individual can be engaged in two distinct occupations at a single point in time, for example listening to music while cooking. The core idea is that humans can multitask and thus be engaged in multiple, distinct activities at the same time. However, based on the results of this study, I suggest that blogging should not be considered either part of multitasking activity or as an enfolded activity. Instead, I propose that many aspects of the blogging process are embedded within other activities and never

acquire an overtly distinctive existence as blogging. In conversations with participant bloggers, it became clear that they remained bloggers at all times; hence, any activity with which they felt an emotional connect triggered their thinking about their blog. In turn, at least part of their blogging was intertwined with other activities.

5.1.4. Conclusion.

I conclude this chapter with a vignette about my experience with blogging that highlights the fluid and interpenetrating nature of this occupation. I began drafting the fourth post on my blog (“What is blogging?”) much before it was published (January 28, 2012). In fact it was the second draft idea for the blog; I began it in December 2012 at RDU Airport on my way to India. It underwent multiple iterations during my journey but by the time I got home to Mumbai, I had forgotten about it in favor of spending quality time with friends and family. I also met a number of the study participants on this visit and posted “Readers” on January 16, 2013. “What is blogging?” was published only after I got back to Chapel Hill, more than a month later. The odd issue with drafting this particular post was that it did not always occur in front of the computer: some was done on boarding passes and a lot was constructed in my head, even as I met with participants. I was not always actively doing anything observable about this blog post, but if something triggered a thought about this post, for example during the interview situation, I knew it was going to influence my blogging.

Through its innate affordances, blogging seamlessly moves between media and the online and offline. To quote Hillis (2009): “Materially, web participants remain ‘here’ in front of the screen’s display; experientially they are also telepresent ‘there’” (p. 2). Thus, blogging occurs anywhere, everywhere, and nowhere, yet its artifact is visible somewhere in

cyberspace. So how could this reconcile with the ideas of the discrete, observable chunks of activities, Occupational Science has for long conceived as occupations?

5.2. Findings II: Participation in occupation

5.2.1. Introduction and Overview.

My core argument for this section is that the blog is not an individual product created in isolation by the blogger. Instead blogging extends to encompass the participation of its readers. This participation includes but is not limited to interactions between readers and bloggers; it also includes other blogging-related activities (e.g., reading blogs and sharing blog links). Through the rest of this section I describe various aspects of this argument and bring them together in the discussion section.

During a conversation about his blogging in May 2012, Sai described how the blog post “Yeats it is now” (April 1, 2012) came into being. Early that morning, in Hyderabad, Sai was exchanging chat messages with Geet⁴ (pseudonym). Geet was in Chapel Hill, getting ready to wind down after a particularly difficult day of struggling with her course work. In an attempt to distract her from the stresses of student life, the two friends were chatting about their mutual love of poetry and particularly for the English poet William Butler Yeats. In the course of this text-based conversation of about 30 minutes, they discussed the Yeats poem “A deep sworn vow.” As they were chatting, Sai also blogged a post based on this poem and, as soon as he hit the publish button on his blog interface, shared the link with Geet. When she saw the blog post, she was happy and typed that he had brought back her smile, which had been missing since the morning. As Sai described this incident to me, he mentioned how her smile was a big reward to him. The blog post was created only because of the particular

⁴ Geet declined to participate in the study but generously gave me permission to describe this incident.

situation occurring at that particular point in time (i.e., he was chatting with Geet about Yeats's poetry).

This vignette captures the essence of this chapter: participation in the occupation of blogging. Sai's blog post about Yeats was created through both Sai's and Geet's participation. It is credited as Sai's work, yet without Geet's engagement in a discussion about a particular poem, it would probably not have been created at all. The two friends' participation in the occupation of blogging was influenced by multiple factors and mediated by the presence of the Internet, which enabled them to connect despite being in different time zones and on different continents. The artifact was shared with Geet as soon as it was created (i.e., when Sai published the post in the blogosphere, for anyone to see), which made it a consummatory experience for her. In a later conversation I had with Geet about this incident, she mentioned that she felt like she was a part of creating the blog post, but that it was clearly Sai's work.

Three months into my dissertation research, participation in the occupation of blogging became a major focus of this study. This change was driven in part by the study bloggers' extensive references to their readers. The most common way of talking about readers was by sharing blogger dashboards with me and pointing to the statistics tool. This feature enables bloggers to identify where their readers are located, which are the most popular posts, how the readers came upon their blog, which Internet browsers and key words brought in more readers, and more. The idea that readers play a major role in blogging was evident, but what became more obvious as the data analysis progressed was that the readers are important as contributing members in the occupation of blogging and, in their absence, blogging would probably not be what it is. The blogosphere tantalizes a reader to become

part of the blog by providing a comments section while at the same time pointing the reader to other blogs.

I have spent a lot of time immersed in the blogosphere, both during this study and otherwise. However, it was only after I began analyzing the data that I realized just how much of what I read, linked to, and commented on or did not comment on may have shaped the blogging of individual bloggers. In my view, participation is an extremely social construct—in this context, one that encompasses both engagement in the creation of a blog’s artifact and the colloquial use of the term “participation” as “take part in.”

5.2.2. Themes.

In this section, I explicate the occupation of blogging through a description of how tools and people come together to create the blog. The findings in this section build on those discussed in the previous section to provide a more tangible structure to the idea of occupation. I coded the data on participation into five categories: (a) who participates, (b) tool affordances, (c) invite into blog, (d) not a community, and (e) why participate. Each of these themes is further discussed in the following subsections.

5.2.2.1. *Who participates?* From the bloggers’ perspective, readers are indispensable because bloggers want their sentiments and feelings to matter to other people. As Aatmaj said: “Whenever I write I am addressing an audience. I know there will be someone who will read my blog. Otherwise I would not do it.” As the study progressed it became clear that blogging is a social activity. For example, Suman’s comments on some of the reasons she experiences anxiety related to her blogging included one about how it felt demotivating to even think that no one read her work.

Obviously the study's bloggers wanted their blogs to be read by others and to influence them, but who these readers could be remained an open question. Lalit, whose blog is a place for him to share his experiences, expressed the idea that his blog would be followed by people who were like-minded and believed in what he wrote. Still, he knew that there would be one-time visitors who disagreed with his opinions and therefore would not return. Similar sentiments were echoed by Suman, who in her first blog post said "Do drop a line if you happen to know me and you are welcome to do so even if you don't" (August 8, 2009). Bloggers are acutely conscious of who their potential audience could be. They know their blogs are public by default and can be viewed by anyone who comes across them, but they are blogging "for" people who know them and are like-minded. Their thoughts about who their audience is, influence their blogging; in turn, this relationship makes blogging a social occupation that cannot be conducted in total isolation.

The findings from this study suggest that the occupation of blogging involves more than the individual actions of blogger, lurker, and commenter, which may occur in isolation, without physical, social, or temporal connections among them. Consider Ashley's blogging; she blogs about her son's growing up and her intended audience includes her family and close friends. Her choice of pictures to post on the blog are strongly influenced by who she knows reads or comments on her blog:

These [pictures] are from when my friend was visiting us from New York. Now she is not one of my closest friends, but has been a follower of the blog. She has commented on the blog or emailed me about it, so I put her on the blog because I know she reads it. So there are these things too.

In Sara's case, her parents and parents-in-law follow her blog, usually as a way to

keep up with happenings in the lives of their children. Sara's mother is her most avid blog follower and usually comments on all her blog posts. The fact that both sets of parents follow her blog impacts how Sara blogs in multiple ways; some are subtle and others are obvious. For example, given Sara's passion for reducing consumption and leading a more environment-friendly life, she and her husband donate excess items to charity. One of the reasons she blogs is as a way to document her efforts at minimizing; in line with this thinking, she uploaded pictures of this project onto her blog. However, while creating this blog post she had to be very careful not to capture any of the items given to her by either set of parents. In other words, this consideration impacted what she felt she could post on the blog. In another instance, her father shared a link of a photo post on her blog with his colleagues, some of whom sent grateful emails to her about this post. Prior to receiving these emails, Sara had no idea that her father had shared this link. But once she became aware of this, she also became cognizant of the fact that her father's colleagues could read her blog; this realization has impacted her blogging. In addition, the popularity of her photo-blog posts among other photo-bloggers has resulted in her publishing many more of these to maintain steady traffic to her blog.

5.2.2.2. Tool affordances. In addition to how the people involved in the occupation of blogging shape what is going on, the tool (i.e., the blog-hosting website) plays an equally important role. By convention, blogs are not static, but instead are ongoing dynamic environments in which the latest post is always visible as the newest, comments can be added, and posts can be edited. As the data analysis progressed, it became evident just how much of a role the innate affordances of the blogging interface play in the engagement of bloggers and readers. In talking to me about who she thought read her blog, Suman said, "I

have followers on my blog and I am guessing they do read the blog posts, but may not comment because the number of page views is usually about 10–12 even if there are no comments.” My question had been about who reads her blog; in her answer, she relied on the blog’s tools to help her explain that she knew others were reading her work.

From the previous sub-theme, “who participates,” we see that blogging is shaped by others’ participation; however, for Suman it was the tool itself that determined the specifics of this participation. The map feature on the Blogger interface provided another way for blogger participants to track the number of visitors, most popular blogs, which blogs link together, where readers accessed the blog from, and so forth. For the blogger participants, many of whom checked these statistics regularly, the determination of what to post next on their blog was made through this feature. Sara described this map feature as “fascinating” and mentioned how she spent quite a bit of time checking it.

Before she created her blog, Riha was hesitant to comment on others’ blogs, simply because she was not sure if her comments would be appreciated or if she would get replies to them. After she created her blog, however, she listed a number of other blogs on her blog roll, thus endorsing those bloggers’ views. (The blog roll is located on the right side of her blog; continuous updates indicate when any of these bloggers have published a new blog post.) As Amee, a reader participant, said, when viewing any blog, the blog roll almost sends out an invitation (“You read _____’s blog and she thinks we are good enough for her to follow, come take a look at us”).

In addition, the blogosphere seemingly encourages participation in blogs one doesn’t set out to view. For example, the top of a blog page on Blogger displays links (“previous blog,” “next blog”). The standard sentence that appears at the end of every blog post, “Leave

a comment,” is also enticing. In these ways, the blogosphere appears to be encouraging readers to leave tangible proof that they read a blog post. The reader is always being encouraged by blogging software not only to come into the blogosphere, but also to stay there and become a participant in the world of blogging. As Aditya, one of the reader participants, said, “I came across some of my current favorite blogs simply through the suggestions that came up on my friend’s blog.”

