

Mommy Blogging & New Domesticity

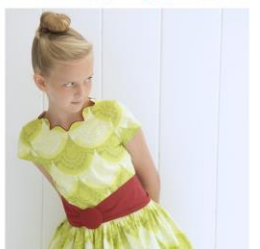
How discourses of new domesticity feature as a link between private post-feminist identities and public domestic communities.

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Images on the front page (from top to bottom)

Image 1: Aesthetic Nest, 2013, November 16

Image 2: Johnston, 2013, July 1

Image 3: Willard, 2013, April 23

Image 4: Hart, 2012, September 12

Image 5: Willard, 2013, August 27

Image 6: Dill, 2013, June 26

Image 7: Hart, 2013, July 27

Image 6: Aesthetic Nest, 2014, February 7

Abstract

“Time over money and people over things” (Matchar, 2013, p. 218) is the sentence that captures the discourse of new domesticity in its essence. It is the current sensibility to provide one’s life with meaning by focusing on quality over quantity, by enjoying the small things and by favouring authenticity and handmade craft. This thesis discusses the social phenomenon of new domesticity in relation to academic literature and within the context of a medium that could be a carrier of the discourse, the creative mommy blog. It thereby poses the research question: (How) do discourses of new domesticity feature in creative mommy blogs?

In order to investigate these discourses a thematic analysis is applied to the linguistic content of twenty-five blog posts written by five creative mommy bloggers, covering four types of content: projects, tutorials, reflections and introductions. As a result of intensively questioning the material on what it conveys, the thematic analysis extracted three main themes. These themes are: identity, new domesticity and community.

This thesis shows that within their writing, the five bloggers reflect upon their own identities by describing their desires, their actions, their characteristics and also by writing in a certain manner. They use elements of new domesticity, especially the desire to simplify and the engagement in handmade crafts, to construct their identity but also as a link to a broader community of creative mommy bloggers and their readers. This community acknowledges both the identity of the author and the discourse on the creative mommy blogs. Therefore, *the discourse of new domesticity can feature as a link between identity and community.*

From a theoretical perspective this means that the bloggers’ investment in (new) domesticity should not be seen as anti-feminist, but as a way to construct a post-feminist identity within the private sphere. At the same time the bloggers communicate their domestic identities to the outside world through their blogging, suggesting that (new) domesticity is not restricted to the private sphere, as it was historically. Rather, new domesticity seems to emerge as a discourse specifically ‘conducted’ in the public sphere.

Key words: new domesticity, mommy blogs, private sphere, public sphere, domesticity, identity, community, discourse, femininity, motherhood, post-feminism.

Foreword

This thesis has come to reflect one of the characteristics central to my own identity. The art of 'being Switzerland': the capacity to always find a place in the middle. Which admittedly, as a private person, is not always the best place to be. But as a student of a scientific field, I think of neutrality as a pretty good starting point. In the process of writing this thesis I have found many opposites. I have found that in discussions on women, there are distinctions between the feminist and the housewife. I have found the distinction between the private and the public, and the opposition between 'the good mother' and 'the bad mother'. I have discussed the distinction between the passive and the active audience. Media as having an effect, and media as a place of active interpretation.

When I started my master thesis I decided I finally wanted to take a stance and make a point. I wanted to be critical and I thought that in order to be critical, I had to see the mommy blogs I was going to analyse as non-feminist to begin with. Because I had this stereotypical pantsuit feminism in my mind, that scared me on the one hand and seemed the only 'true feminism' to me on the other. I considered, to become a successful female adult, I had to 'grow a pair' and make a statement.

But over the course of writing this thesis I have found that the middle road remains to be the best way to go. Because the women who wrote the texts I analysed are certainly not pantsuit feminism material, but they are also no repressed passive housewives. They write about their private lives, but discuss it in public. Sometimes they are exhausted mothers making mistakes, sometimes they try their best to be 'the good mother'. The bloggers are producers, but what they are producing is not a straightforward discourse influencing others, but a conversation with other women in their same position by which they reconstruct meaning. There is no right or wrong, good or bad, private or public, black or white. As it turned out, reality is fluent and Switzerland is a good place to be. That is reassuring.

*Thank you to the women I want to prove myself to,
And the men who take my shit while I'm trying to do so.
(And that statement is very creative mommy blog)*

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Anne-Wil Huisman

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction research subject

In the non-academic book *Homeward bound: why women are embracing the new domesticity*, author Emily Matchar (2013) describes what she sees as a “profound shift in the way Americans view life” (p. 4). She describes an increasing investment in old-fashioned domesticity. A focus on the authentic, hand-made and vintage. A sensibility that prefers the natural, by growing your own vegetables and going back to nature, and that celebrates local community and heritage. A sensibility probably most effectively described in the sentence “time over money and people over things” (p. 218) and reflected in thoughts of giving meaning to meaningless activities by investing effort in them. Matchar (2013) calls this sensibility *new domesticity*.

It is a shift that can be found in one’s surroundings as well. Dutch newspapers have featured page-long articles asking about the biologic trend that is booming. People want “honest” food, as they increasingly distrust the food industry. Friends or family members have taken up knitting or crocheting, to take their minds of the daily rush. In the city one increasingly finds small initiatives that usually include an urban garden, something with handmade illustration, homemade foods and flowers in mason jars. Fellow students’ Facebook pages are covered with mellow pictures of flowers on wooden tables, the rustic apple pie they made or their visit to the performance of an authentic singer-songwriter. It is clear that there is some shift in lifestyle going on that prefers quality over quantity. According to Matchar (2013), as well as Joanne Hollows (2006), who has written academically about women and domesticity before, this lifestyle is generally adapted by educated young women. This makes new domesticity an interesting research subject, as an investment in a lifestyle that embraces old-fashioned values might have implications for gendered identities and relations.

This focus on the authentic and domestic seems to be a 180 degree turnaround from consumerism and second-wave feminism as well as post-feminism. ‘You are what you buy’ seems to become ‘you are what you make’ and instead of trying to make it in the urban masculine world, or using one’s femininity to do so, women are retreating to the home. Where does this focus on the genuine, the authentic and natural come from? Why are educated women sewing and baking? Does this mean that children of second-wave feminism are returning to old-fashioned times that bring them right back to the sewing machine and the kitchen counter? In order to investigate such questions we need to investigate how the story of new domesticity is being told and disseminated in society. Therefore, this master thesis will look into a discourse of new domesticity, as reflected in media. It will look into this shift, by discussing what it is, by putting it in a scientific perspective, and by investigating new domesticity within the context of a different popular phenomenon: the creative mommy blog.

The creative mommy blog is a sub-genre of the mommy blog, in which mothers blog about their daily lives with a focus on their creative lifestyle. Since the rise of the term “mommy blog” in 2005, which in itself has generated some discussion because of its possible degrading sound (Lopez, 2009), mommy blogs have become an increasingly popular medium. According to research conducted by eMarketer in the United States in 2010, 3.9 million women with children were blogging about their lives as mothers and other subjects related. The prediction was that by 2014, this number would reach 4.4 million. In turn, the amount of mothers reading these blogs consisted of 17.5 million in 2010, with a prediction of 20.8 million in 2014 (eMarketer, 2010). More recent statistics on the amount of mommy bloggers are hard to find, but in her 2013 book Matchar concluded “It’s clear that women are online, women are blogging, women are online blogging about family, homemaking and domesticity. The blog, an entirely new medium of self-expression, is being used to express something so... old-fashioned” (Matchar, 2013, p. 51).

