Agencing femininity: digital Mrs. Consumer in intra-action
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ABSTRACT
Social media is abound with women writing about consumption goods and practices associated with femininity and heterosexual nuclear family life, such as being married, dressing, cooking and home decoration. This article examines how the housewife ideal can be an attractive identity in the 2010s and, drawing on the post-humanist performativity by Karen Barad (2007), it maps the material-discursive agencies that enable the re-emergence of this figure. Building on in-depth interviews with women who refer to themselves as influencers and bloggers, and visual and textual analyses of their Instagram-accounts, including links to sponsors and comments from followers, the article analyzes how the tensions between these women’s real lives and their cyber lives, become meaningful in this technological culture. The breaking of boundaries between human and non-human resulting from digital technology has re-configured the housewife role by transforming boundaries between intimate and commercial practices. By focusing on the three areas: Transforming the feminine body, Transforming Intimacy, and Entrepreneurial femininity the article shows how agency emerges from within transforming practices of body, intimacy and entrepreneurship, intra-acting within this new housewife phenomenon. In doing so it discusses the negotiations and space for agency these women thought that digital technologies provided for them.

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One day I decided to write a story about my mental breakdown and about how bad I had felt. I thought long and hard about it. I didn’t dare to press send, but then I did it anyway. After that I turned my computer off and didn’t look again until the next day. When I looked again I was overwhelmed with the response; hundreds and hundreds of comments, most of them supportive and sharing similar stories. I got so many followers that day. That is how it all changed for me and from then on blogging became my main occupation. I could live on it. (Ellinor)

Introduction
Digital technology has enabled the emergence of an entrepreneurial home-based woman who appears to spend her time pleasurably consuming while dealing with the trials and tribulations of everyday family life (Arse and Zhao 2012, McQuarrie et al. 2013, Chittenden, 2016). Activities that were formerly considered as belonging to the private domain have become market-building economic activities. These activities are often associated with what a housewife might occupy her time with, such as setting tables, arranging flowers, choosing outfits, making dinner, or planning...
the family vacation. Online stories and pictures about being married, dressing oneself, and cooking for a family attract huge numbers of followers and can result in sponsorship agreements between brands and companies and the blogger (Kretz and de Valck 2012, Marwick 2013, Laurell 2014, Findley 2015, Hänninen 2015, Pedroni 2015, Titton 2015).

This article presents an analysis of the agency of digital technologies in the context of the emergence of a new kind of femininity that draws on an ideal of the traditional housewife (Levy 2018). The study is based on a number of in-depth interviews with women who refer to themselves as ‘influencers’ and ‘bloggers.’ Furthermore, visual and textual analyses of Instagram-accounts, including links to sponsors and comments from followers, are also included in the present study. Many of the women who were interviewed had names on their blogs that refer to a married heterosexual woman, such as ‘Mrs. X,’ ‘Mother of Y,’ or ‘Wife of Z.’ These women had all shared a story similar to the story by Ellinor (see above) in which they recounted a special moment when they had written something personal they had earlier thought could not be shared with their readers. Once they had shared their personal story online, from then on, they could live off the income the blog generated. The personal stories that they shared ranged from accounts (and pictures) of their cellulite and stretch marks, details about breast jobs and implants, photos of the blogger without make-up, reports of a tragic childhood story, to discussions of mental health. Although the topic of each story may have been different, the overarching narrative was the same; all of the women bloggers had shared something intimate that they initially hesitated to share. These women had published their stories online even though they were not sure whether this was the right thing to do. When they returned to their blog accounts, they were surprised by the number of responses their stories had generated. From then on, they received increasing numbers of sponsorships and endorsements and they were able to continue working as professional bloggers. What was common to all of these stories was the role that digital technology played in transforming the meaning of ‘intimacy’ by turning it into an economic practice.

Sponsorship deals that were offered to the bloggers were, for instance, frequently also related to the bloggers’ caring activities. Taking one’s child to the doctor could be financially supported by a medical clinic, for example. One blogger made posts about treating her husband’s feet with a sponsored moisturizer, and included close-up pictures of the husband’s very dry feet. Another blogger provided detailed discussions of whether she should let her son’s hair grow long. This story ended with a sponsored visit to a hair dresser. The visit was documented and followed up on with comments and questions from the blogger’s readers.

The potential connections between a person’s emotions and economic behavior are many (Schmidt and Conrad 2016). Even if the relationship between ‘intimacy’ and ‘economic practice’ is far from new (Radway 1984, Zelizer 2005, Berlant 2008), digital media devices have made the production of a distinct female self possible; a self that relies on re-configuring the relationship between production and consumption through commodification of intimate spaces, ties, acts, and (not least) the feminine body. These women have, through their use of certain digital platforms, been enabled to connect with other women and sponsors in ways that were not possible previously. Tools like ‘blog-fame’ and active searches from brands and affiliate marketing companies have multiplied the number of possible connections that can be made between bloggers, their readers, and brands and marketing companies. These new relations which are enabled by information technology have empowered these women to become economic actors in ways that were not previously available to them.

Women who blog about consumer goods can be seen as an ‘entrepreneurial self.’ In this self, boundaries between work, consumption, intimacy, and markets are dissolved. Furthermore, in relation to this self, experiences in one’s personal life are conceived as assets that can be commodified (Brydges and Sjöholm 2019). This development may be seen as an intensification of work conditions that have been often termed as ‘neo-liberal’ (Abidin 2016, Scharff 2016) and expressive of a post-feminist media culture in which the commodification of the feminine self is interpreted by participating women as ‘empowerment’ (Negra and Tasker 2007). We note that the gendered nature of the
phenomena (women blogging about consumer goods) seems to reinforce traditional notions of femininity, by enabling women to engage in practices of care, beautification, and mothering. However, their activities may also be interpreted in more open ways. When listening to these women’s explanations as to why they blog, I found that, by calling the dualism of subject and object into question, the development of the ‘self’ referred to above could be understood as questioning the boundary-drawing practices that place production, masculinity, the public sphere, and disembodiment on one side of what counts as a ‘legitimate economic practice,’ whilst issues of reproduction, femininity, the private sphere, and the body, on the side of consumption (see also Cowan Schwartz 1983, Sparke 1995, Lövheim 2011a, 2011b, Palmgren 2015, Roelvink et al. 2015). Drawing on the theory of ‘post-humanist performativity’ by Karen Barad (2007), I argue that these women’s practices break down the boundaries between ‘human’ and ‘non-human,’ and that it is the blurring of the relation between ‘human’ and ‘non-human’ that followers are interested in, and that makes the market possible (Yung Nielsen 2018). Thus, the present article contributes to the wider study of the consequences of the entanglement of gender and technology (Wajcman 2004), and to critical femininity studies (Dahl and Sundén 2018).