In addition to enticing readers to participate in a blog by posting comments, Blogger also persuades readers to become bloggers. Both Sai and Lalit created their Blogger accounts long before they published their first posts; both mentioned that Google “encouraged” them to log into other social media through their existing Gmail accounts. In general, the Internet’s power to enable people’s participation in occupations is highly underrated. The nature of the power of a dominant entity, however (in this case, Google), is quite obvious (as Sai eloquently stated, “It was Google this, Google that...”). This power was even more obvious given that only Sara, of all the study participants, had a non-Google (Wordpress) blog.

Participants’ reasons for using Blogger varied. When talking about her blog’s creation, Ashley said, “At that time, I wasn’t even really sure what a blog was. So it took me maybe half an hour or so, because I already had my Gmail. I didn’t even know what I was doing; I was just following the steps on the site.” Riha’s reason was more pragmatic: “Blogger was giving me the background themes I needed for free.”

Pranjal and Abha’s story is different. Their blog, “A rational mind,” was hosted initially on Blogger. However, after they entered their blog into a competition for most popular blogs, it was voted among the top blogs and awarded a year’s free hosting on Wordpress. At the end of this free year, they decided to keep their blog on Wordpress.

Pranjal's reasoning was pragmatic: Wordpress gave their blog a better look, a matter that was important to both of them. Nonetheless, when the blog crashed in October 2012, Pranjal didn't hesitate to return to the Blogger interface: "We made efforts to re-start it [on Wordpress], but it was just too much work, instead going back to Blogger was the easier fix and you know it is Google, always better." Pranjal added that because most of his online communication relies on Google, it made much more sense to stick with Google products.

The tool's affordances and constraints play important roles in how participation in blogging occurs. Because blogs are technologically and socially focused on the blog writer, they are heavily tilted toward unequal participation with an emphasis on the blogger. As Akshay emphasized in our conversations, the blog was a way to "do something, tell people about how you feel/think and get to know what they feel/think." Yet the determination of what is shared or not shared, which is carefully made by the blogger, includes the persona the blogger wishes to portray. What readers can share is also moderated by the blogger. For example, Sara has her blog's settings arranged such that when a first-timer comments on her blog, she receives an email alert; only if she approves the comment does it become visible. Commenters can delete their comments but the same option is also available to the blogger: she can delete any comment, for any reason.

Bloggers may explicitly invite reader participation. As Abha writes in her introductory "About me" post, "You may not always agree with all that I write and so I would love to hear your side of it too." Dipti, who follows Abha's blog, said it almost feels as if she is being invited into Abha's house; through comments such as this Abha makes her feel welcome, yet also reminds readers that it is "her house." In response to a post by Abha ("Don't know don't care," February 20, 2011) about what she perceived as the nonchalant

attitude of the denizens of Mumbai, Dipti and other readers wrote defensive comments. Abha, in response, stuck to her opinions. According to Dipti: “I didn’t agree with Abha’s blog on Mumbai and so I commented as much on her blog post. She replied and explained her point and said that what we wrote would not change her feeling about what she wrote and that it is her opinion which she has every right to express on *her* blog.” It is always the blogger’s blog, as the tool itself suggests, but without participation from the readers or commenters as determined by the blog’s tools, a blog would not be what it is.

5.2.2.3. *Invite into the blog.* In the previous subsection, I described how the tool (i.e., the blogging interface) enables participation in the blog. In this subsection, I describe how bloggers invite readers to participate. One of the primary ways the study’s bloggers invited a readership was through how they wrote. Depending on the kind of readership bloggers intend for their blogs, not just the content but also the tone of writing is important. For example, Laura and Mohan spoke about their favorite bloggers having a sarcastic style of writing about the mundane.

The tone for the participants’ blogs was usually conversational. One of the reasons Pranjal asked Abha if she would co-blog with him was that their different ideas about content would help them target multiple audiences and thereby get a much larger following. Another reason was Abha’s *boli bhasha* style of writing—this is an easy tone, almost like oral communication. Readers perceive and appreciate this quality in Abha’s blog posts. Dipti, for example, is friends with Pranjal in the offline world but follows “A Rational Mind” mainly because of Abha’s posts: “I love what she writes. Her writing makes me want to read more.” This conversational style is also demonstrated in the comment responses by these bloggers, which attempt to create dialogue.

Suman revealed a vision of blogging as dialogue in her first blog post: “Of course i look forward to your comments, suggestions, arguments, questions, disagreements, affirmations etc. to make it an interactive place...” (August 8, 2009). Suman appears to be encouraging conversation with and among her readers; such reciprocity of communication, however, would not be available if there were no readers.

Other methods used by the study’s bloggers included creating an identity and posting personal details about themselves, so that readers can develop a connection through “empathy which gives us a deeper reason to connect” (Rose, 2011, p. 210). For Dipti, who looks to blogs for ideas about quilling, “the Internet is always full of ideas but these blogs have a personal touch.” The blogs on quilling she follows are written by people much like herself. Another way that Suman, Pranjal, Riha, Suruchi, Lalit, and Sara worked on sustaining interest in their blogs was by posting links to their blog posts on their Facebook pages. According to Lalit: “I wanted it to be read and followed only by people who believed in the stuff that I wrote but it so happens that if I don’t promote it, no one knows about it... So I put a link on Facebook for the second one.” Parul said that her friends’ newsfeeds on Facebook alerted her to interesting blogs that she would read and occasionally subscribe to. By contrast, Neeraj said that it sometimes got irritating when his friends tagged him on Facebook on a link for random blogs that he didn’t have any interest in reading, yet would show up on his Facebook page.

Of all the study’s bloggers, Sai was the only one who did not link his blog to other social media, use the reliable method of posting regularly (as Pranjal did), or use key word rich texts, which enable the blog to be ranked highly by search engines (techniques employed by Sara and Suruchi). Nonetheless, he invited participation in his blog in multiple ways. As

previously mentioned, Sai writes in three languages (English, Hindi, and Telugu) and is least familiar with Hindi. For this reason, he asks his friends who are familiar with Hindi to review drafts of posts before he publishes them on his blog. In one instance, a friend he had asked to review a draft shared a link to his blog with another friend, who then commented on it. In this way, inviting participation is not restricted to the online forum but extends into the offline; in addition, “inviting into the blog” is not restricted to the blogger but includes the blog’s readers. As Aditya (one of the reader participants) said, he would often email links of blogs to his friends and family if he thought the blog’s content would interest them. Inviting others into the blog is a major part of the occupation, because it is one way to make sure that others participate in the blog.

5.2.2.4. *Why participate?* There are multiple reasons that the individuals involved in this study participated in the blogosphere, including wanting to produce creative writing, as a hobby, as “me time,” and as an emotional release, among others. But bloggers and readers alike were primarily motivated by social reasons such as wanting to connect with others, reading a blog because it was written by their friends, and so forth. In the next few paragraphs I discuss what I have come to think of as social motivators of blogging.

Pranjal, Akshay, and Sara spoke about their love for creative writing as their major motivator for blogging. As Sara said, “Blogging is the lazy man’s route to publishing.” This perspective indicates that they have ideas they want to express to others and they believe blogging provides an outlet for creative expression. In his introductory column, “About the Authors,” Pranjal writes that “The blog has given me a platform to speak up my opinions and reach out to a part of the society.” This reason for blogging (i.e., having something to say and looking for a place to say it to an audience) was most common for all the bloggers.

A code related to this subtheme, “store and share,” was Sai’s reason for choosing blogging over other media. The blog is a place to store ideas and share them. As Sai said, “I like to look at my blog posts and share them with only some friends.” A similar idea concerns storing incidents and happenings on the blog as a way to preserve and create memories. Ashley, who writes to document her son’s growing up, mentioned that her blog might have outlived its purpose, given that her son was almost 3 years old at the time of our interview. Yet while we were looking at her blog together, she said, “See, I don’t even remember this day unless I look at this picture and then I feel like maybe I should get on and post. We have done so many fun things in the last two months and I want to remember, so maybe this is a good way to remember.” Given that this study included individuals who blogged about the everyday, such storage was a primary reason for their blogging. As Abha wrote on her blog: “I like to write about normal things...the little things in our lives which we sometimes overlook, forget, hide or break.”

Readers’ reasons for following particular blogs were social for the most part. Here, a relevant code is one that I termed “needs-based reading.” When readers need to look up information online, many prefer to look at blogs. For example, when Rachita was looking for a recipe for a particular soup she ate at a local café, instead of looking at formal cooking websites she chose to check a blog that she had seen before. She reasoned that “the blogger adds her personal touch to the recipe, tells me what works and what doesn’t, and I prefer that over some instructional information.” In fact, most of the readers in this study mentioned “the personal touch” as a primary reason to look at blogs. Still, after some experience there were blogs they would go to and others on a similar topic that they would avoid. Such

reasoning on the part of readers affirmed the bloggers' habit of carefully reflecting on what they wanted to put up on their blogs, including the identities they wanted to portray.

5.2.3. Situating Findings in the Literature.

In the next few paragraphs I discuss what these findings about participation in blogging imply for occupations more generally, and situate them in the OS literature. In particular, I discuss how these findings aided the evolution of my thinking about occupations and the theoretical perspectives that I initially used to frame this study. Then I will problematize some of the concepts in the OS literature.

5.2.3.1 *Not a community.* The idea of how individuals participate in group/community-level occupations is commonly discussed in the OS literature (Asaba, 2008; Bratun & Asaba, 2008; Graham, 2002). Therefore, this was a primary pre-understanding I brought to this study. One of the initial guiding concepts for this research on blogging had to do with community, specifically a community brought together by its common interest in something that is fascinating to its members. As Rheingold (1993) defined it, “virtual community is a social network of individuals who interact through specific social media, potentially crossing geographical and political boundaries in order to pursue mutual interests or goals”. This definition seemed to fit with my conceptualization of blogging because it specifies there must be a mutual interest or goal that keeps people engaged (in this case, with the blogosphere).

Participants in the blogosphere return to blogs, to read or comment on them, because of this mutual interest. The repetitive cyclical nature of posting, which involves creation followed by reading and commenting, leads to a sense of being in a shared space that in turn fosters a feeling of community. As I mentioned in the description of the pilot study that

preceded full-scale research, a theoretical pillar of this study was *Communities of Practice* (Wenger, 1998) and its view of participation. The popular press I was reading at that time also encouraged notions of community in the blogosphere. Based on such ideas and notions, at the outset of this study I was pretty confident of this utopian idea of a community that comes together to perform this group-level occupation.