So how exactly is this discourse of new domesticity reflected in the content of these blogs? How do these bloggers use the discourse, and what does this mean from a social perspective? This master thesis will explore how the sensibility of new domesticity is reflected in mommy blogs, and specifically craft or creative mommy blogs. These terms will be used interchangeably and are both defined as mommy blogs with a focus on creative activities such as sewing, knitting and crafting. Five bloggers were selected from the Top 50 of most popular craft mommy bloggers from 2013, selected by parenting website *Babble.com*. Using thematic analysis this thesis will research the linguistic content of twenty-five of their blog posts, covering four different types of blog posts, in order to answer the following research question: (How) do discourses of new domesticity feature in creative mommy blogs?

1.2. Social and scientific relevance

Media can play an important role in constructing and re-evaluating ideas about social reality, as they reflect this reality for a certain audience. Blogs, media close to their readership, can serve as important tools in this social construction of reality. Certainly, as readers use the content of blogs to reflect on their own identities (Karlsson, 2007), the way reality is reflected on blogs or the discourses on a certain topic can have a significant influence on their audience. Also, these discussions say something about present-day society. It reveals ideas about society and values that are considered important. This is why it is socially relevant to research which narratives and images of femininity in relation to the sensibility of new domesticity are displayed on mommy blogs. For example, as mentioned before, one might ask if such a discourse would lead to an old-fashioned gendered roles or even repression of women, as they (voluntarily) retreat to the home.

From a scientific perspective it is relevant to research this subject for several reasons. First, the concept of new domesticity as a current trend or discourse is retrieved from Matchar’s (2013) non-

scientific non-fiction book. From an academic perspective, both Delilah Campbell (2001) and Joanne Hollows (2006) have started to address the topic of the specific sensibility of new domesticity in present-day society. However, beyond the scholarship of Hollows the topic has not received much scientific attention. Therefore, this thesis approaches new domesticity theoretically and empirically, by referencing to the limited amount of scientific attention that has been given to the subject and exploring the subject further and within a specific context.

Second, femininity has often been researched in relation to the public sphere, discussing the private sphere as something that has to be left behind in order to move forward or ignoring the domestic completely (Brunsdon, 2000; Felski, 2000; Giles, 2004; Hollows, 2006). While liberal (second-wave) feminism considered domestic work as inherently unfulfilling (Friedan, 1963), post-feminist media studies have focused on researching representations of femininity in popular culture, which was often featured in an urban environment, for example in studies on *Sex and the City* (Gerhard, 2005) and *Ally McBeal* (Mosely & Read, 2002). This thesis will research domestic feminine representations, focusing on the private (but not limiting its view when it comes to the public sphere).

Third, the subject of mommy blogs has been investigated by several academics (Friedman, 2010, 2013; Lopez, 2009; Morrison, 2010, 2011, 2012). However, several types of mommy blogs have developed around specific subjects. There are mommy blogs with a focus on food and cooking, blogs written by military wives, blogs written by mothers of twins, blogs that focus on photography etc. This thesis focuses on blogs written around the subjects of crafts and DIY (do-it-yourself), because these blogs are expected to cover more subjects in relation to new domesticity. As this thesis tries to research how discourses of new domesticity feature in creative mommy blogs, and not how much the discourse of new domesticity is discussed within the entire mommy blogging community, this is a relevant choice. Also because the separate 'genres' of mommy blogs remain largely unexplored in academic literature on mommy blogging, this research can be considered an addition to existing scholarship.

Summarizing, it is relevant to research discourses of new domesticity because the subject is about the creation of meaning within society through certain discourses, in this case a discourse of new domesticity. A discourse that is related to the subject of gender and identity. But also to the subject of class, as new domesticity is a distinct middle-class phenomenon. It is important to analyse media expressions when it comes to discourses, because media help in the social construction of reality. Furthermore, from a scientific perspective, this thesis is relevant because it covers gaps in research on domesticity and femininities in the private and public spheres, as well as research on specific kinds of mommy blogs.

This research thereby places itself in research traditions on feminine identities, referring to the history of domestic femininities (Giles, 2004; Hollows, 2006; 2008), second-wave feminism (Friedan, 1963) and post-feminism (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2007). It is also embedded in a research tradition that

tries to understand the way in which women use their (popular) cultural consumption and production in their daily lives (Ang, 1982; Radway, 1984), as this thesis reflects on the ways in which creative mommy bloggers use the discourse of new domesticity within their blogging and to which extent their use of a certain discourse can be seen as feminist.

1.3. Thesis structure

In order to answer the main question, this thesis is constructed from several parts. The theoretical framework in chapter 2 will provide a context for the three main concepts from the research question: new domesticity, discourse and mommy blog. It will first discuss the concept of new domesticity as originally introduced by Matchar (2013). It will put this concept in a theoretical perspective by discussing the subject of domesticity on the basis of academic literature, using the historical distinction between the public and private sphere as a guideline. The theoretical framework will discuss why new domesticity can be seen as a discourse by providing the reader with a discussion on ideology and the dissemination of meaning. Finally, the theoretical framework will discuss existing theories on mommy blogging. Instead of using the framework to introduce existing theories to test during analysis, chapter 2 provides literature as sensitizing concepts for the following thematic analysis. This method as well as the units of analysis and the methods of analysis will be explained further in chapter 3. Then, chapter 4 will discuss extensively the themes that were extracted from the thematic analysis, already placing them in a theoretical context to some extent. Finally, the conclusion will critically review the current research and further discuss the results from the analysis from a theoretical perspective. It will finally answer the main question: (How) do discourses of new domesticity feature in creative mommy blogs?

2. Theoretical Framework

In order to address the research question “(How) do discourses of new domesticity feature in creative mommy blogs?” this theoretical framework will discuss the concepts related to topics as new domesticity, discourse and mommy blogging. It will review literature on domesticity and femininity, discussing distinctions between the public and the private; the feminist and the housewife; the good mother and the bad mother. It will discuss why new domesticity is a discourse in need of investigation, and why mommy blogs are the medium to investigate this discourse.

2.1 New domesticity in context

2.1.1. The notion of new domesticity

In order to research discourses on *new domesticity*, it is first important to discuss and define this concept. The notion of new domesticity was introduced to the mass public by Emily Matchar in her book *Homeward bound: why women are embracing the new domesticity* (2013). The author observes a change in society that goes beyond a trend. Instead, Matchar speaks of a “profound shift in the way Americans view life” (p. 4). New domesticity is a change in lifestyle that focuses on a nostalgic return to elements such as the authentic, the natural, the community, the manual and the meaningful. It is slow-cooking, refurbishing your second-hand furniture and knitting your own cable sweater rolled up into one crunchy lifestyle that centres around the home and the domestic. It’s the career woman from New York fed up working at a law firm and eating Japanese take-out, moving to a farm in Vermont to start a small business in handmade stuffed animals and growing vegetables in her garden.