‘Fashion blogging’ has been described as an ambiguous practice, since, on one hand, it challenges normative ideals of work-life, beauty, body, and fashion, whilst, on the other hand, it can be seen as intensifying the capitalist exploitation of people’s dreams (Pham 2011, Lövheim 2011a, Luvaas 2013, Mora and Rocamora 2015). Rocamora (2011, 2012) has discussed how female fashion bloggers dissolve distinctions between subject and object by both posing in, and producing, objectifying images. Likewise, the phenomenon of the ‘fatosphere’ has been described as challenging beauty norms (Connell 2013, Gurriere and Cherrier 2013, Harju and Huovinen 2015), whilst ‘selfies’ are interpreted as a colonization of the visual space that aggressively takes power over representations of the female body (Murray 2015, Ehlin 2014), and/or of representations of ‘femininity’ and ‘race’ (Pham 2015). Similarly, and as I will show below, by turning (i) the home into a work place, (ii) consumption into work, and (iii) bodies into businesses, these women perform acts of resistance against a mainstream culture that does not value feminine beauty and caring practices. It can thus be argued that they make the effects of these economic divisions visible. When one views this form of blogging from such a perspective, it becomes possible for one to understand how a breast enlargement procedure that is broadcast live on Youtube (as was done by one of the interviewees) can be experienced as ‘empowering.’ On the one hand, information technology intensifies the commodification of intimacy by encouraging women to engage in practices defined as ‘feminine,’ based on the home, the family, and the body. However, on the other hand, it can be argued that information technology makes the economic relations that are always involved in the production of intimate femininity visible (see also Dmitrow-Devold 2017, 2013, Palmgren 2010, 2014, Hänninen 2015, Lövheim 2011a, Ekinsmyth 2014, Duffy and Hund, 2015).

While the housewife has become a role that is inexorably disappearing in many Western countries (especially in Sweden – the context of the present study), these blogs now present ideals that can be interpreted as typical of that role. However, note that blogs work as mediators; the traditional feminine housewife role that is mediated through a digital platform is something entirely different than the role devised by the traditional division of labor. Mediators are not neutral, but ‘transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry’ (Latour 2005, p. 39). As mediators, they ‘reassemble the social’ (Latour 2005) by (i) rearranging what it means to be a home-working woman who talks about her intimate life and (ii) by enabling new relations. Digitalization is not so much progress, as it is a re-configuration process (Cochoy et al. 2017). Thus, digital devices stretch norms that surround the phenomenon, ‘housewife.’

Bloggers can be described as a ‘nexus that combines the subjective projection of a given spirit concealed in a particular body, as well as the information and links the profile gathers, connects and displays’ (Cochoy et al. 2017, p. 6; see also Latour et al. 2012). The connection between the blog data and the human individual is relational. A blog persona builds on information technology in several ways. It is both different from and caught up in the blogger’s physical body. In this sense a blog persona
may be compared with a cyborg (Haraway 1991); an organism that is part flesh, part technology. Haraway uses the uncertainties surrounding the notion of a ‘cyborg’ to question concepts such as ‘human’ and ‘non-human.’ In crossing the boundaries between ‘nature’ and ‘culture,’ the cyborg is free to re-create the social order and question conventions concerning gender and sexuality. Information technology has turned all of us into cyborgs, she argues. We have become creations that are not ‘natural,’ a phenomenon that has informed categories of identity too; including gender, sexuality, class, and race. Similarly, by opening up to the notion of a hybridization of the physical body and the digital body, blogging may be understood as freeing these women from norms that historically have located femininity in the physical body. Consequently, a world that is different from the power structures of the physical world is made available to these women (Berlant 2008, p. 117). These bloggers are given the possibility to re-code what it means to be a home-working woman, who is engaged in practices of consumption.

**Purpose and aim**

The purpose of this article is (i) to examine how the house-wife ideal can be an attractive identity in the 2010s and (ii) map the material-discursive agencies that enable the re-emergence of the house-wife ideal. With respect to the participants in this study, none of the interviewees were brought up by stay-at-home-moms. For these individuals, ‘the housewife’ was more a romantic concept than a practical division of labor. Above all, this concept emerged in the participants’ connections with media and technology. By exploring the change brought on by the blogging phenomenon, I analyze the actions and sense-making processes of women who find themselves within this technological culture. I thus interrogate how agency arises in the material-discursive entanglements that instantiate blogs.

These blogging women are both humans and cyber-identities; their messages are artefacts found within that large device called ‘the Internet.’ The tension between their real lives and their cyber lives, the human and the product, is examined here in order to explore how people make sense of these artefacts they create, but also how the infrastructure delegates preferred actions back to the bloggers. In this context, I also discuss the various negotiations and space for agency these women thought that digital technology provides for them. All of the women who were interviewed reported that blogging worked as a means of forming an empowered subject.

**Emotional entrepreneurship and post-feminism**

Digitalization has resulted in an intensified re-configuration of boundaries between consumption and production, or ‘prosumption’ (Pettinger 2004, Zhang 2015). This process relies on a hybridization of home, market, physical space, and the Internet. As argued by Luvaas (2016), fashion blogging erases the differences between the professional and amateur, inside and outside, self and brand.

Blogging is intensely emotional work (Hochschild 1983), but its dependence on technology and electronic devices differentiates it from the emotional labor that is required by face-to-face service workers and the exchangeability and standardization of workers that previously signified service management. As self-employed individuals, bloggers work on cultivating an entrepreneurial self that makes use of their free time, their homes and their family members (Kretz 2010, Mora and Rocamora 2015, Pedroni 2015, Titton 2015). Posts (i.e. the blog entries) are designed to create emotional reactions. The combination of intimate personal ties with economic transactions also entails that the blogger has to manage the discomfort that arises when economic relations and intimate relations become intermingled (Zelizer 2005, McFall 2015). The practice of blogging instantiates what Schmidt and Conrad (2016) call ‘the techniques people have used to generate and control their own emotions and those of others’ (p 6).

In theories of subjectivity and work, the concept of ‘entrepreneurship of the self’ is used to identify the emergence of an entrepreneurial subjectivity that is interwoven with a neoliberal ideology (Du
‘Neoliberalism’ is then seen as governmentality, i.e. something more than the principles of free market forces, which include the organization of subjectivity. According to Scharff (2016), entrepreneurial subjects relate to themselves as if they were a company. They are active, embrace risk, manage difficulties, and hide losses and damages. Individual citizens are constructed as ‘entrepreneurs of the self’ when they take responsibility for, and manage, their own lives (Brown 2003, Petersson McIntyre 2014, Scharff et al. 2017).

