Becoming on YouTube: Exploring the Automedial Identities and Narratives of Australian Mummy Vlogging

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.
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Publications from this Thesis


Conference Papers from this Thesis


# Table of Contents

**List of Figures**

**Abstract**

**Introduction**
- Introducing the Site – YouTube
- Introducing the Subject – Elise (Mummy Vlogging)
- Introducing the Context – Motherhood Online
- Introducing the Problem – The Self
- Introducing the Influencers – The Network; The Convergence of People With Technology
- Introducing the Framework (and Argument) – Automediality
- Introducing the Method – Virtual (YouTube) Ethnography
- Introducing the Structure – This Thesis

**Chapter 1. Developing a Method: YouTube Ethnography**
- Arriving on YouTube
- Australian Mummy Vlogging on YouTube
- Constructing a “Field of Relations”
- Searching for Participants Step 1
- Searching for Participants Step 2
- Searching for Participants Step 3
- Establishing Criteria
- Adjusting The Criteria
- Establishing Authority Through *Practice*
- Rethinking Participation in Networked Digital Media
- Watching Vlogs and Participating (as a Lurker)
- Looking at the First Vlogs
- Ethical Considerations: Are Vlogs Public or Private? – A Relevant Methodological Case Study
- Conclusion

**Chapter 2. Becoming through Vlogging on YouTube; Becoming through the Automedia Diary**
- Becoming through Automedia
- Documenting Life and Making Memories
- “Day 921”: The Vlog as Diary
- “Hi YouTube, My Name’s Ash”
- A Private/Public Arena for the Self
- Maintaining a Cohesive Automedia Narrative
- Conclusion

**Chapter 3. Negotiating Motherhood: Using Confession and Intimate Self-Disclosure as a Relational Tool**
- Negotiating Motherhood: *Becoming* the Role
- Challenging Existing Images through Confession and Intimate Self-Disclosure
- Confession and Intimate Self-Disclosure as a Relational Tool
- Inviting Community
- Conclusion
Chapter 4. Intimate Networked Publics: Co-Creating The Automedial Self............. 141
Mummy Vlogging as Intimate Networked Public....................................................... 144
The Networked Shaping of Mummy Vlogs............................................................... 148
Mummy Vlogging “Norms”: Joining an Existing Practice and Community........... 149
Surveilling and Governing Conduct: The Performance Team................................. 160
How does this Develop our Understanding of Automedia?: Automedia as Co-Created Texts and Subjects................................................................. 165
Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 167

Chapter 5. Authenticity, a Commodity................................................................. 169
Authenticity in Networks: A shift from Fragmented to Cohesive Identities............. 170
Vloggers as Influencers......................................................................................... 177
“I have a new vacuum cleaner”................................................................................ 179
Managing Authenticity; Self-branding and the Skill and Labour of Being an Influencer 185
Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 188

Chapter 6. Curating Life....................................................................................... 190
Looking at the Footage of Children in Australian Mummy Vlogs: becsvlogs: OUR VERY FIRST VLOG! ................................................................. 193
Beginning a Child’s Digital Footprint: Parental Sharing Online.............................. 201
Managing Disclosure: Courtney from Behind The Olive Grove............................ 208
The importance of childhood memories in constructing the self............................. 213
Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 216

Chapter 7. The Ethics of Dealing with Deleted Lives............................................ 218
An overview of the problem .................................................................................. 219
Privacy and Ownership on Networked Digital Media............................................. 224
The Act of Deleting ............................................................................................... 229
Exploring the Implications for Auto/biography ..................................................... 234
Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 239

Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 241
Areas for Future Research .................................................................................... 247

YouTube Content Cited ....................................................................................... 253

References............................................................................................................ 260
List of Figures

Figure 1 *Time* Magazine Person of The Year 2006 ............................................................. 2
Figure 2 Search function on the YouTube homepage ............................................................. 46
Figure 3 “Australian Mummy Vlogger” typed in search function .......................................... 46
Figure 4 Search results for “Australian Mummy Vlogger” ...................................................... 46
Figure 5 “Videos” on channel homepage menu .................................................................. 47
Figure 6 “Uploads” under “Videos” ..................................................................................... 47
Figure 7 “Liked Videos” in “Uploads” drop down menu ....................................................... 48
Figure 8 Join The Jacksons “Liked Videos” ......................................................................... 48
Figure 9 “Channels” on channel homepage menu ................................................................. 49
Figure 10 Join The Jackson’s Featured Channels .................................................................. 49
Figure 11 Standard video layout on YouTube ...................................................................... 50
Figure 12 Comments under Dominika Eve’s first vlog ........................................................ 51
Figure 13 Early channel banner for Elise Sheree ................................................................. 53
Figure 14 Channel banner for TeenMummy94 ................................................................. 54
Figure 15 Subscription count, number of views and number of likes .................................. 65
Figure 16 Ash’s first vlog on YouTube ................................................................................ 101
Figure 17 Recent channel banner for Join The Jacksons ...................................................... 102
Figure 18 First 10 videos uploaded by Ash .......................................................................... 104
Figure 19 10 Videos uploaded by Ash after Heidi’s birth .................................................... 104
Figure 20 Some of Ash’s first daily vlogs ............................................................................ 105
Figure 21 Some of Ash’s last daily vlogs ............................................................................. 106
Figure 22 First daily vlog uploaded by Ash ......................................................................... 106
Figure 23 Last daily vlog uploaded by Ash .......................................................................... 106
Figure 24 Join The Jacksons YouTube homepage ............................................................. 111
Figure 25 Join The Jacksons Facebook page ..................................................................... 111
Figure 26 Join The Jacksons Twitter page .......................................................................... 111
Figure 27 Piles of washing in Paige’s first vlog ................................................................. 122
Figure 28 Kim Kardashian West on the cover of *Mother&Baby* 2015 ......................... 123
Figure 29 Mel’s first vlog on YouTube ................................................................................ 125
Figure 30 Thumbnails and titles of videos uploaded by Australian mummy vloggers ....... 127
Figure 31 Title and description bar for Sharna and Chelsea’s first vlog .............................. 128
Figure 32 Charissa-jo’s comment under Millie’s first vlog ............................................... 131
Figure 33 Kate’s first vlog on YouTube .............................................................................. 132
Figure 34 Screen shots from Sarah’s first vlog .................................................................. 134
Figure 35 Ash’s comment under Sarah’s first vlog ............................................................. 135
Figure 36 00:01 of Elise’s Introduction ................................................................................ 153
Figure 37 00:03 of Elise’s Introduction ................................................................................ 153
Figure 38 00:05 of Elise’s Introduction ................................................................................ 154
Figure 39 00:08 of Elise’s Introduction ................................................................................ 154
Figure 40 00:11 of Elise’s Introduction ................................................................................ 154
Figure 41 00:12-00:18 of Elise’s Introduction .................................................................... 155
Figure 42 Title and description bar below Simone’s first vlog ........................................... 156
Figure 43 Text across the screen in Bec’s first vlog ............................................................. 157
Figure 44 Gemma’s first vlog on YouTube ......................................................................... 158
Figure 45 Comment on Ash’s video .................................................................................. 163
Figure 46 Ash’s video responding to comment ................................................................. 164
Figure 47 Ash meets Elise ................................................................................................. 175
Figure 48 Dominika meets Jen ......................................................................................... 175
Abstract

‘Becoming on YouTube: Exploring the Automedial Identities and Narratives of Australian Mummy Vlogging’ examines 37 Australian mummy vloggers on YouTube and explores how these women construct and present their automedial identities and narratives in the participatory, networked digital space. Using a method of virtual ethnography, consisting of long-term observation and participation in the space, the thesis tracks how these women use vlogging to negotiate their social role as mothers, and construct their own performance of the role, in dialogue with all participants in the network including viewers, vloggers, technology, media, products and brands. Situating the automedial practice of vlogging as an intimate yet public process of ‘becoming’ that resembles the published diary online, this thesis finds that the automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vloggers are shaped and managed by community, reliant upon authenticity, include intimate and vulnerable others (children), and are ephemeral, always changing, appearing and disappearing. ‘Becoming on YouTube: Exploring the Automedial Identities and Narratives of Australian Mummy Vlogging’ contributes to scholarship in Communication and Media Studies, including Internet Research, particularly in the areas of Networked Digital Media and Identity, and to scholarship in Life Writing Studies, including Auto/Biography Studies, particularly in the area of contemporary digital life writing practices, and the emerging field of Automediality.
Introduction

“The appeal is that it’s authentic and about people. There’s nothing more interesting to real people (not Hollywood producers) than authentic stories told about other real people.” – Michael Strangelove (2010, p.65)

Introducing the Site – YouTube

In 2005, Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim launched YouTube, a video sharing service accessible to every computer with an internet connection (Lastufka, 2008). YouTube provided an interface in which users could upload, publish and view videos without high levels of technical knowledge (Burgess & Green, 2009). No limits were set on the number of videos users could upload. The site offered basic community functions such as linking to other users as friends, and it provided URLs and HTML code that enabled videos to be easily sent to others and shared and embedded in other websites (Burgess & Green, 2009).

The founders of YouTube assumed the site would be used primarily by families, to document and share memories, but were surprised when users began uploading clips about themselves (Lastufka, 2008). More and more people began using the site creating a genre known as vlogging (video blogging), an extension of blogging, involving individuals filming themselves and their lives on an ongoing basis (Lastufka, 2008). In 2006 Time Magazine named the Person of the Year “You”¹ (see Figure 1) cementing YouTube as “the number one site for sharing videos online”

¹ This issue of Time Magazine was published on 25 Dec, 2006. The cover of this issue can be viewed here: https://www.dropbox.com/s/jueoog1gfcwn0gx/Screenshot%202018-07-31%2007.00.00.png?dl=0
(Lastufka, 2008) and leading to its purchase by Google in 2006 for the sum of $1.65 billion US (Burgess & Green, 2009). Acknowledging how people were using the site, YouTube’s byline changed from “Your Digital Video Repository” to “Broadcast Yourself.” By 2008, YouTube consistently featured in the top ten most visited websites globally and hosted upwards of 85 million videos (Burgess & Green, 2009).

![Figure 1 Time Magazine Person of The Year 2006](image)

Today, thirteen years after its launch, YouTube is still one of the most popular sites globally. According to Donchev (2018) YouTube is now the 2nd most visited website in the world. A total of 1.3 billion people use YouTube with 300 hours of video being uploaded to the site every minute and almost 5 billion videos being watched on YouTube every single day (Donchev, 2018). In his book *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People* Michael Strangelove (2010) argues that the site’s “appeal is that it’s authentic and about people” (p. 65). He says, “[t]here’s nothing more interesting to real people ... than authentic stories told about other real people” (Strangelove, 2010, p. 65). YouTube offers a platform for sharing and
consuming ordinary people’s lives.

People vlog about all kinds of things on YouTube such as beauty, craft, sewing, DIY house renovations, cake decorating, car modifications, health products, lifestyle, veganism, pregnancy, motherhood, adoption, gender transitions, gaming, and so on. Vlogging is often used to document life, and, as argued by Tobias Raun (2012b, 2015), it can also be a transformative tool. People document their own transformations, be it the transformation of their home or nursery, the transformation of their bodies through pregnancy, weight loss, surgery, or in the case of Raun’s research, gender transition, and even the temporary physical transformation of the beauty vlogger going from bare face to glam, as I (Kennedy, 2016) and others explore (Maguire, 2015). There’s the permanent transformation of a house to a home, a woman into a mother, a man to a woman and a woman to man, both temporarily in drag, and permanently (Raun, 2015).

On YouTube you can watch the surgery your family member will undergo next week, or a time lapse of a nursery mural being painted. On YouTube you can get a glimpse of what it is like to live in a tiny house, or be a CEO, or live in another part of the world, or have a newborn baby. It is on YouTube that I was able to watch my father’s surgery and understand the internal composition of his new leg. I was able to watch my own surgery, to understand how my daughter was delivered into the world. I gained a glimpse of what it is like to do a PhD in other parts of the world and what my life would look like when I became a mother. YouTube is a database (Lovink, 2008) of global shared experience. This database is searchable and accessible to the point where YouTube has become a verb – “YouTube it” (Strangelove, 2010).
Introducing the Subject – Elise (Mummy Vlogging)

On the 21st of September, 2013, Elise, a young Australian mother, uploaded two videos to her YouTube channel (Elise Sheree, 2013a, 2013b). The two videos were the first product of what would become a successful YouTube career. The first of the two videos (Elise Sheree, 2013a) – a vlog (video blog) – begins in the early morning in Elise’s home. Elise, using a hand-held video camera, walks towards her five month old daughter who is sitting on their couch and says, “Good morning, Zara.” Elise keeps the camera on her daughter, Zara, zooming in and out as she asks, “Did you have a good sleep?” The vlog then cuts to “Daddy” kissing Zara goodbye. He is off to work. Now, for the first time, we see Elise. She is in her bedroom, still in her pajamas and with no make-up on. Zara is lying on the bed with toys placed around her in the hope of occupying her while Elise gets ready for the day. The vlog continues and we follow Elise and Zara throughout their day. Elise talks about Zara’s routine - her difficulty getting Zara down for her nap, and their plan for the day. We see Elise doing the washing up, Zara being dressed, and we follow their journey as they drive into the city to meet Daddy for lunch. The day ends with Elise sitting on the couch. It is dark outside and she excitedly tells the camera that they are having pizza for dinner. We see the pizza box being opened, a glimpse of their pizza, and then Elise signs off, “Thanks for watching. I’ll see you tomorrow.” and the vlog ends.

Elise’s first vlog is grainy, and the image does not quite fill the screen. There are thick black lines framing the footage indicating that the resolution isn’t high enough for the standard YouTube format. Elise uses interesting editing techniques, like speeding up the footage of her doing the washing up. The vlog, however, has an amateur, “home
video” feel. When Elise has the camera pointed at herself, it sometimes doesn’t have her whole face in the frame, rather a close up of her nose and lips. This indicates the type of camera Elise is using - one without a viewfinder that she can see through, which would allow her to adjust her positioning of the camera to ensure she is getting the intended shot in the frame. Elise is presumably using a camera with the viewfinder fixed on the back of the device – while capable of taking photos and videos, it is designed for the user to position themselves behind the lens and not in front of it. The viewfinders on modern cameras can be flipped in either direction – an adaption presumably made with the growing “selfie” trend in mind.

Over all, Elise’s vlog feels incredibly intimate, if mundane. The footage is of her home and her everyday routine. The viewer is allowed a glimpse of Elise’s (and Zara’s) everyday life; the ins and outs of which would not usually be seen by anyone other than those closest to Elise. Although nothing seemingly significant happens during their day, the sharing of everyday ordinary life, by everyday ordinary people is significant in and of itself. YouTube is a site for participatory culture (Jenkins, 2008), featuring user generated content which shifts the power balance between media industries and their consumers (Burgess & Green, 2009, p. 10). Like other networked digital media platforms, YouTube features the traditional media audience as producers of media content rather than just consumers (Z. Papacharissi, 2002, p. 643).

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2 Throughout this thesis I use the term networked digital media as defined by Meikle and Young (2012) in their book Media Convergence: Networked Digital Media in Everyday Life. Although there are other investigations of media convergence such as Dwyer (2010), Jensen (2010) and Jenkins (2008), in their book on media convergence Meikel and Young focus on the everyday uses of networked digital media (2012, p. 2). They state that “the significant characteristic of contemporary media is not just that they are digital but that they are also networked, enabling complex relationships of two-way communication” (Meikle & Young, 2012, p. 3). Rather than labels such as new media, which is unhelpful as all media was once new, and digital media, which is ambiguous as most media have been digitised, networked digital media refers to the unique social (two-way) media used by people in their everyday life, such as YouTube (Meikle & Young, 2012). Media, which as Jenkins (2008) asserts, ensure “every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms” (p. 3).
It is not just that anyone can make and share media that is interesting; it is also what people are making and sharing. Increasingly, people are sharing their intimate, everyday lives.

In his book chapter ‘Saving Lives: Digital Biography and Life Writing’ Paul Longley Arthur (2009) explains that the advances in digital technologies over the last few decades “have made it possible for ‘ordinary’ lives that had formerly left no trace, to be recorded and ‘saved’ for the future” (p. 44). Arthur (2009) argues that the 20th century advances in technology come at the same time as a “spectacular new chapter in the ‘democratic turn’ in history making” (p. 45). One that accepts that “knowledge should be available to anyone, not only experts” and that “all subjects are worthy of study and all kinds of lives and experiences should be recorded as accurately as possible” (Arthur, 2009, p. 45). Thus biography, and more broadly the field of Life Writing, has stretched its boundaries to include many forms of informal and unofficial personal records and stories about lives (Arthur, 2009, p. 46). Among the many new forms, Arthur includes videoblogging (vlogging) as one of the most important in the study of lives (Arthur, 2009, p. 49).

Digital storytelling using a video camera (now commonly built into mobile phones) is now one of the most prominent genres for recording personal histories. Videos posted to YouTube (launched in 2005) can reach an audience of hundreds of millions in an instant. Building upon the digital storytelling tradition that grew up around personal digital media devices in the 1990s, YouTube stands out as the iconic video-sharing service of the early years of the Web 2.0 environment. In its first years it has had no equivalent and no
rival. Very quickly it has become a major global channel – even a standard – for recording lives. Easy to use and remarkably flexible, it appeals to young and old and continues to engage huge numbers of new users daily. (Arthur, 2009, p. 49).

As Arthur explains, vlogs reflect a current Western obsession with documenting and recording the self. The digital practice of recording life on YouTube is part of the “broadcast era” (Garde-Hansen, Hoskins, & Reading, 2009). YouTube is a product of this participatory (Jenkins, 2008), peer-to-peer (Merrin, 2014), “memory boom” (Huysssen, 2003), where ordinary people are obsessed with recording and saving their lives (Arthur, 2009), making memories to revisit in the future. YouTube, with its infamous byline “Broadcast Yourself”, allows and encourages everyday individuals to document, edit and share their lives, acting as a “memory bank” (S. Smith & Watson, 2013) and building autobiographical archives which Eakin (2008) argues we later use to identify ourselves.

Vlogging in this manner, and by mothers, is growing in popularity around the world, particularly in Western countries. Successful vloggers such as UK mummy vlogger Anna Saccone, and her family the SACCONEJOLYs, for example, are attracting millions of subscribers and their daily or weekly videos attract, on average, over half a million views per video. In Australia, this practice is relatively new. When I began this research in late 2014/early 2015 I could only identify forty Australian and New Zealander mothers on YouTube. At that point, the longest standing Australian mother had been on YouTube for five years, although she had been uploading inconsistently. Three years later the number of Australian mothers sharing their lives on YouTube
has more than doubled. The Facebook group dedicated to these mothers, called Australian Vlogging Mums, started in 2017, has over 100 members.

I was initially attracted to this sub-genre of vlogging by a surge of Australian mothers who appeared on YouTube between 2013-2015. I was drawn in by the familiarity of Australian lives and subjects (accents, locations and products). I considered what I was watching to be profound: Australian mothers opening the doors to their intimate family lives and choosing to be mothers in public – to create public documents (document referring to the act rather than the product), material (as well as ephemeral), communal and therefore accountable representations of everyday life. Most of all, I was struck by how these women were creating themselves online – engaging in the act of self-representation while performing their social role as mothers and in the process creating themselves. In the opening pages of her book, Girls, Autobiography, Media (2018) Emma Maguire dedicates her work to all the “women who, despite it all, insist on taking up space.” This captures my interest in Australian mummy vloggers and their vlogs. I am in awe of the everyday women who insist on being seen and heard, and I argue what they do in the spaces they create and maintain online is significant, valuable, and worthy of investigation and analysis.

**Introducing the Context – Motherhood Online**

Mothers vlogging their lives, as Elise does, continues an important practice in recent history of women bringing traditionally private and domestic subject matter that has previously gone unseen, such as domestic labour, into the public sphere. Vlogging succeeds previous online practices used by mothers such as discussion boards and...
blogging, in which the act of sharing everyday, ordinary life has been heralded radical, political and empowering. Vlogging is therefore part of a rich context of women trying to bring their roles as wives and mothers, and discussions surrounding these roles, into the public sphere. Women who share their everyday lives as mothers are not only bringing traditionally private information into the public sphere, but they are also showing the realities of their lives, contrasting what many scholars have argued is the romanticised and unrealistic images of motherhood that have been circulated in mainstream media over the last few decades as argued by Douglas and Michaels (2004).

Increasingly, the images of motherhood in Western society have been idealised and romanticised to show unrealistic and unachievable standards of perfection (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Friedan, 1963; Henderson, Harmon, & Houser, 2010). As numerous research studies have shown, women can feel isolated and alone in their attempts to meet the social expectations of being a “good mother” and can subsequently find it difficult to develop a strong sense of self in their new roles (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Friedan, 1963; Morrison, 2010). As a result of increasing social pressure and a sense of isolation women are sometimes left with feelings of frustration, anxiety, guilt and failure (Akass, 2012; A. A. Berger, 2014; Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Lopez, 2009). These feelings are only increased by a growing number of women who find themselves geographically isolated from their places of origin, family and support structures (Morrison, 2010).

In an attempt to combat social pressures, isolation, and most importantly, a lost sense of self, women have created new spaces for discourse and personal discovery online.
Since the late 1980s/early 1990s thousands of women have been gathering online, sharing experiences, forming communities and exploring their sense of identity in relation to their roles as mothers. Online forums, bulletin boards, personal blogs, and now vlogs, have allowed women to create spaces for dialogue about their experiences of pregnancy and motherhood and to take back the conversation, renegotiate images of motherhood in society, and, crucially, to deliberately engage in constructing, discovering and presenting a self of their own making. These online spaces are radical and empowering, giving women an environment in which to explore, re-discover, reclaim and play with their identities. These spaces give women a voice in society, bringing traditionally private subject matter into the public domain, generating experienced-based knowledge and information that challenges expert driven discourse about women’s experiences (Moravec, 2011). Online spaces are empowering as they provide women with fast access to information and knowledge, allowing women to exercise their agency and giving them a sense of control and ownership over their experiences (Arnold, 2003, 2011; Thornham, 2015). Online spaces also allow women to challenge traditional ideas about motherhood, as mothers feel safe online to say what they really think and feel (Arnold, 2011; Moravec, 2011; Samuel, 2011).

Lori Kido Lopez (2009) explores mommy blogging, a precedent to vlogging, as a radical act that challenges and reinterprets representations of motherhood in response to a long history of women struggling to define their identity in relation to their role as mothers. Lopez states that mommy blogging “truly is a radical act with the potential to change the discourse surrounding motherhood” (p. 731). Considering both society’s construction, and the media’s portrayal of motherhood in recent years as an idealised and unachievable image of perfection, Lopez argues that identifying as a
mother in society today is a contentious issue, causing many women frustration and anxiety. “It is no wonder that women are afraid to embrace the identity of mother – the entire concept of being a mother is overwhelming and imbued with failure. Once women become mothers, their lives are taken over by society’s strict sets of rules and expectations” (p. 732).

Blogging, however, does have the potential to change the discourse surrounding motherhood, and can be argued to be a “radical act”, simply because it allows women to share the “unexciting, every day, in between stuff”, which Alice Bradley (2005) argues is revolutionary because it delves into new territory, showing different pictures of motherhood than what we have previously seen in the mainstream media (Lopez, 2009). Instead of the doting, loving mother, these “radical” pictures include “women who are frazzled by the demands of their newborn baby, who have no clue what to do when their child gets sick, who suffer from postpartum depression and whose hormones rage uncontrollably” (Lopez, 2009, p. 732).

While, mommy blogs are often defined as online journals or personal diaries in which day-to-day events are frequently and chronologically recorded (Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008; Henderson et al., 2010; Lopez, 2009; Morrison, 2011; Serfaty, 2004). In fact, Lopez (2009) suggests that the personal mommy blog is an extension of women’s earlier forms of “narrativizing” personal experience (such as diaries and journals) (p. 735). As such, personal mommy blogging is often referred to as an autobiographical practice (Morrison, 2011, 2014) filled with the author’s life and experiences (Lenhart & Fox, 2006); their personality, passions, and point of view (Nardi et al., 2004, p. 42).
Although reasons why people blog include a desire to document life experiences, express opinion, have an outlet for catharsis, inspire their creative juices and participate in a community (Lopez, 2009; Nardi et al., 2004), Morrison argues that mothers have twin and equal motivations in writing their personal mommy blogs: personal self-expression and community development (Miller & Shepherd, 2004; 2011, p. 38).

The personal self-expression of mommy blogs along with the use of narrative and informal language help to form and develop intimate communities online as the readers “feel a tremendous closeness and loyalty to the blog’s author, as if they are reading the words of a close friend instead of stranger” (Lopez, 2009, p. 734). The content of the blogs cover a range of topics, not just about motherhood and children, but also “popular culture, food, current events, politics, their town, the weather, financial issues, their husband …[n]ething is off limits” (Lopez, 2009, p. 734). However, mommy blogs and mommy bloggers are often dismissed as just discussing “feelings”, “families”, “the joys and struggles of parenting” and not “important” things (Camahort, 2006). This is a struggle that Lopez states women have faced throughout history in literary practices such as traditional autobiography.

Aimée Morrison states that personal mommy blogging “is a purposive and deliberate social engagement, a creative as well as interpersonal practice that mitigates the assorted ills (physical isolation, role confusion, lack of realistic role models, etc.) and celebrates the particular joys of contemporary mothering, especially in the earliest years of parenting” (Morrison, 2010). In her survey of almost 250 bloggers, Morrison
(2011) found that ultimately mothers used blogging as a safe space and avenue of release, where they could talk about their feelings, struggles, and ultimately express things they didn’t feel comfortable saying in society, as one mommy blogger states “[I blog] to get out a different part of myself that I can’t express otherwise in today’s society” (p. 41).

There are added dimensions to mummy vlogging, beyond bringing the private into the public sphere. Mummy vlogging allows a mastery of the aesthetic performance of life and identity. Vlogging provides a greater capacity to “show” rather than “tell”. Many bloggers use images (and different types of images, too), but there is a different skill set and mastery involved in creating videos. The editing skills and software involved are different. The practice of filming and editing is arguably more time consuming, and the possibilities of circulation and scope are greater. This is largely to do with the interface and algorithm of YouTube. In order to find a blogger one must know what to search for, but on YouTube you can stumble across mummy vloggers simply by visiting the site. For example, a video by a popular mummy vlogger may appear on your YouTube homepage as a suggestion (among your recommended or trending videos).

The Australian mothers included in this study take on the name “mummy vloggers”. This is a name that comes up repeatedly in the first vlogs and is used consistently throughout each mother’s presence on YouTube. The name mummy vlogger is an evolution of mummy blogger. Vlogging can be seen as an extension of the discursive, communal, yet mainly textual practice of blogging as explored by the scholars such as Lopez and Morrison. As the genre develops, mothers on YouTube are taking on other
names too, such as YouTubers and YouTube Mums (or Moms in other parts of the world). Mumpreneurs is another name gaining in popularity (a play on entrepreneur), and more generally, Creators. The latter, signals the type of product that is produced – one that is crafted and developed, requiring creativity in each stage of its production from filming to editing to sharing, and importantly, one that is crafted to be consumed.

**Introducing the Problem – The Self**

Ultimately, the product being crafted by mummy vloggers is the self. Filming and sharing everyday life, as mummy vloggers do, is an important identity forming and performing practice, which becomes apparent in the second video Elise uploads.

Her second video (Elise Sheree, 2013b), uploaded on the same day as the first is a “sit down” video, a different style to the “follow me” vlog, but an equally common type of video in the genre of vlogging, and the sub-genre of mummy vlogging. In this video Elise is sitting in what appears to be her back yard. Behind her we can see the top of a wooden fence, presumably indicating the boundary of her property, and her backdrop is made up of trees and green foliage. Later, Elise refers to this backdrop as “the bush,” suggesting a wilderness and sense of being cut off. There’s a stillness in the shot, the trees seem static behind her in the grainy, low resolution image, again framed by thick black lines on the YouTube webpage. Elise’s hair is out and she has make-up on, a contrast to how she appears at the beginning of her first video, and she begins to explain. “So I’m a new Mum and we only just moved out to the Hills in Sydney, Australia.” She continues, “I don’t know about all the other new mums out
there but I was just lost in the beginning for tips and just what to do and I was doing whatever I could just to find reassurance that I was doing the right thing.” Elise explains that one of things she came across in her desperation for information as a new mother was YouTube videos predominantly made by mothers overseas (in the UK and USA). “I came across [um] some channels where it was like reality TV shows and I love watching them. ... So I thought, oh my gosh, I’m going to do this ... I'm going to try and do it ... every day for a month and see how I go.”

Elise states that she loves watching other mums on YouTube because “it makes [her] feel good about being a stay at home mum”, it gives her tips about her daughter’s development, she enjoys the details of simple things like the products other mums are using, and “it’s amazing to think that you’ll be able to look back on their [the vloggers’] lives.” Her motivation for giving vlogging a go herself is complex. On one hand there’s the desire to see relatable Australian lives. Elise states that she “tried so hard to find some [vlogs] that were from Australia” and in the absence of these she thought she would try it herself. There’s also the appeal of documenting this time in her life, as her daughter grows. She says “it’ll be an awesome thing for me and my husband to look back on.”

Ultimately, however, the vlogs are a personal project and challenge. The main subject of the videos is Elise. It is her life, her everyday routine, her struggles, her thoughts and feelings that predominantly fill the videos. She is in control of what is filmed and published. She dictates and curates the identities and lives being shared in her videos. She also articulates the practice as a personal challenge, an opportunity for growth and self-fulfillment. In her second video, titled SETTING A CHALLENGE, she says “I
want to learn how to use the programs, to edit the videos, ‘cause I’m quite creative, and kind of being a new mum sometimes is a little bit boring so I need something to fill my days.”

What Elise has already begun with her two videos is shaping and presenting an identity online. Ultimately, vlogging for Elise is a project of the self. Vlogging, for Elise, and for the other Australian mummy vloggers included in this study is a technology or technique of the self and reconstructive endeavour in modern social life. As Anthony Giddens (1991) states in his seminal work Modernity and Identity, “what the individual becomes is dependent on the reconstructive endeavours in which she or he engages” (p. 75). Seemingly, one of the reconstructive endeavours at the core of modern social life is personal narrative. Personal narratives appear in every aspect of society – they are indulged, consumed and even demanded (as evident in scholarship such as the special issue of Social Semiotics titled The star and celebrity confessional edited by Sean Redmond (2008b)). New ways of documenting and presenting the self are constantly being developed and tried with the aid of technology. The thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations that fill personal narratives, coupled with the technology used to present them, form the self and identity in modern social life.

The reason our personal narratives (or the reconstructive endeavours that we engage in) are so important, is because we discover ourselves through their formation and articulation. If writing is thinking, narrativising is being, is existing. In Western society we must actively create our narratives in order to know and understand ourselves. Such is the emphasis on “doing” in the West on “making” memories, on
“documenting” our lives, on “sharing” experiences – all of these activities are deliberate attempts to construct personal narrative – to construct the self. Giddens (1991) observes that this is the era of “the project of the self” (p. 71) – a reflexive project focusing on personal narratives and the thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations that fill them – the individual amounts to the reconstructive endeavours that he or she engages in (p. 75). The reconstructive endeavours we engage in are aided and influenced by the technologies we use. As Bolter (1996) states “our conceptions of self are related to our interactions with communications media” (p. 123). In fact, the technologies we use become part of our identity, hinting back to Marshal McLuhan’s (1964) famous phrase “the medium is the message”, or in this case, the medium is the identity.

What is offered in these vlogs is intimacy and authenticity, achieved through the confession of thoughts, feelings and experiences. Within the first few seconds of Elise’s video she confesses “I just felt lost in the beginning,” and the confessions continue. This is a defining feature of mummy vlogs. Confession is a means of knowing the self that is still valued and highly demanded today. We use confession to communicate the self to others, and others use our confessions to relate to, and understand us. As Sauter (2014) states, confessional writing (self-writing) has become “a universally available medium for understanding and expressing the self” (p. 829). Thus confession could also be described as a technology or technique of the self. Today, confessional modes of expression permeate contemporary media (Fanthome, 2008) to the point of obsession (White, 1992). There is immense pressure on individuals to confess and engage in self-disclosure (King, 2008) in an effort to reveal the essence of themselves (Redmond, 2008a, 2008b) which is demanded and

Vlogging, as I am arguing, is a technology of the self and a reconstructive endeavour. Through daily or weekly vlogging, individuals construct and present themselves through film on YouTube, and actively negotiate the self through this process. As an autobiographical genre, vlogging is an extension of the diary, both in its form and its content. Vlogging extends the increasingly popular genre of the published diary, where seemingly intimate daily thoughts, feelings and experiences are published for the world to consume as entertainment, “consumed by hungry publics eager for intimacy,” as Smith and Watson (2013) write. Although there is text in the multimedia platform of YouTube, the identity performance is predominantly through film (and maintained through text and image, both in the comments section (text) and on social media sites, predominantly Instagram and Facebook (text and image)).

Vlogging features the key aspects of autobiography as a tradition. Vloggers use confession and intimate self-disclosure as a means of self-expression. As a participatory space, YouTube allows everyday media consumers to be media producers, therefore becoming a space for alternative life narratives and subject matter. Vlogging also allows for multiplicity and the construction and exploration of multiple selves, as long as the authenticity of each presentation does not come into question. Vlogging is a tool for the construction of self and for self-transformation,
and vlogging, arguably more than other genres of autobiography, and as I argue in this thesis, acknowledges the other, the viewer as participant in the individual process of making meaning and identity.

**Introducing the Influencers – The Network; The Convergence of People With Technology**

Not only is YouTube a database of lived experience, but it is also a social space, affording connection and community. Through the functions of liking, subscribing and commenting, communities form around particular lives and experiences. Strangelove (2010) explores YouTube as a social space, a “domain of self expression, community, and public confession” (p. 4). He argues that the medium of video “helps us to represent subjectivity as plural, intertextual, and interrelational” (Strangelove, 2010, p. 76). It is the visual, video, that extends vlogging beyond previous genres such as the blog, offering an increased sense of intimacy and authenticity (Strangelove, 2010), attracting community, and leading to new constructions of the self (Bolter, 2002, pp. 129-130). In this project of the self there are crucial elements that dictate the formation and success of individual mummy vlogger identities. One of the key aspects is the relational, social way that identities are formed, performed and maintained on networked digital media sites such as YouTube.

The gearing towards the social - the fact that these identities and performances are not only for others, but for the purpose of connection and dialogue is apparent in the very first vlogs, such as Elise’s second video, and this is why I place such an emphasis on the first vlogs in this research. Of course, Elise’s videos are being published on a
freely accessible website - a platform that anyone with an Internet connection and device can access and search. Elise’s videos are for an audience, even if the audience is not known. But more than this, Elise addresses her audience directly. She addresses her viewers and articulates her hope for dialogue and relationship. At the end of her sit down video she says, “I hope that it works and I hope that people like it - people like me who are just looking for something else to give them guidance as a new mum and also I hope that it’s sort of interactive and that people watch and give me comments and give me tips about what I’m doing and what they think.” Again, at the very end of her video Elise says, “I hope you guys like it. Thumbs up if you do and we’ll see how it goes ... Thanks for watching.”

Identities are socially formed (Baym, 2015, p. 118), and online, they are heavily influenced by the technologies, spaces and practices in which they are created, all of which involve others (Baym, 2015, p. 124). Often communities are formed and maintained in these online spaces and around their consequent identity forming practices. The concepts of the networked self and networked public are useful in this investigation in understanding the relationship between the network (others), the self, and the role/affordances of the technologies that enable the two to converge. In her essay in the edited collection titled *A Networked Self: Identity, Community and Culture on Social Network Sites*, danah boyd (2011) argues that,

Networked publics are publics that are restructured by networked technologies. As such, they are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice. (p. 39).
As boyd suggests, the collective emerges as a result of the intersection between people, technology and practice. All elements are sensitive to each other and the removal of any of the elements would see the collective collapse. I think this is crucial to our understanding and exploration of online communities, identities and texts that are formed using networked digital media. The context must be considered as being as important as the text, and in order to be understood, the text cannot be removed from, or be examined outside of, the context.

If we consider mummy vlogger performances on YouTube to be ongoing texts, the virtual communities or networked publics\(^3\) that form in that space are bound by the text, by the performances of motherhood that take place in that unique space (boyd, 2011; Livingstone, 2005). In these networked digital spaces, the production and consumption/creation and dissemination of the texts is a communal endeavour in which all participants in the space engage (boyd, 2011; Certeau, 2002; Jenkins, 2008). As Mizuko Ito (2008) states, publics become “reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors, engaging in shared culture and knowledge through discourse and social exchange as well as through acts of media reception” (p. 3).

Networked publics also serve as important arenas for self-formation. As feminist scholar Nancy Fraser (1992) argues, publics are “arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities” (p. 68). Identities are formed and explored in public,

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\(^3\) Considering I draw on interdisciplinary theories and scholarship, I have found the concepts of networked publics and virtual communities to be interchangeable when removed from their respective fields. I move between the two terms where relevant, however, consider both to relate to, and be interchangeable with, each other.
by and through the public, and are heavily influenced by the public and the affordances of the space in which it congregates.

**Introducing the Framework (and Argument) – Automediality**

Vlogging is underexplored as a technology for the self – a means of self-documentation, representation, experimentation, narration and formation. Some work has been done on this by scholars such as Tobias Raun in his research exploring trans gender vlogging (2012a, 2015, 2016), and in Life Writing, Emma Maguire in her research exploring girlhood online (2015, 2018). However, the complexities of exploring vlogging as automedia have not been examined in depth. In particular, complexities surrounding the authenticity of these identities and narratives, the relational way in which the self is formed in these contexts, the vulnerable subjects caught in these practices, and the ethics surrounding researching and writing about these ephemeral subjects and narratives, have yet to be examined in depth. In this thesis I want to frame vlogging as automediality, an example of contemporary digital autobiography. Doing so requires an examination of how identities and narratives are formed in the participatory, networked digital space of YouTube.

The project of the self in this context is aided and influenced by the site, by the technology, by the network. The self, in this context is attached to, and merged with, and therefore morphed by, as Smith and Watson (2013, p. 71) suggest, other people; viewers and vloggers, media and technology, products and brands. The self, in a networked digital environment, is influenced by *all* the participants in the space.

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4 Here I suggest that the audience does the work for us, and we can trust the audience in their determination of authenticity, see Chapter 4, ‘Intimate Networked Publics’ and Chapter 5, ‘Authenticity’ of this thesis.
Networked digital media are spaces for the self, and for community. They are a source for contemporary forms of entertainment, platforms that make celebrities, machines that perform functions (such as data collection), and they are markets that promote consumption and generate profit. All of these functions of the networked digital space happen in conjunction with identity formation and have a profound effect on the resulting identities and narratives that are formed and performed in the space. As N. Katherine Hayles (2003) explores in her work on electronic literature, in these contexts “human boundaries blur as people merge with” the technologies, participants and functions of the space (Smith & Watson, 2013, p. 71). Identity (subjects and narratives) in these spaces must be understood as phenomena forged by (and not just in) networked digital media. As Smith and Watson (2013) state, summarising Nick Couldry (2008),

[M]edia cannot simply be conceptualized as “tools” for presenting a pre-existing, essential self. Rather, the materiality of the medium constitutes and textures the subjectivity presented…Media technologies…do not just transparently present the self. They constitute and expand it. (p. 77).

