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# Blogging: Public, Private or Social Rhetoric?

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BLOGGING: PUBLIC, PRIVATE OR SOCIAL RHETORIC?

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College & Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Kristin Roeschenthaler Wolfe

May 2013

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2013

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Approved March 01, 2013

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## ABSTRACT

### BLOGGING: PUBLIC, PRIVATE, OR SOCIAL RHETORIC?

By

Kristin Roeschenthaler Wolfe

May 2013

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Calvin L. Troup

This project examines personal blogging through the philosophy of Hannah Arendt and her understanding of public, private and social. Personal blogging is the latest in a long history of self-representational writing with each form taking on a more public overtone. By utilizing Hannah Arendt's philosophy in this manner, this project provides a venue for her work in the realm of today's mediated world. Hannah Arendt's understanding of public, private, and social allows us to better understand the need for boundaries and the need for both a public and private space in our lives. Utilizing several interpersonal communication theories, including Boundary Management and Parasocial Framework, to better understand how people navigate public, private, and social boundaries in communications.

Chapter One examines the evolution of self-representational writing. Looking at the diary, the journal and the personal blog, this chapter examines the similarities and differences of these genres. Chapter Two explains Hannah Arendt's philosophy of public, private and social more fully and applies them to the different genres of self-representational writing. Chapter 3 discusses the evolution of communication technology and different theories of interpersonal communication including Boundary Management theory, the para-social framework established by Horton and Wohl, and the effect of technology on interpersonal communication. Chapter 4 looks at the evolution of personal blogs from their inception so that computer insiders could share new links on the Internet to today's personal journals and interest-driven content. Chapter 5 looks ahead. How can Arendt's philosophy be used to navigate not only personal blogs, but all computer-mediated communication today and in the future.

## DEDICATION

To my husband, Don, for supporting me through this process and completely understanding the pressure and process. I love you!

To my parents who always told me I could do anything, even if they don't understand most of what I do.

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## Chapter 1: Historical Journey from Diaries and Journals to Personal Blogs

As long as humans have been able to communicate, they have been passing down stories in order to share experiences and lessons learned. This is one way communities grow and people learn how to live together. Stories of great hunts and warriors were passed on by storytelling.

As far back as ancient Greece, people understood that they must examine their own life. Socrates said, in *The Apology*, "...a life without investigation is not worth living..." (Plato, 24). "'The unrecorded life,' Emerson observed, 'is not worth examining'" (Johnson, 37). Taking Socrates' observation to another level, Emerson realizes that investigating is one step, but writing down events and feelings made it easier to examine and investigate life's challenges and successes.

Not all things needed to be shared with the community; however, people wanted to be able to account for their life and share information with their children and their children's children. Why should future generations not learn from past mistakes and also learn something about their ancestors? Who does not want to leave their mark on the world, in some way? The various genres of self-representational writing provide a way for a person to be remembered. Anne Frank explains, "I want to go on living even after my death! And therefore I am grateful to God for giving me this gift, this possibility of developing myself and of writing, of expressing all that is in me" (197). Writing down adventures, misadventures, and everyday happenings provides an accounting of a life, ensuring that a person would be remembered and their life will have made an impact, however small, on the future. There are many reasons people begin writing about their

lives; however, one noteworthy reason is that people want to be remembered, they want to be immortal; the written word is one way to do that.

Andy Warhol's fifteen minutes of fame can be achieved through a written record of a life; whether the document was written to be private and only discovered after the writer's death, or the document was written with a specific audience in mind, one thing is certain: self-representational writing always provides a glimpse into a way of life, or an individual's life, that would not be accessible if someone had not taken the time to write down their thoughts, concerns, and activities. This written record provides the writer their proverbial fifteen minutes.

The past, Virginia Woolf noted, urges us to "leave a trace" (Johnson, 5). Aristotle wrote that man is a social animal (*Politics*, 3); thank goodness, otherwise we would still be making the same mistakes as our ancestors because they would not have shared these details without storytelling and/or the written word. This trace, in the form of self-representational writing, allows the human race to evolve and grow in our communication habits and in our ability to live together communally.

Examining the different genres of self-representational writing and their evolution throughout history will allow us to examine the evolution of society in terms of the type of communication that is shared and the different levels of sharing that were, and are, considered acceptable or desirable at different times in human history. Steven Kagle writes, "I offer no absolute standards, but I would suggest that the genre of an autobiographical work depends primarily on the extent to which the entries preserve the passage of time from entry to entry" (1979, 15). We begin with the diary, which is written as a private document for the future self, not to be shared with anyone until after

the writer's death. As time progressed, although many people still keep diaries, others wanted to hear opinions on life-changing situations, and self-representational writing began to be shared through journals. These writers know that they will have an audience; however, it will be limited to those whom the writer chooses, at least as long as the writer is still alive. The autobiography allows a person to write his or her life story with the knowledge that people, both known and unknown to the author, will read it to gain a glimpse into life as the writer perceived it. In the twentieth-century, technology evolved so that people could share self-representational writing on the Internet in the form of personal blogs. These writers not only know that there will be an audience of both people they know and people they might never meet, but they value the input and allow comments and feedback regarding their entries or posts.

This study focuses on the diary, journal, and personal blog specifically because of their similar formats. All three genres utilize a chronological format. All three provide a date at the top of the entry allowing the reader to follow the author's life as it occurred/occurs. Because of their similar formats, these types of self-representational writings allow for a compare and contrast examination of their communication styles. Utilizing the work of Hannah Arendt regarding public, private, and social we begin to study these forms of writing from a philosophical standpoint to further examine the extent of communicative sharing through self-representational writing.

Later in this study we will fully delve into Arendt's understanding of public, private, and social; for now we will summarize these terms as:

Private: self or family

Public: community

Social: “one superhuman family” (Arendt, 1998, 29).

These terms suggest that the diary belongs in the realm of the private; the journal in the realm of the public; and the blog also in the realm as of the public as we examine below.

## DIARIES

It is best to start with a definition that grounds the notion of how the term diary is defined for this research project. According to Johnson, diaries “are about making connections. About getting around your unconscious mind. About breaking into your own store of preserved memories, stories, projects. About stealing them back to the light of day” (39). The connection that is described in this definition would be to connect events or ideas to each other and for the individual to understand how these things relate to each other in terms of his or her life. Since diaries are written for the author alone, the connections are not about connecting with other people.

Why has the art of writing diaries lasted for so many generations? Why did people start writing diaries and why do they continue today? Steven Kagle, in his text *American Diary Literature 1620-1799*, explains that the diary is often “born of a tension, disequilibrium in the life of its author, which needs to be resolved or held in check. A journey, a new role, a spiritual crisis—these are some of the sources of tension that can bring about and sustain a diary” (17). This statement begins to examine why people write diaries. Although, today, many people believe that the diary is mostly a habit of females, history shows that many men have kept diaries. Some of the more famous include Samuel Pepys, “Clerk of the Acts and Secretary to the Admiralty” (Pepys, Location 1); John Adams and other members of the Adams family; Ralph Waldo Emerson; and Henry

David Thoreau. Many other men kept diaries also; but the diaries of the men listed above have become part of the public record<sup>1</sup>.

Diaries help to clarify a specific situation in the mind of the diarist. By writing about something and rereading past entries, the individual may be able to better understand a situation that he or she is currently in. Writing things down always seems to shed some light on any situation. By being able to review what was written, the diarist can take lessons learned from previous experiences and apply them to what is happening at any given time. This allows the diarist to avoid repeating the same actions again and again. Just as our ancestors' diaries help to share information so that we do not repeat their unproductive actions, rereading our own diary can keep us from repeating our mistakes.

Although each diary is written in response to a life-changing situation, or a situation that the author is struggling with, there should be no limitations on what is written in the diary; anything that affects the diarist and inspires them to write should be included. Limiting the diary to only a specific topic does not do the diary or the diarist justice as something that seems completely unrelated to the topic may help to clarify a situation and, if the scope is limited, it may be lost from the author's memory. A diary provides the writer a venue to record his or her life as his or her values may shift and the amount and type of knowledge that he or she gains may change (Kagle, 1979, 15). This written record allows the writer to review this change and take note of the events and circumstances that brought it about, permitting the diarist to gain a better understanding of him- or herself. The diary is, therefore, an invaluable tool to help an individual grow and evolve throughout his or her life.

One of the advantages of writing a diary is the privacy and the freedom that comes from knowing that you are not writing for an audience. Kagle explains this freedom: “A diarist is less likely than other writers to be concerned about presenting a consistent attitude and more willing to record atypical feelings of the moment” (1979, 18). This freedom from criticism may lead to more honest writing. Anne Frank shares how this lack of audience affected her writing: “There is a saying that ‘paper is more patient than man’.... Yes, there is no doubt that paper is patient and as I don’t intend to show this cardboard-covered notebook, bearing the proud name of ‘diary,’ to anyone” (2). Through this quote Frank begins to demonstrate a common feeling of many diarists—no one else would be interested in what I am writing. However, the popularity of the diary as literature demonstrates that people are interested in reading about ordinary people’s lives. After all, Anne Frank was not famous until her father published her diary.

Diaries can only be expected to remain private as long as the author is alive. Kagle emphasizes the near impossibility to keep things private and the expectation of the diarist as to who will read his or her diary. “It is useful to recognize that factors related to audience do influence diary production; but, as a result of these complex components of the nature and degree of privacy, it is impossible to propose more than very general principles that have any wide application (1986, 6). There really is no such thing as eternal privacy. If something is written down, expect that someday someone will see it. This discussion leads into the research of journals—understood in this research project as self-representational writing that was expected to be shared with select others whom the writer chose.

## JOURNALS

The need to bring in another person or persons for an opinion may have led to a shift in the intent of self-representational writing. Although there are many people who still keep a private diary in which to share their thoughts and dreams with no one other than their future self, many people have decided to share their journal with others to gain insight and input, possibly becoming momentarily famous to the readers of their journal.

The journal differs from the private diary mainly due to its focus of writing for an external audience. Kagle explains his opinion that almost all self-representational writers write for an audience. “Even those diarists who have claimed to be writing for themselves, even those who would profess horror at the idea that anyone else might see their ‘private confessions’ have been writing for an audience” (1986, 5). Kagle’s point is well-taken; a writer must have someone in mind who they are writing for. Take a moment and try to write something with no audience, including yourself, in mind. It is almost impossible, right? Without a notion of audience, the tone and word choice is extremely difficult to select; therefore, on some level, every diarist or journal-writer has someone in mind as they write.

The writers of journals in early nineteenth century America had discovered the literary value of diaries and, therefore, decided to make their writings public. Conversely, “[r]elatively few colonial diaries were written with the intention of opening them up to public scrutiny” (Kagle, 1986, 5). Because the writers in the early nineteenth century read the private diaries of others, they were aware that their writings would likely become public also. This shift in the degree of privacy that a person hoped to keep begins to

demonstrate that people realized that there was a limit to keeping something private forever.

The tradition of sharing self-representational writing was also utilized in the salons that took place in Europe pre-World War II. The salons “were the meeting places of those who had learned how to represent themselves through conversation” (Arendt, 1974, 38). Many of the “conversation starters” may have come from a journal entry even though the other participants may not have been made aware of this connection.

Another important movement in the historic shift from private diary to public journal was Transcendentalism<sup>2</sup>. The Transcendentalists’ journals demonstrated two emerging characteristics in American journals: “extreme-length and self-conscious literary intent” (Kagle, 1979, 183). These journals were kept by many famous writers including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. By writing in their journals, these men and women could more easily evaluate their ideas for future inventions or literary endeavors.

Sharing their journal with close friends and family became popular with authors and others who wanted input into either their writing style or a complex situation that they needed help with. This sharing of his or her writing led the author to be conscious of perception and response as the author wrote. This consciousness likely led to editing and careful word choice on the part of the writer. When the author assumed his or her writing would remain private, proper grammar and spelling would not have been deemed as important. Now, however, the author did not want to appear uneducated because of his or her writing. Kagle explains that the journals of the early nineteenth century differ from the diaries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries “in the sophistication of their

language and the variety of their concerns” (1986, 4). One of the reasons for this was the “result of the influence of the sophisticated culture of the urban centers” (Kagle, 1986, 1). Many factors influence the grammatical content of a journal because the author must now consider the perception of the public to his or her writing.

The knowledge of an audience may also have influenced the type of information that was shared. One example was the journal of Amos Bronson Alcott. Alcott showed his journal to many of his friends who were also writers, including Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller, claiming that his journal was his confessional. He shared his journal with his wife, who took issue with the content if it involved her. “Alcott protested that he had only written from his ‘convictions and what seemed...plain fact,’ she placed some of these passages ‘under the ban of her scissors,’ removing them from the manuscript (2/2/39)” (Kagle, 1986, 129). Alcott showed no reservations in sharing his deepest thoughts and feelings with those he considered close friends and family; however, his wife obviously had issues with appearing in a bad light, hence her editing. Public perception and response definitely played a role in Alcott’s journal content.

The possibility of an audience provided a focus of sorts to the journal. A private diary would not need to be as clear to someone else, as long as the diarist understood the entry. Now, with the focus on another, the journal must be written more coherently. An excellent example of this audience consciousness can be seen in the journal kept by Lewis and Clark. Most of their journals captured descriptions of the landscape and information that would be essential as others began to move westward. Therefore, the journal of Lewis and Clark was one of the most important instruments they carried (Kagle, 1986, 31).

Another change to the self-representational writing brought on by the audience was the desire to provide some biographical information about the author. This can be seen in Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s writing. Dana knew that all or part of his journal would become public so he provided an autobiographical section prefacing it by writing that no author "could help but think about an audience or avoid subjectivity..." (Kagle, 1988, 66). This example demonstrates that many journal-writers understood that someone, at some time, would read their journal. This knowledge of an audience led some, like Dana, to provide more information about themselves than would need to be shared in a private diary.

Writing their journal for an audience also provided a benefit to professional writers, or those who hoped to become professional writers—it allowed them to hone their craft. Emerson and other American Transcendentalists wrote in their journals "as a means of improving their writing and as a sourcebook that might be mined for materials to be used in their public writings" (Kagle, 1986, 104). Accessing story ideas through reading one's journal became common for many authors at this time. "It was in his [Thoreau's] journals that the moment of inspiration was captured for later revision" into *Walden* (Kagle, 1979, 184). As this example demonstrates, journal writers had come to realize not only the possibility of someone reading their journal, but also the benefits of journal writing to the creative process.

Emerson used his journal to improve his writing because "he mistrusted his ability". The journal gave Emerson a way to "experiment with his technique" and "express his strongest feelings". Much of what Emerson published was considered "outspoken" but Kagle points out that "he [Emerson] 'sometimes toned down or altered

his original thought when he presented it for public consumption' (1:xxxii)" (Kagle, 1986, 107). Journals sparked the ideas and training for some of the greatest authors to create great works of literature.

Revision of journal entries played a key role in utilizing real life experiences to include in literature. Kagle explained that comparing the original journal entry and the "sections revised for publication offers useful data to show how a work changed as the conception of audience changed" (1986, 6). An author must write and revise for an audience, no matter who or what that audience is, especially if the work is to be published.

Writing itself takes on a public or private aspect and the author cannot change that. Kagle addresses the public and private dichotomy in *Late Nineteenth-Century American Diary Literature* when he writes that "[t]he division between public and private genres has never been as great as most people believed" (1988, 154). Once something is written down it is never completely and eternally private; once something is written down expect that someday someone will see it. This statement was true when things were written with pen and paper; it becomes more accurate in the age of computers. Once a file is saved on a computer, unless the computer is properly wiped clean, someone will be able to find that file. Once a document, post, or comment is placed on the Internet, it is available forever. This raises the question—why do so many people place self-representational writing on the Internet in the form of a personal blog? Why are people allowing others—friends, family, and even total strangers—to read their writing?

## BLOGS

*The Origins of Blogging.* Before examining the origin of the weblog, let us examine the history of the World Wide Web. In 1990, Tim Berners-Lee's boss approved his "global hypertext system". Berners-Lee called his project "World Wide Web". Berners-Lee wanted to build a system that was "equal parts readable and writable—the latter part of his genius was essentially forgotten until blogging came along" (Stone, 12). Without his vision, there would be no World Wide Web, and there would be no blogging. His vision took nine years to come to realization with the introduction of the weblog, but Berners-Lee created a way for people to write, read and respond to each other no matter where they were located. "... [T]he rise of blogs has gone a long way toward making good on the promise of the Web's first inventors: that their creation would welcome contributions from every corner of the globe and open a floodgate of human creativity" (Rosenberg, 11).

This technology would change the way that humans lived, learned, and communicated. Suddenly, a lot of information, some accurate and some not, was available with just a couple of clicks of a mouse or some typing on a keyboard. A benefit to making information very accessible, which most people can agree on, is that people can communicate with others around the world. Whether it be to conduct business, strike up a friendship, start a romantic relationship, find lost friends and relatives, or make new friends, the World Wide Web can assist with any and all of these endeavors. "As the Web extended its reach first to offices and then to homes, across the United States and around the world, it became theoretically possible for millions of people to publish millions of thoughts for millions of other people to read. The Web implicitly invited people to say

anything and everything” (Rosenberg, 11). Blogging has made it possible for people to share their opinions and thoughts freely. “Here was the mother lode of personal expression—the one place in our lives that we (as people lucky enough to have access) can say whatever we want about anything we want” (Perseus Publishing Editors, 3). Since there is no distinctive governing body for the Internet, it is truly a location for free speech. The obvious exclusions to this include libel and slander (Bick, 43-45). Say what you want about yourself and others, as long as it is accurate and not malicious; however, remember that nothing on the Internet is private (Serfaty, 12). Anything you post on the Internet can be viewed by anyone who has Internet access, although many people feel protected by the sheer size of the Internet (Serfaty, 13).

One of the major drawbacks of the Internet is the ability to overshare. “In 1994, Justin Hall invented oversharing. Of course, we didn’t have a name yet for the compulsion to tell the online world too much about yourself” (Rosenberg, 17). Some researchers and readers commonly call personal blogs “what I had for lunch” sites; because bloggers may feel the need to be current and post regularly, some may list what they ate for lunch or dinner, or what they wore to work or school.

### *What is Blogging?*

Is blogging self-expression, personal publishing, a diary, amateur journalism, the biggest disruptive technology since e-mail, an online community, alternative media, curriculum for students, a customer relations strategy, knowledge management, navel gazing, a solution to boredom, a dream job, a style of writing, e-mail to everyone, a fad, an answer to illiteracy, an online persona, social networking, resume fodder, phonecam pictures, or something to hide from your mother? It’s all of those things and more (Stone, 34-35).

Blogs began as a way for technology enthusiasts to share links to other websites with each other. These types of sites can be traced back to 1994 with the start of Justin Hall's "Links from the Underground" (Stone, 37). Besides sharing hyperlinks, the main commonality of these early blogs and the personal blogs of today is the fact that all entries are listed with the most recent at the top of the page, making it easy for readers to find the newest information shared on the website. However, as more and more people started to engage in this type of sharing, the technology enthusiasts realized there was a market for software that would allow others, who were not as adept at writing computer code, to utilize this type of website. This led to a flood of blogging software released in 1999 and 2000. Such software included Blogger, Movable Type and Live Journal, to name a few that still exist today (Stone, 38; Serfaty, 20). This software allowed anyone who wanted to start a blog to be able to do so. And so, blogging became a new mass medium. Blogging is communicating at its global finest, utilizing the Internet in all its communication glory.

Although blogging had taken hold in 1999 and 2000, it truly came into the public eye in 2001 with the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Traditional media could not keep up with the events, and many bloggers were giving eyewitness accounts of the attacks (Stone, 38). This onslaught of blogging entries and newsworthy updates regarding such a horrific situation brought blogging into the foreground of mainstream society. "In retrospect, 9/11 hardly marked any sort of maturity for blogging. Instead, it marked the moment that the rest of the media woke up and noticed what the Web had birthed" (Rosenberg, 8). The number of blogs continues to grow, even today with social

networking sites becoming mainstream, and it is the ability to write and receive feedback almost instantly that makes blogging a mainstay.

“The blog is a new rhetorical opportunity, made possible by technology that is becoming more available and easier to use, but it was adopted so quickly and widely that it must be serving some well established rhetorical needs” (Miller and Shepherd).

Obviously, blogs filled a void in terms of communication and rhetoric. Through the ability to share ideas, opinions, and daily life experiences with many people at once, the personal blog provided a one-to-many channel similar to, but not as intrusive as email. This ability to share personal ideas with the masses and not have the need of an editorial page, which may edit the opinion, provided a means for an individual to share his or her thoughts as the person so chose.

This rhetorical opportunity to speak one’s mind without censorship provided a communication channel that allowed freedom of speech to take on a greater meaning to the common person. “The cultural moment in which the blog appeared is a *kairos* that has shifted the boundary between the public and the private and the relationship between the mediated and unmediated experience” (Miller and Shepherd). People had ideas to share and information to communicate, but they were not sure how to do this efficiently; along came the blogging software which opened the floodgates for individuals to share their knowledge and opinions with others, including those outside of their expected social circle. The ability to share with others, including those outside of the expected social circle, allows bloggers to expand, not only the reach of their interests, but also the ability to learn new things and meet new people.

Blogs began to become a form of mainstream communication during the 1990s. An examination of society during this time period demonstrates that people were sharing more information with anyone who would listen than at any other time in history. Such cultural events included the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal and the invention of reality television. These events helped to establish the blog and its rhetorical qualities as a specific genre (Miller and Shepherd). Blogging has similarities to many of its predecessors, but it is a creation of the Internet and therefore, although the similarities are there, blogs are truly unique in their format and reach combined. Technological availability is what made blogging happen. According to Miller and Shepherd, the technology allowed the blog to encompass “the diary, the clipping service, the broadside, the anthology, the commonplace book, the ship’s log”.

The timing of the technological advancement, the 1990s, could not have been more perfect based on cultural events. By combining different elements of the services listed above, blogging allowed people to share links, news, and opinions in a way that made it easy for readers to find the newest information and for those readers to comment on the posts shared. Taking the best of each of the genres listed above, the personal blog allows the bloggers to share links (the clipping service), share personal anecdotes (the diary), announce events and information to many people at once (the broadside), discuss many topics in one location (the anthology), share phrases and quotations (the commonplace book), and keep a record of the blogger’s activities in one location (the ship’s log). By combining these aspects of existing written genres, the personal blog allows a person to keep track of his or her life and to receive input and comments on any activities that he or she chooses to share.

Blogging is about sharing information and discussing that information, it is not a one-way channel; bloggers hope to engage in conversation about their posts. “The new webloggers, instead of focusing on the Web itself, used the Web to create social alliances and to broadcast tidbits of their days to those who were interested in reading them” (Perseus Publishing Editors, x). Blogging is a two-way communication channel in which bloggers and readers have the ability to engage in a dialogue about whatever is on their minds. Blogs are dialogues between the author and his/her readers and his-/herself. “[T]he blogging ethos—shared by Hall and Winer and Sippey and Barger and all the other early weblog enthusiasts who would soon follow their lead—was different. These under-the-radar upstarts said, ‘Here are things that are of interest to *me*. Maybe you’ll like them too’” (Rosenberg, 85).

The blogosphere is a community, albeit a virtual community, of real relationships, and it grows every day. An example of the reality of these relationships can be seen in a personal interview with Liberty, a blogger since 1999 who blogs at colorfully-see-through-head.com. She explained this community dynamic when describing a time that she posted about losing her Christmas decorations. Liberty explained that she used her blog to work through her disappointment but that “within days, packages from all over the country started pouring in. I even received packages from Canada and eventually Australia with Christmas ornaments to replace those I had lost”. More than twenty people, many of whom she did not know, sent ornaments to Liberty. “Without my blog, that miracle never would have happened, certainly not on that kind of scale” (Personal Interview, 2006). Through the reach of the blogosphere and the relationships that are created, Liberty’s Christmas, and that of her family, was made brighter because of her

blog readers. If taking care of each other through difficult situations does not demonstrate “real” relationships, what does? Relationships are about caring for the other person; this example demonstrates that bloggers do care about each other on more than a superficial level.