Closely related to ideas of ‘neoliberal subjectivity’ are critical discussions of post-feminism. ‘Post-feminism’ has been described as the state of affairs where feminism is associated with ‘pleasure and lifestyle.’ It is rooted in consumption and leisure time is seen as a place for indulging in the self. According to Negra and Tasker (2007), the post-feminist media culture presupposes and naturalizes aspects of feminism by commodifying it in terms of an image of woman as an ‘empowered’ consumer (McRobbie 2009). Gill (2007, 2016) interprets ‘post-feminism’ as a ‘sensibility’; a kind of emotional responsiveness that is enmeshed in what she claims is a ‘neoliberal message.’ By this, Gill refers to an observable pattern in contemporary cultural life that emphasizes individuality, choice, and agency as dominant sense-making processes. These processes are the means through which life is interpreted. Post-feminism is characterized by a two-sided relationship with feminism, which is celebrated, but also subject to criticism, not least via social media. Consequently, the pursuit of feminist politics is made more difficult (McRobbie 2009). The ideal neoliberal subject is the master of self-control, presented as free and independent, responsible and rational, and constantly strives to control its body and its movements (Gill 2007, Scharff 2016, Harjunen 2017).

Devices and digital technology

Blogging plays with our perception of reality by blurring the distinctions between personal ties and marketing. Private stories and experiences are manipulated and provide a manufactured backdrop to commercial products. Even if all advertising relies on such techniques, the extent to which individuals participate is now taken to a new level and exemplifies how consumption invades all aspects of life (Cochoy et al. 2017). As argued by Astra Taylor (2014, p. 7), the Internet is not a leveling of the cultural playing field, but rather, it is a re-arrangement, with new winners and losers. Forces and pressures on individuals to be quick off the mark, sensational, and attractive to corporate sponsors multiply online when every click can be measured, every piece of data mined, and every view marketed for or against. ‘Networked technologies do not resolve the contradictions between art and commerce, but rather make commercialism less visible and more pervasive’ (Astra Taylor 2014, p. 7). As I will show below, when bloggers become impersonal they are punished by the Internet, and when they expose sexual abuse, or their cellulite, they are rewarded. These rewards are in the form of attention, but this attention also translates into hard cash. This phenomenon is entangled within a technological infrastructure and the relationships that are mediated by the blogs.

Blogs may be understood as heterogeneous assemblages, since they contain a number of different elements, such as ‘human,’ ‘nonhuman,’ and discourses on ‘gender’ and ‘intimacy.’ Cochoy et al. (2017), drawing on ‘actor network theory,’ identify the following interrelating effects that digital devices have on consumer culture: (i) They change actions. Digital technology becomes integrated in all aspects of consumption and changes what consumers do, want, and think. Devices possess the agency to encourage or discourage specific acts of consumption and have the ability to enhance consumers’ competence to perform certain actions, such as making calculations and choices. (ii) Human dispositions and capacities emerge in socio-technical arrangements. ‘Devices not only assist and channel consumers, but also rework their dispositions, emotions and values’ (Cochoy et al. 2017, p. 7). Human dispositions and capacities become the outcome of human and nonhuman relations. Consumers and their devices form hybrid systems that blur the relations between human and machine (see also Belk 2014, p. 1107, 1113). (iii) Digital devices help produce consumer subjects, such as the ‘ethically conscious consumer’ (Hansson 2017, Fuentes and Sörum 2018). For
bloggers, this means that: (A) The 'housewife' who uses digital tools to show and share her practices in the home, and finds/seeks funding to do this, is a very different 'housewife'; a housewife who possesses a new repertoire of capabilities and skills (cf. Jenkins and Denegri-Knott 2017). Note that cultural meanings are socially- and technically constituted (Sörum and Fuentes 2017). In such an approach, 'intimacy' may also be seen as socially- and technically constituted; not necessarily a practice shared between human bodies of flesh and bone, but a practice that is extended through the means of various prostheses that are not neutral, but are inscribed with commercial, ideological, or normative intentions or programs of action (Hansson 2017, Jenkins and Denegri-Knott 2017, Fuentes and Sörum 2018). A similar approach is taken by McFall (2015), who, in a book entitled Devising Consumption uses the notion of 'devising' to refer to how consumption is practically enabled and to how the design of a particular market helps this to take place. (B) Human capacities such as the ability to calculate, to engage in intimacy, and to share emerge as the results of human and technological connections, and are afforded by the technology. Finally (C), devices change the meaning of what it is to be a housewife, and thus they produce a particular form of femininity.

**Gender performativity and material agency**

In her critique of mainstream science studies for failing to attend to ‘gender-in-the-making,’ Karen Barad (2007) questions human categorizations in a way that actor network theory, according to her, does not (2007, p. 59f). She argues that more emphasis needs to be put on discourse, and on how questions of gender, class, and race matter in the workings of assemblages, and for whom. She calls this working ‘the conditions of possibility of humans and non-humans.’ Barad’s theory helps one understand how gender discourse works through digital platforms in a way that is not deterministic. Barad’s theory of post-human performativity draws on Judith Butler’s (1990, 1993) theory of gender performativity, but it also develops the concept of ‘material agency.’ For Butler, gender identity is performative; the result of complex discursive practices in which gender, sexuality, and desire are co-produced. Barad (2007) also sees gender as performative, but rather than understanding performativity as ‘iterative intra-activity,’ she understands performativity as an ‘iterative intra-activity.’ Her theory presents a view of the world as one that is constructed of phenomena that consist of intra-acting entities. ‘Agency’ emerges in this intra-action. Note that the prefix *intra* (meaning ‘within’) is quite different to *inter* (meaning ‘between’). Consequently, *intra-activity* is different to *interactivity*; the latter referring to a relationship of two or more distinguishable entities that network with each other. With *intra-action*, on the other hand, the entities that are found within a network are understood as being constituted in terms of their relationships, and as such, they are inseparable from each other. If the form of lifestyle blogging that this article discusses is understood in terms of a phenomenon, it is understood as made up of intra-acting entities, human and nonhuman actors in a network, each entangled and mutually-constituting the other. The human blogger, her followers, her sponsors, her online persona, the comments, likes and shares that she receives, the gendered ideals of ‘beauty’ and the consumption that she promotes, along with the devices, programs, and applications that help produce these ideals are intra-acting entities within the phenomenon of being a ‘blogger.’ I claim that the phenomenon (of being a blogger) is constituted in these relations and that ‘agency’ emerges as the continual reworking of human, nonhuman, and cyborgian forms of *intra-action*. Phenomena are comprehended by means of a ‘cut’; a boundary-drawing practice that is both constructed and contingent.