Networked digital media are not merely tools for self-presentation – that is tools for presenting a pre-existing identity. Rather, networked digital media are identity forming spaces and practices, allowing for new identities and narratives formed through the use of, in participation with, all the function of, and participants in, the space. We do not merely present ourselves on Facebook, for example, our Facebook identity is unique, formed through our use of, and interaction with, the technology, the platform (its interface and functions), the people – friends, acquaintances, strangers –
organisations, products and brands on the site.

In her exploration of automediality (including beauty vloggers on YouTube), Emma Maguire (2014, 2015, 2018) suggests that automediality “takes for granted that the self is brought into being through the processes of mediation” (2015, p. 74). She argues that social media accounts and posts “can be understood through the lens of automediality as autobiographical texts that we can interpret” (Maguire, 2015, p. 74), and crucially, these “texts” are “shaped by the networks of production and consumption in which they circulate” (2015, p. 74). As Nancy Baym (2015) writes in her book *Personal Connections in the digital age*, “our ability to construct an online self-presentation ... is limited and enabled by the communicative tools, or affordances, a platform makes available and our skills at strategically managing them” (p. 124). Existing, and constructing identity, online involves a strategic choice around which mediums to use. As Julie Rak (2015) writes, “the choice and materiality of a medium constitute the subjectivity rendered within it” (p. 155). Increasingly, people are choosing to use participatory, networked digital media, sites that are inherently social and relational.

Smith and Watson (2013) argue that “online lives are fundamentally relational or refracted through engagement with the lives of their significant others: the lives presented are often interactive; they are co-constructed; they are linked to others – family, friends, employers, causes, and affiliations” (pp. 70-71). I argue that one of the defining characteristics of automediality, as presented in my example of Australian mummy vlogging, is the relational way in which identities in these contexts and spaces are formed. Mummy vloggers construct and perform their
automedial identity in dialogue with their viewers, in relationship with the community of practice or performance team, in relation to, and in negotiation with, the site, the technology, and the products and brands that circulate in the space. Mummy vlogs, I argue, are an example of automedia - a contemporary digital form of autobiography, resulting in unique auto/biographical texts that are intimate, relationally formed, and ephemeral.

But what does this mean? What do digital selves/lives look like? And how are these different to texts that we have previously understood as autobiography or life writing? The first main difference is our understanding of auto/biography as a complete text structured by a narrative. Rather than a finished product, automediality denotes process. In her paper titled ‘Life Writing Versus Automedia’ Julie Rak (2015) explores automediality as living; “as an incomplete process of doing” (p. 156) – existing, participating, presenting and adapting in a digital space. Participating in digital media, such as online games like The Sims – which Rak explores, or social media such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, are examples of an incomplete process of autobiographical doing – of living. Self-representation in these spaces is not only significant (worthy of differentiation and study) because of the affordances of the technology and medium for the kinds of identities that can be articulated, but it is also significant because the subject in these spaces and processes is, as Smith and Watson (2013) state, a “moving target” (p. 71).

This is a defining characteristic of automediality, differentiating it from other genres of autobiography and life writing, where one is faced with a tangible and therefore complete life – a narrative or work of some description that presents a subject, a life,
in a complete and tangible form (although one susceptible to other “versions”). In
automediality, the subject and life is ephemeral, always in the process of living – of
being formed and transformed, presented and re-presented, distributed and re-
distributed and across multiple platforms – the narrative is never complete and often
changing. Emma Maguire also points to this as a key characteristic of the genre. In
her exploration of Jenna Mourey/Marbles, a beauty vlogger on YouTube, Maguire
writes,

Consumers of Morey’s automedial self cannot hold a single cohesive version of
Morey’s story in their hands, as reader can with a memoir. Morey’s friends
and followers do not reach “the end” of her self-representation, as readers do
when they complete the final page of a printed autobiography – at least not as
long as Mourey continues to post photos on Instagram, update her blog, tweet,
and upload videos. (Maguire, 2015, p. 75).

The ephemerality of automedia, the lack of fixed narrative (or sometimes narrative at
all, as Rak (2015) argues), and the influence of the medium and network are the
defining characteristics of the genre, differentiating it from other forms of
auto/biography and life writing.

Applying this to Australian mummy vlogging, Elise’s two videos, which I discuss
above, could be described as the beginning of her automedial (YouTube) self. These

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5 When talking about narrative Rak (2015) is careful to distinguish between “‘narrative’ as a process of
making story, and ‘a narrative,’” which is what I [Rak] would call a story product’” (p. 156). In
automediality life and narrative are process, not product. The product, if there is one, is fleeting, to be
added to, erased, replaced, re-positioned, re-distributed, and re-created repeatedly. Thus automedial
selves and lives are more vulnerable than other genres of autobiography (Kennedy, 2016).
videos mark the beginning of her narrative and identity on YouTube. They, however, no longer exist. Since collecting and analysing these videos, the beginning of Elise’s life on YouTube has shifted. These videos were the beginning of her mummy vlogger identity, but during the course of this research Elise deleted them, shifting the beginning of her “narrative” and self-presentation on YouTube – shifting the starting point and date of her mummy vlogger identity – to the following year. Now on her channel, it appears as if the beginning of Elise’s videos and mummy vlogger identity and narrative is four months later. By this point Elise is more skilled in filming and editing, her daughter is older, the camera quality is better, and Elise is talking to her audience in this (new) “first” vlog, like a TV presenter would, discussing their (Elise’s and Zara’s) favourite products. In a similar way that the end of Elise’s narrative on YouTube is unknown, unfixed, - as she continues to add to it daily and weekly across multiple platforms - so is the beginning unknown, unfixed, - as she can change the beginning at any time by deleting content. This is a common practice among the Australian mummy vloggers in this study.

Still, Automediality remains relatively underdeveloped as a concept. The term originated with European scholars, was expanded by Smith and Watson (2010, 2013), and later Julie Rak (2015) and Anna Poletti and Julie Rak (2013, 2018). It was, most recently, picked up by Emma Maguire (2015, 2018) and my own work with Emma Maguire in our special issue of *M/C Journal* (“Automediality,” 2018; Kennedy & Maguire, 2018). What automediality is, however, is still being defined and developed. In this thesis, while I argue that mummy vlogging is automediality, I explore the unique features and problems of automedial texts, beginning with how to research them.
As the name automediality suggests, it is a unique merging (convergence) of the self with technology, and in the case of this research I always mean networked digital media, namely YouTube. An investigation of automediality requires a mesh (convergence) of literature from the field of Life Writing (encompassing auto/biography) and Communication and Media Studies. I also draw on scholarship from Sociology and Cultural Studies where relevant, as all identity presentations and performances exist within cultures and contexts that cannot be ignored. In this case we have the broader Western context, the more specific Australian culture and context, the online culture and context, the culture and context unique to YouTube, and the culture and context unique to women and mothers on the internet, on social media, and on YouTube.

**Introducing the Method – Virtual (YouTube) Ethnography**

As I argue above, scholars in the field of Life Writing are still defining and developing automediality and its methods of enquiry. Part of the discovery of this research is the method for exploring, participating in, analysing and writing about automedia and automedial selves and lives. Automediality is process not product, and therefore, unlike other explorations of auto/biography, researching this phenomena is not limited to reading a text. Rather, exploring automediality involves participation in a space, culture and community. The space and practice of automediality demands automediality of anyone who participates in it. In order to watch vlogs, for example, one must use the technology of a device such as a computer and engage in automedial self-representation by merging the auto with the media, YouTube, by creating an
account with a profile. In order to explore Australian mummy vlogging and its
subjects, I found I had to come very close to becoming a mummy vlogger myself. I
found the best method to employ in my enquiry is an adaptation of virtual
ethnography as developed by Christine Hine (2000, 2015), which I call YouTube
ethnography, along with some borrowed concepts from auto-ethnography.

Ethnography seemed the only adequate method to explore mummy vlogging because
of the emphasis on context: the locations, cultures and communities in which
identities are formed and performed. An ethnography allowed me to explore the space
and process, rather than just the individuals (subjects and texts or products), and a
virtual ethnography allowed me to redefine the field, as Hastrup and Olwig (1997)
suggest, as a “field of relations” (p. 8), which is necessary considering the relational
way automedia and automedial selves are formed. On YouTube, the anthropological
concept of “the field” with clear (physical) boundaries (usually denoting a literal,
geographic location in which the researcher can immerse themselves for several
years) is no longer visible. The field must therefore be constructed by following
“people, things, metaphors, narratives, biographies and conflicts” (Hine, 2000, pp.
129-130). The field becomes a fluid concept that flows around certain people, events,
stories and interactions. With fluidity comes insecurity and uncertainty as an
ethnographer is responsible for constructing and categorising their field perhaps
without knowing whether they really have a grasp of its scope, or in fact, whether
they are in the field at all (Hine, 2000, p. 60). The field is thus constructed by the
ethnographer, organised and categorised around “connection rather than location”
(Hine, 2000, p. 60; Marcus, 1995). The ethnographic emphasis on connection and
culture allows the automedial researcher to focus on processes and relationships
through which the automedial self is formed.

The challenge of using the established method of ethnography in this kind of enquiry is in redefining critical ideas such as “participation.” Participation on YouTube looks very different to participation IRL (in real life) and to participation in other virtual environments, such as the virtual worlds of online games (see Tom Boellstorff’s (2008) ethnography of Second Life), for example. On YouTube, simple acts such as viewing a video, liking the video and subscribing to a channel are all important forms of participation which have substantial impact in that space. A viewer may feel anonymous when watching a video – may feel like they are not leaving a trace as their identity cannot be ascertained – however, their viewing of a video adds value to the video by increasing the view count (which is used as a measure of success on YouTube). Therefore, they are not invisible, and their seemingly insignificant, anonymous action holds huge value in the space and practice. This sort of “participation” is commonly known as “lurking.” The majority of internet users are “lurkers” (Baym, 2015), who are highly engaged consumers (readers or viewers) who rarely if ever comment (or actively make their presence or voice known by “speaking”). In this YouTube ethnography I argue that lurking is participating, and I use this to justify my participation in the practice as the researcher.6

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6 I pick this argument up again in Chapter 1, ‘Developing a Method: YouTube Ethnography’.
Introducing the Structure – This Thesis

Chapter 1. Developing a Method: YouTube Ethnography

In this chapter I introduce and justify my method for conducting this research, an adapted version of Virtual Ethnography as developed by Christine Hine (2000, 2015). I work through the various steps of conducting this research while critically engaging with the fundamental principles of ethnography and applying them to YouTube. These include concepts such as the field of enquiry (which I argue is a “field of relations” on YouTube, as suggested by Olwig and Hastrup (1997), establishing authority (which I argue is achieved through firsthand experience with the practice of vlogging), and participation (which I argue has to mimic the most common form of participation in the space). I argue that lurking is a legitimate, visible form of participation on YouTube, suggesting that the lurker takes the role of listening audience, as Kate Crawford (2011) suggests, which is a crucial role in identity forming practices. I also explore the ethical concerns surrounding consent and ownership in research such as this that explores intimate, public lives. In order to explore this issue I draw on Tobias Raun’s (2012b) recent experience in his Virtual Ethnography of transgender vlogging on YouTube.

Chapter 2. Becoming through Vlogging on YouTube; Becoming through the Automedial Diary

Drawing on Rob Cover (2013), I explore automedia as a process of becoming, whereby Australian mummy vloggers live their lives in relationship with networked digital media such as YouTube and become their automedial identity and narrative in the process. I demonstrate how the automedial activities of mummy vloggers
resemble the diary, extending the parameters of the published diary online, as explored by Kylie Cardell (2014). The resulting automedial identities and narratives are cohesive and ongoing, updated daily or weekly, as demonstrated by Australian mummy vlogger, Ash (Join The Jacksons).

Chapter 3. Negotiating Motherhood: Using Confession and Intimate Self-Disclosure as a Relational Tool

I argue that Australian mummy vloggers use the discursive diary format of the vlog, laden with confession and intimate self-disclosure, to negotiate their roles as mothers in the public sphere. Mummy vlogging extends the radical, political, empowering nature of its predecessor genre, mummy blogging, by sharing the realities of day-to-day life as a mother in society as explored by Lori Kido Lopez (2009) and Aimee Morrison (2011). Rather than using vlogging as a political tool, however, I demonstrate how Australian mummy vloggers use confession and intimate self-disclosure as a relational tool, inviting dialogue, and community.

Chapter 4. Intimate Networked Publics: Co-Creating the Automedial Self

In this chapter I argue that the communities that form around the practice of mummy vlogging play an active role in co-creating the automedial identities and narratives of mummy vloggers. I call these communities intimate networked publics, a play on intimate publics (introduced by Lauren Berlant (2008) and discussed in the context of mummy blogging by Aimee Morrison (2011)) and networked publics (as discussed by scholars such as danah boyd (2011)). I explore how Australian mummy vloggers establish belonging by adopting the “norms” of the community and practice as
explored by Nancy Baym (2015). I argue that these norms, together with the community’s ongoing response (in the form of comments, likes and subscriptions), influence and shape the mummy vlogger’s ongoing identity and narrative on YouTube. The intimate networked publics of mummy vlogging resemble Goffman’s (1959) performance, whereby the team actively manages the individual mother’s performance, taking the active role of co-creators.

Chapter 5. Authenticity, a Commodity

Managing and maintaining authenticity is crucial to the success of the automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vloggers. In the context of networked digital media authenticity is concerned with transparency and consistency, which is complicated by the products and brands that circulate in the space. Unlike questions surrounding authenticity that have arisen in previous Internet research concerning identity, which mainly concerned the correlation between the online and offline self, in networked digital spaces the coherence and consistency of identity is managed by the network. Rather, in these spaces authenticity is compromised by the fact that networks function as markets, and mummy vloggers stand to make an income through self-branding and sponsorship. Using the examples of Elise and Ash, I demonstrate how mummy vloggers manage their authenticity when working with products and brands, and how their viewers respond to these performances.

Chapter 6. Curating Life

The automedial identities and narratives of mummy vlogging include the intimate, vulnerable subjects of children. I demonstrate that Australian mummy vlogs are not only autobiographies of motherhood, but they are also autobiographies of childhood,
curated by the mothers. I explore the ethics surrounding the inclusion of small children in this practice from a life writing perspective. Considering their lives have been published and consumed without their consent, I ask what effect mummy vlogging may have on the children’s future sense and formation of self.

Chapter 7. The Ethics of Dealing with Deleted Lives

In this final chapter I explore one of the problems I encountered during this research, which had a profound effect on my understanding of automedia, that is, the tendency of these texts and subjects to disappear. I demonstrate the ephemerality of the automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vlogging, and explore challenging questions surrounding the ownership of these co-created texts and subjects, and the ethics of researching and writing about lives that have been deliberately deleted.

Finally, my Conclusion summarises the findings and contribution of this research and outlines a number of areas for future research.
Chapter 1. Developing a Method: YouTube Ethnography

Investigating automedial narratives and identities requires a method equally as versatile and contemporary as the subject. As discussed in the Introduction, automedia is about the process of living and doing in relationship with digital media, its technologies and communities. Automedial subjects are formed and performed in relationship with digital media platforms such as YouTube, are limited and afforded by the parameters of the site and its technology, and are heavily influenced by the people, brands and products that congregate, circulate and participate in the space.

The “products” of automedia – which in this study refers to the vlogs produced by mummy vloggers - are only one part of an automedial investigation. Whereas other Life Writing examinations may focus solely on the “text” and apply some form of literary, discourse or content analysis to examine and unpack the text (the object, the narrative, etc.), an automedial investigation is concerned with the process through which the automedial life/narrative/identity is being formed. Understanding that these are always in motion, always under construction and subject to change, is crucial to an investigation such as this. When looking at automedia, the researcher cannot rely on the “text” because it is inherently unreliable, ephemeral and therefore vulnerable. Basic markers such as the beginning, middle and end - which are expected characteristics of traditional life writing genres - are always shifting in automedia. The beginning is often erased to show a “new” starting point and the end is never reached. Therefore, the value of the object/the text - in this case the vlog - is limited in its ability to offer any sort of complete insight into the practice.
Rather than focusing on the vlog and what it is (as a text), it is far more useful to investigate what the vlog does for mummy vloggers. The vlog makes the mother visible. The vlog allows mothers to document and share their lives. The vlog places the mother within a practice and community. The vlog invites dialogue and participation, and so on. The vlog shows connections and networks. It is the framework around which these kinds of automedial narratives are formed and performed. The vlog tracks dialogue and changes - it shows the identity and narrative in motion. The vlog - as the automedial act - creates a space in which people congregate and participate - become community and market (consumers).

If we view vlogging as a practice that creates a space in which things happen - important things that have a significant effect on the way narratives and identities are formed - a method is required that looks beyond the text, to explore the space, and the way people interact in the space - with technology, with brands, and with each other. The method I employ in this research is an adaptation of Virtual Ethnography as developed by Christine Hine and as recently demonstrated by Tobias Raun (2012b, 2016) in his virtual ethnography of transgender vlogging on YouTube. Ethnography is appropriate for an automedial investigation because of its focus on culture.

Traditionally ethnography was a methodology used in the field of anthropology, but has since been adopted by many fields in the Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (Hine, 2000; Jankowski & Jensen, 1991). This research uses ethnography because of its focus on culture, specifically the everyday practices in a particular culture. When you arrive on YouTube as an ethnographer, you begin with one person, one video, one connection. Every discovery builds on this starting point. Ethnography, and
particularly virtual ethnography, allows the researcher to follow connections, stories and events as they emerge in the space.

When applying ethnography in networked digital media, the fundamental principles and defining characteristics of the method are challenged, and have to be re-negotiated. Basic concepts such as “the field” become flexible, intangible and invisible. Arriving in the field is a solitary, subjective, irreplaceable experience that takes place through the interface of technology. Unlike arriving in a virtual world, like Tom Boellstorff (2008) does in his virtual ethnography of Second Life, when exploring networked digital media, the ethnographer arrives in a space where there is no narrative, no pathway, no prompts or guiding interactions. Effectively, on YouTube, the ethnographer arrives in a living database that has to be navigated. The ethnographer must construct the field and create their own pathway by building a web of (entirely perceived) connections7. This demands a reflexive approach. Other principles like the ethnographer’s authority are also challenged. Rather than establishing authority (to speak about the subjects) through the experience of travelling to the destination of, and living among, the subjects, an ethnographer looking at networked digital media establishes their authority by demonstrating competency with the technology, and conventions of the space and practice. In the introduction I state that an automedial investigation requires automediality of the researcher. In order to explore vlogging on YouTube, I had to become a vlogger on YouTube. Gaining proficiency with the technologies that enable the convergence of the self with media required me to borrow ideas from auto-ethnography; a way of discovering and knowing that is both method and practice (Ellis et al). By far, the

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7 The ethnographer is relying solely on their own construction of themes, codes, connections etc. which demands a reflexive approach.
principle of ethnography that is challenged the most in this investigation is that of participation. In this virtual ethnography I participate in the genre of mummy vlogging as most internet users do (Baym, 2015; Crawford, 2011), as a lurker. Building on Crawford’s work, and as I have already suggested in the Introduction, I argue that this is a legitimate and crucial form of participation in networked digital media that has a large visible impact on the automedial identities and narratives of the Australian mummy vloggers that I explore in this research.

In this chapter I introduce myself as the researcher; I introduce my method for conducting this research, engaging with each of the problems which I lay out above; and I introduce the subjects of my ethnography, how I found them, chose them and observed them.

**Arriving on YouTube**

Before I arrived on YouTube (sometime in 2012), my only conception of the site was as a place where people posted short, entertaining, homemade videos of cats and babies. These videos would circulate on social media sites like Facebook, where I was exposed to them, and as a result of this recurring content I largely dismissed YouTube as a site for “silly” things. What I did not realise at the time is that among the cats and babies are millions of videos made by ordinary people sharing their everyday lives. When I eventually discovered the plethora of lives shared on the site, I was particularly drawn to the lives of young women who resembled myself.
I am a white, Australian, well educated, twenty-something-year-old from a fairly conservative middle-class family. When I began watching YouTube I was in a full-time professional role and preparing to marry my husband. Although I had no intention of having children in the near future, I was interested in, and curious about, what my life might look like. I was not idealising marriage or motherhood. Rather, I was curious about how to exist in these stereotypical, highly socialised roles. Aware that my (some may argue) conservative choice to marry at a young age (23) conflicted with my views about women, I was fascinated with how my generation of women were performing such roles on YouTube – recognising that performing these roles involves a huge amount of conscious, deliberate and thoughtful work.

Initially, it was the work these women were doing by publicly performing – constructing and presenting – their identities and lives on YouTube that gripped me. What I soon realised, however, is that this work is done in collaboration with others. The significance does not lie in what these women are performing, rather the significance lies in how these performances are formed and performed in relationship with viewers/consumers, other vloggers, celebrity, technology, media, and brands. These others are participants in the performance, and together they constitute a network. My understanding of the network grew as the automedial identities and narratives I was observing developed.

My interest in these lives on YouTube developed into a full-time research project (encompassing many years) because I believe that this example has a lot to offer in terms of how we understand identity in networked digital environments. Familiar with scholarship exploring identity construction and presentation – a personal passion of
mine developed during my undergraduate years – I saw in YouTube an opportunity to expand our understanding of the way identities are formed and performed in contemporary society. Today, most people engage in identity construction and presentation online, but unlike previous research that explores the Internet as an alternative (to IRL “in real life”) space for alternative identities (multiple, fluid, flexible, deviant and deceptive identities), most people construct and present their identities using networked digital media.

Networked digital media are social spaces where identities are socially formed and maintained. Individuals construct their identity in dialogue with the network, which connects on multiple platforms both online and offline. The network, and particularly its reach across all our devices, spaces and interfaces, demands a coherent, consistent, authentic self. The example of the women I was drawn to watching on YouTube provides an opportunity to explore how average, ordinary people construct and present their identity using networked digital media – how they become and belong in these spaces, and what the resulting identity looks like. In order to explore this phenomenon, I chose to examine the performances of a particular (emerging) group of Australian women, who called themselves “mummy vloggers.”
Australian Mummy Vlogging on YouTube

Before I go on to introduce the women who I observed in this research, I want to address the homogeneity of these identities and narratives. I state above that I was drawn to these women because they were performing roles, such as marriage and motherhood, which I was preparing myself to fill, and felt conflicted about. It is important to note that feeling conflicted about these roles and having a choice in how they are performed comes from a position of privilege. I was only able to think about marriage and motherhood because both of these things are a choice for me, which shows my position in society as a white, affluent, well-educated, middle class woman. Overwhelmingly, these are the women on YouTube, especially among Australian mummy vloggers.

Australian mummy vloggers are typically young, between the ages of 18-35, with most in their mid 20’s when they begin vlogging. They are all middle class, affluent (with most owning their house and paying off a mortgage – fulfilling the Australian dream) and educated, all having completed high school and most either having begun a tertiary degree or currently undergoing one part-time. Except for Nikki Perkins they are all white. The one exception to the “white Australian” demographic represented among Australian mummy vloggers, Nikki, was born in Sudan, and moved to Australia with her family as a child. Although Nikki is a woman of colour, her husband Jamie is white, and performs, it could be argued, a white Australian middle class life.8 The mothers are all married or otherwise in long-term relationships, and the majority are “stay-at-home” mothers (with vlogging eventually becoming their

8 She has an Australian accent and engages in the same activities as her Australian mummy vlogging peers.
occupation). All are heterosexual apart from one same-sex married couple.
Importantly, all have access to a quality Internet service allowing them to upload and watch videos.

Research exploring motherhood shows that many, if not all, of the performances and images of motherhood in society that we associate as “good” are by white, middle class or upper class, affluent, heterosexual, married women (Arendell, 2000; Crowley, 2015; Elliott et al., 2015; Hays, 1996; Henderson et al., 2010; Lareau, 2002; Zimmerman, Aberle, Krafchick, & Harvey, 2008). Although the performances of motherhood by mummy vloggers can be radical and empowering (Arnold, 2011; Lopez, 2009) they are exclusive, and as Imelda Whelehan states, leave many victims in their wake (2000, p. 178). In Chapter 3, ‘Negotiating Motherhood’, I talk about how mummy vlogging gives women a space in which to negotiate their roles as mothers and share the realities of day-to-day life in this role. Although I argue, like others have before me (S. J. Douglas & Michaels, 2004), that this allows women to challenge the idealised images of motherhood that have been circulated in mainstream (broadcast) media over the last few decades, it is important to note that women of colour, a differing race or ethnicity, a working class background, lower income or lower level of education are still largely absent from these performances (Zimmerman et al., 2008) in both mainstream media, and participatory media, such as YouTube. This seems to confirm what Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) and Hays (1996) argue, that these performances of motherhood are specific to white, middle class and upper class parents, they have been coded white, and do not resemble or reflect the experiences of working class parents. Playing with motherhood – what it

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9 It’s interesting that even once everyone has access to, and the ability to, produce media, we’re still seeing the same types of images. Participatory media, in this small case study, has not lead to more diverse or inclusive images of motherhood in Australia.
looks like and how it is performed – is an activity for privileged women who have
*time* (which means they are usually heterosexual, married, stay at home mothers, who
are financially supported by their husbands).

Although it is accurate to assert that performing motherhood, as a full-time
occupation, is the unique experience of a certain group of women, these performances
are still worthy of investigation because of the way these women use vlogging to
perform their social roles, and because of the stories they tell as they do so. During
this investigation I identified and observed 37 Australian mummy vloggers, using the
methods laid out below.

**Constructing a “Field of Relations”**

As noted earlier, online, the ethnographic concept of the “field” is different than in
IRL face-to-face contexts. When an ethnographer “arrives” online, the boundaries of
the field, and its key players are unknown. Whereas offline the ethnographer can see
or walk the physical perimeter of their field of enquiry, or observe a meeting where
the key players in the community emerge, when you arrive on YouTube, you start
with one person, and you follow the connections. The field *emerges*, it follows people
and stories, and it changes, it shrinks and expands and collapses (Hine, 2000). Online,
the field is constructed by the ethnographer, organised and categorised around
The ethnographer constructs their field by following “people, things, metaphors,
narratives, biographies and conflicts” (Hine, 2000, p. 60; Marcus, 1995). The field
becomes a fluid concept that flows around certain people, events, stories and
interactions. The online field can therefore be redefined and understood, as Hastrup and Olwig (1997) suggest, as a “field of relations” (p. 8).

In his virtual ethnography exploring transgender vlogging on YouTube, Tobias Raun (2012b) used a similar method to discover and construct the field, stating that he spent an “extensive and uncountable amount of time “strolling” (YouTube), searching for vlogs” (p. 37) which fit his research category.

“I have several times during the research process allowed myself to “get lost” in cyberspace, going randomly from one vlog to another, being directed by the videos that popped up when typing the search words or by going through a vlogger’s uploaded “favorites,” “friends lists,” or list of “subscribers.” I figured that this was a good way to get to know the field and to imitate how others (trans) people, vloggers or not, would behave on YouTube.” (p. 37).

I constructed my field in a similar way to Raun, getting lost on YouTube, always searching for, and following, connections. I spent a considerable amount of time in the first year of my doctorate searching for participants. Having identified Australian Mummy Vlogging as a new and emerging practice prior to commencing my PhD, I was already familiar with, and closely following (watching), a number of Australian mothers on YouTube. From my history of watching these mothers, I had identified the term “mummy vlogger” as one that these mothers used to describe themselves in their uploaded videos. I consequently decided to use this term in my initial search for potential Australian mummy vloggers to observe in my study. I searched for and
identified the mummy vloggers in this research using the following steps, which are all inbuilt features of YouTube, each of which I explore below:

1. Using the YouTube search function;
2. Searching for “connections” by scrolling through liked videos, subscriptions and comments;
3. Scrolling through published videos to identify collaborations between vloggers.

Searching for Participants Step 1
A basic search using the term “Australian Mummy Vlogger” through the search function on the YouTube homepage (see Figure 2) revealed two Australian Mummy Vloggers, both of who were familiar to me. The familiarity of these two vloggers confirmed the accuracy of the search results. I had already established that these women identified as Australian mummy vloggers from my own informal watching of their content, and so the search results, and the YouTube search function, seemed a reliable way of discovering Australian mummy vloggers. Figure 2 below shows the search function that appears across the top of the YouTube homepage. Figure 3 shows “Australian Mummy Vlogger” typed into the search box on the YouTube homepage. At the time of my search (in mid-2015) these were Elise, from the channel Little Miss Zara (now Elise Sheree) and Ash, from the channel Join the Jacksons (also an updated channel name). I introduce Elise in the Introduction, and I introduce Ash in Chapter 2, ‘Belonging Through Vlogging On YouTube’. A similar search today (in mid-2017) reveals a longer list of Australian Mummy Vloggers, many of whom have only begun
vlogging recently and are therefore not included in my research (see Figure 4). Figure 4 shows the results for the search conducted in mid-2017.

![Figure 2 Search function on the YouTube homepage](image1)

![Figure 3 “Australian Mummy Vlogger” typed in search function](image2)

![Figure 4 Search results for “Australian Mummy Vlogger”](image3)

**Searching for Participants Step 2**

The two Australian mummy vloggers identified in my initial search, Elise and Ash, became the starting point from which this study’s field of relations emerged. I began to scan their channels for “connections”. I searched their liked videos and their
subscribed channels. For example, having determined that Ash from Join the Jacksons identified as an Australian Mummy Vlogger, I clicked on her channel and viewed her liked videos. In order to do this I followed this process:

1. Click on “Videos”, which can be found on the menu of her channel homepage, as shown in Figure 5.

   ![Figure 5 “Videos” on channel homepage menu](image1)

“Videos” is the second option (from left to right) on the homepage menu under the channel name and has been circled and magnified in Figure 5 for the purpose of this explanation.

2. Having clicked “Videos”, a dropdown menu labeled “Uploads” appears just under “Videos” as shown in Figure 6. Select “Liked Videos” in the drop down menu as shown in Figure 7.

   ![Figure 6 “Uploads” under “Videos”](image2)
The “Videos” page displays the thumbnails and titles of the videos uploaded by Join The Jacksons. The first video (top left) is the most recent upload.

![Join The Jacksons](image)

Figure 7 “Liked Videos” in “Uploads” drop down menu

 Liked videos is highlighted in Figure 7 because the cursor/mouse is hovering over it (unseen in screen shot as to not obstruct the view).

3. Scan the list of liked videos (Figure 8) using the same criteria listed above.

![Join The Jacksons “Liked Videos”](image)

Having searched the liked videos, I also searched the subscriptions, using the method below.
4. Click on “Channels” on the channel homepage as seen in Figure 9.

The “Channels” menu option is underlined in red because the cursor/mouse is hovering over it, and circled and magnified for the sake of this explanation.

5. Scan the channels listed here. Ash only has a select number of featured channels (as seen in Figure 10). Other Australian Mummy Vloggers have an exhaustive list of channels featured here.

This shows the channels Join the Jacksons have subscribed to and chosen to feature.

I also scanned the comments under published videos hoping to find mummy vloggers among the commenters. For example, choosing a recently published video at random,
I would scroll down the page to the comments section, which sits below each vlog, under the description bar (see Figure 11 for the standard video layout on YouTube), and read the comments as shown in Figure 12.

![Standard Video Layout on YouTube](image)

**Figure 11 Standard video layout on YouTube**

This is the layout for all videos on YouTube: The video sits at the top of the screen; underneath which sits the title, channel name, subscription count, view count and likes and dislikes count; underneath which sits the description box that can be minimised to “show less” (the date and first two lines of the description only) or “show more” (as it does in this screen shot); underneath which sits the comments section.
As seen in the example in Figure 12, the only commenter on Dominika’s first vlog at the time the screen shot was taken was MotherhoodandMakeup (Dominika Eve, 2014; MotherhoodandMakeup, 2014b). Depending on the profile picture and profile name of the commenter, and whether it indicated that they were a mother or potentially a vlogger, I would click on the profile name, which would take me to their channel. In this example the profile picture of the commenter looked like it could be of a mother as the picture shows a woman and a child. Also, the name, MotherhoodandMakeup suggests that the commenter is a mother. Having clicked on the profile name and being re-directed to MotherhoodandMakeup’s channel (MotherhoodandMakeup), it quickly became clear that not only was she an Australian mother, but also a vlogger, vlogging about motherhood (as her channel name indicated).
Searching for Participants Step 3

Finally, I scanned the published videos of each of the mummy vloggers identified looking for any that indicated collaboration with another YouTuber.

Every time I found a new Australian mummy vlogger I would repeat the process (looking through their liked video’s, subscribed channels, commenters and published videos for collaborations).

Establishing Criteria

Initially I was looking for anyone who met the following criteria:

1. **A female YouTuber.** This was easily identified by the user/channel picture and/or name.

2. **Living and vlogging in Australia.** This could usually be identified on their About page if they listed their country as Australia or in their channel art if they specified that they were “Aussie” or “in Aus” or “Australian” or “in Australia”. If Australia wasn’t listed in either of these two locations, I would scan their list of video uploads too see if the video titles or thumbnails gave any clues as to vlogger’s location. Finally, I would watch the first vlog uploaded, listening for an Australian accent, or a description of the vlogger’s location in their introduction to their viewers.

3. **Who has given birth to a child** (identifying as a mother). This was necessary to determine the difference between a ‘mummy vlog’ and a ‘pregnancy vlog’ or a ‘TTC (trying to conceive) vlog’. *This criterion quickly changed which I discuss below.*
4. **Whose channel content must include motherhood and their children.** This could be identified either through the vlogger’s self-identification as a mother on their YouTube channel homepage art, or About page, or in their reference to themselves as a mother in their vlogs, or through the title of their vlogs e.g. “A day in the life of a young Mum”, or through the content of their vlogs e.g. a vlog displaying baby products, talking about bedtime routines, or featuring their children’s activities.

I found most mummy vloggers clearly identified as “Mum” or “Mummy” somewhere on their channel\(^\text{10}\). Similarly, most mummy vloggers indicated they were Australian on their channel. Usually in their channel description on their ‘About’ page, or on their channel banner (the large banner across their channel homepage as seen in the examples below – Figures 13 and 14).

![Figure 13 Early channel banner for Elise Sheree](image)

Figure 13 shows one of Elise’s early channel banners (since then it has been replaced many times). In the banner she clearly identifies herself as a non-American mother, crossing out the ‘o’ in the American spelling of “mommy” and replacing it with ‘u,’ indicating that she is either British or Australian. Her inclusion of ‘in oz’ indicates that she is Australian, as ‘oz’ is a well-known (to Australians) abbreviation of Australia (mimicking the phonetic sound of ‘Aus’). The profile picture on the banner

\(^{10}\) Either on their channel homepage, on their channel banner, on their About page, in their video titles or in the video descriptions.
also supports the fact that she is a mother, because it features both herself and a young child (her daughter). It would be fair to assume, on first inspection that the channel content features the two “characters” represented in the profile picture. While searching for Australian mummy vloggers, clicking on Elise Sheree’s channel and seeing this banner alone would be enough for me to shortlist her as a participant for this study.

![Figure 14 Channel banner for TeenMummy94](image)

Similarly, Figure 14 clearly identifies the vlogger as an Australian wife and mother by featuring the miniature map of Australia, including the words “wife” and “mother” in the banner, and showing three images of a young heterosexual couple with an infant, indicating they are a family of three.

The easiest way to exclude participants was the use of ‘o’ instead of ‘u’ in their reference to themselves as mothers. For example, if a channel feature ‘mom’ or ‘mommy’ somewhere in writing (either on the banner, in their channel description, on their about page, in their channel name or vlog name), this immediately identified the YouTuber as American or Canadian and they were therefore excluded from the study. For mummy vloggers who used the spelling ‘mum’ or ‘mummy’, I was quickly able to identify whether they were from New Zealand or the UK simply by clicking on a video of theirs at random and listening to their accent.
Adjusting The Criteria

While searching for vlogs I made two important discoveries, which forced me to change my criteria. These were:

1. Many Australian Mummy Vloggers began vlogging when trying to conceive or while pregnant with their first child.
2. The natural connections that I was discovering among Australian mummy vloggers through the comments section, like videos or subscriptions included women who were trying to conceive and/or were pregnant, who hadn’t necessarily given birth.

Although I was identifying many Australian Mummy Vloggers who met my criteria at the time that I found them, they did not necessarily meet my criteria when they began vlogging. Many of the mummy vloggers identified began vlogging when trying to conceive or while pregnant for the first time. They eventually became mummy vloggers, but at what point? Considering their channels comprised the many stages of becoming and being mothers, these experiences were also reflected in their viewers. While some viewers (identified in the comments section below vlogs) appeared to be mothers (based on their profile pictures, profile/channel names, and the content of their comments) others were either trying to conceive or pregnant. The practice and community of viewers seemed to be inclusive of all stages and experiences of becoming or being a mother. The criteria for identifying participants therefore changed to include this discovery.
Considering this study is an ethnography and I knew the only way to define my field was through the field of relations, I chose to expand my criteria to include everyone who was participating in what seemed to me to be the Australian mummy vlogger community. What I realised is that all mummy vloggers had at some stage gone through a period of trying to conceive and had, of course, experienced pregnancy. These two experiences are natural, universal parts of motherhood, although everyone experiences them differently. Even though the women participating in the field of relations were at different stages in their motherhood journey, they were all seeking and sharing the same experiences, based information from each other, and were all identifying as being on the same journey. Therefore, I changed criteria 3 and 4 to the following:

3. **Who is trying to conceive, pregnant, or has given birth to a child** (and therefore trying to become a mother, soon to be a mother, or is currently a mother). Therefore, my definition of mummy vlogger had to change to include the early stages of trying to become a mother and carrying an unborn child. Inevitably these women became mothers who had given birth and therefore eventually met my original definition of a mummy vlogger.

4. **Whose channel content must include the motherhood journey** including trying to become a mother, carrying an unborn child, and having children. This could be identified either through the vlogger’s self-identification as a mother, mother to be, or hopeful mother to be, on their YouTube channel homepage art, or About page, or in their reference to themselves as a mother in their vlogs, or through the title of their vlogs e.g. “A day in the life of a young Mum”, “12 weeks pregnant”, “TTC baby no.1” or through the content
of their vlogs e.g. a vlog displaying baby products, ovulation kits, pregnancy tests, or talking about bedtime routines, doctors’ visits, fertility, or featuring their children’s activities.

I added the following criterion to reflect my search process and my method of virtual ethnography:

5. **Who has naturally appeared in the field of relations** either through the comments section, in reference by an Australian mummy vlogger either in a video or in the description bar below their video, in collaboration with an Australian mummy vlogger through a tag or stated collaboration, in their liked videos or subscribed channels.

