

Good Mothers, Bad Mothers and Mommy Bloggers: Rhetorical Resistance and Fluid Subjectivities

by Rebecca Powell

I crawl out of bed, tiptoe past my son's door, pour a cup of coffee, open my laptop and begin clicking through the headlines of the *New York Times*. On this morning, the world is still the world, still at war, still watching the economy, still gossiping and theorizing. I leave the news of the world for the news of the domestic, the maternal and the everyday. The web addresses, familiar as my mother's phone number, *dooce.com*, *girlsgonechild.net*, *notesfromthetrenches.com*, belong to mommy bloggers I have read since shortly before my two-year old son's birth. I know the names of their children, the layout of their houses, their favorite drinks and their pet peeves. Like thousands of other readers, I have read of their depressions, their moves, their children's birthdays, and their marital squabbles. I have read their tales of motherhood as I have negotiated the discourse of the role and constructed my own practice.

That I am, and was, able to witness the negotiations of motherhood is a privilege of the digital age. Historically, depictions of motherhood have been imposed by experts (Dr. Spock, Focus on the Family's James Dobson and Freud) iconicized by the media (June Cleaver, Claire Huxtable), villainized or glorified by politicians (Ronald Reagan's welfare mother, Dan Quayle and Murphy Brown, George Bush and mothers of veterans), or negotiated in the private space of the home and playground. Although Erma Bombeck's *If Life Is a Bowl of Cherries, What Am I Doing in the Pits?* and Anne Lamott's *Operating Instructions* presented alternative constructions of motherhood, seldom have mothers negotiated their own constructions in the public eye. Yet, mommy blogging happens in the public space of the World Wide Web; it is done by actual mothers, responded to within seconds by mothers and nonmothers. Mommy bloggers construct versions of their own motherhood and readers identify, correct, clarify and reinterpret those constructions. A picture of a mother and daughter is not a family keepsake, but published on a blog and instantly a representation and construction of motherhood, not by a third party, but by mothers themselves. In mommy blogging, motherhood goes public; motherhood goes rhetorical.

To explore the construction of motherhood, I will examine three mommy blogs (*dooce.com*, *girlsgonechild.net* and *notesfromthetrenches.com*) as rhetorical constructions of identity. I will first outline the workings of the good mother/bad mother discourse and then show how in the blog medium, where mothers control the texts, the pictures, and the layout, they negotiate the discourse of motherhood, in concert with the rhetorical and immediate audience of their blogs.

Discourse of Motherhood: Good Mothers, Bad Mothers

The public, rhetorical motherhood of mommy blogging belongs to a discourse fraught with contradictions. Constructed through powerful historical and popular discourses that birthed the good mother/bad mother dichotomy, the current discourse of motherhood whips mothers between the "age old Madonna-whore poles of perfect and failed motherhood" (Douglas and Michaels 27). Neither pole, perfect nor failed, offers

mothers fully fledged beings. Perfect mothers become perfect through sacrifice, while failed mothers are continually faced with the removal of their children. Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky's *"Bad" Mothers: the Politics of Blame in Twentieth Century America* identifies the familiar stereotypes of the failed/bad mother: the welfare mother, the teen mother, the career woman who has no time for her kids, the drug addict who harms the unborn, and the overprotective mother (2). America's mothers straddle a multitude of positions that may disqualify them from the "good mother" category: "By virtue of race, class, age, marital status, sexual orientation and numerous other factors, millions of mothers have been deemed substandard" (6). And substandard motherhood is not just the business of the family, it is the business of the state. Discourses outside of motherhood deem who will be a "good" mother. Indeed, Ladd-Taylor and Umansky claim only white middle-class mothers can fit the good mother image. Furthermore, mothers must constantly guard against slipping into the "bad mother" category in a culture that disagrees on the major tenets of motherhood.