Matchar (2013) defines new domesticity by the values that are central to the lifestyle: an emphasis on family, a Do-It-Yourself spirit, a concern for the environment, suspicion towards big corporations, “time over money and people over things” (p. 218). Although the author stresses that men are also found ‘engaging’ in new domesticity, this lifestyle is increasingly adapted by women in their twenties or thirties with a higher education. In an article in the *New York Times* relating to the subject of new domesticity Lisa Belkin (2003) introduced the term *opt-out* revolution, discussing how increasingly professional women with promising careers decide to “opt out” of the workplace (Belkin, 2003). As they increasingly experience difficulties in managing a high-status and time-intensive job and a family, these women quit working to become a homemaker and focus on domestic work in a new domesticity fashion (Belkin, 2003).

Belkin (2003) as well as Matchar (2013) argue that this group of women leaving the workforce is motivated by both push and pull factors. These women, as Matchar (2013) argues, are raised with the

idea that they can be anything they want, that they can “have it all” according to the postfeminist adagio. But once they tried to enter the workforce, especially after the recession hit in 2008, it turned out to be more difficult than that. Wages were low and working conditions less than satisfying. Working long hours, they started to ask themselves if it was truly possible to “have it all”. Watching how their mothers had struggled in combining professional careers and family, a life as a happy homemaker seemed increasingly appealing (Matchar, 2013).

New domesticity, in this sense, can be seen as a reaction to some aspects of present day life. Matchar (2013) distinguishes between six factors that are important in the rise of New domesticity in the United states. First, people increasingly distrust large social institutions such as the government, corporations and the food industry which leads to preference for a self-reliant DIY lifestyle. Also, a concern for the environment has become increasingly individual, as people try to make a difference themselves by adjusting their lifestyle under the statement of “We can’t control what’s outside the home, but we can control what’s inside” (Matchar, 2013, p. 20). This frugal lifestyle is also motivated by the aforementioned recession and the discontent and disconnection from the workplaces high demands and low rewards (in terms of for example wage and maternity leave). Fifth, the increasing presence of technology in every part of life has drawn people to hands-on work and skilled labour. Finally, as Matchar (2013) shows in a chapter on attachment parenting, the standard for parenthood is set higher and higher.

Therefore, new domesticity is a way of talking and thinking about life, within the context of social circumstances. It is a conversation that includes stories on slowing down, going back to basics, and doing what seems ‘natural’, within a historical and societal context that becomes increasingly fast-paced. In analysing this conversation it is important to consider the idea that this discussion is limited to a certain group of people in the condition to focus on such a lifestyle. Matchar (2013) states that new domesticity is explicitly pertained to the middle-class. Lower, working, classes do not have the financial freedom to quit a job and invest in time and money consuming efforts as canning jam and searching for organic products. Back to basics has a much less romantic feel to it when you experience true rural poverty (Matchar, 2013). For the truly rich high-class there are many options. The feeling that society has failed them, therefore, is something felt especially in the middle-class.

This element as well as the discussion on feminism and domesticity make the lifestyle of, or the conversation on, new domesticity an interesting one. Because what can be said about educated women leaving the workplace to solely focus on domestic tasks and childrearing? Is this a feminist act, as some have argued, or is it a return to pre-feminist ages? And why is it important to understand new domesticity as particularly a middle-class phenomenon? In order to deepen our understanding of New domesticity as used by Matchar (2013), the concept will be further discussed in relation to existing scientific theories in the following paragraphs.

2.1.2. The private and the public sphere: nineteenth century domesticity

The development observed by Matchar (2013) also been registered in a small amount of academic literature (Campbell, 2001; Hollows, 2006). For example, Hollows (2006) has identified a similar development among her peers. As a result, the author has sought into literature on femininity and domesticity, and identified a lack of such literature. While critical approaches of post-feminism use the distinction between feminist and homemaker as an illustration of how post-feminism tries to go back to before feminism, positive approaches largely focused on single girls making it in the public sphere, like *Ally McBeal* (Mosely and Read, 2002) and *Sex and the City's* Carry Bradshaw (Gerhard, 2005).

Hollows (2006) argues that feminists have often reproduced the distinction between public and private, by preferring to move into the urban public sphere as part of masculine culture, instead of the private suburban home. The author identifies a literature that is anti-home and describes domesticity as dull, familiar, narrow-minded and ultimately anti-feminist. A literature that states that in order to truly 'move forward', one has to move into the public sphere, not into the home. This results in a lack of academic literature on femininity and the private sphere of the home.

This distinction between the private and the public sphere is very important in the discussion on domesticity or domestic cultures. Scholars argue that the distinction between two separate spheres has come about along with modernization in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Hollows, 2008). Before, in pre-industrial times, the public and private were united in one house as a sight for work and family life. As people lived with both family and others (employees, colleagues) the home was rather a social place than a private place (Hareven, 2002). The distinction between the public and the private was made "following the removal of the workplace from the home as a result of industrialization and urbanization" (Hareven, 2002, p. 35).

The public and the private have been defined by their oppositional values. The private has become associated with the household, the domestic and the family, while the public is associated with the political community, sociability and the market economy (Weintraub, 1997). Similarly, the public has connotations with urban chaos, mobility, impersonality and the private with the domestic, organic, natural (Hollows, 2008).

Home had come to be seen as a special place; a place to be 'yourself' and put down roots; a place of innocence, warmth, intimacy and hospitality; a site devoted to marriage and the family, to religion and morality, to leisure rather than labour; a stage to display status through the exercise of 'good taste' through appropriate consumption; a place of national importance. (Hollows, 2008, p. 17)

Accordingly, the private and the home have become associated with femininity and feminine values, while the public has become associated to masculinity. With the introduction of modernity production

increasingly became a public activity, which was left to men, as women became responsible for the home and the family (Hollows, 2008).

Therefore, the nineteenth century brought forward what Welter (1966) calls 'The Cult of True Womanhood'. According to this ideal image of a woman, true femininity was based in four basic values: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity (Welter, 1966, p. 152). Welter (1966) argues how these four values successively kept women in the private sphere, using their 'strength' and 'power' to serve their families, working in silence to acquire the love and affection of her loved ones, "without thought of money or ambition" (Welter, 1966, p. 160). Dependency, gentleness and submission were important elements of the true woman. Appropriate pastime for women was found in arts and crafts (varying from embroidery to knitting to painting frames for her own artwork), writing letters and arranging flowers (Welter, 1966).

Domesticity was the way for women to make their men better men, and to protect their family from the desires of public life. True womanhood, or true domesticity, was therefore a way to improve the values of society at large. Welter (1966) quotes the American magazine *The Lady at Home* stating "even if we cannot reform the world in a moment, we can begin the work by reforming ourselves and our households – It is woman's mission" (p. 163). This discourse suggested that True Womanhood was an ideal situation, as women had both "power and virtue" (Welter, 1966, p. 173).

This discourse of the woman as the guardian of proper (Christian) values inside the home was also very tied to religion and class (Hollows, 2008). Women's caring role was seen as natural for them, as they were more pure, pious and therefore, more religious (Hollows, 2008). Women were seen as naturally more suitable to guard Christian and moral values in the home, and this task gave them 'equal power' to that of men (Davidoff & Hall, 2002; Williams, 2000). At the same time, this discourse kept women confined to the private sphere, as it was seen as their explicit task to guard it. Hollows (2008) notes that this nineteenth century discourse on femininity, domesticity and morality should be related to class, as it was a characteristic of the emerging middle-class, separating itself from both lower and higher classes using domestic culture (Davidoff & Hall, 2002).