Importantly, such phenomena are both material and discursive. The blogger phenomenon depends on enabling new forms of relations, but also on gender discourse. Barad resists engaging in a dichotomous thinking between ‘matter’ and ‘discourse.’ Discursive practices are not human-based activities, she argues, but specific material (re)configurings of the world through which boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted. ‘Matter’ is not a fixed essence; rather ‘matter is substance in its intra-active becoming – not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency’ (Barad 2007, p. 151). Consequently, discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a
relationship of externality to each other; ‘the material’ and ‘the discursive’ are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity (Barad 2007, p. 184). According to Barad, ‘agency’ does not pre-exist actions, but rather, it emerges from the relationships of intra-action. This means that ‘agency’ is distributed, and is an attribute of ‘matter,’ even of technology. Accordingly, ‘agency’ is not aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity, but it emerges in *intra-action*. Thus, a blogger’s ability to act as a blogger emerges in the relations enabled in the intra-action of the different human, non-human, and cyborgian entities that exist within the blogging phenomenon. Identity categories are formed through intra-actions with the material world. There are no inherently determinate boundaries or properties to either the human blogger or the blog phenomenon. As a result, the ‘subject-object’ dichotomy is called into question.

Barad’s framework makes it possible for the researcher to not only understand the gendered agency of matter, but also the ways gendered identities, such as the ‘housewife’-blogger, emerge as a result of material-discursive relations and the fact that a blogger’s capacity to act is a result of this intra-activity. However, the framework does not entail that humans lack agency. As I will show, the bloggers who were interviewed for this study have argued that digital technologies made them feel empowered, and that they were able to function as economic actors in new ways. Barad’s framework helps us to see how ‘agency’ emerges in the relations that are afforded, how the phenomenon does something, and that these human’s sense of empowerment relies on these actions. This also means that there is no conflict between interviewees’ sense of empowerment, and the gender discourse that aligns this sense of empowerment with the enactment of traditional femininity. It does mean, however, that blog personas are more than a materialization of discourses on neoliberal femininity, or post-feminism, taken to the digital realm. For the interviewees, blogs afforded them an agency that made them feel as if they had power over their lives, even if their actions re-iterated, and depended on, normative forms of femininity.

**Methodology**

The article is based on a number of in-depth interviews that I conducted with female bloggers. Between 2014 and 2016, I conducted interviews with 12 self-defined influencers or bloggers. I also followed their Instagram, and/or YouTube channels for four years, sometimes daily, sometimes weekly, and sometimes less frequently. I also followed 25 similar accounts that they had recommended or that automatically appeared in my Instagram flow. Furthermore, I read two biographies written by top bloggers and media representations during the afore-mentioned time period. I followed these individuals on their networks, human and non-human, but also in terms of the phenomenon ‘blogger,’ (or *bloggeress*, as the feminized Swedish term was at the time) in media representations, noting how they evolved from early, moral panic-like condemnations of young women’s superficiality to later celebrations of their entrepreneurial spirit. The bloggers who were interviewed were all anonymized. Furthermore, examples from accounts were also taken from bloggers who were not interviewed.

Combining online – and offline methods gave me access to (i) material that was published online (and available to the public), and to (ii) the explanations influencers gave of their online practices, when they had the opportunity to be anonymous. During the interviews, the bloggers talked about the reasons why they blogged, the choices they made, and how they felt about their activities, followers, and sponsors. They also discussed things they would not write about. In this way, I was able to obtain information about posts that were edited from their sites, or never written. I studied the tensions between ‘the self’ and ‘technology,’ and the breaking down of boundaries between ‘human’ and ‘non-human.’

Most of the interviewees started as fashion bloggers, to then become lifestyle bloggers and influencers; a development also observed by Brydges and Sjöholm (2019). For some, the passage of time informed their developing biography. They began as school-girls and, as these young ladies matured, they moved on to blog less about ‘outfit-of-the-day’ and more about different issues of everyday life.
They were active in a wide field of fashion, beauty, shopping, and lifestyle consumption. All of them ran an independent blog, in its own name. Some had the blog as an income source; some used it as a resource for a day-job in marketing or communications. Others produced their blogs as a free-time activity. Their ages were between 25 and 45 years of age. In addition to their blogs, they published updates on Instagram, at least once a day, and some had recently expanded their operations with vlogs and YouTube-channels and had become among the largest operators in their respective categories. Some of the women who were interviewed shut down their blogs and switched completely to Instagram or Facebook groups. Their homes were the center of their activities. Many wanted a ‘free job,’ in order to spend more time at home or combine this activity with raising a family (Ekinsmyth 2011, De Wit Sandström 2018). Even if they did not all explicitly refer to themselves as ‘housewives,’ their blogs, as phenomena, intra-acted with the housewife ideal, not least with names such as Mrs. Something or Lady So and So. In a fashion similar to Barad (2007), instead than interrogating the ‘housewife’ ideal merely as something directly represented on blogs, I studied it as a diffracted, differential pattern of mattering mediated through technology.

Actor network theory and Barad’s post-humanist performativity are both easier to apply to the study of technical networks than processes, like human intentions and emotions, where the material aspects of existence run the risk of becoming reduced to what the human senses perceive or what is of interest to certain individuals. Mellander (2018) discusses how a methodology that is based on in-depth interviews, focusing the intentionality and agency of humans, may be combined with theorizing about the agency of nonhumans (see Crease et al. 2003, p. 16f, Latour 2005, p. 72). With respect to actor network theory, one claim that can be made is that no such clear distinctions can be made, since actor network theory draws on ethnographic methodologies. Further to this, drawing on Verbeek and Crease (2005, p. 175) we can argue that encounters between ‘humans’ and ‘nonhumans’ are slices of larger networks that stretch beyond the experience of humans. Humans can also be seen as actants with abilities to image futures or goals (Mellander 2018). Just like a number of human capabilities are embedded in devices (Sörum and Fuentes 2017), ‘intentionality’ may be seen a capability embedded in humans, and thus allows itself to be examined. Further, note that ‘intentionality’ does not emerge in isolation from the rest of the world, nor is it constant or necessarily unilateral (Mellander 2018; see also Ahmed 2006).

The above remarks draw on a view of ‘knowledge’ as always situated and partial. Returning to Barad (2007) and Butler (1990), the self is not a humanist entity, but rather an effect. It is not a fixed entity, but a becoming, made in the connections that technology enables. Speech acts in interviews are performative; they are not necessarily expressive of the interviewees’ intentions, or simply express opinions and experiences that the interviewees already had, but they can help make sense of situations. Speech does not come from inside an intentional subject. Instead, it constitutes sense-making effects that emerge in connections. Speech works as an articulation of the self. Bloggers don’t use devices, they become entangled in them; an intrinsic part of a phenomenon. Thus, it is not an intentional blogger who uses a device, but the agency emerging in intra-action.