In conversations with participants, I regularly brought up the notion of community created by blogging practices. The usual responses varied among “I am not certain of what are you saying” to “What do you mean by ‘community’?” to the emphatic “No.” Many of the participants agreed that there probably was a bigger community somewhere out there in the blogosphere, but whether or not they felt a part of it was an issue they had not considered and didn’t appear to care much about. The latter sentiment provided me with one of the biggest “a-ha moments” of the entire research process, because so much of the material in my early readings of popular media and scholarly literature (Dennen, 2009) about blogging and social media focused on the need to connect and, in turn, to form community. Although much of the early literature on blogging emphasized its interactional nature (Mortensen & Walker, 2002), this characterization was later called into question (Mishne & Glance, 2006), especially because many blogs, and especially those of a personal nature, do not contain many links or comments. The characterization of bloggers as open to dialogue (Schmidt, 2007) does remain frequent in academic discourse; for my part, I obviously undertook this research with a preconceived notion of community. This disconnect was my first big hurdle in terms of what I thought and what the other participants thought.

A level of connectivity through backlinks among blogs has been posited as one way to develop community among bloggers (Dennen, 2009). Because I had reviewed the

participants' blogs before I met them, it seemed apparent that some level of connectivity was being demonstrated when the bloggers would list other blogs they followed, blog rolls, or followers of their blogs. Yet this level of connectivity did not contribute much to the development of a feeling of community.

Pranjal, Abha, and Suman, as previously mentioned, are members of a forum for Indian bloggers (Indiblogger.com) through which their blogs are linked with others. This website also hosts competitions for ranking blogs and provides resources for bloggers to connect with other bloggers from whom they can get opinions and suggestions about improving their blogging practices. Through this forum, Pranjal and Abha's blog "A Rational Mind" was voted among the top blogs in Mumbai; nonetheless, their response to the community question was a categorical "No". Even though they went out of their way to link with other individuals, to them blogging was not a community and they did not feel a sense of communal belonging.

As I puzzled over this discrepancy, I reviewed their blog posts and found some illumination. Although the idea of blogs being linked to each other through multiple backlinks (Schmidt, 2007) is common, their blog posts displayed few such links. In addition, although the space on their blog allowed for others to contribute, the blog was very clearly "their" space, defined by them. For example, even though there was a comments section in their blog, the priority was obviously the author-bloggers' opinions. Most of the comments on their posts are affirming, as is usually the case with personal blogs (Nardi, 2004), but even the occasional spate of negative comments elicited reactions which emphasized that both the opinions and the space in which they were posted clearly belonged to the author-bloggers.

For these author-bloggers, blogging is a way to let others know what they were doing and what their views are, rather than to maintain relationships through reciprocal exchanges of information. As mentioned in the findings section above, during the course of our interactions most of the study bloggers enthusiastically shared their blogger dashboards without being asked. These conversations followed a pattern: we talked about who their audiences were and where they accessed the blog from, which were the most popular and least popular blog posts, and how the readers came to their blogs. These topics were indicators of how the bloggers viewed their audiences; in general, an audience member was viewed as someone who reads or views a blog but not as someone the bloggers were interested in getting to know intimately. Blogging was about being social and connected, but these qualities were on the bloggers' terms. Therefore, it was their prerogative whether or not to respond to the comments on their blogs, as well as to choose whose comments were published (depending on the host's security/privacy settings). Riha, for example, rarely replied to comments on her blog posts whereas Sara (as previously mentioned) moderates first-time comments and only allows them to be posted if she approves of them.

Riha's thoughts about community and how it developed provided an important contrast to the dominant ideas from this research about lack of community or similar ideas:

You have different people commenting and this may not involve the main blogger, who posts, but then you have these different people commenting and you go to their blog and start responding and then it just starts expanding... Over time it becomes more like a community, more people who are interested in some topic continue the conversation and it definitely could become more like a community.

Riha also mentioned, however, that this was not what she had set out to do, because this level of involvement required time and commitment to the process that she wasn't sure she was ready for. Interestingly, this excerpt is from a conversation I had with her at the very beginning of the study, when she had just started to blog. When we met recently, however, she shared a box of delicious home-baked cookies with me and mentioned that these cookies were an exchange gift from a blogger in California. This exchange came about through their contact with another blogger who had organized a "blog links" type of website. In my understanding these connections are very much like a community; the mutual exchanges that occurred surely had a community-like feel.

The only participant whose blogging evoked a feeling of a community was Akshay. Inspired by popular Indian bloggers Chetan Bhagat and Sidin Vadukut, whose work they admired, Akshay and a group of his close friends joined the blogosphere when they were in college. His purpose for blogging was to put out his ideas creatively and give and receive feedback to improve his work. Although he and his friends aspired to reach the level of writing of the more popular bloggers, he was candid enough ("We don't write that well") to realize that he may never achieve such popularity. As part of "a circle of people [who] write and read each other's blogs," connectivity within the blogosphere and being connected with them in the blogosphere seemed to him an extension of their offline affiliation rather than a new community they had created.

As the data collection and analysis phases continued, it gradually dawned on me that there was a definite sense of shared experience among the participants, demonstrated in part by the comments readers left on their blogs. However, what seemed missing were conversations in which readers shared and links among blogs. In addition, the power

differentials in these blogs regarding who could post and whose voice got heard precluded these blogs from developing community. Almost all of the blogs were about the authors' experiences and, although these authors spoke proudly about how they had readers in different countries and on different continents, to them that was all. The readers were an audience of people who consumed their work, not people to friend or become intimate with. This attitude posed a contrast to "the reciprocal action of posting, linking, reading and commenting along with sharing a general category of identity makes bloggers part of a community" (Dennen, 2009, p. 26) and thus made the blogs not communities but just spaces for the authors to share their thoughts.

Most of the participants agreed that there was a community out there somewhere in the blogosphere, but they weren't interested in being part of it. This attitude fit with Boyd's (2008) observation that the practice of personal blogging is ultimately enhancing to the individual. As Sara said, the community probably existed as an overarching model, but it was never her intent in creating her blog to be part of a community, nor did she know if she had any "buy-in with that community bit." Blogging may provide ancillary benefits to other individuals or to groups; however, the primary beneficiary is the individual. Through this study it became clear that these blogs were not creating "community," in either the traditional or the virtual sense. Engagement in this occupation was not for community development or a sense of belonging; instead, the purpose was more about the "me." This unexpected finding also reiterated Dickie's (2003) warning that theories of occupation should be based in more than personal experience and conjecture. If I had gone only by my previous understanding, I probably would never have come to these understandings of how bloggers and readers do not think of blogging as a community activity or of the blogosphere as a community.

5.2.3.2. Neither a community of practice nor legitimate peripheral participation.

Communities of practice, a concept that helped form the initial theoretical framework of this study, is closely tied with the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Because participation is a major focus of this research, I also explored the concept of peripheral participation. The differing levels of participation in blogging can be understood through Wenger's conception of "trajectories" (1998, pp. 154–155). In this context, peripheral trajectories refer to the quiet readers of blogs (i.e., lurkers); inbound trajectories refer to people who are trying to become full-fledged bloggers; insider trajectories refer to blog authors; boundary trajectories refer to individuals who may be weaving among different communications media (e.g., between blogs and microblogs); and outbound trajectories explain the behaviors of individuals who may have been actively participating in a blog but who have lost interest and therefore reduced their participation. This kind of structure, although linear in the way I have described it, need not be so linear after all: people can remain lurkers all the time. If they do, that will be the only level of participation they achieve.

I realized early in the research process that, although an introduction to blogs is necessary before one can take up blogging as an occupation, the mere presence of the technology is no guarantee that one will become a blogger (Sreberny & Khiabany, 2010). As I began to collect data, instances of learning and participating that I had thought plausible were not reflected in the data or in my interactions with participants in the blogosphere. For example, individuals sometimes became bloggers without going through any of these phases. Ashley rarely read any blogs before she decided to become a blogger; all she knew was that blogging could be a way for her to communicate with her family and friends—and she

already had a Google account. It took her approximately 30 minutes to set up her blog and become a blogger. Lalit and Sai, however, set up their Blogger accounts a few years before they actually created their own blogs.

The idea that individuals could eventually engage in full participation through sustained, legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) did not hold true for the participants in this study. In fact, for most of the readers (i.e., the secondary cast), the idea that they were participating in the blogosphere so that one day they could become bloggers themselves was almost incomprehensible; on more than one occasion I was laughed at for even suggesting it. Yet, as Geet stated, she felt that she had taken part in the creation of Sai's blog post about Yeats but certainly not in a way that would enable her to become a full-fledged blogger.

The lack of desire among the readers to move between levels of participation was one reason that the theory of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) did not fit with the participants' conceptualizations about blogging. Communities of practice is based on three major aspects: domain, community, and the practice itself. In this study, however, except for the shared domain wherein readers as well as bloggers were interested in the topic of the blog, the other two aspects were not apparent. The idea of community was never a focus of a single blog from the perspective of either the readers or the bloggers, especially because it was possible to be a part of a blog without holding explicit membership status. Nor is the practice itself a shared experience. Bloggers write and readers read or comment; and, as previously mentioned, readers are not necessarily interested in taking their participation to the next level as in legitimate peripheral participation. The ideas that blogging is not a community of practice and that legitimate peripheral participation does not explain

participation in it are supported by Baumer, Sueyoshi, and Tomlinson's (2011) work on participation in political blogs.

Yet participation definitely occurred in the occupation, and this participation was obviously social. The notion of the social nature of participating in occupation has been examined in the OS literature (Asaba, 2008; Bratun & Asaba, 2008). However, the generally prevailing, individualistic view of participation continues to dominate the OS/OT literature, as evidenced by Law (2002); Borell, Asaba, Rosenberg, Schult, and Townsend (2006); Vessby and Kejellberg (2010); and Palmadottir (2010). Because my understanding of participation is social, the focus in this research is neither explicitly on the person nor on the activity; instead, it encompasses both and also includes the features of the tool without which this participation would be unimaginable.

5.2.3.3 *Not a co-occupation.* Blogs have been characterized as online diaries, but what makes them unique is the presence of an audience (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). One of the primary findings from this study is that blogging occurs because of the participation of many individuals in the creation of the occupation's artifact. This participation can occur both online and offline. In fact, the meshing of the online and offline as suggested by Jurgenson (2012) is a prominent feature of blogging. Bloggers blog about what has occurred offline and in many instances the people who are involved in the offline activity may in fact not be part of the audience for the blog. For example, Ashley blogs about her son and mentions her husband in many of her posts. He rarely reads her blog unless she asks him for an opinion, but when he gives an opinion he participates in the creation of a blog post.

In Graham's (2002) paper about participation in dance, dance was considered a field for participation in which dancers and audiences all participate (as in a dance performance); their participation, however, happens in different ways. Taking a cue from this research, I also think of participation in occupation as being widespread. For blogging, participation includes reading, lurking, linking, being part of creating the blog, and more. In addition, as I have already stated, blogging technology does not only support this participation in the occupation but literally instigates it. For these reasons, I looked to the literature on blogging and occupational sciences to help me better understand this aspect of participation in the occupation of blogging.