In the interwar period domesticity became professionalized and modern, with help from emerging technology. Housekeeping was increasingly understood as a 'science', as the idea of the professional housewife appeared (Hollows, 2008). Domesticity was made more efficient and standardised. Some authors argue that the rationalization of housekeeping, the introduction of modern technologies in the privacy of the household, deprived women of their domestic autonomy, deskilled them and made them passive consumers (Matthews, 1987; Sparke, 1995). Others argue that the loss of personal servants in the interwar period and new technologies required women to acquire new skills (Hollows, 2008). Also, the discussion on domesticity in this time period is mediated by class, as middle-

class discourses on domesticity still focused on the pleasurable aspects of domesticity such as cooking, childcare and interior design (Giles, 1995).

2.1.2. Domesticity and second-wave feminism: liberal feminism and domestic feminism

Moving forward in time, second-wave feminism in the late 1960s and 1970s introduced new ideas about femininity and the two separate spheres (Hollows, 2008). Under the adagio “The personal is political” feminists argued that politics was not just performed in the masculine public world, but also in the private sphere. On the other hand, the existing discourse on the home as a safe place, guided by mother, protecting its inhabitants from the public world of work was understood as enforcing gendered inequalities and denying the fact that women were actually performing work inside the house. Moreover, the gendered distinction in two separate spheres was understood as contributing to gender inequality by producing and reproducing ideas about masculinity and femininity (Hollows, 2008). Therefore, Hollows (2008) identifies two feminist positions on domesticity, which are referred to as liberal feminism and domestic feminism:

Although many feminist critics have seen domesticity as an ideology imposed on women that naturalized their roles as housewives and helped to reproduce gender inequalities, other critics have suggested that women’s investment in domesticity can act as a basis for a form of resistance to a male dominated public sphere. (Hollows, 2008, p. 56)

The first position is well illustrated by Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), in which Friedan identified ‘the problem with no name’. In this classic work Friedan discusses the increasing unhappiness of American middle-class housewives in the 1950’s. Intelligent women had retreated to the suburbs to live a life focused on motherhood and housewifery, leaving their promising future behind. Friedan argues that the discourses in magazines of the time promoted the idea that taking care of children and husband was naturally fulfilling for women: the *feminine mystique* (1963). According to the author, the idea of the ‘professional housewife’ was promoted by advertisers to keep women from acquiring a ‘truly professional’ career in the public sphere, legitimizing their role of mother and housewife (Friedan, 1963). Domestic work proved to be unfulfilling for these women, because of its repetitive and dull nature, as they showed symptoms of depression. Friedan (1963) argued that a life focused on housework and motherhood would never be truly fulfilling for women. According to the author, focussing on their own identity creation rather than that of others, women should find meaningful education and work as a ‘cure’ for the feminine mystique (Friedan, 1963).

This study is one of the starting points of the representation of housework as “boring, monotonous, laborious, degrading and isolated drudgery” (Hollows, 2008, p. 68). The housewife and the feminist became two oppositional characters in the eyes of the liberal feminist, stating that a lifestyle focusing on domestic work could never be united with feminism. As Hollows (2008) argues,

Friedan's statements can be critiqued when it comes to class, as Friedan (1963) focused on the middle-class housewife with material wealth. The function of social class as a moderating factor in domesticity will be discussed further on.

The second (alternative) position on feminism and domesticity – domestic feminism – focuses on the very topic liberal feminism critiques: the idea, as originated in Victorian times, of the feminine nature leading them to be more virtuous and suitable for domestic work. Instead of motivating women to move into the public sphere to measure themselves with masculine culture, this position celebrates values associated with femininity. It focuses on the differences between men and women rather than equality (Hollows, 2008). In one of the important texts on this position by Carol Gilligan (1982) it is argued that men and women think in fundamental different ways when confronting ethical dilemmas (Gilligan, 1982; Griffin, 2011; Hollows, 2008). While men are focused on an ethic of justice, women are focused on an ethic of care, centred around others instead of the I (Griffin, 2011). As women show more empathy, it is suggested that they are more virtuous and therefore, morally superior (Hollows, 2008). It is also suggested that women should use these virtues as a counterbalance for the rational and masculine public sphere, which focuses on achievement and self-interest (Hollows, 2008). As critic Joan Williams (1991) stated: "At best, Gilligan's celebration of domesticity promises to resuscitate a rhetoric in which Americans traditionally have expressed their misgivings about a society out of touch with human motivations other than self-interest" (p. 69).

This idea can be problematic as it matches essentialism, stating that there is an essential womanhood or motherhood, that has its basis in nature rather than culture (Hollows, 2008; Williams, 1991). This legitimizes the idea that women's place is in the home, not in the public sphere. This is one of the often mentioned criticisms on domesticity in feminist discussion. A different critical stance towards domesticity states that as housework is not recognised as true labour, women stay economically dependent on men, therefore reinforcing male dominance (Hollows, 2008). Also, as Gilligan (1982) suggests women are always oriented towards others, personal identity formation can be in danger as women are suggested to put the needs of husband and children first (Hollows, 2008).

Therefore, although second wave feminism did discuss domesticity and the private sphere, it was largely about women moving into the public sphere. This discussion resounds in post-feminism of the 1990's and early 2000's (Hollows, 2006).

2.1.3. Post-feminism as a basis for new domesticity

There is little agreement on the actual definition of post-feminism (Gill, 2007). Some have identified post-feminism according to the 'backlash' thesis, focusing on the distinction between feminist and housewife as two different characters, and identifying post-feminism as a return to pre-feminist times

as if second wave feminism had never happened (Faludi, 1992; Hollows, 2006). Feminism has been described as something constraining young women today in their freedom, as something young women want to distance themselves from (McRobbie, 2004). Others have identified post-feminism as a historical shift and focus on discourses about women in popular culture since the 1980's (Gill, 2007; Hollows, 2006; McRobbie, 2004). These discourses are about "what emerges between feminism and femininity" (Hollows, 2006, p. 104). They are about a generation of women that has been brought up with the freedom second-wave feminism has brought them. These women take this into account, but at the same time act in ways that might contradict feminist ideals (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004). However, they handle this 'double entanglement' with irony to give it a less heavy-handed touch (McRobbie, 2004). In this paragraph, I would like to expand on feminism using the explanation Gill (2007) has provided on post-feminism as a sentiment.

Rather than defining it as an actual (political) movement like first- and second-wave feminism, Rosalind Gill (2007) has identified post-feminism as a sensibility that emerged at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century and can be identified in media culture. Gill (2007) identifies this sensibility according to several features which are, according to the author, relatively stable in postfeminist discourses in (popular) media.