*Why People Blog.* People decide to start blogging for many reasons including: all of their friends have blogs; they want to share their story; they want to share or learn more information about something; they want to be remembered after they are gone; etc. Wanting to share their story and wanting to be remembered are two ways in which blogging is similar to past self-representational writing genres. “Blogging is information sharing, and the more you research and share, the more you gain expertise in your area of interest, even if that area is only ‘things that interest me’” (Stone, 115). By providing information and sharing that information, blogging helps people to gain knowledge and learn from each other. It also allows the blogger to write, think, and search on a regular basis; thus allowing the blogger to become smarter (Stone, 115). Nardi, et. al. provide five motivations for blogging that were discovered during their research: “documenting one’s life; providing commentary and opinions; expressing deeply felt emotions; articulating ideas through writing; and forming and maintaining community forums” (43). Sharing information and communicating on a regular basis allows the blogger to obtain a greater knowledgebase on topics that are of interest to him or her and find a way to coherently explain the information to his or her readers.

Blogging is storytelling, and most of the stories are about real life. “Most bloggers say they cover a lot of different topics, but when asked to choose one main topic, 37% of bloggers cite ‘my life and experiences’ as a primary topic of their blog” (Lenhart and

Fox). Storytelling is yet another way that blogs and previous self-representational genres are similar. Self-representational writing tells the story of the author's life and blogs do something very similar. After all, storytelling is how people share experiences with each other and with future generations. Arendt explained:

...every individual life between birth and death can eventually be told as a story with beginning and end is the prepolitical and prehistorical condition of history, the great story without beginning and end.. But the reason why each human life tells its story and why history ultimately becomes the storybook of mankind, with many actors and speakers and yet without any tangible authors, is that both are the outcome of action (1998, 184).

The storyteller then provides the experience to future generations. The actor may complete the task, but the storyteller documents it for others. The blogger knows that it is important to read others' blogs as a way to truly understand the community that is the blogosphere. "Blogging is as much about reading other blogs as about writing your own, and the best way to understand blogging is to immerse yourself in it" (Walker Rettberg, 1).

Of course, many times, in terms of self-representational writing, the actor and the storyteller are one and the same. Reading and writing are a part of the blogosphere, and this demonstrates Aristotle's insistence that man is a social animal (*Politics*, 3). The need and desire to communicate with others is what sets man apart from all other animals. This desire is fueled by the fire of the Internet and blogging as it opens up the communication to many more people than traditional communication outlets allow. According to Parks and Floyd, "computer-mediated communication liberates interpersonal relations from the

confines of physical locality and thus creates opportunities for new, but genuine, personal relationships and communities (e.g., Pool, 1983; Rheingold, 1993)” (81). By providing a way for people to communicate with others around the globe, the Internet allows the world to seem like a much smaller place as people can communicate with anyone, anywhere.

Blogging embodies a return to an oral culture in many ways; “...blogs are conversational and social, they are constantly changing and their tone tends to be less formal and closer to everyday speech than is the general tone of print writing” (Walker Rettberg, 33). By allowing information to be edited after it is published and by using a more conversational tone than traditional written media, blogs bring us back to a simpler way of communicating. Walker Rettberg explains, “[o]ur transition from print to electronic media has been characterized by the scholar Walter Ong as a *secondary orality*, a return in some ways to a culture more like that of the Ancient Greeks than of the post-Gutenberg society (Ong 1982)” (33).

Echoing the ancient marketplace, the electronic marketplace allows for stories to be told and retold, sometimes with information changing with each retelling. The information in the stories can be passed on to those not currently at the marketplace through retelling of the story; similarly, bloggers can repost a story they read somewhere, or they can simply link to the original post, allowing others who may not have seen the original post to read the information as well. Blogs are not written in a formal, grammatically correct style, but are written as if the blogger were speaking to the audience, using contractions, slang and all the other idiosyncrasies of the spoken

language. This accessibility of language allows for a wider audience to understand and share the blog post.

Blogs allow for dialogue between blogger and readers and also between readers and other readers. Because most blogs allow for the ability of others to comment on a post, it provides a way to disagree with or to clarify the original remark. If the reader does not understand what the blogger is trying to say, the comments section provides a way to start a dialogue to clarify the original post; it is even possible that another commenter may clarify the post better, or before, the blogger has an opportunity. Also, the comments section provides a way to create dialogue and discussion if a reader does not agree with what the blogger posted. This can lead to an interesting thread as others may, and usually will, join in the conversation to either clarify a side of the argument, choose a side of the argument, or just to provide their own opinion. “Dialogue implies more than a simple back-and-forthness of messages in interaction; it points to a particular relationally based process/quality of communication in which the participants not only meet to exchange messages but to allow fully for changing and being changed” (Anderson, 92-93). If the blogger were not open to discussion and the possibility of a change in his or her opinion, more than likely he or she would not have posted to the blog or allowed for comments. The ability of a one to many communication, such as the blog post, can lead to a many to many communication as commenters and the blogger alike have the ability to communicate about the topic at hand.

Arguments that suggest that dialogue must be face-to-face need to be addressed. According to Anderson, “[a]lthough Bakhtin did not focus on electronic media, he showed through his analysis of fiction that the technology of writing is yet another

avenue to dialogue” (103). After all, according to Plato, writing was not rhetoric, only the spoken word was true rhetoric. That communication form has been revisited and acknowledged as a form of rhetoric in today’s society. Is it not time to revisit the meaning of dialogue to include computer-mediated avenues?

Blogging is participatory. Blogging allows for two-way communication between the blogger and the commenter or reader. “In Douglas Rushkoff’s *Media Virus*, Greg Ruggiero of the Immediast Underground is quoted as saying, ‘Media is a corporate possession.... You cannot participate in the media. Bringing that into the foreground is the first step. The second step is to define the difference between public and audience. An audience is passive; a public is participatory’” (Perseus Publishing Editors, 9). Bloggers are not looking for an audience, they are looking for a public. Most, if not all bloggers, allow for comments on their posts because the blogger is looking for feedback. Most bloggers do not hope that all of their readers agree with them all of the time; many are looking for a forum to argue their case and prove the validity of their ideas. However, feedback and many readers is not the norm for most blogs. “[T]he reality of most webbloggers’ everyday experience was, as the quip went, being ‘famous for fifteen people’” (Rosenberg, 90). Because the Web is so vast, it is often difficult to garner a lot of traffic to a personal blog so instead of Warhol’s fifteen minutes of fame, Web insiders began to comment that bloggers were famous, not for fifteen minutes, but only for fifteen people.

A blog is merely a message board if no one responds to the posts. Bloggers and blog readers build traffic and community through the give-and-take of communication. It is not a one-way forum for the blogger to spout his or her opinion, but a rhetorical space

for the interaction of ideas and opinions. “Although some critics of media systems are justifiably concerned about the effects of anonymity, the overall tendency of the new electronic environment is toward increased presence and rejuvenated possibilities for dialogue” (Anderson, 106). Blogging is one way that dialogue can be achieved in a technological environment.

How honest are the bloggers in what they share on their blog? Most bloggers will admit that they do not share every minute detail of their lives on their blog, but only those things that they want an opinion on or that they are interested in learning more about. Many bloggers share details to the point that regular or frequent readers often “...feel that [they] know its writer” (Perseus Publishing Editors, xi). It is difficult to read someone’s personal writings for a period of time and not begin to feel like you know the author. “Blogs are saturated with the personality of their creators. Many blogs are about the day-to-day goings-on of their authors’ lives, which gives them a personal focus” (Stone, 40). Whether the blogger is someone whom the reader already knew or someone who had opinions and/or stories that interested that person, there is a community feeling that grows among the blogger and readers. Many bloggers meet in person after reading each others’ blogs for a while, taking the virtual relationship into a real-world relationship.

Blogging allows people to share their true feelings about events happening around them. Many times people will not stop and say that there is a problem with something, but a blog allows them to do that. Matt Welch, a Los Angeles based writer, began a blog one week after 9/11. “‘Starting a blog,’ Welch says, ‘was a chance to stand up to people I’d walked among for fifteen years and yell ENOUGH!’” (Rosenberg, 138). The ability to state his opinion without interruption or argument, at least until he stated his full

opinion, allowed Welch, and many other bloggers, to express his true thoughts on a given situation.

The first personal blog was started by Justin Hall when he was a freshman at Swarthmore College (Stefanac, 50). Hall wrote with an honesty and audacity unheard of when he started. “The details were explicit and sometimes titillating, sometimes heartbreaking. Whether writing about his latest romantic escapade or his father’s suicide, Hall seemed to speak directly to the reader” (Stefanac, 51). Reading any personal blog over a period of time, even a week, gives the reader a glimpse into who the blogger truly is. It is difficult to completely hide behind the screen and eventually the person behind the blog begins to peek through and reveal him- or herself to the readers.

Because the blogger puts the information “out there,” he or she is hoping for someone to see the information or photos that are available. “Thanks to the screen, diarists feel they can write about their innermost feelings without fearing identification and humiliation, readers feel they can inconspicuously observe others and derive increased understanding and sometimes power from that knowledge” (Serfaty, 13). This interest in sharing details with others willingly is indicative of the “me” culture. Blogging allows the author to shout “look at me” without physically causing a scene, but still attracting the desired attention.

Blogs provide a way for the blogger to share information with distant friends and family, as well as make new friends along the way. A benefit of blogging is that it combines “the immediacy of up-to-the-minute posts, latest first, with a strong sense of the author’s personality, passions, and point of view” (Nardi, et. al., 42). Knowing the blogger is a feeling that separates patrons of a blogger from those of someone who hosts

a personal webpage. Not always will the writer's true personality come through on a webpage, but it is difficult for a blogger to hide behind the screen indefinitely.

However dissimilar, most "bloggers have personal codes of ethics dictating what goes into their blogs (such as never criticize friends or express political opinions that are openly inflammatory)" (Nardi, et. al., 43). An example of this type of code comes from a post by Beth Fish on her blog on August 24, 2007: "I am shocked, positively shocked, by the number of you who claimed you were unaware that we had boundaries. People, there is so much that I don't tell you, and I can assure you that we are all much happier that way." Beth set up a set of guidelines for herself regarding what she would and would not blog about; these codes of ethics vary from blogger to blogger. The code of ethics created by the blogger can evolve over time as the person continues to blog and the blog continues to evolve in the blogosphere.

If the intent of the blog is to share information with people the blogger already knows, many wonder why the blogger does not just send an email. The reason that Nardi, et. al., discovered was that "blogs are not intrusive. No one is 'forced to pay attention,' observed Lara, as they are with email. Reading is voluntary, when convenient" (43). People find a need to read email when it appears and also feel the need to respond; with a personal blog, reading feels more voluntary and commenting even more so. Blogs allow people who want to find out what someone is doing the ability to do so without feeling the *need* to stay up-to-date.

*Public vs. Private in Blogs.* As previously addressed, once something is written down there is little hope of it staying private forever. Blogging, however, takes this issue to a whole new level. Gunter refers to a paper by Gillian Youngs that "examines the public

versus private spheres of blogging and identifies that in blogging the ‘public’ can become personal and the ‘private’ becomes public” (124). This leads to a blurring of the two areas of society and an opportunity to engage in a study of Hannah Arendt’s public, private, and social spheres in terms of the twenty-first century and the new technologies that are available to us.

*Why Study Blogs?* With the growth of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google+, why should anyone pay attention to research regarding blogs? Blogs are the original social media. It is of utmost importance to study the beginning of a genre, especially when that beginning product is still used and remains an impressive force in the social media universe.

Although the growth of new blogs has slowed, and the genre has been almost abandoned by the younger generation, the use of blogging has remained a constant among those over 25. The true benefit of a blog is the “power it bestows upon its owner” (Stone, 36). This power to share ideas and have a voice allows bloggers to participate in public and social discussions, demonstrating a greater democratic forum. Applying Arendt’s philosophy regarding private, public, and social to twenty-first century technology such as personal blogging allows us to examine interpersonal communication and its evolution through the history of mankind.

#### SUMMARY

All three genres of self-representational writing we have examined—the diary, the journal, and the blog—are still used today; therefore, a distinction must be reiterated explaining both the connection and divergence among these genres. For this project, it is

especially important to examine how each genre is affected by the perceived audience; as well as how Arendt's understanding of public, private, and social may be applied.

A brief review reminds us that the diary is not expected to be read by anyone other than the writer until after his or her death. The journal is expected to be viewed by those select individuals that the writer deems appropriate. The personal blog is accessible to anyone who has access to the World Wide Web making the audience immeasurable. The diary, therefore, represents the private; the journal, the public; and the blog falls in line with the public, also. This determination is based on the anticipated audience for each type of self-representational writing which determines what is written and how it is written. The diarist does not feel the need to correct every grammatical or spelling error because the expected audience is only a future self, thus falling into the private sphere. The journal writer must take into account spelling, grammar, and word choice because close friends and family will be reading their journal; however, an error here or there will usually be overlooked; the blogger must pay very close attention to word choice, spelling, and grammar because anyone can read his or her posts and without a personal relationship with the blogger, the mistake may be seen as something larger than a typographical error. The need to keep the audience engaged and entertained is one major difference between the diary and the blog. Since the diarist is writing for a future self as his or her primary audience, the diarist does not have as much pressure to keep the diary updated daily with interesting details. The blogger, however, must attempt to keep an audience engaged, and that involves regular and interesting posts [maybe this general location is the place for that earlier paragraph on distinctions between blogs and diaries]

By engaging Hannah Arendt's philosophy to distinguish these genres, this study hopes to provide a clearer delineation of each genre and also demonstrate a greater understanding of each sphere and the related genre. Arendt's view of private as for the self, or family, falls in line with the diary. Her view of public as being community directly relates to the specific, limited audience who is exposed to the journal. Finally, the super-human family that Arendt expresses as the social can be related to the reach of the World Wide Web on which blogs are published. Although the technology did not exist for the World Wide Web when Arendt was alive, her foresight into what technology could do lends her thinking to be engaged to study personal blogging.

## Chapter 2: Hannah Arendt's Understanding of Public, Private and Social

How can the work of a philosopher who died fifteen years before the advent of the World Wide Web provide any insight into the study of personal blogs? Using Hannah Arendt's work on public, private, and social will enable this research to clearly delineate self-representational writing into these realms and provide a historical look at how communication evolved.

The distinction between a private and a public sphere of life corresponds to the household and the political realms, which have existed as distinct, separate entities at least since the rise of the ancient city-state, but the emergence of the social realm, which is neither private nor public, strictly speaking, is a relatively new phenomenon whose origin coincided with the emergence of the modern age and which found its political form in the nation-state (Arendt, 1998, 28).

Arendt's distinction is grounded in Aristotle's understanding of the *polis* and *oikos*. One major difference between the two was that "[t]he *polis* was distinguished from the household in that it knew only 'equals' whereas the household was the center of the strictest inequality" (Arendt, 1998, 32). The *polis* in Ancient Greece included only property owners in the city-state.

The definitions of public, private, and social evolved throughout history. Grounding these terms in a philosophical tradition, such as the philosophy of Hannah Arendt, demonstrates the changes in their definitions and the ever-fluid understanding of communication; thus allowing us to examine how self-representational writing went from something not to be shared to something to be shared with the world-at-large. Why do people feel that something so extremely personal at one point in history that it was kept

under lock and key can now be shared on the World Wide Web for all who wish to read it? Through Arendt's philosophy of the public and social and her clarification of the blurring of the public and private that the rise of the social has brought about, this study hopes to provide a better communicative map of what is consistently referred to as "oversharing."

This discussion begins with the different understandings of the public and private communities. Farrell explains that throughout the years the differences between public and private has reversed many times. At one point moral character and integrity were related to the public while the private was tied to creativity and imagination. Today morals have become private and aesthetics are tied mostly to the public (Farrell, 1993, 150). Arendt, relying on Aristotle, saw the public as being more than political life. She believed that humans do not have an "essence" the way that other things do but that "who" a human being is can be disclosed only through action which takes place in the public sphere (Øverenget, 430). A closer examination of these terms will help to further clarify the terms' etymology.

Arendt develops her understanding of the public and private realms simultaneously. Arendt noted that:

The true character of this *polis* is still quite manifest in Plato's and Aristotle's political philosophies, even if the borderline between household and *polis* is occasionally blurred, especially in Plato who, probably following Socrates, began to draw his examples and illustrations for the *polis* from everyday experiences in private life, but also in Aristotle when he, following Plato, tentatively assumed that at least the historical origin of the *polis* must be connected with the

necessities of life and that only its content or inherent aim (*telos*) transcends life in the “good life” (1998, 37).

This “good life” is a term that Aristotle coined to describe “the life of the citizen”. In *The Human Condition* Arendt elaborates that the “good life” is “not merely better, more carefree or nobler than ordinary life, but of an altogether different quality. It was ‘good’ to the extent that by having mastered the necessities of sheer life, by being freed from labor and work, and by overcoming the innate urge of all living creatures for their own survival, it was no longer bound to the biological life process” (1998, 36-37). The “good life” was the life one lived after the basic necessities of living were achieved.

#### PRIVATE

According to the ancients, private life meant that the person was “not fully human” (Arendt, 1998, 38). Because humans are social animals, they need to be with others in order to be completely human and a private life would not allow that. The evolution of the term private includes the Greeks believing that private life was “idiotic”; the Romans believing that “privacy offered but a temporary refuge from the business of *res publica*”; and into today where privacy is considered “a sphere of intimacy” which was “unknown to any period prior to the modern age” (Arendt, 1998, 38). This description so clearly explained by Arendt helps to further her definition of the private. However, Arendt does address a common misinterpretation of Plato’s desire to create the *polis* as a form of a private family. She explains:

Plato was still quite aware that he proposed a revolutionary transformation of the *polis* when he applied to its administration the currently recognized maxims for a well-ordered household. (It is a common error to interpret Plato as though he

wanted to abolish the family and the household; he wanted, on the contrary, to extend this type of life until one family embraced every citizen. In other words, he wanted to eliminate from the household community its private character, and it is for this purpose that he recommended the abolition of private property and individual marital status) (1998, 223).

Plato's attempt to arrange the public as an extended form of the private begins an examination of a concept of the social which had yet to be addressed or even considered. After all, Arendt describes the social as a "super-human family", referring to the explanation of Plato's suggestion of how to manage or rule the *polis* in the best possible way for all citizens.

Moving through history, Arendt also addresses the understanding of the public and private realms after the fall of the Roman Empire. She wrote: "While one can equate the public with the religious only with some difficulty, the secular realm under the rule of feudalism was indeed in its entirety what the private realm had been in antiquity" (1998, 34). The prominence of the Catholic Church in this era brought about such a major shift in these definitions as the faithful became more concerned with life after death than the life they were living.

Arendt continues to describe the Medieval mindset:

The bringing of all human activities into the private realm and the modeling of all human relationships upon the example of the household reached far into the specifically medieval professional organizations in the cities themselves, the guilds, *confréries*, and *compagnons*, and even into the early business companies where the original joint household would seem to be indicated by the very word

‘company’ (*companis*)’ ....The medieval concept of the “common good”, far from indicating the existence of a political realm, recognizes only that private individuals have interests in common material and spiritual, and that they can retain their privacy and attend to their own business only if one of them takes it upon himself to look out for this common interest (1998, 34-35).

This distinction from the Ancients can be demonstrated by showing that the political was public—or part of the *polis*—for the Ancients, but private—or part of the secular—in Medieval times.

From the Middle Ages, Arendt moves into the sixteenth century with the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau regarding intimacy. Arendt describes Rousseau as “the first articulate explorer and to an extent even theorist of intimacy...who, characteristically enough, is the only great author still frequently cited by his first name alone” (1998, 38-39), This intimacy that Rousseau refers to is a replacement of the private at this point in history. Arendt explains that “the intimacy of the heart, unlike the private household, has no objective tangible place in the world, nor can the society against which it protests and asserts itself be localized with the same certainty as the public space” (1998, 39). She addresses the dichotomy of Rousseau’s thinking by suggesting that: “To Rousseau, both the intimate and the social were, rather, subjective modes of human existence, and in his case, it was as though Jean-Jacques rebelled against a man called Rousseau” (1998, 39). This dichotomy within himself points to the inner struggle of humans to want to be a part of society, but at the same time to want to rebel against it. This struggle continues today in many people and began with the rise of the social out of the private and public.

Today, privacy refers to the intimate rather than the family. And, according to Arendt, “under modern circumstances, this deprivation of ‘objective’ relationships to others and of a reality guaranteed through them has become the mass phenomenon of loneliness, where it has assumed its most extreme and most antihuman form” (1998, 58-59). Privacy, in the modern world, has become a problem of isolation rather than the safety of the household. However, “We no longer think primarily of deprivation when we use the word ‘privacy,’ and this is partly due to the enormous enrichment of the private sphere through modern individualism” (Arendt, 1998, 38). The private can be seen as the ability to keep some information and experiences either known only to the individual or to the individual and those few that he or she deems worthy to share the information with. In this manner, privacy becomes more of a privilege than a burden or a misfortune. The private means that something is so important to the individual that he or she does not want to share it or that he or she only wants to share it with those people that are truly important. This evolution of the private realm can best be seen in a comparison with the evolution of the public realm, which is examined next.

#### PUBLIC

The public is where human beings interact for the good of the community or *polis*. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life, compared to which even the richest and most satisfying family life can offer only the prolongation or multiplication of one’s own position with its attending aspects and perspectives....Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered

around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear (Arendt, 1998, 57)

The public allows those experiences that must be observed by others to exist and become reality. By closely examining the evolution of the public realm from Ancient Greece to the present day, we can begin to see how the public has, in some ways, expanded in its definition.

According to Arendt, the public “does not always exist, and although all men are capable of deed and word, most of them—like the slave, the foreigner, and the barbarian in antiquity, like the laborer or craftsman prior to the modern age, the jobholder or businessman in our world—do not live in it” (1998, 199). This statement refers strictly to the political understanding of public. However, many of the types of people listed above would not be allowed or would not want to participate in this aspect of a shared realm.

The only consistent feature of the public realm, throughout history, deals with the concept of living with others outside of the household. “Human beings are plural and mortal, and it is these features of the human condition that give politics both its miraculous openness and its desperate contingency” (Arendt, 1998, xvii). This plurality helps to explain why human beings live in communities and not in isolation from each other.

In Ancient Greece, the *polis* or public realm was defined as the city-state; however, Arendt clarifies that

The *polis*, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where

they happen to be.... It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly (1998, 198-199).

This quotation helps clarify the *polis* in terms of citizens and location. The connection of the *polis* and the household rests in mastering the necessities of life. The *polis* was freedom from these necessities in order to be involved in politics (Arendt, 1998, 29-30). In order for a citizen to be involved in politics, one must first have truly understood and cared for the basic necessities of life: food, shelter, and safety. Only then was man able to focus on the *polis*. However, in order to participate in the *polis*, a man must own land (Arendt, 1998, 29-30). This kept slaves and foreigners from having a say in the activities and governing of the *polis*.

Although the *polis* provided freedom, it also provided competition. This competition revolved around finding a way to stand out and “distinguish himself from all others, to show through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all (*áien aristeuein*). The public realm, in other words, was reserved for individuality” (Arendt, 1998, 41). Distinguishing himself allowed the citizen to create an identity separate from the household. Arendt explains:

Every activity performed in public can attain an excellence never matched in privacy; for excellence, by definition, the presence of others is always required, and this presence needs the formality of the public, constituted by one’s peers, it cannot be the casual, familiar presence of one’s equals or inferiors (1998, 48-49).

Competition brings out both the best and the worst in men. This need for recognition

causes harm and hostility in the *polis*. She continues: “The *polis* was supposed to multiply the occasions to win ‘immortal fame,’ that is, to multiply the chances for everybody to distinguish himself, to show in deed and word who he was in his unique distinctness” (1998, 197). This distinctness was easier to establish away from the household and the fame that could be achieved needed to be observed by more than just household members.

This recognition leading to immortality needed to exist in public so that future generations could learn about the person’s achievements and share them with others. “The *polis* “assures the mortal actor that his passing existence and fleeting greatness will never lack the reality that comes from being seen, being heard... [the actors] needed Homer and ‘others of his craft’ in order to be presented to those who were not there” (Arendt, 1998, 198). It is here that storytelling becomes important for Arendt and for the ability to learn from the past and engage in thoughts of the future. The *polis*, therefore, allows the stories of the Greeks and Romans to be shared to the present day and helps to shape each shared or public space in history and in the future.