Baumer, Sueyoshi, and Tomlinson's (2011) study about participation in political blogging emphasized the collaborative nature of political blogs; the authors even suggested that "if blogging is the process of creating a blog and if a blog is created through the interactions among bloggers and readers, then not only is the interaction important, but moreover the interaction itself is what constitutes blogging" (p. 33). Their research included blog writers and overt contributors (i.e., individuals who communicated with the blogger through the blog or email). The findings from this study were different: interactions among bloggers and readers need not be as explicit as communication. Instead, sometimes all it takes is a change in the number of lurkers and often the lack of lurkers can in and of itself be a cue for changing things on the blog. Even Sai, who insisted that he wrote only for himself, was familiar with his blog's statistics and was aware that somebody in Greenland had viewed his blog. This person in Greenland had no clear or direct communication with Sai, yet the fact that his blog had been viewed made Sai cognizant of its public nature.

From an occupational science perspective, a theoretical concept that recognizes the collaborative aspect of occupation is co-occupation (Pierce, 2009). As defined by Pierce, co-occupations do not necessarily occur within shared space, time, meaning, affect, or intent, yet they are fairly symmetric experiences. The findings from this study, however, suggest otherwise: blogging involves asymmetric experiences (after all, bloggers have total editorial control), yet without readers they might as well not blog at all. Although the construction of the blog goes beyond the blog writer, the blog is nonetheless tilted heavily in favor of the blogger. Moreover, blogging does not occur only on the blogging interface. Instead it encompasses many different spheres, both online and offline, as I have repeatedly pointed out in the sections on fluidity and participation. Blogs will exist as long as bloggers have the necessary commitment, time, and connection to produce them (Sreberny & Khiabany, 2010), but the participation of readers, even if they remain anonymous, is also necessary.

5.2.4. Conclusion.

In this findings section on participation I have attempted to highlight how certain commonly-used concepts (communities, communities of practice, legitimate peripheral participation co-occupation, etc.) fail to adequately describe the occupation of blogging as outlined in this study. Also, concepts that are *original* (emphasis in original paper) to occupational science such as co-occupation (Pierce, 2009), do not explain an occupation like blogging, in which participation occurs in multiple frames of time, place, effort, and so forth but for which credit for the activity is placed squarely upon the blogger.

I conclude with an example from my blogging experiences. I began my journey into the blogosphere by reading a blog for which a link was emailed to me in 2008. I then didn't look at another blog until early in 2010, after I moved to Chapel Hill. Craving Indian food in

a place where I did not know how to find authentic ingredients translated into long hours of online searches for solutions. It was then that I came across food blogs, which have since been a companion I rely on at least multiple times per week. Gradually, this step into the blogosphere sucked me into the vortex of blogging. I would spend hours reading and linking to blogs on varying subjects. During all this time, however, I didn't consider for one moment that I was participating in how blogs were being shaped; if at that point somebody had told me as much, I would have thought the idea ludicrous. Yet, as I got into the research, I began to develop some semblance of understanding about participation. It was not until I created my own blog that I finally understood the full import of others' participation.

I created my blog as a way to collaborate with the study participants and anyone else who might be interested in what I was writing. Because collaboration and sharing were the reasons I was writing, I would spend a lot of time using the statistics tool to figure out which people might be reading my blog. Every single comment was precious to me and every time I published a blog post I would spend the next few days checking up on comments and page views. I linked my blog to my Facebook account and asked people I knew to share the link with others. Using the blog's statistical tools, I discovered that there did not seem to be much interest. As a result, I began to feel discouraged about the blog and haunted by the blogging anxiety Suman had mentioned.

I finally stopped writing new blog posts. I knew that no community had developed through my blog nor was there enough symmetrical participation in the blog for it to be considered a co-occupation. Yet the blog lives on in the blogosphere, ready to be picked up and continued; at least once a week I still check on the statistics to look for "participation."

5.3. Findings III: Serendipity of change and creativity

5.3.1. Introduction and Overview.

The argument in this section is that, given the dynamic nature of blogging, creativity and change are an integral component of the occupation and occur insidiously. They occur in a gradual and cumulative manner, while the blogger is engaged in the process of blogging. When I began to talk with Riha (the first blogger to be enrolled in this study) about her blogging, she was still in the process of setting up her blog; her ideas about it and its aesthetics immediately had me thinking about the creative nature of blogging. Riha was interested in blogging about cooking, which she described as an activity that one can get as creative about as one wants. As previously mentioned, Riha had some experience with both blogging and cooking prior to beginning her current blog (she had developed an active interest in learning how to cook before she moved to Chapel Hill from India in August 2009). In the six months between when she began to consider blogging and when she published her first blog post, she indulged in many blog-related activities. After thinking about blogging for some time and reviewing her options for using blogging platforms, including Wordpress and Blogger, she settled on Blogger because the background theme she wanted was being offered for free on Blogger. Also, since she wasn't sure about how much interest she could sustain in blogging, she was not ready to invest money in a blog. Still, she wanted a theme background that would be evocative of food-related memories and also convey her identity.

The creative aspects became more and more obvious as Riha and I continued to discuss her blogging. When Riha sets out to post on her blog, she makes sure that she has pictures of what she is blogging about and an idea of what she would like her blog post to look like. The final outcome does not always match these ideas, however. For example, with

her only step-wise photo-blog, some pictures she had selected didn't seem to fit the blog post as she drafted it. This lack of fit led to changes in ways she had not previously determined. The ultimate product was still a photo-blog, but with different photographs than she had originally planned to use.

As this vignette highlights, the creativity that goes into making a blog post and the changes that occur while making it may seem integral to the blogging and may seem to occur by chance. While change in blogging was a defined research objective for this study from the beginning, creativity became a focus only as it progressed. Blogging is a highly creative occupation; in conversations with the participants, this concept came up repeatedly. However, what I found myself confronting was not just the notion of the artifact of blogging as creative; instead, I was amazed at the creativity involved in the *doing* of blogging. The way creativity and change occurred together led to a focus on goings-on in the present rather than anticipation of an expression of creativity through the blog post.

5.3.2. Themes.

In this section I focus on the intertwined themes of creativity and change; however, as the research proceeded it became clear to me that all the themes are interlinked. For example, the social nature of blogging and its embeddedness in other activities, came to the fore in the findings about both creativity and change. This reiteration of some common ideas was reassuring for me, in the sense that I would be able to tie it all together, but it has proved difficult to handle in other ways—especially in terms of the presentation of these findings. I have striven to maintain a balance between repetition and relevance to how this theme offers a new perspective.

5.3.2.1. Role of creativity. Most of the study's bloggers began blogging to express themselves creatively and share their ideas with others in an ingenious manner. As previously mentioned, Pranjal, Abha, Sara and Akshay all told me that their love for creative writing brought them to a forum (i.e., blogging) in which they could easily express themselves. The fact that they can have the last word on what gets published provides the freedom to express their views. However, given that they are always writing for someone who reads, their expressions were done in a creative manner (including aesthetics, which were of prime importance) to invite others into the blog and maintain their attention once they were in.

I came to think of the more obvious creative decisions, such as selecting among background themes provided by the blogging interface, as an overt process. All of the blogger participants experimented with different background themes before finally choosing one they were most comfortable with. The selected background theme provides the blog with a rough framework and the bloggers work within the structure provided. Yet blogs are also responsive to people's needs. The structure supplied by the background theme may be somewhat rigid, but this parameter prompted the bloggers to figure out new ways to personalize their blogs so that the blogs resonated with what they wanted to portray. For example, when Suruchi began blogging she selected a background theme template that she has since continued to use. However, within a few months she added a new design to the basic template that helps to distinguish her blog from others that use a similar background theme. Suman has also made similar changes to her blog so that "the blog reflects its author more clearly."

When Ashley started her blog, she did not know much about blogging technology but knew that she wanted her blog to be esthetically appealing to her target audience of

friends and family. She asked a blogger friend for help and learned how to change the blog's background and in general how to be more creative within the confines of the blog's structure. One of the "fun things" she did with her blog was to add background music and create a playlist. When she changes this playlist, she feels rewarded by comments such as "I turn your blog on and just listen to the music." Although she no longer has the background music on her blog, she could not recall when she stopped adding the music, just that she no longer has it.

The creative opportunities created by bloggers within their blogging were interesting to note. For example, Aatmaj's blog is mostly about his activities in the offline world; occasionally he shares stories he finds interesting. Like so many of the participant bloggers in this study, Aatmaj works hard to make his blog attractive. He chose a pale blue background, with a picture of bird silhouettes in the upper-right corner. For every blog post he makes sure to find a graphic that is appropriate to its content. His idea of the creative potential of blogging was obvious when he said that "writing gives me a sense of fulfillment and achievement." Yet Aatmaj's creativity is not limited to the output of his blogging: he also believes that "writing is emoting" and the spontaneity that emoting demands is reflected in his blogging. For example, when we discussed his first blog post, "Simple Joy!!!" (April 16, 2011), he described how he began the draft in a way that was much different from how it looked when he published it.

Any creation, however small or however gigantic, takes a lot of effort and all the thinking, doing and expressing that goes into creating the blog, is mostly not visible, because as the reader you only see the final product. But the little tweaks that I make when writing change the post tremendously and that is an

enjoyable process... Most times I am so focused on making my writing understandable that the final product is never clear until I see it and then decide if it is ok or make more changes.

Yet Aatmaj does not like to make changes to his posts once they are published, because he prefers the errors to be reminders that he needs to improve his work.

In contrast to Aatmaj's policy is Sai's willingness to change things on his blog. Sai's blog consists of poetry written in a mix of languages (Hindi, Telugu, and English); each post is accompanied by sketches. Some of these sketches were added long after the posts were first published, because Sai felt they "looked forlorn and empty." The sketches he added were ones he had made himself; if he felt that any of them fit with what he had written, he would add them to the post. At other times he created sketches to fit in with what he had written. Sai had not intended at first to add sketches to the blog yet he did, based on what he saw. The creativity, which occurred as part of the occupation, was inspired during the occupation itself.

In the above sub-sections I have attempted to demonstrate that although it is well accepted that blogging is a creative act, in terms of the product and selection of the themes, and so forth, the salient aspect of these findings concern how creativity is integrated into the act of blogging itself. The small changes, or "tweaks" as Aatmaj called them, happened during blogging, rather than as separate manifestations of the need to be creative.

5.3.2.2. *Insidious nature of change.* As I had stated in my dissertation proposal, I was interested in studying the process of change in the occupation of blogging. In keeping with this interest, I spent hours trying to figure out what if anything had changed on the participants' blogs, with the intention of using observed changes as starting points to talk

about changes in their blogging practices. Most of this time was spent in noting inconsistencies, whether in terms of the frequency of blogging, content of blog posts, number of comments, or even (occasionally) a change in tone. As I presented examples to the participant bloggers, their genuine looks of “Really! I hadn’t thought about that” surprised me. Because all of these individuals wrote insightful material on their blogs, I had assumed that they would also reflect on the work they were doing. Yet, as Akshay explained, he hadn’t thought about the changes in his blog so he wasn’t aware that there were any noticeable differences, except as they mirrored events that happened in his life because that’s what he blogged about. Many such instances occurred during the data collection process. In this section, I focus on the change as an insidious occurrence during blogging.