First, post-feminism in media is reflected by a focus on the body to display femininity: "Instead of regarding caring, nurturing or motherhood as central to femininity (...) possession of a 'sexy body' is presented as women's key (if not sole) source of identity" (Gill, 2007, p. 149). Second, the sexualisation of contemporary culture is reflected in post-feminism, as discourses about sex and the explicit showing of female (and male) bodies are increasingly featured in popular media. Whereas sexual female representations were once showing women as subjects of the male gaze, women are increasingly portrayed as active desiring sexual subjects (Gill, 2007). A third feature mentioned by Gill (2007) is a focus on individualism, reflected in discourses of personal choice, of 'being who you want to be' and of self-determination. These discourses imply that inequality is no longer an issue, and women can function as autonomous agents with freedom of choice, choices which they make in order to reach total personal fulfilment (Gill, 2007, p. 155). Related to individualism is the focus on self-management and self-surveillance, which requires women to be aware of their bodies and minds and the ways in which those are used. What do I look like and how do I act: who am I? This constant surveillance of the self seems to be a feminine subject, when looking at magazines (Gill, 2007). A fifth element related to the sensibility of post-feminism, according to Gill (2007) is a renewed focus on sexual difference that states that men and women are fundamentally different, whether biologically or psychologically. Media discourses on this subject suggest that there is no problem in this difference: it is unavoidable and pleasurable. When women are portrayed in sexist ways (as with the representation of ethnic minorities), humour and irony is used to give the subject lightness and dismiss any form of criticism (Gill, 2007).

Finally, post-feminism has a tense relationship with earlier feminism, and therefore can be called feminist as well as anti-feminist (Gill, 2007). As Gill (2007) suggests:

Postfeminist heroines (...) value autonomy, bodily integrity and the freedom to make individual choices. However, what is interesting is the way in which they seem compelled to use their empowered postfeminist position to make choices that would be regarded by many feminists as problematic, located as they are in normative notions of femininity (Gill, 2007, p. 162).

This ambiguous relationship between the post-feminist and the feminist brings us to the discussion on femininity and domesticity that will be elaborated on in the following paragraph.

2.1.4. 'Between the feminist and the housewife': new domestic femininities

In *Homeward bound: why women are embracing the new domesticity* Matchar (2013) has indicated the context of the development of new domesticity. The author argues that consumerism and public sphere post-feminism of the 1990's and early 2000's, as illustrated by role models such as *Sex and the City's* Carry Bradshaw and *Ally McBeal*, are replaced by a lifestyle that focuses on handmade objects and the private sphere of the domestic.

As indicated earlier, authors (Brunsdon, 2000; Felski, 2000; Giles, 2004; Hollows, 2006) have argued that since second-wave feminism the home, the domestic or the private has largely been ignored or discusses as something to be left behind in order to move forward. This is reflected in the earlier mentioned distinction between the housewife and the feminist (Brunsdon, 2000; Hollows, 2008). Also, research that described post-feminism as a new discourse on femininity related to popular culture, has largely focused on women in the public sphere, investigating television shows like *Sex and the City* (Gerhard, 2005) and *Ally McBeal* (Mosely & Read, 2002).

Joanne Hollows (2006) has investigated what emerges between the feminist and the housewife, describing the domestic femininities that have been ignored or criticized on earlier studies. In earlier work on Nigella Lawson's *Domestic Goddess* Hollows (2003) investigated the postfeminist identity as (re)presented by the famous television cook. A first important notion about Nigella's representation is her distinct middle class positioning (Hollows, 2003). In her books and programmes, the television cook makes references to both high and low culture, presenting herself as a cultural omnivore (Peterson, 1992) that enjoys both high and low class elements and thus presenting herself in the middle: in the new middle class (Hollows, 2003). Also, in her programmes Lawson involves in both hedonistic cooking and eating (eating a giant piece of chocolate caramel cake in the middle of the night) and healthy eating. This combination between upper class restraint and lower class indulgence also positions the cook in the middle class (Hollows, 2003).

Second, in her books and programmes, Lawson presents herself as a woman, wife and mother in the city, who loves to cook and eat for her own pleasure (Hollows, 2003). This is an important element when put in feminist perspective, as cooking is not represented as a feminine domestic task in service of the family, but as a pleasurable activity, a hobby. Lawson highlights the de-stressing, comforting nature of cooking something “as an escape of the demands of modern life” (Hollows, 2003, p. 185). Therefore Hollows (2003) argues that Nigella Lawson represents a new domestic femininity that focuses on pleasing and comforting the self, rather than others.

Hollows (2003) therefore argues that the cookbook on how to be a *Domestic Goddess* is not an argument for a return to pre-feminist times, but rather an advice for the hurried working woman on how to escape reality for a short period by investing time in baking a cake. “It is precisely the time consuming nature of baking that offers a temporary escape from the pressures of managing time, which, for many women, constitute the contemporary feminine experience of modernity” (Hollows, 2003, p. 106). Therefore, as a reaction to modern times, Lawson provides advice on how to feel like a domestic goddess, not how to become a domestic goddess. This fantasy about being the pre-feminist housewife gives women the idea of what femininity between the dichotomous housewife and feminist would be like. This because, as Hollows (2003) argues, the discourse on femininity remains one based on choice between several different femininities, within which the choice for the emancipated modern women remains the most legitimate. And still, in the abundance of choices for a contemporary woman, the fantasy of the ‘stable’ domestic goddess character seems a temporal escape from reality (Hollows, 2003).

2.1.5. New domesticity: dealing with contemporary reality

This escape from reality or reaction to contemporary reality is also identified as one of the fundamentals of new domesticity by other authors. Matchar (2013) identifies it in the non-scientific work that is at the basis of this thesis. But earlier Delilah Campbell (2001) identified the same development of reevaluating domesticity as a reaction to contemporary culture, as she compared the recent urge for nostalgia with Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* (1963) and asked: are we going back in time or are we making progress?

“Perhaps the greatest problem with work in the twenty-first century is the demands it makes on workers’ time” (Campbell, 2001, para. 6). Today’s working life is busy, harried, stressful and increasingly demanding (Campbell, 2001; Hollows, 2003). As Matchar (2013) notes, the financial crisis that started in 2008, has not made this any better. Although both Matchar (2013) and Campbell (2001) note that the phenomenon of new domesticity is not necessarily restricted to women, it is clear that the current dissatisfaction with the workplace and the resulting investment in domesticity is largely found among women. Surely, although the division of domestic work has become increasingly divided

between spouses, women are still performing most of the housework (Bianchi et al., 2000). Combining the 'first shift' of demanding work with a 'second shift' of taking care of house and children therefore particularly affects women (Campbell, 2001).

This is where we find a link between *downshifting* narratives and femininity. Downshifting stories usually include a reduction in working hours and the simplifying of life (Hollows, 2006). In a report by The Australia Institute (2003) downshifter were defined as "those people who make a voluntary, long-term, lifestyle change that involves accepting significantly less income and consuming less" (p. vii). Popular narratives on downshifting include urban civilians moving to the country in search of a simpler and happier life (Hollows, 2006), a narrative very similar to that of new domesticity as described by Matchar (2013). Hollows (2006) combines this downshifting narrative with femininity by arguing that difficulties of *urban femininities*, in combining work and private life, are thought to be magically resolved with a move to the 'rural idyll'. She concludes by saying "The downshifting narrative tries to imagine something between feminism and 'traditional' femininity, it tries to imagine a solution to the problems of inhabiting contemporary femininities" (Hollows, 2006, p. 111).

Hollows (2006) identifies two elements in the downshifting narrative that make it (seem like) a social critique, rather than a simple 'return home' or re-embrace of pre-feminist domesticity. First, it can be perceived as a critique of "the masculine values of corporate culture" (Hollows, 2006, p. 109) and second, a statement against consumer culture.