In the following, I discuss how the breaking of boundaries between ‘human’ and ‘non-human’ that results from using digital technology has re-configuration of the ‘housewife’ role by transforming the boundaries between intimate – and commercial practices. Focusing on three areas: (i) Transforming the Feminine Body, (ii) Transforming Intimacy, and (iii) Feminine Empowerment, I consider how ‘agency’ emerges from the entangled agencies of transforming practices of body, intimacy, and entrepreneurship intra-acting within this new housewife phenomenon.

**Transforming the feminine body**

Many of the interviewees started blogging in the mid 2000s as a form of diary writing. It was ‘fun’ and they wanted to ‘inspire’ others. Reports on intimate matters were sparse at first and early photos were often anonymous, headless mirror reflections of the outfit-of-the-day. The interviewees quickly noticed that showing one’s face or sharing personal stories generated traffic; more readers,
comments, and likes. Gradually, the bloggers crossed the boundary of what they had formerly considered to be ‘too personal.’ Being open about one’s body and one’s appearance worked particularly well. In this way, the relationships that were enabled by the platform in the form of comments and sponsorship changed the bloggers’ behavior. They changed how they viewed the boundaries of intimate bodily practices, since the platform enabled them to easily share their stories, and rewarded or punished them with comments, followers, and business deals.

Some of the bloggers were drawn to writing a blog as a tool which they could use to question and challenge the distribution of power within the fashion field, as well as in other ‘representational systems’ (Rocamora 2011, Mora and Rocamora 2015). Substituting one’s own body in place of a skinny, young model, or a vintage dress styled as a fashion photograph, offered the bloggers the opportunity to subvert prevailing beauty and fashion ideals, thus illustrating how photos of themselves and the young model, or a vintage dress styled as a fashion photograph, offered the bloggers the opportunity to subvert prevailing beauty and fashion ideals, thus illustrating how photos of themselves and the comments the photos generated enabled them to feel as if they could act as empowered subjects who could make a difference in the world:

It’s fun to see that a middle-aged woman can still be interested in appearances and fashion. It’s how you look that is important but what is behind vintage. The history of the garments and the environment around them, it is not wear and tear, but simply wanting sustainable clothing… Recycling. (Susanne)

However, reports of mixed feelings towards body ideals were common in the interviews. As argued by Mora and Rocamora (2015), a capitalist logic governs blogs and most blog subjects are light skinned, young, thin women with an aesthetic that is shared by the middle classes. This sentiment is echoed by one of the interviewed bloggers, Nina, who said that ‘many bloggers are very thin and it can be difficult to be open with images of your body when you are not,’ but that this situation is also ‘understandable’ and that ‘thin bodies simply look better on photos,’ thus simultaneously embracing this logic. Or, as put by another interviewee, Rebecca:

I get comments that I am too fat, have an ugly nose and ugly mouth. I have learnt to accept the way I look. You become used to seeing yourself. I used to hate my nose, now I don’t care […] In the beginning, I needed a lot of confirmation ‘oh my God, people think I’m pretty, I inspire them!’ (Rebecca)

Photo editing functions such as filters and applications for added contrast and focus, along with easily-produced idealized texts, facilitate the production of posts that resemble the aesthetic of fashion photography. On the one hand bloggers felt as if they could challenge normative ideals. On the other, however, ‘gender discourse’ is another entity that intra-acts within the blogging phenomenon and is embedded in the apps and filters, and the gazes and comments of the blogger’s followers. Gender discourse is at work in the camera’s gaze, in the followers’ interest, and in the bloggers’ own will. This discourse is actively working to afford, or nudge bloggers, to become part of the same ideals, both by making it technologically possible for the blogger to look like a beautiful model in an advert, and by punishing those who choose a different aesthetic. Further, the visual form of the blog media makes comparison to ideals very easy. This is an aspect with normative functions that was easily communicated in commentators’ fields, where bloggers who don’t conform to the commentators’ ideas were called ‘too fat’ or ‘ugly,’ and led to self-censorship:

There is a lot of pressure on young girls who blog. You have to be thin. You can’t eat. The three-day juice-diet is popular now. Kissie [top blogger] ate baby food to lose weight, and then every supermarket in Stockholm ran out of baby food. Sometimes you need to be careful about what you write. People wonder how you can afford to go on all those trips, but it’s all sponsored. (Rebecca)

The blogger Matilda said that she saw it as important to show ‘that there is something behind [beauty]. Even if I have worked as a model, there is still a brain behind it all.’ In this way, making money out of one’s (feminine) body and one’s (feminine) interests, was talked about as ‘empowering’ and as ‘up-valuing’ that which had previously been of low cultural value because of its associations with femininity. The ability to create an almost perfect feminine body was understood as a feminist victory, and not as a concession to the male gaze (Gill 2016). As pointed out by a number of feminist scholars who have been inspired by post-structuralism, embracing of artificial beauty can be
interpreted as a way of presenting femininity as ‘created’ and ‘cultural,’ as opposed to something ‘natural’ (Dahl 2012, 2014, Baker 2017). From such a perspective, blogging can be interpreted as challenging traditional feminine ideals by exposing those ideals as ‘constructions.’ Thinking of the feminine body in terms of an economic asset is, therefore, not only an expression of a one-way commodification process in which femininity is seen as a project of the body and gender structures not criticized. The interviewees saw their practice as a way of acting as a subject and a way of questioning the boundary-drawing practices that place the female body and femininity on the other side of legitimate economic practices. As argued by Smelik (2016), ‘technology is one of the major factors in affecting our identity and changing the relation to our own body’ (Smelik 2016, p. 170). In showing how the feminine self and the female body are constructed in relation to consumer goods, the digital mediation of intimate matters blurs the object-subject dichotomy. The blog phenomenon does not so much help the production of one body ideal, as reveal how the body is produced in material-discursive networks that change the relationship to the body by pushing the boundaries of what a body is, what a woman is, and what normative femininity is. Technology changes our relationship to the body and the way we talk about the body.

The interviewees confirmed that their sharing of intimate matters quickly connected them with sponsors and companies who gave them ‘gifts,’ such as nail polish, eye lash lengtheners, hair stylers, clothing, household appliances, washing machines, prams, or hair removal products. What these companies expected (and received) in return varied, and many of the bloggers felt that too much was expected from them in return for a simple ‘gift’ such as a bottle of nail polish. Over time, the relationship between the bloggers and these corporate sponsors became more professional:

Some companies are super professional. They say ‘we want three posts, a contest and to be seen on your Facebook page. We will pay this much. Style a picture that includes our product […].’ They have thought it through! (Nina)

The blog mediates the transformation of the female body and the intimate practices associated with the female body into an economic activity. Women were sent products that were designed to create a certain form of the feminine body, which, in turn, was placed in aestheticized home environments. With the relationships that were enabled by their blogs, the boundaries between ‘public’ and ‘private,’ ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ are dissolved, and norms of femininity transform. Importantly, even if these practices may seem the same as they were before, they are not. By including followers in practices of transforming the female body from ‘non-ideal’ (with cellulite, etc.) to something ‘beautiful’ and ‘perfect,’ blogging practice may be seen as revealing the constructed nature of femininity. This practice does this by exposing how the female body is created through the intra-actions associated with blogging: the economic and social intra-actions.