Initially, I identified 37 Australian mummy vloggers using the process set out above. By the time I began my first round of official data collection, 4 of the mummy vloggers I had been informally watching had deleted all their content on YouTube, leaving me with 33. Two of the four who had deleted all their content, up until that point, had been extremely active and, I would argue, central in the Australian mummy vlogging community. Within the Australian mummy vlogger community, I had identified a core group,\(^{11}\) who all started vlogging around the same time, who were active, and visibly interacting with each other on YouTube, and two of the four who deleted everything were visibly a part of this. The two in question are Courtney (Behind the Olive Grove) who had vlogged her entire trying to conceive journey,

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\(^{11}\) I would say the core group members at the time were Gemma Times, Elise Sheree, Dominika Eve, Ash from Join The Jacksons, Jen from Jen and Zoe, Courtney from Behind the Olive Grove, Rachel from Ivy and Rachel, Charissa-jo, Paige from My Tribe and I, Michaela from MotherhoodandMakeup, Bec from becvlogs (for a short period), and Sarah from iMumma.
pregnancy, traumatic birth, and the first six months of her daughter, Evie’s life. Courtney gave her viewers warning that she was leaving YouTube and published a video explaining her decision to do so which was mainly to protect the privacy of her daughter. I make reference to Courtney in the last two chapters of this thesis. The other is Kim (formerly, Kim and Co), who had been actively vlogging for many months about her life in Queensland with her husband and three children. Kim’s videos disappeared without warning. Kim has since reappeared on YouTube twice, first as Kimberly Hope, and currently as Study Plan Purpose, however the channel is inactive (Study Plan Purpose). Kim’s channel is currently all about studying (as Kim is studying nursing part time at university – an occupation coincidentally shared by many of the Australian mummy vloggers in this study), however all her videos have been deleted.

**Establishing Authority Through Practice**

I arrived on YouTube twice. The first time I arrived was as a viewer, a consumer, as I describe above. The second time I arrived on YouTube was as a producer, a vlogger. Becoming a producer, a vlogger, was essential to my understanding of, and situation within, the field. The experience of vlogging, although it does not contribute to my research findings, gives me authority to speak, because of my firsthand experience of the space, practice, and its technologies. Vlogging, for me, was a way to participate in the space and practice, without actually becoming an Australian mummy vlogger (something I was not able to be when I began this research as I was not in any stage of becoming or being a mother).
In traditional (and some examples of virtual) ethnography the ethnographer typically established their authority to speak about the subject through their experience of travelling to the destination. Travel has been a very important part of traditional ethnography as the process of travelling to, and arriving in, the native land and culture form the experience which ultimately gives the researcher authority to speak (Hine, 2000; Pratt, 1986). The travel, description of travel and arrival story anchor the research in its context (Pratt, 1986) and the description of the experience validates the researcher as one who “knows” first hand (Hine, 2000). The arrival story is the process of discovering and explaining the context of the research. As Hine (2000) suggests “the details that the ethnographer gives of the way they got into the field encourages us as readers to accept the account that follows as authentically grounded in real experience” (p. 45). The arrival story validates the research and researcher by grounding the research subjects and findings within a rich context.

Online, the travel experience, and to some extent the context, are replaced by the process of using technology, and participating in the digital space. In networked digital media environments, the ethnographer’s travel experience is replaced by their automediation. Hine states that some researchers choose to deliberately limit their knowledge of the technologies used by participants for fear of “losing their skeptical approach to things which their informants take for granted” and to maintain their “edge as cultural commentator” (Hine, 2000, p. 54). This practice removes the researcher from one of the core principals of ethnography, participation and immersion in the culture, making them just an observer. However, Hine argues that the process of becoming competent with technology (specifically with the internet
through which the virtual culture interacts) is part of the experience that validates the researcher and gives them authority.

The process of becoming competent in the use of the Internet is a way for the ethnographer to find out just how hard it is, and in what specific ways it is made either hard or easy. Rather than forming a barrier to ethnographic strangeness to be guarded against, competence in using the Internet acquires a multiple significance: as a ground for reflexive exploration of what it is to use the Internet; as a means to deeper engagement and conversations with other users of the Internet; as a way to developing an enriched reading of the practices which lead to the production and consumption of Internet artifacts. With due (skeptical) caution, it appears that there are good grounds for an ethnographer of the Internet to become competent in its use. The processes through which field sites are found and materials collected become ethnographic materials in themselves. (Hine, 2000, p. 55).

All interaction in the Australian mummy vlogger community is mediated and requires automediation of all participants, regardless of level of participation. In the mummy vlogger community, competency with the Internet, with YouTube, with other networked digital sites such as Facebook and Instagram, with filming conventions and camera technology and techniques, and with editing software such as Adobe Premier and Final Cut Pro and so on, is not only part of the way the community interacts, it is a fundamental component of the community without which the community, culture and practice (which are all fundamentally connected) would not exist. Therefore, in
order to participate in the community, experience and competence with these technologies and processes is paramount.

Engaging in the practice of vlogging has shaped my understanding of the functions of the site, the technical knowledge and labour involved in the practice, and the nature of forming and maintaining relationships and community online. These first-hand experiences have shaped my knowledge and understanding of vlogging (broadly speaking), and my involvement in the genre has facilitated many conversations with other “creators”\(^{12}\) that have been useful in informally affirming or challenging some of my thoughts about the practice. These conversations have allowed me to talk about my experiences of vlogging and “compare notes” about my struggles and joys while participating in the practice. These first-hand experiences add to the rich “background” for my research, the “thick description” that all ethnographers strive for. The insights and findings have not changed my research, however they have allowed me as the researcher to delve into the practice, participating to the fullest extent in the genre (although not among the specific community that I explore in this thesis). Ultimately, I think this experience has established my authority to speak about vlogging on YouTube as not only have I followed and analysed the “data” (the automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vloggers for over three years), but I have also participated in the practice first hand (for over 18 months) which has mostly affirmed my findings, and strengthened my position as an “expert in the making”.\(^ {13}\)

\(^{12}\) YouTubers often refer to themselves as “creators” particularly overseas, and particularly in the context of networking at events such as VidCon.

\(^{13}\) Specifically, the three most valuable things I learnt that I would not have if I simply observed the practice without dabbling in it myself, are the time and labour that goes into producing a vlog, the way conversations continue beyond the vlog on other platforms, and the inability to control who views the vlog and the effect this has on the content (in the form of self-censorship).
Participating in the practice of vlogging may give me authority to speak generally about creating and publishing content on YouTube, but a fundamental part of ethnography is the participation of the researcher in the community in question. When I began this research, I did not have children and I was not pregnant or trying to conceive. I therefore was not able to participate in the community I was exploring in the traditional ethnographic sense. I was, however, able to participate as most Internet users do, as a lurker. In the following section I argue that lurking is a legitimate and important form of participation in networked digital media.

**Rethinking Participation in Networked Digital Media**

A critical part of traditional ethnography is the participation of the researcher in the culture being researched, building rapport with subjects and gaining firsthand experience (Seiter, 1989). As Hine (2000) suggests “being there” is unique to ethnography. “The ethnographer is not simply a voyager or a disengaged observer, but is also to some extent a participant, sharing some of the concerns, emotions and commitments of the research subjects” (Hine, 2000, p. 48). This involves becoming an active part of the community which Van Maanen (2011) stresses is paramount in ethnography. Traditionally, the researcher builds rapport through face-to-face interaction (Hine, 2000, p. 48). The primary form of interaction on most networked digital media sites such as YouTube, however, is not face-to-face. Participation in these spaces looks different than in face-to-face contexts. The researcher no longer

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14 Jankowski and Wester (1991) identify participant observation as the ideal method for qualitative research. They state that the primary purpose of participant observation “is to describe the fundamental terms various events, situations, and actions that occur in a particular social setting. This is done through the development of case studies of social phenomena, normally employing a combination of data-collection techniques” (Jankowski & Wester, 1991, p. 61). As the focus of my research is to explore the culture and community of mummy vlogging, an adaption of the traditional participant observation is fitting for my research.
needs to permanently leave their context behind for a number of months or years.\textsuperscript{15} The researcher does not even need to leave the comfort of their home or office. Immersion is a geographically isolated experience mediated through the interface of the screen.

Online, the most common role and form of participation among everyday users is that of the “lurker,” “the person who reads but never posts” (Baym, 2015, p. 97). In her book chapter ‘Listening, not Lurking: The Neglected Form of Participation’,\textsuperscript{16} Kate Crawford explores the role of the lurker, arguing that it is a valid and crucial form of participation online. Crawford suggests that the lurker plays the integral role of the \textit{listening} audience. Online, participation has most commonly been understood as the active contributing and sharing of information (Crawford, 2011, p. 63; see also Karaganis, 2007). Using the metaphor of the voice, most investigations of participation online have been explored using terms such as “speaking up” and “having your say” (Crawford, 2011, p. 63). In these investigations, participation online has been defined as having a voice and contributing to the discussion in the online public sphere (ibid). In contrast to a participant, a lurker has traditionally been viewed as a passive consumer, following an online debate, for example, but rarely if ever contributing to it (see Kollock & Smith, 1996; M. Morris & Ogan, 1996; Sharf, 1999). If the participant is the speaker, then the lurker is the listener. Rather than discounting the listener, Crawford suggests that the role of listening is an overlooked yet fundamental part of all participation.

\textsuperscript{15} Wolcott (1975; 1995) suggests that this time should be a minimum of one year.
Although it is one of the most common roles among internet users (Baym, 2015, p. 97; Crawford, 2011, p. 63), lurking has only recently begun to be considered as an important part of online communities (Lee, Chen, & Jiang, 2006). This is partly due to the negative connotations associated with the label (see Nonnecke, Andrew, Preece, & Voutour, 2004; Nonnecke & Preece, 2003). Crawford (2011) suggests that lurkers take on the important role of a listening audience, and that the unhelpful term “lurker” laden with negative connotations should be replaced with listener.

“Once the activities defined as lurking are understood as forms of listening, they shift from being vacant and empty figurations to being active and receptive processes” (Crawford, 2011, p. 64). If we adjust our understanding of networked publics to be listening audiences – as Sonia Livingstone (2005) argues the term “public” is synonymous with “audience” – we know that simply the presence of an audience is crucial to any performance of identity (Goffman, 1959). In Erving Goffman’s terms, the audience plays an important role in accepting and affirming the performance, through which the individual realises and becomes their performance. The role of the audience on YouTube is active and visible, even if the members of the audience are not known.

The role of the audience, the viewer, the listener, the lurker, is fundamental on YouTube, and unlike previous conceptions of the role as passive and invisible, it is active and visible in a crucial way. Lurking on YouTube includes the participatory acts of viewing, subscribing and liking, which are deliberate acts, and which may appear anonymous, but the result of which are visible as demonstrated in Figure 15.

The presence of the viewer impacts the success of the automedial identity and

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37 In a recent study Nonnecke, et al. (2004) found that people felt uncomfortable about their status as a lurker.
narrative of vloggers on YouTube. The viewer’s presence is seen through their contribution to the view count – an anonymous sign to say that the video has been received and consumed. There are other anonymous activities that impact the vlogger’s performance, such as likes and subscriptions. Watching videos as a lurker influences the performance as the vlogger uses the active response from lurkers – in the form of views, likes and subscriptions – to assess and adjust their ongoing performance on the site. A high number of views, likes or subscriptions on a certain video, for example, is seen as a successful video, and so is replicated.

Because vlogging communities and practices are public and take place in the public sphere (there are no exclusive passwords necessary to access the space, for example), making myself known as a researcher did not seem necessary. I wanted to participate as anyone would (initially) in the space. I watch vlogs regularly (daily), like videos
when I feel inclined to do so (although this is extremely rare for me), subscribe to all channels I choose to follow, and never comment. Every time I watch a video, it adds to the view count displayed directly below the video, as shown in Figure 15. My presence is known, and this affects the vlogger and the performance. It is a legitimate form of interaction in this space and can be viewed as a response. Each view is a mark of affirmation. The video did not randomly start playing by itself, rather the “lurker” chose it, clicked on it, waited through the advertisement (before YouTube Red) and watched it. Similarly, a subscription is a greater mark of affirmation. It says “I like what I see so much that I want more – I want to support what you are doing, and continue to watch your future content”. YouTube audiences are savvy, they know that their participation on YouTube (their acts of liking, subscribing and commenting) have a positive effect on the vlogger; they know that eventually, their support will lead to monetary rewards for the vlogger. And regardless of the benefits to the vloggers, they know that the more they respond, the more likely they are to get more content from the vlogger (after all YouTube audiences are consumers, consuming entertainment).

Lurking is a legitimate way of participating in this community and space. It is not how Australian mummy vloggers participate with each other, but I am not an Australian mummy vlogger and neither are all their viewers. However, the audience, regardless of who is present, is important for the whole process to take place. Australian mummy vloggers may not know who is liking their videos or adding to their view count, however, these activities are legitimate and important activities in the space, and their presence is important for the continuation of the practice. A vlogger may not know who is responsible for their subscriptions going up by 10, their
likes going up by 6 and their views going up by 15. However, these actions and their visibility means something to the Australian mummy vlogger, it validates, affirms and encourages their practice/participation/performance in that space. More importantly for my research, it validates, affirms and encourages their performance of their identity in that space – and after all, that is what the practice is about.

My participation may not look like a traditional ethnographer’s participation in a face-to-face community. However, online, my participation as a lurker is valid, and requires knowledge and mastery of the technologies, processes and functions of the space, which is part of establishing my authority as the researcher, as suggested above.

*Watching Vlogs and Participating (as a Lurker)*

Whenever I identified a new Australian mummy vlogger who met my criteria, I spent some time watching their content. Beginning with their very first vlog, I would watch all their videos spanning their presence on YouTube. Once I had identified them, I subscribed to their channel and continued to watch their content as it was uploaded. This watching, as a lurker, was informal. I made notes of anything of interest – something they said that caught my attention, any changes in their performance, interesting interactions in the comments section, collaborations or references to others showing a deepening of connections or relationships and so on. All of my watching was informal, as I had not begun any kind of official data collection. I was simply getting to know the community and its participants, familiarising myself with the language and conventions of the community, and familiarising myself with the genre more broadly.
In October 2015, having put together a substantial list of participants who met my criteria, I began collecting and analysing the first vlogs. Initially, I wanted to explore the first vlogs because I was interested in how the Australian mummy vloggers injected themselves into the space and practice. I wanted to understand their motivation (knowing that true motivation is impossible to know, and rather expressed motivation is most likely to be found in the first vlog). I wanted to hear their introductions, their rationalisations and stated motivations for participating in this very public yet intimate practice. I wanted to understand what drew them in, how they plucked up the courage, and what they were hoping to gain from the experience. I also wanted to understand the purpose, if any, of vlogging (as expressed by them). Was my interpretation of this practice as an identity forming and communicating practice shared by them? Were they aware of this? Did they speak about it in these terms? And so on.

*Looking at the First Vlogs*  
There are a number of elements that make the first vlog significant and worthy of investigation and analysis. The first vlog is the mother’s introduction to the space, her first attempt at participating in the practice and community as a vlogger. At this early

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18 Taylor and Bogdan (1998) suggest that analysis should begin while collecting data, in order to record “emerging themes or patterns: conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings” or common sayings (p. 143). This involved downloading the video, copying the URL, and taking screen shots of the channel banner, opening shot of the video, description bar below the video and comments section, including all comments, below the video. I kept all of this information in Microsoft OneNote. I liked that in OneNote I could store and view all different kinds of data and files together on the same “page”. On any given page I would include screen shots, notes, the downloaded video file, the original URL for the video, my transcription of the vlog, and any other information, in any format, gathered from any destination, relating to each vlogger.

19 By following each of the steps, laid out in this section, I was using a version of grounded theory as presented by Taylor and Bogdan (1998) who state that qualitative data analysis “is a process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing” and is an intuitive and inductive process (p. 141). They propose that a project such as this should be carried out by first collecting data, then identifying themes or developing concepts and ideas based on the data (including language, quotes, practices and behaviours), then collecting additional data which might shed light on the theme, and finally, confirming, discarding, refining and elaborating on the themes, concepts and ideas developed, building on theory that fits the data.
stage, the vlogger’s audience is assumed based on their history of watching other vloggers and is not yet fully known.\textsuperscript{20} The mother is therefore appealing to her ideal audience, rather than her actual audience (which may include people like family and friends – people in their everyday face-to-face contexts – who their videos may not be intended for). As a result, the first vlog includes a level of honesty, self-disclosure, vulnerability and “rawness” which is unique to the experience of trying something new. The first vlogs are also significant because they often include a justification for the vlogging and the expressed motivation for participating in the practice, which is useful in understanding how the vloggers perceive the practice and why they say they are doing it, i.e. what they hope to gain out of it etc. The first vlogs also tend to reflect the original genuine desires of the mother (before these get muddied or complicated by the realities of becoming successful and earning an income on YouTube).

Having collected the 33 first vlogs,\textsuperscript{21} I then began transcribing the videos. While transcribing, I was careful to not only provide a transcription of the words the vloggers were speaking, but also the context of the vlog – the physical location, the camera quality, the mother’s positioning in the shot, the characters featured in the vlog, the mother’s body language and so on.\textsuperscript{22} Once transcribed I then began coding\textsuperscript{23}

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item Based on my long-term observation of these vloggers, and from my own experience of vlogging, after some time the audience becomes known and this can lead to self-censorship. The vlogger gets a better understanding of their core group of viewers. The knowledge and reality of this sometimes affects the content. Australian mummy vloggers sometimes refrain from talking about certain things or giving detailed accounts of their experiences because, as they sometimes state, the person in question may be watching the video.
\item Although I identified 37 Australian mummy vloggers in my initial search, because many of them had deleted their content, I only had access to 33 first vlogs to analyse.
\item David Silverman argues that, when observing subjects, context and non-verbal communication are just as important as what is said. Similarly, Taylor & Bogdan argue that it is paramount to understand the context in which data is collected (1998, p. 142).
\item Taylor and Bogdan (1998) state, “coding is a way of developing and refining interpretations of the data. The coding process involves bringing together and analysing the data bearing on major themes, ideas, concepts, interpretations, and propositions. What were initially general insights, vague ideas, and hunches are refined, expanded, discarded, or fully developed during this process” (pp. 150-151).
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the data – the transcriptions (both audio and other), the text in the description bar below the vlog, and the comments in the comments section. Initially, I separated my analysis into natural categories that appeared obvious when looking at the first vlogs such as:

- **Motivation** pertaining to the mother’s expressed motivation for vlogging, either stated in their vlog, or written in their vlog title, in the description bar below their first vlog, in one of their comments in the comments section below their vlog, on their about page on their YouTube channel, or perhaps expressed on their channel art banner.

- **Composition and Quality** pertaining to the composition of the first vlog including the layout (sit down on vlog style), lighting (natural or artificial), location (in the privacy of their home or elsewhere, and if in their room, which room in particular), camera quality (grainy home video style or professional TV style), and body language of the mother (closed and vulnerable, sitting on the floor, making hand gestures, simply a close-up of the face showing facial expressions).

- **Content/Disclosure** pertaining to the type of information the mothers were sharing in their first vlogs (what were they saying, what were they talking about, what were they revealing by way of introducing themselves in the space, who were they referring to).

- And finally, **Response**, pertaining to the response the mothers received from their viewers, mainly determined through the view count, subscription count, like and dislike count (all of these numbers are featured below the vlog as shown in Figure 15) and by reading the comments in the comments section below the vlog.
Eventually, after working through each of the vlogs with these loose categories in mind, four very clear themes emerged, reflected consistently throughout the first vlogs. These themes were mainly apparent in the type of language used by the vloggers (both spoken and written). What I mean by this is that I identified these themes while coding because of the seeming repetition of the same language and ideas by many of the vloggers. For example, many of the vloggers repeated phrases such as “share the journey”, and many invited their viewers to “like, comment and subscribe”. These repetitions were spoken in the vlogs, written in text across the screen in the vlogs, written in the description bar below the vlogs, or written in comments in the comments section below the vlogs.

The four themes that emerged were:

- **Sharing Information** – It became apparent that what most of the mothers were doing in their first vlogs – what they were offering by way of introduction – was intimate and experienced-based information about the various stages of becoming and being mothers. They not only offered their intimate embodied experiences of trying to conceive, pregnancy and motherhood in their first vlogs, but they asked their viewers to share their experiences in exchange.

- **Finding/Joining Community** – Many of the mothers either expressed a desire to find/create community or to join the YouTube community, which they had identified through a history of watching other mummy vloggers on YouTube.

- **Documenting and Sharing Life** – Coupled with the desire to find/join community, many of the mothers expressed a desire to document their lives with their children and share their journey with others. This is, of course, what
the practice entails (recording daily life and uploading it to YouTube for the world to watch), but it is interesting that the mothers expressed this as a motivation for vlogging, particularly in the context of “making memories to look back on”.

- **Making Myself** – The last theme to emerge in the vlogs was the desire to work on and improve the self. This was often framed as a guilty pleasure or selfish desire.

Having identified these themes, I collected additional data (as recommended by Taylor and Bogdan (1998)), drawing on my long-term informal and ongoing observation of each of the mummy vloggers. Focusing on these themes I recorded everything that I felt built on and developed these themes. I was particularly interested in gathering illustrative examples. As part of this process I both confirmed and refined some ideas, while discarding others (as suggested by Taylor and Bogdan (1998)).

Listing the steps in this method highlights my (the researcher’s) construction of the research findings. As Taylor and Bogdan (1998) state, qualitative data analysis is an inductive and intuitive process, open to the researcher’s interpretation and biases. Qualitative research such as this often adopts a number of methods (a multi methodological approach often referred to as triangulation24), in order to allow for a concentrated and in-depth enquiry resulting in a more “holistic work” or “thick description” (Geertz, 1973; Jankowski & Wester, 1991; Jick, 1979, pp. 608-609), and also to raise the researcher “above the personalistic biases that stem from single

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24 Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods of data gathering and analysis in a single object of study (Jankowski & Wester, 1991, p. 62).
methodologies” (Denzin, 1970, p. 27). As Webb et al (1966) suggest “the most fertile research for validity comes from a combined series of different measures” (p. 174).

All research is shaped, however, and the use of multiple methods does not absolve the researcher from bias or interpretation, and therefore reflexivity through the research process is paramount (ibid). Particularly a researcher must acknowledge their agenda.

Earlier in this chapter I position myself as the researcher, demonstrating my privilege and the way it has informed my research, right down to the subjects that I have chosen...
to explore. It is important to acknowledge that as the researcher I have a specific agenda. This research project is my attempt at a Doctor of Philosophy – a level of qualification which I hope will grant me the ability to pursue an academic career. Beyond this agenda, and speaking to the specific subject matter of this thesis, I also have an agenda to position what Australian mummy vloggers are doing as important, meaningful, and worthy of investigation. This means that, largely because of my status as a white middle class woman, I place value on the performances of Australian mummy vloggers and I want them to be seen as valuable by others. With this agenda comes the risk of being celebratory of the practice. As an academic enquiry demanding rigor, I critically engage with Australian mummy vlogging, questioning the motivations and ethics of the practice. My interpretation of these automedia as meaningful and significant, however, cannot be ignored, as I (like all researchers) am not capable of being completely objective and unbiased. I bring my own framework, experiences and contexts to this research, and a reader with a different framework, experience and context may not agree with my interpretation of these texts and subjects as valuable. It is in this case that I motion towards my argument – that shows the significance of these texts beyond the specific subjects of this research project to demonstrate how automedia is formed in networked digital environments.

**Ethical Considerations: Are Vlogs Public or Private? – A Relevant Methodological Case Study**

In 2012 Tobias Raun published his PhD dissertation on trans vlogging which explored a number of transgender vloggers, recording their transition from MTF or FTM. One of the members of this community on YouTube, sillyyet succinct, publicly declared
his concerns about an external researcher “analysing” his vlogs without his permission stating “he never told me that he was looking at my videos”. The vlogger in question published a vlog on his channel warning people about Raun on YouTube and expressing his outrage that someone would be analysing the community’s vlogs without their permission. He states “I find this problematic that he’s doing this because he’s using our videos and writing about them and writing about how we present ourselves and how we think about ourselves and all this kind of stuff …but he’s not participating in the community - as far as I know - I don’t think he leaves anyone comments or sends people messages of support or encouragement or engages in the dialogue or makes videos of his own”. He goes on to explain that the vlogs are only 10% of what goes on in the community, noting,

…and so for me someone analysing the audio visual component of this community and not really understanding the deeper aspects of it is really problematic and when I confronted him about this a couple of years ago, really upset, he just responded that I was being hostile and horrible and that I shouldn’t contact him again. So he didn’t want to take my concerns seriously. He didn’t want to listen to me. He didn’t want to listen to my feelings about how I thought this type of research was unethical and how I found it oppressive or anything. He didn’t want to hear any of it, as if the fact that he’s trans gives him a pass to do anything, you know, free of criticism, free of critique, free of any kind of dialogue about it, and …I’m not okay with that. (syllyyetsuccinct in his vlog published Oct 15, 2011 on YouTube).27

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27 This video has since been deleted.
This vlog can still be watched today. Although Raun himself has gone through the transition that each of his subjects were documenting (from FTM or from MTF), although he had the language and terminology and could relate to the physical transitional experience firsthand, one member of the trans vlogger community did not accept him as having the authority to “analyse” or conclude anything from his research because he was not participating in the community.

I think this is a valid, although surprising, critique of research such as Raun’s and potentially my own. I think it is surprising because syllyyetsuccinct does not acknowledge that the vlogs that Raun is analysing, just as the vlogs I analyse, are publicly available for anyone to watch. And according to the YouTube Terms of Service, anyone can do more than watch the vlogs. syllyyetsuccinct seems to be distressed about two things: one is the fact that Raun is not participating, and therefore is only researching “10%” of what happens in the community. In other words, according to syllyyetsuccinct, Raun doesn’t have the “whole” or “big” picture which may affect his findings, and two, Raun can publish whatever he wants.

There are a number of issues here that I would like to explore. Raun is researching the content that he has legitimate access to, the “10%” that has been deliberately filmed, carefully edited, and consciously published online by participants. Accessing and analysing these videos is no different to accessing and analysing public archives. The distress articulated by syllyyetsuccinct seems to imply shock or at the very least disapproval with the content/vlogs being accessed or used in this way or for this purpose. This suggests an alarming issue surrounding ownership and consent. The YouTube Terms of Service make it very clear that a viewer has the right to do almost
anything with the content they have access to. Are vloggers unaware of this when they produce and publish content? As a researcher I am covered by the YouTube Terms of Service and I use this to justify my decision not to get consent from my participants, however, should we hold ourselves to a higher ethical standard and ensure informed consent is given to collect and analyse content that is publicly available in case the participants are not aware that their content could be used in this way? I think this is one of the most important and timely questions that arises in my research which I explore in depth in my final chapter, ‘The Ethics of Dealing with Deleted Lives’.

When addressing the issue of the subject’s consent to have their vlogs included in the research, a researcher must first establish whether vlogs published on YouTube are public and therefore able to be analysed, critiqued and commented on like all other published media, or private and therefore requiring consent by the author before any analysis can be done. In their paper ‘The Psychology of the Blog: Public or Private?’ Gurak and Antonijevic (2008) discuss the nature of blogging which they conclude is both private and public. They state that blogging “promotes a high level of self disclosure” (Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008, p. 64) much like a personal diary, but that “blogging is the event of ’rewriting oneself’ through interaction with the audience” (p. 65) making blogging both personal/private and collective/public.

Raun (2012b) chose not to get consent from the YouTubers he included in his research arguing “that uploading a video on YouTube is itself a form of consent; it may not be informed, but it is nevertheless a form of consent where you agree that millions of people are allowed to watch and discuss your vlog, including researchers”
(pp. 34-35). Acknowledging that “some vloggers may feel personally and emotionally exposed (though YouTube is a public forum)” Raun chose to anonymise the vloggers by “not stating their current city of residence, name of significant others, or name of their YouTube channel, and to use pseudonyms” (p. 35) unless he was specifically asked not to by the participants. Presumably Raun chose to make his participants anonymous because of the “extra” information they revealed in their interviews with him. Unlike Raun, I do not include interviews as part of my method and am only dealing with material that is publicly available.

Although the material I am dealing with is publicly available, as a researcher I still have a responsibility to protect my participants, considering vlogs, like blogs, include intimacy and self-disclosure similar to that of a personal diary (Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008). Although a YouTuber may give consent for anyone to watch their vlog, it is an entirely different matter for a researcher to analyse, interpret, frame and construct the content of the vlog, (and indeed the vlogger), and then publish it in an external forum (alien to the vlogger; alien to YouTube) presenting it as fact. Cultures and communities exist within contexts, and although the researcher has a responsibility to accurately present the research findings within their qualitative context, surely the vlogger should be entitled to consent for their intimate lives to be presented in a different context, outside of their control. This is one of the major issues that arises in my research which I explore in depth in Chapter 7, ‘The Ethics of Dealing with Deleted Lives’.

The YouTube Terms of Service, which are the only official rules or regulations of the site relating to both vloggers and viewers, clearly states that a viewer is free to do
almost anything with the content that they watch on YouTube, as seen below. This was enough for me to justify my decision to gather and analyse the vlogs without the vloggers’ consent and publish my findings in academic contexts. This was also a strong enough justification for my ethics committee. (However, having completed this study, I question whether the ethical standards we have in place when exploring this kind of intimate yet public material are good enough. This opinion forms part of my research findings, and I explore this issue in depth in Chapter 7, ‘The Ethics of Dealing with Deleted Lives’.)


- “You understand that YouTube does not guarantee any confidentiality with respect to any Content you submit. …“Content” includes the text, software, scripts, graphics, photos, sounds, music, videos, audiovisual combinations, interactive features and other materials you may view on, access through, or contribute to the Service.”

- You are “solely responsible for your own Content and the consequences of submitting and publishing your Content on the Service. You affirm, represent, and warrant that you own or have the necessary licenses, rights, consents, and permissions to publish Content you submit; and you license to YouTube all patent, trademark, trade secret, copyright or other proprietary rights in and to such Content for publication on the Service pursuant to these Terms of Service.”

Since completing this research, and while preparing to submit this thesis, the YouTube Terms of Service have been updated, which I note in Chapter 7, ‘The Ethics of Dealing with Deleted Lives’.
As the YouTube Terms of Service clearly state, a vlogger is not guaranteed confidentiality with any content they submit, and by publishing content on YouTube a vlogger grants the user a non-exclusive license to access their content through the service “and to use, reproduce, distribute, display, publish, make available online or electronically transmit, and perform such Content as permitted through the functionality of the Service.” As the user I have a non-exclusive license to do any of these things, as permitted by the site, and this is the justification I use when choosing not to make the subjects of my research anonymous.

Although there are many considerations when working with such sensitive autobiographical (intimate) data (pertaining to a person’s life), there are other reasons, beyond YouTube’s Terms of Service that suggest content of this nature should not be
made anonymous. If the premise and practice of mummy vlogging is intimate self-disclosure, and it is the process of intimate disclosure that brings the subject into being (Foucault, 1990), then surely the mummy vlogger name and YouTube channel is central to their performance of motherhood and identity and therefore the vlogger cannot be removed from these factors. If self-disclosure is key to the way the mummy vlogger culture and community functions, and self-disclosure is inseparable from the individual who is disclosing, then one cannot present the disclosure separate from the identity (its owner).

Secondly, and depending on your discipline perhaps more importantly, vloggers are creators, they are publishing material of their own making (material that they legally and legitimately own). As researchers/scholars/academics one of the fundamental values of our discipline is attribution of intellectual property. Making the participants of my research anonymous would be to deny them ownership and attribution of their published intellectual and creative property. This is not only disempowering for the vloggers who deserve to be recognised for their published work, but it is fundamentally wrong – unethical – in our discipline.

I have informally witnessed the outrage and devastation when a vlogger realises their content has been copied, or their ideas copied without being credited. Considering the labour that goes into producing a vlog, something I have experienced firsthand through my own practice of vlogging – the many hours of filming, editing and publishing, the weeks of planning and thinking about content and creative ways of representation, and pride that is associated with producing a creative, engaging piece of media to be consumed by the public – to make a “creator” anonymous in any
context, for any reason, is wrong. We cannot ignore the fact that vlogging is a deliberate practice and that the individual chooses what to reveal and what not to reveal. To override their decision to “go public” would be to remove their agency and to assume superiority over the subject – something a researcher, an ethnographer, should never do.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I outline the principles of ethnography, justifying my decision to use it as the method for my research, and working through the many issues that arise when applying ethnography to virtual spaces. Using Hine’s (2000, 2015) theory of virtual ethnography, examining recent virtual ethnographies such as Raun’s (2012b, 2016), I navigate methodological questions and considerations that are still in their infancy. In this chapter I work through the issue of defining the field in a virtual space, where the physical boundaries of the community are not visible, concluding as Olwig and Hastrup (1997) suggest, that the field online should be redefined as a field of relations. In this redefinition, the boundaries of the field are determined by following the connections, relationships, references, stories and events that take place in the space. I explore the issue of establishing authority as the researcher online, arguing that in the absence of the physical experience of travelling to the geographic location and living in the context, online authority is established by the ethnographer by gaining mastery of the technologies used by the community. Here, I borrow ideas from autoethnography as a means to establish authority, dabbling in the practice of vlogging myself as a means to gain the “thick description” so desired in traditional ethnography. I talk through my method step-by-step, establishing my processes for
choosing the subjects of this research, collecting and analysing data, and presenting my findings, using grounded theory as suggested by Taylor and Bogdan (1998).

Considering observation and participation are fundamental components of ethnography I suggest the role of a “lurker” as a legitimate form of participation online. Unlike the traditional understanding of a “lurker”, which is derisive, I build on Crawford’s definition of the lurker as listener, giving them an active rather than passive role in the community. I argue that the lurker plays an important role as audience and witness to the identity performance taking place. The presence of the audience is crucial to any identity performing practice in that it helps the individual realise their performance. The lurker is not passive and invisible, as some might think. The lurker plays an active and visible role through their participation – through the functions of viewing vlogs, liking vlogs and subscribing to channels. All of these actions are visible and have a significant effect on the vlogger, affirming and encouraging their performance and identity in that space.

I explore the necessity for a reflexive approach in all research, and in particular in ethnography, presenting my assumptions, motivations and agenda in conducting this research. Lastly, I explore the ethical considerations surrounding the nature of the practice as both public and private. When faced with the option of making my participants anonymous, as Raun chose to do in his ethnography, I argue that not only is this not necessary based on YouTube’s Terms of Service, but to make the participants anonymous would be to remove the vlogger’s agency, deny them attribution for their intellectual and creative property, border on plagiarism, have an
adverse effect on their deliberate practice of constructing identity through intimate self-disclosure, and conflict with a fundamental principle in academia.
Chapter 2. *Becoming through Vlogging on YouTube; Becoming through the Automedial Diary*

In the *Introduction* I state that the mummy vloggers included in this research are actively engaging in a process of constructing and presenting their identity through vlogging. Vlogging is, what Giddens (1991) calls, a “reconstructive endeavor” (p. 75) through which the individual becomes who they want to be. I suggest that the reconstructive endeavour at the core of modern social life is personal narrative, a phenomenon indulged and demanded in every aspect of Western society. Vlogging is arguably a new way for the construction of personal narrative – a new way for individuals to ‘become’ in modern society. The platform (YouTube), and the practice (vlogging), allows ordinary people to film and upload their everyday lives; to live, and to share their lives simultaneously, and in doing so create, maintain and present their automedial narrative.

The automedial narratives of mummy vloggers, updated daily or weekly, are like diary entries. Mummy vlogging is an extension of the published diary online as explored by scholars such as Kylie Cardell (2014). Mummy vlogging supersedes mummy blogging, featuring the same intimate, private content (explored in the next chapter, ‘Negotiating Motherhood’), but extending beyond text to include footage (moving image) of everyday life. The Australian mummy vloggers included in this study post videos like diary entries, documenting their daily lives, cataloguing their thoughts, feelings and experiences, reflecting on their lives and themselves, and growing and developing through the process. The difference between this kind of diarising, and the traditional journal or diary is that vlogs are public, immediately consumed, interactive, and constantly being updated.
Personal narrative in this context is not concerned with a finished product, but rather with a process of living and becoming through the practice of vlogging – through the marriage of individual with media platform, technology, creative practice and community. Vlogging allows mothers to become their role and identity, in relationship with media and with others, as they live their daily lives, and they achieve this through the continual construction, updating and maintenance of their personal narratives on YouTube, as well as on other networked digital media such as Facebook and Instagram.

In this chapter I explore vlogging as a process of becoming. Using one of the Australian mummy vloggers included in this study, Ash, as an example, I demonstrate how vlogging is a contemporary form of the published diary online; an arena for the self in which mothers document and share their daily lives, and in doing so, become themselves. The result of these practices is most commonly a cohesive automedial narrative.

**Becoming through Automedia**

Autobiography and automediality share the same focus and purpose, the formation and discovery of self, and both denote processes through which the self is realised and actualised. Smith and Watson (2010) state, “in Greek, *autos* denotes ‘self,’ *bios* ‘life,’ and *graphe* ‘writing.’ Taken together in this order, the words *self life writing* offer a brief definition of the *autobiography*” (p. 1). Responding to this definition Kennedy and Maguire (2018) argue,

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29 Parts of this section were published in *The Texts and Subjects of Automediality* by Ümit Kennedy and Emma Maguire (the Introduction to the M/C Special Issue on Automediality, edited by Emma Maguire and Ümit Kennedy). The parts used are clearly referenced.
If “autobiography” has denoted a way to write the self from the location of the self, automediality points to the range of media forms and technologies through which people engage in digital, visual, filmic, performative, textual, and transmediated forms of documenting, constructing and presenting the self.

Automediality allows us to explore the ways subjects, narratives and selves are formed in relationship with new media technologies, their influencers and participants. As Smith and Watson (2010) suggest, the term automediality allows us to “expand the definition of how subjectivity is constructed in writing, image, or new media” (p. 168). An automedial investigation calls for new language (Kennedy in Kennedy & Maguire, 2018) and new understandings of the effect of media technologies on the self. Rather than tools for the communication of identity, media technologies constitute the self in modern social life.

Conjoining autos and media, the concept redresses a tendency in autobiography studies to consider media as “tools” for rendering a pre-existing self. Theorists of automediality emphasize that the choice of medium is determined by self-expression; and the materiality of the medium is constitutive of the subjectivity rendered. Thus media technologies do not simplify or undermine the interiority of the subject but, on the contrary, expand the field of self-representation beyond the literary to cultural and media practices. New media of the self revise notions of identity and the rhetoric and modalities of self-presentation, and they prompt new imaginings.
of virtual sociality enabled by concepts of community that do not depend on personal encounter. (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 168).

The difference between autobiography and automedia is the emphasis on process. Anna Poletti and Julie Rak (2018) state “[w]e understand automedia to be about the mediation of identity when identity is both a product of representation and a process that is continually becoming.” Automedia allows for exploration of the process through which selves and identities are created in relationship with media technologies, platforms, and networks. In the Introduction to the special issue of M/C Journal on Automediality (2018), in conversation with Emma Maguire, I write:

I think what automediality is, which is different to auto/biography, is process rather than product. Automediality allows us to explore how our lives intertwine with different mediums and technologies resulting in new subjects, but subjects in motion. There is no product, there is no complete narrative, there is no snapshot that captures the subject. The subject is always developing, always in motion, always in the “process of doing” (Rak 156), of being and becoming. It is a “moving target” as Smith and Watson suggest (“Virtually” 71). And therefore, automediality, as Rak suggests, is the process of living: living in relationship with media. Whereas an autobiographical enquiry has usually (not always) involved the study of a subject in a complete form (although susceptible to other “versions”)—a text in other words, which can be examined by itself—an automedial enquiry has to adapt to the fact that there isn’t a product that can be examined in isolation. As Emma has argued elsewhere, we can never hold “a single cohesive version” of

automedial subjects in our hands and we never reach “the end” of a subject’s self-representation as long as they continue to “post” (“Self-Branding” 75).