Looking back through the conversations with the study bloggers, one consistent idea was “that’s the way the blog turned out.” This finding foregrounded the idea of agency for the blog. Many of the study bloggers referred to their blogs almost as if they had lives of their own and were even somewhat responsible for the changes that occurred within them. As Suruchi phrased it, the changes in her blog occurred as if they were “meant to.” The more she became aware of what she wanted the blog to say, the more the blog seemed to provide her with ways to say it. For example, when Suruchi began blogging she would publish posts once a week. Within a few months, she was publishing very short posts of one or two sentences, every day. When we spoke about this change in her blogging, she said:

I wanted my blog to have a healthy amount of audience traffic, and so I knew I had to post regularly, but I didn’t have time to write longer posts and this seemed like an easy way to do it. Plus, since I figured out how to link my blog to Facebook, it became so much easier.

Blogging is thus constructed as a coming together of the blogger and the blogging technology.

Audience responses also play an important role in determining the changes that occur in blogging. “To keep an interested audience, one should blog at least 2–3 times per month if not more” was a refrain I heard many times from bloggers. Riha mentioned in our very first conversation that she planned to blog “over weekends, and have about 2 or 3 posts every month, it’s a good way to ensure steady traffic to the blog.” Yet what actually happened was that she wrote one blog post per month from when she started to blog until January 2013; since then, there have been no new posts. The discrepancies between what the bloggers espoused and enacted were also indicative of another fact, namely that blogging was never the highest priority for participants in this study. Blogging was an enjoyable experience, not a chore, so if something more engaging came along, blogging would take a break. The discrepancy between what bloggers professed to want to do and actually did was related to the idea that “life happened,” as was evident through Suman’s experiences with her blog.

Suman began to blog a few months after she got married in 2009 and moved to a new city. She conceptualized her blogging as generalist and began her blog with the desire to influence other people’s thinking as well as to hear from others what they thought of her blog. When she reflected on the changes her blogging has undergone, she thought deeply before replying, “I can’t help but relate it [blog changes] to the changes in me as a person. It’s got a lot to do with the way I have changed as a person in the last five years.” She elaborated this observation by telling me how her level of confidence with blogging had increased:

Before, my output was poor also because I used to face huge performance pressure to write the best post that sounds interesting, witty, and has a nice structure to it. So the thought of writing a blog post was stressful.

Eventually she got used to her new city, got a new job, and generally became more confident in her dealings with the events in her life. Of this change she said, “Now I feel there is only a lack of time and not ideas to write blogs.”

Another idea about change that came out from the data was about routine. Sara wanted to be regular with her blogging, but if other incidents happened in life, like the end of a university semester, blogging easily took a back seat. The blog in a way reflected what was going on with the blogger. Sara’s blog is a good example of this, while her stated purpose to blog is to share her bit on the sustainability ideas, many of her blog posts are far removed from this idea. She posts pictures of her visit to European countries, her attempts at cooking and in a way the blog has changed dramatically from what she conceived it to be when she started the blog. Yet how much of this was a conscious decision to change her blog remained unanswered.

5.3.3. Situating the Findings in the Literature.

I was repeatedly struck by how integral both creativity and change were to blogging; in fact, it was difficult to set these apart as two different themes. These connections, as previously mentioned, were vital in developing my understandings of blogging. The discussion that follows has a twofold purpose: to highlight how the theory of mediated action, which was part of the theoretical framework, was sidelined by the data; and to

emphasize how research in OS has failed to account for the serendipitous nature of change and creativity within occupations.

5.3.3.1. *The process of transformation of occupations.* In addition to the changes in individuals' blogging practices, I was interested in the transformation of the occupation itself and its links to other occupations. As previously mentioned, occupations do not develop in isolation and the mere presence of the technology does not guarantee that people will become involved in blogging. Yet the occupation of blogging, which has developed over the past two decades, has become immensely popular. A socio-historical approach, though not the primary focus of this study, was one I was interested in employing to know more about this transformation of occupations. Werstch's (1998) theory of mediated action provides precisely this type of focus. According to this theory, agents, cultural tools, and the irreducible tension between them always have a particular past and are always in the process of undergoing further change. People are adaptive, innovative, and influential in determining what technology is and will become. At the same time, the socio-historical context we are in determines how our occupations are conducted. I postulated that an analysis through this lens of mediated action would aid me in determining connections rather than discontinuities between earlier forms of mediated action and those of today.

Many authors in the initial days of blogging research characterized blogging as a form of journal writing (Nardi, 2004). More recent literature, however, has rejected this idea (Baumer, Sueyoshi, & Tomlinson, 2012), and the findings from this research support the latter literature. As my study progressed, it soon became apparent that none of the participants thought of blogging as similar to maintaining a diary but instead, as Sai characterized it, as a way to "store and share." The idea of using the blog as a receptacle of

memories came up very often. Ashley, for example, used the blog to document her son's journey through childhood; when we met, she showed me a book she had had published from the blog. Nonetheless, blogging has only recently been thought of as a mode of memory storage. During our conversation, Ashley mentioned how her mother maintained a scrapbook to document her childhood memories and how her blog was a way for Ashley to do the same while also helping her widely dispersed friends and family to stay in touch. The book she published became her way of storing her son's memories in essentially the same way the scrapbook had done for her mother. Thus, the blog provided a medium for her to do a similar activity in a slightly different way.

For Pranjal, who wrote articles for newsmagazines, blogging was "a continuation of my love for writing, whether I blog or write in other media." This continuity of writing is similar to what Hayles (2008) meant when he wrote that "the accumulated knowledge of previous literary experiments has not been lost but continues to inform performances in the new medium" (p. 59). Aatmaj wrote for his office's internal magazine, whereas Lalit communicated his love of writing by recalling his work on school essays. It became obvious that although blogging was not the study's bloggers' first experiment or experience with writing, something about blogging drew them in.

Despite some interesting findings about the evolution and transformation of occupations, these ideas about transformation of occupation never became the focus of my research. As I looked over my field notes and memos from the early days and middle of the project, I began to see a change in the way I was thinking about these ideas: I had moved away from an active focus on the learning and transformations within blogging to a more dispersed and insidious outlook about how these transformations took place. Among the

codes I created, transformation and community did not show up as I had expected. What did show up, emphasizing once again the importance of readers in the occupation of blogging, was the influence of blog posts' popularity and how that translated into a change in blogging practices, or how a reader's comment influenced a change in what was written.

5.3.3.2. Creativity and change as part of the occupation. Occupational science has a long tradition of studying creative occupations such as quilting (Dickie, 2003), cooking (Hocking, Wright-St. Clair, & Bunyarong, 2002; Shordike & Pierce, 2005), textile making, and so forth. Yet a review of the occupational science literature suggests that not enough has been theorized about this crucial aspect of occupations. For the study's blogger participants, being creative was meaningful in its own right; everything posted on the blogs was done creatively (Jurgenson, 2012). Rather than a focus on creativity as the goal of blogging, how creativity occurred in the midst of the occupation (i.e., by a little bending of the rules by the blogger and the flexibility offered by the medium itself) were more significant. Dickie (2003) suggested that creativity in an occupation is supported by the structure and rules of traditional crafts. This study on blogging has produced a similar result; namely, how the coming together of the media and the bloggers fosters creativity. Because of this combination, creativity has remained an integral part of the occupation of blogging.

The findings of this study reveal two major ideas about creativity. The first is that creativity is socially defined; in other words, the medium itself plays an important role in fostering creativity. A closely related corollary of this idea is that creativity is not an individual-level phenomenon. The second is that creativity is not necessarily intentional, as Blanche (2007) suggested:

In process-oriented creativity, the person may have an idea about the process and the outcome but does not know how it will be reached and is willing to change the course of action at any time because the experience of performing the occupation guides the action. (p. 25)

In the context of this research, creativity was more than the active thought-out process Blanche referred to. In the examples above, the changes that occurred were clearly related to the situation of blogging.

5.3.4 Conclusion.

In this section, I have attempted to show how creativity and change were an integral part of the occupation of blogging rather than dichotomous between the product and process of the occupation. I conclude with an example from my blogging experience. Creating my blog and putting my first post on it took place over a period of months. I decided that I would use Blogger as the blogging interface because most of the other blogger participants used it and I had become familiar with the interface. Choosing the background theme template was easy; all I did was decide on one that seemed appropriate to the idea of the blog (it had books in the background).

What took longest was coming up with the title of the blog. I toyed with multiple ideas before finally settling on “Dissertation Ruminations.” But the creativity aspect of blogging as integral to the occupation was not obvious to me until much later, when I realized how I structure my writing in terms of punctuations or emoticons that make the final product it that much more aesthetic and fun to make. As I reflected on some of the changes my ideas for this study have undergone, I have had to confront the fact that in the dissertation proposal I outlined a study of change in occupation. I started with the idea of studying how

changes occurred in blogging, with extensive reliance on Humphry's (2005) model of transformation of occupation. However, through the data collection and interactions with other participants, I ended up with a different concept—namely of creativity and change as integrated and co-constitutive.

As I have summarized the findings from this study, I have also problematized some ideas from the occupational science literature, including the discrete nature of occupations, the process of co-creation, and the notions of creativity and change. In the next chapter I discuss the findings using an occupational lens and through the transactional perspective. In this discussion I connect the different themes and attempt to show both how the problems in the way OS has considered occupations can be overcome and what more we can understand about occupations through a study of Internet-mediated occupations such as blogging.

Chapter 6

Discussion

I began the research for this doctoral project with a determination to understand more about occupations, accompanied by the naïve optimism of a novice researcher that I would find new ideas that could change the way we think about occupations. What I found instead was a reiteration of some ideas already present in the literature and some different ways of conceptualizing occupations. The most exciting parts of the journey of this dissertation were its unexpected findings and changes in direction. I was not very enthused about the process when I coded and recoded the data multiple times, but as I kept at it, the interesting aspects of doing research began to dawn on me. I saw ideas such as participation in blogging in a new light. When I started the study, participating in occupation seemed like such an inane concept in thinking about occupation that I never thought it would become a primary focus of this research, especially in the ways that it did. But as was repeatedly pointed out to me, if we knew the questions to ask we wouldn't investigate the data with an open mind. This fact underlined the importance of the exploratory ethnography.