Arendt valued storytelling because it focused on the nature of human experience more so than philosophy did. According to Swift, Arendt “thought that storytelling opens up the possibility of different interpretations, based on the differing world views of those who hear the story, and also the possibility of an open-ended, perhaps inconclusive debate about the meaning of the story” (4). For instance, in *The Human Condition* she demonstrates her belief that storytellers are very important to anyone’s life being remembered:

Even Achilles, it is true, remains dependent upon the storyteller, poet or historian, without whom everything he did remains futile; but he is the only ‘hero,’ and therefore the hero par excellence, who delivers into the narrator’s hands the full significance of his deed, so that it is as though he had not merely enacted the story of his life but at the same time also ‘made’ it (1998, 194).

Without storytelling, Achilles, Hercules, and Perseus would remain mortal men whose bravery and conquests would be forgotten. Storytelling did not disappear with the Ancients but continued into the middle Ages, also.

In Medieval times, the public realm was specifically tied to the church—more accurately, Christianity. The public, things that would be seen by others, included only activities involving the church and charitable actions. The main concern with the public realm, in terms of Christianity had to do with a “good” deed being done for God, as the following quote suggests:

The one activity taught by Jesus in word and deed is the activity of goodness, and goodness obviously harbors a tendency to hide from being seen or heard. Christian hostility toward the public realm, the tendency at least of early Christians to lead a life as far removed from the public realm as possible, can also be understood as a self-evident consequence of devotion to good works, independent of all beliefs and expectations. For it is manifest that the moment a good work becomes known and public, it loses its specific character of goodness, of being done for nothing but goodness’ sake. When goodness appears openly, it is no longer goodness, though it may still be useful as organized charity or an act of solidarity. Therefore: ‘Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be

seen of them.’ Goodness can exist only when it is not perceived, not even by its author; whoever sees himself performing a good work is no longer good, but at best a useful member of society or a dutiful member of a church. Therefore: ‘Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth’ (Arendt, 1998, 74).

In Medieval times people addressed the need to replace the political with something else to help the community. “The medieval concept of the ‘common good,’ far from indicating the existence of a political realm, recognizes only that private individuals have interests in common, material and spiritual, and that they can retain their privacy and attend to their own business only if one of them takes it upon himself to look out for this common interest” (Arendt, 1998, 35). This common good was charity.

To find a bond between people strong enough to replace the world was the main political task of early Christian philosophy, and it was Augustine who proposed to found not only the Christian ‘brotherhood’ but all human relationships on charity. But this charity, though its worldlessness clearly corresponds to the general human experience of love, is at the same time clearly distinguished from it in being something which, like the world, is between men: ‘Even robbers have between them [*inter se*] what they call charity.’ (Arendt, 1998, 53).

Augustine believed that, on some level, all members of humanity had a form of charity inside of them that could be used to assist the community. This “common good” of charity allowed the public to take a new form in Medieval times. Arendt explains that the Medieval concept of the common good “recognizes only that private individuals have interests in common, material and spiritual, and that they can retain their privacy and attend to their own business only if one of them takes it upon himself to look out for this

common interest” (1998, 35). By realizing that the common good must be addressed in order for individual life to flourish, the Medieval man took the necessary steps to address the public aspect of charity.

Many stories from Medieval times were written as poetry to recount tales of greatness and ordinary life. Arendt explains that it was “this closeness to living recollection that enables the poem to remain, to retain its durability, outside the printed or written page, and though the ‘quality’ of a poem may be subject to a variety of standards, its ‘memorability’ will inevitably determine its durability” (1998, 169-170). The storytelling through poetry allowed those in Medieval times to recall events.

Arendt’s examination of the early Modern era demonstrates the need to share information with selected confidantes through salons and also economical and marketplace aspects of the public realm. Arendt wrote a book on Rahel Varnhagen based on the letters and diaries that she left behind. Three thinkers—Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and Rahel Varnhagen—provide Arendt with a political, as well as philosophical examination of this time period. Addressing the changes, in chronological order, will build upon the understanding of the public realm as we approach Modernity and the present day.

Arendt believed that money and public admiration, or the need for greatness as defined in ancient times, became equal substitutes for each other at this time. The modern thought regarding the public realm was expressed when Adam Smith stated that “men of letters” recognized the importance of public admiration, as well as monetary compensation, in terms of professional success (Arendt, 1998, 56). She explains that this public mindset allows the equal substitution of money for admiration. “Public admiration,

too, is something to be used and consumed, and status, as we would say today, fulfils one need as food fulfils another: public admiration is consumed by individual vanity as food is consumed by hunger” (1998, 56). Both of these needs, Arendt explains, are necessary for life in the public realm and in the world-at-large. Food is necessary for life itself, and public admiration is necessary for self-worth in the public realm no matter why the person is admired.

Arendt considers the public realm as equal to the marketplace and not the politics of a given community.

His [*homo faber*] public realm is the exchange market, where he can show the products of his hand and receive the esteem which is due him. This inclination to showmanship is closely connected with and probably no less deeply rooted than the ‘propensity to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another,’ which according to Adam Smith, distinguishes man from animal (1998, 160).

This distinction demonstrates the beginning of the evolution of the public realm from something that was strictly a political arena into something more which many Arendtian scholars believe comes closer to her interpretation of the public. This something more, as recognized in the quote above, is the marketplace. The marketplace was the place where craftsmen would gather to sell their products and catch up on current events. This understanding of the public does not discount the political in the public realm, but only enlarges the understanding of the public to include areas other than the political.

Arendt enlarges her sense of the public realm beyond the political in her discussions of the salons which emerged during the German Enlightenment. Rahel Varnhagen was a Jewish woman during the late-seventeen hundreds into the early- to

mid-eighteen hundreds and was an outcast or “pariah” in her time because, although her father was rich, when he died he left her nothing. Rahel was not married because, in her words: “I have no grace, not even the grace to see what the cause of that is; in addition to not being pretty, I also have no inner grace...” (Arendt, 1974, 6). As time went on, Rahel became the center of salons in Germany which brought great minds and individuals together for intellectual discussion. Arendt explains that “the Jewish salons in Berlin provided a social area outside of society, and Rahel’s garret room in its turn stood outside the conventions and customers of even the Jewish salons” (1974, 57). These salons included many of the great German thinkers such as “the Humboldt brothers (Alexander and Wilhelm), Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Gentz, [Friedrich] Schleiermacher, Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia and his mistress, Pauline Wiesel, the classical philologist Friedrich August Wolfe, Jean Paul, Brentano, the Tieck brothers” (Benhabib, 9). Rahel’s salons brought people from many different ways of life together in order to discuss current affairs and other important topics in a public arena.

Rahel shared her thoughts so freely with those in her circle that “she repeatedly told Veit he was free to show all of her letters to others; she had no secrets, she wrote. On the contrary, she believed people would know her better from her letters, would be more just toward her” (Arendt, 1974, 19). This statement illuminates the growth of the public realm to include things that past generations would have considered to be private. However, it demonstrates some control as only those that Veit knew would possibly have access to her documents. Although the public and private begin to blur during this time, there is still some control over the visibility of communication.

Rahel's salons provided much comfort to those who wished to discuss different topics no matter what their social status was. Rahel's salons were a "socially neutral place where all classes met and where it was taken for granted that each person would be an individual" (Arendt, 1974, 38). In her salons "private things were given objectivity by being communicated, and in which public matters counted only insofar as they had private significance—this salon ceased to exist when the public world, the power of general misfortune, became so overwhelming that it could no longer be translated into private terms" (Arendt, 1974, 122). The military and societal pressures of the time prevented "the possibility of living without any social status as 'an imaginary Romantic person, one to whom one can give true *goût*,' was now blocked off" (Arendt, 1974, 122). This ended the salons in Germany and other parts of the world and began a time of political struggle for much of the world.

This political struggle involved Karl Marx and his ascent into the economic and political spotlight. Marx recognized the natural distinction of workers and facilitators. He understood that it took different types or classes of people to keep mankind moving forward, in addition to the fact that work-value and social value were of great importance to communities. Arendt states that:

values, in other words, in distinction from things or deeds or ideas, are never the products of a specific human activity, but come into being whenever any such products are drawn into the ever-changing relativity of exchange between the members of society. Nobody, as Marx rightly insisted, seen 'in his isolation produces values,' and nobody, he could have added, in his isolation cares about them (1998, 164-165).

Marx's view of value was the amount of work and time put into a product, and not the community's desire for the product. In other words, if one item took four hours to construct, it should hold the same value as any other item that took four hours to create. This view of value does not take into account supply and demand, but specific utility. This utility allowed all work to be valued based on the quality of the product, allowing the craftsman to be appreciated in the public realm for the product he produced. Marx's comments need to be understood within the early manifestation of Modernity, which was Arendt's primary concern.

Modernity brings us into the Industrial Revolution and beyond, moving into the Machine Age. The first and most relevant change to the public realm, at this time, is the exclusion of the political from the public.

The modern age was as intent on excluding political man, that is, man who acts and speaks, from its public realm as antiquity was on excluding *homo faber*. In both instances the exclusion was not a matter of course, as was the exclusion of laborers and the propertyless classes until their emancipation in the nineteenth century. The modern age was of course perfectly aware that the political realm was not always and need not necessarily be a mere function of 'society,' destined to protect the productive, social side of human nature through governmental administration; but it regarded everything beyond the enforcement of law and order as 'idle talk' and 'vain-glory' (Arendt, 1998, 159).

This exclusion was an attempt to focus on production and consumption as opposed to political discussion and lack of action. What this meant for the political man was that there was a move to a more social realm as Arendt explained because the larger the

population, as was true of the Modern age, the more likely that politics would become a product of the social realm and move away from the public (1998, 43). This shift of the political will be examined more closely later in the chapter.

Another relevant change in the public realm was the inclusion of labor and the labor class. Labor, to Arendt, has a different connotation than work. Relying on her understanding of Marx's philosophy, she notes:

Labor was to him the 'reproduction of one's own life' which assured the survival of the individual, and begetting was the production 'of foreign life' which assured the survival of the species. This insight is chronologically the never-forgotten origin of his theory, which he then elaborated by substituting for 'abstract labor' the labor power of a living organism and by understanding labor's surplus that amount of labor power still extant after the means for the laborer's own reproduction have been produced (1998, 106).

The "reproduction of one's own life" prior to the modern age, would be considered part of the private, as it was a function of the household. This inclusion significantly affected the future of the world, as Arendt explains:

The admission of labor to public stature, far from eliminating its character as a process—which one might have expected, remembering that bodies politic have always been designed for permanence and their laws always understood as limitations imposed upon movement—has, on the contrary, liberated this process from its circular, monotonous recurrence and transformed it into a swiftly progressing development whose results have in a few centuries totally changed the whole inhabited world (1998, 46-47).

By bringing labor into the public realm, the community saw what was happening in terms of the amount of labor being completed and the conditions under which the laborers were forced to work. This admission helped to improve labor conditions and establish the first national labor union in 1866 ([www.aflcio.org](http://www.aflcio.org)). The introduction of labor into the public realm also brought action into the public realm.

Action does not always mean work, but is not possible in isolation or privacy. “Action and speech need the surrounding presence of others no less than fabrication needs the surrounding presence of nature for its material, and of a world in which to place the finished product” (Arendt, 1998, 188). Both action and speech need to be in “constant contact with the web of the acts and words of other men” (Arendt, 1998, 188). If these occur in private, no one will hear or see them and they will, for all purposes, not exist. Action corresponds, in Arendt’s philosophy, to birth. Action and speech reveal a uniqueness of man. “Action and speech are so closely related because the primordial and specifically human act must at the same time contain the answer to the question asked of every newcomer: ‘Who are you?’ The disclosure of who somebody is, is implicit in both his words and his deeds...many, and even most acts, are performed in the manner of speech” (1998, 178). It is because of this that it is important for action and speech to be brought forth and exposed to the public.

Labor and action became important during this time because of the introduction of the assembly line and mass production. Labor brings to bear those items which are not permanent, but are used up or discarded, and mass production created more products than a generation could use up. Through the use of machines to create more products, craftsmanship, to some extent, became reduced to labor.

The Industrial Revolution, as its name implies, brought about the invention of machinery to make each person's life easier.

The newly invented electronic machines, which, sometimes to the dismay and sometimes to the confusion of their inventors, are so spectacularly more 'intelligent' than human beings, would indeed be *homunculi*.... They are, like all machines, mere substitutes and artificial improvers of human labor power, following the time-honored device of all division of labor to break down every operation into its simplest constituent motions, substituting, for instance, repeated addition for multiplication (Arendt, 1998, 172).

This understanding allows Arendt to demonstrate how machines may, at some point in the future, replace the need for man in order to create products.

For remembering, passing on, and learning from the Modern Era, poets, storytellers, and historiographers took the time to write down events and stories to pass on to future generations. The different genres available allowed for the story to reach a larger audience based on each individual's personal taste regarding storytelling.

The 'doing of great deeds and the speaking of great words' will leave no trace, no product that might endure after the moment of action and the spoken word has passed. If the *animal laborans* needs the help of *homo faber* in his highest capacity, that is, the help of the artist, of poets and historiographers, of monument-builders or writers, because without them the only product of their activity, the story they enact and tell, would not survive at all (Arendt, 1998, 173).

The need to record acts and thoughts became very apparent during this time as recording was made easier through the telegraph and phonograph. Gutenberg had introduced the

printing press years before, but recording the voice made it easier to share stories with others. And, because it is difficult for one to tell his or her own story, “it is not the actor but the storyteller who perceives and ‘makes’ the story” (Arendt, 1998, 192). Without the men and women who wrote down the events and actions of others, we would have little record of what happened in the past with which to gauge our own actions and responses.

Moving into the mid- to late-twentieth century, and the early-twenty-first century, the understanding of public has again shifted. However, in Arendt’s understanding of the Modern public, politics is no longer conducted publicly. Two areas in which Arendt’s public has not changed from the Modern understanding: public is not political and public is where men and women still meet to discuss things that affect the community. One thing that has shifted is the understanding of community. With the advent of technological communication abilities, the community is now the entire world as any person, no matter where he or she is located, can discuss anything with any other person, as long as they are somehow connected technologically.

Today, the public realm is first and foremost permanent. It is difficult, if not impossible, to have a public space, where individuals congregate, that is not always present. “Only the existence of a public realm and the world’s subsequent transformation into a community of things which gathers men together and relates them to each other depends entirely on permanence. If the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men” (Arendt, 1998, 55). The public must exist before and after the lives of those currently alive in order to truly be public. If an area or idea exists only for the

lifetime of an individual, it falls more into the realm of the private than the public. The public is common, that which, according to Arendt:

we enter when we are born and what we leave behind when we die. It transcends our life-span into past and future alike; it was there before we came and will outlast our brief sojourn in it. It is what we have in common not only with those who live with us, but also with those who were here before and those who will come after us. But such a common world can survive the coming and going of the generations only to the extent that it appears in public. It is the publicity of the public realm which can absorb and make shine through the centuries whatever men may want to save from the natural ruin of time (1998, 55).

The need for anything that is permanent to be public does not necessarily require that anything that is public needs to be permanent. It is just the visibility of the space, item or idea that is required in order for any type of permanence to exist.

This permanence also requires that others have experienced or felt it, that the public is tangible. “The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember, and, second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things” (Arendt, 1998, 95). This tangible product may be a story or a feeling, but more individuals than just the actor must have experienced it. It may be the storyteller reliving the adventure told through the words of the actor, but the experience must become tangible for it to be public.

The fact that the public is tangible makes it the perfect location for any act of greatness to be recognized and noticed. Arendt explains that “no activity can become

excellent if the world does not provide a proper space for its exercise. Neither education nor ingenuity nor talent can replace the constituent elements of the public realm, which make it the proper place for human excellence” (1998, 49). Because, as was discovered in previous generations, in order for something to be excellent, it must be seen by others, and even though the understanding of the public realm has shifted, this is still the case today. This recognition comes through the common area of the public and through the ability for others to hear about such greatness. The Olympic games, started in Ancient Greece, and continuing today demonstrate the need for public recognition for greatness, as do all sporting events. Although greatness can include many different areas, sporting events are a universal example of the need for public recognition. This need for greatness requires a public realm in which to act.

An area of change is the emergence of the necessities of life—food, clothing, and shelter—in the public realm. According to Baehr “since the rise of society, that is, the rise of the ‘household’ (*oikia*) or of economic activities to the public realm, housekeeping and all matters pertaining formerly to the private sphere of the family have become a ‘collective’ concern” (188). By bringing the household activities into the public realm, the private realm has been limited to that of intimate activities. However, certain areas of the private realm have benefited in public. The African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child” is a perfect example of the household benefiting by being brought into the public realm. This proverb expands on the notion that it takes more than two people, the parents, to raise a child—teachers, family members, and others must also be involved in the child’s life.

The village or, more specifically, the people of the village can benefit each other because they live in proximity to each other. Arendt explains that this proximity creates “the realm of human affairs, strictly speaking, consists of the web of human relationships which exists wherever men live together” (1998, 183-184). This web creates connections and experiences which join people together in ways which reach far beyond the political understanding of the public through previous generations.

These human relationships also help create a reality. Without human connections and exchanges, there are many events that are not thoroughly experienced. Arendt explains that:

everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. For us, appearance—something that is being seen and heard by others as well as ourselves—constitutes reality. Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life—the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses—lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance. The most current of such transformations occurs in storytelling and generally in artistic transposition of individual experience. But we do not need the form of the artist to witness this transfiguration. Each time we talk about things that can be experienced only in privacy or intimacy, we bring them out into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality which, their intensity notwithstanding, they never could have had before. The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and

ourselves, and while the intimacy of a fully developed private life, such as had never been known before the rise of the modern age and the concomitant decline of the public realm, will always greatly intensify and enrich the whole scale of subjective emotions and private feelings, this intensification will always come to pass at the expense of the assurance of the reality of the world and men (1998, 50)

This need to share all emotions and experiences with others envelops the household into the public. Take one of the most private emotions—love—for example. When two people fall in love, they do not share that emotion only between the two of them; they tell their friends and family and, usually, hold a large public event when they decide to marry. This very public display brings a very private, even intimate, moment into the public realm in order for it to become real and recognized by the community.

The public realm can also be associated with the term “world.” However, this term does not imply nature or earth; it is “the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together. To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time” (Arendt, 1998, 52). By bringing people together based on commonality, the world creates an area for communication to occur and ideas to be shared, but not a world that allows us to step on or fall over each other—literally and ideologically (Arendt, 1998, 52). The public allows people to share ideas but also creates a space of individuality to distinguish one person from another, allowing new and unique ideas and creations to flourish.

One drawback to existing purely in a public realm is that a life may become shallow. “While it retains its visibility, it loses the quality of rising into sight from some darker ground which must remain hidden if it is not to lose its depths in a very real, non-subjective sense” (Arendt, 1998, 71). Because a life lived in public has no hidden or private sector, it is difficult for anyone living a purely public life to have any mystery or discretion to it. This type of life can become only about appearance with no depth to the character of the individual. One example of public life becoming shallow relates to individual description. Arendt explains that the “moment we want to say *who* somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he is;...we begin to describe a type or a ‘character’...with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us” (1998, 181). Next time you go to introduce two people, try not introducing them by their profession or hobbies; describe their personality...you will find it quite difficult as we are a community of labels and description.

The current era is not immune to the benefits of storytelling. Arendt explains: That every individual life between birth and death can eventually be told as a story with beginning and end is the prepolitical and prehistorical condition of history, the great story without beginning and end. But the reason why each human life tells its story and why history ultimately becomes the storybook of mankind, with many actors and speakers and yet without any tangible authors, is that both are the outcome of action. For the great unknown in history, that has baffled the philosophy of history in the modern age, arises not only when one considers history as a whole and finds that its subject, mankind, is an abstraction which never can become an active agent.... The perplexity is that in any series of

events that together form a story with a unique meaning we can at best isolate the agent who set the whole process into motion; and although this agent frequently remains the subject, the ‘hero’ of the story, we can never point unequivocally to him as the author of its eventual outcome (1998, 184-185).

Once again, for all intents and purposes, the storyteller and the actor remain separate individuals. Although there may be some stories which are told by the actor, many historical and biographical events are told from an outsider’s point of view, allowing for a more intersubjective view of the situation.

Examining the public realm throughout history provides a solid ground to understanding how the area of life that is shared by most, if not all of humanity, has evolved into its current state and the current understanding that humanity holds of this shared space in the world. After all, “that civilizations can rise and fall, that mighty empires and great cultures can decline and pass away without external catastrophes...is due to this peculiarity of the public realm, which, because it ultimately resides on action and speech, never altogether loses its potential character” (Arendt, 1998, 199-200). The public realm exists today, existed in the past, and more than likely, will exist long into the future. It also provides a solid ground on which to begin our exploration into the realm of the social.

## SOCIAL

The social, for Arendt, is a modern phenomenon which has multiple nuances in her work.

Benhabib writes:

There are three dominant meanings of the term *social* in Arendt’s work. At one level, the *social* refers to the growth of a capitalist commodity exchange

economy. At the second level, it refers to aspects of mass society. In the third and least investigated sense, the *social* refers to sociability, to the quality of life in civil society and civic associations (23).

The works which are associated most closely with the social include *Rahel Varnhagen*, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, and *The Human Condition*. Although the above quote mentions three meanings of the social, it is more an evolution of the concept than separate meanings. This evolution occurred through Arendt's life experiences and the time in which she wrote each work. Her major concern with the social was the tendency of people to begin thinking like the majority—groupthink—and losing the ability to have and/or to express a unique thought. This concern never leaves Arendt, but the topics regarding the nature of the collective thought evolve throughout her work.

Although these works were published within seven years of each other (between 1951 and 1958), their writing spanned almost twenty years, allowing life experiences and scholarly research to affect Arendt's understanding of this term. Arendt began work on *Rahel Varnhagen* while she was in Paris between 1933 and 1939; she began *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1947; and she began *The Human Condition* in 1952 (<http://www.egs.edu/library/hannah-arendt/biography>). During this time, Arendt lived in several different countries and experienced different forms of government and different cultures. Arendt's largest concern with the social is that it will become an all-encompassing realm.

The social realm, where the life process has established its own public domain, has let loose an unnatural growth, so to speak, of the natural; and it is against this growth, not merely against society but against a constantly growing social realm,

that the private and intimate, on the one hand, and the political (in the narrower sense of the word), on the other, have proved incapable of defending themselves (1998, 47).

Loss of the public and private realms is of major concern to Arendt because these realms are the basis of the human community for her. The absorption of these realms into the social is apocalyptic for Arendt.

Another concern regarding the social for Arendt is that many people want to get involved in all activities and work. In the social realm “others are not content with beholding, judging, and admiring but wish to be admitted to the company of the craftsman and to participate as equals in the work process” and this involvement “threatened the ‘splendid isolation’ of the worker and eventually undermined the very notions of competence and excellence” (Arendt, 1998, 161). This problem with unskilled involvement in the work is best described in the idiom “too many cooks in the kitchen”. The craftsman needs to work in seclusion in order to create his product. Inexperienced people who want to get involved remove the skill and talent needed to create the artifact with the excellence of the craftsman.

One understanding of the social to be examined is that of a “capitalist commodity exchange economy”. In *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt wrote:

That a movement of expansion for expansion’s sake grew up in nation-states which more than any other political bodies were defined by boundaries and the limitations of possible conquest, is one example of the seemingly absurd disparities between cause and effect which have become the hallmark of modern history. The wild confusion of modern historical terminology is only a by-product

of these disparities. By comparisons with ancient Empires, by mistaking expansion for conquest, by neglecting the difference between Commonwealth and Empire (which pre-imperialist historians called the difference between plantations and possessions, or colonies and dependencies, or somewhat later, colonialism and imperialism), by neglecting, in other words, the difference between export of (British) people and export of (British) money, historians tried to dismiss the disturbing fact that so many of the important events in modern history look as though molehills had labored and had brought forth mountains (131-132).

Growing a country for no viable reason was unthinkable for Arendt. Her interpretation allows a glimpse into her personal experience with the Nazis taking control and attempting to grow the regime by conquering other governments without any thought as to why a specific area should be included except for a grab for power. This was especially apparent to Arendt when it came to democratic governments and the capitalist mentality of gaining capital solely for the purpose of gaining capital. She continues:

Contemporary historians, confronted with the spectacle of a few capitalists conducting their predatory searches round the globe for new investment possibilities and appealing to the profit motives of the much-too-rich and the gambling instincts of the much-too-poor, want to clothe imperialism with the old grandeur of Rome and Alexander the Great, a grandeur which would make all following events more humanly tolerable. The disparity between cause and effect was betrayed in the famous, and unfortunately true, remark that the British Empire was acquired in a fit of absent-mindedness; it became cruelly obvious in

our own time when a World War was needed to get rid of Hitler, which was shameful precisely because it was also comic (1994, 132).