What we are exploring as scholars of automediality is a process of living. How people live, create and present themselves, participate, narrativise, and simply “be” in different spaces, using different mediums and technologies. (Kennedy in Kennedy & Maguire, 2018).

It is important to note that autobiography has long been recognised as process, too, and there is a large body of scholarship dedicated to how the self is realised, actualised and governed through the process of writing. Writing, and more specifically self-writing, has long been seen, as Foucault defines it, as a technology or technique of the self (Foucault, 1986, 1988, 1997; Sauter, 2014, p. 827). Through self-writing (through personal narrative or writing about the self) the author shows themselves, works on themselves, governs their conduct, and knows themselves (Foucault, 1997; Sauter, 2014). Using writing as an arena for the self – a place for self-reflection and growth can be dated back to the ancient Greeks and Romans who used writing to work on themselves as part of their practice of the care of the self (Foucault, 1997; Hadot, 1998; Sauter, 2014, p. 827). And there have been many genres of self-writing throughout the years that have allowed people to develop, discover and work on the self, including religious autobiography, secular autobiography, memoir, the journal and the diary.

Rather than writing in private, until there is a whole volume of work, automedia involves publishing short multimedia excerpts about the self (in this case) on a particular networked digital media platform on an ongoing basis. Be it 140 characters on Twitter, a url link on Facebook, an image and hashtags on Instagram, or a 10
minute video on YouTube, these posts are the self, they contain the self, they become the self.

Through posting, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat or any other social media site becomes a tool for self-formation – social media become techniques of the self. In her paper titled ‘‘What’s on your mind?’ Writing on Facebook as a tool for self-formation’ Theresa Sauter (2014) analyses posting on Facebook as a technique of self and a tool for self-formation. In her paper Sauter says “[t]he increasing technologisation of modern western life means that day-to-day processes of self-formation are becoming more and more implicated with new digital tools” (pp. 823-824). Sauter explores our use of technology, and self-writing (or personal narrative) in our efforts to manage our conduct and self-govern ourselves. She calls our activity using these technologies, such as Facebook, self-writing, the purpose of which is to form and work on ourselves. Sauter uses Facebook updates “to illustrate some of the ways in which people become selves in modern societies” (pp. 824-825).

The significant thing about automediality, as I suggest above, is the unique way people live in relationship with media and the fact that this “living” is material. The mediated self, while it exists, is a material, traceable self. By material, I don’t mean that it can be held in one’s hand. Rather, the process of self-formation is recorded at every stage of its development and the media technologies, interactions and other influencing factors (like brands and markets) are all visible, documented and traceable. And all of this – every stage of the automedial development – is published and accessible (as long as it remains available).
Although mediated subjects and texts can be fleeting and ephemeral, the fact that they are mediated means that to some extent they are traceable. The mediation of the self means we can see and track its progression, its influencers, its forms, its relationships and dialogues. Although it is changeable and deletable, “doing” (living in relationship with media) leaves a record. On YouTube, for example, I can see the interactions that take place, through comments, likes and subscriptions, and I can therefore trace the subject as it changes. Mediating the self in this way materialises the process of self-formation. Automediality illuminates the process and makes it accessible to us to research. (Kennedy in conversation with Maguire in Kennedy & Maguire, 2018).

Rather than relying on the individual’s account of their self-formation, an automedial investigation allows the researcher to see the subject in every stage of its development; to track its interactions and influencers; to see, for example, how the self is socially shaped in dialogue with others, with brands, with media and technologies.

In the introduction to the special issue of M/C Journal on Automediality, titled ‘The Texts and Subjects of Automediality’, Emma Maguire and I suggest becoming as a useful way to understand and explore automediality. We draw on Rob Cover and his chapter, ‘Becoming and Belonging: Performativity, Subjectivity, and the Cultural Purposes of Social Networking’, in Poletti and Rak’s (2013) Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online. In his chapter, Cover uses Butler’s theory of performativity to explore identity construction on Facebook. He summarises,
“Butler’s theory of performativity is based on an ongoing process of becoming, rather than an ontological state of being, whereby becoming is a sequence of acts that retroactively constitute identity (Salih 2002; Butler 1990)” (p. 56).

Rather than the self being fixed, and simply presented online, Cover (2013) argues that “social networking sites operate as a space for the continued, ongoing construction of subjectivity” (p. 55). Social networking sites are “neither a site for identity play nor for the static representation of the self”, but rather enable “an ongoing reflexive performance and articulation that utilizes the full range of tools made available through common social networking sites” (Cover, 2013, p. 55). Rather than thinking about networked digital media as something that people approach with pre-existing identities (Cover, 2013; Green, 2008), which they either present or express (boyd, 2007) or deliberately deviate from (Turkle, 1995) online, Cover (2013), referring to Butler (1993), urges us to view online behaviour as “a set of acts and behaviors that constitute” identity (p. 58):

Where Butler's theories provide an important perspective for the study of social networking and identity construction is in extending the very idea of performance from the bodily, the experiential, the affective into the field of online acts. In other words, online social networking behavior is as performative as “real life” acts, and just as equally implies a stabilized core inner self behind the profile. Importantly, this shifts our understanding of social networking from one in which identity is understood through ideas of representation of the “real” in the realm of the “digital.” Instead, it opens the possibility of thinking about social networking and identity in the context of
being a matrix of acts of profile building, maintenance, friending, updating, tagging, album adding, and other networked communication, contiguous with the many everyday nonvolunturist and nonconscious performance of selfhood. (p. 56).

Identities are cultural, retrospective and ephemeral. It is more useful in an investigation such as this to view online activity and real life acts – as real life “doing” – in accord with cultural norms. Becoming, as Cover (2013), and others such as Bell (1999), suggest, is always in relationship to belonging (which I explore elsewhere).

Simply, what Cover (2013) argues, using Butler (1993), is that it is our actions that constitute our identity and not our identity that determines our actions. Identity must be viewed as the result of our actions, or, in Butler’s (1993) terms, “the “self” is an effect of the performance constituted in and through language, discourse, and culture” (Cover, 2013, p. 58). Identity is not a preexisting thing, we perform roles and behaviours in accord with a set of cultural and social norms, and the performance becomes our identity (Butler, 1993; Cover, 2013, p. 58). The fact that we “do” life in accordance with cultural and social norms is, as Cover argues, stabilising, and therefore produces “the fiction of a fixed, inner, essential selfhood, which retroactively produces the illusion that there is a core doer behind the deed” (Butler, 1993, p. 12; Cover, 2013, pp. 58-59).

The point of all of this is that it is the “doing” that constitutes identity, and when we “do” using different media and technologies, in different spaces and with different
people, each of these things can reconstitute or reconfigure our identity/ies. However, there are binary, stabilising factors, because of the cultural need for consistency. Cover (2004; 2015) refers to these as “identity coordinates”. For mummy vloggers this may be their consistent performance of motherhood across all of their accounts on various social media - maintaining their (retrospective) identity as consistent, recognizable and intelligible (see Cover, 2013, p. 59), however one that is never finished, always “under construction” (Kennedy, 2006, p. 869; 2013).

What mummy vloggers are “doing”, therefore, that constitutes their automedial life and narrative is documenting and sharing their lives as mothers on YouTube, in daily or weekly installments.

**Documenting Life and Making Memories**

For mothers, YouTube offers a space to document a significant time in their lives. Usually beginning with a focus on their body (as they try to conceive or as it changes during pregnancy), mummy vlogging is a ritualistic practice that documents and shares the ordinary, everyday experiences of becoming and being a mother; from tracking their ovulation cycles, to giving “bump dates” every week as their body and “bump” (pregnancy) changes, to showing their everyday routine with babies, toddlers and children. In the following sections I explore how this practice is framed by mothers – their stated motivations for documenting and sharing their lives on YouTube – and what form it takes – the ritualistic, dated, daily or weekly intimate updates. In the following chapter I explore the content of the practice – the ordinary, everyday content laden with confession and intimate self-disclosure – how it is used by mothers and why it is significant. The significance of documenting life and
publishing it on YouTube is that women become their mummy vlogger identity through this practice; every activity done by mothers on YouTube constitutes their retrospective automedial identity and narrative.

Documenting and sharing life is a primary function of vlogging (video logging). The very word “log” implies a record of an ongoing nature. A log is something you add to, keep updated, and refer back to as an archive of events holding some significance. I am reminded of a captain’s log, a dutiful and accurate recording of an adventure or endeavour done in the service of others (in the service of government, humanity, the progression of knowledge and the human race). In my mind, logs are official – I’m thinking of the lead scientist keeping a log while working on a new experiment, or the lighthouse keeper keeping a log of the weather. Logs are records, artefacts, archives that are stored, held on to as significant, and revisited, referred back to as documents containing knowledge. Logs are also intimate, usually only ever containing the subject (the individual) and the pen and paper, audio recording device, or camera. Although they are recorded to be referenced in some way in the future, they are inherently intimate (a one-way conversation) during their making, and in my mind, even when official, are valuable because they contain the personal subject – the thoughts and feelings of the individual keeping the log.

Often the desire for a mother to document their journey begins with a change in circumstance, a decision to begin trying to conceive a child, a pregnancy, or the birth of a new child and a desire to document their development. Some mothers express a desire to document the difficulties of falling pregnant, the many months of trying to conceive and the various methods they tried along the way. Some mothers want to
document their pregnancy, symptoms, body as it transforms, and unborn child as it develops. Other mothers express a desire to document the physical and developmental changes of their children as they grow. Although all of these desires are very personal in nature, as each journey is specific to the individual mother and her circumstances, vlogging any one of these experiences is a practice undertaken by an increasing number of mothers around the world. In Australia, as I note in the Introduction, the number of mothers documenting and sharing these experiences on YouTube when I began my research in 2015 was just under 40. Today, in 2018, the number of Australian mothers documenting and sharing their lives on YouTube has more than doubled. The Facebook group for Australian Vlogging Mums\(^{31}\) has over 100 members (as at August, 2018).

For many mothers, vlogging is a way to keep a record of this significant time in their lives. One mother, Jen\(^{32}\), signs off her first vlog saying, “I’d like to keep this up and have a nice little video record for both of us really, um, well for our family” (Jen And Zoe, 2012). Jen’s first video is an update on her 18-month-old daughter, Zoe. The video is entirely about Zoe and where she is up to in her development. Another mother, Dominika\(^{33}\) (formerly Running Lipstick Babies, now Dominika Eve), expresses a desire to document the rest of her pregnancy with her second child. In her first vlog on YouTube she says, “Um, I really wanted to start this channel just mainly to document the rest of my pregnancy” (Dominika Eve, 2014). Similarly, Sarah describes her desire to start vlogging by saying,

\(^{31}\) This is a private group for Australian Mummy Vloggers. I was invited to join this group through my relationship with one of the Mummy Vloggers included in this study. I was permitted access because I am technically a vlogger and a mother and my vlogs (about PhD life) unavoidably include content about my life as a mother and my baby daughter.

\(^{32}\) Video still available 18.7.17

\(^{33}\) Her video is also still available 18.7.17
So, I thought I would get in from behind the camera and um, kind of, do this myself. It’s mainly for myself. I’m an avid diary kind of person. I did video diaries for my first pregnancy every week up until I was due. I still look back on those now and um you know just kind of see what was happening back in my life back then. (sarahandwade86, 2012).

Vlogging, as I maintain, is an autobiographical practice. The subject of the vlogs is the self (the mother) in motion. The act of recording, of documenting, of archiving, is an identity forming practice. Mummy vloggers often refer to what they are doing as a deliberate attempt at making memories to look back on. In her first video, Elise, introduced in the Introduction, says, “it’s amazing to think that you’ll be able to look back on their lives…if all else fails it’ll be an awesome thing for me and my husband to look back on” (Elise Sheree, 2013b). The memories are their own, and their children’s and partner’s. They are intimate memories of family life (curated by the mothers as I discuss in Chapter 6, ‘Curating Life’).

As discussed in the Introduction, vlogging by mothers and families reflects a current obsession in the West with digitally documenting and recording ordinary life (Arthur, 2009). YouTube enables this practice, allowing people to create digital episodic memory banks (S. Smith & Watson, 2013) and automedial archives, which we later use to identity ourselves (Eakin, 2008). The obsession with “saving” and “memory” is an important one, as memory is closely linked with identity (Brockmeier, 2015; Conway, 1990; Locke, 1964). Memory is crucial to the Western process of making and knowing the self, as the memories we make become who we are. We document
and record our lives through all forms of technology and media, in order to create ourselves and leave a record of ourselves to look back on. For if we do not record, document and share our lives, do we exist?

The documenting and sharing of life on YouTube is the automedial act – the activity of *becoming*. But what form does this activity take? In the following section I explore the vlog as diary, using Ash as an example.

“*Day 921*: The Vlog as Diary

Mummy vlogging is a documentative and archival endeavour focused around recording the domestic, the familial, and the intimate – subject matter traditionally considered private, and gendered female (which I explore in depth in Chapter 3, ‘Negotiating Motherhood’) like the diary (Cardell, 2014; Holmes, 1995). As an autobiographical practice, mummy vlogging is an extension of the Diary, specifically the published diary online, as explored by Kylie Cardell (2014) in her book *De@r World: Contemporary Uses of the Diary*. Cardell writes, “[i]n all kinds of ways, contemporary diaries make visible the intimate and the personal, they blur and destabilize conventional boundaries between public and private, and they foreground processes of formation and reformation of subjectivity in self-representation” (p. 3). It is these three main characteristics, along with the similarities in form such as dated entries, the way they are discursively constituted, and the unfinished nature of the published diary online, that situate mummy vlogs as an extension of the contemporary diary.
Cardell (2014) writes, “The diary now is a performative space, a print genre, a digital platform, a behavior regime, a smartphone app” (p. 3). Examples of the diary can be seen in many of the everyday digital practices ordinary people participate in, be it posting on networked digital media (see Sauter, 2014), tracking our activities and sleep with digital devices such as the Fitbit (see Cardell, 2018) and smartphone apps, or even scanning our loyalty cards at supermarkets or departments stores. More and more of our activities, interactions and transactions are recorded and saved. And this information is stored and mined as valuable data containing and/or amounting to the self.

Today, the autobiographical technologies and process that allow us to document and save the self are becoming increasingly popular. The diary, in particular, is an increasingly popular contemporary genre because of its “marginal mode” as an unconventional genre for “‘other’ kinds of subjects” (Cardell, 2014, p. 4). Subjects include those traditionally considered “as peripheral to matters of public importance or historical significance” (Cardell, 2014, p. 4) such as women and young people. The subjects of the diary, along with its discursive form, have historically led critics to consider it both “unprofessional” (Cardell, 2014) and “structureless” (Lejeune, 1989), and considering its recent popularity as “an icon of confessional culture” has been thrown in the bag of practices deemed self-indulgent and narcissistic (Cardell, 2014, p. 5). However, for all the criticism the diary has received throughout the decades, never has it been more popular as the unconventional embodiment and fulfillment of our “widespread fascination for the lives of others” (Cardell, 2014, p. 5).
Australian mummy vloggers fulfil this fascination for the intimate lives of ordinary others. In filming and uploading footage of their homes, families, thoughts, feelings and experiences, they are adding to one of the largest databases of private human lived experience, and they are feeding society’s obsession with intimate self-disclosure, provided daily or weekly as entertainment, to be consumed by audiences as reality television. The vlog as diary is a complex genre. By vlogging, Australian mothers are bringing traditionally private life, laden with intimate self-disclosure, into the public sphere and offering it to audiences to be consumed as entertainment, almost in real time. And through this process, mummy vloggers form and perform, negotiate and re-negotiate the self, responding to feedback and criticism as they go. Such is the nature of the published diary online, updated weekly on an ongoing basis, as demonstrated by Ash.

“Hi YouTube, My Name’s Ash”
Ash Jackson is one of the most consistent, long standing Australian mummy vloggers on YouTube. She lives in the suburbs of Brisbane, Queensland, with her husband and three children, close to her parents, her siblings, and her school friends. She met her husband, James, at school, and has been with him ever since. Ash and James moved in together in their teens, while working and studying at University. Ash’s journey on YouTube began in May, 2011, a couple of weeks after her 20th birthday (see Figure 16).
Her first video, titled *8 Weeks And 1 Day Pregnant*, features a young woman with dark brown shoulder length hair and silky-smooth skin. All we can see is her head and shoulders, and that she is sitting in a room in daylight. There’s a dark hallway with stairs behind her and half her face is illuminated by what must be a window just off screen, bringing in natural light. There are thick black lines on either side of the image – the video doesn’t quite fill the YouTube display. She begins to speak. Her voice sounds small and child-like, making her seem even younger than she looks.

Hi YouTube, my name’s Ash. Um I’ve just started, decided to start doing these YouTube pregnancy vlogs um just to keep my family and friends updated on what's going on in my pregnancy and also to get support from other young mums who are in my situation and to give my support as well. Um, so yeah, I’m hopefully going to be doing them once every week, but I’ll
just see how things go in terms of um juggling uni and work and all that stuff as well. So yeah, I am 20 years old, however I’ve only just turned 20, I fell pregnant when I was 19, um but right at the end of being 19 because I am only 8 weeks as of yesterday. Um, so yeah I’ve decided to start doing these vlogs quite early on, um just so I can get yeah as much feedback as possible from you guys on what’s normal and um yeah share my stories with you and you share them with me. (Join The Jacksons, 2011)

Ash keeps talking for 8 minutes and 50 seconds in her first video. She talks about her boyfriend, her living situation, her parents’ reaction to her pregnancy considering how young she is, her symptoms and her plans for the future. She shows us her belly and explains how it is different than usual. Then she signs off, “see you later, bye.” This video is the first in what is now over six years of vlogging on YouTube for Ash and her family. For almost three of those six years Ash uploaded a vlog to her channel – featuring herself, her now husband, and her now three children – every single day. Figure 17 shows a recent channel banner for Join The Jacksons, featuring all five members of the family.

![Figure 17 Recent channel banner for Join The Jacksons](image)

From her very first video Ash is disclosing intimate things about herself, her relationship, her body and her family. She talks about the intimate details of her
pregnancy, such as her symptoms. She exposes herself as vulnerable to criticism (becoming pregnant at a young age and out of wedlock). She even shows her unknown viewers her body in this first vlog – an intimate and literal undressing of an area of the body women do not usually expose in normal daily life. And she does this every week until her daughter, Heidi, is born.

Women like Ash, who publish intimate information about themselves and their lives on an ongoing basis, are doing what Cardell attributes to the contemporary diary – they are making “visible the intimate and the personal”, and are destabilising the “conventional boundaries between public and private” (Cardell, 2014, p. 3). They do this by sharing detailed, intimate information in the public sphere, as Ash does in her videos on YouTube. As noted earlier, the vlog, like the contemporary diary, acts as “a matrix through which key social discourses are played out and made visible” (Cardell, 2014, p. 4). Sharing intimate, embodied information about women’s experiences such as pregnancy and motherhood, allows women to take back the conversation from traditional sources of authority, and can challenge the expert driven discourse on these topics (Moravec, 2011; Thornham, 2015). I explore the content of mummy vlogs and the significance of sharing traditionally private information about motherhood in the following chapter.

Ash’s video titles during this time document the different stages of her pregnancy, clearly marking each week, as shown in Figure 18 - 8 Weeks And 1 Day Pregnant, 9 Weeks And 1 Day Pregnant!, 10 Weeks And 1 Day Pregnant! etc. Among these videos are other videos revealing intimate content, such as her 7 week ultrasound video, and a house tour, giving viewers intimate access to the inside of her home.
When Ash’s daughter, Heidi, is born, the vlogs change to document Heidi’s development each week. Again, these vlogs are named in the same way – *Heidi’s 7th Week Of Life!, Heidi’s 8th Week Of Life!, Heidi’s 9th Week Of Life!* etc. as seen in Figure 19. Continual updates on a child’s development are also a typical component of mummy vlogs, although most commonly these videos are uploaded monthly, not weekly.

Ash documents her second pregnancy, and her son’s life after he is born, in the same way – weekly. After 2 years and 7 months of uploading at least one video about herself, her family or (at that point) her two children every week, Ash begins vlogging daily, a commitment she keeps for 3 years. The vlogs are a typical “follow me” style.
Ash documents her days and through her documentation viewers become familiar with her home, her family and daily routines, her parenting style, her marriage, and herself – her thoughts, feelings, experiences, opinions, likes and dislikes.

Her very first daily vlog begins in the evening. Ash is sitting in her office. It’s New Year’s Eve, the kids are supposed to be going to sleep, James is preparing the backyard for a party they are going to host that night, and Ash is preparing orders for her business – she wants to get them done before they go away. The footage cuts to Heidi leaning against the sliding glass door, watching her Dad. Ash is pointing the camera at her daughter and says, “You’re a grub.” Heidi has just turned 2, and her brother, Archie, is 6 months old. The camera swings round from Heidi to Heidi’s view of her Dad, James, outside on the patio. Ash gives James instructions. Then she turns around and walks down the hallway where she finds Archie, sitting on the floor, playing with large sheet of discarded plastic, trying to get it in his mouth. Ash leaves him and walks to the living room, showing the floor littered with colourful toys. “And we have mess” she says. Then the footage cuts to Ash in the car, on her way to Woolworths to pick up supplies for tonight. We follow the rest of her evening: more footage of Heidi and Archie, then Ash talking to the camera about waiting for James to get out of the bathroom and wanting to put on her heels, then various clips of the party, then a black screen with white words “Don’t forget to Comment, Rate Subscribe + Follow” and “Thanks For Watching!” (Join The Jacksons, 2013).
During her three years of uploading a vlog daily, Ash labelled the videos like diary entries, as shown in Figures 20 (beginning of daily vlogs) and 21 (end of daily vlogs), above. Figures 22 and 23 are a comparison of Ash’s first ever daily vlog and her last ever daily vlog labelled in this manner.

Dated entries are a common, recognizable feature of the diary, although they are not necessary to be included in the genre (Cardell, 2014). Her three years of vlogging daily are marked by the titles *Happy New Year! (31.12.13- Day 1)* (Join The Jacksons, 2013) and 984 days later, *LEARNING TO BAKE WITH JOJO | 11.10.16 | Day 984* (Join The Jacksons, 2016b).

The construction of Ash’s video titles during this time show the delicate balance of public and private in the practice of mummy vlogging. The vlog titles comprise of
three parts, and arguably each component demonstrate the public and private nature of
the vlog. The name of the vlog, along with the vlog thumbnail (the picture chosen to
accompany the name like an advertisement for the content of the vlog) are carefully
crafted and designed to draw the viewer in – to encourage the viewer to click on and
watch the video. The names also record significant events in the family’s life that they
may want to refer back to in the future. **LEARNING TO BAKE WITH JOJO**, for
example, coupled with the image of Heidi adding ingredients in a bowl, suggests an
intimate moment where Heidi learns to bake with her maternal Grandmother (Jojo),
and it is precisely the intimacy suggested in this title and thumbnail which makes it
appealing to viewer. Secondly, the date included in the title has both private and
public value as it acts as an official record of time, and as a way to categorise intimate
family and childhood memories. Lastly, the day, Day 1 – Day 984, acts as both a
public and private record of the practice, the life and the narrative on YouTube. In this
way, Ash’s vlogs are both public logs and private logs – in real time – and this is
unique to the published diary online.

The beginning of most videos is also reminiscent of the traditional diary. Ash and
other mummy vloggers will often begin their videos by saying “Hi YouTube,”
greeting and addressing the platform and its congregation, just like Diary writers
would greet their diary “Dear Diary.”

Ash’s vlogging channel (the channel she began in 2011 and has been vlogging on for
6 years) has over 27,900 subscribers and features over 1,300 videos (Join The
Jacksons).
Long-time viewers of Ash have seen and followed her three pregnancies, deliveries and children’s development. They’ve seen her battle post-natal depression, breastfeeding, weaning, day care, kindergarten and more. They’ve watched her daily life, her parenting and interactions with her husband and children, and have listened to her talk about herself for years. Ash has matured and developed – her life has drastically changed. She has become a mother, a home-owner, a vlogger, and a businesswoman. She has (re-)invented herself, collaborated with others, grown her channel and community, and branched out into other things. All the while she has been living and becoming on YouTube – becoming through each and every vlog, comment and social media post, because each of these activities constitutes identity. As Cover (2013) argues, the 1,300 videos Ash has posted, along with every comment and like she has made under videos, retrospectively constitutes her identity. Ash has been living on YouTube for the last 6 years and in doing so has constructed her automedial narrative. A narrative that is still developing and changing.

A Private/Public Arena for the Self

The diary format of vlogs is significant because the self is both presented and constructed through it (Strangelove, 2010, p. 69). As Cardell (2014) states, “the diary is the genre linked intimately to the representation and construction of self” (p. 19). Embodying and extending the diary, blogs and vlogs act as an interactive extension of identity (Tucker, 2009, p. 6) allowing the mother to construct, enact and play with her performance of self. Not only does the individual construct and present their identity through blogging/vlogging, but in turn, the blog/vlog influences their identity as Webb and Lee (2011) state “identity can be influenced by the performance itself – creating a mutually influential relationship between the blog and the blogger’s identity” (p. 248).
YouTube, in particular, allows the individual to experiment with the self, and document an ongoing transformation, through film (Kavoori, 2011). Many scholars have described this ongoing process of identity construction online using the metaphor of “the mirror” (see Kavoori (2011), Raun (2015, 2016) and Procter (2014) as recent examples). In his research on trans gender vlogging on YouTube, Raun (2015) explores the theme of the mirror. He describes vlogging as a “transformative medium for working on, producing and exploring the self” (p. 366). He argues the vlog acts as a mirror allowing the individual to try out and assume various identities (Raun, 2015, p. 366). He writes that the mirroring function of the vlog “invites the YouTuber to assume the shape of a desired identity/representation, constantly assuming and evaluating oneself as an attractive image, trying out different ‘styles of the flesh’ (Butler, 1990:177), poses and appearances” (Raun, 2015, p. 367).

Strangelove (2010) states that YouTubers do feel that their online diaries (in the form of vlogs) change them. In reference to trans gender vlogging, Raun (2015) writes, “[t]he vlog seems to serve an important function in the transitioning process, and is an important part of a process of self-invention, serving as a testing ground for experimentations with, and manifestations of (new) identities” (p. 367). The mirror (vlog) gives the individual a place/space to construct and perform their identity, and an opportunity to see the reflection and adjust the identity accordingly.

This intimate performance of self takes place in front of an audience making the genre both private and public. Cardell (2014) suggests that the public nature of published diaries brings their privacy into question. Philippe Lejeune refers to the publishing of diaries as a “vile habit” (2009, p. 175) insisting that the published (computer aided)
diary loses its value because it is editable (2009, pp. 182-183). However, as many scholars suggest, all performances of the self are edited, and all versions of the diary have an imagined audience. Vloggers maintain the sense of privacy in their video diaries through the content of their vlogs. The vlogs are filmed in the privacy of the home and maintain an amateur quality, at least in the beginning, filled with confession and intimate self-disclosure. The confessions of vloggers assist in the construction of the autobiographical self, and maintain the authenticity of the image, which I discuss in the following chapter.

Maintaining a Cohesive Automedial Narrative

Although identity constructing activities such as vlogging on YouTube afford a great deal of creative expression, enabling the individual to play with their identity, most often the performances of self among Australian mummy vloggers on networked digital media build a cohesive narrative. The consistency of the vlogs – with some Australian mummy vloggers vlogging daily or weekly for 2-6 years – as well as the consistent performance across platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook in addition to YouTube – showing different facets of the same identity – all work together to build a cohesive narrative. Ash, for example, maintains a Facebook (Figure 25) and Twitter (Figure 26) account under the same mummy vlogger identity in conjunction with her YouTube (Figure 24) channel, as seen below.
This cohesion, between the ongoing uploads on YouTube and on other networked
digital media such as Instagram and Facebook, is necessary in order for the individual
to maintain their authenticity, and therefore ensure their ongoing success, on
YouTube. As I discuss later in Chapter 5, ‘Authenticity, a Commodity’, authenticity is a core value on YouTube (and indeed all networked digital media) and viewers are quick to reject anything they deem inauthentic. As Cover (2013) writes, becoming is always in relation to belonging, and cohesion is necessary in order to belong. The social/networked nature of identity online means that the activity of self-creation and identity play in conjunction with digital media must maintain authenticity and cohesion.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued that mummy vlogging is an automedial act of documenting intimate ordinary life on YouTube. It is through the documenting of everyday life – the doing and living on YouTube, in other words – that mothers become their mummy vlogger identity. The sum of their videos, and other activities on YouTube, retrospectively constitutes their automedial narrative and identity.

Documenting life through vlogging on YouTube is reminiscent of the diary. Mummy vloggers post videos daily or weekly, constantly updating and adding to their lives. These videos are sometimes dated like traditional diary entries, as demonstrated by Ash. The vlog, like the diary, creates a space for women like Ash to bring traditionally private, intimate content about becoming and being a mother into the public sphere. Like the diary, the vlog acts an arena for the self – an arena to form and perform, negotiate and re-negotiate identity through its discursive, intimate format.
Unlike the traditional diary, usually unpublished, mummy vlogging is an extension of the published diary online as explored by scholars such as Kylie Cardell. The vlog walks a delicate balance between private and public, serving as both private memories of intimate family life, and a public record, destabilizing our understanding of the type of lives that (or, more accurately, whose lives) are worthy of recording and saving (whose lives are valuable as cultural artefacts).

Vlogging materialises lives and identities as it records subjects and narratives in motion. The act of filming and uploading film to YouTube – a public site – leaves a record. Vlogging therefore allows identities to be trackable, traceable, and comparable. The resulting mummy vlogger identities are largely cohesive, meeting the cultural demand for consistency. Mummy vloggers like Ash, maintain their automedial identity and narrative across all networked digital media.

In the following chapter I continue my argument that vlogs are an extension of the published diary online by demonstrating the discursive format of the vlog, laden with confession and intimate self-disclosure. I demonstrate how mummy vlogging is a progression from mummy blogging, a genre closely associated with journaling and the diary. Critically, I argue that rather than being a politically motivated act, Australian mothers confess and disclose intimate details about their lives in order to connect with others. This is significant to my argument as it begins to demonstrate that automedial lives and narratives are socially formed – influenced by, and co-created in dialogue with, others.
Chapter 3. Negotiating Motherhood: Using Confession and Intimate Self-Disclosure as a Relational Tool

In this chapter I continue my argument that mummy vlogging is an extension of the published diary online. I demonstrate how mothers use the discursive format of the vlog to share intimate details about their everyday ordinary lives. I situate mummy vlogging as an extension of mummy blogging - a contemporary diary genre - which has been praised as a radical, empowering and political tool, giving women a space to share intimate, embodied information about motherhood in society. Rather than a politically motivated tool, however, I argue that mummy vloggers disclose the intimate details of their lives in order to connect with others. Mummy vloggers use confession and intimate self-disclosure as a relational tool. This is important as it sets up the automedial self as a relational self - a self co-created - formed in dialogue and in relationship with others, as I argue later.

Negotiating Motherhood: Becoming the Role

As discussed in the previous chapter, automedia – the activity of doing and living in relationship with media - is a process of becoming. Mummy vlogging is an automedial activity through which the mummy vlogger becomes their narrative and identity. But becoming is complex, influenced by history and culture. As Stuart Hall (1989) writes,

Cultural identity […] is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’, […] It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like
everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed […], they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narrative of the past. (p. 70).

When women become mothers they are faced with a new social role which they must learn to perform. New mothers play with their performance of the role in order to master it and renegotiate their identity in light of it. As Robert Ezra Park (1950) and Erving Goffman (1959) suggest, it is through the roles we play in society, and more specifically through our performance of them, that we know and understand ourselves. Although Park and Goffman argue the roles we play in society can be a powerful tool for forming and realising the self, the role and performance of motherhood has been criticized in parts of feminist scholarship for stopping women from reaching self-realisation, self-actualisation and a sense of selfhood (Friedan, 1963; Greer, 1970), involuntarily reducing women to one role through a rhetoric and illusion of choice (Arendell, 2000; S. J. Douglas & Michaels, 2004; O’Brien Hallstein, 2011) and ultimately resulting in women losing a sense of who they are (Friedan, 1963, p. 313).

In addition to many women feeling involuntarily limited by their role as a mother, some scholars argue that the images of motherhood in Western society have been idealised and romanticised to show unrealistic and unachievable standards of
perfection (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Friedan, 1963; Henderson et al., 2010). Some scholars argue that these images are circulated in mainstream media, particularly through the use of celebrity mothers (Akass, 2012; Crowley, 2015; S. J. Douglas & Michaels, 2004; O’Bien Hallstein, 2011; Vavrus, 2007; Zimmerman et al., 2008), while others argue that these unrealistic standards of perfection are enforced through both formal and informal means and often on an individual, interpersonal level through our everyday interactions and social contexts (Arendell, 2000; Henderson et al., 2010). The social expectations placed upon mothers has led to phenomena explored largely in American scholarship such as Intensive Mothering, New Momism, Mother Blame and The Mommy Wars. The pressure of perfection associated with these images and standards has resulted in many women feeling stress, anxiety, guilt, fear and isolation (Arendell, 2000; A. A. Berger, 2014, pp. 116-117; Boulton, 1983; S. J. Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 4; Oakley, 1992; Ribbens, 1994; Ross, 1995; Wolf, 2001). As Lori Kido Lopez (2009) states, identifying as a mother in society today is a contentious issue, causing many women frustration and anxiety. She writes,

“It is no wonder that women are afraid to embrace the identity of mother – the entire concept of being a mother is overwhelming and imbued with failure. Once women become mothers, their lives are taken over by society’s strict sets of rules and expectations” (p. 732).

In Western society, motherhood is socialised as an individual, private experience (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Henderson et al., 2010) leaving many women feeling isolated in their negotiation and performance of the role. These feelings are only
exaggerated by a growing number of women who find themselves geographically isolated from their places of origin, family and support structures (Morrison, 2010). In an attempt to combat social pressures, isolation, and most importantly, a lost sense of self, women have created new spaces for discourse and personal discovery online.

As I maintain, mummy vlogging is an extension of previous practices allowing mothers to share intimate details about their lives online, such as parenting discussion boards and blogging, both of which grew in popularity in the 1990s. Online parenting discussion forums, such as BabyCenter, have drawn thousands of women online, providing a space in which mothers can share information, support, encouragement and be honest about their day to day experiences of mothering (Moravec, 2011; Samuel, 2011). These online sites have been praised with building social support and social capital (Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005), giving mothers opportunities to challenge traditional views about women’s experiences of motherhood (Moravec, 2011; Samuel, 2011), and creating supportive, encouraging environments that are empowering (Arnold, 2011).

Much of the praise that parenting forums have received is to do with the fact that women are largely anonymous in these spaces. Women are free to say what they really think and feel free from any consequences IRL (in real life) because of the geographic distance separating them from each other and the limited information necessary to create an account (a username can be any made up combination of letters and numbers, for example). As Alexandra Samuel (2011) states in her reflection of her participation in the online community Breastfeeding After Reduction (BFAR), “Online, …you get to be the mother you actually are; the real mom you can’t be in
“real” life” (p. pxxi). Samuel continues, “on the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog, which liberates you to be a bitch. Not a bitch to others… but the impatient, imperfect bitch of a mom who uses jarred babyfood, disposable diapers and a TV-as-sitter. The mom who takes off the halo and admits to imperfection…” (p. xii). Similarly, Lorin Basden Arnold (2011) found that participants in online forums felt they could say things online that they would be too embarrassed to say to their IRL (in real life) friends and family. Saying things online had little to no social consequence as participants did not have to deal with other online participants face-to-face. Arnold states that participants felt able to share negative thoughts and feelings about their children and motherhood, and even reveal secrets about their marriage which they would not want people in their social circles to know. One of the participants interviewed by Arnold states the “forum can serve as my own private confessional. I can get things off my chest, find support, and not have any consequences” (p. 79).

Similarly, blogs have become an increasingly popular medium used by mothers, fostering ongoing interaction through their extended personal narrative format, which resemble diaries and journals (Ley, 2011, p. 35). In the last twenty years mothers have developed a voice in society through blogging, forming the revolutionary genre of mummy blogging (spelt “mommy” in North American scholarship). 34 The personal blogs of mummy bloggers have created online communities and movements of women who are actively trying to change the performance of motherhood in society, one every-day-personal-post at a time.

34 Unless I am directly quoting a North American scholar, I use the Australian spelling for mothers who blog – mummy bloggers.
In American scholarship, mommy blogging has been labelled a radical act, one that allows women to reveal their true thoughts, feelings and experiences of motherhood through personal narrative (Lopez, 2009). Blogs are often defined as online journals or personal diaries in which day-to-day events are frequently and chronologically recorded (Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008; Henderson et al., 2010; Lopez, 2009; Morrison; Serfaty, 2004; Whitehead, 2015). Lopez suggests that the personal mommy blog is an extension of women’s earlier forms of narrativizing personal experience, such as diaries and journals (2009, p. 735). The discursive diary format of the blog allows women to sound out and embody varying experiences of, and ideas about, motherhood through the intimate disclosure and confession that the genre affords (Cardell, 2014; Holmes, 1995).

In her paper exploring the radical act of mommy blogging, Lopez (2009) concludes that the diary-like posts of bloggers, although seemingly repetitive and containing insignificant dramas, “are given new power when they are posted on the internet for the public to view and discuss” (p. 744). She argues that online, women are creating their own voice to explore motherhood, a voice that challenges the images of motherhood in the wider public sphere and liberates women to engage in public dialogue about their experiences.

Mummy vlogging is an extension of diary writing and blogging. It combines the intimacy of the diary, the autobiographical personal narratives of mummy blogs, and the social, communal function of networked digital media. In addition, vlogging brings the added dimension of audiovisual presentation, resembling contemporary forms of entertainment like reality television. Most mothers use vlogging as an
extension of blogging, maintaining a blog, and other social media accounts under the same identity at the same time. Vlogging provides an easily accessible format for mothers to engage with, and attracts a wider community than blogs considering YouTube’s global popularity as an alternative source of reality TV style entertainment. One Australian mummy vlogger, Kate (Bella the homesteader), explains her decision to vlog in addition to maintaining her blog saying,

I’ve been blogging now for over 5 years about various stuff…and I’m finding it really hard to connect with people. I was hoping that a combination of a vlog and a blog will get me more in touch with people. (Bella the homesteader, 2014).

Kate explains the attraction of a vlog saying,

I watch a lot of vlogs so I guess I understand for me the attraction to vlogs is you can just click and play while you’re doing something like doing the dishes, you can just set it up and watch it, and you can’t sort of read a blog as easily as doing that. (Bella the homesteader, 2014).

Unlike parenting discussion forums that create a “safe” space for women because they afford the user a certain level of anonymity, mummy vlogging is not an anonymous activity. Mummy vlogging, as I argue throughout this thesis, is a demonstration of Australian women living out their lives as mothers in relationship with digital media such as YouTube. Mummy vloggers document their daily lives, disclose intimate details about themselves, interact with others, and they do this on an ongoing basis,
spanning many years. What these activities produce is a largely cohesive narrative and identity maintained across multiple networked digital media accounts (as I explore in the previous chapter). Whenever the authenticity of the mummy vlogger does come into question, there are consequences that impact the success of the vlogger, as I discuss in Chapter 5, ‘Authenticity, a Commodity’. Arguably, the lack of anonymity for Australian mummy vloggers makes their confessions and intimate self-disclosures in their vlogs all the more powerful and significant, because they are not removed from IRL consequences.