Who I am influenced the study in many ways and also steered the direction of the research. Many of the biases I brought to this study came from my engagement with blogging, my background as an occupational therapist, my Indian ethnicity, and the theoretical lenses that framed my thinking. A particular example of my biases concerned how I was trained to think of occupations as occurring in a discrete manner. I realized that this

particular bias shaped what I was doing only when it became evident that blogging occurs in multiple frames of time, space, and place. In addition, as I noted in Chapter 2, my cultural background led me to see occupations as being more than individualistic. Even as I continued to look at the occupation of blogging as occurring within a community, I found that the “community” was never a focus of blogging participation. How I originally thought of community for this study was influenced by Wenger’s (1998) conception of communities of practice as occurring through the process of sharing information and experiences within a group whose members learn from each other. This research has confirmed that blogging is a social occupation, one that encourages connectedness (Dean, 2010); nonetheless, the study participants’ reasons for engaging in the occupation were never about community; they did not form community through the occupation of blogging; and learning was not a focus for them. Therefore, communities of practice did not fit in this study.

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, changes in the focus of this research reinforced my belief in the importance of studying an Internet-mediated occupation in order to gain new understandings about occupations. As the study progressed, it also seemed that the directions the research was taking were unequally weighted toward the process of blogging and the context of the creation of the artifact, rather than the product (i.e., the blog itself). This inequality in focus occurred in part because of the occupational lens I chose and in part because of the findings from the pilot study that laid the foundation for the full study.

One of the stated aims of this study was to explore blogging as a means to further understand some concepts from the Occupational Science literature and integrate them with ideas from blogging research. In keeping with this aim, I have problematized a number of Occupational Science concepts through the findings of this study, including the discrete

nature of occupation, participation in occupations, co-occupation, and the integral nature of creativity and change. In this chapter, I summarize how these findings relate to the transactional perspective. To do this, I first provide a summary of the findings and then discuss some concepts of the transactional perspectives of occupation which helped me in coming to these findings. In conclusion, I discuss how this study helped to slowly unfold and reveal the hidden world of occupations.

6.1. Summary of Findings

The findings I described in Chapter 5 indicate how blogging transcended the boundaries I was trying to draw around it in order to delineate a study of occupation. My attempts were unsuccessful mainly because I found the boundaries of blogging to be socially constructed, not technologically defined. Defining blogging as only typing a post and publishing it turned out to be a very narrow way of thinking about blogging that does not do justice to the more dispersed occupation that blogging actually is. The interpenetrations of this occupation among its context and the people involved in it, as well as its continuity across time, place, and space were some of the key findings of this study.

Where blogging began and the directions it took were developed by the bloggers in the midst of the act of blogging, in combination with the technology. Technology was altered and used in multiple ways by the study's participants to achieve their desired outcomes. The structure of the blogging platform Blogger.com reveals that a blog can be structured as "any one of a million things." For the participants in this study, structure definitely meant different things at different times. They changed their blogs to accommodate their needs. Although at times their blogs could be used as means of creative expression, at other times they functioned as ways to store memories. As Baym (2010) wrote, people are adaptive,

innovative, and influential in determining what technology is and will become. Accordingly, study participants' blogging continued to evolve as they engaged in it.

The features of the blogging tool (i.e., the blog-hosting website) heavily influence the blogs produced through it, but it is bloggers who choose particular websites to meet their needs. As a researcher, I had to reconcile the fact that many of the participants accorded agency to the blogging interface when they spoke about how the blog turned out the way it did or how the blog "made" them do certain things. Therefore, the insight that technology does not determine occupation but that these factors are co-determinant, co-constitutive forces remained crucially important throughout the study. According to our ideas and actions, we choose technologies; we also adapt and shape them, yet the way that technology and culture interact is a complex dance (Kozinets, 2010). For example, linking between blogs has been around for a long time but participants discovered that the ability to link their blogs to other social media was an easy way to maintain higher visibility.

Another interesting finding concerned the social performative aspects of blogging. Blogging was a well-thought out performance, which blurred the lines between what was considered public and private. Blogging was always conducted with a view toward an audience, even though that audience may not actually be present or listening and regardless of whether its presence can be noted only via access logs or explicit reactions such as comments or other communicated references to the blog material. Nonetheless, knowing that others read their blogs was a high priority for the bloggers in this study. The social nature of blogging was highlighted from the beginning; moreover, I was brought face-to face in unexpected ways with the reality that the blogging platforms were largely responsible for this. Yet I began to see that the more I tried to describe a circumscribed way of thinking

about blogging, the more new threads appeared, and the better I thought I was getting at untangling them, the more they seemed to get knotted up.

Occupations are “chunks of culturally and personally meaningful activity in which humans engage, that are named in the lexicon of culture” (Clark et al., 1991). This oft-quoted definition of occupation suggests that occupations should be easy to classify and observe, because they have names and obviously occupy specific times and places. Hocking (2009), an influential occupational science scholar, suggested that occupations can be studied using certain parameters, so I attempted to use these parameters to develop guiding questions for the research. But foundational to Hocking’s framework remain the basic assumptions that occupations are discrete and visible, and this study consistently revealed that there is much more to the occupation of blogging than what is observable and, in addition, that occupations spread in ways that cannot be fully accounted for. Other major points revealed by this study had to do with how blogging involves the participation of individuals other than the author as well as the technology and the insidious nature of creativity and change. This study of blogging has challenged me in many ways to think about what occupations are and how we study them. Obviously, my theoretical orientation, the transactional perspective, has something to do with this challenge.

6.2. How the Transactional Perspective Set the Stage for this Discussion

My understandings about occupations were repeatedly being challenged as I began this study; therefore, I kept returning to the transactional perspectives to help me resolve some of the issues that arose. Using the transactional perspective has helped me develop a profound appreciation for the situation of blogging and the multiple idiosyncratic and non-uniform ways in which blogging has evolved. According to the transactional perspective, the

purpose of occupation is thought of as functionally coordinating relations to maintain the transactional unit as a whole. In addition, as I stated Chapter 2, I have used Cutchin, Aldrich, Bailliard, and Coppola's (2008) definition of occupation as "a type of relational action through which habit, context, and creativity are coordinated toward a provisional yet particular meaningful outcome that is always in process" (p. 164). I did not begin this study with an a priori understanding of this definition of occupation; instead, as the study progressed my increasing reliance on the transactional perspectives of occupation (Cutchin & Dickie, 2013) not only became evident but also reiterated this understanding of occupation. Blogging, for example, occurs in a particular manner for each blogger, but the act of blogging is always coordinated through the habits of using the Internet and particular interfaces (e.g., Google), occurs in a particular context, and moves toward an undetermined future.

The findings from this study brought out an interesting aspect of occupation, namely what happens when we are challenged in unique ways—as bloggers are every time they decide to blog. The blogging interface, how to type, and so forth, are habitual circumstances, decisions, and actions for bloggers, yet time and again idiosyncrasies seem to rear their heads in blogging—whether this occurs in the little tweaks bloggers make to their blogs or posts or the big changes the study participants made in what they did and said about their blogging. Still, the fact that blogging extends beyond the blogging interface and defied my every attempt to contain it for the purposes of observing and studying it, along with the participation of people and tools, can all be explicated well with concepts from the transactional perspectives.

In the following section, I attempt to show how the transactional perspectives of occupation can help us to move forward in our thinking about occupations and also help us to overcome the problems I observed in the Occupational Science literature. I use three transactional perspective concepts to show how occupations as diffuse as blogging can be viewed through a transactional and ultimately occupational perspective. The rest of this section is organized into three major subsections: continuous, co-operation, and ends-in-view.

6.2.1. Continuous.

Blogging took off in the late 1990s and in the mid-2000s, blogging became a common way to maintain an online social media presence. Blogging does not occur in isolation from other people or activities because bloggers are always blogging for an audience. Blogging is emergent in terms both of the socio-cultural context in which it occurs and of how it occurs as a result of interactions with other people in a social context. However, just because the blogging technology is available, not everyone takes it up (Srebeny & Khiabany, 2010); instead there is something about the history of a person, her context, and where she is situated that make her take up blogging. Blogging thus occurs “from the constantly emerging relations that bind person and world” (Cutchin, Dickie, & Humphry, 2006, p. 98). In addition, the online presence of blogs does not imply that blogging is restricted only to a single blogging platform. It became obvious through the study that blogging spreads through various channels and develops into a web that intertwined with multiple online and offline spaces and should, as with other Internet-mediated activities, be considered “continuous with and embedded in other social spaces” (Miller & Slater, 2000, p. 5).

The dispersed nature of blogging and its links with other occupations also mean that blogging is a temporally continuous experience, one that involves multiple aspects. As the study progressed, it became obvious that blogging includes a lot more than just reading, typing, and linking. It is integrated with other activities, especially those about which one is blogging. For example, bloggers may feel an emotional connection to a particular event and think about how they would blog about it. Thoughts about blogging and how to frame the present activity for the blog dramatically change the experience of the activity: bloggers are in one situation yet link those activities to blogging without imposing a break between them. As Humphry and Wakeford (2013) stated, “The continuity among elements is an important dimension of the occupational situation” (p. 219). Such continuity is mirrored by the fact that bloggers think about activities through a blogging lens. In turn, this lens makes the thinking and reflecting and linking integral parts of the occupation of blogging. Thus, even in the absence of the technology (e.g., connectivity to the blogging interface), bloggers are still involved in the occupation.

The occupational situation as proposed by Cutchin (2004) framed my thinking about blogging. According to Cutchin, the context of action is always part of the process of action and the situation sets the stage for a possibility for action. Thus, the context is always part of who humans are, which explains how a continual relationship can exist between the occupations we engage in and who we are. Thus, that the blogger participants reflected on an event through a blogging lens while in the midst of it, and drafted their blogs far away from the blogging interface, are parts of the continual occupational situation of blogging. In addition, the use of other media as extensions of blogging reflects the continuous nature of occupation. Blogging is not a discrete, individual act occurring in isolation; instead, it occurs

continuously with other activities. This idea of continuousness fits with Jurgenson's (2012) concept of enmeshing the online and offline, but goes further in that it suggests the continuous nature of online and offline occupations.

6.2.2. Cooperation.

In the occupational situation of the blogger, other people are also involved. As humans, even when we perform an activity by ourselves, the activity still has a social link (Humphry, 2005). Thus we are never really isolated—a fact that was reiterated multiple times during the study. Blogs have been considered to be highly individualistic (Sreberny & Khiabany, 2010), but collaborative efforts (Baumer, Sueyoshi, & Tomlinson, 2011) at maintaining blogging undermine any such individualistic claim. When the bloggers in this study were drafting and publishing their posts, they did so with a view that “extended beyond a single person's experience to *encompass* others” (Dickie, Cutchin, & Humphry, 2006, p. 85). This encompassing of others was accomplished through the social performative nature of the writing and the tools provided by the blogging software.