This capitalistic government and growth provided a shared mentality for the necessity to grow for economic purposes no matter the cost or detriment to the country or its citizens. This is the concern that Arendt experienced with the economic aspect of the social realm.

The scientific thought that corresponds to this development is no longer political science by “national economy” or “social economy” or *Volkwirtschaft*, all of which indicate a kind of “collective housekeeping”; the collective of families economically organized into the facsimile of one super-human family is what we call “society,” and its political form of organization is called “nation.” We therefore find it difficult to realize that according to ancient thought on these matters, the very term “political economy” would have been a contradiction in terms: whatever was “economic,” related to the life of the individual and the survival of the species, was a non-political, household affair by definition (Arendt, 1998, 28-29). Economic factors, which used to be in the realm of the private, have become a community concern, moving them into the realm of the social. Arendt continues “politics is nothing but a function of society, that action, speech, and thought are primarily superstructures upon social interest, is not a discovery of Karl Marx but on the contrary is among the axiomatic assumptions that Marx accepted uncritically from the political economists of the modern age” (1998, 33). A major concern for Arendt was “a complete victory of society” with a political agenda that is “ruled by an ‘invisible hand,’ namely, by nobody” (1998, 44-45). This concern of rule by nobody can be seen in many mass cultures where no one can verify who makes the rules, just that the rules must be followed. Arendt explains that this can be seen in “the all-comprehensive pretension of

the social sciences which, as ‘behavioral sciences,’ aim to reduce man as a whole, in all his activities, to the level of a conditioned and behaving animal” (1998, 45). Through mass society and economic factors, man, as an individual, has been somewhat consumed by the need to coordinate behavior and consolidate economic concerns together in order for him to live with others.

An example of this economic consolidation can be seen in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where a “500-unit middle-class townhouse community called Pennsbury Village became, in 1977, the only private condominium complex in the United States ever to form its own municipality” (Stark, 10). Once the separation was complete, “Borough manager Irv Foreman recalls, ‘We sat down, the condo association and the municipality, to divvy up powers, and for tax reasons we gave everything we might otherwise have purchased privately, ...to the public government’” (Stark, 10). This example shows both capitalist economy and mass society mentality at work. How can this work best for the community, but be the most cost-effective for community members? It is this type of question that has been raised by the emergence of society. Arendt specifically addresses this type of community in *Human Condition*: “Society, when it first entered the public realm, assumed the disguise of an organization of property-owners who demanded protection from it [public realm] for the accumulation of more wealth” (1998, 68). Although this protection can sometimes be the case, in terms of homeowners’ associations, at other times it addresses the issue of conformism.

Another area of conformism that relates to the economic understanding of the social realm is that of labor emerging from the private realm.

The development of the modern age and the rise of society, where the most private of all human activities, laboring, has become public and been permitted to establish its own common realm, may make it doubtful whether the very existence of property as a privately held place within the world can withstand the relentless process of growing wealth. But it is true, nevertheless, that the very privacy of one's holdings, that is, their complete independence 'from the common,' could not be better guaranteed than by the transformation of property into appropriation or by an interpretation of the 'enclosure from the common' which sees it as the result, the 'product,' of bodily activity (Arendt, 1998, 112).

Labor being introduced into the social realm provided the need for individuals to hold property independently from others which allowed for the growth of organizations outside of the government to manage and protect these holdings.

This growth outside of the government brought about the beginning of mass society. This mass society involved large groups of people getting together to create products, protect private property, and introduce norms and mores that were expected from its members. Baehr's interpretation of Arendt's understanding of the social states that "what makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them" (201).

Through his interpretation of Arendt's work, Baehr provides a clearer understanding of the social than Arendt provides in *The Human Condition*. This is furthered through *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social*. This text interprets Arendt's understanding of the social as a "living, autonomous agent

determined to dominate human beings, absorb them, and render them helpless” (Pitkin 3). As this definition demonstrates, Arendt does not feel that the social is a productive move for humans. Her feeling is that the social caused humans to lose their freedoms. Pitkin’s understanding of Arendt’s social as “an evil monster from outer space” that is “destroying us, gobbling up our distinct individuality and turning us into robots that mechanically serve its purposes” (4) lends itself to the title of Pitkin’s text, based on a science-fiction movie of the 1950s. Pitkin then becomes a bit more focused on the true intention of Arendt’s concept of the social: “The real-world problem that Arendt intended her concept of the social to address... concerns the gap between our enormous, still-increasing powers and our apparent helplessness to avert the various disasters—national, regional, and global—looming on our horizon” (6). This quote can be understood to mean technology; not just computer technology, but also things which previously seemed impossible to accomplish, such as the Atomic Bomb or the moon landing.

Ramsey specifies the understanding of a technological world, through a reading of Heidegger in which the only “dangers are that we see only calculation and objective truths as the necessary components of orienting ourselves in the world” (463-464). This provides a greater understanding of Heidegger’s concern with technology, and also provides a greater, philosophical definition of technology that expands its understanding to be more than just computer technology. The social deals with technology, more specifically, Arendt’s concern with our ability to deal with the consequences that technology, such as nuclear weapons, could trigger. Her understanding of the social in terms of technology had to do with how these advancements would impact the world as a whole because the results would impact more than just a single community or public.

Another concern with technology had to do with machines gaining control of one of the most human activities, laboring. “The frequent complaints we hear about the perversion of ends and means in a modern society, about men becoming the servants of the machines they themselves invented and of being ‘adapted’ to their requirements instead of using them as instruments for human needs and wants” (Arendt, 1998, 145). For laborers, Arendt writes, “the world of machines has become a substitute for the real world, even though this pseudo world cannot fulfil the most important task of the human artifice, which is to offer mortals a dwelling place more permanent and more stable than themselves” (1998, 152). Machines having such a large influence in society was a concern for Arendt because there was little knowledge of how the machines would change labor and how the machines would impact man and the interactions between men and the world.

Arendt also had concerns with the social in terms of the loss of the household and family unit and the rise of group-think based on social opinion.

Before the modern disintegration of the family, this common interest and single opinion was represented by the household head who ruled in accordance with it and prevented possible dis-unity among the family members. The striking coincidence of the rise of society with the decline of the family indicates clearly that what actually took place was the absorption of the family unit into corresponding social groups. The equality of the members of these groups, far from being an equality among peers, resembles nothing so much as the equality of household members before the despotic power of the household head, except that in society, where the natural strength of one common interest and one unanimous

opinion is tremendously enforced by sheer number, actual rule exerted by one man, representing the common interest and the right opinion, could eventually be dispensed with (1998, 39-40).

This unanimous opinion was of great concern for Arendt in terms of the loss of unique thought and individual opinion. This is the largest understanding of group-think and also the biggest concern for Arendt. By agreeing with the majority just because it is the majority, Arendt fears that humanity will not always be advancing in the correct and best direction.

This group-think can be driven by social status, allowing those with the highest status to control social opinion.

What matters is this equation with social status, and it is immaterial whether the framework happens to be actual rank in the half-feudal society of the eighteenth century, title in the class society of the nineteenth, or mere function in the mass society of today. The rise of mass society, on the contrary, only indicates that the various social groups have suffered the same absorption into one society that the family units had suffered earlier; with the emergence of mass society, the realm of the social has finally, after several centuries of development, reached the point where it embraces and controls all members of a given community equally and with equal strength. But society equalizes under all circumstances, and the victory of equality in the modern world is only the political and legal recognition of the fact that society has conquered the public realm, and that distinction and difference have become private matters of the individual (Arendt, 1998, 41).

Although mass society supposedly equalizes all, there remains a hierarchical structure in even the most democratic of societies. This hierarchy can be based on financial or political power, but the hierarchy exists no matter how much “equality for all” is expressed.

Arendt’s concern with the social, specifically mass society, is that a form of despotism may occur. She states that “the unfortunate truth about behaviorism and the validity of its ‘laws’ is that the more people there are, the more likely they are to behave and the less likely to tolerate non-behavior” (1998, 43). Arendt’s experience with many members of her intellectual cohort joining the Nazi party, because it was either join or be silenced, provided her with the foundation for great concern regarding this type of behavior. “It may also happen under conditions of mass society or mass hysteria, where we see all people suddenly behave as though they were members of one family, each multiplying and prolonging the perspective of his neighbor” (Arendt, 1998, 58). This situation occurred in Arendt’s life and provided a lifelong aversion to any form of society in which one opinion or idea held the majority of individuals’ captive through alienation without compliance to the ideas of the majority.

This conformism can be seen today in the cliques formed by teenagers and in the gang subculture. This reality can also be seen in the media through the movie *The Stepford Wives*. The need to fit in and dress and act like everyone else in order to be accepted into the group is a concern for Arendt: “Power can indeed ruin all strength and we know that where the main public realm is society, there is always the danger that, through a perverted form of ‘acting together’—by pull and pressure and the tricks of cliques—those are brought to the fore who know nothing and can do nothing” (1998,

203). This constitutes a concern because it can lead to the loss of the individual and the creativity that comes from thinking “outside of the box”. Belonging to a specific social class, for Arendt, has replaced belonging to a family. The social class affords the protection and comfort that the household once provided. This is a concern because the social class lacks the historical and situational ground that the family provided through generations of traditions and stories of shared ancestors and experiences.

Taking the idea of social class in another direction, the third nuance of the social, for Arendt, is that of sociability. This sociability can be best demonstrated through the salons in Europe pre- and post-World War II. Benhabib explains that:

The “rise of the social,” in this alternative genealogy of modernity... would designate the emergence of new forms of sociability, association, intimacy, friendship, speaking and writing habits, tastes in food, manners and arts, as well as hobbies, pastimes, and leisure activities. Furthermore, in the midst of this alternate genealogy of the social is a curious space that is in the home yet public, that is dominated by women yet visited and frequented by men, that is highly mannered yet egalitarian, and that is hierarchical toward “outsiders” and egalitarian toward its members (22)

For Arendt, the social is more than economic growth and mass society; it also deals with interactions with those who would seem unlikely. Arendt’s focus on this area is expected because “as a historian of anti-Semitism and totalitarianism, she focuses on transformations occurring in these spheres of modern societies as they eventually lead to the formation of a mass society” (Benhabib, 29-30). By expanding the social beyond the political and economic, Arendt bridges her philosophy into the realm of communication.

The social, as being sociability or society, is best illustrated in *Rahel Varnhagen*. In this work, the group-think is compartmentalized in the salons of Europe, which were smaller-scale communities that recognized the problem of class-structure and discrimination in the larger arena, but did not recognize that the salons had become mini-societies.

The Jewish salon, the recurrently dreamed idyll of a mixed society, was the product of a chance constellation in an era of social transition. The Jews became stopgaps between a declining and an as yet unstabilized social group: the nobility and the actors; both stood outside of bourgeois society—like the Jews—and both were accustomed to playing a part, to representing something, to expressing themselves, to displaying ‘what they were’ rather than ‘showing what they had,’ as Goethe put it in *Wilhelm Meister*; in the Jewish houses of homeless middle-class intellectuals they found solid ground and an echo which they could not hope to find anywhere else. In the loosened framework of conventions of this period Jews were socially acceptable in the same way as actors: the nobility reassured both that they were socially acceptable (Arendt, 1974, 57-58)

Although the salons still possessed some form of group-think it was a small community based on common ideas and attitudes and less on birth-right, class structure, politics or economics. Pitkin explains that:

even when society is the company one keeps or the ensemble of all social circles, it is characterized by what holds those circles together, the ‘social’ outlook they share, which is the parvenu’s outlook: a concern with rank and status, a striving to conform to the rules and standards set by ‘higher’ ranks, a suspension of autonomous judgment and truth in favor of submission, deference, and hypocrisy (32-33).

In the salons, people would come together in someone's home to discuss many different things. These individuals would not normally interact in a public situation, but would interact in the salons. Arendt states that:

The salons were the meeting places of those who had learned how to represent themselves through conversation. The actor can always be the 'seeming' of himself; the bourgeois as an individual had learned to show himself—not something beyond himself, but nothing but himself. The nobleman was, in the Enlightenment, gradually losing the thing he represented; he was being thrown back upon himself, 'reduced to the bourgeoisie.' The world of the aristocracy remained intact in the landed gentry in which the closeness of the family still survived. Where an individual did leave from such a family, the only circles he could enter with impunity were those of the aristocracy, where nothing was asked of him but to be 'a member of the family,' where he was accepted and esteemed simply for being what he was (1974, 38).

The salons allowed individuals to meet and converse on different topics without concern for class or status. One example of this is Count Karl Finckenstein.

Finckenstein came to Berlin for professional reasons. For him it was like going into exile. In bourgeois Berlin where even the princes 'would have despised themselves if they had lived differently and sought for anything different from the small-town citizen' (Marwitz), in this city of individuals, he was forced to be an individual. That was all the more so when he came to Rahel's salon, a socially neutral place where all classes met and where it was taken for granted that each person would be an individual. But as an individual Finckenstein was nothing;

stripped of his title of nobleman he had nothing he could represent. And this title of his was of little account among Rahel's friends (Arendt, 1974, 38).

Allowing himself to enter the salon as an individual, not as nobility, allowed Finckenstein, and others like him, to express his opinions freely among a small group of like-minded individuals who wanted to discuss ideas without the concern of titles, societal stereotypes, or class structure.

Rahel's salons were one of the most popular to attend. Many different classes of people, with many levels of education and political knowledge, attended her salons. The salons allowed for introspection and also provided a safe place to share ideas and create "new, experimental, and transgressive modes of self- and other presentation" (Benhabib, 16). The salons allowed for the individual to become an individual; to break the mold of group-think and express thoughts that might otherwise be suppressed by the masses.

Rahel experienced much alienation in her life. She was never part of an accepted social group and had become a master at "the art of representing her own life: the point was not to tell the truth, but to display herself; not always to say the same thing to everyone but to each what was appropriate for him" (Arendt, 1974, 117). Sharing only bits and pieces of herself allowed Rahel to have "a specific social quality, and of being not only a single person but a person naturally intertwined with many others in the intricacies of social life; of existing simultaneously as mother and as child, as sister and as sweetheart, as citizen and as friend—this she had to learn" (1974, 118). This skill allowed Rahel to become part of society, yet maintain her own personality by sharing those parts of her that were appropriate for any given audience at any given time.

As time moved forward and the community moved into a more civil society, “the forms of sociability and intimacy prefigured by the salons become in part social reality” (Benhabib, 17). As the dictatorships faded and people became more independent thinkers, feeling less oppressed, people began communicating *with* each other and not *to* each other. “There is no greater proof of our common humanity than the fact that we can communicate with and understand each other. The salons are social gatherings in which the ‘joy of conversation,’ the joy of communication and understanding as well as misunderstandings and lack of communication is discovered” (Benhabib, 17). Communication and conversation have become important to society as a result of the salons and a freer government in which the fear of consequences has been removed. Communication is important as society and community grows and moves forward.

The salons were short-lived for Rahel because in 1806 Napoleon gained control of a part of Prussia. According to Arendt:

The catastrophe of 1806 not only destroyed the ethereal, idyllic and illusory society of the salon, but above all showed the fragility of that other fixed, permanent world in which it had been possible for one to live only as a ‘link in a chain.’ Perhaps, therefore, the breakdown of the old world would provide Rahel with a chance to enter a new one, in spite of the fact that the narrow fringe of private life which the old world had left inviolate was carried along and destroyed in the general disaster (1974, 129).

This entrance into a new world was not at all what Rahel had hoped for and began to understand the disillusion that others with status, such as Marwitz, had with society (Arendt, 1974, 162). Rahel realized that social status was not such a wonderful thing.

Arendt writes, in regards to Rahel, “society had been for her ‘half of life,’ and the only thing she had almost succeeded in achieving was a legitimate disgust with society” (1974, 176). This disgust resonates with Arendt as she also disapproved of any form of society and the group-think it encouraged.

As Arendt’s understanding of the social evolved, her fear of the “blob” diminished. Remaining as one part of her concern was the concept of group-think while allowing the aspect of sociability to emerge. The evolution of this term in Arendt’s work spans three distinct, yet interrelated, interpretations of the social realm. The economic interpretation, the mass society interpretation, and the sociability interpretation demonstrate how a concept can shift meaning based on a situation or viewpoint. The economic and mass society understandings are best demonstrated through *The Human Condition*, and are the best known interpretations of Arendt’s work with the social. Her earlier works, especially *Rahel Varnhagen*, demonstrate an understanding of the sociability aspect of the social realm as interaction and communication among people for many different reasons. This concept of the social is not the evil blob that Arendt fears—although the concept of group-think is still present—but refers to individuals working together, sharing ideas with each other, and having conversations regarding many topics. With the other aspects of the social still in place, this project will utilize the sociability aspect as it moves forward.

In order to move forward, I must take a step back and address the diary, journal, and blog in terms of Arendt’s philosophy regarding public, private, and social. The diary is written to be shared with no one while the author was alive; therefore, the diary undeniably falls into the realm of the private. The journal is written with the knowledge

that a limited number of “known” readers would see the journal. This puts the journal in the realm of the public. The public involves a community of individuals with whom the author can interact on a regular basis, such as family and close friends in terms of readers of the journal. Finally, the blog is written with the knowledge of an audience of both known and unknown readers. The personal blog, because of a common interest which unites the blogger and his or her readers, also shall be placed in the public realm.

Individuals are asked to participate and engage in conversation about the blog’s topics.

This conversation creates the connection between reader and blogger, which concretely places the personal blog in the realm of the public.

### Chapter 3: Interpersonal Communication and the Role of Communication Technology

Hannah Arendt believed in the necessity of a public realm in order for humans to be productive and to survive. This public realm included the need to communicate with each other. She examined previous philosophers' thoughts on the need to live together and discovered that the understanding of communicating, working, and living together changed dramatically over time.

The beginning was made when, in *The Republic's* allegory of the cave, Plato described the sphere of human affairs—all that belongs to the living together of men in a common world—in terms of darkness, confusion, and deception which those aspiring to true being must turn away from and abandon if they want to discover the clear sky of eternal ideas. The end came with Marx's declaration that philosophy and its truth are located not outside the affairs of men and their common world but precisely in them, and can be 'realized' only in the sphere of living together, which he called 'society' through the emergence of 'socialized men' (*vergesellschaftete Menschen*) (Arendt, 1968, 17). Throughout history the question has been whether interpersonal communication, on a "common" level, is good or bad, or, more specifically, productive or harmful to both the individual and the community as a whole. Arendt identified two well-known scholars' opinions on the subject and summarized her thoughts in *Rahel Varnhagen*. "If we feel at home in this world, we can see our lives as the development of the 'product of nature,' as the unfolding and realization of what we already were. The world in that case becomes a school in the broadest sense, and other people are cast in the roles of either educators or misleaders" (Arendt, 1974, 4). By using the example of a school, Arendt acknowledges

that there are both good and bad influences which can occur through humans living together. However, Arendt explains that “it is only with the later concept of a *societas generis humani*, a ‘society of man-kind,’ that the term ‘social’ begins to acquire the general meaning of a fundamental human condition” (1998, 23). The natural, merely social companionship of the human species was considered to be a limitation imposed upon us by the needs of biological life, which are the same for the human animal as for other forms of animal life (Arendt, 1998, 23-24). Although the Ancients may have felt that living together was a limitation of biological life, Arendt explains that the benefits of learning through tradition while working and communicating with others outweighs any limitations that might occur. Living together breeds innovation and collaboration. This innovation has led to new ways of communicating with others, who may not be physically close, for intellectual and personal relationships.

The public community is not the location, but the people. Arendt explains that the *polis* is “the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together” (1998, 198). In this way, she may consider the idea of an online community, made through blogging or other means, to be a public community—it is the people, not the place; therefore, it should not matter if people are in close physical proximity to one another. She explains “though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it” (Arendt, 1998, 57). Arendt would likely agree that the physical location would not matter in terms of communication or community; the important part of communication and community is the sharing of ideas, opinions, and experiences.

The distance between people is necessary for the public world. “To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time” (Arendt, 1998, 52). The world, then, comes between men when they are communicating and interacting with one another. There is no reason that people need to be physically close in order for a community to be created. Distance may be seen as beneficial to the growth of the human race as different locations lead to different experiences and different solutions to sometimes very similar problems. Having the ability, through communication technology, to discuss similar events or concerns may bring a faster solution to a problem or provide insight into new innovations much more quickly.

#### EVOLUTION OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Humans have always sought mechanical means of extending and enhancing face to face communication to efficiently serve needs for security, socialization, collectivization, and fantasy. The result has been the permanentizing and electrifying of the channels of communication which make possible the reproduction of human communication over time and space. Each new technology not only extended the reach of human communication, it also altered the ways in which humans related to information and to each other (Cathcart & Gumpert, 160).

The effects of media, i.e. communication technology, on interpersonal communication can be observed as far back as Socrates. In *Phaedrus*, Socrates stated that “once a thing is committed to writing it circulates equally among those who understand the subject and those who have no business with it; a writing cannot distinguish between

suitable and unsuitable readers” (Plato, 97). Each new communication technology brings about its own challenges and benefits regarding interpersonal communication. This chapter explores the evolution of communication technology, as well as several theories of interpersonal communication that have been created to address this phenomenon.

An examination of the evolution of communication technology, in terms of interpersonal communication, must begin with the spoken word. Speech is the first form of interpersonal communication and, for a long period, was the only “true” form of interpersonal communication. McLuhan explains that speech is a “cool medium, or one of low definition, because the ear is given a meager amount of information” (39). Defining speech as a medium allows for a true valuation of communication from the grunts of cavemen to the beginning of media through the spoken word. Then someone invented the new communication technology of writing and suddenly communication took a new form—one that was more permanent and allowed for the evaluation of ideas. “The development of writing and the visual organization of life made possible the discovery of individualism, introspection, and so on” (McLuhan, 66). However, just as with any technology, there were those who had concerns. Thamus, from Plato’s *Phaedrus*, was “concerned not with *what* people will write; he is concerned *that* people will write” (Postman, 7). Despite concerns with writing, this communication technology allowed for a greater understanding of each individual and the community as a whole.

Arendt spoke about the impact of the written word in 1973. During her remarks to the American Society of Christian Ethics, she discussed the impact the written word might have.

Each time you write something and you send it out into the world and it becomes public, obviously everybody is free to do with it what he pleases, and this is as it should be. I do not have any quarrel with this. You should not try to hold your hand now on whatever may happen to what you have been thinking for yourself.

You should rather try to learn from what other people do with it (1998, xx).

As this statement demonstrates, Arendt determined that a person could learn from whatever he or she wrote down, not only through writing it, but also by examining what others are doing with the information. By following the intellectual path of a written idea the writer, and others, have the ability to watch the idea grow and expand into areas that the original author may never have thought about. For Arendt, this was a benefit; for Socrates, this would not have been.

After the written word became an accepted form of interpersonal communication, there was a need to make it easier for everyone to obtain copies of written works. In 1440, Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable type printing press (springfieldlibrary.org). This invention, although not the first printing press, was the first with movable type which made books more affordable for everyone. This communication technology provided a way for interpersonal communication, in the form of books, to be shared with the masses. However, as with any technology there are tradeoffs. The printing press may have provided a way for writing to be shared with the masses but “memory will be confused with what he [Thamus] disdainfully calls ‘recollection,’ and he worries that wisdom will become indistinguishable from mere knowledge” (Postman, 8). The concern with the loss of memory increases with each new technology that provides information. “Every new medium, McLuhan understood, changes us. ‘Our

conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot,' he wrote. The content of a medium is just 'the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind'" (Carr, 141-144). It is the medium, not the message, that affects how people react to information. "The arguments in books became longer and clearer, as well as more complex and more challenging, as writers strived self-consciously to refine their ideas and their logic" (Carr, 1162-1163). From the beginning, with the written word, media has played a role in how individuals understood the message.

The next interpersonal communication technology invented was the telegraph. According to Meyrowitz, the invention of the telegraph allowed "informational differences between different places" to lessen (144). "But by the 1870s, about twenty years after Morse had created the first public telegraph, six hundred and fifty thousand miles of wire and thirty thousand miles of submarine cable had been laid, and a message could be sent from London to Bombay and back in as little as four minutes, notes Standage in his history of the telegraph, *The Victorian Internet*" (Jackson, 31). The invention of the telegraph allowed people to communicate with those who were not located physically close to them.