**Challenging Existing Images through Confession and Intimate Self-Disclosure**

Australian mummy vlogs are immediately raw and intimate because of their setting, image quality and content. The mothers film their introductory videos in the privacy of their homes, featuring their bedrooms, kitchens, toy rooms and backyards as their setting. These early videos are filmed on low quality video recording devices such as mobile phones, or laptop, producing low resolution, grainy images that often do not fill the YouTube screen. The first vlogs are badly lit, relying on natural light, and feature mothers with no makeup on and their unwashed hair pulled back. The private setting of these videos along with the badly lit grainy image quality, create a sense of intimacy, authenticity and spontaneity. The viewer feels privileged to a spontaneous, amateur “home video” style snapshot of the mother’s everyday life inside their home. The intimacy and authenticity of these introductory videos is re-enforced by the vlog content. The introductions are typically long and heartfelt, with mothers going into detail about their thoughts, feelings and circumstances. The mothers are usually new
mothers, either pregnant for the first time, trying to conceive or having recently given birth.

Australian mothers begin their very first vlogs showing their piles of washing (as seen in Figure 27), talking about disrupted sleep patterns, sharing heartache over trying to conceive, showing their opk’s (ovulation prediction kits) for the month, listing their pregnancy symptoms, revealing how lost and alone they feel, sharing their failures as wives and mothers, and discussing often taboo subjects such as depression, stress, and anxiety. It is these confessions and disclosures of everyday thoughts and feelings that challenge the stereotypical images of motherhood in society. As Lopez (2009) discovered in her exploration of mommy blogging, it’s the content – the “unexciting, every day, in between stuff” (Bradley 2005) – which is radical because it delves into new territory, showing different pictures of motherhood than what has previously been seen in the media (Lopez, 2009; Webb & Lee, 2011).
Sharing ordinary everyday life does the important work of unravelling the idealised and romanticised images of motherhood in society such as the celebrity mum image circulated in mainstream media. As Douglas and Michaels (2004) argue, the celebrity mother has been the most common tool used since the 1980’s to circulate images of motherhood in society. In their book, they use the example of celebrity mother interviews in, and features on the covers of, magazines such as *InStyle*. These interviews and images are still prominent today in popular women’s magazines. A recent Australian example is the August/September (2015) issue of *Mother&Baby* featuring a slim Kim Kardashian West and her daughter North on the front cover, with the quote “[b]eing a mum is the best, most fun job in the world,” as shown in Figure 28.\(^{35}\)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{kim_kardashian_mother_baby_cover.png}
\caption{Kim Kardashian West on the cover of *Mother&Baby* 2015}
\end{figure}

Douglas and Michaels (2004) argue the celebrity mum image is powerful because it is presented as ‘real’ and ‘true’ creating a distorted image of motherhood that is

\(^{35}\text{The front cover of this issue can be viewed on the Mother&Baby Australia Facebook page, here: https://www.facebook.com/mbmag/photos/a.428880343963.224354.48486833963/10153280829273964/?type=3&theater}\)
unachievable for the average mother who does not have a team of personal trainers, dieticians, chefs, nannies, make-up artists, personal stylists, interior decorators etc. at their disposal. These distorted images of motherhood are packaged like fantasies that work because, as Douglas and Michaels suggest, they blur the lines between reality and daydream, inviting the average reader/viewer to an exclusive peek inside the celebrity’s home that isn’t really authentic, but isn’t counterfeit either. They argue the celebrity mum image is also powerful because it sparks envy, which Berger (1972) states is the most powerful element of advertising and publicity. Coupled with envy is mimetic desire – the desire to imitate (Girard, 1991), resulting in women trying to reproduce the glamorous performance of the celebrity mum (Berger, 1972), and feeling like failures when they are not able to (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

It is the sharing of intimate information, of confessing with words and with moving images, that does the visible, public work of renegotiating motherhood in the public sphere. The ordinary struggles of everyday Australian mothers include radical, sometimes shocking revelations, generally considered taboo. One Australian mummy vlogger, Mel (For The Love Of Sorted), starts her very first vlog by revealing all her weaknesses as a wife and mother. Mel is one of the oldest and latest to start vlogging (being a mum of three) among the Australian mummy vloggers followed in this study. Figure 29 shows a screen shot of Mel’s first vlog.
We’re a single income, single car family. We’re just below average in terms of income … We have been incredibly irresponsible with money … I have never been a healthy weight … I manage anxiety and depression personally … I’m not a home keeper. I’m not good at house work. I’m not … I have no skills … Um this is me, just doing it. (For The Love Of Sorted, 2014)

Mel’s first vlog is incredibly intimate. She admits to being irresponsible with money, to being unhappy with her weight, and to having depression and anxiety. Mel also admits that she’s not a “home keeper” and not good at housework, although she would like to be. All of these “confessions” contradict many images of motherhood in mainstream media, where most negative feelings or experiences associated with motherhood are seemingly absent.
Like Mel, many of the Australian mummy vloggers in this study admit to having depression and anxiety in their first vlogs (For The Love Of Sorted, 2014; Mum Geek89, 2015). One mother, Jess (Mum Geek89) says in her first vlog, “I’ve recently been diagnosed with OCD, stress, anxiety. I also have an eating disorder and depression” she continues “I want to start doing this so I can express how I feel…” (Mum Geek89, 2015). Not only do these Australian mummy vloggers challenge the traditional images of motherhood that see child-rearing and the home as the woman’s domain in which they excel and are happy, but Mel and Jess’ confessions invite dialogue about the realities of being a stay-at-home mother for many women.

Australian mothers offer confessional intimacy not only through their vlog content but also through their vlog titles and channel home pages. Vlog titles such as the ones in Figure 30 illuminate the day-to-day experiences of motherhood, which challenge the celebrity mum image. For example, rather than Kim Kardashian’s statement, “being a mum is the best, most fun job in the world,” Australian mummy vloggers title their vlogs, publishing their experience of motherhood, with alternative thoughts about the role such as Always Tired! (Dominika Eve, 2016), ITS HARD BEING A STAY AT HOME MUM (Elise Sheree, 2015) and I’M LOSING IT (Join The Jacksons, 2015d). Figure 30 shows a number of videos uploaded by Australian mummy vloggers including Dominika Eve (2016), Elise Sheree, Join The Jacksons (2015c, 2015d) and Bella the homesteader (2015).

36 The YouTube videos mentioned that are still available are cited under “YouTube content referenced” at the end of the thesis. Always Tired! (Dominika Eve), Talking Anxiety, feeling Overwhelmed + Tips (Dominika Eve), ITS HARD BEING A STAY AT HOME MUM (Elise Sheree), MY POSTNATAL DEPRESSION STORY (Elise Shree) have been deleted by the vlogger.
These titles are confessional. As Michael Strangelove (2010) argues, YouTube is a platform inundated with autobiographical video diaries which “are a new form of self-presentation and an expression of a surrounding confessional culture” (p. 71). YouTube offers a seductive menu of current confessions by real people allegedly revealing their deepest selves (Strangelove, 2010, p. 81; Zalis, 2003). For women, YouTube provides a new space to continue negotiating their roles, and generate experience-based information and dialogue with other mothers. YouTube also facilitates a new practice of vlogging, of narrativizing the self through film. The discursive diary format of the vlog allows women to sound out and embody varying experiences of, and ideas about, motherhood through the intimate disclosure and
confession that the genre affords (Cardell, 2014; Holmes, 1995). The published diaries of vloggers reflect and feed society’s obsession with the confessions and intimate self-disclosures of everyday “ordinary” people (Dovey, 2000; Fanthome, 2008, p. 225; King, 2008; White, 1992).

YouTube is also an accessible space in which to share new stories that have not necessarily been told openly before, or stories that have not been included in mainstream narratives about motherhood. One couple that does this are Sharna and Chelsea (TwoBabyMamas) who share their story of conceiving their unborn daughter as a lesbian couple. Sharna and Chelsea’s first vlog is titled ‘Lesbian Couple WE’RE PREGNANT!!’ and was published 12 August, 2011. In their words, Chelsea is “carrying” (pregnant with) their daughter and is 33 years old, and Sharna, 29, at the time of their first vlog, making them two of the older mothers among the 34 (represented in the 33 first vlogs). The two mothers explain that they want to document their pregnancy as “gay mums” (their words) and help other couples on their TTC journey, inviting people to ask questions and follow their journey (see Figure 31). In the description bar below their first vlog they write:

![Figure 31 Title and description bar for Sharna and Chelsea’s first vlog](image)

As seen in the examples above, mummy vloggers use the vlog to challenge the historical view that motherhood is a private matter of little significance to public
discourse, and to challenge the images of motherhood that have traditionally been circulated in main-stream media. In this way, vlogging extends the genre of mummy blogging, increasing the intimacy of these narratives through the added visual dimension of the vlog. The vlog extends the radical, liberating practice of blogging by showing the realities of day-to-day life through film. Vlogging brings a context to mothers’ narratives online in a way that has not been achieved previously. Mummy vloggers invite their viewers into their homes, their bedrooms, their bathrooms, and show the viewers the realities of day-to-day life as mothers and wives. As Tobias Raun (2015) says, “the camera acts as an eye that moves across, around and over surfaces, emphasizing the YouTuber’s intimate, tactile and immediate connection to what is represented” (p. 369). Although mummy vlogging does continue the radical, political, empowering work of previous online genres, this is not the purpose of the vlog expressed by Australian mummy vloggers.

**Confession and Intimate Self-Disclosure as a Relational Tool**

As I argue throughout, mummy vloggers share experience-based, embodied information about becoming and being mothers in order to connect with others. In this context confession and disclosure are used as a collective and relational tool (Goldthwaite, 2003). By disclosing intimate thoughts and feelings about themselves, the individual invites the viewer in, to connect and respond (Bell, 1985; Cockshut, 1984; Metzger, 1992; Tompkins, 1987). Each of their confessions – be it about depression and anxiety (like Mel, Jess, Elise and Dominika), unpleasant pregnancy symptoms (like Ash, Millie, and Rachel), or the extreme lengths undergone to conceive (like Sharna and Chelsea, and Sarah) – invite the viewer to connect around
the same experiences and circumstances. One of the most common ways that Australian mummy vloggers invite a response (other than the invitation to like, subscribe or comment at the end of each video) is to invite others to “share the journey”, “share life”, “share information”, “share stories” and give each other support and feedback. Sharing detailed information about their experiences, from the radical to the mundane (such as products used) allows mothers to connect. This is the motivation they state over and over.

In her first vlog, Ash, introduced in Chapter 2, ‘Becoming through Vlogging on YouTube’ says she has decided to make videos in order “to get support from other young mums who are in my situation and to give my support as well” (Join The Jacksons, 2011). By support, Ash is referring to people to share the journey with – to share experienced based, embodied information about their pregnancies – and in doing so support each other through the process. Later in her video Ash says, “I’ve decided to start doing these vlogs quite early on, um, just so I can get, yeah, as much feedback as possible from you guys on what’s normal and, um, yeah, share my stories with you and you share them with me” (Join The Jacksons, 2011). Similarly, another young woman pregnant for the first time, Millie (millieandbaby), talks in detail about her pregnancy in her first vlog. Millie’s first vlog is titled i’m pregnant! first trimester update and was published 24 June, 2015. Millie is 24 years old at the time of her first vlog. Like Ash, Millie encourages her viewers to share how far along they are in their pregnancy, and later asks for anyone doing pregnancy vlogs to let her know so that they can subscribe to each other and follow each other’s journeys. Millie also mentions the fact that she doesn’t know anyone else going through this and seems to be looking to YouTube to find others who are sharing her experience, which she does.
Underneath her first vlog, another Australian mummy vlogger, Charissa-jo leaves the following comment (see Figure 32), connecting with Millie around their due dates (Charissa-jo, 2015b).

Mothers share all kinds of information in their first vlogs relating to their pregnancy, experiences, doctors, symptoms, processes, their plans for when their baby is born, and their intimate details of their TTC journeys. Everything can be found on YouTube from how to track ovulation to what to pack in your hospital bag when preparing to go into the hospital to give birth. The exchange of information is not limited to the process of becoming a mother. Australian mothers use YouTube to exchange a variety
of information including personal interests. One mother, Kate (Bella the homesteader, 2014), talks about wanting to share basic skills that she feels society is losing in her first vlog. Figure 33 shows a screen shot of her first vlog on YouTube.

Kate talks at length about basic skills which she feels society has lost touch with, but an overarching motivation for sharing these basic skills is to find something through which she can connect with people. This is reaffirmed in her closing statement:

So I’m sure there’s something, you know, we can connect on and we can, you know, share interests with and I can get advice and tips from you guys. So like videos if you like what I’m talking about, dislike if you don’t like. Make sure you leave a comment if you have any information to share. And I hope that we get to know each other and go from there. (Bella the homesteader, 2014).
Although Kate promises to share information on an array of topics surrounding her interests in her videos, including “budgeting, pregnancy, parenting, miscarriage, food, homemade [items],” the purpose of the information, as she explicitly states, is to connect with people and find community.

It is in this context of wanting to connect with others that the everyday, seemingly mundane, disclosures of mummy vloggers become important. As Elise, introduced in the Introduction makes clear, mothers such as herself are hungry for relational information that can help them feel connected and part of a shared experience of motherhood. By sharing simple things like the products that they buy (and from where), the mothers are sharing relational information with fellow Australian mothers. The information is relational because the Australian viewer can go to the same stores and buy the same products, and therefore participate in the shared experience of locating, buying and using those same products. As Elise states, when watching mummy vloggers on YouTube, “I tried so hard to find some that were from Australia because I feel like I want to know the products and, um, know the places that, um, these people are going to” (Elise Sheree, 2013b).

For example, Sarah (iMumma, 2015), shows her weekly grocery shop including products from Woolworths, Aldi and a local fruit barn (see Figure 34).
In her book *Personal Connections In The Digital Age*, Nancy Baym (2015) talks about the importance of shared space for communities to thrive, and as Baym (2015) identifies, in the age of “networked collectivism”, a term she has coined, “groups of people now network throughout the internet and related mobile media, and in-person communication, creating a shared but distributed group identity” (p. 101). I argue throughout this thesis that the space or context within which mummy vlogger identities are created and performed is critical to understanding the practice. The main space or context in question is YouTube, however, as I argue, the practices and performances that take place in this space are not disembodied, and so the physical experience of sharing geographic IRL (in real life) experiences is also important to a feeling of connection. Australian mummy vloggers connect over the everyday, in real life, experiences that they have in their local suburbs. Sharing in these embodied experiences (of shopping at Woolworths, for example), even though they are experienced separately, helps to create a connection between the mothers, and validates the performance (on YouTube) as authentic.

For example, Ash (Join The Jacksons), a fellow mummy vlogger, comments under Sarah’s first vlog (see Figure 35) featuring her grocery haul and says the following:
Ash, who is included in this study, is a veteran in the Australian mummy vlogging community. Although she doesn’t have the title of the first Australian mummy vlogger, she has been the most consistent vlogger for the longest period of time in this community. At the time of writing this comment, Ash had been vlogging for four years.

This simple interaction between Sarah and Ash allows them to build a connection around their shared experience of shopping at Aldi (an affordable Australian supermarket). Sarah and Ash are sharing in an embodied experience, a typical routine of grocery shopping that they perform as mothers. They do not experience buying groceries at Aldi together, however, the fact that they both perform this action at the same stores, enjoying the same specials on avocados, makes it feel like a shared, connected experience.

**Inviting Community**

Historically, dialogue about motherhood, womanhood and raising children have belonged in the private and domestic spheres and for men or women to talk about these issues openly and publicly would be to “air their dirty laundry in public” (Lopez, 2009, p. 731). In Western culture, motherhood is still socialised as an individual experience (Douglas & Michaels, 2004), and much of the content of personal mummy blogs and vlogs is intimate feelings about, and experiences of,
motherhood (Lopez, 2009; Morrison, 2011). However, the space in which these intimate thoughts and experiences are shared is very much a public space, making motherhood online both a public and private conversation. These online spaces not only allow women to challenge the discourse about motherhood, but they also form community and lifelong friendships, eliminating the sense of isolation and re-establishing motherhood as a collective experience.

Henderson et al. argue that motherhood is shaped and re-shaped, negotiated and re-negotiated by mothers through their social interactions, relationships, and support systems (Henderson et al, 2010). They (and others before them such as Apple & Golden, 1997; Arendell, 2000) choose not to explore motherhood as a natural, unchanging and universal phenomena (Glenn, 1994, p. 4) – a private, singular, separate, distinct or even primary activity. Rather, Henderson et al choose to conceptualise motherhood as an “ongoing process” shaped by “prevailing societal contexts, including structural constraints and gender ideologies” (2010, p. 233). The shaping, re-shaping, negotiating and re-negotiating of motherhood is a collective process undergone through dialogue with the larger community of mothers. As Douglas and Michaels (2004) state “motherhood is, in our culture, emphasized as such an individual achievement, something you and you alone excel at or screw up. So it’s easy to forget that motherhood is a collective experience.” (p. 25). Genres such as blogging and vlogging have allowed women to reassert motherhood as a collective experience by forming communities online.

The diary is a space to encounter the self and also a place to encounter the “real of others” (Webb & Lee, 2011, p. 248). As Raun (2015) suggests, “[t]he need to
represent oneself goes hand in hand with the need to connect and communicate” (p. 369). The diary may be a place for private recordings and reflections, but it is also directed towards a desired audience (Dijck, 2007). Vlogging is not an individual, anonymous endeavour to explore the self (which blogging can be). In fact, the audiovisual presence of the vlog breaks the anonymity and disembodiment associated with early text-based communication on the internet (Raun, 2012a). Vlogging, like traditional autobiographies, is for an audience. The vlogger is performing for “you guys” and with every performance comes an invitation for the viewer to respond.

The personal narratives of mummy vlogs, filled with intimate self-disclosure, invite community. When constructing and presenting the self, the individual typically engages in a process of self-disclosure, revealing intimate thoughts, feelings and experiences (Dovey, 2000; Giddens, 1991; King, 2008; Roberts, 2002). The individual cannot disclose intimate things about themselves without disclosing intimate things about others (Garner, 2002). Confession and disclosure in this context can be seen as a collective and relational tool (Goldthwaite, 2003). By disclosing intimate thoughts and feelings about themselves, the individual invites the reader in, to connect and respond (R. Bell, 1985; Cockshut, 1984; Metzger, 1992; Tompkins, 1987). Out of the individual confessional practise of the vlogger emerges an ongoing process of collaboration and co-creation of their identity in dialogue with the viewers (Harley & Fitzpatrick, 2009; Strangelove, 2010). Identity, therefore, becomes a collective, collaborative project online.

Lopez (2009) states that the very nature of blogging “invites an audience to participate in discussions, share ideas and vocalize support for other participants” (p. 369).
By utilizing the interactivity of the internet and its immediacy, mummy blogs and vlogs have extended and remediated the personal diary – traditionally regarded as a site for solitary and private reflection – to invite communication and mobilise communities (Lopez, 2009, p. 10; Sorapure, 2003). Thus, mummy blogging and vlogging have become what Morrison (2014) describes as “an autobiographical practice that fosters community among women producing interlinked, self-reflexive texts on parenting” (p. 286).

Like in mummy blogs, the personal self-expression of mummy vlogs, along with the use of narrative and “extremely” informal language (Lopez, 2009), help to form and develop intimate communities online as the readers “feel a tremendous closeness and loyalty to the blog’s author, as if they are reading the words of a close friend instead of stranger” (Lopez, 2009, p. 734). Morrison states that mommy blogging “produces ‘intimate publics’ among readers and writers who balance the individual right to honest self-expression against a desire to create emotionally reciprocal communities” (Morrison, 2011, p. 286; 2014). The term “intimate publics” was introduced by Lauren Berlant (2008) in her work The Female Complaint, and developed by Aimee Morrison in her exploration of mummy blogging (Morrison, 2011). The characteristics of the intimate publics of blogging apply to vlogging.

Intimate publics are formed through vulnerability and disclosure where personal feeling and experience form a communal identity and practice (Morrison, 2011, p. 40). Morrison found that “[p]ersonal mommy bloggers organize their writings around the intimate details of their private lives, expressing the greatest comfort in writing about the most personal topics…” and “…the more the bloggers disclose about their
personal lives, the more tightly bonded they feel to the communities in which they participate, and the happier they feel, generally” (Morrison, 2011, p. 41). This tightly woven community cemented through personal and intimate self-disclosure creates a bond, a trust between writers and readers, which they describe as genuine friendship (Morrison, 2011, p. 4). For many mothers, vlogs become safe spaces to overcome the overwhelming struggle through support and encouragement from the network of other mummy vloggers and to explore and disclose their personal failings as a mother to the same encouraging network.

Communities form around these stories, lives, and the ongoing practice of sharing information, and giving each other feedback. A culture forms around the practice of updating the community through daily or weekly vlogs, and in each vlog the mother continues to negotiate and perform their identity. They do this in dialogue with their community of viewers, making mummy vlogging and their resulting identities a collective practice. Eventually, mummy vlogs become Berlant’s (2008) autobiographies of collective experience which tell the story of women becoming, negotiating and constructing motherhood, and their conception of self, in dialogue with other new mothers. These communities play a significant role in shaping and maintaining the automedial self, which I explore in the next chapter.

Conclusion

As I have sought to argue, mummy vlogging extends previous genres of the published diary online, such as mummy blogging, which has been heralded as radical, political and empowering for women by giving them a space in which to share the realities of their day-to-day lives as mothers; bringing discourse about motherhood into the
public sphere, and destabilising the idealised and romanticised images of motherhood in society that have been circulated by main-stream media, such as the celebrity mum image. Although mummy vlogging extends this practice, the confession and self-disclosure inherent in the practice invite viewers to connect around the same intimate and embodied experiences of becoming and being a mother. As Michael Strangelove (2010) states, YouTube invites community as it presents subjectivity as “plural, intertextual, and interrelational” (p. 76). The communities that form around mummy vlogger narratives and identities are intimate publics, an extension of Berlant’s (2008) and Morrison’s (2011) definitions.

In the following chapter I explore the communities that form around mummy vlogging. Building on Berlant (2008) and Morrison (2011) I call these communities intimate networked publics. I explore how these intimate networked publics co-create and manage mummy vlogger identities and narratives – showing how the automedial self is relationally formed in dialogue with others who participate in the space.
Chapter 4. Intimate *Networked* Publics: Co-Creating The Automedial Self

“How inextricably we are intertwined! We form each other. We form ourselves in response to each other.” – Helen Garner (2002, p. 42)

As discussed in the previous chapter, mummy vloggers use confession and intimate self-disclosure as a relational tool in order to connect with others and begin dialogue about their experiences of becoming and being a mother. Mummy vloggers seek and invite community. Communities form around the mummy vlogger narratives, congregating in the digital spaces that vlogging (the practice) creates. In this chapter I explore mummy vlogging as a community practice. I demonstrate how mothers position themselves as part of (belonging to) the community of practice, and I explore the influence of the community on the mummy vlogger’s identity and narrative. Ultimately, I argue that the communities that form around mummy vlogging play a crucial role in co-creating the mummy vlogger identity and narrative. Through their “norms,” ongoing participation and response (through their presence, dialogue and feedback), the community shapes, influences and maintains the mummy vlogger identity and narrative. This is significant as it demonstrates that the automedial self is a relational self, co-created in dialogue and in relationship with others.

Nomenclature that could be applied to the collective group of mothers in Australia, and internationally, who choose to vlog, include ‘communities of practice’ (Etienne Wenger, 1998), ‘intimate publics’ (Lauren Berlant, 2008)37 and ‘performance teams’ (Erving Goffman, 1959). There are also many names that could be applied to the

37 See also, Jay Prosser’s interview with Lauren Berlant, published in *Biography* (Berlant & Prosser, 2011).
groups that form around individual mummy vloggers, such as ‘virtual communities’ and ‘networked publics’. These groups are complex and many overlap. All of these groups could be referred to as virtual or online communities, networked publics or intimate publics. Most mummy vloggers are also viewers, watching and commenting on other mummy vloggers’ videos and social media posts. Most viewers watch multiple mummy vloggers, they group around multiple mummy vlogger identities and narratives. There are the visible forms of participation, dialogue and relationship that all take place within these groups (like comments, collaborations, references to each other), and then there are the anonymous, less visible forms of participation, that are still important, but more difficult to demonstrate (like anonymous views, likes and subscriptions). And all of these groups and the activities that take place in them influence mummy vlogger identities and narratives. All are a form of participation and co-creation.

As I have found, in Australia, mummy vlogging is still a relatively new practice that involves a small (although growing) number of women. As a result, the overlap between vloggers and viewers is significant. When I began this research there was surge of new Australian mummy vloggers, all of who entered the space and practice with a history of watching other (mostly American and British) mummy vloggers on YouTube and who were seeking Australian (and New Zealander – our close geographical and cultural neighbour) connections. Because the visible overlap between mummy vloggers and viewers, and in my case study of Australian mummy vloggers, is so great, I do not distinguish between the community of mummy vloggers and the communities that form around individual mummy vloggers. When I began this research in 2015 Australian mummy vlogging resembled the intimate publics of
mummy blogging as explored by Aimee Morrison (2011), where “most personal mommy blog authors are also committed blog readers (and frequent commenters), and their alternations between these roles create are non-hierarchical, tightly woven webs of interconnection marked by serial, mutual, and intimate self-disclosure” (p. 37).

In the following sections of this chapter I explore mummy vlogging as a virtual community – an intimate networked public - brought together by a shared identity as mothers, and shared practice of vlogging. I examine how mummy vloggers assert themselves as part of the community, demonstrating belonging by meeting the “norms” of the practice and space. Adopting these norms creates belonging, but it also shapes the mummy vlogger identity and narrative. In this way, mummy vlogger identities are influenced, and to some degree, managed by the community of practice, embodying Erving Goffman’s “performance team” (1959). In addition to the norms that dictate the practice, there are other conventions surrounding the practice and space that influence the mummy vlogger identities and narratives, such as likes, subscriptions and comments. All of these things demonstrate how the automedial self is co-created in dialogue with community and the affordances and limitations of the digital space. Finally, I conclude that that automedia can be understood as “space” in which texts (subjects and narratives) are co-created in dialogue with others, and in relationship with digital media.
Mummy Vlogging as Intimate Networked Public

Online, communities often form around shared social identities (Baym, 2015, p. 99) such as motherhood. Virtual (in this case meaning online) communities allow people to come together regardless of their geographic location and form community around shared experience. Some scholars argue that the ability to form communities online has resulted in a loss of connection in our geographic locations (Baym, 2015, p. 102), however, overwhelmingly, scholarship in this area, particularly exploring motherhood online, has situated online community as a direct consequence of a loss of connection in geographic locations (Morrison, 2011). Rather than virtual communities leading to a loss of face-to-face communities, the inability to find face-to-face community has led women to seek community online.

The nature of community online is of course different, in many ways, to traditional, local, face-to-face communities. In some ways the internet is liberating, allowing people to share openly without consequence (Baym, 2015; McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002). Critics have argued that the lack of consequences could also lead to a lack of accountability, allowing individuals to create false and fabricated versions of themselves. As I demonstrate in this chapter, however, identities, including online identities, are socially formed and maintained in community, and communities tend to operate using core values and norms that keep the individual accountable. YouTube, for example, is formed on a core value of authenticity, which is maintained by the community of viewers who typically reject anything they deem inauthentic, which I explore in more depth in the following chapter.
Online, the affordances of the community are shaped by the technologies and media used in their creation and maintenance. Online, individuals often engage on a number of platforms and mediums. Stories unfold and identities are performed in polymedia (Madianou & Miller, 2012, 2013) or transmedia (Ley, 2011) environments. Mummy vloggers, for example, perform their identity on a range of social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, SnapChat and various blog sites. Baym (2015) calls the transmediated natured of online interaction “networked collectivism, meaning that groups of people now network throughout the internet and related mobile media, and in-person communication, creating a shared but distributed group identity” (p. 101). As Baym importantly identifies, online communities often permeate the media interface to include in-person communication. Mummy vloggers, for example, have “meet ups” with their viewers and collaborate with other mummy vloggers in ways that force them to interact IRL (in real life). This serves as another important form of accountability where the community have an opportunity to ‘cross-check’ the online and offline mother.

In her book *Personal Connections In The Digital Age* Baym (2015) offers a number of qualities that can be used to identify online groups and communities, which are consistent with scholarship exploring community and virtual communities (see Parks, 2011). She suggests that online communities have a shared sense of space, a shared practice, shared resources and support, shared identities, and interpersonal relationships. All of these can be applied to the Australian mummy vlogging practice and community. Australian mummy vloggers have the shared space of YouTube. They have the shared practice of vlogging, constructing and presenting their identities as mothers through film. They have shared resources and support – they share
information with each other, have access to the same editing/filming resources, and support and encourage each other in their shared experience as mothers (or mothers to be/mothers in the making). They have shared identities as women/mothers/mummy vloggers. They have interpersonal relationships among each other and with their viewers. Thus they are a community by Baym’s standards and because the community is brought together around the shared practice of vlogging, they could also be described as a community of practice as explored by Etienne Wenger (1998).

Mummy vlogging communities extend the intimate publics of mummy blogging as explored by Aimee Morrison (2011), where vulnerability, disclosure, personal feeling and experience form a communal identity and practice. They experience the same tight bond, trust and friendship towards each other forged through the disclosure of intimate details about their personal lives (Ko & Kuo, 2009; Morrison, 2011, p. 41). Like mummy blogs, vlogs are autobiographical texts that foster community among women (Morrison, 2014, p. 286). Communities that are small in scale (initially, although huge in potential), and the texts of which Morrison argues are circulated through network rather than broadcast theories of transmission (Morrison, 2011, p. 37).

It is the network – the networked technologies – used in the automedial identities and narratives of mummy vlogs that “restructure” (boyd, 2011, p. 39) our understanding of the group (the community; the networked public). boyd (2011) argues that networked publics “are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice” (p. 39). The ‘network’ in my
adaptation ‘intimate networked publics’, emphasises space, context and relationship. It emphasises how automedia is created in relationship with media, technology, space, practice and people, not what automedia is, in this case vlogs. Mummy vlogging is an intimate networked public – a space, practice and collective – that acts as “reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors” (Mizuko, 2008, p. 3) of the social identity (Fraser, 1992) of motherhood. Intimate networked publics demonstrate the co-creation of automedial narratives and identities such as those of mummy vloggers, because they illuminate the way they are formed in dialogue with people, practice, technology and media.

The reason why it is necessary to distinguish between community and network here is because community refers to a group of people and adding the prefix of ‘online’ or ‘virtual’ to community simply identifies where and maybe how the community congregates. Network, on the other hand, includes community (the group of people that congregate), but equally emphasizes the other contextual components surrounding the community which influence the community and how it operates, such as technology, media, brands, markets, products, practice and so on. The network is inclusive of every aspect of the phenomena, not the just the people, not just the practice. Automedia such as mummy vlogs are created in relationship to everything in the network – the people, the technology, the media, the practice, the products, brands and markets.
The Networked Shaping of Mummy Vlogs

In his chapter ‘Becoming and Belonging: Performativity, Subjectivity, and the Cultural Purposes of Social Networking’ Rob Cover (2013) states that becoming is always in relation to belonging. As I argue in Chapter 2, ‘Belonging Through Vlogging on YouTube’, mummy vlogging is a process of becoming; becoming in relationship with digital media such as YouTube, the result of which resembles the diary. It is also a process of becoming in relation to the social and cultural role of motherhood that has a textured history in the West, which I argue in Chapter 3, ‘Negotiating Motherhood’. What I argue here, is that becoming for mummy vloggers is also heavily influenced by the network: the space, practice, technology and group that embody and participate in mummy vlogging. Mummy vloggers are limited and afforded by the space and technology, by the conventions and norms of the practice and community, and by the ongoing feedback, interaction and dialogue that takes place in relationship with others in the group (viewers and vloggers). Mummy vloggers, their identities, lives and narratives are shaped, defined, bounded, governed and managed by the network. These subjects and texts are produced through the network, and as I argue throughout this thesis, the product (if there is one) cannot be removed from the process and its influencers. In this section I will explore the different influences of the network on mummy vlogger identities and narratives, demonstrating how automedia is co-created by intimate networked publics in the case of Australian mummy vlogging.

Like Berlant’s (2008) autobiographies of collective experience, mummy vloggers negotiate, construct and become their automedial identities and narratives in relation
to the network. The automedial mummy vlogger self is created in dialogue with a community of mothers (viewers and vloggers) who actively shape the autobiography by explicitly stating what they would like to see, encouraging certain images by linking them, and criticising others in the comments section when they don’t like them. The automedial mummy vlogger self is also created in relation to the form, language and conventions of the community and practice (Bennett & Kennedy, 2003; Dijck, 2007). Adopting the conventions of the genre in the sharing of life stories is crucial within the community as it establishes belonging (Linde, 1993).

Mummy vloggers operate under “norms” as Baym (2015) suggests and have their own language, embodying Philipsen’s (1992) “speech community”. Australian mummy vloggers demonstrate their belonging to the community by meeting the norms of the practice, acknowledging the conventions and embodying the norms of the practice and community, such as confession and intimate self-disclosure as discussed in the previous two chapters. Baym (2015) writes that shared practices entail norms (see also McLaughlin & Vitak, 2012). She writes, “Norms can be explicitly stated, but they are often implicit, negotiated without discussion” (Baym, 2015, p. 87). Baym (2015) writes, “Community norms of practice are displayed, reinforced, negotiated, and taught through members’ shared behaviours” (p. 89).

**Mummy Vlogging “Norms”: Joining an Existing Practice and Community**

Many of the vloggers included in this research state in their first vlog they have been watching YouTube for some time. As Gemma explains, “I watch a lot of people on YouTube, so I thought why not add my life to it” (GemmaTimes, 2013), or as Sarah says, “I myself have been watching YouTube mummies on here for the past over a
year since I fell pregnant with my first son” (sarahandwade86, 2012), and as Kate states, “I watch a lot of vlogs so I guess I understand for me the attraction to vlogs is you can just click and play” (Bella the homesteader, 2014). This admission places them as legitimate members of an existing network on YouTube. They are long-time viewers, already active members of the Australian, and indeed wider, YouTube community of mothers. Not only is their history of watching others like them on YouTube significant in legitimising them as part of the community and therefore authorising them to upload videos (a response that has been invited by other vloggers), but the fact that they have been watching others on YouTube means they are familiar with the conventions and characteristics of the genre, reproducing them in their own videos, and further legitimising them as part of the genre and community.

Australian mummy vloggers refer to their history of watching other mothers and refer to the group they are visibly joining (by vlogging themselves) as a community. One of the Australian mummy vloggers, Dominika, signs off her first vlog saying, “looking forward to being part of the YouTube community” (Dominika Eve, 2014). While other first-time vloggers may address YouTube, beginning their vlog with “Hi YouTube”, Dominika recognises and labels YouTube as a community which she expresses a desire to get to know and become a part of. Another mother who recognises and refers to the YouTube community is Jen. In the description bar below her vlog Jen writes, “I’d love to get to know more in the youtube community better xo” (Jen And Zoe, 2012). All of the first vloggers in this chapter are contributing to an existing connected practice, identified by Dominika and Jen as the YouTube community.

38 Jen’s first vlog is titled ‘Zoe - 18 Month Old Toddler Update September 2012’ and was published on the 17th of October, 2012. Jen’s channel name is called Jen And Zoe and her first vlog can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sxzph5Uxqc0.
As discussed in the introduction, YouTube attracts millions of participants. When Australian mummy vloggers refer to the YouTube community their understanding of the boundaries of the community is based on their history of watching other mummy vloggers on YouTube. Australian mummy vloggers are not referring to the millions of people who participate on the site. They are referring to the web of connections and field of relations (Hine, 2000; Olwig & Hastrup, 1997) they have identified through their history of watching videos about certain topics (relating to becoming and being a mother) on YouTube. The web of connections that begins to define the community becomes evident when Australian mummy vloggers begin talking about their individual connections on YouTube – who they have been watching, who they have connected with, who inspired them to join the practice and so on. Connections become apparent in the vlogs where mummy vloggers explicitly state them, in the description bars below the vlogs where other mummy vloggers are linked, and in the comments section where different members of the community interact. (See Chapter 1, ‘Developing a Method’ for all the ways connections become apparent.)

When Kimberly introduces herself as TTC (trying to conceive) in her first vlog, the first comment she receives is “welcome to the ttc community” (KimberlyRose, 2013). Similarly, vloggers refer to each other, demonstrating the scope of the community and network, encouraging their viewers to subscribe to other channels and follow tags that get picked up by vlogger after vlogger in the community. Bec begins her first vlog

39 Kimberly’s first vlog is titled Pre TTC Vlog #1 – Introduction and was published on the 14 of January, 2013. Kimberly’s channel name is KimberlyRose and her first vlog can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cZ45D6e7Qg.

40 Bec’s first vlog is titled Mummy TAG 2 and was published on the 29th of January, 2013. Bec’s channel name is MumDownUnder and her first vlog can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ausNA--CMg. Bec is doing a ‘tag’ for her first vlog which involves answering a set number of questions, in this case about motherhood. Bec has found the tag as a result of watching another mummy vlogger. Anyone can do a tag on YouTube. Once a mummy vlogger has filmed a tag, she often nominates other mummy vloggers to do it at the end of her vlog.
by answering 20 questions about herself as a mother (MumDownUnder, 2013). This is a tag which she picked up from another YouTuber who she refers to and encourages others to go to and check her out. These are only some examples of countless ways the community and network (or field of relations in ethnographic terms – see Chapter 1, ‘Developing a Method’) begins to emerge when watching mummy vlogs.

There are a number of ways the first-time vloggers establish themselves as part of the YouTube community of mothers. Some simply state that they have been watching mothers on YouTube for some time, like Gemma, Sarah and Kate. Others, like Millie and Bec, use the language specific to the practice and community such as TTC (trying to conceive) and TAG, referring to a list of questions that circulates around the network of mummy vloggers. By using the language specific to the group, Millie and Bec demonstrate belonging. Others refer to common practices they have observed among mothers on YouTube, for example Millie offers her due date saying, “just so everybody knows because I found watching videos a lot of people leave it out” (millieandbaby, 2015). Others imply belonging within the community by referring to their viewers as “you guys”. Addressing the viewers as “you guys” in a first vlog suggests a familiarity with, or at least an assumption about, who is watching.

Other first-time vloggers reproduce the style and conventions of the genre from their very first vlog, in terms of content, structure, editing and styling. Elise, for example, has an edited introduction on her very first vlog with a montage of pictures of herself with her husband and daughter to music, much like an introduction to a TV show

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41 A reference to the game, tag, as in “tag, you’re it.”
episode (which is a common feature among established YouTubers) (Elise Sheree, 2013a, 2013b). This channel introduction (like the opening credits/montage of every Friends episode with the famous Friends theme song (I’ll be there for you)) is used for many months as the introduction to all of her videos. A breakdown of Elise’s introduction can be seen in Figures 36-41.

The first image appears in the top left-hand corner of the screen and moves down to settle in the bottom right hand corner of the screen. This first image is of Elise and her husband. Repetitive music is playing in the background.

More images have panned onto the screen. Again, these images are of Elise and her husband. They appear to be telling a story. The first is of a couple. The second is of a woman putting lipstick on. The third is of a bride and groom. The pictures set the scene for the life being introduced. The viewer is being shown that the story starts with a couple who got married.
The story (depicted in the montage of images) progresses to include an ultrasound picture and, panning in from the bottom left hand side of the screen, and image of Elise pregnant.