Americans are divided on whether mothers should stay home with their children, and on whether a "good" parent would spank a child. We even disagree about what age a "good" mother should be. Most of us agree it's bad to become a mother too young, but at what age does a new mother become too old? . . . Is it bad to breastfeed a toddler -- or give a newborn a bottle? The proliferation of consumer goods compounds the problem: advertisers make mothers feel bad if they don't buy the right baby products, while advice givers say a sure sign of "bad" mother is a woman who buys her child too much. (5)

Women birth a child and are immediately navigating the good mother/bad mother discourse, a discourse fraught with hidden ideologies of class, race, and hidden rules.

Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels turn to media portrayals of mothers, illustrating the workings of the good mother/bad mother discourse in *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it Undermines All Women*. They identify a popular construction of the good mother arising from postfeminist ideals "the new momism," which they define as intensive mothering: "With intensive mothering, everyone watches us, we watch ourselves, and other mothers and we watch ourselves watching ourselves" (6). The new momism says now that mothers can choose between June Cleaver and the corporate office, of course, they will choose June Cleaver and become extremely competent stay-at-home moms. According to new momism, "motherhood is the most important thing a woman can do," and motherhood is a competition (22). The best mothers are main caregivers, always smiling and understanding, and exhibit "boundless, unflagging and total love" (Douglas and Michaels 15). Douglas and Michaels conclude new momism makes a failure of all mothers, while placing mothers in competition against each other.

Laura Knudson's "Cindy Sheehan and the Rhetoric of Motherhood" demonstrates the good mother/bad mother dichotomy in the portrayal of Sheehan's peace activism and motherhood. After the death of her oldest son in the Iraq War, Sheehan began demonstrating against the war, most famously camping outside the gates of then President George Bush's Crawford, Texas ranch. Knudson examines media portrayals

of Sheehan's activism and concludes her motherhood was used to both demonize and promote her peace message. Sheehan's activism was authorized by her motherhood, the mother of a dead soldier she felt she had the right and moral imperative to speak out against the war. Yet, critics used the practice of her motherhood to discredit her message. Claiming her dirty house drove her oldest son to enlist, and thus ultimately to his death, and that her peace activism led to the neglect of her living children, Knudson concludes that critics held "a mother's most deeply held belief against" Sheehan, the belief that "no matter what she did it was not good enough" (179). In effect, because critics claimed Sheehan was neglectful and slovenly, she slipped into the bad mother category, a category that cannot authoritatively speak.

This is the work of the good mother/bad mother discourse -- it holds "a mother's most deeply held belief[s] against" us. It says if we are the perfect mother, we will disappear, become the nameless sacrifice, and if we are the bad mother, our children will disappear, to the state, to death. Whether good or bad, the speech of a mother is suspect, yet in the midst of the good mother/bad mother discourse, mommy bloggers publish their motherhood online, record the detail of their lives, state their opinions on vaccinations and spanking. How do they work in/against/with the discourse?

Method

To get at the construction of a gendered role, motherhood, I use points of inquiry developed by feminist poststructuralist critique and Kenneth Burke's definition of rhetoric and consubstantiation. Feminist poststructuralism's points of inquiry challenge "the fundamental dichotomies of the Enlightenment," including male/female (Hekman 2). They have also interrogated the workings of particular discourses and their links to power and ideologies. What separates feminist poststructuralists from poststructuralists is their insistence on the agency of individuals within the workings of discourses: "Agency is never freedom from discursive constitution of the self but the capacity to recognize that constitution and to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted (Davies 51). Feminist poststructuralists do not just allow for the deconstruction of binaries and discourses; they also allow for reconstructions of subjectivity and discourses. Thus, feminist poststructuralism makes a two-way relationship between discourse and the individual. Discourse works to constitute individuals and individuals work in/with/against the discourse. As I critique the mommy blogs, including specific posts, the main page, and blogger self-descriptions, I will examine how the bloggers are both the "site and subject of [a] discursive struggle for their identity" (Weedon 83).