The telephone created a more personal communication technology. According to Cathcart and Gumpert, conversation on the telephone "takes place at a socially 'intimate' distance" (162). The telephone allowed people to communicate through technology while still hearing the other person's voice, bridging the distance while allowing an aural connection because the intonation of the voice was able to be heard and emotion could be more clearly interpreted. The telephone appreciably broke through walls and distance and

provided a way for people to talk to each other without having to travel distances in order to hear each other's voice.

The next evolutions in communication technology brought about one-to-many communication. Radio, television and movies provide one-way communication of a message or a form of entertainment. The announcer or performer would communicate from a studio or on the screen and many people would have the ability to react to it at the same time. Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl recognize “one of the striking characteristics of the new mass media—radio, television, and the movies—is that they give the illusion of face to face relationship with the performer.” Because the script was written with the audience's reaction in mind, it appeared that there was a true interpersonal relationship with the character represented. “The spectacular fact about such personae is that they can claim and achieve an intimacy with what are literally crowds of strangers, and this intimacy, even if it is an imitation and a shadow of what is ordinarily meant by that word, is extremely influential with, and satisfying for, the great numbers who willingly receive it and share in it” (Horton and Wohl). This one-to-many communication, while not traditional interpersonal communication, allows for a para-social relationship. “Horton and Wohl suggest that the new media lead to a new type of relationship which they call ‘para-social interaction.’ They argue that although the relationship is mediated, it psychologically resembles face-to-face interaction” (Meyrowitz, 147).

The most recent form of communication technology is computer-mediated communication (CMC). This involves email, websites, social networking, and blogging. “The person-computer mediated encounter should be contrasted with the situation in

which one communicates *through* a computer rather than *with* a computer” (Cathcart & Gumpert, 166). Because the communication is with another person, and not the machine itself, CMC is a form of interpersonal communication. This type of communication can be delayed in that both people do not need to be online at the same time which allows for the opportunity to think about and possibly research a response. With the ability to “think before you speak” in CMC, the respondent has more time to make an informed and well thought-out response; this differs in some ways from face-to-face communication because sometimes the person speaks before thinking...not that there has never been a person who “typed without thinking”. CMC provides a way for people to communicate throughout the world, including with people they do not know. This is a major advantage of CMC because it allows for the world to become smaller in terms of the ability to communicate, and yet larger in the knowledge and experiences that each individual can gain without the expense of travel. The ability to communicate through technology affords a wealth of ideas and an enlarged conversation. Disney was right: “it’s a small world after all”<sup>3</sup>.

This small world, achieved through communication technology, requires a shift in communication styles. However, in terms of mediated interpersonal communication, Meyrowitz explains that electronically mediated communication is closer to face-to-face than written communication because of the ability for the receiver to provide feedback (146). This can be attributed to the statement-response format allowed by CMC which mitigates Socrates’ concern for the lack of response available with the written word. CMC brings back the ability, even though the words are written on the screen, for the give and take of communicator and audience interaction. However, Turkle notes that

“when technology engineers intimacy, relationships can be reduced to mere connections. And then, easy connection becomes redefined as intimacy. Put otherwise, cyberintimacies slide into cybersolitudes” (16). Although interpersonal mediated communication may make it easier to communicate with one another, and is closer to face-to-face than written communication, interpersonal mediated communication lacks the nonverbal and paraverbal cues that occur in face-to-face communication.

CMC offers the ability for multiple people to engage in communication without leaving their home or office. This ability for communication with no distance barriers allows for a greater reach of the message and more feedback and input into the conversation, but at what cost? Does interpersonal mediated communication make it too easy to collaborate but not connect to others? According to Chesebro and Bonsall in 1989, “when humans use computers, a dimension of their social condition is ignored. While a large number of human expressions can be conveyed in binary notations, the binary system itself reflects only one feature of human consciousness” (81). The date of the publication is specifically noted because CMC has progressed a long way from 1989, but there is still the concern that CMC can distance people from each other while seemingly connecting them. Maggie Jackson, in *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age*, explains that:

Today, our virtual, split-screen, and nomadic era is eroding opportunities for deep focus, awareness, and reflection. As a result, we face a real risk of societal decline. But there is much room for hope, for attention can be trained, taught, and shaped, a discovery that offers the key to living fully in a tech-saturated world.

We need not waste our potential for reaching the heights of attention. We don't

have to settle for lives mired in detachment, fragmentation, and diffusion. A *renaissance of attention* is within our grasp (25).

The concern of CMC only seemingly connecting people, while real, has been minimized by the advances that social media has made in the past twenty-plus years.

One area of concern raised by communication technology is the loss of the “gatekeeper”. Meyrowitz explains that “electronic messages . . . do not make social entrances” and that “once a telephone, radio, or television is in the home, spatial isolation and guarding of the entrances have no effect on information flow” (145). This upsets many people because of the availability of information to children without any control from adults. “Now we weave in and out of a vast array of relationships, dancing across multiple spaces of connection, seemingly freed from the limits of body and earth. Attention becomes ethereal in a world of multiplicity. No longer do boundaries matter” (Jackson, 34-35). The lack of control that parents have over the information that their children can see and the people that they may meet through technology can cause great concern and real problems.

The ability for communication technology to access location and information raises another concern regarding the private aspects of life. Turkle explains this phenomenon: “Only a decade ago . . . it might have seemed intrusive, if not illegal, that my mobile phone would tell me the location of all of my acquaintances within a ten-mile radius. But these days we are accustomed to all this” (Turkle, 15-16). What is the cost of this advancement in technology?

Another way that communication technology creates an invasion of privacy is the ability to store information about individuals so that businesses can target them more

easily. Postman notes that “private matters have been made more accessible to powerful institutions. They [people] are more easily tracked and controlled;...are increasingly mystified by the decisions made about them.... They are easy targets for advertising agencies and political organizations” (10-11). This targeted marketing, although an excellent advancement for businesses and government agencies, is an invasion of privacy for the individual.

Communication technology makes it easy to “look things up” instead of knowing things. This becomes a problem of knowing where to look for the information instead of knowing it. “What the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. Whether I’m online or not, my mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles” (Carr, 182-183). The collective lack of memory that the constant access to information encourages creates the possibility for culture and history to be lost if the files containing that information are corrupted or deleted.

CMC, especially social networking sites, allows for anything and everything about a person’s life to be shared online. And, according to Arendt, “a life spent entirely in public, in the presence of others, becomes, as we would say, shallow. While it retains its visibility, it loses the quality of rising into sight from some darker ground which must remain hidden if it is not to lose its depth in a very real, non-subjective sense” (1998, 71). The lack of depth in an individual’s life may begin to “dumb down” humanity, and that was a major concern for Arendt and should be a concern for all as CMC becomes the norm and not the exception.

Communication technology can extend a disembodiment of communication. According to Peters, “the power of ‘communication’ lies in its ability to extend human interaction across the expanses of space and time; its pathos lies in its transcendence of mortal form. Communication suggests contact without touch” (228). Although most forms of communication can be seen as contact without touch, with the obvious exception of non-verbal communication, the use of mediated communication extends the metaphor even further as media extends the reach of communication beyond those in proximity to each other. No longer do two people need to be in the same space to communicate; they do not even need to be in the same country. “Now we live in a society dominated by what Wellman has dubbed ‘networked individualism.’ We can connect with almost anyone and at any time, but the connection is to the person and not to the place and largely to a slice of the person and not the whole” (Jackson, 54). This allows for communication to become a global phenomenon and reach more individuals almost instantaneously with the message it conveys, but also provides for a minimum experience as each person may not be fully engaged. Pitkin explains Arendt’s concern with technology: “The real-world problem that Arendt intended her concept of the social to address...concerns the gap between our enormous, still-increasing powers and our apparent helplessness to avert the various disasters—national, regional, and global—looming on our horizon” (6). Although global communication allows for greater collaboration to the benefit of most; there are also those individuals who use this global reach for evil—the use of CMC for terrorist attacks, for example.

Good or bad, global communication allows an individual the opportunity to gain a better understanding of different people and cultures which also allows for

communication to become the preeminent field for carrying out the command, “Know Thyself” (Peters, 229). An individual begins to gain a better understanding of who they are and what is important to them by communicating with others about issues that are important to him or her. Peters continues, “the key question for twentieth-century communication theory—a question at once philosophical, moral, and political—is how wide and deep our empathy for otherness can reach, how ready we are to see ‘the human as precisely what is different’” (230). This question continues into the twenty-first century, and I would argue, will go beyond it. Empathy is a uniquely human emotion. How willing are we to step into another person’s situation and truly understand it? Can that situation be embraced and clarified through communication? These questions examine the fact that interpersonal communication need not always be face-to-face. Sharing a life experience in a letter, on a blog, on the telephone, or through an email, provides much information while certain unspoken communication cues are lacking. Poyntz states that “Arendt’s is a more primordial description of democratic practice, one which draws attention to how and if media publics render our sense of the real larger, deeper, and more secure” (20). Sometimes writing can provide more detail and clearer thinking from the sender of the message; however, the lack of nonverbal cues may cause a misinterpretation of the message.

CMC allows communication to occur among people who are not located physically close but who have a similar thought or ideal which draws them to each other towards a common goal; this may also be referred to as disembodied communication. Pitkin explains that for Arendt, “human interrelationship” has a “structure: a particular, established ‘web of relationships,’ pattern of institutional organization and habitual

practice. Now, institutional structure, as Arendt would hasten to stress, is not physical structure; institutions are not buildings” (193). This definition of institutions emphasizes that “they consist only in the patterned conduct, the relationships, of their participants. Nevertheless they have a certain fixity or inertia of their own, and they can coerce recalcitrant participants” (Pitkin, 193). Spatial infinity provides a way for communication to occur to with those who may be emotionally close to a person, but not physically close. Turkle explains that “online connections were first conceived as a substitute for face-to-face contact, when the latter was for some reason impractical” (13). Disembodied communication also allows for strangers to “meet” through mediated communication and become emotionally close, possibly even lending emotional support or a different type of friendship than an individual could receive from those physically close to him or her.

#### INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION THEORIES

Examining the different theories associated with interpersonal communication and communication technology will help to ground this study and provide a clearer understanding of how communication changed due to the use of interpersonal technology. The interpersonal communication theories this chapter will examine are boundary management / communication privacy management and para-social framework. Communication privacy management (CPM) “represents a map that presumes private disclosures are dialectical, that people make choices about revealing or concealing based on criteria and conditions they perceive as salient, and that individuals fundamentally believe they have a right to own and regulate access to their private information” (Petronio, 2002, 2). This theory, established by Petronio and others, examines how

people decide which information about themselves and their lives they want to share with others, as well as which others they share this information with. The goal of CPM “is to offer a theoretical perspective that suggests a way to understand the tension between revealing and concealing private information” (Petronio, 2007, 218). The tension between revealing and concealing has only become stronger with the advent of social networking websites, some of which were started with less than noble intentions<sup>4</sup>. This determining of revealing or concealing creates guidelines or boundaries for each individual.

CPM is also known as Boundary Management theory because CPM theory “uses the metaphor of boundaries to illustrate that, although there may be a flow of private information to others, borders mark ownership lines so issues of control are clearly understood. Thus, regulating boundary openness and closedness contributes to balancing the publicness or privacy of individuals” (Petronio, 2002, 3). This balancing must fall within the comfort zone of each individual. What one person considers private information, another person may willingly share with close friends and family, while a third may share this information with anyone who will listen. Why does the definition of private information differ so greatly between individuals? Petronio, Martin, and Littlefield draw attention to a “preliminary scheme developed by Derlega and Chaikin” which “relates disclosure to the concept of privacy suggesting that privacy is an ‘interpersonal boundary process by which persons or groups regulate interaction with others’ (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977, p. 103)” (268). Thus, communication boundaries become a private matter.

CPM theory focuses on communication and the information shared more so than the person sharing. By highlighting the information instead of the person, CPM focuses on what individuals consider private information and less emphasis is placed on the individuals involved in the sharing process. This focus lends itself to allowing the information to take the primary role in an exchange. Petronio explains that the “application of CPM to life circumstances has illustrated the practices of disclosure where people are both proactively making choices while reactively dealing with responses to those choices” (2002, 22). Instead of the focus being on what do people want to know about each other, or what the individual wants people to know about him or her, the focus is on what information the individual is willing to share with others and which information each individual considers private. This also leads into the next question of who should information be shared with? Is the information something that an individual would share with anyone who asked or is the information something that he or she would only share with those people that he or she knows well? Or, is this information that the individual would share with no one else?

CPM examines the nature of the relationship between individuals to determine a connection between the information shared and the strength of the connection with those whom the information is shared. “The contextualization or how the dialectical tensions are situated for privacy management assumes that whenever private information is disclosed, a privacy boundary is formed around the participants” (Petronio, 2002, 22). The relationship between the individuals may determine which type of information is shared between them and which type of information is withheld. For example, a teenager may tell his or her friends about a date but he or she may not feel comfortable sharing the

same information with his or her parents. The relationship that is formed between individuals determines the level of sharing that occurs.

One important aspect of CPM that needs to be addressed is that of what happens to the information once it is shared. How does the individual sharing know that those who know his or her private information will not share that information with someone he or she does not want to know? CPM addresses this through the argument that “people co-own private information and coordinate their efforts to manage the degree of access others have to it. In addition, disclosures are made to others linking them relationally into a jointly ‘owned’ privacy boundary” (Petronio, 2002, 18). There is some coordination which must take place between the sender of the information and the receivers to determine who the information may be shared with. By telling someone not to tell anyone else, an individual begins to establish the guidelines which the group, or co-owners of the information, are expected to follow in terms of the information shared. Have you ever told someone, or been told, “Do not share this with anyone” or “This information is just between us”? If so, you have co-owned private information.

This new understanding of the importance of focusing on the information helps to remove the therapeutic aspect of focusing on the individual. Petronio states that “claiming that we needed to have private information at the core changed the very way I began to think about the concept. Privacy became the root of understanding instead of (or in addition to) the self” (2004, 195). This theory then allows us a new way to examine the issue of privacy using the information as the fulcrum creating the shift of focus towards communication and away from the individual. The creators of CPM state that “rather than searching for the meaning of ‘self information,’ an examination of ‘private information’

became the focus. This reallocation of privacy gave us more specificity about the kind of information we were seeking to understand” (Petronio, 2004, 195). By focusing on what information individuals consider private, CPM allows for a more targeted examination of communication than focusing on all information that is shared about the self. There is such a concern about privacy because it “has importance for us because it lets us feel separate from others. It gives us a sense that we are the rightful owners of information about us” (Petronio, 2002, 1). Especially in the age of the Internet and identity theft, it is important for individuals to believe that they own all information that pertains to them. This sense of ownership of information allows each of us to have control over our lives.

Control over one’s information is important for all individuals. Even celebrities try to maintain a sense of privacy and control over some aspects of their lives. Control is “important because people feel they have a right to determine what happens to their private information” (Petronio, 2004, 202). A recent celebrity example of this need for control is the quick and private divorce settlement of Katie Holmes and Tom Cruise. The divorce was filed and settled very quickly and no terms of the agreement, to date, have been leaked to the media. The need for privacy appears to have driven the couple to quickly resolve any differences so that their personal matters did not become public news fodder. This demonstrates Petronio’s claim that “ownership and control are rudimentary to understanding the way people define and handle their private information” (2004, 202). Control of information is very important, if not crucial, to some people’s sense of self and boundaries with other people.

Sharing information is how we get to know one another and create relationships, most people are apprehensive that they may share too much or share too soon.

However, there appears to be a generational difference in the amount and types of information that will be shared, or made public, through different means. People create rules to determine how they share information with others (Petronio, 2002, 23).

By setting standards for how information is shared, an individual creates a sense of security surrounding his or her private information.

If privacy is so important, why do people decide to share any information? One reason is intimacy. “Intimacy reflects all of the aspects of a close relationship. Disclosing private information may be one way intimacy is established” (Petronio, 2002, 5).

However, there are reasons other than intimacy that people share private information.

Some include a “wish to relieve a burden, gain control, enjoy self-expression” (Petronio, 2002, 6). It is for the last reason, self-expression, that many people begin writing a personal blog.

Exactly how does a person decide what information to disclose to others, either on a one-to-one basis or through mediated communication? There are five primary principles to demonstrate how people deal with disclosure of private information. These five principles include: 1. “individuals or collectives believe they own their private information”; 2. “people feel they have the right to control the flow of private information to others”; 3. “people use privacy rules to decide whether to open a privacy boundary so they can disclose or keep the boundary closed to conceal the information”; 4. Once information is shared individuals “presume these co-owners will follow existing privacy rules or negotiate new ones”; and 5. Privacy “management issues can become

turbulent” (Petronio 2007, 219). These principles are the basis of CPM and help to determine how to better understand and manage the privacy of our own information.

One key factor in CPM theory is that “disclosure and privacy had to be joined because it is problematical to consider disclosure (or making something public) without considering a sense of privateness” (Petronio, 2004, 196). This tie between disclosure and privacy relates to the issue which Arendt addressed regarding the blurring of public and private. As the need for this theory became evident, Arendt’s philosophical concern was brought to light as reality.

CPM addresses the sharing or oversharing from both the sender’s and receiver’s point of view. “Letting it all hang out’ could indeed be painful for both the person revealing and the recipient....people tell too much information that others do not want to hear, leading disclosers to become angry, unhappy, or emotionally distraught because of the response they receive” (Petronio, 2004, 197). This consequence of oversharing can be problematic for all parties involved. The oversharing that has become rampant on the Internet, and especially on social networking sites and personal blogs, creates an abundance of situations in which the receiver feels uncomfortable by what is shared. This may lead to someone no longer visiting a blog or to blocking a person’s postings on a social networking site.

Petronio addresses the connection of technology and privacy in her introduction to *Boundaries of Privacy: Dialectics of Disclosure*. She writes that “two interwoven features of our lives today and in the future are *technology* and *globalization*....we have already begun to experience the *personal and interpersonal* opportunities and problems of globalization and technology. The opportunities are spectacular and will surely

increase geometrically in years to come” (2002, xiii). The opportunities which Petronio mentions may well include the social networking sites, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, which did not exist at the time of her publication. With Child and Pearson she examined blogging specifically in a 2009 study involving college students which determined that “since disclosure of private information is central to blogging, it is important to know how college students traverse the Web by managing the tensions between balancing the need for contact and the need for privacy” (2002). Boundary management theory will be useful as this study moves forward in examining how bloggers decide what information to share on their personal blog.

Another interpersonal communication theory that will be useful is the para-social framework as created by Horton and Wohl in 1956. Horton and Wohl explain that “one of the striking characteristics of the new mass media—radio, television, and the movies—is that they give the illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer. . . . We propose to call this seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer a para-social relationship”. Utilizing this theory in terms of CMC we will also look at the unknown, or virtually known, other in terms of the para-social relationship. Many people feel that the relationships they have online are equivalent to face-to-face relationships because sometimes the communication may be more frequent in virtual relationships (see Walther 1996). One of the features of this theory, which seamlessly moves into the realm of CMC, is that of intimacy. Replacing the role of the persona of the performer with the blogger demonstrates that personal relationships are possible through CMC. “The spectacular fact about such personae is that they can claim and achieve an intimacy with what are literally crowds of strangers” and the blogger’s intimacy may be “extremely

influential with, and satisfying for, the great numbers who willingly receive it and share in it” (Horton and Wohl). Many people who communicate with others solely online have been communicating with some people longer than they have known many people in real life. This allows the relationships formed through CMC to be just as strong as those which occur face-to-face.

The para-social relationship theory can be applied to CMC. According to Horton and Wohl, “the para-social is complementary to normal social life”. The relationships “provide a social milieu in which the everyday assumptions and understandings of primary group interaction and sociability are demonstrated and reaffirmed”. Personal blogging provides an avenue for those who are busy with work or family obligation to have a way of sharing day-to-day activities and interests with others. As life becomes busier, the personal blog allows for sharing and friendships at a time that is convenient for all parties, which may be difficult to do in today’s over-scheduled society.

One of the phenomena that Meyrowitz discusses in terms of para-social relationships is that in which the performer does not die. “The *only* means through which most people came to know him or her...are still available. The relationship is frozen, rather than destroyed” (149). Many blogs can be shown as examples of those that live on after they have passed. Two examples are: Eve Markvoort, 25, of [65redroses.livejournal.com](http://65redroses.livejournal.com) who passed away on March 27, 2010 from cystic fibrosis and five month old Avery Lynn Canahuati of [averycan.blogspot.com](http://averycan.blogspot.com) who passed away on April 30, 2012 from Spinal Muscular Atrophy. Both of these blogs continue to have active postings from family members and friends trying to keep Eve and Avery alive in the hearts of their blog followers and to help raise awareness and research monies for

their respective diseases. These examples substantiate Meyrowitz's claim that the relationship with the deceased blogger is not destroyed, but frozen at the time of their passing as outlined in the para-social relationship. Though no one else will be able to meet Eve or Avery in person, many have begun to read their stories after they passed away and provided emotional or financial support to their families or the foundations established in their names. Eve and Avery live on through CMC.

The final category that needs to be examined is that of mediated interpersonal communication. Mediated interpersonal communication "is a general category referring to any situation where a technological medium is introduced into the face-to-face interaction" (Cathcart & Gumpert, 161). They clarify that "*interpersonal mediated communication* refers to any person-to-person interaction where a medium has been interposed to transcend the limits of time and space. A technology is interposed between and is integral to the communicating parties" (Cathcart & Gumpert, 161). Any communication between two people that is not directly face-to-face is therefore a form of interpersonal mediated communication. Creating a general category for any form of communication that is not directly face-to-face allows for a more direct study of any form of media.

The type of interpersonal mediated communication which is especially important to this study is that which involves using the medium of the computer. There are two areas of communication which involve the computer. The first is a person-computer interpersonal encounter. This encounter "includes any situation in which one party activates a computer which in turn responds appropriately in a graphical, alphanumeric, or vocal mode (or combinations thereof) thereby establishing a sender/receiver

relationship” (Cathcart & Gumpert, 165). Through this encounter, the person communicates with the machine or, more precisely, with a program running on the machine. The other area of communication which involves the computer, also described by Cathcart and Gumpert, is the “person-computer mediated encounter” wherein “one communicates *through* a computer rather than *with* a computer. ‘Electronic mail,’ for example, represents a change of medium (paper to display screen) in which the computer is interposed” (166). It is this second form of CMC that this project focuses on.

Communicating through the computer advances Marshall McLuhan’s famous statement that “the medium is the message” (2003, 19). Does using a computer as the medium through which people communicate truly change the message? Or does it just make it more convenient to share the message with others who may or may not be physically close to the sender?

#### EVOLUTION OF MEDIA

One of the benefits of Horton and Wohl’s research involves the understanding of the evolution of media. According to Meyrowitz, “Horton and Wohl point to the differences between ‘old’ and ‘new’ media. But they overlook the overall evolutionary trend, even within each type of medium, toward a shrinking of the differences between live and mediated encounters” (149). This evolution, although argued by some, allows people to communicate globally as if the parties were standing right next to each other. The technology allows for international communication on a personal level creating a global neighborhood.

Another theorist that must be examined in the context of media evolution is Paul Levinson. According to Meyrowitz, Levinson “has detailed the long-term evolutionary

course of media...Levinson's theory gives substance to our intuitive sense that one form of media is 'better' than another. The addition of voice to the telegraph, or sound to silent movies, or color to television, he suggests is perceived as an 'improvement' simply because the medium becomes less like a medium and more like life" (149). This evolution of media expands upon the technological advances into the psychological advances of making mediated communication more life-like than mediated.

In his work *Theory of the Evolution of Media*, Levinson explains his idea that communication technology's goal is to make mediated communication as life-like as possible. Humans in a "pre-technological' state see in colors rather than black-and-white, speak in voices rather than Morse code, usually hear sounds emanating from a variety of sources rather than a single source, the pattern of media change becomes very clear: media are evolving...to reproduction of human or 'pretechnological' forms of communication" (Levinson, 1979, 1). This observation of media allows us to see that the evolution of media attempts to bring communication back to its most natural form, while enhancing it through collapsing time and space so that communication is not limited to those with whom we have direct face-to-face contact with at a time when the need or desire to communicate comes upon us, but provides the ability for communication to be non-linear, but still interpersonal through the use of mediated communication. Reeves and Nass also noticed a tie between interpersonal communication and mediated communication explaining that people interact with media in a way that is "fundamentally social and natural, just like interactions in real life" (5). They continue that "Everyone expects media to obey a wide range of social and natural rules. All these rules come from the world of interpersonal interaction, and from studies about how

people interact with the real world. But all of them apply equally well to media” (Reeves and Nass, 5). The connection between interpersonal communication and mediated communication provides a well-researched area of study on which to stand as the research moves forward into interpersonal mediated communication.