Piled on the previous images are new ones of a baby. By the second image of the baby we can assume it is a girl because the pompoms on the baby’s beanie are pink. (Also, the background to this montage is bright pink.)

We see more pictures of the baby girl, which have now almost completely covered up the pictures of Elise and her husband, indicating that these are more recent and of focus in the channel (a central character, if you like). We also see the channel name beginning to fade in on the screen.
Conventions such as Elise’s intro, above, are significant in a number of ways. Introductions to videos such as this mimic popular culture in that they resemble the introductions of popular TV shows, reinforcing mummy vlogging as a form of entertainment and consumable product. Introductions position mummy vlogging as a product of popular culture – an alternative artefact for popular consumption than the myriad of narratives already available on sites such as Netflix, for example.

Like in popular culture, the introductions of mummy vlogs do the work of introducing the main characters of the show and setting the scene (context) for the episodes. Like televisions series/shows, mummy vloggers post videos daily or weekly, a format consumers are familiar with on Free to air TV and on popular media sites such as Netflix or Stan where some shows have a new episode released each week, rather than having the full season released at once.

The significance here is that mummy vloggers become their automedial selves meeting conventions that mimic popular culture. Their automedial narratives are a by-product of the entertainment industry, culturally formed according to the values communicated in mass media. Therefore, becoming in this context is also in relation
to belonging on a larger popular culture scale. And this is another conflation of intimacy and publicity.

Both as consumable narratives, and as processes of self-formation, vlogs are heavily bounded. Goffman (1959) states that “[i]n our Anglo-American society – a relatively indoor one – when a performance is given it is usually given in a highly bounded region, to which boundaries with respect to time are often added” (p. 99). This is the case with mummy vlogging where the individual controls the performance from the comfort of their home, where their automedial identity and narrative is heavily bounded within 10 minute (on average) videos on YouTube, and social media posts.

Many first-time vloggers do not have the resources or are not yet familiar with the technology that would allow them to reproduce the conventions of the genre (in terms of form and style), but they acknowledge this and apologise for it. For example, in the description bar below her first vlog Simone admits that she has no idea about lighting and sound, but she promises to learn (see Figure 42).

![Figure 42 Title and description bar below Simone’s first vlog](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbL_SRvOJl0)

42 Simone’s first vlog is titled *First Vlog - Intro* and was published on the 26th of February 2012. Simone’s channel name is mscherryize and her first vlog can be found here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbL_SRvOJl0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbL_SRvOJl0).
Similarly, Amanda\textsuperscript{43} starts her vlog by apologising for the lack of light in the room in which she is filming (aussiemumma2010, 2012). She says, “sorry let me just set that up, it’s a bit dark, um I’m just using my webcam on my mac computer” (aussiemumma2010, 2012). Later in her vlog she apologises again “sorry, that lighting. Let me just try turn on the light … oh it didn’t really make a difference” (aussiemumma2010, 2012). Amanda’s apparent concern about the lack of lighting demonstrates her understanding of filming conventions and the need for light for a good image. Bec (MumDownUnder, 2013) acknowledges the filming conventions and apologises for not meeting them at the beginning of her first vlog with text across the screen as seen in Figure 43 below.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{bec_first_vlog_text.png}
\caption{Text across the screen in Bec’s first vlog}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{43} Amanda’s first vlog is titled \textit{Introduction Video!} and was published on the 21\textsuperscript{st} of August, 2012. Amanda’s channel name is aussiemumma2010 and her first vlog can be found here: \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IoP0I3lxetk}.  

157
All this suggests that Australian mothers are engaging in an existing, connected practice. They are appealing to their viewers, an audience they assume based on their history of being viewers of similar kinds of videos. They affirm and reinforce their assumptions about their audience when they state in their first videos that their content is for “like-minded people” (Bella the homesteader, 2014); “people like me” (Elise Sheree, 2013b); people who are on the same journey (Join The Jacksons, 2011; millieandbaby, 2015) of becoming and being a mother. This assumption about the audience is based on their experience of feeling connected to the mummy vlogs that they themselves have watched, identifying a likeness between themselves and the content, and assuming that same likeness between themselves (as vloggers) and their viewers.
For Australian mummy vloggers, their practice of viewing is embedded in their practice of uploading. They see their uploads as a contribution to an existing culture, practice and, more importantly, an existing network/community. Mummy vloggers often refer to YouTube as something to add to and contribute to in their first vlogs. As Gemma (Figure 44) explains “I watch a lot of people on YouTube, so I thought why not add my life to it” (GemmaTimes, 2013). Gemma is adding her life to the collection of lives and narratives already on YouTube. YouTube is often referred to as a database of people’s lives (Lovink, 2008), an archive of experiences and emotions (Raun, 2012a). What Gemma is offering is the Australian version, as she states, “I will show you what we do over here in Australia” (GemmaTimes, 2013). In this way Australian mothers are adding their unique Australian motherhood journeys to the collection of European and North American stories already online. In doing this they are providing what Elise craved, a familiar, relatable experience/story for Australian viewers (Elise Sheree, 2013b).

Importantly, Australian mummy vloggers feel invited to add their lives to the collection on YouTube. Just as Australian mummy vloggers invite their viewers to respond in their vlogs (through likes, comments and subscriptions), their vlogs feel like a response to the mothers they have been watching. YouTube invites the individual to “Broadcast Yourself” and the intimate networked publics of mummy vlogging invite the individual mother to share life and share the journey. The lives that are shared, however, are carefully bounded, governed and managed by the intimate networked publics.
The automedial lives and narratives of mummy vloggers are not only shaped by the norms and conventions of the practice and community, such as language, form and style, but the community of viewers (of which the visible ones are made up of mostly other Australian mothers) actively govern and manage the mummy vlogger’s identity and narrative on YouTube. This is a phenomenon that many scholars attribute to the socialisation and performance of motherhood in Western society.

Henderson, Harmon and Houser (2010) argue that mothers govern and surveil each other’s behaviour and thus enforce and uphold certain aspects of the performance of motherhood in society through informal means. Taking Foucault’s conception of surveillance in his 1975 work *Panopticonic stage of punishment: post-structuralist surveillance*, in which he argues that the panopticon – a circular building made up of cells with a central watchtower, giving the illusion to each cell occupant of always being observed – represents a power mechanism in modern “disciplinary” society, whereby people surveil their own behaviour based on an assumption of always being surveilled by others. Henderson et al argue that “mothers surveil one another through interpersonal communication and observation, ranging anywhere from conversations about children’s appropriate developmental milestones to a covert, silent monitoring of other moms’ disciplining behaviour in public places” (p. 231). Thus, ideals about motherhood are circulated and enforced on an interpersonal (mother-to-mother) level. This constant self-surveillance by mothers, where mothers watch others on an individual level, and apply the same standards to their own practice of motherhood leads to what Douglas and Michaels (2004) describe as “everyone watches us, we
watch ourselves, and we watch ourselves watching ourselves” resulting in motherhood as a “psychological police state” (p. 6).

The suggestion that ideals about social roles are upheld and enforced on an interpersonal level is supported by Erving Goffman. In his work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) states that the performance of a role is socialised, “moulded and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented” (p. 44). Just as Cover (2013) argues that “we police each other’s subjecthood for coherence” (p. 59), mummy vloggers manage, and to some extent surveil, each other’s subjecthood based on the values of the community, such as sincerity, consistency and authenticity (Strangelove, 2010; Wesch, 2008; Young, 2007). (I explore the issue of authenticity in depth in the following chapter.) In this way the mummy vlogger community – the intimate networked public – become like Goffman’s performance team.

Goffman uses the term “performance team” to refer to “any set of individuals who cooperate in staging a single routine” (1996, p. 124). Arguably we see in mummy vlogging such a team. The mummy vlogger community has the same ‘collusion’ or ‘understanding’ as referred to by Goffman (1959) whose role is ‘impression management’ (p. 85) where every member of the community embodies and maintains certain standards. Mummy vloggers encourage each other, give each other feedback, embody certain conventions, have a distinct language, and they also keep each other accountable – they criticise each other when they deem the performance to be inconsistent or damaging to the overall “impression”.
Behaviour that may damage the images and narratives embodied by the community are highlighted by the community. YouTube communities are quick to comment and criticise when they disagree with a performance on YouTube. As Baym (2015) points out YouTube audiences are famous for their aggression. Typically, the Australian mummy vlogging community is supportive of new Australian mothers, however there is evidence that these communities become more aggressive as mummy vloggers become more successful on YouTube – as can be seen on gossip sites discussing largely American mummy and family vloggers such as YTMD (YouTube Momma Drama) and Guru Gossip.

Although the Australian mummy vlogging community is largely supportive, they do comment openly when they disagree with the performance in a vlog. For example, Ash (Join The Jacksons, introduced in Chapter 2, ‘*Becoming* through Vlogging on YouTube’), received a challenging comment on one of her daily the vlogs, as seen in Figure 45 (Join The Jacksons, 2015b; Rachael Hall, 2015). The vlog featured a staged debate with her husband in which they both have three minutes to present an argument (for and against on a particular topic), three minutes for a rebuttal, and three minutes for a conclusion. The debate was part of an ongoing series they were trying in order to come up with engaging new content for their viewers. During the debate, in response to a comment her husband, James, made, Ash responded, “that’s so bogan” (Join The Jacksons, 2015b). A ‘bogan’ is an Australian stereotype, usually referring to a white Australian of low socio-economic status, generally meaning unrefined or unsophisticated, the use of which is often pejorative.44

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44 This definition of bogan is based on my own understanding of the term, along with a number of different sources including the Macquarie Dictionary, the Urban Dictionary and Wikipedia.
In her comment, the viewer explains that she has been watching Ash “for years” and says “but wow I was a little shocked with how you spoke to James, he was trying an idea and trying to get into your videos and that was just a really rude way to go about things” (Rachael Hall, 2015). The viewer concludes by saying “show some more love lol” (laugh out loud) (Rachael Hall, 2015). Ash responded to the comment saying, “I didn’t realise it came across that way” (Join The Jacksons, 2015f). Critically, Ash identifies that a number of people “liked” the viewer’s comment indicating that they agreed with her, and therefore communally supporting the criticism. Ash says, “I can see by the number of thumbs up on your comment that a few people took it that way also so I really should be careful about the things that I say” (Join The Jacksons, 2015f). Ash explains that she was joking and ends her response by saying, “Thanks for your feedback lovely! I really appreciate it otherwise I never would have realised that what I was saying/doing could come across the wrong way” (Join The Jacksons, 2015f).
Ash’s recognition of the comment being a community response and responding in a way that both acknowledged and appreciated the feedback, implying that she would take it on board, is an example of the way the community works together to manage their individual and collective performance of motherhood on YouTube. The next day Ash published a video titled *Am I A Terrible Wife?* (Join The Jacksons, 2015c) in which she addresses the comment (Figure 46). Ash explains her behaviour in the video, insisting that she was only joking. She also asks her husband how he felt about the incident. This example demonstrates the way the community responds to, influences and participates in individual Australian mummy vlogger narratives, together creating collective narratives or autobiographies of collective experience.

![Figure 46 Ash’s video responding to comment](image-url)
What this example demonstrates is the way automedial identities and narratives such as those of mummy vloggers are co-created in dialogue with the network – with the intimate communities, technology and space. It was not just the comment, but the spatial/medial/technological response through likes that influenced Ash’s automedial identity and narrative on YouTube.

**How does this Develop our Understanding of Automedia?: Automedia as Co-Created Texts and Subjects**

Scholars have long acknowledged the work of the reader of traditional autobiography in interpreting the text, and many scholars have explored the necessity and influence of the other in confession and the production of truth about self (see Foucault, 1990, for example). We know, therefore, that any process of documenting, showing, constructing and revealing the self involves others (Garner, 2002). As Helen Garner (2002) writes, “It’s impossible to write intimately about your own life without revealing something of the people who are close to you. … The intimate involves other people” (pp. 42-43). Online, in spaces such as YouTube, the other plays a much more active role in shaping the identity and narrative as it is formed. The immediacy of the response as well as the ongoing nature of the narrative (with no foreseeable end) makes autobiography (or rather, automedia) an ongoing, collaborative project in digital networked spaces. It is collaborative in nature because the narrative usually does not continue on YouTube unless there is visible increasing success – an increasing number of viewers and interaction from viewers. Therefore, the viewers are necessary for the narrative to continue, but they also contribute, giving feedback

45 See Anna Poletti’s (2011) ‘Intimate Economies: PostSecret and the Affect of Confession’ for a contemporary example of the connection between confession and intimate publics.
in the form of likes, subscriptions and comments at every step of the way. YouTube audiences voice their opinions on content and take ownership of the lives, identities and narratives they chose to consume. YouTube audiences are particularly concerned with authenticity, rejecting any images that do not meet this core value (as I argue in the following chapter).

Contemporary digital genres of autobiography – automedia, such as mummy vlogs – are created and shaped in ongoing dialogue with the audience of the text. This takes place in unique participatory online spaces where the medium, for example YouTube, becomes both a place (context) and a space (medium) as defined by Heidi McKee and James Porter (2009) in their work *The Ethics of Internet Research: A Rhetorical, Case-Based Process*. McKee and Porter (2009) explore online spaces as both a place for community and culture and the study of people and a space for publishing material and the study of text. The use of the word “text” here resembles Jodie Nicotra’s (2009) examination of writing in her work “Folksonomy” and the Restructuring of Writing Space’ as a shared, performative, production of space, by a group of multiple users, and not a single author. This definition of space and text is also used by Jay David Bolter (2001) in his work *Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print*. Working with these definitions the text becomes a unique collaborative product influenced and shaped by many authors/creators. The text exists and belongs within the social space, culture, and community in which it was created. The relationship between text and context, between author and consumer, are impenetrable online, begging Garner’s (2002) insightful question “where do I end and other people begin?” (2002, p. 42). Although this isn’t a new question, and Garner was not referring to digital writing when she
wrote her essay in Meanjin titled “I”, online spaces document the collaborative nature of producing autobiographical selves. The texts themselves are vulnerable (Kennedy, 2017), a statement which can be applied to contemporary autobiography at large, however, the interactions and dialogue between participants online is documented and archived. Exploring digital autobiographies, as social places and productive spaces, can give us new insight into the way everyday people become and belong in contemporary society, using networked digital media.

Conclusion

Australian mummy vlogs are automedial texts which are co-created in dialogue with intimate networked publics. The automedial identities and narratives of mummy vloggers become collective, collaborative texts – “autobiographies of collective experience” as explored by Lauren Berlant (2008) – created in dialogue with others. The intimate networked publics of mummy vlogs not only influence the creation of each mummy vlogger identity and narrative, but they also collectively manage the texts, resembling Goffman’s ‘performance team’. Mummy vloggers establish their belonging within the practice, space and community by adopting the language, conventions and form of the genre.

In this chapter I have demonstrated how the automedial identities and narratives of mummy vloggers are co-created in relationship with community and technology/medium. In the following chapter I explore the complications of automediality in participatory, networked spaces where the authenticity of the
subject/text – authenticity being a core value on YouTube – is compromised because of the other participants in the space: products, brands and markets.
Chapter 5. Authenticity, a Commodity

“The self today is an entrepreneurial self, a self that’s packaged to be sold.”

- William Deresiewicz (2011, p. 7)

So far, I have introduced mummy vlogging as an automedial practice that resembles the diary, laden with confession and intimate self-disclosure. I have demonstrated how automediality is a process of becoming that is shaped by culture, history and network (community, media and technology). In the following chapters I explore some of the complexities of automediality that arise in my example of Australian mummy vlogging. In this chapter I explore the issue of authenticity.

Authenticity is critical to the automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vlogging. Unlike debates about authenticity that have dominated internet research in the past (which I outline below), authenticity in this context is not concerned with the correlation between the online and offline self. The correlation between online and offline is managed by the network which, as Bayms (2015) suggests, connects across a range of media platforms online, and face-to-face (Baym calls this “networked collectivism”). Authenticity in this context is concerned with transparency, especially when it comes to the commercialisation of automedia.

YouTube operates on a core value of authenticity (Strangelove, 2010; Wesch, 2008; Young, 2007) where it is demanded and consumed as entertainment. The success of automedia such as mummy vlogs is dependent on viewers accepting that what is published on the site is real and authentic. Authenticity is established and maintained by mummy vloggers through their content – the intimate setting of their vlogs, as
discussed in Chapter 2, ‘Becoming through Vlogging on YouTube’, and their confessions and intimate self-disclosures, as discussed in Chapter 3, ‘Negotiating Motherhood’. Authenticity is also complicated and often compromised by the other participants in the network – products, brands and markets.

In this chapter I demonstrate how the automedial identities and narratives of mummy vloggers are not only shaped by community, technology and media, as discussed in the previous chapter, but are also influenced and shaped by the products, brands and markets that participate in the space. Using the example of Elise and Ash, I demonstrate how mummy vloggers incorporate products and brands into their vlogs, and how their viewers respond to this. I conclude that authenticity is a commodity that has to be carefully managed by mummy vloggers to ensure their ongoing success on YouTube, and that this task requires a huge amount of labour and skill.

**Authenticity in Networks: A shift from Fragmented to Cohesive Identities**

Over the last four decades of internet research prominent scholars such as Sherry Turkle have argued that the internet allows for multiplicity and fragmentation of the self (1996, p. 157) reflecting postmodern notions of the self (Gergen, 1991). Unlike

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46 Postmodernism is a response to the breakdown of traditional hierarchies, and the rejection of the predetermined wisdoms of traditional sources such as the State and Church (Fanthome, 2008; Giddens, 1991). Instead of relying on the authority of the Church, for example, for objective Truth and therefore meaning and identity, a postmodern attitude insists on the individual construction of truth, meaning and identity. Individuals must look inwards, and reflect on their own personal experiences and autobiographical narratives to find and construct identity and meaning (Fanthome, 2008; Giddens, 1991). See Kenneth Gergen (1991) who introduces the postmodern self as fragmented, empathetic, and anti-Cartesian.
traditional notions of a unified self, the internet allows for multiplicity, heterogeneity and fragmentation (Turkle, 1996, p. 157). Technologies such as the computer invite “definition or redefinition of the self” fostering “different constructions of the self” (Bolter, 2002, p. 130), and become an extension of the self, or even a second self (Turkle, 1984). The internet has had a deconstructive effect on identity and culture (Wynn & Katz, 1997, p. 298) creating fragmented, complex and diffracted identities (Stone, 1996, p. 36). According to scholars such as Turkle, online, identity is fluid – people can explore elements of themselves, develop certain characteristics, explore scenarios, revisit familiar situations to re-examine and understand them, or create completely new versions of themselves that bear no resemblance to their ‘real self’, and they can do all of these things at the same time (Papacharissi, 2002; Turkle, 1996). Turkle argues that cyberspace affords endless spaces that invite self-creation and allow people to become masters of self-presentation (1996, p. 158). She writes that MUDs (short for multiuser dungeons or multiuser domains), for example, act as identity workshops where “people don’t just become who they play, they often play who they want to be” (1996, p. 157). In this way the individual and computer “function as one” and “because of the machine …the individual is able to reinvent him/herself online” (Z. Papacharissi, 2002, p. 645).

47 This notion has its origin in Christian confessional writing such as the Augustine’s *Confessions* (arguably the first autobiography written in Latin between AD 397 and 400) which he was allegedly forced to write in order “to refute the idea that he was a divided being, on account of his divided doctrinal loyalties” (Moore-Gilbert, 2006, p. 11). Augustine devotes much of his attention in his writing to “the construction of the autobiographical Self as unitary” (Moore-Gilbert, 2006, p. 11) and uses confession to solidify this construction. Autobiographical writing is later used by writers such as Rousseau (arguably the first secular autobiography), visibly influenced by Augustine giving his autobiography the same name *Confessions* (originally published in 1782), but instead using the medium to explore the divided nature of the self – the divide he felt between his individual self and society (Storey, 2009). Rousseau uses autobiography as a means of self-expression (Tell 2008), and, heavily influenced by the Romanticism and Enlightenment periods, exemplified the emergence of individuality (Sauter, 2014) focusing on “purely inner experiences and their expression, outside the roles and institutions of society” (King, 2008, p. 118). Rousseau’s *Confessions* reflects an era where authenticity was valued above the constraint of social convention (King, 2008, p. 118). And we see this social value of authenticity above all else, still today.
When exploring authenticity, internet researchers during the 1990s and 2000s were concerned with the correlation between the online and offline self. Scholars were arguing that the affordances of the internet and the disembodied nature of interaction online (through the interface of the screen) allowed the individual to present themselves free of face-to-face consequences (Baym, 2015), which some argued left the potential for fanciful or deceitful representations of self, and led to the distinction between IRL (in real life) and ‘virtual’ life (‘virtual’ and ‘actual’ as Boellstorff (2008) puts it, which allowed for anything. The methods of enquiry in internet research had to adjust accordingly. In her development of Virtual Ethnography as method, Christine Hine (2000) writes that the question of authenticity intensifies online because “the ethnographer cannot readily confirm details that informants tell them about their offline selves” (p. 49). Hine suggests that the notion of a single identity, single truth, single performance of self is an outdated way of approaching identity (2000; Wynn & Katz, 1997).

For scholars interested in identity during this time, the question of authenticity was less concerning as research in the various fields of life writing have acknowledged and explored the various ways narratives and identities – both online and offline – are constructed, created, shaped, chosen, and invented by the individual (Bridger, 2009; Eakin, 2008; Garner, 2002; Goldthwaite, 2003; Maguire, 2014; Marshall, 2013; Poletti & Rak, 2013; S. Smith & Watson, 2010). It is widely accepted that all presentations of self are constructed. Crucially, it is the process of documenting or communicating the self that is identity forming (Richardson, 2001; Bridger, 2009) as the process, including writing, filming, and posting, brings the subject or self into being (Neuman, 1992). The individual embodies the performance and realises the self
through it. As Baym (2015), Boellstorf (2008) and Uimonen (2013) point out, the identities people create and perform online feed back into their self-concepts. Individuals can become the self they want to be by performing their role and impressing upon the observer the self they want to portray (Goffman, 1959).

In recent years there has been a shift in scholarship exploring identity online with voices such as Helen Kennedy’s calling for the need to move away from notions of the self online being anonymous, multiple, and fragmented, as previously claimed by the leading scholars in internet research such as Sherry Turkle (1995, 1996). Rather, Helen Kennedy argues for the need to explore the continuity between offline and online selves (2006, 2013). Scholars interested in identity online, today, particularly using networked digital media, argue that most people do not create fantastic, radical or deceptive versions of themselves online (Baym, 2015; Curtis, 1997) and these “online applications are taken up for anything but anonymity” (Cover, 2013, p. 56). Rob Cover (2013) argues that online applications (such as the networked digital media including social media) “are part of a complex response to an older, ongoing cultural demand that we process our selves and our actions into coherence, intelligibility, and recognizability, and thus disavow the instability of identity” (pp. 56-57).

Most internet users participate in networked digital media where authenticity and cohesion are demanded. The preliminary act of creating a profile on most sites— which is a necessity in order to participate in the space—requires connection and cohesion between the online and offline self. Users of Facebook, for example, are required to provide information such as a first name and last name, date of birth,
profile picture and authenticable email address and mobile phone number (not to mention more detailed identifying and connecting information such as workplace, school, university and so on). A lot of this information is able to be faked, however most people use the same profile, using their real name, real picture and real information, across multiple sites, for different purposes, both professional and social. Furthermore, the users they interact with are part of a network, some of whom engage with the user in-real-life. Even users who create alternative profiles, as explored by Emily van Der Nagel (2018), are still known to members of the network. The alternative profile may be used to share different kinds of content, but the authenticable identity is still known, and adds to a cohesive overall identity, made up of both online and offline presentations and activities. Importantly, the type of information shared on networked digital media is embodied information. People share pictures of themselves in real life. They share their experiences and location in real life. They tag other people in the network who they are interacting with in real life. Rather than viewing networked digital media as an alternative virtual space, it is more helpful to view the activities that take place in these spaces as real life.

Baym’s notion of ‘networked collectivism,’ refers to how “groups of people now network throughout the internet and related mobile media, and in-person communication” (2007; 2015, p. 101). In this definition the networked public that gathers around mummy vlogger identities/performances communicates and communes across a range of digital media platforms, and face-to-face. An example of the face-to-face element of vlogging is the popular “meet up” where vloggers arrange to be at a certain place at a certain time and invite other vloggers and their viewers to join them. Another example of this is when mummy vloggers get together and film
videos with both vloggers in the same physical location. Examples of this in the Australian mummy vlogging community include when Ash, who lives in Brisbane, travelled to Sydney to meet Elise (Join The Jacksons, 2015a), as seen in Figure 47. They produced a number of videos together and organised a “meet up” with viewers later in Brisbane city. Similarly, another example is when Australian mummy vloggers Dominika (Dominika Eve) and Jen (Jen and Zoe) vlogged meeting each other for the first time at a local park in Perth (Dominika Eve, 2017), see screen in Figure 48. Jen had travelled to Perth from Queensland, for other reasons.

It is the network (of vloggers and viewers), as demonstrated in the previous chapter, that govern and manage the identities performed in the space. As Baym (2015) writes,

“Wealthy in western cultures often think on the self as a set of essential truths that can be revealed through communication. However, identities are always social. They are made, displayed, and reshaped through interaction.” (p. 118).
When it comes to investigating identities online, Hine (2000) suggests that instead of assuming authenticity to be a problem in cyberspace, an ethnographer should instead deal with it as it arises in the research. “Assuming a priori that authenticity is a problem for inhabitants of cyberspace is the same kind of ethnographic mistake as assuming that the Azande have a problem in dealing with the contradictions inherent in their beliefs about witchcraft.” (p. 49). Hine continues,

“A search for truly authentic knowledge about people or phenomena is doomed to be ultimately irresolvable. The point for the ethnographer is not to bring some external criterion for judging whether it is safe to believe what informants say, but rather to come to understand how it is that informants judge authenticity.” (p. 49).

Similarly, in their toolkit for exploring virtual selves, Smith and Watson (2013) address the issue of authenticity. They write, “virtual environments only make clearer … that all self-presentation is performative, authenticity is an affect, not an essence” (Smith & Watson, 2013, p. 75). Authenticity in these environments can be understood as “calculated” (Pooley, 2011), “manufactured” (Graxian, 2003), and managed. As William Deresiewicz (2011) states, “[t]he self today is an entrepreneurial self, a self that’s packaged to be sold” (p. 7; cited in S. Smith & Watson, 2013, p. 79), and as Jeff Pooley states, “The best way to sell yourself is to not appear to be selling yourself” (quoted in New York Times Magazine 2011, pp. 1-2; cited in S. Smith & Watson, 2013, p. 75). Authenticity in this context refers to “the credibility or sincerity of a performance and its ability to come off as natural and effortless” (Graxian, 2003, pp. 10-11; cited in Gray, 2009, p. 1164). When it comes to exploring the authenticity of
virtual subjects, Smith and Watson (2013) ask, “Is this a site where authenticity of self-presentation matters and if so, for whom and for what reasons?” (p. 76).

Ultimately, in the context of networked digital media such as YouTube, authenticity is judged by the participants of the space. Viewers decide whether mummy vloggers are being authentic, and authenticity is compromised by the fact vloggers can attract and influence large audiences, making them a desirable marketing and advertising tool for brands.

**Vloggers as Influencers**

Vloggers work with brands, promoting products in their vlogs, because it is one of the ways to make money from vlogging. The more viewers a vlogger has the more attractive they are to brands, as the greater their potential is to ‘influence’ a larger number of people. Essentially, all viewers are consumers, and vloggers offer a contemporary way to reach already established niche audiences and influence their consumer behaviour. This form of influence is successful because rapport is already established between the intimate networked publics of vlogs where intimacy and community have already been set up based on the authenticity of the vlogger and their content (as discussed in previous chapters).

This type of advertising – using ‘influencers’ such as vloggers – is successful and growing in popularity because it penetrates the intimate networked publics of mummy vlogging. Products penetrate the intimate exchange between vlogger and their viewers because the product is framed as part of the intimate disclosures of everyday mummy
vloggers. The products advertised are presented as the secret to the mummy vlogger’s success, or the secret to how they got through the difficult phase of their child’s development, for example. Like word of mouth in traditional face-to-face communities, mummy vloggers share the products they use as part of their journey through motherhood, offering their experiences in order to help others. The problem is that these intimate disclosures about products used are often “sponsored” (paid for), which brings the vlogger’s authenticity into question.

Once a vlogger’s authenticity comes into question, they quickly lose their community and their success. In her exploration of two Christian mummy blogs, Deborah Whitehead (2015) found that “the rhetoric of authenticity in social media plays a central role in the formation of online communities” (p. 120). Whitehead argues that the success of narratives such as blogs and vlogs,

“depends a great deal on a credible narrative and narrative identity, and on readers who enter into relationship with that story and its author because they find the author’s self-representations and story to be unique, persuasive, and trustworthy. When doubt enters into that equation, trust is questioned or lost altogether” (p. 125).

In order to ensure their ongoing success on YouTube, mummy vloggers have to carefully manage their authenticity. Below is an example of two Australian mummy vloggers working with a brand and featuring a product in their videos. This example is interesting because of the way each mummy vlogger frames the product to their
viewers, manages their authenticity, and because of the way their audience responds to each video.

“I have a new vacuum cleaner”

In mid 2016 the two most successful Australian mummy vloggers included in this study, Elise (Elise Sheree) and Ash (Join The Jacksons), published videos which feature the Dyson Cinetic Big Ball Vacuum (Elise Sheree, 2016a; Join The Jacksons, 2016a) (see Figures 49 and 50 showing video thumbnails, titles, descriptions and view counts below)\(^{48}\). Both Elise and Ash talk with excitement about their new vacuum cleaner in their videos.

![Figure 49 Dyson video Elise](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EliseSheree2016a)

Elise’s video is framed as a “first impression” style unboxing and review video. Elise unboxes the vacuum, taking it out of its packaging and showing all the different parts and attachments. She then talks at length about what it’s like to clean her home, how her house is carpeted and gets dirty frequently, and how she has to vacuum several times a week. She turns the vacuum on and films herself vacuuming her living room,

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\(^{48}\) Elise’s thumbnail accessed here: [https://www.youtube.com/user/littlemisszaratv/search?query=dyson](https://www.youtube.com/user/littlemisszaratv/search?query=dyson)
Ash’s thumbnail accessed here: [https://www.youtube.com/user/AshandJ2011/search?query=dyson](https://www.youtube.com/user/AshandJ2011/search?query=dyson)
kitchen, couch (using a different attachment), stairs (using a different attachment),
and her trick of vacuuming the lint from her dryer filter (using a different attachment).
Elise tests the claim that the vacuum will always realign itself upright if it topples
over – it does. A hashtag appears across the screen #Dysonstandup. Finally, she
demonstrates how to empty the contents of the vacuum cleaner into the bin. Elise ends
her video talking about her thoughts on the product, “I have to say it’s amazing”
(Elise Sheree, 2016a). She continues by listing her favourite things about the vacuum.
She ends the video by asking her viewers to tell her what cleaning video they would
like to see next.

Ash’s video title HOW WE KEEP OUR HOUSE CLEAN! | DYSON CINECTIC BIG
BALL VACUUM reads like a question and answer. The question of how they clean
their house, which Ash says is highly requested at the beginning of the video, is
answered simply with the name of the product – a Dyson vacuum. The video is
framed like a long-awaited answer to a highly requested question, and a piece of
information that may help others (as discussed in Chapter 3, ‘Negotiation
Motherhood’). Ash opens the video by saying “some of the most frequently requested
videos on this channel are videos on how we manage to keep the house clean … so
today I thought I would do a fun video on our vacuuming routine” (Join The
Jacksons, 2016a). Ash shares in detail about her vacuuming routines over the years.
She talks about the inferior brand vacuum cleaner she had in the past and how
amazing the Dyson is in comparison. She shows us detailed footage of the vacuum
and its features and attachments in action. At the end of the video Ash gives the
Dyson vacuum a 10/10 and invites her viewers to click on the link directing them to
the Dyson website. The focus throughout the video is firmly on the Dyson vacuum.
Neither Elise or Ash say in their videos that the vacuum has been sent to them by the brand (meaning it has been sent to them for free for the purpose of promotion). Rather, both of them simply state they have a new vacuum cleaner. Elise says, “I have a new vacuum cleaner” (Elise Sheree, 2016a) and Ash says, “we got a new Dyson vacuum cleaner” (Join The Jacksons, 2016a). Elise does, however, write in the description bar below her video that “Dyson was lovely enough to send me their new … vacuum cleaner” (see Figure 51), and when asked by a viewer where she bought it from in the comments section below her vlog (Josiah 101, 2016), Elise replies that it was sent to her (see Figure 52) (Elise Sheree, 2016a).

![Figure 51 Description bar below Elise’s Dyson video](image-url)
This transparency from Elise maintains her authenticity and results in congratulations from her viewers. As one viewer writes in the comments section below her vlog, “Lucky lady! … congrats on over 7000 subscribers. You are doing such a great job with your channel” (Teresa Wasiak, 2016) (see Figure 53). YouTube audiences (regular participants in the space) are overwhelmingly aware of, and familiar with, the ways vloggers work with brands and products. This is largely due to the fact that a number of very successful vloggers talk openly about brand deals and sponsorship as a way to maintain their own authenticity on the site. Viewers are happy to accept this sort of advertising on the grounds that the vlogger maintains their authenticity by only promoting products and brands that they genuinely believe in and actually use in real life, and on the grounds that they are transparent about when they are working with a brand. Where there is transparency among more successful vloggers, viewers will actively support promotional videos and buy the products as a way to support the vlogger.

Successful UK vloggers in the same genre of mummy and family vlogging such as Louise Pentland and The Michalaks talk openly and at length about brand deals and sponsorship, how these are secured and the effort and labour that goes into winning brand deals, working with brands as clients, and incorporating the products into their videos and social media posts (particularly Instagram). These vloggers are also open about why they need to work with brands (in order to make vlogging financially viable) and how their viewers can support them in these ventures.
Australian mummy vlogging is still in its infancy and has not yet reached the level of success necessary to be able to demonstrate this complex commercial relationship between brands, vloggers and viewers. However, this example of the Dyson vacuum cleaner does demonstrate that Australian mummy vloggers are aware of, and concerned about, authenticity in the face of sponsorship, as demonstrated in the comments below Ash’s video. Ash never mentions that the Dyson vacuum has been sent to her, but her viewers pull her up on this and ask her to clarify (Join The Jacksons, 2016a). One of her viewers comments, “Was this a sponsored video?” (IVF Dreams, 2016) (see Figure 55) and another, a fellow Australian mummy vlogger, Jen, asks, “i see your link to Dyson has a Jacksoncampaign thing in the link – did you or do you guys get benefit (financially or otherwise …) from Dyson for promoting the …vacuum?” (Jen And Zoe, 2016) (see Figure 56).
This video is all about how we keep our house clean, what our cleaning routine is like and how using a particular vacuum has completely changed our cleaning routine. Check out where you can get your Dyson Cinetic Big Ball Vacuum here! [http://goo.gl/0ZQa8Q](http://goo.gl/0ZQa8Q)

Figure 54 Description bar below Ash’s Dyson video

I love my Dyson, so much so that I have two!! Was this a sponsored video?

Figure 55 Comment below Ash’s Dyson video

Firstly just out of curiosity, I see your link to Dyson has a Jackson campaign thing in the link - did you or do you guys get benefit (financially or otherwise from clicking on the link or buying from the link) from Dyson for promoting the Dyson vacuum?

Figure 56 Comment below Ash’s Dyson video
Ash never responds to these questions, potentially damaging her authenticity and ability to influence and work with brands in the future. What these comments demonstrate is that even among the infant networks of Australian mummy vlogging, viewers are sponsorship savvy, concerned with authenticity, and confident in calling out Australian mummy vloggers who aren’t transparent.

Arguably, Elise successfully managed her authenticity in this brand deal, as affirmed by her viewers, and Ash did not. As vloggers become more successful, their ability to manage their authenticity requires an increasing amount of care and creativity (skill) and becomes paramount to their success on the site.

**Managing Authenticity; Self-branding and the Skill and Labour of Being an Influencer**

Mummy vlogging has the potential to become a successful full-time career, offering fame and fortune, as has been demonstrated by successful mummy vloggers in other parts of the world.50 As Nancy Baym (2015) writes, digital media such as YouTube have allowed “individuals to communicate and produce mediated content on a mass scale” which “has led to opportunities for fame that were not available outside of the established culture industries before” (pp. 4-5). Such is the case with mummy vlogging on YouTube, which allows the individual to produce mediated content for (potentially) mass audiences, as a form of entertainment.

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50 Such as Anna Saccone, see Molony (2017), see also Dredge (2015), Gibbons and Wainwright, and Harvey (2013) for related articles.
The content that mummy vloggers produce is entirely focused on the self, their identity and narrative. Success, and the labour involved in reaching success, is solely based on the individual’s performance and presentation of self. The self, in this process, becomes a consumable product, and brand in its own right, which has to be carefully managed and maintained (Pooley, 2011; Smith & Watson, 2013). In this context, the self is “a commodity to be packaged for brokering in a variety of media sites, including YouTube” (Smith & Watson, 2013, p. 79). In her book Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age Alice Marwick (2013) calls this self-branding, which draws upon the same marketing principles as in mainstream cultural industries (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Hearn, 2008), and requires a huge amount of labour.

In their article “Having It All” on Social Media: Entrepreneurial Femininity and Self-Branding among Fashion Bloggers’ Duffy and Hund (2015) explore the expectations and pressures associated with creating a business and career which is essentially formed around the presentation of an online identity. They discuss expectations such as being “always on” (accessible at all times) and maintaining a consistent presence on social media (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Gill, 2011; Lazzarato, 2006). The work of mummy vlogging becomes a constant endeavour to manage the automedial self, and a mummy vlogger’s career becomes an individual project of the self (Gill, 2011), which involves a constant effort of self-production, self-presentation, and self-promotion (Duffy & Hund, 2015).

All efforts of self-branding are done against the backdrop of feminine confessional culture (Banet-Weiser & Arzumanova, 2013; Duffy & Hund, 2015; Harris, 2004).
which today, is a cultural expectation demanded of everyone in the public sphere (as discussed in Chapter 3, ‘Negotiating Motherhood’). However, in order for self-branding to be successful, it is vital that each individual maintains an image of authenticity (Duffy, 2013; Marwick, 2013; McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2013). They do this through the confessional aspects of their self-presentation through sharing ‘behind the scenes’ images, images of seemingly candid ‘personal life’, snap shots of ‘real life’ thoughts, feelings and experiences, among other concerns, which Duffy and Hund (2015) argue do nothing to disrupt the overall aesthetic, and successfully manage the appearance of ‘authenticity’.