Kenneth Burke augments my feminist poststructuralist critique with a rhetorical perspective grounded in the communal nature of humans. Burke's definition of rhetoric "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce action in other human agents" nicely complements feminist poststructural critique's focus on agency and also adds a goal to the act of communication. Thus, when looking at a blog post, I can ask what attitudes or actions the post induces. Burke views the acts of persuasion, the inducement, as identification (Schwartz 211). Rhetors and audiences identify with one another through consubstantiality, the sharing of substance which means sharing

“common ideas, attitudes, material possessions or other properties” (Foss 63). In this analysis, it may mean even sharing the same space in the World Wide Web. Conversely, we are always identifying against that which we do not identify. Identifying as a “mommy blogger” means not identifying as a infertility blogger. Simply put, using Burke helps me examine the rhetorical and communal nature of blogging, while feminist poststructuralism allows me to see how bloggers work in/against/with dominant discourses.

Choosing the Rhetors

My sample mommy blogs, *dooce.com*, *girlsgonechild.net*, and *notesfromthetrenches.com* are the sites of Heather Armstrong, Rebecca Woolf and Chris Jordan, respectively. The sample blogs represent a range of readerships, ages and number of children. Because blogs can span immense time periods (Armstrong’s *dooce.com* spans over ten years) and there are literally thousands of posts to analyze, I chose mommy blogs that were familiar to me. Thus from the beginning, Burke’s ideas of consubstantiality and identification are in place. I read blogs by white-middle class women who share features of my own background. Like me, Armstrong, Woolf and Jordan have bachelor’s degree in the humanities. Like me, they make their homes west of the Mississippi. Like me, they birthed children in their twenties. I critique their constructions of motherhood from the position of an insider, reader, and mother.

The diminutive and contested term, mommy blog, denotes the primary topic, mothering and children. These white middle-class bloggers embrace the controversial term. Heather Armstrong of *dooce.com* is a thirty-four year old blogger, living in Salt Lake City, Utah with her husband, child and two dogs. In Los Angeles, mother of two, Rebecca Woolf began blogging shortly after an unexpected pregnancy at twenty-three years of age. The mother of seven children, Chris Jordan has been blogging since 2004.

While mommy bloggers write about motherhood, they are read by a diverse set of readers and have captured the attention of mainstream media. Armstrong and Jordan have been featured in the pages of the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Both Armstrong and Woolf have published books closely related to their blog’s content (*dooce.com*, *girlsgonechild.net*). Armstrong’s *It Sucked and Then I Cried* made the *New York Times*’ Bestseller List (*dooce.com*). She has also appeared on *The Oprah Show* and *The Today Show* to talk about her blog (Schellenberger par. 3). All have been active participants and presenters at blog conferences, like Blogher and SWSX. Typical posts on these blogs generate hundred of comments. The bloggers allow advertisements on their blogs, thus producing income. Reports of Armstrong’s blog income range from \$10,000 to \$40,000 a month, similarly reports of her web traffic range from a 1 million readers a month to forty-thousand a day (“Technorati”). Jordan and Woolf have smaller audiences, but still counts of their readers range in the thousands per week. Posts on these blogs share common patterns; they are frequently narratives of daily interactions with family, reflections on mothering, and letters addressed to children.

The Medium: Sites of Construction, Sites of Negotiation

Blogging, once a fringe activity, has become mainstream. Technorati.com, a blog traffic site, reports that in 2007 there were over 94.1 million blog readers and over 22.6 million bloggers in the United States. Newspapers, like the *New York Times*, and magazines, like the *Atlantic Monthly*, employ bloggers to keep their web presence fresh. Nevertheless, a review of terms common to the blogging world may clarify later analysis.

- Post - the individual entries written and published to a blog that make the changing content of a blog
- Comment - enabling readers to leave their remarks, frequently a link at the end of a post
- Masthead - like the masthead of a newspaper, commonly features the name of the blog, a graphic and stable page links

Blogging involves an active audience. The blogger posts; the readers comment. It is reader-response theory in real time. Meanings are contested, supported and complicated all within the frame of a screen and within minutes. Mommy bloggers write about a specific interaction with their child and within seconds readers respond, defend, support, and disagree. Understanding how blogging mothers construct motherhood means carefully examining the construction of their blog. What layout greets a reader? The following descriptions of the blogs focus on the landing page of the sites because these pages greet readers and hold the most recent posts.

dooce.com



(April 2009 masthead of dooce.com)

32 weeks
This week marks the 32nd of my pregnancy!