Campbell (2001) also mentions consumer culture as one of the 'motives' for those embracing new domesticity. She draws a parallel with Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1963) by saying the 1950's women suffering from 'the problem with no name' were partly suffering from the same problem as modern-day women. Increased technology and the ability to buy material things to help them in their domestic work 'de-skilled' women and made them passive consumers. The domestic tasks became repetitive and less psychically demanding (Campbell, 2001). There was increasingly less knowledge and skill involved in 'keeping house'. In the following years, consuming became a way of creating an identity: you are what you buy. According to Campbell (2001), in one way, new domesticity is a reaction to this. Making things yourself, buying locally and eating 'honest' food can be a statement against consumer culture. However, Campbell (2001) argues, this lifestyle still includes buying things. They might be more 'honest' and more natural things, but it still includes consuming. Therefore, the author argues that new domesticity is not so much a protest against consumer culture, but rather a way of giving things 'meaning':

... this kind of domesticity is not embraced to save either time or money. It has more to do with saving our souls, by replacing a meaningless consumption ritual like ordering a pizza with the more meaningful and creative process of making one from scratch. (Campbell, 2001, par. 7)

However, this meaning making includes investing money, because biological vegetables are more expensive than 'regular' ones, and time, because baking your own bread is a time consuming job. One has to be able to invest these resources in a lifestyle like new domesticity. Therefore, several authors (Campbell, 2001; Hollows, 2003; 2006; Matchar, 2013) have noted the connection between new domesticity and the middle-class. Both Hollows (2006) and Matchar (2013) note that the discourse of downshifting and authentic experiences is limited to middle-class women, who often enjoyed higher education. These women are in the economic position to make a choice. They partake in the pleasurable forms of domesticity, such as sewing and baking. New domesticity becomes a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) by which the middle class distincts itself from the working class, who is unable to invest in such a lifestyle, and the upper class, who does not need to invest in such a lifestyle as they are not limited by economic capital (Matchar, 2013).

Also, by investing in a Do-It-Yourself lifestyle and focusing on the family, or the local community, as the most important community, new domesticity neglects needs in society at large (Campbell, 2001; Hollows, 2008; Matchar, 2013). Because when high educated middle class women (and men) retreat from the labour market to invest in a high maintenance lifestyle that focuses on the family, who is going to rally for better childcare? In this way new domesticity, with its focus on the local, the family, the homemade, neglects needs of those unable to invest in such a lifestyle and demotivates people to be politically involved in solutions for society at large (Campbell, 2001; Matchar, 2013). At the same time, by investing time and money in a high-maintenance method of for example childcare, it is possible that new domesticity raises the standards for a 'good life' for those who might not be able to make a homemade meal every day or engage in attachment parenting (Matchar, 2013). Because of these considerations it is important to involve class in the discussion on new domesticity. Although not discussed here, race might also be an influential factor.

Summarizing this section it can be said that new domesticity is a lifestyle and a way of considering and talking about contemporary life that is reflected in a nostalgia for elements attributed to past times. This nostalgia is characterised by a renewed focus on domestic skills and practices and narratives of craftsmanship, community, care, cosiness and creativity. Authors have identified different causes for the emergence of new domesticity including: dissatisfaction with the labour market, consumption culture, individualization, industrialization and globalization.

New domesticity is mainly adapted by high-educated people (women) from the middle classes. Also, most of the new domesticity practitioners are women, as they are more likely to retreat from the labour market to take care of children. These two elements place discourses of new domesticity in a context of both gender- and class relations. As discussed earlier, questions can be asked about the reinforcement of feminine ideologies by using discourses of domestic femininities.

Because of this, this thesis will regard new domesticity as a discourse that relates to questions about ideology, because it is a discourse that might articulate existing gendered identities and gender relations, and furthermore draws on issues of access to (economic and cultural) capital. Therefore, the following section will discuss what concepts such as ideology and discourse mean, and why they are important in relation to new domesticity.

2.2 New domesticity: from ideology to everyday discourse

This section will discuss the concept of ideology and discourse in relation to new domesticity, asking three questions: what is ideology, how is ideology transferred and how does discourse disseminate culture? This will eventually lead us to the subject of analysis of this thesis in the final part of this theoretical framework: mommy blogs.

2.2.1. Ideology and hegemony

A concept such as ideology is hard to define and can be value-laden, as it can have positive as well as negative connotations (Van Dijk, 1998). It is often associated with Marxist theory, and is related to names such as Engels, Lúkacs and Althusser, as well as Durkheim and Mannheim on the “non-Marxist side” (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 2). As a result of its Marxist origins in the current everyday use ideology has a negative definition related to *false consciousness* of a dominated group in society as a result of political domination of those with control over material resources (Jost, 1995). This group was assumed to take over ideas and value systems disseminated by and in the interest of those in power. As a result, these ideas, ideologies, served to repress groups within society (Jost, 1995).

With regard to power, some argue that by transferring a certain ideology media can promote the ‘dominant worldview’ of the powerful in society. According to this view, media messages can serve to sustain existing power relations. Often these representations serve the interests of an economic or political elite. This elite has the ability to articulate and disseminate ideas about society “because of their privileged access to public discourse, and because of their tasks to lead a group, co-ordinate its actions, and make sure that its goals are realized and its interests protected” (van Dijk, 1998, p. 172).

Although the discussion on ideology still involves questions about power and the relation between social ideas and power, the concept has become more flexible and nuanced. As Machin and Mayr (2012) state “... the concept has developed a broader meaning to refer to belief systems held by individuals and collectives (...) it is used to capture the way that we share broader ideas about the way the world works” (p. 25). Van Dijk (1998) defines the concept broadly in his multidisciplinary study on ideology saying it includes “shared, social beliefs of (specific) social groups” (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 314).

These belief systems however, contribute to an idea about what is 'normal' in contemporary society, and what is deviant from that norm.

Ideology, in this sense, relates to Gramsci's (1971) theory of *cultural hegemony*. According to this theory power can be exercised through consent. Once conceptions of reality are accepted as common sense knowledge, they will be internalized and remain unquestioned. In his theory, Gramsci (1971) therefore describes how thoughts on what is 'natural' can serve the dissemination of ideology. For example, the conception of women being nurturers is hard to contest if this role is understood as natural for women.

This agreement on common sense ideas and values, has to be sustained through constant reinforcement, as some people do not have views that match the dominant hegemonic worldview. Moreover, as Stuart Hall (1992) asserts in his encoding/decoding theory, the receiver of a message might understand it in its intended interpretation, the dominant reading, but he or she might also read a message in a negotiated or even oppositional manner. This reinforcement and reconsideration happens through daily interaction, for example through institutions such as school or by interaction with media representation. For example, if media represent a narrow range of lifestyles, other values are being left out. Therefore, ideological analysis is not just about what is conveyed in messages, but also about what is not conveyed in messages.

In relation to the aforementioned Van Dijk (1998) refers to three important concepts with regard to ideology: cognition, society and discourse. Van Dijk (1998) refers to cognition as ideology includes belief systems consisting of thoughts and ideas. Second, these thoughts and ideas are societal, as they might be taken up by groups in social structure such as classes, institutions, organizations. They function in society, for example by giving certain groups the possibility to exercise power as mentioned earlier (Van Dijk, 1998). Thirdly the author emphasizes the role of language and discourse in the sustainment and reproduction of value systems.