But authenticity is challenged in the context of digital media, both by the conventions and boundaries of the genre (discussed in the previous chapter, ‘Intimate Networked Publics’), and by the vlogger’s ability to control what is revealed and what is not. Mummy vloggers choose which parts of the themselves and their lives to show and they do so in a heavily edited, bounded “texts” (see previous chapter). As Melissa Goldthwaite (2002) states, in her paper ‘Confessing Contradictions’, when asked by a friend why she discloses such intimate things about herself in her academic writing she responds “[b]ecause I choose what’s revealed and what’s not” (p. 644). Goldthwaite (2003) further explains that her disclosures “can be partial… It’s not about the truth the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God. Sometimes, there are contradictions; always, there are absences” (p. 55). Mummy vloggers who want to become successful, and maintain their success, on YouTube, have to carefully manage their disclosures in order to maintain their authenticity. Exactly how authenticity is managed as Australian mummy vloggers become more successful, is yet to be seen.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the complexities surrounding authenticity in the automedial identities and narratives of mummy vloggers. I have argued that authenticity is no longer a concern about the correlation between online and offline selves (as it was in the early years of internet research), rather, in networked digital environments (where the network manages authenticity), authenticity is compromised by the other participants in the space – products, brands and markets. Using the example of Elise and Ash and their reviews of the Dyson Cinetic Big Ball vacuum, I explore how mummy vloggers manage their authenticity in the face of working with brands, and how audiences respond to this. Ultimately, I suggest that authenticity is the most important feature of mummy vlogs, a commodity that must be carefully managed and maintained, which requires skill and a huge amount of labour.

This chapter demonstrates the way automedia is shaped in networked digital environments, not only in relationship with people, technology and media, but also in relationship with the other participants in the space, products, brands and markets. The work of, and success of, automedia in networked digital environments, is in managing and maintaining authenticity. This is achieved through transparency (disclosure), despite the heavily constructed (mediated and bounded) nature of automedia.

In the following chapter I explore another complexity in the automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vlogging. This is that mummy vloggers are not only constructing and presenting their own automedial identities and narratives, but in
doing so they are also curating and publishing their children’s automedial identities and narratives. I demonstrate how mummy vloggers include footage of their children in their vlogs, and I explore the ethics of this practice, asking whether the natural inclusion of children in mummy vlogs is exploitative, considering children are not able to provide their consent. Rather than focusing on consent and privacy, however, I ask how having your life curated by a parent in dialogue with a network and published online, affects a child’s sense of self moving forward. Considering the children’s automedial narratives have been published and consumed (and co-created) within networks, will the network accept a later self-published version?
Chapter 6. Curating Life


In Chapter 4, ‘Intimate Networked Publics’ and Chapter 5, ‘Authenticity’ I demonstrate how automedia, using networked digital media, is formed in relationship with all participants in the network. I argue that the automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vloggers invite community and are co-created in dialogue with, and in response to, their community of viewers, which I call intimate networked publics (see Chapter 4, ‘Intimate Networked Publics’). The automedial identities and narratives of mummy vlogs are socially formed, inextricably intertwined with others. Not only do they involve others, but they also feature others, for as Garner (2002) states, “It’s impossible to write intimately about your own life without revealing something of the people who are close to you … The intimate involves other people” (pp. 42-43).

The automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vloggers are critically reliant upon, and heavily feature children. The only qualifying factor in mummy vlogging is the presence of children, as mummy vloggers can only adopt the title if they are becoming or being a mother, which requires a child or children. The identities and narratives of mummy vloggers are therefore intertwined with their children. Mummy vloggers cannot reveal intimate things about themselves without revealing intimate things about their children. Essentially, Australian mummy vloggers are curating and publishing their children’s lives, and in doing so they are constructing their children’s automedial identities and narratives.
There is extensive research published about adolescence and privacy online, particularly in the context of managing children’s engagement and risk online, but little about *parents* sharing information about their children online and the issues surrounding this. The few studies that do address this call for a greater investigation of the rights of children and the attitudes of parents participating in this practice (see Ammari, Kumar, Lampe, & Schoenebeck, 2015; Chalklen & Anderson, 2017; Hiniker, Schoenebeck, & Kientz, 2016; Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015; M. R. Morris, 2014, and more generally, the special issue of Social Media + Society edited by Tama Leaver and Bjorn Nansen (2017) titled Infancy Online). Generally, scholars such as Ammari et al have found that studies focusing on the ethical responsibilities of individuals who post content about another person, and therefore manage that person’s privacy/footprint online, are less developed (2015, p. 1896). This is the area I would like to focus on in this chapter.

Mummy vlogs are not only (contemporary networked digital) autobiographies of motherhood, they are also autobiographies of childhood as explored by Life Writing and Childhood scholar Kate Douglas. Typically, when we refer to autobiographies of childhood it involves the adult subject revisiting their memories of their childhood. In mummy vlogging, however, we see mothers curating and recording the children’s memories in real time. This is true to an extent of all families, in that all childhoods are shaped and influenced by parents, and importantly domestic media plays a part in this, such as family photo albums (whether digital or physical) and family home videos. The family memories of mummy vlogs, however, are published, shaped by a network, and consumed by audiences as entertainment.
In this chapter I explore how mummy vloggers include their children in their vlogs and I ask what effect this practice might have on the children’s future sense of self. What might be the effect of such practices on the children who essentially have their autobiographies curated, constructed and published by their parents? If we use our archives to identity ourselves as Eakin (2008) suggests, then what effect does it have when our archives have been produced by someone else? Furthermore, if the automedial self has been produced in relation to a network, what role does the network play in remembering and enforcing this narrative in the future? When it comes to children, these questions are complicated by the inability of a child to consent; that is to fully understand the consequences of publishing something online, and therefore have the ability to give informed consent. Questions of privacy and ethics must therefore also be addressed.

For many of these questions there are not yet answers, as these genres of vlogging are still young (only 6-8 years old), with even the oldest children affected by these practices still being legally considered children (under the age of 18). The extent of the effect of automedia such as mummy vlogs on children will only begin to emerge in the next 10-20 years, by which time these texts may no longer exist (either the technology will become outdated, the platform may be replaced, or the vlogs and channels may be deleted). These questions are worthwhile, however, as they apply to all networked digital media, and all parents sharing information, images and footage of their children in these spaces.

The significance of this chapter to the thesis is the demonstration of the way automedia created with the use of networked digital media features other intimate
subjects, begging questions about consent, privacy, and the network’s control over the narrative moving forward (well into the future).

Looking at the Footage of Children in Australian Mummy Vlogs:

becsvlogs: OUR VERY FIRST VLOG!

In order to illustrate the way Australian mummy vlogs feature children, I use Bec’s (becsvlogs, 2015) first vlog on YouTube as an example. Bec’s first vlog is a typical vlog (video log) style in that it captures snippets throughout her day. Starting in the morning, Bec records her day, in a linear fashion, ending with dinner at an Indian restaurant. Rather than a sit-down vlog, which is what many of the Australian mummy vloggers’ first vlogs are, Bec shows us her life, her routine, her surroundings, with little narration or commentary in her first vlog on YouTube.

In the description bar below her vlog Bec writes,

Hi I’m Bec! I live in Australia. I’m a young mother to my beautiful 2 year old daughter Isabelle, engaged and pregnant with my second child (baby boy) who’s due in May. I’m going to be documenting via vlogs our daily lives, crazy adventures and the rest of this pregnancy + labour. This channel is also going to include videos such as DIYs, hauls and possibly cooking! So follow our journey :). (becsvlogs, 2015).
Figure 57 Bec’s first vlog on YouTube

This screen shot\(^{51}\) is taken 5 seconds into Bec’s vlog. As all videos are presented on YouTube, the vlog is underlined by the title, user picture, profile name, number of subscriptions, and on the right-hand side of the screen, the number of views and likes. The 4 minutes and 8 seconds of this vlog comprises of 6 separate periods (snapshots) throughout the day. Three of the 6 feature Bec’s daughter, Isabelle.

The vlog starts with a view of little hands, guided by big hands, interrupted momentarily by the introductory title seen in Figures 57 and 58. The footage has been sped up and put to music. We see a montage of what appears to be a small child making breakfast (eggs in a bowl) with the aid of a parent. The camera angle makes it

\(^{51}\) This screen shot was taken on 2 November, 2015. The vlog was uploaded on 3 February, 2015. As at August 2017 the vlog is no longer available, but was originally accessed using this address: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uw6MgrHlYwE
appear that we are part of the process, looking down at the bowl of eggs, with little hands being assisted by bigger hands. Because of the height of the camera, we have the adult’s view, which we can assume is the mother’s view. The vlog is therefore, seemingly being “told” by Bec. This is Bec’s day, Bec’s experiences, Bec’s perspective, and yet it features little helping hands, as seen in Figure 59.

Continuing with the montage of making breakfast, the view changes as seen in Figures 60 and 61. We see a small child who we can assume is Isabelle as mentioned in the description bar below the vlog (included above) pouring the eggs into a fry pan aided by a man’s hairy hands who we can assume belongs to Dad (again, as referred to in the description bar below the vlog). The camera angle has changed. The viewer, still assuming this scene from the mother’s perspective is looking down at Isabelle, watching her reactions to the eggs cooking. Music still plays in the background, but we can hear Isabelle making sounds and the eggs cooking.
The scene then changes to Isabelle playing in the pool as seen in Figure 62. This time, we hear Bec (Mum) talking to her. There is no music in the background, only the voices of Bec and Isabelle and splashing in the water. Towards the end of this scene we see a man in the background on the right-hand side of the screen, however, he doesn’t speak or come into focus, Isabelle remains the focus of the shot. Again, we can assume that we are seeing everything from Bec’s perspective.

![Figure 62 Isabelle in the backyard pool](image)

The vlog then cuts to footage of Isabelle speaking about a snail, attempting to say the word “disgusting”. Figure 63 shows a screen shot of the footage of Isabelle with no top on. In the bottom right hand side of the screen the words “Thumbs up for cuteness!” appear and remain for most of this footage. The footage occasionally cuts to the snail as seen in Figure 64 to which Isabelle is referring.

![Figure 63 Isabelle topless in the backyard](image)  ![Figure 64 “Disgusting” snail](image)
The footage then cuts to the view seen in Figure 65. For the first time in the vlog we actually see what we can assume to be Mum, Bec. The camera angle shows us a close-up of her belly and part of her legs are also in frame. We know Bec is pregnant from the description bar below her vlog where she writes, “I’m pregnant with my second child (baby boy) who’s due in May” (becsvlogs, 2015). The footage shows her belly moving, which we understand to be the baby kicking because of the text that appears on the screen for most of this footage stating “Baby kicking”.

![Figure 65 “Baby kicking”](image)

The vlog then cuts to a quick clip of the backyard in the middle of hailstorm, as seen in Figure 66 with the text “Hailing in Australia”.

![Figure 66 “Hailing in Australia”](image)
Finally, the last piece of footage is of what we can assume is Mum (Bec) and Dad (fiancé) having dinner at a restaurant as seen in Figure 67. We know it is Indian cuisine because Bec tells us in the description bar below the vlog. Bec pans the food and we see the text across the bottom of the screen “Our dinner was amazing!”

![Figure 67 Indian dinner](image)

Finally, the vlog ends with two screens with text as seen in Figure 68 and Figure 69.

![Figure 68 “please subscribe”](image) ![Figure 69 “thank you for watching”](image)

At no point throughout the vlog does Bec address the camera and talk to her viewers. She does not narrate her day. There are no voice-overs. The only time we hear her speak is when she addresses Isabelle. Bec does provide some narration through the text captions throughout the vlog, as seen in Figures 65, 66 and 67. She also explains her day in the description bar below her vlog, where she writes,

52 A common convention of “day in the life” style vlogs is to have the vlogger’s voice overlay the footage, narrating the events of the day, explaining what can be seen, and generally talking the viewer through the experience.
Today Isabelle and I made daddy some breakfast, then later on had a swim (which we do nearly everyday because it is so hot here in Australia atm [at the moment]), Isabelle found a snail, a little bit of baby kicking, then we went out for dinner to a lovely Indian restaurant and the food was amazing! (becsvlogs, 2015).

Although the vlog is shot from Bec’s perspective and the footage is undeniably of Bec’s day (and her vlog is therefore showing her life), the individual featured most often is Isabelle. By the end of the first vlog we have no idea what Bec’s face looks like and have only caught a brief glimpse of her fiancé in the background. The person we are most familiar with, and associate with Bec’s vlogs, is her 2 year old daughter, Isabelle.

Bec’s vlog demonstrates the way the automedial lives of Australian mummy vloggers are intertwined with their children.53 Mummy vloggers cannot document and publish their lives without documenting and publishing the lives of their children. In Chapter 3, ‘Negotiating Motherhood’ I argue that mummy vlogs are filled with confession and intimate self-disclosure. Confession and intimate self-disclosure are used by mummy vloggers as a relational, community building tool. Intimate networked publics form around the intimacy and authenticity of mummy vlogger identities and narratives, as I explore in Chapter 4, ‘Intimate Networked Publics’ and Chapter 5, ‘Authenticity’.

What this chapter and this example demonstrate, is the way the intimacy inherent in these automedial identities and narratives transfers onto the children of mummy

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53 I do not extend this statement to the partners of mummy vloggers because they are so often absent from the vlogs – the majority of the footage of mummy vlogs is taken when partners are at work. Also, partners have more agency as adults, meaning they can express their desire not to be included in the footage, or not to have their face shown.
vloggers. The footage of Isabelle is intimate for the same reasons that mummy vlogs are intimate. The setting is intimate – we see Isabelle in her home, a private place; in her pyjamas, cooking breakfast which we are told is for her father. The vlog is penetrating the intimacy of their everyday family morning routine. Later we see her in her back yard (again, a private place), in her pool, in her swimming costume, and then topless. We see her trying to pronounce a word, it is “cute” as Bec prompts us to think, but it is also intimate, showing a process of learning and developing as a child, which at that age (2 years old) is usually reserved for family. Similarly, the footage of Bec’s unborn baby boy kicking is also intimate, embodied information that would not usually be shared outside the familiar circles of family and friends. Garner (2002) writes that we cannot reveal intimate things about ourselves without revealing intimate things about those closest to us. “The intimate involves others” (Garner, 2002, p. 43). But the consequences and implications of this are significant, especially when considering that the others involved are children.

Essentially, what Bec is doing is beginning both her daughter, Isabelle’s, and her unborn son’s digital footprint and automedial identity and narrative. Bec features Isabelle throughout her first vlog, curating her life, constructing her memories of childhood, and most importantly, publishing them on a freely accessible, globally popular website. There are basic concerns surrounding this practice such as the parental responsibility regarding protection (privacy), and the inability of children to consent to these practices. There are also ethical questions from a Life Writing perspective, about the effect of having your childhood curated and published for you, and the impact of this on a child’s sense of self in the future.
A study conducted by Hiniker, Schoenebeck and Kietz (2016) found that children viewed the content shared by their parents about them online as embarrassing and contributing to an online footprint, presence or identity without their consent. The children participating in this study were much older (10-17 years old) than the children in Australian Mummy Vlogging, however, as Chalklen and Anderson (2017) rightly point out, “the findings still provide valuable insights into potential future attitudes of [] children” to information shared about them online (p. 2). Generally, studies in this area (see Chalklen & Anderson, 2017 and Ammari et al., 2015) demonstrate that parents are aware of the need to manage the information they share about their children online, however the rules by which they do so are subjective, based on the norms of the site (Ammari et al., 2015), and as Sandra Petronio (2002, 2010) identifies, often cross boundaries.

**Beginning a Child’s Digital Footprint: Parental Sharing Online**

In their special issue of Social Media + Society titled *Infancy Online*, Leaver and Nansen (2017) state,

Following birth, social practices of sharing images and videos of infants are becoming increasingly normalized, and researched, with preliminary studies showing varying intensities of sharing across different social media platforms based on their affordances and publics (M. R. Morris, 2014). While identity and privacy concerns are evident in studies of infant visual content shared on popular social media sites—dominated by the desire to share quotidian, cute, and milestone images (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015)—alternative research
highlights instances of crafting and curating infant profiles in order to gather views or build a brand (Abidin, 2015; Nansen & Jayemanne, 2016).

Parents, and particularly mothers (Ammari et al., 2015), feel increasing pressure to share information, pictures and footage online, especially relating to their children’s development, and this pressure begins with pregnancy (Tiidenberg & Baym, 2017). By sharing information about their children online, parents are beginning their child’s digital footprint and shaping their child’s online identity – which is something the child will inherit. And this practice begins before birth with more and more women sharing ultrasound pictures, gender and name reveals, visualizing and establishing a social media footprint for infants before they are actually born (Leaver, 2015; Leaver & Highfield, 2016).

In a recent study titled ‘Managing Children's Online Identities: How Parents Decide what to Disclose about their Children Online’, Ammari et al (2015) found that “mothers take on the responsibility of sharing content about their children more than fathers do” (p. 1895). This is consistent with other research (see Chalklen & Anderson, 2017). Mummy vlogging is an extreme example of this. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 mummy vloggers share intimate, embodied information about becoming and being a mother, which quite often begins with the process of trying to conceive, and as the name of the practice denotes, the sharing of this information is initiated and managed by the mother. Even in the case of Join The Jacksons, where the father, James, has joined the practice, filming and the content of the channel
remains largely the responsibility of Ash, the mother.⁵⁴

Australian mummy vloggers feature their children in their videos in different ways. They all share intimate information about their children, contributing to their child’s digital footprint and online identity. Whether it be corporeal, embodied information about pregnancy and giving birth, information about their child’s development, or images or footage of their children, all of this is intimate and contributing to the child’s automedial identity and narrative. Some examples of the way mothers feature their children in their vlogs are below. These examples are drawn from the 33 first vlogs analysed in this study.⁵⁵

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⁵⁴ There are a growing number of family vloggers on YouTube where, even if the channel is begun by the woman, the man takes over editing (in particular) and filming as their full-time job. Most of these channels are overseas, such as SHAYTARDS, Daily Bumps, SACCONEJOLYs, Ellie and Jared and so on. In the few Australian family vlogging channels that have appeared since this study began, such as Jamie and Nikki and Life with Beans, the responsibility of filming and editing is varied. Jamie carries most of the responsibility on Jamie and Nikki, and Chloe carries most of the responsibility on Life with Beans.

⁵⁵ Of the 33 first vlogs included in this study, 10 show images or footage of children, while the rest include information about children. Most Australian mummy vloggers feature their children in consequent vlogs. Also, vlog style videos, as opposed to sit down videos, tend to feature children more. The distinction between the two is outlined in the Introduction.
Alana’s first video is ‘a day in the life video’ featuring her daughter, London and her unborn son (Alanaandbaby, 2014). Figure 70 shows London standing in her cot.

![Figure 70 London in the cot](image1)

Amber’s first video is a montage of images from her daughter, Lily’s, newborn photo shoot (amber watts, 2015). Figure 71 shows a photo of Lily as a newborn.

![Figure 71 Lily as a newborn](image2)

Bec’s first video is a tutorial showing how to make a family recipe, featuring her two children as helpers (Bec Jane, 2014). Figure 72 shows Bec’s children sitting on the kitchen counter, helping to measure out ingredients.

![Figure 72 Bec’s children helping to bake](image3)

Sarah’s first video features her and her two daughters going grocery shopping (iMumma, 2015). Figure 73 shows Sarah’s daughters sitting in the boot of the car before it is filled with groceries.

![Figure 73 Sarah’s daughters in the boot](image4)
Charissa’s first video shows footage of her day which consists of a play date between her son, Max, and a family friend (Charissa-jo, 2015a). Figure 74 shows Max playing with family friend, Kaylee.

![Figure 74 Max and Kaylee playing](image1.jpg)

Bec’s first video shows footage throughout her day, always featuring her daughter Isabelle (becsvlogs, 2015). Figure 73 shows Isabelle in the backyard pool.

![Figure 75 Isabelle in the pool](image2.jpg)

Jen’s first video is a sit-down vlog, in which she gives a detailed update on her 18-month-old daughter, Zoe (Jen And Zoe, 2012). Figure 76 shows Zoe, centre screen, sitting on Jen’s lap. Jen continually adjusts the camera angle as Zoe moves around so that she remains centre screen.

![Figure 76 Zoe sitting on Jen’s lap](image3.jpg)

Bec’s first video mainly features herself answering questions, however she does turn the camera around to show her son who is watching her, illustrating that mothers never get a minute alone (MumDownUnder, 2013). Figure 77 shows Bec’s son watching her.

![Figure 77 Bec’s son watching her](image4.jpg)
Mel’s first video is a montage of images and footage predominantly of her daughter, Mia, as a newborn (missmellyfull, 2009). Figure 78 shows an image of Mia as a newborn.

Figure 78 Mia as a newborn

Paige’s first video features her whole family, including her husband and two children (My Tribe And I, 2015a). Figure 79 shows all four members of the family in the shot.

Figure 79 Paige and her family

Ammari et al (2015) state that despite their concerns about raising children in a technology saturated world and protecting and limiting the amount of information shared about their children online, “parents themselves post extensively about their children online, often sharing personal content about their children’s behavior, development, and appearance” (p. 1895). This suggests that although parents are aware of, and bring up, the dangers of posting (particularly) images of their children online, they are the main perpetrators of this practice.56

Similarly, in a study looking at Mothering on Facebook, Chalklen and Anderson (2017) found that the majority of their participants (78%) shared concerns about privacy on Facebook, but continued to share information about their children on the site because of the perceived benefits of doing so. The benefits here refer to the

56 Although it should be noted that other adults also do this such as family members like Grandparents and family friends, and this has to be managed, as Ammari et al suggest.
mother and include social capital, empowerment (Arnold, 2011; Cohen & Raymond, 2011; Lopez, 2009; Madge & O'Connor, 2006), confidence (Gibson & Hanson, 2013), validation (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015), and maintenance of identity (Gibson & Hanson, 2013). What Chalklen and Anderson’s (2017) small sample of participants (17) shows is that the risks of posting (information about children) online are outweighed by the benefits to the mother (see also Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015). When looking specifically at mothers sharing images of their children on Facebook, one participant states, “I do worry that some people post pictures of their kids, and that it’s not their story to be sharing, it’s their kids’ story – and that could affect their kids later in life” (Chalklen & Anderson, 2017, p. 6). Despite the awareness of the issues surrounding this practice, Chalklen and Anderson found that “posting photos/comments about my children” was still the most popular Facebook activity for survey respondents, selected by 61% as one of their most frequent activities.

These findings are consistent with what we see among Australian Mummy Vloggers, where most mummy vloggers are aware of the dangers associated with sharing personal information about themselves and their children, and do take measures to manage this, as I explore below, however, largely continue to participate in the practice because of the benefits to the mother – relational benefits, such as community, and personal benefits such as learning a skill, and potentially earning an income from the practice.
Managing Disclosure: Courtney from Behind The Olive Grove

Australian mummy vloggers do manage their disclosures about their children. They do this mainly through the type of footage shared. For example, tantrums, discipline, and nudity (which are all normal parts of parenting) are rarely, if ever, shown. This is consistent with studies of family photography conducted prior to the Internet that typically show that “parents take and share photos that depict an idealized family: happy, healthy, and having fun [35]” (Ammari et al., 2015, p. 1897). This is also consistent with studies exploring parental sharing of information about children online. For example, Ammari et al (2015) explore how parents negotiate boundaries around what they share about their children online, concluding that disclosure on social network sites is based on and determined by the normative values of the specific site. They found that “[M]others of younger children posted pictures that were “cute” or “captured a really sweet moment.” They posted pictures of their children eating different types of food, wearing various outfits, or meeting family and friends. They also posted milestone pictures that highlighted their child's development” (p. 1898). Similarly, Chalklen and Anderson’s (2017) study involving 17 mothers who participate on Facebook found that sharing images containing nudity, or stories of toilet training were perceived by participants as crossing the privacy boundary.

Most Australian mummy vloggers disclose information about themselves and their children according to the norms and conventions of the practice, as explored in Chapter 4, ‘Intimate Networked Publics’, and this is managed, as I suggest, by the intimate networked publics that gather around mummy vlogger identities and
narratives. One mummy vlogger, however, Courtney (Behind the Olive Grove), expressed concern over the implications of her vlogging about her daughter, Evie, which eventually led to her deleting all of her content on YouTube. Figure 80 shows all that remains of Courtney’s channel, her channel banner.57

![Figure 80 Courtney’s channel banner](https://www.youtube.com/user/BehindTheOliveGrove/about)

Courtney began vlogging on YouTube in late 2013, when trying to conceive her first child with her husband. Her channel featured two years of videos showing her journey of trying to conceive, pregnancy, and the first six months of her daughter’s life. As a viewer, I remember58 so many of her videos because they were particularly emotive and intimate. I remember watching Courtney’s heartache every month over not being able to fall pregnant. After many months of trying I remember her talking about “giving it a rest” for a month and just enjoying her time away with her husband on a planned holiday to Tasmania. I remember the joy and overwhelming emotion when she found out she was pregnant – Courtney filmed her reaction to the pregnancy test on camera, something she said at the time she did with every pregnancy test, although she never uploaded the previous ones because they were negative. I remember her swearing when she saw the positive result – which to me reinforced the rawness of her reaction, and I remember her tears in that video; her hand over her mouth as she

57 Her channel still exists, and can be viewed here: [https://www.youtube.com/user/BehindTheOliveGrove/about](https://www.youtube.com/user/BehindTheOliveGrove/about)
58 I have to say “I remember” because these videos no longer exist. I explore this issue in depth in the next chapter.
collapsed in sobs leaning over her kitchen table. I remember her anxiety during the pregnancy, her panic when she fell over out the front of her house and her recounting of how she called her sister, who is a nurse, for advice. I remember Courtney sitting in front of the camera, crying inconsolably as she spoke about giving birth to her daughter, and the many months of trauma that she experienced (the many tears that she shed on camera) following the birth not going the way that she had hoped.\textsuperscript{59} I remember her struggles with breastfeeding; engorged breasts, pumping foremilk to get to the hindmilk, and then all the issues with her daughter having hip dysplasia, which involved day long round trips from the country to the city to get to the children’s hospital. All of this – two years of content and weekly updates – is now gone, deleted from Courtney’s channel.

Courtney explained her decision to delete all her content in her final video. This video has since been deleted. The only record I have of it is a paper print out, a picture of which I have included below (see Figure 81). The paper copy is dated 8/10/15, which means Courtney’s content was deleted, and this video uploaded, in September 2015. This is indicated by the fact the video is dated by YouTube as 1 month old, as seen in the image below.

\textsuperscript{59} Courtney ended up having an emergency caesarian section, and her husband missed the experience. She felt out-of-control and alone and was grateful to the anaesthetist who showed her some kindness during the process.
In this video titled “Life & Channel Update | Is This Goodbye? | Behind The Olive Grove” Courtney states that she is deleting all her content because she is uncomfortable about putting her daughter, Evie, on YouTube. Courtney has always expressed hesitation about sharing footage and information about her daughter on the internet, and any footage of Evie has been very limited. For Courtney, the risk of sharing information about her daughter on YouTube was too great. Courtney is the only mother in this practice that has decided, and communicated, that the risk to her daughter outweighs the benefits she gets from being on YouTube. Courtney makes it clear that she is not leaving YouTube, and will continue to be present in the network, but will no longer be uploading videos (and her previous videos are gone for good). Courtney is the only example of an Australian mummy vlogger who has ceased vlogging, or even expressed concern about vlogging, because of the potential effect on her child. She is the exception to the rule. Other mummy vloggers manage their children’s privacy in different ways.
In her book chapter ‘Social Network Sites as Networked Publics’ danah boyd (2011) explores the boundaries of public and private when participating in social network sites. boyd states that SNSs (social networking sites) challenge people’s sense of control (2011, p. 52). Rather than agreeing with scholars such as Grafinkel (2000) who think privacy is dead, boyd (2011) suggests that “just because people are adopting tools that radically reshape their relationship to privacy does not mean they are interested in giving up their privacy” (p. 52). In the context of daily vlogging, just because people are choosing to upload their daily family/domestic lives to YouTube, does not mean they are interested in giving up their privacy. Arguably, today people are increasingly motivated to publish intimate, private information because of our growing social obsession with the intimate details of everyday people’s lives (Fanthome, 2008; White, 1992). As boyd (2011) reminds us, “technology complicates people’s ability to control access and visibility” (p. 52) of that private information.

When participating in a networked public, which all YouTube audiences are, people have the ability to download, redistribute, modify and recontextualise the information. In light of the networked context in which the sharing of private information takes place, boyd suggests that “we need to examine people’s strategies for negotiating control” (p. 52).

Mummy vloggers manage disclosure and maintain control over their privacy by limiting access to what we see. In the examples shown above, the mothers only show us snapshots of their day, limiting the footage to 10 minutes, not including footage of the façade of their home or neighbours’ homes, blurring the number plates on their cars, and limiting the footage of their children to exclude certain images such those stated above (tantrums, nudity etc.), for example. These factors could be viewed as
protective strategies. An established English vlogging family, called The Michalaks, for example, talk about how they make their vlogs cinematically beautiful as a way of protecting their son, Grayson. For them, creating beautiful, heavily and obviously constructed, montages of family life creates a barrier, a distancing from reality, which they argue is a deliberate protective strategy.\(^6\)

No matter the protective strategies employed, the implications of mummy vlogging on children must be explored. I am interested in the implication of mummy vlogging on children’s’ ongoing sense of self. As discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1, mummy vlogging is often framed by mothers as “making memories” for the family to look back on. Mummy vloggers document and record their lives with their small children creating a record and archive of this period in their own and their children’s lives. Importantly, this record is published, and this is where the implications for identity raise concern.

**The importance of childhood memories in constructing the self**

As I discuss in the Introduction and in Chapter 1, memory is critical to identity (Brockmeier, 2015; Conway, 1990; Locke, 1964). In the West we use our memories to form our identity. Childhood, our memory of it, is an essential part of our shaping and understanding of ourselves. As Douglas (2010) writes,

> Childhood is a recognizable synecdoche for history – a means for explaining and interpreting the past, revising and correcting the mistakes of history.

\(^6\) The Michalaks talk about this in their Q&A video, which can be watched here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgElYRPMwEA
Concurrently, childhood continues to be a symbol of the future and its potential – a means for sanctioning an autobiographical narrative and for drawing attention to its politics. (p. 9).

Individuals use their childhood to construct their personal narrative and identity. One of the crucial parts of this process is the curating that the individual does of their memories; ordering, re-ordering, focusing on some memories while forgetting or dismissing others. This process that we each go through is crucial, as scholars in Life Writing tell us, it is through the process of writing, ordering, narrating, curating, remembering, mediating etc. that the subject/self is brought into being. Considering the importance of curating our own memories for the development of our selves, what are the implications for children who have had this process done for them by their parents?

It is not so much the recording of these memories that has the potential to damage (as families have been doing this using domestic media for generations), but the sharing. These autobiographies of childhood are being consumed, daily or weekly, by hundreds of people. The children have no authority or agency over this version of their childhood; their memories, the images of them, or the narrative. Whether they will have the opportunity to re-write their childhood later in life is yet to be seen. Perhaps it is no different to releasing an autobiography after the release of a biography of your life in which you had no input. It is also not a question of truth, because that too is something that the child will determine for themselves as adults (and this too is an important self-defining process). I think it comes down to whether
parents have the right to share their children’s lives – whether their responsibility for their children means they have ownership of their children’s automedial narratives.

Douglas (2010) refers to The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (effective 1990) that, in her words, asserts, ‘[c]hildren are not to be considered the rightful property of parents or guardians’ (p. 4). In practice, however, parents are responsible for, speak for, make decisions for, and discipline their children until they are legally considered adults. With this responsibility also comes the potential for abuse. As I explore in this chapter, parents sharing information about their children online, on networked digital media, has become increasingly normal and expected, and the activity of doing this is usually performed by the mother, for whom research shows the benefits of sharing this kind of information outweigh the negatives.

In order for the parents to consider the implications of their online sharing and disclosures on their children, first these practices must be acknowledged as identity forming practices that begin children’s digital footprints and online identities. Second, as Ammari et al suggest, theories that consider identity and privacy from an individual perspective must be reframed as shared concerns (2015, p. 1895), encouraging parents to consider their responsibility for their children’s digital footprints and online identities moving forward, and taking the role of what Kumar and Schoenebeck (2015) refer to as privacy stewards for their children.

Ultimately, the true effect of these practices on children is unknown. In this chapter I have demonstrated the way children are featured in mummy vlogs, resulting in their own automedial identity and narrative on YouTube. I have argued that the intimacy
and disclosures of mummy vlogs transfer onto the children, and although the long-term effects of this are not yet known, I suggest some reasons why this practice is concerning. Namely, mummy vlogging is framed as memory making, and memories of childhood are crucial to a person’s formation and understanding of self. Having memories of childhood constructed and published by parents, therefore, raises concerns about the effect on the child moving forward.

Conclusion

In every aspect of the practice, vlogging is connected to others. Mummy vloggers cannot share intimate information about themselves without sharing intimate information about the people around, particularly their children. Considering the public nature of the practice, and the role vlogging plays in constructing identity, the long-term consequences for the children of this practice are significant, and not yet fully known. The children featured in mummy vlogs are not able to consent to their automedial identities and narratives that have been curated and published by their mothers; and in many cases these digital footprints and online identities precede the child’s birth. Although research shows that parents are overwhelmingly aware of the dangers of sharing information about children online, mothers continue to do so because of the social benefits they receive from participating in the practice. What mothers disclose about their children is determined by the norms and conventions of the site, and as a result the disclosures are managed to some extent. Although the consequences of this practice have not yet been fully realised, what this phenomenon demonstrates and adds to this thesis is the connected nature of the automedial self—the way automedia is inextricably intertwined with intimate others, raising questions
about the ethics of revealing intimate information about others, and in this case vulnerable others.

In the following chapter I explore another complex issue inherent in this investigation, the vulnerability of the automedial identities and narratives of mummy vlogging. Mummy vlogs are fluid, fragile and ephemeral. They are constantly changing, being updated and added to. Vlogs and channels appear and disappear, and overwhelmingly, as demonstrated by Courtney in this chapter, they are deleted. The vulnerability of these texts and subjects raises a number of ethical questions for researchers surrounding agency, ownership and method, which I explore in depth.
Chapter 7. The Ethics of Dealing with Deleted Lives

During the course of my investigation exploring the automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vloggers on YouTube I have encountered a number of pressing ethical questions. These questions mainly surround issues of ownership. In this chapter I explore the difficulties surrounding ownership on the participatory, networked digital site, YouTube. I draw on scholarship exploring networked digital media and ethics. There seems to be a lack of literature exploring ethics relating to YouTube research, and so where necessary I revert - as a user/consumer/participant of YouTube would - to the YouTube Terms of Service. The subject matter of my research is people’s individual lives and identities. In Western culture we value these things as individual constructions, and therefore belonging to the individual. YouTube, however, is a participatory space in which communities gather and collectively create, shape and influence these individual identities and narratives. Furthermore, the lives and identities shared on YouTube are facilitated by the space. Do they, therefore, belong to the space and the community in which they were created? Questions of ownership permeate every stage of the research process which I explore in detail in this chapter, however one scenario is most disturbing for myself as the researcher, and that is when YouTubers delete their lives (their channel, and its content) on YouTube. Despite the YouTuber’s decision to delete their lives, as the researcher, I have their lives or, at the very least, analysis of their lives, in my possession. Is this ethical? Thus, I have named this chapter ‘The Ethics Of Dealing With Deleted Lives’ in the hope of unravelling and examining some of these unsettling questions.
Although I am mainly concerned with ethical questions that concern the YouTube researcher in this chapter, there are also questions to be asked about the implications of ownership and deletion in the context of vlogging as a contemporary networked digital autobiographical genre. What does it mean for the future of autobiography if the lives shared are vulnerable, ephemeral, always changing and being deleted without notice, and without a record of what came before? Do we need to change the way we examine autobiography and autobiographical texts? Do we need to change our approach to focus instead on the space in which the work is created and the process of its creation, rather than the final product? I explore the implications of deleted lives for Life Writing scholars in the final section of this chapter.

An overview of the problem

To contextualise and illustrate the ethical dilemmas I faced in my research I draw on one particular experience involving my analysis of the first vlogs uploaded to YouTube by Australian mummy vloggers. Having followed (watched/observed) these mothers for over a year before I began collecting and analysing their first vlogs, I was aware that one mother in particular, Rachel (IvyandRachel), had a tendency to disappear from YouTube and reappear many months later. The process of disappearing would begin with “silence” – by this I mean, having kept a regular schedule of uploading videos to YouTube, all of a sudden there would be silence – no uploads for a number of weeks. During this time her channel was still visible as was her content, but there was a clear lack of activity. This was what I came to identify as a warning. Soon, everything would be deleted. Sometimes just the content was deleted, and other times the channel was also deleted. As the researcher this would send me into a panic. Not only had I lost access to a vital (and one of my favourite)
sources/participants, but at that stage I had no record of them ever existing. (I did eventually find gossip sites where followers expressed their distress at Rachel leaving.) This experience taught me to record everything. However, recording, and by this I mean taking screen grabs, and downloading the videos, was my first ethical dilemma. I could, of course, and did, copy the URLs of vlogs, but once the vlog is deleted the URL is useless. The researcher is met with something resembling the screen shot (Figure 82) below, although the wording may change depending on whether the video has been deleted or made private.

![Figure 82 Deleted videos](image)

Is it okay to download YouTube videos? I was faced with this question before the release of YouTube Red which allows you to download YouTube videos. I mention this because the fact that YouTube Red offers a download function suggests that this action is permitted by the site. YouTube does not have this feature. However, it is very easy to download a YouTube clip by using a secondary site such as Clip Converter. Anyone can copy the URL for a YouTube video and paste it into one of these secondary sites which convert the media into a downloadable file. I wasn’t sure
if this was illegal or not, so I consulted the only reliable source for this particular question, the YouTube *Terms of Service*, which I explore in depth below.

What I found interesting about the YouTube *Terms of Service* is the way they promote the participatory features of the site. Anyone can reproduce, reorganise and redistribute the content on YouTube. How would they be able to do these things without getting their hands on the original video? The only way to do this would be to download the video from the site. I felt that the YouTube *Terms of Service* provided a strong justification for the ability of any user (including myself) to download the content. Although I was reassured that it was permissible for me as a user to download the videos and do with them as I pleased, did the vloggers/YouTubers that I was observing know this? This may be an impossible question to answer. Either way, there is a strong argument that the vlogger *should* know. But how would they know? Where, or at what stage, are they made aware that the content they produce can be “built on” by others?

When I began vlogging towards the end of my PhD, I did not read the *Terms of Service* at any stage before I started producing content. I do not recall being required to click an “I Agree” box when setting up my channel. If I had encountered such an agreement, I most likely would not have read the Terms to which I was agreeing. Meaning, there is no guarantee that I, or anyone else participating on the site, have read or understood the YouTube *Terms of Service*. As researchers who work with people, so much of our research processes are designed around ensuring that all participants fully understand and consent to being involved in the research with the option of opting out without consequence at any time. On YouTube there are
consequences for publishing content, and people can use the site without understanding or being aware of what may happen to their content. So where does this leave me? The fact that at least one of the mummy vloggers I followed had deleted their content suggested that they did care about what they were communicating and where it was located, otherwise why delete it?

Eventually, I had to decide that the way people use the site is outside of my control. If a user is not aware of the consequences of their use of YouTube, this is not my responsibility. I wanted to understand what was taking place on the site, and if a misunderstanding of the Terms of Service was taking place I also wanted to include this in my research. I contemplated making the vloggers anonymous, but this seemed pointless, not only because they are published authors (or creators as YouTubers call themselves) and should be given credit for their content. Whether the mothers understand the consequences of publishing content on YouTube or not, they certainly understand that what they publish on the site is accessible and consumable by anyone in the world (YouTube analytics – which are available for all published videos - provide a clear snapshot of this).