**Rewards and punishment**

As argued by Abidin (2016), the production of an attractive body has become a prop in the display of the consuming and entrepreneurial self. A central part to this production is the communication of ‘authenticity’ (cf. Lewis 2013, Marwick 2013, Yung Nielsen 2018, Brydges and Sjöholm 2019). The role of authenticity was an important feature of how Susanne, one of the interviewees, made sense of her activities. She reported that she had tried writing a fictional blog about a made-up character whilst being selective with the sponsorship she accepted. This strategy did not work at all, because followers kept asking for authentic information. The non-human artefact, Susanne’s online persona, was only interesting to followers as an extension of her, as a human. Contrariwise, Matilda, similar to the sentiment expressed by Ellinor, mentioned how a self-revealing post gave her ‘a sick number of responses.’ Pictures of bloggers without makeup, without Photoshop manipulation, or before the blogger’s weight loss, ‘as they look in real life,’ is a genre in itself. It is seen as a form of sharing, or nakedness, that is typical of Internet culture, and is often celebrated as ‘courageous.’ Even if these two stories appear to be different from
each other, they can both be interpreted as a post-humanist collapse of the object-subject divide. This is because the Internet, in both cases, demands that the non-human artefact and the human be one and the same.

However, for bloggers, as well as for their followers, the value of authenticity was found in its economic qualities. For bloggers, the authenticity that demanded that the ‘non-human’ and the ‘human’ was one and the same was aimed at qualifying their advice about consumption as authentic and trustworthy (Entwistle 2016, p. 280). For their followers, the tokens of authenticity, such as no-make-up-day, work to instil trust in their tastemakers (i.e. the bloggers) by collapsing the difference between the ‘non-human’ and the ‘human.’ In this context, authenticity functions as a qualification of promoted goods, since bloggers are precieved as ‘real’ and ‘honest.’ The sharing of intimate information creates a special relationship of trust that qualifies the products that the bloggers talk about as desirable. In turn, the bloggers’ followers share intimate information too.

The ability of to keep track of the number of (new) followers quickly taught and encouraged the bloggers to think of their bodies in economic terms. It enabled them to easily calculate the rewards associated with sharing intimate information about their body, and nudged them to push and transgress the boundaries of intimate matters. The large number of likes, new followers, and invitations for collaboration that sharing pictures of stretch-marks, faces without make-up, or breast enlargements resulted in meant that intimate matters quickly became commercial matters. Links to brands and clinics were easily inserted into posts and this was a source of economic compensation for the bloggers. By showing pictures of cellulite on their body before and after treatment, bloggers communicate to their followers that they, too, can transform their bodies into glamorous products. In this way, a female conversation about consumption online is transformed into a market practice. Bloggers related to their bodies as products, assets that could be sold, improved upon, and generate an income. As Rebecca said:

I train a lot. Five days a week. You want to look good. [...] I have a beautiful side. I know how to hold my leg to look taller and thinner (Rebecca)

With beauty treatments such as laser treatment, hair removal, and skin rejuvenation, changes of the physical ‘real’ body were funded by sponsors who had found their way to these women’s sites and presented offers to them, based on their profile and the number of followers that the bloggers had. As Matilda put it: ‘People don’t understand that it costs 5000 euros a month to look like me.’ The effects of digitalization with respect to images of the female body are, however, contradictory. On the one hand, images are digitally enhanced, which could mean that the adoption of certain beauty ideals can be merely achieved online. However, somewhat contradictorily, the requirements of actually conforming to certain beauty ideals have never been stronger (Elias et al. 2017). The bloggers claimed that their followers are interested in reading about changes in the physical, real body, albeit digitally improved, or about how the transformation of the physical body took place, as a projection of authenticity. The followers can be seen to be interested in the relationship between (i) what appears real and (ii) what appears created, that is to say, the relationship between the ‘human’ and the ‘non-human’ artefact. Followers are interested in bloggers’ relationship with their body and desire to watch this body undergo a transformation. The commodification of the female body and intimacy, in itself, is not enough to make a new market; it is the transformation of the body and intimacy that interests followers and generates an income, even if the whole cost of this project is not always transparent.

**Transforming ‘intimacy’**

Different techniques were used by the bloggers in an effort to appear authentic, honest, and intimate. Many of these techniques were visual, such as no-make-up-day, but emotional qualities were also subject to manipulation, even though they are more difficult to visualize. Stories about mental health problems, drug addiction, and ‘failed’ beauty treatments led to immediate success, many of the
bloggers explained. As Stina said: ‘I don’t mind being vulnerable. It just creates a deeper relationship with my readers,’ or Matilda: ‘The more they think they know me, the more credible I am in what I write. If I say “Yes, this mascara is good,” it increases the chances that my readers will actually buy it if they know me.’ Many bloggers reported that products that they had recommended online had quickly sold out in stores. Clicks and likes, comments, and new followers worked as devices which were used to calculate their popularity; they could see immediately how well sharing an intimate story worked. The bloggers used portable devices to ‘grab’ or ‘capture’ special moments, in real time. Devices with functions that the bloggers used to measure and calculate the effect their the stories and pictures had on their followers helped the bloggers to evaluate these strategies. This is an integral part of any sales technique (McFall 2015), and feed backs into the social media loop, thereby encouraging the blogger to continue with her blogging practice with intensified power.

However, the interviewees still found it important to keep aspects of their private life outside the blog. One interviewee, who blogged about her family life, mentioned that she had other children from a previous marriage who she would never ‘expose’ on the blog. The happy nuclear family mom-life that she blogged about was clearly a boundary-drawing practice; it relied on the creation of a persona, not unlike the creation of Hollywood’s ‘star system’ (Dyer 1979). Susanne expressed a similar idea:

I do not write about personal traumas and joys and such, it is a very, very small percentage of my life that is seen on the blog. And I know that is something that keeps the blog back, too. I know that [the blog] would have grown explosively if I had been more open, but I’m not willing to pay that price actually. (Susanne)

Many of the bloggers referred to their blogging practice as a form of ‘therapy,’ and thus a Foucauldian analysis of ‘writing the self’ seems to be close at hand. Blog entries can be reviewed by the writer at a later date. Thus, they can operate as a confessional, where the blogger takes an active role in their own surveillance, since they are both governor and governed. In this form, the blog can emerge as a ‘calculated confession,’ turning the subject into an entrepreneur, instead of cleansing the mind and soul (Foucault 1978, 1982).