First of all, how much does that photo look like a recreation of the new Pepsi logo? Seriously, go look at the new Pepsi logo and tell me it doesn't look like the belly of a pregnant woman who refuses to buy maternity clothes. Or maybe the profile of a someone who had a serious run-in with a beef burrito.

Yesterday I wore a set of ridiculously tight workout clothes when I picked up Leta from school, and as I walked in the door one of the kids in her class who was pretending to nap on a tiny cot sat up straight, pointed in horror at my belly and screamed, "YOU'RE HUGE!" I guess I hadn't seen this particular kid in several weeks because of my book tour, so I can understand how the growth of my torso might

Healthier discussed the impact of her parents' divorce on her's home-education.

Bona
Hardwood Floor Wax
Extra Cleaning Power

Special Web Offer
Bona Hardwood Floor Wax + Extra Cleaning Power

IN STOCK NOW

Only 2 Payments of **\$19.99**

Meaningful Mother's Day
Give a truly meaningful gift. Give a gift that does good.
www.onlinefeminist.org

Baby Blues
Join Jen in Sara as they face the everyday challenges of 24-7 as a mom.
www.onlinefeminist.org

2009 Cutest Kid of the Year
Think you have the cutest baby? Submit your photo & win \$1000!
www.holidaykid.com

TEST ADS

(dooce.com, screen shot of vertical frames)

Armstrong's site is divided into four frames. Horizontal frames line the top and bottom of the blog and two vertical frames fill the middle. The top horizontal frame features a row of stable links on the left hand of the page (About This Site, Contact Me, Archives, Mastheads, Shop, FAQ) and on the right, three tabs (Daily Photo, Daily Chuck, Daily Style) that open to photos with a paragraph of commentary. On the same top horizontal frame is the masthead. Armstrong designs a new masthead for each month, commonly featuring a tagline she had culled from reader's comments or emails. April 2009's masthead featured a background of pink roses in bloom, with the letters d-o-o-c-e shadowed over top and the tagline "as soft as steel wool" in white capitals aligned to the right. Under the masthead is an advertisement.

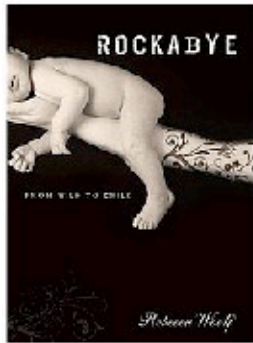
The largest vertical frame holds text posts and strips of titled pictures that are also available by clicking on the "daily" tabs on the top horizontal frame. The border vertical frame features more advertisements. The bottom horizontal frame is a black band with three columns of information: the covers of Armstrong's books *It Sucked and Then I Cried* and an a collection of personal essays by bloggers she edited *What I Learned About My Father in Therapy*; her flickr (a photo hosting site) and Twitter streams, and her archives. Below the three columns, copyright, feed and advertising information line the bottom of the site.

Girlsgonechild.net



(girlsgonechild.net masthead)

FROM BLOG TO BOOK.
NOW AVAILABLE!



Place Orders Here
Press, Appearances and More
@ RebeccaWoolf.com

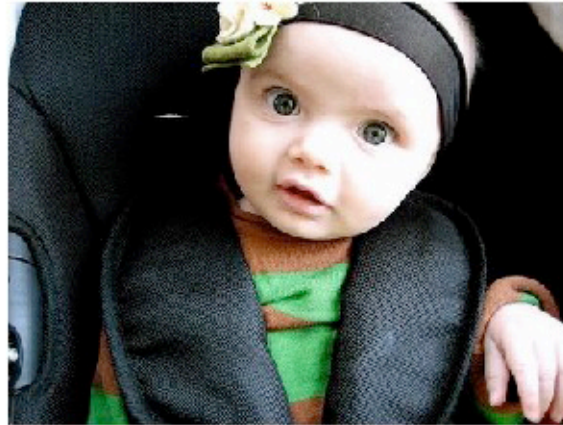
INSPIRED BY:



Ads by Google Child Radio Baby's Sleep Mollie Babe Child Raise a Son

Chapter (Month) Seven: A Loveable Feast

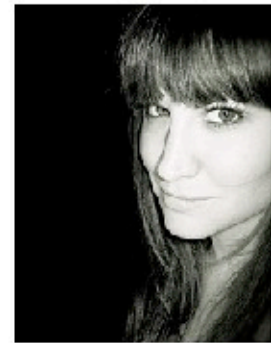
POSTED BY GIRL'S GONE CHILD ON SATURDAY, MAY 02, 2009 AT 12:58 PM



green eyes. Oh, whoa, whoa, whoa.

This month's video inspired by a quote that sums up this blog and pretty much everything else I've been working on these last four years of my tenure as Mother. (Archer turns four in three weeks omg.)

GIRL'S GONE CHILD IS
REBECCA WOOLF



My Homepage
Email: rebecca woolf (at) gmail
(dot) com



(screenshot of *Girlsgonechild..net*)

Woolf's site is divided into five frames, a horizontal top and bottom, and three vertical frames. The top horizontal frame features the masthead worded "(This) Girl's Gone Child." Graphically, the text is interrupted by a fifties pin-up blonde tying on a pink dress between the words "This" and "Girl." The text ends with a picture of an old-fashioned black baby pram. Below the masthead but in the same frame is a thin strips of Google text ads.

The three vertical frames consist of a left and right border frame and a large middle post frame. The left border frame begins with a pic of Woolf's book cover, *Rockabye*. Below the book covers is a text box, "Inspired By" flanked by a black and white picture of a young boy sleeping next to an infant on the arm of a sofa. Below the picture is another text box, "Friends and Links" with a list of hyperlinked names and titles. The next section of the left border read Woolf's flickr feed and her "Dirty Laundry," archives of her posts, dating back to 2004. The right border frame begins with a black and white photograph of Woolf, looking sideways into the camera. The rest of the right border holds advertisements. The middle vertical frame holds the posts, comments and accompanying pictures. The bottom horizontal frame holds copyright information and a site counter.

Notesfromthetrenches.com

CONTACT ME
notesfromthetrenches at
gm all dot com

blocher

"Did you read this post? -- It's BRILLIANT."



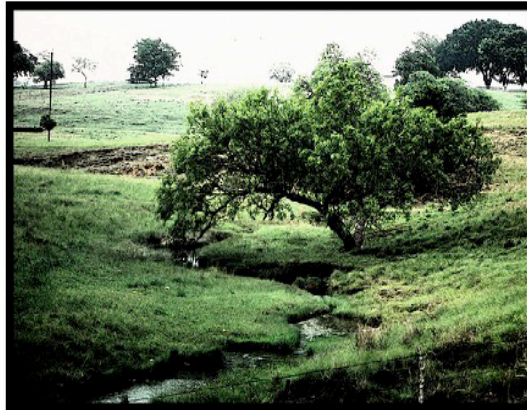
"I'm giving this AMAZING blogger some LOVE."

Help us find the BlogHer of the Week

NOMINATE NOW!

just a little creek

May 3, 2009



I pass by this almost every day. Driving about 50mph. It is a small meandering creek on the edge of a farm where yellow cows and sheep graze. I'd like to hop the fence that separates it from the busy road and sit down under the tree next to the creek. It seems so peaceful.

On the other side of the road is a long dirt driveway. In the distance you can see some buildings, a house maybe? I am not sure. I don't know how long the driveway is. It looks pretty long. I can't get used to judging distances in this flat landscape.

One afternoon, Miles pointed to the dirt driveway and shouted, "Don't go down there! That is where the werewolves live!"

My oldest son and I started laughing. I have no idea where Miles ever heard of werewolves or what he thinks they are.