Having resolved (using YouTube’s Terms of Service) the question of whether it was acceptable to download the videos, I began to collect data including screen shots, urls, downloading the videos, annotating them, coding them, making notes and so on, for all of the first vlogs. I spent three months analysing and writing up my findings. By the time the three months was completed and my findings submitted for review, 13 of the 33 first vlogs were no longer available. Some being made private, others deleted. More than a third of my research was gone which left me in a position where no one
could verify my data or my findings – it was conceivable that I had fabricated a third of my PhD.

This could have made for an interesting research question “why do Australian mummy vloggers delete their content on YouTube?”61 But how could I get in contact with them? Even if I had their contact details (because I had recorded them when they were available) could I now use them if the mother had deliberately decided to remove them? Was that not an ethical breach? Should not their decision to delete be respected? I had intended to do interviews after analysing the vlogs but had not yet made first contact. If they had agreed to being interviewed prior to deleting their content, then I could have made contact without breaching their privacy, but in this case I did not feel that I could. Deletion is a conscious, deliberate act. The vlogger has to decide to remove themselves, has to decide that they no longer want to be seen. In the genre of mummy vlogging, which takes place in community, it is also a severing from community, which could be interpreted as an aggressive and violent/harmful act (although not necessarily final). I felt this decision and act must be respected.

In the following sections I explore a number of issues which I think are relevant to this discussion. First, I explore the issue of privacy and ownership in participatory spaces (a context where texts are collectively made). Second, I explore the act of deletion, what it means, and how, as researchers, we should approach it. Finally, I

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61 Reflecting on my own experience of vlogging on YouTube, the urge to delete is always present and overwhelming. I have been vlogging on YouTube for 18 months and I frequently think about deleting everything, not just my YouTube videos, but also my Instagram posts under the same identity. The urge to delete, for me, comes from a desperate need to eliminate the vulnerability inherent in the practice. Vlogging my PhD life makes me feel vulnerable. The urge to delete is the urge to wipe my public record clean, to remove from public gaze the parts of myself that make me feel vulnerable. Part of this vulnerability comes from my position as a PhD student, an inherently vulnerable, powerless situation. Arguably, motherhood is another position that leaves people feeling vulnerable, and so to perform this role publicly brings its own anxieties and insecurities. In light of this feeling of vulnerability, the act of deleting is understandable.
explore the implications of deletion for Auto/biography Studies and Life Writing scholars.

**Privacy and Ownership on Networked Digital Media**

Privacy and ownership are increasingly difficult concepts to deal with in networked digital spaces. As more and more information gets collected and shared online, privacy is becoming impossible to protect, and ownership, although perhaps still attributable to a source, is increasingly difficult to maintain. Privacy and social media scholar, Michael Zimmer (2010), states that in these circumstances it is even more important for researchers to ensure ethical practices. He writes, “it is our responsibility as scholars to ensure our research methods and processes remain rooted in long-standing ethical practices. Concerns over consent, privacy and anonymity do not disappear simply because subjects participate in online social networks; rather, they become even more important” (p. 324).

In his article, “‘But the data is already public’: on the ethics of research in Facebook,” Zimmer analyses a group of researchers’ decision to publicly release the Facebook profile information on an entire cohort of American university students. The project, known as T3 “Tastes, Ties, and Time” took place in 2008 under the leadership of Jason Kaufman (the principal researcher). Although the T3 research team seemingly met all the ethical standards and considerations before them in collecting and releasing their data, Zimmer points out that they failed to realise and address a number of factors. Although many of Zimmer’s criticisms of the T3 project are not relevant to my own research, I find his analysis to be a useful “checklist” of sorts and

224
have identified one of the key issues that applies to my research. To explain this issue, Zimmer refers to Bloustein’s (1964) dignity-based theory of privacy. Zimmer explains, “merely having one’s personal information stripped from the intended sphere of the social networking profile, and amassed into a database for external review becomes an affront to the subjects’ human dignity and their ability to control the flow of their personal information” (p. 321). This issue is critical to my research, as I am taking information (and very intimate, autobiographical information) out of the sphere in which it was shared (YouTube), away from the community for which it was intended, and this denies the YouTuber the ability to control the flow of their personal information. Zimmer uses Smith et al.’s (1996) framework to argue that “this loss of control over one’s personal information is considered a privacy violation” (p. 322).

For me, this is where the question of ownership comes up. Who owns the information once it is shared publicly, and particularly once it is shared in a participatory space? The participatory nature and features of the space are important, as the information shared may be influenced by others, in which case do the influencers share ownership of the information? Who do the narratives, lives, and stories shared on YouTube belong to: the creator, the publisher, the space, the viewers, the community for which they were intended? Can this question be answered? Does the individual have a right to control the flow of their personal information if they share it on a public site free of any privacy settings (unlike Facebook) and accessed by someone without any privileges (I do not have access to specific networks as the T3 researchers did). As a researcher, I am taking the personal information of YouTubers (their narratives, memories, and so on) and sharing them in an academic space, a context they are not
familiar with, may not have access to, and may not consent to. I do not require their consent, however, because the data is public – more public than the data taken from Facebook in the T3 project because there is nothing restricting me from accessing the content on YouTube. YouTube does not require users to sign into their account before accessing content on site, like Facebook does, for example. This response is sufficient for my relevant ethics committee. Similarly the review board committee overseeing the T3 project also found their methods and justifications sufficient (Zimmer, 2010, p. 320).

In order to find answers to my questions I had to revert again to the only authoritative or governing source/body in this scenario, something that bound both the YouTuber as creator and me as user, the YouTube Terms of Service. When dealing with ethical questions unsatisfactorily engaged with in the academic community (usually as a result of them being new questions) I believe one must revert to the rules of the context and community (as any ethnographer would). In this case, the only binding universal rules for all YouTube users and producers are the YouTube Terms of Service. It was this clause, in particular, which helped me form a position on this issue.

YouTube Terms of Service which can be accessed here,
https://www.youtube.com/static?template=terms&gl=AU and are dated 9 June 2010.62

- And, “by submitting Content to YouTube, you hereby grant YouTube a worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free, sublicenseable and transferable

62 The YouTube Terms of Service has since been updated (May 2018), bringing clarity around this subject, and ultimately dictating that deleted content should be respected. Please see my note at the end of this chapter.
license to use, reproduce, distribute, prepare derivative works of, display, publish, adapt, make available online or electronically transmit, and perform the Content in connection with the Service and YouTube’s (and its successors’ and affiliates’) business, including without limitation for promoting and redistributing part or all of the Service (and derivative works thereof) in any media formats and through any media channels. You also hereby grant each user of the Service a non-exclusive license to access your Content through the Service, and to use, reproduce, distribute, display, publish, make available online or electronically transmit, and perform such Content as permitted through the functionality of the Service and under these Terms of Service.”

Functionally, I am able to download the content from YouTube. I am also able to use, reproduce, distribute, display, publish, make available online or electronically transmit, and perform such content. As these are the rules of the site, binding all participants (whether producers or users) on the site, this felt a strong enough justification to collect and publish my data. This was certainly a strong enough justification for the ethics committee overseeing my research.

Ultimately, I felt the Terms of Service made it clear: Just as Bunkers found in her own experience of publishing the diary of Sarah Gillespie Huftalen, as recounted in her article ‘Who’s Diary Is It, Anyway?’, she concludes that the diary belongs to the publisher (2001, p. 19) and in the same way, the content (videos published by vloggers) belongs to the publisher, the site, YouTube. The Terms of Service make it clear that YouTube owns a sublicense, and therefore YouTube determines how the content is distributed, accessed, interacted with, and used by others.
Although this was enough for me to justify my decision not to seek consent from mummy vloggers for collecting and using their public videos, I had to ask the question whether the vloggers were aware of what they were “signing up for”. As Zimmer (2010) points out, “studies have shown that users frequently simply “click though” such agreements without fully reading them or recognising they are entering into a legally binding contract (Gatt, 2002)” (p. 320). I agree with Zimmer that research involving social networking sites must require “a better understanding of the contextual nature of privacy in these spheres” and that not all information shared on social networks is “fair game”. I also agree that “what constitutes “consent” within the context of divulging personal information in social networking spaces must be further explored, especially in light of this contextual understanding of norms of information flow within specific spheres”. I think it is in the repeated emphasis on “context” that we can begin to approach some of the issues associated with dealing with this kind of “public” data.

An option often employed by researchers to protect their subjects is to make the data anonymous. As vloggers are actively engaging in producing media to be consumed by a global audience, I felt that anonymising the data was an injustice to the vloggers, and more importantly a form of plagiarism, as YouTubers, like any media producers, should get credit for the content they produce. Otherwise, I would be breaching copyright and, I believe, breaching the licensing agreement between the YouTuber and the site. In this way a comparison between Facebook and YouTube is redundant as the two sites have different functionalities. In the case of Facebook, the functionalities are tailored to the individual and how they choose to engage with the
site. I decided that anonymity is not relevant in my case (as it was for the T3 research team) as the YouTubers included in my research should be credited for the media they produce. To this extent they own their content.

Like the T3 research team I am not seeking consent and I view the YouTuber’s public information as “freely accessible for collection and research” (Zimmer, 2010, p. 322). I believe the participatory nature of YouTube supports this position. But what about when the data is deleted?

The Act of Deleting

Scholars interested in disclosure and identity have recognised the significance of the individual’s ability to choose what to share and what not to share, to choose what to remember and what to forget, but what about when something shared is changed or taken back? Deletion is a complicated yet common problem when dealing with automedial, networked digital narratives and selves. When looking at contemporary digital forms of autobiography such as vlogging, the life “is” because of the digital technology employed in its creation and dissemination. With the promise of accessibility comes too, the promise of change, the prerogative to update or delete.

Most of the Australian mummy vloggers included in this study have deleted some or all of their content. When I began this research in early 2015, I identified 37 Australian mummy vloggers who met my criteria. By the time I started analysing their first vlogs in late 2015, 4 of the mummy vloggers had deleted all their content on

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63 See Kylie Cardell and Emma Maguire’s (2015) Hoax politics: Blogging, betrayal, and the intimate public of A Gay Girl in Damascus, for example.
One of these mothers is Courtney (Behind The Olive Grove), discussed in the previous chapter, and the only one to explain her decision to delete all her content – in order to protect her daughter. In November 2015, I began analysing the 33 remaining first vlogs. By the time I submitted my findings to my supervisors in February, 2016, 13 of the 33 first vlogs had been deleted. Since then, one (For The Love Of Sorted) has reappeared. (Rachel’s first vlog has both reappeared and disappeared again).

Of the 42 videos cited in this thesis, 19 have been deleted. These deleted vlogs do not necessarily erase the automedial identity and narrative from YouTube, but they change it. Elise, introduced in the Introduction, for example, began vlogging in September, 2013. Today, there is no record of any videos uploaded by her in 2013. Instead, her first video appears to be BEST BABY FOOD BRANDS IN AUSTRALIA uploaded on 22 January, 2014. Many of Elise’s videos that I analyse and cite in this thesis such as her two “first” videos on YouTube, SETTING A CHALLENGE and FIRST TIME ON HARBOUR BRIDGE (discussed in the Introduction), and the videos I discuss in Chapter 2, such as ITS HARD BEING A STAY AT HOME MUM and MY POSTNATAL DEPRESSION STORY, no longer exist. Not only have many of Elise’s vlogs been deleted, but like other Australian mummy vloggers, her channel name has changed. Formerly Little Miss Zara, her channel name is now Elise Sheree.

What this demonstrates is the ephemerality of automedia such as mummy vlogs. These texts and subjects are always in motion and open to revision. In the Introduction to this thesis I argue that automediality denotes process. Vlogging allows

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64 This Is It, Kym and Co, hannahclara88, Behind The Olive Grove
mummy vloggers to engage in the constant work of crafting the self, redefining its borders, its visibility, its beginning, middle and end, and this is done in relationship with the network. The malleability of automedia makes it vulnerable and slippery – difficult to get a hold of and keep a firm grasp on. What is shared can be erased, or can it?

Can the networked self be deleted? Can the life narrative created, stored, and shared using networked technology be erased and cease to exist? Increasingly we use technology to tell our stories and share our lives. With the use of technology (our connection to the machine) comes the promise of disconnection. When we disconnect, delete our narrative (and possibly our presence) from/on technology, what happens to it? What is the deleted self? What is a life erased? Can anything truly be deleted, especially when it is collaboratively created? And what is the effect on the network in which it is created?

When writing about Courtney (Behind The Olive Grove) in the previous chapter, for example, she presented her decision to delete her content as a deliberate, considered act, with the purpose of protecting her daughter. What right do I have to talk about the intimate details she shared in her videos that have now been deleted? This is the problem I am trying to address – I remember her automedia, her videos have become part of my memory. Courtney may have deleted her automedial identity and narrative, but it lives on in the memories of her network. What is the effect of Courtney’s act of deleting her automedial identity and narrative on the network?
Autobiographical texts such as mummy vlogs create space in which people can
gather, communities can form, dialogue can extend, and the text can be collectively
shaped and continued. Deletion (or making private), for whatever reason, is a removal
from the space. This is a deliberate and destructive act. If the channel is deleted, the
space ceases to exist, the foundational texts are removed, the community is
disconnected or severed, and the participatory essence of the text production is
immediately removed. Suddenly, the binding, foundational element of the community
is erased. In this context I think deletion could be seen as a violent and harmful act.

Again, here the question of ownership arises. If the viewers have invested in
extending the text, they feel some attachment to it and ownership of it. Especially as
viewers are aware that their watching, liking and subscribing to the channel brings the
mummy vlogger success. Viewers feel responsible for that success and therefore feel
the right to make suggestions or even point out things in the content they do not like
or disagree with. All of these actions suggest a sense of ownership (I’m part of this).
Even when things aren’t deleted, for example, For the Love of Sorted made her first
vlog private for a period of time, it’s still a severing of space. Even if some people can
see it, for others, like myself, the act says, “this isn’t for you”, “I’m excluding you”,
which contradicts the defining characteristics of participatory spaces.

If we look at other examples of participatory media and collaborative text production,
such as Wikipedia, the decision to delete is communally made. Wikipedia shares
some similarities and differences with YouTube. Yam (2016) Explores Wikipedia’s
Articles for Deletion (AfD). When dealing with AfD on Wikipedia the discussion
largely focuses on knowledge, collaborative knowledge production and access to
knowledge. Interestingly, as I have found with YouTube, most articles or wiki’s are eventually deleted.

When an article appears in Wikipedia, it immediately serves its purpose to our global village by being publicly accessible. The darker side to this is less known – article death. While there are more than four million articles at the time of writing, these articles’ fate can change significantly if an editor places an AfD to it: more than half of the article in Schneider et al.’s AfD data set eventually got deleted. (Yam, 2016, p. 310 referring to Schneider et al., 2012)

I think this only confirms the ephemerality of all content online. Scholars such as Viktor Mayer-Schönberger insist that digital remembering has become an obsession and digital forgetting requires much more effort (2009, p. 169). I disagree, however, as just because something is recorded does not mean it is remembered. Recording is not remembering (Brockmeier, 2015, p. 226), and what is digitally recorded is easily erased or deleted without a tangible reminder (see Arthur, 2015). As Smith and Watson (2013) state, “[t]he encoding of memory is … technologically vulnerable in that data may be lost or corrupted” (p. 84). They ask “[w]hat does memory become on online sites where entries can be made episodically” (p. 85) and where the data is “technologically vulnerable” (p. 84)?

Unlike YouTube, Wikipedia operates under a consensus decision-making process meaning decisions to delete are democratically made. Users have the opportunity to respond to AfD as explored by Yam (2016). Yam makes it clear that not all AfD are discussed and not all discussion are interactive (invite interaction), however all AfD
are open for discussion and consensus decision-making by users. This suggests joint ownership of the site and its content by all participants. A suggestion for deletion is open to discussion by the community of contributors. YouTube, although participatory, does not function in this way and the vlogger still maintains ownership enough to delete their content without consultation with viewers. I should note that although Wikipedia’s AfD are open for discussion, closing admins can delete the article regardless of the majority view, leading Yam to conclude that “the genealogy behind adminship is crucial in determining Wikipedia’s fate” (2016, p. 319). (And like with any community, participating in the discussion requires learning the institutional language (Yam, 2016).) So even Wikipedia is not an entirely democratic space.

Beyond the individual researcher, the text and subject, the space and network, what is the effect on the future of auto/biography? What does this tendency to delete the self mean for Life Writing scholars? How are we to understand and explore automedia if it keeps disappearing? These questions I cannot answer. Instead I attempt to offer some suggestions for the future.

**Exploring the Implications for Auto/biography**

In his introduction to the now foundational collection of essays published in Biography titled *Online Lives*, John David Zuern (2003) writes “online environments represent a “different place” … for life writing, worthy of study on its own terms” (p. viii). In this “different place,” Madeleine Sorapure (2003) states that texts are

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65 A version of this section was published in *a/b: Auto/biography* under the title ‘The Vulnerability of Contemporary Digital Autobiography’ (2017)
“inherently unstable objects – constantly changing, sometimes disappearing altogether” (p. 19). Addressing Smith and Watson’s (2001) question (posed in their article ‘The Rumpled Bed of Autobiography’) about whether our theorising about these alternative lives needs to be “remade by contemporary practice” (p. 13), Zuern (2003) expands the question, asking, “[h]ow should we adjust our established methods for life writing research when works present their authors as living interlocutors, when readers’ feedback creates a communication loop that perpetuates the ongoing creation of work?” (pp. xv-xvi). He continues, these lives “call for reflection on the epistemological and ethical implications of studying others’ lives as they are lived” (p. xvi).

In the succeeding collection of essays titled Online Lives 2.0 published in 2015, Melanie Sorapure (2015) references Lejeune who writes that his investigation of French online diaries has become “an archaeological study, bearing witness to a world that has disappeared” (Lejeune cited in Sorapur, p. 267). Sorapure (2015) presents a similar view of her investigation of online diaries, published twelve years prior. “Of the thirteen online diaries I referenced in that article, only four are still online ... Of the 20 online diary lists, webrings, ‘burbs, and publishing venues I cite, only three are still online” (p. 267). These online diary sites have “disappeared,” which Sorapure argues is “because of the intense popularity of other online venues for self-representation,” that promote “everyday autobiography” (Smith & Watson, 1996), like Facebook, for example.

66 “…so that we may take account of changing autobiographical audience relations, shifting limits of personal disclosure, and changing technologies of self that revise how we understand the autobiographical” (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 13).
Increasingly, people are using digital media such as YouTube to share their lives with others, constructing their life narratives and identities in the process. These online life writing practices are extensions of diary writing, and they constitute contemporary forms of autobiography. Like traditional autobiography, individuals publish material about themselves, making it available to the public, but these digital modes of self-representation present particular challenges to life narrative scholars and are vulnerable in specific ways.

For example, in my research I explore vlogging on YouTube as a contemporary digital form of autobiography. The texts I encounter on YouTube are constantly changing, appearing and disappearing, making every aspect of my research vulnerable. This instability is an effect of particular functionalities of participatory media platforms such as YouTube which permit users to amend, edit, hide and delete their published content whenever and as often as they like. Publishing material in these online spaces lacks the permanency of traditional (printed) texts as they allow the author to leave and return, revisiting and revising the sites and instances of their self-narration.

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67 These technologies, accessed through a computer in its various forms, invite definitions and redefinitions of the self (see Bolter, 2002). They also invite the individual to reinvent themselves (see Z. Papacharissi, 2002).

68 Blogging, in particular, is often referred to as an extension of the diary (see Cardell, 2014; Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008; Serfaty, 2004; Sorapure, 2003). This is especially true in the case of women's and mothers’ online practices of narrativising the self (see Lopez, 2009; Morrison, 2011). In the case of mommy vlogging, the arguable predecessor to mummy vlogging, Morrison (2010) frequently refers to it as an autobiographical practice.


70 The word “space” is limiting here, since I believe that YouTube is both a place (context) and a space (medium) as defined by McKee and Porter (2009); both a place for community and culture and the study of people and a space for publishing material and the study of text. For their explorations of writing online as a production of space, see also Nicotra (2009) and Bolter (2001).
The author’s ability to revisit and revise their text indefinitely indicates the unfinished and ongoing nature of contemporary digital autobiography. There is no foreseeable end to the text, and the beginning can always be reworked and re-established. The malleability of these texts and their changing visibility and accessibility online make contemporary digital autobiography a rich site for exploring narrated selves that are ephemeral, unstable and open to revision, but they also make the genre seem more vulnerable.

The autobiographical text is vulnerable; changing not only with the author, but with each person who distributes, embodies and adapts it. The author is vulnerable, both to the influence of others online, and to being taken out of the unique context in which they choose to create and publish their work. Lastly, the researcher is vulnerable to collecting and analysing data which is constantly changing, appearing and disappearing.

In the introduction to *Online Lives 2.0* Laurie McNeill and John David Zuern (2015) write,

This atmosphere of uncertainty and vulnerability … is transforming not only our relationships with other people but also our experience of our own identities, and consequently, our practices of self-representation. To a significant degree, the ongoing construction of our online selves has been infused with an impulse to manage risk, not only to safeguard our finances and reputations, but also to ward off a kind of disintegration, the unsettling loss of control over the bits and pieces of “ourselves” adrift on the Internet. (pp. xiii-xiv)
Such anxieties are compounded by the ephemeral nature of online postings: they disappear, the links break, or as Arthur notes in this issue, the software becomes obsolete and unreadable. (McNeill & Zuern, 2015, p. xiv)

Contemporary digital autobiography is fluid and fragile, and as researchers we must be delicate in our handling of these texts, aware that they are works in progress that exist within specific moments and contexts which at other times look different. Instead of isolating individual texts, I want to shift the focus to explore the participatory spaces in which they are created. Emphasising the nature of contemporary digital autobiography as social, I want to explore how these texts are created in and by specific online communities, ultimately focussing on the meta-life-narratives that emerge from each media space. As Sorapure (2015) writes, "today's readers are much more engaged in a kind of co-production of life writing. Now more than ever, the autobiographical I is socially constructed through a range of interactive features offered by blogs and social networking sites" (p. 269). Just as Berlant (2008) asserts that intimate publics tell autobiographies of collective experience, Sorapure (2015) argues “[t]he most common autobiographical account today is collective rather than individual” (p. 269). Life writers interested in automedia need to shift focus, to explore the collective processes of autobiographical construction. We need to “theorize a “posthuman autobiography” to account for this more collaborative mode of life writing” (Sorapur, 2015, p. 269 referring to McNeill).
Conclusion

This growing phenomenon of dealing with deleted lives calls for an entirely new approach in the study of life narratives. I think we must shift from exploring texts to exploring contexts, from exploring lives to exploring the spaces in which they are created, from exploring the person to exploring the community in dialogue with which the identities and narratives are shaped.

I’m not convinced that the ethics of dealing with deleted lives can be established and resolved. Rather, I think the phenomenon of deleting (networked digital lives) provides an exciting opportunity to explore the unique way in which digital lives are collectively, collaboratively, communally created, shaped and maintained in participatory, digital, networked spaces, enabled and influenced by technology.

For those of you who feel a shudder at the thought of texts changing or being deleted without a trace, perhaps this is always how it was meant to be. Perhaps this is a truer reflection of a self in motion. Perhaps the record, the archive, the stagnant nature of the printed text is limiting to the self in a way that it was never intended to be. If we form ourselves through the act of writing, filming, performing etc. If the self is always changing, always developing, does the record of the past not hold us back? Does the constant comparison to our archive not confine us, restrict us, define us, and cripple us?
Is it not the recording, and not the record, that holds significance? Isn’t deleting just as important as recording? I think there is far more to be explored around this issue. I hope this discussion will continue an ongoing debate.

Note: I wrote this chapter at the end of 2017, and while making the final edits in mid 2018, I discovered that the YouTube Terms of Service had been updated (on 25 May, 2018). Under section 6 Content and Conduct, under clause C, the Terms of Service now state “The above licenses granted by you in video Content you submit to the Service terminate within a commercially reasonable time after you remove or delete your videos from the service.” This new agreement has a significant effect on my thesis and on this discussion. Considering I was preparing to submit my thesis when the Terms of Service were updated, I chose not to include them, but note them and their significance on future research here.
Conclusion

This research adds to the growing body of knowledge around automediality, a new term and area of enquiry that explores contemporary digital life writing practices, and specifically refers to the convergence of the self with media (Kennedy & Maguire, 2018; Maguire, 2015, 2018; Poletti & Rak, 2013, 2018; Rak, 2015; S. Smith & Watson, 2010, 2013). Looking at automedia in participatory, networked digital media environments, this research has explored the automedial identities and narratives of 37 Australian mummy vloggers on YouTube (identified in 2015). I have argued that Australian mummy vlogger identities and narratives are formed and performed in dialogue, and in relationship with, the network, including its technologies, functions and participants. I began this research by developing a method for investigating automedia on YouTube, arguing that applying traditional methods such as ethnography requires redefining its fundamental principles.

In Chapter 1, ‘Developing a Method: YouTube Ethnography’, I justified my use, and applied the method, of Virtual Ethnography as developed by Christine Hine (2000, 2015). I argued that ethnography is useful for investigating automedia because it allows the researcher to construct the field by following “people, things, metaphors, narratives, biographies and conflicts” (Hine, 2000, p. 60; Marcus, 1995). Virtual ethnography allows for the exploration of context, space, practice and culture, which I have argued are more important than the text (the vlog) in an automedial investigation. The context is more important than the text because automedia is a process of living and becoming, and the significant thing about vlogging is the way in which people use vlogging to live and become. The vlog is significant because of what it does to and for identity, not just because of what it is. Applying ethnography
in this investigation required challenging and redefining the fundamental characteristics of ethnography. The field of enquiry had to be redefined as a “field of relations” as Olwig and Hastrup (1997) suggest. Establishing authority as the researcher was achieved through first-hand experience of participating in the practice, which in this context required automediality of the researcher. Finally, participation had to mirror the most common and accepted form of participation in the context, which in this enquiry was that of the lurker. Establishing lurking as a legitimate, visible and influential form of participation required redefining the lurker as a listener, a listening audience, whose presence has a fundamental impact on identity formation and maintenance on YouTube. Having established my method of enquiry, I began my research by exploring vlogging as a process of becoming (Cover, 2013).

In Chapter 2, ‘Becoming through Vlogging on YouTube’ I situated automedia as a process of living in relationship with networked digital media, and I demonstrated how, for Australian mummy vloggers, this automedial process of becoming resembles the diary. Using the example of the Australian mummy vlogger, Ash, I demonstrated how mummy vlogging is a ritualistic practice of filming and uploading everyday life that succeeds the genre of blogging, and expands our understanding of the published diary online, as explored by Kylie Cardell (2014). For Australian mummy vloggers like Ash, YouTube acts (as the diary always has) as an arena for the self, a discursive, intimate yet public space for alternative (and typically feminine) narratives. For Australian mummy vloggers, the daily or weekly (date stamped) uploads are organised around the embodied and intimate experiences of motherhood, such as pregnancy. And the repeated, episodic act of documenting and sharing life in the
space forms the automedial identity and narrative, an identity and narrative that are largely cohesive and consistent.

Continuing my argument that vlogs are an extension of the published diary online. In Chapter 3, ‘Negotiating Motherhood’, I demonstrated that mummy vlogging is a discursive practice, laden with confession and intimate self-disclosure, which succeeds the genre of mummy blogging, as explored by Aimée Morrison (2011) and Lori Kido Lopez (2009). I demonstrated how the confessions and intimate self-disclosures of mummy vlogs continue to dismantle the stereotypical images of motherhood in society, as discussed by scholars such as Douglas and Michaels (2004), but rather than politically motivated, I have argued that Australian mummy vloggers use confession and intimate self-disclosure as a relational tool, to invite dialogue and community. This is significant as it begins to demonstrate how the automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vloggers are socially formed, in dialogue with the network. Dialogue and relationship are actively invited by the mummy vloggers in their very first videos on YouTube.

The intimate, discursive nature of the vlog, and the repeated invitation for dialogue and relationship, encourages communities to form around mummy vlogger identities and narratives. I called these communities intimate networked publics, a play on Lauren Berlant’s (2008) intimate publics, which Aimée Morrison (2011) attributes to mummy blogging, and includes the defining influence on these communities, the network in which they participate, as explored by scholars such as danah boyd (2011) and Nancy Baym (2015). In Chapter 4, ‘Intimate Networked Publics’, I argued that the communities that form around this practice influence and manage the mummy
vlogger identities and narratives, both through the conventions and “norms” (Baym, 2015) of the practice, and by embodying Erving Goffman’s (1959) “performance team”, where the team take responsibility for, and manages the performances to ensure consistency. This demonstrates how the automedial identities and narratives of mummy vloggers are co-created, socially formed and maintained in dialogue with, and in response to, other vloggers, viewers, and the technologies and conventions of the practice. This is one of the ways that automedia involves others; and so the process of becoming on YouTube is a social processing involving convention, technology and community.

I continued to demonstrate how “others” are involved in becoming on YouTube in Chapter 5, ‘Authenticity, a Commodity’, by highlighting the influence of the other participants in networked digital media, products and brands. Arguing that an exploration of authenticity in networked digital media is not concerned with the correlation between the online and offline self (as this is managed by the network who interact both online and offline), I explored authenticity as a commodity in the era of self-branding. Authenticity is critical to the success and longevity of mummy vlogger identities and narratives as YouTube is built on a core value of authenticity (Strangelove, 2010), and YouTube audiences are quick to reject performances they deem inauthentic (Baym, 2015). I demonstrated how Australian mummy vloggers have to manage their authenticity in the face of sponsorship and brand deals (a highly desirable activity that gives vloggers an income). As with community, mummy vloggers’ identities and narratives are formed in relationship with the products and brands they chose to include in their presentation of daily life. Using the example of Elise and Ash, I demonstrated how mummy vloggers incorporate products and brands
into their vlogs, and how their viewers respond to this. I concluded that authenticity is a commodity that has to be carefully managed, and this requires a huge amount of labour and skill.

Addressing a complexity that appears in this practice in Chapter 6, ‘Curating Life’, I argued that the automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vlogging involve an intimate, and this time, vulnerable “other”: children. The automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vloggers are critically reliant upon, and heavily feature, children. As well as producing contemporary digital autobiographies of motherhood, mummy vloggers are also producing autobiographies of childhood; recording, curating and publishing their children’s lives on YouTube. I explored how Australian mummy vloggers include children in their vlogs, and I asked what affect this may have on the children’s own understanding and formation of self in the future. Considering mummy vlogs are co-created by the network, what role do the network play in co-creating and remembering the children’s automedia? Although these questions are not answerable at this early stage in the genre’s development, they demonstrate one of the complexities of co-created automedia in networked digital media environments, highlighting the intimacy of these texts and subjects and affirming Garner’s (2002) assertion about the connected nature of the autobiographical I, in her question “[b]ut where do I end and other people begin?” (p. 42).

Lastly, in Chapter 7, ‘The Ethics of Dealing with Deleted Lives’, I explored another complexity inherent in the automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vlogging, that is their tendency to disappear. Automedia is inherently ephemeral,
changing, appearing and disappearing. Throughout my investigation of mummy vlogging, vlogs have appeared and disappeared, channels and identities have been deleted, and the beginning and end of these narratives have repeatedly shifted. In this chapter I explored questions of ownership, consent and ethics. I asked if it is ethical for researchers to collect, analyse and present lives that have been deliberately deleted. I justified my decisions to collect and include data that have been deleted, arguing that the binding agreement between all members of the site – the YouTube Terms of Service – permit me to do so, but I also questioned whether researchers should be held to a higher ethical standard. I concluded that this complexity inherent in these automedial texts and subjects affirms the need for a shift in focus in scholarship investigating automedia. Automedia requires new methods that focus on context, rather than text, on process, rather than product, and on collective (groups and practices) rather than on individuals.

Australian mummy vlogging is an example of how most people use networked digital media, although to varying degrees. The principles and characteristics identified in this research apply to all automedia in networked digital media environments. The automedial self is a process of living and becoming, performed in relation to the network: influenced, shaped and managed by the people, technology, and brands that congregate, circulate and participate in the space. The technologies and media that we choose to engage with, converge with, form and inform the automedial self – a self that is newsworthy, entertaining, commercial, and yet, still intimate. The automedial identities and narratives of mummy vlogging illuminate the relational, connected nature of the self in networked digital environments, and highlight the labour that goes into constructing and managing these automedial identities and narratives. The
automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vlogging also demonstrate the ephemerality of automedia, which are subjects and texts, processes and products (Kennedy & Maguire, 2018; Poletti & Rak, 2018), that are always changing, appearing and disappearing, but remain collectively owned. Ultimately, this research demonstrates how the self, in networked digital media environments, is an ongoing intimate, public, and vulnerable process, co-created by the network.

**Areas for Future Research**

As a qualitative, focused, methodologically limited and time-limited investigation, this study has only scratched the surface in terms of what the automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vlogging can tell us. The scope for future research is varied and wide reaching. Some possible areas for future research, which I think this study illuminates, are listed, briefly, below.

**Who is watching these vlogs?**

In this investigation I was only able to describe the visible audience, made visible through stated connections and comments. I was able to point to the wider audience, their presence, significance and influence (through their visible contribution to the view count, likes and subscriptions), but neither I as the researcher, nor the YouTubers themselves, know exactly who is watching (who makes up all of their audience) beyond those that choose to make themselves known (through comments and private messages). As I argued in Chapter 3, ‘Negotiating Motherhood’ and Chapter 4, ‘Intimate Networked Publics’ when mothers begin vlogging they largely assume their audience based on their history of watching other mummy vloggers on
YouTube, and they state that their vlogs are for people like themselves (Elise Sheree, 2013b; Bella the homesteader, 2014).

In the USA and UK, where genres of mummy vlogging and family vlogging are much more established and popular, vloggers in these genres often refer to their audiences in ways that imply they are speaking to minors. In some cases, successful mummy and family vloggers state that their audience is younger, or includes younger viewers. Many of these more successful vloggers work with managers and agencies, who perhaps are able to provide these statistics (identifying their audience demographic) for them. In my own experience of watching successful mummy and family vloggers in other parts of the world, the references to a young audience are constant, and the care that is taken when speaking about certain topics as a result of this, is sometimes painfully clear. These lives and narratives can sometimes feel superficial and immature (because of their political correctness and lack of controversy), aspirational, sometimes preachy, and lacking in depth. These vlogs demonstrate the influence of the audience, and labour involved in presenting life in a “responsible” way.

Research is needed to explore who, exactly, is watching these identities and narratives on YouTube, and why are they attracted to these lives (and this source of entertainment). Are mummy vlogger audiences empathetic peers, or are they the next generation looking at, and aspiring to, these lives that may represent their future? Do these identities and lives serve as “when I grow up, I want to be” representations? And what effect does this have on the identities and narratives being performed? Are successful mummy vloggers, for example, feeling pressure to perform stereotypical ideals around their roles as wives and husbands? Do family vloggers feel pressure to
paint a picture of an attractive (perfect) nuclear family life-style (where conflict rarely, if-ever happens, children don’t have tantrums, and husband and wife always love and appreciate each other)?

Considering I argued in this thesis that the audience is crucial to the automedial identities and narratives of mummy vlogs, influencing and managing their ongoing performances on the site, knowing who the audience is makes a huge difference to our understanding of the texts and subjects being examined.

Self-branding and the professionalisation of motherhood
One of the significant things about mummy vlogging is the potential for “success.” Successful mummy vloggers, who grow large audiences, stand to make a substantial amount of money (through sponsorship, brand deals and advertising) from their performance of motherhood on YouTube. The fact that so many successful mummy vloggers in other parts of the world (such as Anna Saccone, Mrs Meldrum, Emily Norris, Louise Pentland, Bonnie Hoellein, Amanda Muse, just to name a few of the ones I watch) have made YouTube their full-time job and career, demonstrates a new era of the professionalisation of motherhood. Mummy vloggers are professionalising their role as mothers by getting money for publicly performing (illuminating, bringing people in to their homes and routines to see) what motherhood looks like.

Rather than a choice that takes a woman (temporarily or permanently) out of the workforce, motherhood is being redefined in these contexts as a socially recognised “job” involving “work” for which one is financially compensated. Motherhood in this
context is also seen as a valuable and desirable advertising and marketing tool by brands.

Turning motherhood into a profession involves a huge amount of labour, the process and implications of which need to be examined in depth. Particularly, an examination of this kind should engage with feminist (including each “wave” of feminism) and post-feminist scholarship and theory (see scholars such as McRobbie (2004), Dux and Simic (2008), and Negra (2009), for example) to explore the changing performances of women’s traditional roles in society, the changing social values surrounding these roles, and the progression (or lack of) in ideas such as “work” and “choice.”

What about the children?

One of the issues raised in this study that concerns me the most is the effect on the children involved in mummy vlogging. Research is needed to explore the long-term effect of having a childhood published, on the individual’s ongoing sense and formation of self. As the children involved in this practice, age, mature and eventually leave home, studies should be conducted exploring their view of the practice and their engagement with, and view of, the network in which they were brought up.

There are also questions about the role of children in mummy vlogging, and whether they serve as a commodity. As I stated in Chapter 6, ‘Curating Life’, mummy vloggers, by definition, can only engage in the practice because of the presence of children. Children are essential to the practice, and they also determine the longevity

71 My mind often wanders to the fictional character, Amy, in Gillian Flynn’s (2012) novel Gone Girl. Amy seemingly suffers the effect of having her child self-published and commodified by her parents in their line of children’s books featuring, and titled, “Amazing Amy”.
of the practice. Pregnancy and a new baby often brings a surge of subscribers to a channel. It also gives the vlogger a range of predictable and well-liked (well-received) content. Is having children a strategic and useful tool in assuring longevity in the mummy vlogger’s success on the site? There will come a time when mummy vloggers will no longer have small children at home to vlog about, what will happen to the practice in this case (unless they keep having children)? Are children therefore a valued commodity that ensures the mummy vlogger’s position on YouTube? These questions are worth exploring.

**What is the future for Life Writing scholars?**

As I discussed in the last chapter ‘The Ethics of Dealing with Deleted Lives’, the vulnerability of the automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vlogging highlights the ephemerality of contemporary digital forms of autobiography, and raises challenging questions for life writing scholars about how to approach, examine and present these texts and subjects. I suggested we need to focus on process and context, rather than text, but how do we do this? What methods do we have for participating in, and examining these processes and contexts, and are they ethical? How do we address issues surrounding ownership and authorship in contexts where texts are always changing, appearing and disappearing? And what does this mean for the future of Life Writing? Will Life Writing studies and scholarship be reduced to a body that explores things that were, that used to be? How do we future proof our research, and protect our findings when the texts no longer exist for others to refer back to? These questions must be addressed.
Different methods and questions – “Why do you delete your vlogs?”

This investigation was limited to the way I chose to participate in, and observe, mummy vlogging. Other enquiries are necessary, and using multiple and differing methods, such as interviews. Questions surrounding deleted lives, for example, would benefit from interviews with the mummy vloggers to reveal their reasons for, and views about, changing and deleting content. Although I talked about issues raised by mummy vloggers as they brought them up with their audience, vlogs (as I argued in Chapter 4, ‘Intimate Networked Publics’) are heavily bounded, constructed, edited and limited (by the constraints of time and conventions, “norms” as Baym (2015) writes). There is a lot to gain from asking mummy vloggers specific questions about how and why they live their lives on YouTube.
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