Another revelation provided by this study was that additional benefits may accrue to collectivities but blogging is ultimately enhancing to the blogger. The positive benefits of blogging would not be obtained, however, without participation and thus cooperation by others. As Aldrich and Cutchin (2013) have noted, most of our lives are spent in cooperation. When this cooperation was absent, the bloggers in this study felt discouraged and stopped blogging. However, such participation is not observable for the most part but rather is a situated transaction (Borell, Asaba, Rosenberg, Schult, & Townsend, 2006) that occurs in the occupational situation. The only way for bloggers to identify such participation is through the affordances of the tool.

The tool's affordances played a distinctly important role not only in determining participation in the occupation but also in the way that bloggers spoke about their blogs as having an agency in and of themselves. This finding strongly indicates that the duality of context and person may not fit well in thinking about occupations. For one thing, it can be argued that the tool cannot do things independently; it is created by humans who have specific ideas about its use(s). In the course of this study, however, both the tool and the humans changed in order accommodate and adapt to the humans' changing needs. Humans and technology are thus co-constructed (Oudshorn & Pinch, 2003) as they go about together in the intertwining that is occupation and which "transforms the situation as well as the person in an ongoing and emergent way" (Dickie, Cutchin, & Humphry, 2006, p. 91).

As Cutchin and Dickie (2012) have noted, people must inquire about what to do in a situation in order to functionally re-coordinate their use of occupation. The term "inquiry" as used in the transactional perspectives is based on the Deweyan concept of how transformation changes an indeterminate situation into a more determinate one. This inquiry is not a one-time endeavor but is continuous and, as became clear through the findings, inquiry in this context included individuals other than bloggers. These other individuals may not even be aware of their status as participants; even so, their involvement in the occupation of blogging is extremely important to bloggers. Their cooperation may not be overt, as if they explicitly take part in blogging, but even lurkers play an important role in determining the fate of a blog. In fact, all of the people involved in the activity that a blogger is blogging about play important roles, whether or not they are aware their participation: blogging would not be what it is without cooperation.

6.2.3 Ends-in-view.

Given that every blog post is permanently archived on the Internet, it can be picked up at any time and changes can be made to it. These possibilities imply indeterminacy in terms of the fate of any blog. In the transactional perspective, the concept of “ends-in-view” is used to explain this indeterminacy because the term implies that the goals to be achieved are not fixed or end points to be achieved but instead are provisional, dependent on experiences and context, and are changing constantly (Garrison, 2001). In terms of the occupational situation, each blogger copes in a unique manner that involves who he or she is and what he or she sees the blog becoming. Therefore there are always multiple possibilities and these may remain hidden until people begin to investigate and reflect on them. The creativity required by such investigation was a big part of the results from this study. Through a transactional viewpoint, occupations develop as part of indeterminate situations that create reflective action. The indeterminacy of a given situation is also related to the desired future that shapes occupations and the problem-solving that occurs in the present. Changes in blogging, which I have described in Chapter 5 as being insidious to the blogging process, can be explained by this concept.

The bloggers in this study had ideas about what they wanted to achieve with blogging, but the directions their blogging took were different depending on the bloggers’ past, present, and future orientations. As Pedersen (2010) observed, changes in blogging practices usually happen in response to readers’ comments and the structure of the blogging interface. However, as I emphasized in the findings section on serendipity, in addition to this kind of change related to the audience, creativity also plays an important role in changing blogging. In the findings, as I have emphasized, creativity and change are intertwined. It is

the element of creativity that makes humans with their habit configurations into more than automatons (Cutchin & Dickie, 2012); in addition, this creativity—which manifests in multiple ways—changes how we perform occupations. This finding suggests that occupations are ever-changing transactions, characterized by more than their habitual configurations.

Although the transactional perspective has been widely used in the occupational science literature, few descriptions are available of what a transactional perspective on occupation means. The preceding section explicates my understandings of blogging through a transactional perspective. Blogging acts as a way to create, adapt, express, and, most importantly, relate to the world. Looking at blogging through an occupational and transactional lens enabled me to move beyond what has previously been suggested in the literature on blogging. As the importance of socially constructed borders and the potential of occupation became clear, the transactional viewpoint also enabled an embedded view of human action as taking into consideration the dynamic relationships between a number of interconnected mechanisms (e.g. action, humans, context, thinking, and history, and present and future orientations).

6.3. Conclusion: How the Hidden world of Occupations Unfolded

I use the remainder of this chapter to reflect on how this study of blogging helped me explore the world of occupations. As previously mentioned, I began this study by taking a cue from Dickie (2003) and Hocking (2000, 2009) to study occupation as a human enterprise rather than to make a study of humans as occupational beings. This ethnography of blogging brought to light some of the hidden aspects of occupation, especially through its use of multiple data collection tools such as interviews, focus groups, and experiencing the

occupation along with the research participants (Bailliard, Aldrich, & Dickie, 2013). When thinking of technology-mediated occupations through a transactional perspective, it is important to remember that technology is not just about artifacts and processes but also encompasses the context of the object use and the practices engaged in by people. Blogging and other social media, which cover an innumerable array of occupations, therefore constitute a fascinating avenue by which to explore the world of occupations.

Bloggers need an audience to perform for, not necessarily to interact with (Baumer, Sueyoshi, & Tomlinson, 2011). Therefore blogging, as I have noted, is mainly about the enrichment of the individual (whether the individual engaged as a blogger or reader); yet the need to engage with blogging also arises from a need to connect, seek information, share what is known, and so forth. Blogging, as a dispersed occupation, can be considered almost as having an almost indeterminate nature. For these reasons, being a participant-observer in this occupation was a challenging proposition, as was viewing blogging from the narrow perspective of an observable occupation. Instead, I chose to be a participant-observer by participating in blogging by reading, commenting, emailing, and linking; through these experiences, I began to understand the discrepancies between what bloggers say and what they do. The nuances of blogging, including the role of the readers, the performative nature of the writing, the occasional anxiety, and the spontaneity, became evident as I spent more time in the blogosphere.

In some of my earliest field notes, I questioned how I was going to immerse myself in an occupation in which my presence was necessarily brief and inconsistent. What I found was that there was no fixed way to delineate the occupation into a neat beginning, middle, and end. In fact, the participants' presence in the blogosphere is also inconsistent, but they

were always bloggers and so it was not possible for them or me to delimit presence or absence from blogging. Although many authors have encouraged occupational scientists to move beyond the personal experience of an occupation, for me the “doing” of this occupation formed a very important aspect for developing understandings about blogging that I would probably have missed without having the experience. This finding in no way undermines the importance of other activities in developing understandings about occupation. What this study of blogging helped me to do was bring to life patterns of the everyday, including cooperation, linked activities, participation, creativity, and change.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

A blog is a hybrid entity of personal and public spheres in which individual monologues are exposed under a gaze of anonymous comrades and critics. Blogging cannot be thought of as limited only to the Internet or only as typing up a post, because it involves a lot more. Not only do we need certain skills to be able to blog, knowledge of blogging websites, and so forth, but the mere presence of these “abilities” is also not the only factor that allows individuals to blog. In truth, many complex factors and relationships determine if and how blogging occurs. Applying a transactional perspective to this occupation and to occupations in general will allow occupational science to contribute its unique perspectives, in meaningful ways, to the growing literature about the Internet.

The findings from this study indicate the complexity of occupation that occurs in a non-dichotomous manner and integrates the co-constitutive forces of humans and context. As I have stated, the purpose of this study was to explicate the construct that is occupation; to a large extent, this study fulfilled that promise. The transactional perspective helped to provide an understanding of how occupations can be diffuse and non-contained. At the same time, the social nature of occupation became evident in terms of the participation in blogging and was determined again by the technology and tools participants used. Finally, a better understanding of the innate creativity involved in blogging, in contrast to the explicit creativity and change patterns, also made this study of occupation unique. In the sections that

follow I present some of the lessons I learned from the study, the limitations of the study, the study's potential implications, and future directions.

7.1. Personal Reflection: Lessons I Learned

I wish I had set a penny aside for every time I said that a participant said this but did exactly something that is not “this.” Maybe today I would have a few jars full! The discrepancies between what the bloggers espoused and what they enacted turned out to be the biggest lesson for me in this research. First, these discrepancies reiterated the fact that a reliance on interviews would not provide a complete picture of an occupation. Second, they forced me to embrace the uncertainty that is qualitative research. Through my course work in the occupational science program at UNC-Chapel Hill, I have often felt as if I am a closet quantitative researcher—and qualitative research doesn't come naturally to me. Still, the excitement I felt at learning to embrace the uncertainty and messiness of studying an occupation actually enabled me to appreciate how such uncertainty can evolve into something both tangible and structured.

Among the many things I learned in the process of this dissertation, one of the most important is that research reveals an investigator's assumptions for what they are. It took a while for me to understand my own biases and assumptions and, given that the other participants saw me as the “expert” researcher, they also took a while to tell me that my assumptions were flawed. Abha's telling me off about observing blogging set the stage for me to understand that the participants were the experts and I ought to defer to their understandings. This was a scary moment for me because ceasing to rely on my own ‘expertise’ made me feel as if I had given up control of the study. The principles of collaborative ethnography (Lassiter, 2005), however, served me well. Being cognizant of the

cooperation I had to engage in with my subjects enabled me to reflect more on my other assumptions and, in turn, become a more involved researcher.

My thinking as a budding occupational scientist evolved as I conducted this study; moreover, I truly experienced just how messy research into occupations can get. From starting out to do a descriptive study of blogging to problematizing concepts from the literature to getting to a more nuanced understanding of occupations, I see that I have come a long way. The participants and the technology together rewrote the study in ways I could not have predicted at the outset. Furthermore, the indeterminacy described in the transactional perspective played a major role in the unfolding of this study. I learned a lot about the muddle of ethics in conducting Internet-mediated research. I had to be careful which blogs I linked to and how my actions could affect individuals who may be not interested in participating in this research. Such situations led me to a much better understanding of the integral nature of ethics to research, rather than continuing to think of ethics as merely something that one must consider at the beginning of a study.

7.2. Limitations

This research illustrates the occupation of general everyday blogging. Still, I acknowledge that there is considerable diversity in the way blogging practices are framed and understood by the individuals who participate in the blogosphere. Although this study was considerably limited by the type of blogs I selected, I believe that many of my findings may be applicable to other technology-mediated occupations. Everyday general blogging is not limited by geographical or national boundaries, but some specific cultural limitations are imposed by the history and context of the bloggers. In addition, the fact that only two of the bloggers in this study were not of Indian descent may have influenced the findings in ways I

did not foresee. I did not find any obvious differences in the ways that the non-Indian participants practiced blogging, but this idea cannot be ruled out based on the data I have on hand. In addition, given that this is among the first few studies to venture into the as yet under-explored and emerging areas of internet-mediated occupations, the relatively small number of participants (36) could have impacted the findings. But the relatively long time (15 months) spent in the field developing deeper connections with the participants off-sets this limitation in part.