(screenshot of notesfromthetrenches.com)

Jordan's site is divided into three frames, one horizontal frame on the top and two vertical frames. The top horizontal frame features the masthead, a profile picture in black and white of pages flipping in a book. The title "Notes from the Trenches" is aligned to the right in black, bold font. Below the picture a black band holds the tagline "fighting the war on terror one tantrum at a time." The bottom of the horizontal frame holds links to stable pages (About, Contact Me, Recognition, Archives). The vertical border frames of advertisements sits to the left of the larger vertical post frame.

Individuated and Branded Motherhood

The landing sites of the blogs present a copyrighted, branded and commodified motherhood: The Good Mothers of Capitalist America. The mastheads at the top of each blog work as brands. They brand the content of each page, signifying where the reader is a to whom this space belongs. These branded spaces are simultaneously mommy blogs, thus the branding extends to the constructions of motherhood the blogs represent.

The sites share certain genre features common to blogs: the use of frames to divide space, mastheads, archives, taglines, graphics, etc. However, the shared elements are individuated, so that each space (blog) becomes trademarked by that individuality. Armstrong uses the repetition of the blog's title "dooce" at the end of every post. Woolf plasters pictures up and down the vertical frames and within posts, singling out her mommy blog from all the rest. This is not a random mommy blogger -- this is "this" mommy blogger. Jordan's blog has the least branding, only the masthead frame

individuates the content. However, Jordan's motherhood falls farthest outside the norm; she homeschools her seven children. There may be less need for her to brand her content because there may be less need for a mother of seven to her separate her content from other mommy blogging content.

Copyright notices on the blogs lend authority to the various bloggers' constructions of motherhood. These constructions are legally protected, not available for copy. They belong to the bloggers and so do any profits that may be generated.

Advertisements mark the blogs as commodified spaces, but their positioning decenters and sidelines that commodification. Advertisements on the blogs are regulated to the borders, never featured within the posts, the main content of the blog. The border position of advertising, the generator of profit, positions it as an addition to mommy blogging, not the sole purpose, or even driving factor. Advertising is regulated to the border of the sites while the focus remains on the posts where words and pictures present changing constructions of motherhood.

Dichotomous Lives and the Bleeding Over: The Shit Ass Ho' Motherfucker, Waiting for the Real Mother, and The Author

An analysis of the bloggers' stable biographies names a split between life before and after motherhood. This dichotomous representation of motherhood responds to elements of the good mother/bad mother discourse. Good mothers change their whole beings for their children; they sacrifice who they are to become what their children need, yet even as the bloggers present the before and after motherhood dichotomy, they complicate it. Two of the bloggers, Armstrong and Jordan, appear to make clear distinctions between their lives before and after motherhood. Armstrong writes, "I am a Stay at Home Mom (SAHM) or Shit Ass Ho Motherfucker. I do both equally well. In a previous life I was a web designer." Jordan writes "Chris Jordan was a child in her former life [. . .] and after thirteen years of parenting still looks around and wonders when the real mother is going to come home." The dichotomy breaks apart lived experience, separating parts from the whole and walling off fluidity.

Nonetheless, the experience of the blogs reveals continuity. For example, Jordan "used to be a child" and then she had children, yet that same child is waiting for the "real mother" to show up, indicating the performative aspect of motherhood and the resilience of the child. Armstrong used to be a web designer; now, she is an SAHM, yet here is the reader at her website -- the website she designed. The child and the web designer did not disappear when the "mother" appeared. There is no dichotomy. These women did not become new people for their children; motherhood expanded their subjectivities. It did not do away with them.

In contrast, Woolf's biography presents a stable subjectivity before and after motherhood. In contrast to the other bloggers' page long biographies, Woolf's biography is less than four sentences long. In those four sentences, Woolf is and was a writer: "Rebecca began freelance writing at the age of sixteen [. . .] She writes and lives in LA with her husband and family." There is no break, no discontinued subject, no

acknowledgement of the good mother/bad mother discourse. For Woolf, the youngest of the bloggers, life neither begins nor ends with children. As a writer, she simply shifts her subject.