Moving away from television and computer programs and into social media, Levinson, in *New New Media*, explains that one of the key aspects of the new new media is that they are “intrinsically social, and, indeed, whether the readers and commenters on a blog, the reader/editors on Wikipedia or the activist groups on Facebook, the social element is not only indispensable to new new media but provides the human dynamic that makes all new new media tick” (2009, 4). This social aspect of the media, according to Levinson, set the new new media apart from new media such as the Internet. The new new media allow each and every user to create content if they choose (Levinson, 2009, 4). One aspect which Levinson points out, and which is important to this research, is that although all new new media have a social aspect, there are certain new new media that “are primarily social in that their main purpose is to connect people” (2009, 5-6). These media include blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites.

Blogs are an exemplar of the new new media, according to Levinson. “A blog can be written on a moment’s notice, can be amended indefinitely and can last forever. Anyone, including any reader, can become a blogger. Consumers of other new new media daily become producers of new new media in this way. Readers can also contribute to the narrative of the blog by writing comments” (2009, 12). The term new new media brings about some comparisons to Web 2.0, but the new new media is focused

completely on interactions between people and not just a person and a computer which is what makes the new new media so important in the field of communication.

Social media, given its name because of the two-way communication aspect, can bring about a type of classification of individuals. Whether interacting with an individual that is an online friend, i.e. someone that a person has never met in real life, a friend or a family member there is a type of role that is assigned to that individual. These roles can allow the user or blogger to determine what information that particular individual might see. According to Pitkin, Arendt would understand that “in mass society, the social is a leveling force, normalizing all into conventional patterns of behavior, but this is merely an extension of what society has already done and meant: forcing people into arbitrary categories” (Pitkin, 183). Quoting Arendt, Pitkin writes that “no society can properly function without classification, without an arrangement of things and men in classes and prescribed types,’ because such stereotyping is ‘necessary’ for ‘social discrimination,’ which is itself the basic ‘constituent element of the social realm’” (183). Consider how you classify people daily; you may have your work friends, your school friends, your neighbors, and your family, for example. For Arendt, this is acceptable because it is necessary. And, while Arendt may not advocate social media in its current state, she did recognize the inherent need to classify people into categories for a better understanding of how to relate to them. However, Arendt “opposes confining a human collectivity to only this sort of organizational device, and specifically, she opposes substituting them for politics” (Pitkin, 189). Choosing categories by which to classify and define people is a problem for Arendt only if these procedures are used to replace politics but she does understand the need to categorize people in other aspects of life.

Reeves and Nass note that when interacting with media “the default is to automatically and unconsciously ignore fabrication and expect reality, as if the technology itself were invisible” (13). This revelation came through their study which states that our brains have not evolved as quickly as media technology has and that “our old brains hold sway and we accept media as real people and places” (Reeves and Nass, 12). These “old brains” know that “anything that *seemed* to be a real person or place *was* real” (Reeves and Nass, 12). The interactions and interpersonal communication matter most, no matter if they are face-to-face or mediated.

The interactions and communication that occur through CMC usually lead to dialogue. As people comment on a blog and then more people, or the original poster, respond to that comment, a dialogue evolves which involves anyone reading and commenting on that particular blog post. This medium allows for dialogue to occur between those that are separated by time and space. McNamee and Shotter explain that the actual space is not important “because the overall outcome of any exchange cannot be traced back to the intentions of any of the individuals involved, the ‘dialogical reality or space’ constructed between them is experienced as an external reality or a ‘third agency’ (an *it*) with its own (ethical) demands and requirements” (99). The lack of spatial limits on dialogue in the blogosphere creates an arena with considerable opportunity for a complete and well-informed conversation to occur. “Interpersonal reasoning is guided by an attitude that values the relationship of interactants over any particular outcome, and is characterized by connection rather than separation and abstraction” (Arnett and Arneson, 250). Where a person physically is does not matter as long as the persons in dialogue are emotionally or intellectually connected. One constant about dialogue is that dialogue

cannot lead to one particular outcome because every contributor to the dialogue owns a part of it and cannot control what the others may or may not contribute. This allows the dialogue to belong to no one individually, but every participant collectively.

## DIALOGUE

The give-and-take of a conversation between individuals is known as dialogue. Arnett and Arneson explain that “dialogue is invited as we address limits, flaws, and difficulties presented by the nitty-gritty reality of common life together in a situated historical moment. Dialogue begins when we act out of our situatedness, not when we respond from a position of unrealistic hope” (32). Dialogue, then, must be based in reality and grounded in the present historical moment; therefore, interactions in MUDs (Multi-user games) are not technically dialogue according to Arnett and Arneson because they are not based in reality. However, since most personal blogs are based in reality and are happening real-time to the blogger, any interactions between a blogger and his or her commenters can be considered dialogue.

Through dialogue, an individual not only learns about the other people in the conversation, but also learns more about him- or herself. Baxter explains that:

an individual knows self only from the outside, as he or she conceives others see him or her. The self, then, is invisible to itself and dependent for its existence on the other. Self cannot be a unitary, autonomous phenomenon, according to dialogism; rather, it is a fluid and dynamic relation between self and other. Bakhtin’s metaphor for this relation is a dialogue—a simultaneous unity of differences in the interpenetration of utterances (109).

Dialogue, then, can be seen as a way to self-understanding, as well as a way to understand others. Both the other and the individual's reaction to the other are needed in order to invite self-understanding in this context.

Dialogue allows for opinions, arguments and revelations to guide an individual to a better understanding of his or her stance on many subjects. After all, "interpersonal communication includes both intimate and public discourse" (Arnett and Arneson, 7). And without the interaction with others, through dialogue, the individual only thinks that he or she understands his or her true feelings on a subject. Bahktin explains that dialogue is needed as a way for humans to become "able or competent to perceive in ourselves the given whole of our own personality" (5). Dialogue, whether face-to-face or mediated, allows one to gain perspective on his or her stance on any given topic or situation.

Dialogue allows for an individual to "know thyself". Mediated communication allows an individual to have a larger group to engage in dialogue with than typical face-to-face communication would allow. Therefore, mediated communication provides for a greater sounding board to help an individual know him- or herself on many levels and on many different subjects. However, the greater ability to know oneself on many levels can lead to a overzealous focus on oneself, most commonly referred to as narcissism.

#### NARCISSISM

One of the drawbacks to mediated communication, especially mediated communication that is created by an individual based solely on personal opinion and not on facts, is narcissism. By providing an outlet for anyone's voice to have a say, CMC provides an entrance into a therapeutic culture and individual mindset of "it's all about me". Christopher Lasch explains that living "for the moment is the prevailing passion—

to live for yourself, not for your predecessors or posterity. We are fast losing the sense of historical continuity, the sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future” (5). This concern with self over history or future is one of the reasons that many people no longer have a connection with their family or with their personal history. Also, the concern with self makes it difficult to be concerned with future generations. When did this shift begin? “The fight for the greater good of the 1960s became looking out for number one by the 1980s. Parenting became more indulgent, celebrity worship grew, and reality TV became a showcase of narcissistic people” (Twenge and Campbell, 4). Once the “Me” generation began, the focus on the world and consequences of the individual’s actions for others began to diminish.

As the focus on celebrity lifestyles and the desire to learn more about the personal lives of public figures grew, there began a drive to share more of our lives with other people as well. This cultural shift created a shift towards narcissism. “The new therapies spawned by the human potential movement, according to Peter Marin, teach that ‘the individual will is all powerful and totally determines one’s fate’; thus they intensify the ‘isolation of the self.’ This line of argument belongs to a well-established American tradition of social thought” (Lasch, 9). However, it is somewhat ironic that the narcissist “depends on others to validate his self-esteem. He cannot live without an admiring audience” (Lasch, 10). Without other people to notice how magnificent a narcissist is, there is no way to establish his or her greatness and validate that opinion. Not that the narcissist cares about the other people, except for what those individuals can provide for him or her (Twenge & Campbell, 4). This lack of concern for other people demonstrates the difference between those people who have high self-esteem and narcissists.

The American culture of admiring those who are famous and desiring to be like them has fostered the increase of narcissism in our culture. After all, there is a desire to be noticed and recognized, as well as a desire to be famous that comes from a celebrity-worship type of culture. “People strive to create a ‘personal brand’ (also called ‘self-branding’), packaging themselves like a product to be sold” (Twenge & Cambell, 1). This personal brand may stem from the desire to be more like a celebrity whom one finds intriguing. Public relations and advertising have demonstrated that the right package and the right message can “sell” just about anything to the right individuals, so why not package an individual to “sell” his or her personality and appearance? This attitude has been driven, not only by advertising, but also by the media-focused culture of today. The revelation that narcissism may be a cultural phenomenon has led to the creation of the term “cultural narcissism,” defined by Twenge and Campbell as “changes in behavior and attitudes that reflect narcissistic cultural values, whether the individuals themselves are narcissistic or simply caught up in a societal trend” (5). This dialectic of which came first may lead to another important dialectic for this project: which came first, the desire to share private information with others or the communication technology which allows us to do so?

This question begins to be answered by a survey which Twenge and Campbell reference in their book.

In a June 2009 national poll of more than 1,000 college students, 2 out of 3 agreed with the statement “My generation of young people is more self-promoting, narcissistic, overconfident, and attention-seeking than previous generations.” A majority (57%) also said that one of the main reasons for their generation’s self-

centeredness was social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter (34).

As the agreement with the survey statement asserts, the current generation believes that they share more information because the technology exists to do so. However, the question still remains as to why communication technology was originally created. If the current generation of twenty-somethings believes that they are more self-centered because the technology allows them to be, then what was the original motivation for creating social networking sites and their predecessors, personal publishing venues? This question needs to be examined in further research.

These theories and communication aspects which impact disclosure and oversharing in CMC discussed in this chapter are important for the next chapter, which focuses on communication technology, in general, and personal blogging specifically. CMC opened up new ways to communicate and allows for individuals to share information, sometimes without forethought of the consequences. However, communication technology is not all bad; it allows for further input from others around the globe and provides more opportunities for an individual to “Know Thyself”.

## Chapter 4: Personal Blogs: History, Usage, Future—Are We Just Looking for Our 15 Minutes of Fame?

As discussed in Chapter 1, blogs started as a way for technology insiders to keep track of and share links of interest with each other. The Internet began to grow so rapidly during its early stages that those involved at the beginning had difficulty keeping up with new webpages. Emails were too time-consuming to send and too numerous to read. Personal homepages began to tell others about the author and soon became a good spot to share the links. This link list began being updated with the latest entry at the top...and so began blogging. The list of links became known as a weblog. “Blogs, short for weblogs, are usually defined as ‘online diaries written in reverse chronological order’....Blogs are just web pages in the end, pages on the internet that individual users create and edit” (Ringmar, 17). These webpages became more universal and user-friendly when Pyra, an Internet company, created software to help handle project management. This software “was a website that would take text that a user entered into a form, and post it onto a webpage, with the most recent additions at the top of the page” and Pyra “ended up working more on the in-house tool than on their nominal product. They named their product Blogger and launched it to the world” (Shirky, 182). Other companies quickly followed with different versions of software and the blogging revolution began. Blogging was now available to anyone who had access to the Internet and had something to say. And lots of people had lots to say about many different subjects. There was finally a place for them to talk to others with similar interests outside of their normal social circles.

This place became a twenty-first century public realm. People were able to share ideas with others who had similar interests. Arendt described the public realm as “the

world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it” (1998, 52). This description fits perfectly into the blogosphere because the blogosphere allows people to take a step back from mass society and provides a place to gather. According to Arendt, “What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them” (1998, 52-53). The blogosphere brings back the power to gather people together, if only virtually, and get them talking and relating to each other.

Blogs are at the same time public and private. These websites share private information in a public forum and allow others, including complete strangers, to comment on various posts. Blogs are updated regularly, if not daily, and are based on a common theme or topic. Sometimes that theme is “what is happening in my life” other times it is a favorite hobby or an idea. This chapter examines many aspects of personal blogging and finishes with a look into what the future may hold for personal blogs, specifically, and the blogosphere as a whole.

#### PRIVATE BECOMES PUBLIC

A paraphrase of Andy Warhol’s “fifteen minutes of fame” statement that has been attributed to David Weinberger, among others<sup>5</sup> states that “on the Internet, everyone will be famous for fifteen people”. This statement is especially true for personal bloggers. Even if the blogger insists that he or she writes only for clarity, most blogs have an audience, either commenters or lurkers (people who only read and do not comment), and the blogger is aware of their presence. “Anyone who engages in self-representational writing on the Internet is not producing private material, but is engaging instead in

‘public acts deliberately intended for public consumption’ (Paccagnella 1997)” (Serfaty, 12). It is the ability of others, whether strangers or family members, to read a personal blog that makes it a public medium, even though the subject matter is usually very personal.

The conflict that arises with blogs is that the subject is usually very personal—sometimes intimate, while the medium is public to a fault. Anyone, at least anyone with access to the Internet, can read what is posted on a personal blog. Although many people in younger generations have moved on to social networking sites instead of personal blogs, those in their thirties and above are still writing blogs. Although these blogs may take on a specific focus, i.e. mom blogs, knitting blogs, political blogs, etc., they are still written about the individual, and his or her personal life and opinions will show through in the tone and, sometimes, the topic of a post. Although the blog may specifically be about knitting, a story about something the blogger’s child did or something that the blogger saw at work will most likely be written if the blogger finds it “blog-worthy”. Guidelines established by the blogger establish a basis of his or her own view of public (what can be posted on the blog) and private (what is off limits and will not be shared). In her research, Emily Nussbaum interviewed teen bloggers about their experiences with blogging. She recounts one blogger’s understanding of blurring private and sharing on his blog: “J.’s sense of private and public was filled with these kinds of contradictions: he wanted his posts to be read, and feared that people would read them, and hoped that people would read them, and didn’t care if people read them. . . . He also had his own stringent notions of etiquette” (Kline & Burnstein, 353). This type of indecision about what to post is not uncommon in the blogosphere. Miller and Shepherd explain that this

occurs on more than just personal blogs: “On personal home pages and message boards, in chat rooms and on listservs, and most especially on blogs, people are sharing unprecedented amounts of personal information with total strangers, potentially millions of them”. Each individual blogger establishes what will and will not be shared about his or her life on the blog. “Of course I knew there were limits to what I could say.... Legal limits, limits set by embarrassment, by fear or by an old-fashioned sense of decency. How exactly these lines should be defined, however, I did not know....but in my blog I was my own editor” (Ringmar, 3). Ringmar’s statement helps to begin to clarify that limits are set by more than just the blogger, that there are legal ramifications, as well as personal or professional ramifications to what is posted on a personal blog. Arendt’s concern about the blurring of public and private has become reality as some bloggers share too much and some, those without a lot of readers, do not share enough to hold the attention of an audience. Establishing a guideline, whether personal or shared, determining what should and will be shared with others becomes an important aspect for a blogger, and knowing something about Arendt’s philosophy may help make that determination simpler.

A benefit to the publicness of a personal blog is the ability to build relationships or a community outside of one’s normal social circle. This sense of community can be the result of shared interests, or just everyday happenings that could occur to anyone. A sense of community is formed because “weblogs include software enabling readers’ responses to be automatically posted and to appear next to the entry. Thus a dialogical space is created within what is supposed to be an intensely personal space” (Serfaty, 53). This dialogic space can go one step further as those that comment can see others’ comments

and may respond not only to the original post but also to the other comments. Nussbaum explains that “the threads of comments can amount to a public microconversation, in which a group of friends debates a subject or plans an event or offers advice” (Kline & Burnstein, 355). This dialogue, although lacking nonverbal cues, allows for the readers to begin to know each other as they continue to read and comment on each others’ blogs.

Another way in which community is formed is because the stories that bloggers share are real and relatable. The “small events of everyday life are widely shared” and “the reality common to all may emerge and lay the foundation for a new community” (Serfaty, 46). Talking about something funny that happened on the way to the office or a story about something that your spouse or child did can be highly relatable to a large audience. These are the types of stories that appear on personal blogs on a regular basis.

Bloggers also form a community through blogrolls. Blogrolls are links either on the sidebar of the first page of the blog, or on a separate page. Stone explains “when bloggers add a link to their blogroll, they are adding another blogger they may or may not know personally but are intellectually attracted to” (101-102). Something about the blogger or the topic the blogger frequently writes about has drawn the attention of the person who linked to his or her blog, and a link on his or her blogroll makes it easier to return to read more at a later time. The blogroll helps in “defining your community and telling others that you see yourself as the company you keep” (Stone, 102). Who a blogger reads helps to define who the blogger is in terms of the blogosphere, just like the people a person connects with in real life helps to define who he or she becomes. After all, Stone continues, “if a blog is the online version of you, then the blogosphere is the online version of our world, our home” (111). Understanding this fact may help bloggers

better determine which information they want to share and who they want to link to; after all, social groups, even virtual ones, help to determine how others see you.

The links on a personal blog also help to extend the public aspect of the blog. “To the extent that such blogs purvey a point of view as well as a collection of links, they combine the personal and the public in ways that are distinctive to the blog as a rhetorical form, and they allow bloggers to cultivate the self in a public way” (Miller & Shepherd). Links provide connections in the blogosphere. These connections can link to other people that the blogger follows or other links that the blogger finds interesting. Also, if the blogger has another website, the list of links may include his or her other projects. The links “mimic the social clustering that happens naturally all over the planet” (Stone, 194). Take a look around: people gather in groups that share similar interests every day, so why should the gathering on the Internet be any different? Blogs allow for a larger reach of people with similar interests, but the readers and bloggers still have some type of connection or there would be no reason for the reader to keep visiting and certainly no reason for the blogger to link back to the reader’s blog—not that all blog readers necessarily have a blog.

Links are important in the blogosphere. Stone calls them “the currency of the blogosphere” (91). The more people who link to a blog, the more likely others who read the first blog will follow the link and find something of interest at the new blog as well. After all, links do not happen haphazardly. “A blogger who realizes someone has linked to his/her site often responds by also linking to his reader’s blog, in a self- and reciprocal promotional process that has been characterized as ‘the incestuous, snowballing sensation of getting linked in the blogosphere’ (Glaser 2003: 87)” (Serfaty, 25-26). Links are often

used by bloggers to keep track of sites of interest and allow for the blogger to return to the site without trying to remember all of the different addresses, similar to “favorites” in a web browser. Remember, blogging started as a list of links, and that portion still exists today. This linking and sharing of links adds credibility and traffic to a blog. If people visit a blog that has added a link to a new blog, those people may click on the link to see if there is something of interest on the new site as well. Thus, the more people that link to a blog, the more likely that other people will follow and continue visiting if there is something of interest on the new site. Brad Graham explains this quid pro quo: “My weblog is linked from several others, and theirs from mine. We are a community, of sorts, a small town sharing gossip and news, recreation and sport, laughter and tears, all for the commonweal. And, for the most part, we’re friendly to strangers” (Perseus Publishing Editors, 39). This phrase, “friendly to strangers,” leads to the need for a clearer understanding of friendship. C. S. Lewis helps with this understanding: “Friendship, I have said, is born at the moment when one man says to another ‘What! You too? I thought that no one but myself...’ But the common taste or vision or point of view which is thus discovered need not always be a nice one” (113). These commonalities lead to friendship, and Lewis further explains that “you can become a man’s Friend without knowing or caring whether he is married or single or how he earns his living” (102). Sharing a common interest is the basis of friendship, and this commonality leads to communities of friends. Small communities enjoy getting to know new people and learning new things about each other; the blogosphere is the same way. Rebecca Mead explains that “reading blogs can feel a lot like listening in on a conversation among a group of friends who all know each other really well. Blogging, it

turns out, is the CB radio of the Dave Eggers generation” (Perseus Publishing Editors, 50). Not only do blogs have the feel of a CB radio from the listening in on conversations aspect, but many times bloggers will have a “handle” or nickname that they use on their blog to help maintain their anonymity. The listening in that Mead discusses can also lead to conversations among the commenters and the sharing of many opinions and ideas. Sometimes the person outside the group joining in may have the freshest opinion and solution. Blogs help to pull a community together to help all of its members. Thus it is possible, and likely, that people will develop friendships in cyberspace, especially in a public space, such as a personal blog.

The commonality of interests mentioned in the previous paragraph is an important factor in friendships and connections in the blogosphere. According to Burnstein, “blogs, in the broadest sense, derive from the human urge to give voice to our ideas; to have our ideas understood, acted on, and remembered; and to engage in the quest for knowledge and understanding interactively and collaboratively” (xvi-xvii). The personal blog provides the perfect platform to give voice to ideas. This idea can be a funny story, a question, or an observation which may be of interest to blog readers or a topic which the blogger wants feedback on.

One commonality comes from the expectations or plans which others have for an individual’s life, sometimes even before the individual is born. “We all begin life inserted into narratives, stories, and webs that were spun before us, and that will accompany us, and against which more often than not we will have to struggle” (Benhabib, 113). This struggle, which is common among people, is a form of presupposition or “horizon” that each individual is born into. “For Hannah Arendt, the ‘web’ of human relationships and

enacted stories constitutes the horizon, in the phenomenological sense, of human affairs. Every speaking and acting human person finds such a horizon as the always already present background from which life unfolds” (Benhabib, 112). The fact that each individual has predisposed expectations or a horizon set for them leads to a sense of commonality, and this commonality is the basis of friendship. “Friendship must be about something, even if it were only an enthusiasm for dominoes or white mice. Those who have nothing can share nothing; those who are going nowhere can have no fellow-travellers” (Lewis, 98). Lewis continues that “even if the common ground of the Friendship is nothing more momentous than stamp-collecting, the circle rightly and inevitably ignores the views of the millions who think it a silly occupation and of the thousands who have merely dabbled in it” (116). Friendships based on Lewis’ understanding lend themselves to the blogosphere and the interest-specific blogs which have emerged over time. These personal blogs may discuss a specific hobby (e.g. knitting) or be about a specific life experience (e.g. mommy blogs) but the readers have an interest in the subject or they would not continue to read the blog. This commonality leads to friendship and, although Lewis claims that “a few years’ difference in the dates of our births, a few more miles between certain houses, the choice of one university instead of another, posting to different regiments, the accident of a topic being raised or not raised at a first meeting—any of these chances might have kept us apart” (126), the Internet, and the blogosphere, have managed to remove many, if not all, of these barriers to friendship.

The removal of barriers also creates greater visibility for what is written and shared on the Internet. Blogs “make intimate writings potentially accessible to a

multitude of readers,...they also make it possible to include the responses of the readers. In so doing, they set up a dense network of echoes and correspondences between diarist [blogger] and audience and, more importantly still, they give it visibility” (Serfaty, 52). When ideas have visibility, those ideas take on a life which allows them to grow and flourish in ways that would not be possible without the ideas being available for public consumption. However, this visibility can also lead to personal and societal conflict. In her address to The American Society of Christian Ethics in 1973, Arendt stated, “I am frequently quoted, ‘we don’t know what we are doing,’ and the reason of course is that we can only act together. And since we can act only together, we depend upon the goals of all our fellowmen. So what we actually wanted, never comes out as we originally conceived it”. From the first blog, people have struggled with what should and should not be visible to others. Justin Hall wrote one of the first personal blogs, which included intimate details of his life. His “actions said, *I’m doing this because I can do it*. They also said, *Soon, everyone will be doing it*....That wasn’t what technology was for. Most people don’t want to expose themselves fully to the world” (Rosenberg, 36). Or do they? The question becomes, why do people share private and intimate information on the Internet, and is this what technology is ideally for?