Stina described her blog as a ‘documentation’ of her life: ‘There are things I wrote ten years ago that I wouldn’t write today, but it is all part of my history, I wouldn’t take anything away.’ The blog is ‘her,’ and many other bloggers referred to their blog as ‘part of me,’ or expressed sentiments like: ‘I couldn’t live without it.’ Stina sometimes goes back to see what she did on a particular date three years ago. As she put it: ‘If my blog disappeared, I would be torn apart, I would […] the thought itself is enough to give me anxiety.’ Rebecca also expanded upon the blog’s dual value of marketing and therapy:

It is a social thing. You get out there. Market yourself. It has a marketing value. It is also like therapy for me, clears my mind. Express myself and inspire others. I burn for it, I breathe fashion! I think it’s therapeutic for many, you blog instead of writing a diary. […] When I finish, I would like to print my life. Five years at a time.
Take my archive and make a book. Go back, see how I felt. I am going to do it! (Rebecca)

There was a constant negotiation between staging a character who, on the one hand, appeared genuine, and, on the other hand, keeping key elements of privacy outside the blog. ‘Openness’ was clearly staged, and many situations and images that the blogger could have shared were left out. The feeling of openness was sought after by the bloggers, and it was often impossible to keep personal matters out of the blog. But then there was a price to pay for this, and sometimes the costs were too high. All of the bloggers had experienced angry comments about being a ‘bad mom’ for exposing their children to public scrutiny. But, in contrast, too little intimacy gave no followers and, in return, no business. Of course, too much intimacy generated a lot of followers, but this also generated floods of angry comments, which were difficult to deal with and made bloggers feel bad. Too much intimacy could also lead to scaring sponsors away, or contact with the wrong types of sponsor. As remarked on above, too much openness could cause problems in the blogger’s personal life. These lines were very fine and closely entangled with cultural norms of femininity and intimacy.
Feminine empowerment

Making money from consumption and the female body was described by the bloggers as ‘empowering,’ both in the interviews and in the blogs. The empowerment was made manifest in how the bloggers questioned the power structures that they encountered in ‘the real world.’ Many talked about themselves as brands, and in terms of their personal interests and experiences as resources for entrepreneurship, thus reiterating the logic of post-feminism and ‘entrepreneurship of the self’:

You have to think of yourself as a brand. There is no education for how to be a blogger. It is how you are as a person. (Stina)

The success of a particular blog, one’s own or someone else’s, was measured in the number of followers that the blog generated, the amount of commercial collaboration that the blogger engaged in, and in terms of any spin-off businesses that the blog gave rise to, such as the sale of the blogger’s own fashion designs or a line of cosmetics. The interviewees often mentioned the importance of investing one’s interests and emotions in the blog, of being ‘honest’ and liking the products one recommends ‘for real.’ Ideally, there was no conflict between the two (the self and the brand) and interviewees always publicly liked the products that their online persona marketed, even if, in reality, this was not always possible. Similar to the issues related to the ‘authenticity’ of the body images that are published in the blogs (as described above), the lack of conflict between the self and the brand can be seen as an expression of authenticity, as well as the collapse between the ‘human’ and the ‘non-human.’

The notion of ‘boundlessness’ was encouraged by followers and sponsors, and this encouraged the bloggers think of, and present, the ‘self’ in terms of a ‘brand.’

The creation of an online persona is the perfect dissolution and simultaneous combination of the subject/object dichotomy. Importantly, the collapse of the ‘self’ and ‘brand’ was explained in terms of women’s empowerment. This illustrates how the actions enabled by the blogs made the interviewees feel as if they possessed agency. However, it also led to a number of problems and several bloggers actually suffered from exhaustion syndromes. I claim that this reveals something important about the relationship between ‘femininity’ and ‘intimacy,’ how ‘boundlessness’ with respect to ‘intimacy’ depends on gender discourse, and, furthermore, is related to femininity.

Nina reported on how she thought that building a personal brand, by showing one’s own body and personality and sharing intimate thoughts, was mediated by the social media platforms. This, apparently, made sense to her as a matter of women’s empowerment:

Women learnt to master this platform in other ways than men, of course there are men who blog about politics or technology and have a lot of followers, but they never focus on the person. I think girls picked up on the idea of building a personal brand very fast, and in a fashion blog you show your body, even if many were anonymous at first, it is built up around you as a person, and I think that girls are better at telling others about their lives, and at knowing what others find interesting, to write about fashion, about what you like yourself and put your personality into it. (Nina)

The stories found in the blogs echo a post-feminist sensibility identified by Gill (2007). As she and other critics of post-feminism argue, feminism, during times of post-feminism, is equated with femininity, and is drained of its political content and is (merely) related to consumption and business.

Similarly, the cultural links between femininity and feminism also entailed that many interviewees felt (as feminine subjects (and objects)) that they were compelled to engage in matters of feminism, even if they did not specifically think of themselves as ‘feminist.’ Feminism thus became yet another measurement of the bloggers’ femininity, and thereby engaged with their sense of selfhood (whether this was a matter of their choice or not). As part of the Internet culture, the bloggers’ followers post comments, and include debates taken from other arenas (of life or the Internet) and compare the content of different blogs. Susanne said, for instance, that many followers wrote angry comments when she dressed in vintage dresses. These followers claimed that she looked ‘too feminine’ and, by doing so, she did not support feminism. She was criticized for both being ‘too fat’ (something classed as ‘unfeminine’), and for overly conforming to norms of femininity (i.e. ‘too
dressed up’ and ‘too feminine’), thereby illustrating the contradictory relations in the prevailing gender discourse. Relationships can empower, but they can also bring about pain and hurt. The online persona cannot be hurt without also hurting the ‘human.’