The discourse dichotomizes the lives of the Armstrong and Jordan, but Woolf is able to resist the discourse by calling upon another subjectivity, that of a writer. Furthermore, the superficial dichotomy presented by Armstrong and Jordan belies the complications of the role. While they are mother, they are also web designer and child. Subjectivities from before motherhood bleed over, infiltrate the present and make it habitable.

Fluid Positions

In response to the policing function of the good mother/bad mother discourse, the bloggers fully engage in/with/against the discourse when the analysis moves to actual posts. Within the posts, Constructions of motherhood and identity become more fluid and juxtapositions of complexity reign. Motherhood is isolating and motherhood is a community; motherhood is a favorite place and motherhood is torture; motherhood is almost perfect and motherhood is failure.

Woolf's post "Motherhood is An All Ages Show" of April 20, 2009, vacillates between the communal and isolating nature of the role. At one point she states, "The isolation that comes with new motherhood is standard," making isolation the given of motherhood. In the same post, she claims mothers are "all in the same concert hall, trying to see the stage." Interestingly, Woolf claims it is our common isolation that binds us together: "It doesn't matter who you are or what you own or whether you're raising a child as a single mom in her teens or a happily married mother in her forties, you feel alone." In that community of isolation, mothers are exhorted to "offer support, to tell our stories, to relate. To hold each other's hand across the armrest of the concert hall and not let go." Mothers must commune with each other because we are isolated.

While Woolf uses a community of isolation to work against the good mother/bad mother discourse, Armstrong presents a changing, fluid practice of motherhood to work in/with/against the discourse. Armstrong has used her lifelong struggle with depression, her subsequent hospitalization for post-partum depression and recovery as blog content. In that content, Armstrong constructs motherhood as both torture and her favorite place. On April 14, 2004, a few months after the birth of her first child, Armstrong began a post, "My daily life feels like torture. I struggle to make from hour to hour. I feel like I don't know what I am doing." Shortly after this post, Armstrong checked herself into a psychiatric ward where she was treated for postpartum depression. Four years later, she writes,

It struck me really hard this morning that here I am having a multi-level conversation with my daughter [. . .] I remember when I used to wonder what her voice would sound like [. . .] Perhaps it's because the anniversary of my stay in a mental hospital is this month, but this morning I felt like I needed to say to something to someone out there who may need to hear this right now like I did so badly back then -- it gets so much better.

She goes on to explain the feeling she gets in simple moments with her daughter as similar to the feeling she had as a child before a day at the amusement park: It's the excitement, the anticipation, the general sense of being in one of my favorite places." The excerpts I have chosen portray a simple progression of motherhood with depression to motherhood without depression, but Armstrong still suffers depression, and there were moments even during her post-partum depression when she exclaimed at the happiness of motherhood, like this entry on April 11, 2004, "I never knew that I could be so satisfied to sit and watch another human being for hours at a time and there was barely a moment this weekend when I didn't gaze at The Biological Wonder." Armstrong constructs a motherhood that changes and morphs, that is both her favorite place and her daily torture, that despairs when she sees herself as the bad mother and rejoices when she feel she embodies the good mother.

Jordan's posts are perhaps the most situated within the good mother/bad mother discourse. She identifies herself as both the good and the bad mother as she writes of the perfection and the spoiled perfection of motherhood. In "I Wish for a Do-Over" she writes,

It was one of those perfect summer days. [. . .] We had gone to the beach, caught little fish in buckets, and then gone for ice cream. One of those days where no one fought, or at least they didn't fight much, this is reality after all, and things just seemed easy.

It was one of the days that I thought parenting would be solely made up of when I signed up for this mothering gig. [. . .] My 7 yr old hugged me and thanked me for all the fun he had, and especially for the ice cream. "Remember when we had all those wishing dandelions and we made lots of wishes? I wished for a perfect day... just like today. My wishes came true! What did you wish for, Mommy? Did your wish come true?" On Mother's day he had given me a "wishing dandelion" from our yard. He told me my present was that I could have any wish I wanted. If I were smarter I would have wished for a day with my children just like this one. Instead I wished that all the dandelion seeds would blow into the neighbor's yard, because we have enough of those damn yellow weeds already. What a waste.