2.2.2. The importance of discourse in reproducing ideology

Language is perceived as very important in the production of meaning. Language can be the carrier of a certain discourse as it is used in particular contexts. Discourse, therefore, is above linguistic elements such as grammar. It rather covers the ideas communicated by a text (Machin & Mayr, 2012). As Fiske argues, "Reality, the argument goes, is only accessible through the discourses we have available to make sense of it. Perception is a process of making sense, and sense is a product of discourse" (Fiske, 1987, p. 42). This discourse is a product of culture as well as the product of society, and a network of power relations within society (Fiske, 1987). Therefore, language can play an important role in conveying and

reinforcing ideas about society. As Machin and Mayr (2012) argue, language is “a means of social construction: language both shapes and is shaped by society” (p. 4).

This social construction is closely related to the idea of the social construction of reality. In *Cultural Studies*, reality is understood as a process, as conceptions of meaning are constantly produced and reproduced within social life. Audiences can be passive as well as active in this process, as receivers of reality and as constructors of reality (Adoni & Mane, 1984).

Adoni and Mane (1984) distinguish an objective reality, a symbolic reality and a subjective reality. The tangible, more or less factual, objective reality is represented in for example media and arts. They become a symbolic reality. When reflecting on this symbolic reality, an individual’s subjective ideas about reality can be influenced. This subjective reality can then influence the objective reality, as people start to have different conceptions of objective reality. This is where for example media can have an influence on the way in which audiences talk about reality: the discourse on aspects of reality.

Although the element of ideological power remains uncovered, concepts of hegemony and ideology are therefore also related to *framing*, a concept from *Media Studies*. As Entman defined it, to frame is “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. 5). The concept of framing therefore discusses the way in which media present the public with messages that have meaning instilled because of the way it is presented. There is a perceived reality, not an observable or factual reality, and media select elements from this reality for the public. In doing so, media present their audience with something to think about and a guideline of how to think about it. Media can thereby direct discourses on particular topics.

However, this thesis will use blogs for its analysis. As will be discussed in the following sector blogs can be considered a medium (Walker Rettberg, 2013). However, they are also interactive media, as the very premise of a blog is in its linkage to other sources on the web (Walker Rettberg, 2013). Moreover, readers have the ability to engage in interaction with the writer (and each other) using for example the comment section (Walker Rettberg, 2013). Therefore, although the concept of framing is very useful in discussing the representation by media, it neglects the agency of the reader by focusing on the way in which producers endow media messages with meaning and ignoring the capacity of the reader to interpret messages in different ways. The combination between the notions of discourse and interactivity thus brings us to the concept of cultural dissemination, after which I will also discuss some issues with regard to the agency of readers in interpreting messages and using it in their daily lives, by referring to research performed in feminist cultural studies.

2.2.3. Discourse, cultural dissemination and the agency of the reader

Theory on cultural dissemination explains the spread of cultural ideas (or ideologies) and its possible incorporation in 'mainstream' culture by assuming that:

(...) the likelihood that a given cultural feature will spread from one individual (or group) to another depends on how many other features they may already have in common. Similarity leads to interaction, and interaction leads to still more similarity. (Axelrod, 1997, p. 205)

The theory explains how culture is social in that this system of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours is something people learn from each other (Axelrod, 1997). The more characteristics people share, the more likely they will adopt aspects of each other's culture (Axelrod, 1997). In his model Axelrod (1997) explains how each culture adopts similar aspects of its neighbouring culture until each neighbouring culture has either an identical or a completely different culture. Therefore, the author concludes among others that local convergence can lead to global polarization, as two distinct cultures eventually remain (Axelrod, 1997). In relation to the discourse of new domesticity, this is not only interesting as this theory suggests that new domesticity's investment in an anti-globalization subculture might have opposite effects, but also when considering the dissemination of the new domesticity values among readers with similar traits. These similar traits can possibly be found in the consumers of the research subject of this thesis: the readers of mommy blogs. This indicates that mommy blogs can serve as disseminators of particular values as they feature discourses on new domesticity. The mommy blog will therefore be discussed in further detail in the following section.

Before discussing the mommy blog as a medium, a final note has to be made with regard to the interactive nature of blogging and its relation to ideology. The discussed literature on ideology and hegemony understands meaning mainly as something that is produced and disseminated. Discourses are considered to be transferred by the producers of a (media)product, similar to what the theory of framing suggests. However, as the encoding/decoding theory by Stuart Hall (1992) and the conception of the social construction of reality (Adoni & Mane, 1984) suggest: there is no one-way-path in the production of meaning. Others in cultural studies have suggested that receivers of messages are active in their reception of meaning, by 'consuming' deliberately and in different ways. The audience is considered to be active. Therefore, active audience theory implies that:

(...) conditioned by social and psychological structures and within the constraints of available communications, individuals choose what communications settings they will enter (...) the decision to enter into communication is motivated by goals and uses that are self-defined, and that active participation in the communication process enhances, limits and influences the effects of exposure. (Levy & Windahl, 1984, p. 51-52)

Therefore, audiences are able to interpret media messages in different ways and they use media in different ways. An important academic example to this respect is the research by Janice Radway (1984) on women's reading of romance novels. In her research Radway (1984) analysed both the texts of romance novels and the interpretations of their readers, in order to uncover in which way the women she questioned read these books. Romance novels are often dismissed and devalued because of their lowbrow characteristics and sexist content, similar to soap operas. However, in her analysis, Radway (1984) found that the romance novel readers were not reading the books because of its content, but rather for the act of reading. The act of picking up a book provided them with an escape from the demands of their daily lives as stay-at-home mothers and wives, giving them the opportunity to immerse themselves in a fictional world in which the female main character has all her needs met. Therefore, for these women the act of reading romance serves a purpose, while the message of the book enables the women to vicariously have their needs for nurturance met through the fictional story. Also, the story gives them 'hope' that there is a possibility of romance in which a man takes care of the needs of a woman. Radway (1984) concludes from this that the readers of romance novels used their reading as a way of dealing with, and in some way protesting against, their own social circumstances, while at the same time remaining connected to the family. As the author only questioned white middle-class women, she implies that a medium such as romance novels can be read and interpreted in different ways, depending on the (social) circumstances of the reader.

Similarly, Ien Ang (1982) has studied Dutch (mainly female) viewers of *Dallas*, questioning how it is possible that these women enjoyed a television show that structurally presents women in unfeminist ways as passive and dependent. Like in the study by Radway (1984), the viewers of *Dallas* enjoyed their experience because it gave them the position to 'experience' certain stereotypical female positions through the fictional characters. The act of fantasizing of the situations presented in the series served as some kind of liberation, because the women were able to have certain experience without having to face real-life consequences.

These studies show that women, the indirect subject of this analysis as well, can engage in several uses and have several interpretations of a media text. Although this paragraph has mainly focused on discourse and ideology, because this thesis will analyse texts instead of consumers of media, this thesis also discusses the social meaning of discourses of new domesticity in discussions on femininity. Therefore, these studies on the way in which the production and consumption of media function in the creation of meaning are also of importance.

Summarizing, it can be stated that it is important to investigate discourses as they can serve as carriers of certain ideas and value systems. By means of language, social reality is constantly reinforced or negotiated. This reproduction of ideas about reality is mainly performed by social institutes such as

the educational system and the media. However, the receivers of these ideas are not necessarily passive. They are able to 'read' messages in certain ways, and adopt them to their own situations.