Did technology create the struggle between public and private? Not really. Arendt and others have always struggled with this issue. This struggle is “part of human development—an effort we all face from the moment our infant selves begin to notice there’s a world *out there*, beyond our bodies” (Rosenberg, 44). The Internet did not create this awareness, it “just made the process of drawing this line more nettlesome. In the end we’re each going to find the compromise between sharing and discretion that’s right for

ourselves” (Rosenberg, 44). The delicate balance between self and world or public and private suddenly becomes a personal decision as to what should and will be shared with others and what should be kept to ourselves. The visibility which the Internet provides and encourages needs to be tempered by personal decisions. According to Serfaty, personal blogs “precisely merge public and private spaces in creative ways” and they “represent a way of turning oneself into the hero of one’s own life, seen as a work of art and an ongoing creation” (46). Turning one’s life into a work of art did not arise with personal blogging, but began with self-representational writing in every form.

Blogs are also a means of self awareness. Miller and Shepherd state that “self expression serves the intrinsic self-disclosure functions of both self clarification and self validation, enhancing self awareness and confirming already-held beliefs. The blogger is her own audience, her own public, her own beneficiary”. By writing ideas and thoughts down, clarity may come to the author even before there is any input from the audience. “Blogs help break through the anonymity and isolation of modern life. They give people a voice and a forum with which to speak truth to power—or at least to reach out and touch someone....pluck from the indifference of daily life a bit of validation for themselves, their ideas, and their creative abilities” (Kline & Burnstein, 247-248). Blogs provide a way for people to connect in an over-scheduled and sensory-overloaded world. Blogs provide a means for self-expression. Cameron Barrett explains:

Camworld is an experiment in self-expression. And that experiment is not over.

Over the next year (or two or three), CamWorld will evolve into something more.

It will always have its loyal readers just as Stephen King and his publishing house

have millions of people committed to buying his next book (regardless of whether it sucks or not) (Perseus Publishing Editors, 30)

CamWorld is the exception to most personal blogs as Barrett has many readers, unlike most personal blogs, which have a small following. However, whether the blog is large or small, a dedicated reader base will follow the blog as long as the blogger keeps writing. As Stone states, “a blogger is only as good as his or her latest post” (40). If the blogger does not post regularly, the readers will move on to other blogs and not return. Unlike most self-representational writing, a blog requires that the writer be consistent and interesting when he or she chooses to write.

Blogs are a form of self-publishing media. “The growing reality is that anyone can actually turn their words and ideas into published form, that anyone can have at least a small audience, and that anyone who desires a broad hearing can at least be armed to fight for one” (Burnstein, xv). Anyone can start a blog. All that is required is an Internet connection, even if that connection is at a public library. The ability to self-publish provides anyone with something to say the ability to say it, without a barrier. According to Bruns:

a key attraction to the blogosphere is, and remains, the potential for individual and informal expression and ungatekept self-publishing which both Ratliff and Walker identify, and it seems safe to assume that in any future developments of blogging genres, this form of user-led content production, or produsage, will continue to play a significant role (250).

Without an editor or publisher, the blogger can truly say exactly what he or she wants to say without worrying about edits or revisions changing the true meaning of the statement.

This desire to self-publish is innate. According to Burnstein “our biological and cultural DNA causes us to want to articulate an idea or a vision and ‘publish’ it, thereby taking ownership of it and credit for it” (xvii). He continues by noting that “our biocultural DNA contains instructions that cause us to want to announce our ideas and denounce others, that make us want to interact, comment, converse, communicate, react, respond, elaborate, tweak, inform, refine, argue, criticize—and to do all of this with other members of our tribe across the boundaries of time and space” (Burnstein, xvii). The blog allows its writer to share information with others permanently; once something is on the Internet, it is there forever.

The information shared on a personal blog is almost exclusively non-fiction. Personal blogs are about things that interest and influence the blogger. According to Stefanac, “there are literally millions of blogs that, in one way or another, qualify as diaries” (51). Diaries, and self-representational writing as a genre, are primarily non-fiction and share observations or opinions of the writer. According to Joe Clark, “a blog is a form of exteriorized psychology. It’s a part of you, or of your psyche; while a titanium hip joint or a pacemaker might bring technology *inside* the corporeal you, a weblog uses technology to bring the psychological you *outside* of it” (Perseus Publishing Editors, 68). A blog is a technological extension of the blogger; it is another venue for sharing ideas, experiences, and opinions with friends, family, and even strangers. However, if the stranger reads a blog long enough, he or she may become a friend—albeit an online friend.

Blogs are just the latest form of storytelling. They “are simply a continuation of a phenomenon that, at least in the form of oral storytelling, reaches back to antiquity. But

in terms of its enormous scale, scope, and cultural impact, nothing in history compares to today's explosion of citizen-created media" (Kline & Burnstein, 246). Oral storytelling, as well as written storytelling, has existed as long as man has been able to talk and write. Arendt "thought that storytelling opens up the possibility of different interpretations, based on the differing world views of those who hear the story, and also the possibility of an open-ended, perhaps inconclusive debate about the meaning of the story" (Swift, 4). This debate can now occur directly under the story, or post, on a blog. Kline continues that "Tens of millions of people around the world are now documenting their lives, exploring their religious and political beliefs, and engaging in public conversations.... And they do so not only through blogs, but also through virtually every digital communications tool" (246). By sharing stories on a blog, people can get feedback and have others share similar stories with the original poster.

One problem with sharing is that some people do not know how much is too much. The biggest complaint with personal blogging, in particular, and the Internet, in general, is people sharing too much information with the world.

In 1994, Justin Hall invented oversharing. Of course, we didn't have a name yet for the compulsion to tell the online world too much about yourself. Back then, Hall was just an eccentric nineteen-year-old college student who recorded minutiae of his life on his personal website; no one knew that the self-revelation he found so addictive would one day become a temptation for millions (Rosenberg, 17).

Oversharing has become a problem offline also. People now talk about subjects that at one time, not that long ago, were considered taboo. The presumed security due to the size

of the Internet has allowed people to feel secure sharing information because they erroneously believe that the people they do not want to see it, will never be able to find the information on the Internet. This is not always the case. The Internet is large, but information is easy to find if someone knows how to search.

One extreme example of the ability of someone to find information easily occurred in Pakistan. NBC News reports “Malala Yousufzai, the 14-year-old Pakistani girl shot by the Taliban for writing about daily life in the war-torn Swat Valley, was still in critical condition Wednesday after surgery to remove a bullet” (worldnews.nbcnews.com). Yousufzai was 11-years-old when she began her blog, which “chronicled life in the Swat Valley under the brutal and oppressive rule of the local faction of the Pakistani Taliban, who carried out public floggings, hung dead bodies in the streets and banned education for girls” (worldnews.nbcnews.com). It was this last issue on which Yousufzai was most outspoken. She and her friends believe that they have the right to an education just like the boys. However, in such an oppressive environment, this right was not a possibility. Yousufzai obviously felt that her blog would not be found by the Taliban; unfortunately, she was mistaken and is now fighting for her life in the United Kingdom. The Internet is not nearly as large as many people believe.

The line between public and private has been blurred. And, according to Miller and Shepherd, “the confessional nature of blogs has redrawn the line between the private and the public in our lives”. Because the technology exists for individuals to share a lot of information, many individuals may share more information than they originally intend or may believe that the information is private because no one who should not see it knows the address to their blog. Blogging provides a platform for sharing stories and

information to anyone who wishes to share. Unfortunately, this sharing can sometimes go to extremes. One example of this which pushes the oversharing extreme is Ranjit's HTTP playground. Although it began as a list of offbeat links it also included "a 'lunch server.' Each day, Bhatnagar would carefully record what he'd had for lunch....Although the 'lunch server' was as much a pun as anything else, it foreshadowed a future in which people would use blogs to record all manner of quotidian data points" (Rosenberg, 21). Not only does this show the extent of oversharing which has since become rampant, it also plays into one of the biggest stereotypes of personal blogs as "what I had for lunch" blogs. Oversharing is the largest concern with the Internet, as a whole, and personal blogging, specifically.

#### READERS/RELATIONSHIPS

The reality that a blog has an audience may be overwhelming for a new blogger. If an individual has wanted to publish for a long time or just wants to share his or her thoughts and ideas on any subject, a blog might seem like the perfect place to do it. But, a new blogger must remember that people will read what he or she writes and if the reader does not agree, he or she may provide comments and begin a dialogue about the issue, which may become heated. According to Stefanac, "most blogs, and certainly the most successful, are communities of a kind, where people argue back and forth via posts and comments" (v). This to and fro begins to form a relationship through dialogue, and people can learn about others' opinions on a topic or hear about different experiences with a specific situation that has occurred.

Beginning a conversation allows for a dialogue to develop and for opinions to be shared, thus forming a community and friendships. This was not possible, on a global

level, in the past. “In reality, a few years’ difference in the dates of our births, a few more miles between certain houses, the choice of one university instead of another, posting to different regiments, the accident of a topic being raised or not raised at a first meeting—any of these chances might have kept us apart” (Lewis, 126). Blogging has allowed for location to become less of a factor in friendship. And many times, the blogger does not know the age, sex, marital status, etc. of his or her readers, which may allow many of the other barriers to friendship to be minimized. Many bloggers do not care about the age or location of their readers because bloggers are interested in ideas and experiences.

Bloggers put their ideas out on the Internet in order for people to comment on and discuss them. With a blog, people visit because they want to read what the blogger has written and possibly comment on the post. The comment feature allows the blogger and his or her readers to begin to develop a relationship. The relationship aspect is key to starting and maintaining a personal blog. “Most bloggers have jumped into—and stayed in—the fray because they seek to build a relationship with their readers. They want to engage in conversation and build community around themselves and their ideas” (Stone, 111). The key words in Stone’s statement are relationship, conversation, and community. Many individuals outside of the blogosphere do not feel that developing relationships and communities can occur through an online-only connection; ask any blogger and he or she will tell a different story. One blogger, BusyMom, explains to non-bloggers that the people she meets through her blog are “my friends inside the computer”. And one of the great things about blogging friends, whom the blogger may never meet in person, is that “two friends delight to be joined by a third, and three by a fourth, if only the newcomer is qualified to become a real friend” (Lewis, 92). There can never be too many readers and

commenters on a blog. The more people who read, the more opinions shared, and the more interesting the discussion may become, and the more blogs a readers may start to follow (as well as gain more readers for his or her blog). More discussion creates the possibility for more friendships to be established. Each blog is a reflection of the blogger and the community of readers, because “only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear” (Arendt, 1998, 57). Many times the blogger comes to know the readers as well as the readers know the blogger, and this knowledge helps the blogger tailor his or her writing style to that of the more frequent and vocal readers.

Readers are important to a blogger. If there are no readers, the blogger is essentially writing for him-/herself. Miller and Shepherd explain that “blogs are also intended to be read. Maintaining traffic and link statistics seems important to bloggers, and many provide readers the opportunity to provide feedback either by posting comments directly on the blog or through email”. Most readers comment directly on the blog post in order to share their feedback with the blogger and others, thus helping to build a community. It is not only the blog owner who wants to feel a sense of community with others, it is also the blog readers. “If the explicit presence of a readership can lead diarists to meet their readers in real life, it may also result in another interesting development, in that the conversation may take place not merely with the diarist herself, but between readers of a diary” (Serfaty). By posting a comment publicly on a blog, the reader/commenter opens up the possibility for a conversation with other readers of the blog as well as with the blogger.

Blog readers are looking for relationships as much as the blogger is. In fact, Will Wheaton explains that “a good weblog creates a conversation between the author and the reader, regardless of the subject matter of the blog. And the relationship between the author and the reader grows over time, as each takes part in the ongoing conversation that makes up the core of the blog experience” (Kline & Burnstein, 259). This conversation allows for the individuals to learn about each other and create a relationship, or friendship, based on their conversation. An example of this can be found in the creation of Pittsburghbloggers.com. According to Woy, “The entire Pittsburgh bloggers group that came together to form the website all came out of meeting via our blogs. A tremendous convergence of creative energy to create the website. Most of the organizing was done online before we even met”. Woy’s experience is not unique. Many bloggers collaborate with others online for many different purposes creating the relationships that are sought by bloggers and others.

The reason that blogs have the ability to create relationships and friendships is because a blog represents a person. The blogger is not a creation of a person; he or she is not a created avatar in a fantasy world. Miller and Shepherd explain that

bloggers seem less interested in role playing than in locating, or constructing, for themselves and for others, an identity that they can understand as unitary, as ‘real’. The blog thus seems to us to be a counter-movement to postmodern destabilization, a ‘backward motion toward the source,’ as Robert Frost put it. That is, to the extent that the blog has become a widely understood and shared rhetorical convention, it functions as a site of relative stability.

The blogger is a real person, sharing his or her views on life. Because the blog is about the author's everyday life, "the blogger is compelled to share his world with whomever is reading. He may engage other bloggers in conversation about the interest they share....These fragments, pieced together over months, can provide an unexpectedly intimate view of what it is to be a particular individual in a particular place at a particular time" (Perseus Publishing Editors, 13). Focusing on the last portion of that statement allows one to understand how readers begin to feel that they know the blogger personally, because the blogger shares details about what is happening as it happens. This allows a glimpse into the life of the blogger that would not be visible without the blog.

However much the blog represents an individual, it is also important for the blogger to keep the blog updated and interesting. One way to keep the blog interesting is to write for a specific audience. Stone explains that "keeping your readers in mind will help you develop a consistent blogging style. In this way, your blog persona becomes a kind of memorable brand that readers will want to visit again and again" (72). Focusing on the audience allows the blogger to stay on topic with his or her blog; it also allows the blogger to maintain a consistent tone to his or her blog. Stone states that the most effective way for a blogger to find his or her "blog voice" is to keep blogging for six months to a year (71). This allows the audience to get to know the blogger and for the blogger to find his or her way through writing. Stefanac explains, "If bloggers want people to pay attention to what they're doing, they ought to think like standup comics—you always want to leave the audience wanting more" (54). Keeping the blog interesting, updated, and consistent will allow the audience to get to know the blogger and will keep the audience coming back to read more. A consistent blog voice allows the true

personality of the blogger to shine through his or her writing, providing the opportunity for the readers to know the blogger.

It is no longer considered taboo have met friends through the Internet. “Cyberspace is simply another place to meet. Just like people who meet in other locales, those who meet in cyberspace frequently move their relationships into settings beyond the one in which they met originally” (Parks and Floyd, 94). Blogs, multi-user online games, and social networking sites have allowed friendships through the Internet to become almost mainstream. Developing friendships through blogs and social networking sites has become more likely because “these are real people, putting their lives online” (Perseus Publishing Editors, 6). For both blogs and social networking sites, the information shared actually happened or is happening to the individual. It is not a virtual world in which a separate persona exists but real events happening to the individual, and forming a friendship is easier when other people are sharing real events happening to them. Blogs are genuine and provide just another place to meet new friends. Serfaty explains that the dialogues created on blogs “may be only marginally significant as far as their internal meaning is concerned, but they nevertheless function as markers of the acknowledgement of other subjectivities. They institute an I-Thou relationship, because even one who talks about nothing is still attempting to reach out to another individual” (69). Bloggers and commenters are online to make connections and develop relationships; therefore, pretending to be someone different would only hinder that possibility. Blogs are genuine, as are the relationships formed through the blogosphere.

The available blogging software, as well as the sense of community developed through the blogosphere, provides several means of creating connections between the

blogger and his or her readers, as well as between the blogger and other bloggers. “Blogs, by their nature, spawn communities. Bloggers regularly engage in lively cross-blog conversations, leaving comments and pointers on each other’s blogs, all the while knitting the repartee together with literally billions of clickable links” (Stefanac, 4). The links are only one aspect of blogging which allows for relationships to be created and communities to be built. Through the comments discussed above and this linking ability, the software provides built-in community building features. According to Serfaty, “weblogs include software enabling readers’ responses to be automatically posted and to appear next to the entry. Thus a dialogical space is created within what is supposed to be an intensely personal space” (53). Commenting begins the conversation; linking to the other’s blog extends the relationship. “In the world of weblogs, traffic is currency....Links—to and from other sites—are the coin of the realm” (Perseus Publishing Editors, xi). Comments and links begin to form a community of blogs. If someone comments on a blog, it is most likely because of a shared experience or interest regarding something posted on the blog. This shared interest begins to make connections. After all, if someone were to “read your blog, and if they like it they blog your blog on their own blog” (Perseus Publishing Editors, 59). And visitors to a blog are likely to check out other blogs which are linked to the first. The common interest that the original blogger shares with the second is most likely the same interest the reader shares; the link provides the reader a place to get more information or opinions on the topic.

The linking which occurs creates a bond between bloggers. Most blogrolls are short, providing links to those bloggers that the blog owner wants to be able to return to regularly. Miller and Shepherd state that “Hourihan finds that the combination of links

and accompanying commentary is the distinguishing feature of the blog, creating connections that ‘bind’ bloggers into a community (2002)”. The links create an introduction, of sorts, to other blogs which share opinions or interests which are similar. Blogging began as a way of sharing links to interesting articles or websites; now blogging provides content with links to original sources and has, usually, a sidebar list of other websites that readers may find interesting. Bruns references this history of blogs when he writes, “The ability to link to and comment on content found on other blogs or elsewhere on the Web also remains a crucial aspect, and tools both for identifying interesting links as well as for analyzing the linkage patterns of bloggers more generally continue to multiply” (250). Links create traffic and traffic builds relationships. It is the power of links between blogs which helps to grow the community around a subject.

Two other aspects of blogging which help build community include the contact and notify functions. Contact provides a way, usually email, outside of the blog for a reader to contact the blogger. There may be something outside of the blog post that the reader would like to share with the blogger and instead of posting it in the comments section and possibly moving the topic off-track, the reader may hit the “contact” link and share this information with the blogger off of the blog. This feature allows for a one-to-one connection between reader and blogger, especially if the blogger replies. Notify offers a different type of off the blog connection. The notify function allows the readers to request an email or text message when a new post has been added to the blog. This allows the reader to keep current with the blog without having to check each day, or more frequently, to see if the blogger has posted. Again, this feature helps to build community through keeping the conversation current and interactive.

Blogs provide a way to share ordinary lives with other people around the world and many are labors of love as most bloggers spend money to keep their blogs up and do not make money from the blog. Blogs may also provide a place for amazing things to happen through the potential for caring that comes from humanity. Blog sites such as “Caring Bridge” provide a means for people to keep friends and family updated on a loved one’s medical battle without having to take time away from the patient to make phone calls. Other blogs have been set up to raise awareness of issues or to lend support to others in similar situations. “The New Beautiful” provides exercise and weight loss tips from others struggling with their own weight. The blog is not focused on suggestions from celebrities or trainers trying to get readers to buy their services; this site is run by five or six women who struggle with their own weight and want to share tips and learn from others going through the same struggle. Another site, which has now received international attention and a book deal for the author, is “Momastery”. “Momastery” is described by the author as “a place to practice living bigger, bolder, and truer on this Earth. It’s a place to practice disagreeing with love and respect. It’s a place to remember what you already know: that Love Wins and that We Can Do Hard Things”. “Momastery” takes community to a new level. Glennon, the blogger, and her team help to raise money, through donations from readers, for those who need medical equipment or other items to make their life better and sometimes even tolerable. The readers, known as Monkees, create “Love Mobs” in which a story is posted about someone who needs help and, from donations totaling no more than twenty-five dollars, a person has managed to buy a handicapped accessible van for a woman within five hours. This blog

community reaches out to help others and, in the process, manages to help themselves. These blogs, and many others like them, are truly labors of love.

Whether a blog is about a personal life or a labor of love, updates are important to keep readers coming back. Serfaty explains that “whether they are concerned with the private or the public sphere, weblogs are updated daily at the very least, and often two or three times a day” (22). If people have an outlet for their opinions or interests, they will use it. According to Rosenberg, “you can’t make people shut up they will find a way to say what they want to, if they really need to that’s what’s wonderful about the internet they can say it, and you don’t have to read it” (29). Just because a blogger updates does not mean that every reader will read the update. The benefit of the blogosphere is that readers can decide if and when they read a blog; there is no guilt or pressure that might be felt from an unread email or unopened letter.

Another benefit to the frequency of blog updates comes from the fact that bloggers may be ahead of the mainstream media. Grossman and Hamilton explain this benefit: “Blogs are fresh and often seem to be miles ahead of the mainstream news. Bloggers put up new stuff every day, all day, and there are thousands of them.... They come to us not from some media-genic anchorbot on an air-conditioned sound stage, but from an individual” (Kline & Burnstein, 364). Updating as events are unfolding is a benefit that even “breaking news” cannot provide, especially since personal blogs usually involve first-hand accounts of the situation. An example of this occurred on September 11, 2001. “Television, print, and major news sites couldn’t keep up with the thousands of bloggers doing original reporting, digging up links to quality information online, and adding their own voice and commentary to what was happening” (Stone, 38). Many of

the bloggers also lived through the attacks in New York and Washington D.C. and could provide up-to-the minute accounts of what was happening. Good blogs, and those with the most followers, are updated frequently, if not daily, and provide interesting content for the readers to see and to share with others.

## EVOLUTION

The evolution of blogging has happened quickly and has personalized and revolutionized the way people communicate and the way people get their news. Grossman and Hamilton bring the evolution to light: “blogs have gone from an obscure and, frankly, somewhat nerdy fad to a genuine alternative to mainstream news outlets, a shadow media empire that is rivaling networks and newspapers in power and influence” (Kline & Burnstein, 363). From a list of hyperlinks to share new webpages to a form of media, blogs have come a long way.

Along the way, personal blogs have settled in to a pattern of everydayness with updates about normal life. Personal blogs have also created niche factions allowing for blogs about knitting, cars, and many other topics to gain momentum. Mommy- and Daddy-blogs are popular ways of sharing stories about kids and asking for advice from parents who have already experienced similar situations. Many different types of personal blogs have emerged, but all personal blogs shine when the personality of the blogger can be felt through the blog. As blogging continues to evolve, personal voice should remain a consistent theme as that is what separates blogs definitively from other forms of mass-mediated communication.

## BENEFITS

Reading unknown writers and reading many different viewpoints is one of the biggest benefits of personal blogs. Grossman and Hamilton explain that “blogs showcase some of the smartest, sharpest writing being published. Bloggers are unconstrained by such journalistic conventions as good taste, accountability and objectivity—and that can be a good thing” (Kline & Burnstein, 364). Without editors, honesty in writing can come through. Without advertisers, objectivity without concern of alienating someone can be shared. Unabridged and unrestrained sharing of opinions and ideas, i.e. free speech, can happen to large numbers of readers at one time through personal blogs.

Anyone can blog. Stefanac states that “even the homeless are taking advantage of connected computers in libraries to launch well-organized blogs that update in real time, are available everywhere at once, and that invite dialogue” (5). Blogs allow people to express themselves! Learning about different life situations, finding ways to help those that need help, sharing companionship through a blog can be seen as one of the biggest benefits of all.

## FUTURE

Blogging is still in its infancy. It has evolved from a list of links to a personal journal to a media outlet and it will continue to evolve. Looking five, ten, or even fifty years into the future, it is difficult to say with any certainty which path blogging will take, but many technology insiders have opinions. All of these ideas involve blogs remaining in the hands of individuals and not being overtaken by big media conglomerates.

The first venue continues the path of publication for all. Grossman and Hamilton explain that “blogs represent everything the Web was always supposed to be: a mass medium

controlled by the masses, in which getting heard depends solely on having something to say and the moxie to say it” (Kline & Burnstein, 366). Going back to Berners Lee’s vision for his creation, blogging may continue to grow as a means for individuals to share ideas and opinions without fear of censorship or retribution. It could provide a way for individuals to come together for a common purpose.

Closely related to publication is the idea that blogs may slowly find their path into fiction writing. Saffo writes, “I think bloggers may move into the fiction realm, is all I’m saying, since it could be a perfect fit with the wireless technology that’s evolving and with people’s desire for entertainment” (Kline & Burnstein, 340). Tablets and smart phones may push bloggers to share fiction tales with their readers in installments. This has begun in terms of mass media stories already. There are many examples of fan fiction sites on the Internet. These sites provide alternate stories for what is being seen on television or in movies, and many are updated daily with the latest “chapter” of the story. In a sense, these sites are already taking blogging (although they are not called that) into the realm of fiction writing.

Another area which some bloggers are already exploring is that of multimedia publishing. Saffo thinks, “Especially for the younger generation, the place where blogging can get real interesting is not when everybody is a writer but when everybody is a video or multimedia producer” (Kline & Burnstein, 339). Some bloggers are already creating slideshows of pictures or uploading podcasts of their post so that the readers can listen to the post in the voice of the blogger instead of reading it. Saffo believes that “blogging is only a piece of a much larger trend in which we are crossing over from a mass media age to a personal media age” (Kline & Burnstein, 340). This personal media

age may create a resurgence of the personal blog as very few social networking sites provide the means to post text, pictures, music, and video to one location and provide a means for only those others who may be interested to provide feedback on a specific work.