Jordan's post recognizes the humanity of the role, that mothers waste wishes, that the days are not always perfect. She moves her own subjectivity, but reifies the good mother/bad mother discourse. A good mother would have wished better, would have appreciated the dandelion, weeds or no weeds. Her post is her regret and in that regret, that guilt, she becomes a good mother again. She is redeemed by the realization of her failure.

The good mother/bad mother discourse assumes the role of motherhood is fixed enough to classify. Blogged constructions of motherhood change, contradict and juxtapose. There are no straight narratives, no fixed positions, just messy lives.

Fighting, Resisting, and Cussing: Co-Constructions of Motherhood

The most obvious resistance to the good mother/bad mother discourse happens in the rhetorical and communal interactions between the bloggers and readers. An Armstrong post in 2004, labeled “RE: THE ARMSTRONGS ARE ASSHOLES” blatantly calls out to her readers. To those who support her she asks for back up. To those who criticize her she demands they acknowledge her humanity.

I don't know how many hurtful judgmental emails I can receive before I decide that this is enough. I get many, many wonderful emails and thank you for those. I would have stopped long ago were it not for those. I owe you so much. But on a day like today I just can't take it anymore, people telling me what a dumbass mother I am. There is a person here writing this website. I have flesh and blood and my bones break. I cry, and I bruise. For those of you who have my back, if you will, please join me when I run into the middle of the street and scream: FUCK YOU. BITE MY DUMBASS, DUMBASS.

Rhetorically, she issues a subtle invitation to supporters. She is able to continue blogging because of their support. They are, in a way, responsible for the very content of the blog and in that way they become identified with the success of the blog, illustrating Burke's idea of consubstantiation, the sharing of substance. Thus when she asks them to run out in to the streets and scream against those that attack her, they share in the chorus cussing against the good mother/bad mother discourse. To her critics, Armstrong insists on her own vulnerability and simultaneously issues a challenge -- *you think I am a bad mother? I'll show you bad mother . . .* as she theoretically runs into the street screaming and cussing.

Likewise, Jordan also engages in rhetorical resistance against the good mother/ bad mother discourse in a letter to a rude sales clerk at J.Jill, titled “Open Letter to the Saleswoman Working at J.Jill”:

This morning I went into your store to return a shirt [. . .] I browsed through the store to see if I might like to exchange it for something else. [. . .] I was still looking when my husband popped into the store to see if I was done yet [. . .] You had to stop what you were doing and count my children out loud. I'm used to that. I don't understand it, but I am willing to humor you [. . .] because seven is such a huge number it is hard to count that high. What I am not used to nor will I ever make excuses for is blatant rude behavior to my children. You crossed a line when you blocked their entrance to the store. [. . .] I know the stereotypes about women who have lots of children. I have heard more than my fair share of “Do they all have the same father?” and “Are you on welfare?” [. . .] Then you said to me, “What did you pop one out every year?” and “I'd kill myself.” Well, you pissed me off, frankly.

Jordan never says if she actually sent the letter to J.Jill and the posting of the letter on her blog, as well as the explanatory language about stereotypes, suggest she did not intent to send it, but wanted to counter the good mother/bad mother discourse she had

been subjected to. Within minutes of posting, Jordan started receiving comments from readers, urging her to send the letter, supporting her stance, telling her she was a good mother. The letter received over 400 comments, all in support of Jordan and her mothering. In this case, the rhetorical act of writing an open letter led to Burke's identification and support in resistance to the good mother/bad mother discourse.

Conclusion: All Mothers on Stage

Much like the act and medium of blogging, mommy bloggers construct a continuous, fluid, and resistant motherhood. They present multiple subjectivities, interrupt their self-made dichotomies and resist the good mother/bad mother discourse. They offer the strongest resistance to the discourse when they engage in overtly rhetorical acts, i.e. writing letters and organizing cussing chants in the streets. White-middle class mommy bloggers construct multiple ideas and practices of motherhood, subverting the good mother/bad mother discourse to an "All Mothers" discourse, where mothers are encouraged to tell their stories and create new possibilities.

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