7.3. Implications and Contributions

As I have previously observed, Internet-mediated occupations are more the norm than the exception these days and this state of things is only likely to grow. Within a discipline that is concerned with everyday activities, it is critical that occupational scientists move boldly forward to study what has become for many a dominant form of occupation in everyday living. I hope that this study provides an impetus to other occupational scientists to study Internet-mediated occupations. Also, internet-mediated occupations are becoming more commonly used by individuals with disability whether to find information, develop support communities or just as an everyday activity. This implies that occupational scientists and therapists should take the lead in figuring out how the internet impacts individuals with disability.

The other significant contribution of this study concerns its methodology. Although ethnography is not a novel method for occupational scientists, applying this methodology to an occupation whose visible artifact is present only online was challenging, particularly because the process of the creation of that artifact is done both online and offline. Humans have a need to be connected and thus a need to engage in occupations in a social manner. Yet

occupations are intertwined with history, context, and the environment, and studying occupations without acknowledging this reality will not lead to fruitful understandings about occupations.

7.4. Future Directions

The data that came from this study suggest some future research directions that have been left relatively unexplored. First, blogging is a relatively new occupation; how it has developed could potentially help us to understand more about the transformation and evolution of occupations. Second, given the ubiquity of the Internet, more and more individuals with disabilities are taking to participating in Internet-mediated occupations. As an occupational therapist, I am interested in knowing more about how occupations mediated by the Internet are experienced by individuals with disabilities and the impact of the Internet on such individuals. A third avenue to research this study opened up was the development of understandings about the nature of power on the Internet and the role it plays in determining occupations. Google, a dominant player in the Internet-applications world, played a significant role in terms of the blogging platforms the study participants selected. While I explored the idea of blogging in terms of the transactional perspectives, the idea of the power of the Internet as governing occupations remained in my mind at all times. The occupational science construct of occupational possibilities (Rudman, 2010), which is based on Foucault's notion of governmentality, may provide an interesting way to explore the nature of this power.

Overall, this study of blogging proved to be every bit as unpredictable and fascinating as anybody could have foreseen. The theoretical concepts of the transactional perspectives that shaped the understandings developed during the study have the potential to take

occupational science further in increasing our knowledge about the concept of occupations. The findings of this study have troubled the almost-calm waters of our understandings about occupations and have provided a platform for occupational scientists to better unravel the complex world of occupations.

Appendix A: Guiding Interview Questions

The general guiding questions which will be asked of the participants include:

How did you find out about blogging?

When did you decide to create the blog?

Why did you decide to create the blog?

What does blogging mean to you?

What are the implicit rules of blogging?

Who participates in your blog? How does others participation influence your blogging?

What do you use your blog for?

How do you decide what to write about?

Where do you blog?

How has your blogging changed since you first started? Do you reflect on this?

Do you see blogging as a commitment towards others? (do you feel you are influencing your readers?)

What role does blogging play in your life?

Do you read/ post comments on other people's blog?

What do you think is involved in blogging?

Note: These are general guiding questions for the study, but other questions, in the same vein, may be asked depending on how the conversations proceed and what ideas come up through the conduct of the study.

Appendix B: List of participants' blog urls

Blogger	Name of blog	url
Riha	Citrus and cardamom: a grad student's culinary chronicles	http://citrusandcardamom.blogspot.com/
Pranjal/Abha	A Rational Mind: thoughts here and there in my mind	http://www.rational-mind.com/
Akshay	One upon a speed of light: speed is the essence of life	http://oneuponspeedoflight.blogspot.com/
Sai		
Lalit	Reflections	http://reflections-lalit.blogspot.com/
Suruchi	Life~LiveIt	http://www.lifeliveit23.blogspot.com/
Suman	Roving Eye: sporadic outbursts of whatever catches the fancy of my Roving Eye!	http://suwoman.blogspot.in/
Atmaj	My thoughts...	http://aatmajpancholi.blogspot.com/
Ashley	The Freuler's Nest	http://afreuler.blogspot.com/?zx=7ee603fc44b6149c
Sumita	Dissertation Ruminations	http://bloggingstudy.blogspot.com/

Appendix C: Definitions

Back links: any link received by a web node (web page, directory, website) from another web node. (Wikipedia, n.d.)

Blogroll: a list of simpatico sites that a blogger acknowledges as a sort of posse or tribe. (Rosenberg, 2009, p. 86)

Emoticons: any of several combinations of symbols used in electronic mail and text messaging to indicate the state of mind of the writer, such as :-) to express happiness (dictionary.com, n.d.)

HTML: “text-formatting code used to build webpages” (Rosenberg, 2009, p. 31)

Hyperlinks: A link from a hypertext file or document to another location or file, typically activated by clicking on a highlighted word or image. (dictionary.com, n.d.)

Hypertext: “writing with clickable links that the Web relies on” (Rosenberg, 2009, p.24)

LiveJournal/Blogger/Wordpress: blog-hosting websites

Permalinks: A link to a “permanent” page where readers will always be able to access the post, thus enabling access to a particular post rather than the ever-changing front page of a blog. (Yang, 2006, p.7)

Post: any entry on the blog (Rosenberg, 2009)

Tag: A label/keyword attached to someone or something for identification or other information. This helps to describe an item and allows it to be found again by browsing or searching. (Wikipedia, n.d.)

Time stamp: the time at which an event is recorded by a computer (dictionary.com, n.d.)

URL (uniform resource locator): address of a World Wide Web page (Wikipedia, nd.)

Appendix D: Email invitation letters

Email to participant bloggers:

Hello,

I am a graduate student at UNC, Chapel Hill in North Carolina, US. I am interested in conducting research on blogging. I have been following your blog for some time now and think that if you could participate in this research you could help us to develop valuable insights about blogging.

The study will be conducted over 3-6 months via the Internet and/or in person and will include online interviews, observation and participation in your blog. It is expected that you will have between 10 to 20 hours of contact with the researchers.

I sincerely hope that you will be able to help me with this research. If you have any queries concerning the nature of the research or are unclear about the extent of your involvement in it please contact me at ssrege@email.unc.edu. If you agree to be a part of this study, I will send more information about it in the form of a Consent Form.

Finally, thank you once again for taking the time to consider my request and I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Email to other participants:

Hello,

I am a graduate student at UNC, Chapel Hill in North Carolina, US. I am interested in conducting research on blogging. If you could participate in this research you could help us to develop valuable insights about blogging.

The study will be conducted over 3-6 months via the Internet and/or in person and will include online interviews, observation and participation. It is expected that you will have between 10 to 20 hours of contact with the researchers.

I sincerely hope that you will be able to help me with this research. If you have any queries concerning the nature of the research or are unclear about the extent of your involvement in it please contact me at ssrege@email.unc.edu. If you agree to be a part of this study, I will send more information about it in the form of a Consent Form.

Finally, thank you once again for taking the time to consider my request and I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Appendix E: Consent Form

University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Adult Participants

Social Behavioral Form

IRB Study #__

Consent Form Version Date: 7th May 2012

Title of Study: Dissertation study of Blogging: an Occupational Science perspective

Principal Investigator: Sumita Rege

UNC-Chapel Hill Department: Allied Health Sciences

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Ruth Humphry

Funding Source and/or Sponsor: None

Study Contact telephone number: 919-260-4637

Study Contact email: ssrege@email.unc.edu

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary.

You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research

study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

What is the purpose of this study?

Blogging and other social media are just over a decade old and not much is known about how they may possibly impact individuals and societies. The purpose of this study is to understand the activity of blogging and how it impacts the people who do it.

How many people will take part in this study?

If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of approximately 35 participants in this research study.

How long will your part in this study last?

This study will consist of an average of 10-12 interviews (maximum of 20) conducted via the Internet or in person over a span of 3-6 months. Each interview will be of less than an hour. You can choose to stop the interview at any time.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

The online, text-based interviews will be conducted via emails, “Google Talk”, “Facebook” etc. while the face-to-face interviews will be conducted in person at a mutually acceptable location. I will ask you questions about why you decided to blog, how it has evolved, the networks you have developed through the blog, how and where you blog and the meaning this activity holds for you. I will also take notes about what you say and the blog posts that you write. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer, for any reason.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study?

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. Your participation is valuable as it will help to develop new insights into internet-based social media, but you may not personally benefit from participating in the study.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?

We do not think you will experience any significant discomfort or risk from the interview. However, should you feel that any of the questions are emotionally distressing you can choose not to answer and your decision will be respected by the investigator and no further questions of that type will be asked of you. Also, you can discontinue participation in the study at any point of time without facing any type of repercussions

How will your privacy be protected?

Your privacy is of the utmost importance to us. It may be difficult to guarantee complete anonymity since the blog is publicly available. However, we have the following safeguards in place to protect you: all information from your blog will be used in a paraphrased form when we are making presentations or publications based on this research. In case we wish to use direct quotes from your blog/ your communications with the researchers, your permission will be requested and your opinion will be respected. If at any point you feel that using such direct quotes may jeopardize your privacy, we will not use such information.

The interviews will be recorded with an audio-recording device. You can request that the recording be turned off at any point of time during the interview. The interviews will be transcribed and linked to a file with information from your blog. All data collected will be destroyed 2 years after completion of the dissertation and preparation of manuscript.

Check the line that best matches your choice:

_____ OK to record me during the study

_____ Not OK to record me during the study

What if you want to stop before your part in the study is complete?

You can withdraw from this study at any time, without penalty. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

Will you receive anything for being in this study?

You will not receive anything for taking part in this study.

Will it cost you anything to be in this study?

There are no costs for being in the study, except the time commitment, that is required.

What if you are a UNC student?

You may choose not to be in the study or to stop being in the study before it is over at any time. This will not affect your class standing or grades at UNC-Chapel Hill. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you take part in this research.

What if you have questions about this study?

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact me at ssrege@email.unc.edu. You can also contact me or my advisor at the phone numbers and email addresses listed at the beginning of this form.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Title of Study: Dissertation study of Blogging: an occupational science perspective

Principal Investigator: Sumita Rege

Participant's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time.
I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Printed Name of Research Participant

Signature of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

Date

Printed Name of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

Appendix F: Guiding Questions for Focus Group

The Focus Group discussions will be guided by the following questions:

How did you find out about blogging?

How do you generally select the blogs that you read?

What does blogging mean to you?

What role does blogging play in your life?

How do you see your participation in the blogosphere?

How do you perceive your blog reading/ commenting practices influencing the blogger?

Does participation in the blogging world make you feel supported?

What are your other activities related to blogging?

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