Whatever role blogs play in the future, Stefanac is certain of one thing, “whether or not the millions of blogs and related social networks growing up online today will bear fruits as worthy is yet to be seen, but it seems to be an experiment that is worth our time and effort, and perhaps, even our hearts” (33). Blogging began the social networking genre and where it is going can only be imagined, but, like Stefanac, I believe that it is worth pursuing.

## Chapter 5: Using Arendt to Navigate the Future of Communication Technology

The relation between Hannah Arendt's philosophy and personal blogs begins a journey of expanding the application of Arendt's understanding of public, private, and social into the era of social media and beyond. By utilizing Arendt's understanding of these realms we can gain a better understanding of the global world in which social media and other interpersonal mediated communication play a large role. Arendt helps us to move our understanding of this "new" world to a much deeper level.

The role of communication technology in interpersonal communication will only intensify as more individuals begin to use social networking and the Internet. Current and future generations will grow up with more access to information and the ability to share more with others than any previous generation. This information overload will affect interpersonal communication to an extent that has yet to be experienced; however, because these future generations will be born into a communication glut, it will not appear as an overload of information or an invasion of privacy to them. Unless there is a turn which reinstates the need for privacy and a general desire not to live a completely mediated, social life, as social networking allows, future generations will share anything and everything with anyone, creating a form of the social realm which concerned Arendt.

Although Arendt may not have imagined the technology of the Internet, her research lends itself easily to an examination of the medium. Arendt's concern with the social was that it was consuming the private and the public and making them indistinguishable from each other. Personal blogging, although available to all, does not fit into the realm of the social, but within the public realm, because the blog author and readers have a shared interest in the topic which the blog addresses. However, as

interpersonal technology moves forward and more and more people choose to engage in sharing information through social networking sites and personal blogs, the blurring of the public and social may become greater.

Reexamining Arendt's public, private, and social in terms of today's technological world begins our journey. As time evolves, so too does the overall understanding of the meaning of specific terms. For Arendt, the private realm was that which would not be shared with others; it evolved to include the family or very close confidantes; today, the private is truly the realm of the intimate or body. The public, for Arendt, meant the polis or community. Doing for the polis meant doing what was best for the community at large. In today's technological world, that community could be a virtually known community and, therefore, the members of the community do not need to live in close proximity to one another, but need to share the same common goals for the community and share common interests. For Arendt, the social was "one superhuman family" (1998, 29).

Today the social includes anyone and everyone connected to the Internet. The understanding of each of these terms has evolved to coincide with the changes in the way humans live and communicate with each other. The most consistent of these terms is public because to Arendt, and today, public means living with others outside of the household. The public is the realm for people to demonstrate their uniqueness and individuality, to stand out from others while, at the same time, fitting in and working towards a common goal. This common goal remains—do what is best for the community and not what is best for the individual. The goal of the public is to make life better for the community as a whole.

Arendt had many concerns with the growth of mass society and the creation of the social realm. For Arendt, the social realm created a loss of freedoms for people; because the social created a sense of belonging by going along with the majority, Arendt feared that the social realm would cause people to give up many of their freedoms in order to “fit in” with everyone else. It was this type of behavior that Arendt witnessed first-hand with the Nazis and that created a lifelong disdain for following the crowd without thought or reflection.

In order to apply Arendt’s philosophy fruitfully to today’s information-rich society, some liberties must be taken. The use of the evolved meaning of the terms is the first liberty. Utilizing Arendt’s philosophy to examine a type of world which she did not fully anticipate is the second. And, finally, the liberty to apply her philosophy to communication technologies and an ever-changing technological world must be taken. A careful and deliberate reading of her work allows for it to be applied to today’s ever-changing world. Arendt herself stated that anything that was put into writing must be let go and observed to determine how others might use it (1998, xx). It is this kind of forward thinking that allows us to apply her work to all communication technology, specifically personal blogging.

Another aspect of Arendt’s work that should be examined in terms of personal blogging is that of storytelling. Arendt believed that storytelling was more focused on human experience than philosophy. It is the aspect of storytelling which makes personal blogs worth reading, and worth visiting again and again. The blog tells a story, the story of everyday life for an individual. This story resonates with readers because they may have experienced similar events, they may find the story amusing or touching, and/or

they may share a common interest in what the blogger writes about. Arendt's interest in storytelling may be applied and utilized to gain a better understanding of why someone may start a personal blog.

Simon Swift, in *Hannah Arendt*, examines Arendt's interest in storytelling and explains how it helped to move the idea of the public and her understanding of community to a deeper level. Swift explains:

Story telling proved to be particularly enabling in her attempt to understand events that take place at the limits of what can be understood...Storytelling, as cultural anthropologists have long recognised, is also traditionally the way in which cultures order their understanding of themselves; by being put into the form of a narrative, a series of events can be understood, and so it can be communicated to a wider audience and remembered by the community. If stories help us to understand, if they make events intelligible, they also presuppose an idea of community inherent in the act of telling, which involves at once the teller of the story, the hero of the action, and the listener or reader who stands back, judges it and responds to it. In this sense, too, storytelling already describes another key idea of Arendt's thought: that free thinking is an activity that can only really go on in the presence of others, in a community, rather than in the quiet withdrawal and meditation demanded by theory (6-7).

Arendt believed that storytelling helped to focus on the human experience and grow community. After all, the best way to share experiences with others and with future generations would be to tell a memorable story so that it could be shared with others.

In order to move forward in this research some modifications must be made to Arendt's philosophy in order to apply it to interpersonal communication technologies. For this purpose we will use the understanding of the private realm as intimate; we will take the public realm to mean community; and the social realm will still be applied as "one superhuman family" (Arendt, 1998, 29) in which oversharing may become normal and accepted behavior. Through an in-depth reading of Arendt, these interpretations are not altering Arendt's terms, but adapting them to the twenty-first century.

Although social media networks, such as Facebook and Google+, have emerged as the chosen form of interpersonal mediated communication for many, personal blogs portray the dichotomy between public and private more clearly. As was mentioned in Chapter 4, bloggers form a community. This community comes together due to similar interests and/or life experiences. The individuals may not live in the same city, state, or even country, but they have similar interests and can connect through the Internet and personal blogs to share their interests with others or, in the case of a personal blog about someone's life, to share stories and experiences with each other, possibly even offering suggestions or solutions to a problem. Blogger ChristySwin explains: "I have to say that I chat with people who have much different views than mine and find it refreshing. We all seem to be on equal footing. No one cares too much about age, socio-economics and other things that could get in the way of a friend. We all just seem to be people who care, at least about a lot of the same things". Many times these online connections can lead to face-to-face meetings, phone calls or private emails with others whom the blogger or reader may never have the opportunity to meet otherwise. Much like the salons during

World War II, the blog allows people from many different walks of life to share ideas without being judged for their financial, political, or societal status.

As with any community, the members have guidelines about what information they will and will not share with other members of the community. Serfaty explains the need to keep some things private: bloggers are “highly aware of the public nature of their writings and they accordingly construct a narrative that has very little to do with their inner being” (32). By maintaining some form of boundary regarding what a blogger will share and what he or she will keep private, blogs allow a community to form where oversharing is not the norm, but the exception. Liberty, a blogger, explains that private details are shared through other media if there is a closer relationship between a blogger and a reader, but most of the time the blog does not share private details with everyone who reads it:

We may only update each other through our Blogs or email or IM, but we try to stay in touch and keep up to date with each other’s lives. Even if a friendship has not developed into a face to face relationship, it may still be with someone to whom I confide deepest fears, hopes, dreams and goals or might ask for help or offer assistance in the ways I could if I felt they were in need.

These friendships may originate through a person’s blog, but his or her blog is not where the private details and struggles of life are shared. Those details are reserved for close friends or family. Although the blogging genre may have invented oversharing, most personal bloggers have a definite boundary as to what they will or will not share on their blog.

Oversharing can be uncomfortable for the person who shared too much, but most especially for the people the information was shared with. Many times, the information which is shared may be intimate details regarding the blogger's life, making his or her life shallow by living only in public (Arendt, 1998), but the readers may not know how to respond or deal with the information shared. By having personal boundaries regarding what to share and what not to share, bloggers can minimize the possibility of oversharing. Petronio and others have established the Boundary Management theory so that these personal guidelines can be analyzed and used to help establish boundaries for others.

One benefit of social media, especially blogging, is that those people can have an opinion but only people who want to hear it will visit the blog and read it. By posting this information on his or her blog, the blogger may find others who agree with him or her and therefore will have an outlet for boasting. As a genre which has overcome hostility and abuse (Perseus Publishing Editors, 22), personal blogs are a medium where narcissism may be accepted because the blog's readers probably agree with the blogger.

The possibility of collaboration can be seen as one of the great benefits of blogging. Any type of idea or post may encourage others to share their thoughts on a topic. These thoughts may lead to a solution or they may lead to a collaboration of the original blogger and the reader; it may even lead to a collaborative effort among several people. Collaboration through personal blog--what a wonderful use of technology. Imagine using this collaboration for a scholarly work—to be able to work with colleagues from around the globe almost instantaneously. The possibilities are endless. A scholar from England would be able to collaborate with a scholar from China and another from the United States and the intellectual material that could be produced due to this

collaboration would be unprecedented and would possibly move the area of study forward at a faster rate than ever before.

The comment feature, which almost all bloggers enable when setting up their blogs, allows for the reader and blogger to engage in a conversation, or dialogue, about the topic of the original post. Because more than one person may comment on a post, there is also the possibility that the dialogue could grow to include others. Other than collaboration, this dialogue provides an outlet for people to share stories or make a connection while having a personal connection with the blogger and other readers which allows for the conversation to grow larger than it may offline.

Another benefit of personal blogs is that there is no gatekeeper. No one except the blogger can edit what is written and possibly change the intended meaning. The blogger decides what information is shared and which words will be used to share the stories. This lack of a gatekeeper allows for personal blogs to be a more natural form of CMC than others. This allows for the blog posts and comments to take on a conversational tone. Just as with a conversation, anyone can join in with opinions and comments.

Blogging is about sharing ideas, making connections, and interacting with others. Personal blogs allow for people to carry on conversations with anyone anywhere in the world, making the world appear larger because of the number of connections and smaller because of the immediacy of communication. The interaction created through personal blogging creates a sense of community and expands the blogger's circle of contacts to those who read his or her blog, even if they do not always agree with the blogger.

Because blogging provides a community feel to our mediated world, it provides a positive model for navigating the digital world in which we live. The fact that many

bloggers have established boundaries regarding what information is shared and what is private provides a good example of how and what to communicate to others. It is the boundaries and the shared interests which place personal blogging in the realm of the public, in terms of community, and not in terms of the social. Personal blogs are about sharing ideas and events that happen in the everydayness of life and discussing these events, as well as other topics, with other people. These other people read the blog because they are interested in the blogger and what he or she communicates.

Unlike some other forms of mediated communication, the blog allows individuals to communicate *with* each other and not *to* each other. The ability for bloggers to read comments posted by others, and potentially comment back, creates a dialogic space where ideas can be exchanged and discussed. Arnett and Arneson state that “interpersonal communication that seeks to confirm the other in diversity and difference works to understand and address the historicity of the communicators and the conversational context” (30). Knowing that the historical moment in which we live involves CMC and all of the benefits and trials that entails, the ability to work within the diversity as opposed to against it can create a more harmonious community for all.

Arnett and Arneson continue that “dialogue is not meant for the ethereal, but for those willing to walk with others through the mud of everyday life” (32). If reading, commenting, and acting on the posts of personal blogs does not demonstrate the willingness to “walk with others through the mud of everyday life”, it would be difficult to find a medium which would do so. The blogger looks for advice, suggestions, and friendship to know that he or she is not alone in the everyday minutiae that is life in the twenty-first century.

Writing posts, reading comments, and responding to comments allows the blogger to learn more about him- or herself and about the people who read and comment. Arnett and Arneson state that “we must carve a human future in an era of technology and activities of today’s world—a future in which public respect for person, text, and historical moment can still be a guide” (75). This project demonstrates that blogging may provide the first foray into that future. Allowing others to glimpse in through the open window at the blogger’s life creates the human experience through the moment necessary to slow down, focus on others, and interact with others on a regular basis.

A focus on the other is always present in personal blogging. A blogger realizes that his or her blog will be read by other people. After a certain amount of time, in which the blogger and reader learn about each other, the blogger may begin to write with a specific person or persons in mind. Many bloggers notice that as they get to know their “regular” readers, their style of writing shifts so that the readers will be comfortable with it. As mentioned in Chapter 1, it is almost impossible to write without some audience, even if it is a future self, in mind. Bloggers must also take into account the affect that their writing may have on others. Not only are the readers affected by what is written, but if the blog post is about another person that person may also be affected by it, either in a good or bad way. It is important for bloggers to remember that their writing does impact others.

One of the reasons that personal blogging creates a community feel is that the writing is real. The person behind the screen typing the blog is a real person, there is no one hiding behind an avatar on a person blog. The blogger is a real person, typing honest posts about stories, news items, problems, and funny moments in real life. Blogs are real.

The people behind the blogs are real. The readers are real. The interaction and dialogue are real. There is no virtual persona being used on a personal blog. The reason that personal blogs are written is because the blogger wants to connect with other people who have similar interests or similar life experiences. Blogging is about communication and shared experiences. Blogging does not separate or distance; blogging draws people together through shared stories.

Not only are blogs honest, those that have regular readers are very well written. Bloggers edit, revise, and focus their writing to produce a quality post based on the topic being discussed. If a blogger is sharing a knitting pattern, the post may look completely different than a post from the same blogger sharing a story about something that he or she saw at work or something that his or her kid did that was funny. Bloggers want to tell their story; they want to write good posts. Bloggers want people to read and comment on their posts; otherwise, the blog is just a place to store memories without feedback.

The blogs of today have one thing in common with the original blogs—bloggers still share links of interest with others. Those links may be to other blogs that the person likes to read or they may be to other websites that share information that is of interest to the blogger. These links provide a trail for the readers to follow if they enjoy the first blog and are looking for other blogs that are similar or other websites which share a similar topic. Blogs provide a map through the blogosphere for those who choose to follow the links.

When an event occurs that affects many people, personal blogs may be able to get information out faster than mainstream media. If an event, such as Hurricane Katrina, Superstorm Sandy, or September 11<sup>th</sup> occurs, it may be reported by bloggers before the

news services can get the story out. Because there are no gatekeepers in blogging, there is no need for the editor or producer to approve the content of the story before getting it out to the public. Also, the blogger may be experiencing the event first-hand. If that is the case, the blogger's account of the situation may be more accurate and more heartfelt than the evening news would provide. Hearing the story from someone who is experiencing it allows the event to seem more real and provides a deeper connection to what is happening than hearing the news from a reporter.

As with all public writing, the blogger assumes a co-ownership of information with his or her readers. The blogger uses a good faith judgment that the readers will not share what is posted on the blog with anyone that it should not be shared with. This is especially true if the blogger established a password-protected link to the information. Although bloggers understand that what is posted on the Internet is posted for everyone there is still an assumed good faith agreement that the information will not be used in harmful or inappropriate ways, especially with those readers who have developed a relationship with the blogger. An example of this, which is well-known, is that of Heather Armstrong. Heather assumed that anyone who read her blog regularly would not share information posted with her boss. Heather posts under a pseudonym, dooce, and does not mention her place of employment by name. Unfortunately, someone at her place of work found her personal blog and shared something Heather had written with her boss. Heather was fired from her job, even though the name of the company was not mentioned. Because Heather was the first person this happened to, being fired for a personal blog post is termed being "dooiced". Trust is an important part of communication—trust that the information shared is between those people that were present; trust that the

information will not be shared if asked not to share it; and trust that the other person feels the same way about the conversation. Unfortunately, this does not always occur.

Blogging takes the conversation to a global level.

Personal blogging allows people to communicate about shared interests and life experiences. Blogging allows individuals to create their own personal brand. The style of writing and subject of the blog begins to build the brand. The design of the blog, even if it is a standard template, brings in some of the personality of the blogger and allows others to see it. The “About Me” section, which most blogs have, allows for a glimpse of the individual and what he or she perceives as the information that the reader may want to know about the blogger. Blogging is truly about the individual and who he or she is. By designing his or her blog with photos, colors, and layout the blogger places his or her personal stamp on the Internet.

Media brings us back to a time of community and conversation. Paul Levinson states that the more “technological communications media evolve” the more “they tend to increasingly replicate the pre-technological or human communication environments of the real world” (9). Continuing, he explains that “technological communication has attempted to overcome the limitations of space and time that are a part of pre-technological environments” (11). It is these limitations that the Internet has helped to alleviate. The more bells and whistles that are created for technology, Levinson argues, the more that mediated communication appears to revert back to having a face-to-face conversation with someone. Levinson goes on to give examples of the telegraph evolving into the telephone and black and white television adding color, making them more like real life than their predecessors. Likewise, blogging has made communicating via

computer more like having a conversation than sending an email. Blogging takes us back to a communal feel to communication. Blogging helps us recreate the dialogue that other CMC has taken away. However, blogging goes one step further and allows that dialogue to become global.

Technology is referred to as the “secondary orality” by Walter Ong (Ong, 65). A return back to a culture where conversation and oral storytelling were passed on from generation to generation. Ong explains that:

Secondary orality generates a sense for groups immeasurably larger than those of primary oral culture—McLuhan’s ‘global village.’ Moreover, before writing, oral folk were group-minded because no feasible alternative had presented itself. In our age of secondary orality, we are group-minded self-consciously and programmatically. The individual feels that he or she, as an individual, must be socially sensitive. Unlike members of a primary oral culture, who are turned outward because they have had little occasion to turn inward, we are turned outward because we have turned inward (66).

Ong demonstrates that a return to orality is different than the original because humans have looked into themselves and have decided that it was necessary to look outward. Ong is stating that as humans, we must communicate with and be concerned with the welfare of others because, as Aristotle stated, humans are “social animals”.

One advantage that the secondary orality has over the first is the global reach that may be achieved. Blogs help to reach a global audience. Jacobs and Rushkoff agree that “given the growth rates and decidedly personal nature of the majority of new blogs, it’s probably more significant that blogs represent the current renaissance’s version of cross-

cultural exchange” (242). Sharing cultural customs and well as learning about cultural diversity in terms of traditions, laws, and political awareness has increased tenfold since the founding of the Internet and has taken on a more personal aspect thanks to blogging. Instead of reading a news story about an event or cultural tradition, personal blogs allow readers to hear first-hand about it. The story of Malala Yousufzai, shared in Chapter 4, provides a personal account of what it is like to live under Taliban rule. Although many people around the world have heard about the awful acts of the Taliban, Yousufzai’s blog and the media attention it received after her shooting, allowed global citizens to understand what it must be like to live in terror every day. Personal blogs provide a glimpse into an individual’s life, the cultural traditions of another country, and the political climate in other parts of the world.

What this research hoped to accomplish was to provide a background into the social media genre and offer some suggestions on how to navigate the digital world of the twenty-first century with eyes wide open and with a deliberate look towards the future of mankind. The Internet provides a way for community to grow through shared links, shared interests, and shared experiences; however, without some navigational tools one could get lost in the links. Getting lost in the links does not enable the conversation to continue or dialogue to happen. As digital citizens, we must make deliberate choices as to which links are followed and what information is shared. Sharing too much, as can easily happen without set boundaries, can lead to a very shallow life lived entirely in public. Arendt understood that both public and private were necessary in order to live a full life; utilizing her philosophy as guideline can enable this and future generations to maintain some aspect of a private life while still navigating the increasingly digital world.

The collaboration set in motion through personal blogging can only grow as more and more individuals get on the information highway. However, each person must use careful and educated judgment as to what information is reliable and which should be examined more closely. The Internet, in general, and blogging, specifically, provides a lot of information and allows information to be found easily, almost too easily. Human beings still need to know facts, history and traditions and not just know where to look it up. The loss of all traditions and history could occur if the human race relies on technology to store the information. One computer virus could completely erase the memory of the human race; that would be tragic. The links provided through blogs are excellent ways to find and share information with others, but that information needs to be learned and shared in other ways also. Relying on technology to store all memories and facts should never become an option for humanity.

Personal blogs allow people to share information with others, both known and unknown to the blogger. This information begins to tie these individuals together through shared interests or shared experiences. As these ties strengthen, even if the individuals have never met face to face it becomes evident that they are forming a community. As with most communities, it is important to follow Arendt's view of public and do what is best for the community and not for a specific individual. If this mindset can be extended through the blogosphere and eventually through all social media, the world—mediated or not—will become a much better place for everyone.

Through Arendt's understanding of public and social we can make clear distinctions between personal blogging and social networking sites. The first and most important distinction is that a personal blog is built around a specific topic. It is the

interest in this topic that draws the blogger and the readers together. This is very different than social networking sites which are more about self-promotion than any concern about community or shared interests / experiences. Social networking sites encourage narcissism and a focus on the individual, whereas personal blogs are about making connections and building community. Blogging invites people to disagree. Bloggers do not post for everyone to agree, but to begin a conversation about the content of the post. This allows for a diversity of opinions and a serious discussion about the issue. Blogging does not discriminate in terms of relationship to the blogger, sex, race, or social status—if the reader has an opinion, it is welcome. With most social networking sites the person must be approved or invited to see an individual's posts.

Personal blogging creates an opportunity for the readers to “know” the blogger. The readers are usually more than casual acquaintances, especially if they have read the blog for a while. Julie Powell, author of *Julie and Julia* acknowledges the relationship that can happen between a reader and a blogger when, in her “Acknowledgements” at the end of the book, she thanks “anyone who ever read my blog, ever ever, but especially all of you who became family to me” (309). The term “family” indicates a bond of some sort. Of course, it would be difficult to create such a deep connection without good storytelling.

Blogs tell stories. The blogger, at least one who can get and maintain an audience, must write well. Readers will point out errors in a blog post. Readers will not continue reading the blog if there are a lot of errors or the posts are poorly written. The blogger must take time to read, revise, and edit each story before posting it to his or her blog. Many readers only know the blogger through what he or she posts so if the blogger

expects people to take him or her seriously then he or she must take the time to proofread, edit, and revise a post before sending it to the blog. Quality writing is important in the blogosphere because that is the first impression that a reader has of the blogger. Arendt discusses the importance of storytelling in her work, stating that it is better at explaining the human experience than philosophy. If the story is to be memorable, it must be well-written.

Another difference between personal blogs and social networking sites is the format. A blog has a specific format with the latest entry placed at the top of the page; this is similar with social networking sites. However, the social networking site also posts other users' entries on the same page. These entries may or may not be related to the individual's post—they may be photos, cartoons, reposts of another person's entry, etc. With the blog, the posts are all from the same person and the comments are available only after opening a link. This allows the blog to maintain a cleaner experience where only the posts by the blogger are available on the main page. The continuity of content provides another distinction between the publicness of the blog—sticking to one topic and allowing others to provide insight, and the socialness of social networking—sharing everything that is remotely connected to the user.

Arendt provides the ground from which this examination of personal blogs begins. This project is the beginning of further research in the examination of the public, private, and social realms regarding interpersonal communication and CMC. Applying Arendt's work to our mediated world allows us to gain a deeper understanding of how CMC has changed the way we communicate and how to make informed decisions about what to communicate with others, and which others to communicate with.



## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> This information was obtained from Steven Kagle's books *American Diary Literature 1620-1799*; *Early Nineteenth-Century American Diary Literature*; and *Late Nineteenth-Century American Diary Literature*.

<sup>2</sup> For more information regarding Transcendentalism visit

<http://www.emersoncentral.com/transcendentalist.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the origin of the song and ride at Disney parks visit:

<http://disneyland.disney.go.com/disneyland/its-a-small-world/>

<sup>4</sup> For an example of the founding of a social network, for less than noble intentions, read *The Accidental Billionaires* by Ben Mezrich regarding the founding of Facebook.

<sup>5</sup> A search for definitive attribution for this statement led to disagreements as to who initially stated it.

Weinberger is the most attributed, but even on his blog ([hyperorg.com/blogger](http://hyperorg.com/blogger)), many argue that Inus and others may have made the statement first.

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