Entrepreneurship was generally talked about in terms of ‘women’s empowerment.’ Statements such as ‘knowing your worth,’ ‘getting paid,’ ‘value your time,’ and ‘put value on (women’s) work’ frequently occurred in the interviews, as well as in the blog posts. Rebecca clearly illustrates the connection that many made between success, body control, visual labor, female empowerment, and the lack of critique of social structures or politics. In summary, of ‘being worth it,’ a concept often associated with post-feminism:

Women express themselves better and easier. It’s a thing. Women want to succeed. We shouldn’t be worse. We can do it! […] This is just the beginning. It’s not going to stop. People find new things. We are coming forward. We are going to do this. There is also pressure, lose weight. But on the whole, it’s a push, hell, it is awesome! You build your brand and become someone. You grow, build, my blog, my brand. I get a lot of offers. My profile has put me there. Go women! […] There is a lot of talk on social media, about feminism, to be proud to be a woman. I am neutral when it comes to politics. I love it when women take up space, work hard, and become something. I think we are worth it. But nothing specifically [feminist]. There is talk in social media. Women are taking over. Women are successful. (Rebecca)

Matilda expressed herself in a similar manner. In this case, she was concerned with beauty treatments. ‘Beauty is about being a woman – and getting respect for it,’ she said:

I am convinced that I have influenced many around me to respect themselves more as women. […] Mother of three, wife, and entrepreneur and I use Botox and I am feminist, hey, can you be a feminist, then? (Matilda)

The staging of an objectified image of women (but doing it as a strong subject) was a goal for Matilda. Her blog is about empowerment, she said. She argued that women should receive equal pay and take their rightful place in society, and still be glamously beautiful. Stina, on the other hand, talked about blogging as something which many people found annoying. This was because girls had made it their own, no one took them seriously because they were women, and now they ‘owned’ the whole business, because of it.

Interestingly, a central point in the explanations provided by the bloggers was how objectification felt differently offline than online. Online, the relation between the beautifully made up face and the real face with no makeup, or the showing of cellulite, was an empowering agent for entrepreneurship. However, in the bloggers’ ‘real,’ offline life, a face without makeup or the presentation of cellulite was worthless. Matilda mentioned how, in her real life, she was always assumed to be an assistant to her husband (who actually worked for her). However, online, her body was celebrated for its entrepreneurial qualities. She remarked that she felt the effects of gender structures ‘so strong she could touch them’ when she operated outside of the blog:

As a female entrepreneur, I encounter [gender structures] on a daily basis. I work a lot with my husband, and still it is him they speak to first. […] I have everything against me, really. I love Botox, I’m fashionable. I have long hair, extensions. You know the way it is. I’m not the classic business woman. I carry my LV bag. I don’t have a briefcase. But I have at least as much expertise. (Matilda)

From an individual perspective, the beauty practices and consumer culture of this part of the blogosphere serves as a way of taking control over expressions of femininity, although they often involve aligning the body in accordance with current beauty ideals and standards (see also Davis 1995). Therefore, when mediated through digital platforms, beautification practices could be interpreted as challenging the notions of femininity that circulate in society, instead of being seen as a one-way commodification of ‘woman as consumer.’ Indulging in consumption as a realization of the female self, was, for the interviewees, clearly connected with up-valuing femininity. The ability to make money out of that which has been termed ‘reproduction,’ ‘private matters,’ and ‘leisure’ questions and challenges the boundary-drawing practices that strive to place these matters in the realms of women’s private’, reproductive’, and emotional life, instead of positioning these aspects as
legitimate parts of phenomena such as ‘the economy,’ ‘markets, and “production”;’ in general. Thus, the changes afforded to the bloggers by their blogging activities made them feel empowered, even if this empowerment relied on the initial presentation of a traditionally un-empowered, feminine figure. In summary, blogging afforded them the capacity to act.

Conclusion

Using Barad’s theory of intra-action allowed me to understand blogging as a phenomenon that is made up of material-discursive entities that intra-act with each other. Furthermore, we are able see how the ‘agency’ that emerged as a result of this intra-action made bloggers feel empowered. ‘The body,’ ‘the self,’ ‘feminism,’ ‘intimacy,’ and ‘the economy’ all worked in intra-action; constituting and constantly enfolding the blog-phenomenon. My focus has not primarily been on devices in themselves, or the actions or identities they enable, but rather, on their ‘agency’ with respect to how a traditional women’s role can be unfolded and how they position traditional gender roles in a contemporary setting, notwithstanding the fact that these roles are subject to increasing levels of interrogation and scholarly critique.

The ‘housewife’ ideal that can be mediated through a lifestyle blog in association with corporate sponsorships is not the same as a traditional ‘housewife’ ideal. Even if these women may look as if they reproduce the traditional ‘housewife’ ideal, when this ideal is spread exponentially through digital infrastructure it becomes something entirely different. Rather, the ‘housewife’ ideal presented in these blogs is a non-human artefact. These women are not actually housewives at all; it is a staged role. When intimate information is shared via a digital mediator, the ‘sharing’ is performed by working on a keyboard and with a camera – not over a cup of coffee around the kitchen table. The response to this ‘sharing’ comes in the form of followers who can be translated into an income. The traditional ‘housewife’ ideal was located to the private sphere of the home and the actions and behavior associated with this ideal were dictated by social norms and traditions. This new role discussed above, however, relies on sharing. ‘Shame’ is turned into ‘triumph’ when it is shared. The bloggers are inspired by responses from others, in the form of likes, which turn into an economic benefit. Thus, the blogging practice not only gives rise to a social triumph, but also to an economic triumph. The bloggers are, in effect, providing a service for their followers, but also for their advertisers and sponsors.

By using their devices, the interviewees could measure and calculate the effect of their sharing intimate matters, in the form of economic gains. Clicks, shares, and sponsorships has turned blogging into an economic activity in which success and quality are measured in the form of business. The image of a perfect body in a perfect home establishes a market for influencers, and an updated version of Mrs. Consumer. This has entailed that the ‘housewife’ has emerged as an economic actor, in new ways. The interviewees’ desire to start blogging also had to do with their position on the labor market; a response to the way the labor market is gender segregated and to how women’s interests and choices are generally paid less and considered to be of lesser value. Their blogging practice can be interpreted in response to the way labor is valued, and where wage-labor is the norm.

To function as economic actors in the blogosphere, the interviewees were encouraged to be open about intimate matters, and to cross boundaries which they had previously thought of as private. Crossing boundaries, however, does come not without costs’ and the comments made by their followers were often hurtful and designed to get bloggers back in line with conventions of ‘femininity’ and ‘privacy.’ However, the interviewees’ refusal to respect such cultural boundaries also reveals to us the fact that ‘femininity,’ in this context, is constructed. Images of an aesthetized family at dinners in a perfectly tidy home that appear on blogs are just as artificial as a digitally – and surgically enhanced body. As in the case of the blogger’s body, the work involved in performing consumption and domesticity is made visible. When ‘the self’ and the product/company become one, it offers the onlooker an opportunity to see the enactment of femininity as something plainly constructed; something created so as to do business, and to make a market. The gendered effects of boundary-drawing
practices around ‘the body,’ ‘the self,’ ‘feminism,’ and ‘the economy’ have become visible in this context. We conclude that blogging questions the boundary-making practices inherent to today’s economy and, consequently, allows these women bloggers feel as if they possess a significant amount of ‘agency’ within this network.

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