This thesis will focus on how ideological values are transferred through a discourse on new domesticity in media. As mentioned before, this discourse includes elements of community, craftsmanship, care, domestic skill, "the cute aesthetic" (Matchar, 2013, p.78) and "time over money and people over things" (Matchar, 2013, p. 218). The specific medium that will be investigated is the blog, and more specifically, the mommy blog. The following section will expand on this medium, its meaning for its readers and its relation to the discourse of new domesticity.

2.3 New domesticity and mommy blogging

As mentioned before, this thesis will analyse discourses on new domesticity as featured in mommy blogs. The previous has discussed what discourses on new domesticity are and why they are important in relation to feminism and class-relations. Section two has discussed the importance of investigating discourses in this context. What finally remains to be discussed is an explanation on the mommy blog as the subject of analysis. Therefore, this section will discuss what can be defined as a mommy blog, what its functions are, and why it is important to discuss these media in relation to new domesticity.

2.3.1. Defining the mommy blog

First, a mommy blog is a weblog, blog in short. Weblogs are online journals on a diverse range of topic which are regularly updated and which shows posts in reversed chronological order (Lopez, 2009). It often includes categories, a brief introduction of the writer and affiliations with other websites (Morrison, 2010). Walker Rettberg (2013) defined the blog by its formal features as "a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first" (p. 32).

As mentioned earlier, the blog can be defined as a medium as well as a genre. Walker Rettberg (2013) argued that, when considering the blog by defining it by its software it can be called a medium for transmitting messages, like television can be a medium to show movies. Within this definition genres and sub-genres appear. Because this thesis focuses on the function of the blog to transmit certain messages, the blog will be defined as a medium. Two main genres can be distinguished within the blogging world. First, a genre of filter blogs that usually focuses on one range of topics, such as political blogs. These blogs often use links or references to other (mainstream) websites to create a narrative (Walker Rettberg, 2013; Webb & Lee, 2011). The second genre is the personal blog, an online platform similar to a journal or diary, reflecting on stories from daily life (Webb & Lee, 2011). Although these blogs are characteristically private, they can still reach a significantly large audience.

Mommy blogs therefore, are a sub-genre of the personal diary blog. Webb and Lee (2011) defined a mommy blogger as “a woman whose blog content is predominantly about her family” (p. 244). Similarly, Lopez (2009) described mommy bloggers as “simply women who are mothers and occasionally write about their children” (p. 734). In doing so, they write about motherhood related subjects such as pregnancy and nurturing. But mommy bloggers also write about a range of other subjects such as food, lifestyle, arts and crafts. These last elements are the focus of ‘creative’ or ‘craft’ mommy blogs, as they are used in this thesis. Creative mommy bloggers write about motherhood, as well as creative projects (sewing, knitting, crafting, DIY). Therefore, these mommy bloggers blog about motherhood as well as a certain creative lifestyle.

Morrison (2010) argues that the genre mommy blogs should not be defined by the practical elements by which weblogs are usually defined, such as posts in reversed chronological order, or by the discourse in the text, for example texts about nursing and pictures of a trip to the park. Instead, the genre should be defined by what it does. Therefore she argues mommy blogging can be understood as “deliberate social engagement, a creative as well as interpersonal practice that mitigates the assorted ills (physical isolation, role confusion, lack of realistic role models etc.) and celebrates the particular joys of contemporary mothering, especially in the earliest years of parenting” (Morrison, 2010, p. 1). According to the author, the genre should be defined by its functions rather than its characteristics or content.

2.3.3. Functions of mommy blogging: what do they do?

Community - As mentioned before, weblogs possess social and interactive characteristics as communities can originate among readers, for example around a certain topic, or among blogs and bloggers themselves, by interlinking several different blogs (Li & Chignell, 2010). So while the blog is often used as a diary to write down personal stories, it can also function as a medium facilitating “in interaction with other bloggers and readers, thus allowing for the emergence and sustaining of communities of shared interest and subcultural identification” (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1410). In the formation of these communities, (perceived) similarities between blogger and blog-readers play an important role (Li & Chignell, 2010), as the earlier mentioned theory on cultural dissemination might suggest. Research has shown that people are more likely to be attracted to bloggers they think are similar in character to themselves (Li & Chignell, 2010). This community aspect is also very important in the ‘blogosphere’ of the mommy bloggers.

Different authors have described this community-facilitating-function of mommy blogs (McDaniel, Coyne & Holmes, 2012; Morrison, 2010; Webb & Lee, 2011). The intimate audience of the blog can be understood as a group supporting the writing mother. As new mothers can be isolated from

the world, especially in a time where family support is not as self-evident, online communities can become very important (Morrison, 2010). Research has proven that blogging can improve the well-being of new mothers, as they feel a connection to the outside world (McDaniel et al., 2012). The community of readers and other mommy bloggers can therefore function as an online support group for especially new mothers (Webb & Lee, 2011).

Identity formation - This element of community feeling, and the function of the blog as an extended family supporting the new mother from outside, is connected to the second important function: the role of identity in mommy blogging. First, it has been proven difficult for new mothers to develop an identity as a mother. As there is no instruction manual on being a mother, writing a blog can serve to construct this maternal identity in relation to a supportive community (Morrison, 2010). This community can show appreciation of and validate the ideas, identity and creativity of mothers (Webb & Lee, 2011). This is also important in relation to the private nature of (new) domesticity as historically, domestic work or motherhood has not been considered as 'real work', leading to a lack of validation for 'women's work'. Modern women with high education levels are suggested to be in more need of personal or intellectual satisfaction, which may be offered by the supportive blogging community (Matchar, 2013). The other way around, for readers, identification with the mother writing the blog is very important (Karlsson, 2007). Because the stories are written in real-time, readers might be affirmed that "there are people like me in real-life" giving them a sense of recognition, which in turn leads to a sense of community feeling (Karlsson, 2007).

Re-evaluating notions of motherhood - A third function that has been identified by researchers is the ability of mommy blogs to re-evaluate and re-establish existing notions of motherhood (Lopez, 2009; Morrison, 2010). Popular media are thought to disseminate an image of motherhood and family life, that does not reflect the real experiences of mothers (Morrison, 2010). Mommy blogs have the potential to "challenge these dominant representations of motherhood within our society" (Lopez, 2009, p. 729) by discussing the difficulties of parenting and the mundane of everyday life. Morrison (2012) argues that this motivation to 'reveal' the truth about everyday parenthood within a society that "idealizes mothering in the abstract but offers very poor support of it in the concrete" (p. 4) is one of the central notions of personal mommy blogging. So, what are these discourses on motherhood and how are mommy blogs able to re-define motherhood?

2.3.4. Re-defining discourses on motherhood

Rebecca Powell (2010) catches discourses on motherhood in one phrase by calling it the good mother/bad mother dichotomy. The possible identities of motherhood, she argues, are based in the age-old distinction between the Madonna and the whore (2010). On the one side, the mother who

brings sacrifices in order to involve completely in the nurturing of her children, on the other side, the woman incapable of nurturing of her children, resulting in a collapse of the family.

In both childrearing manuals (Dobris & White-Mills, 2009) and popular media (Douglas & Michael, 2004) the idealized image of the involved and devoted mother is repeated. This discourse is often dominated by white, middle-class and relatively young mothers (Dobris & White-Mills, 2009). As Sharon Hays argued in *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (1996) modern women are expected to be involved in their child's every move, as both the child and motherhood are presented as something 'sacred'. Women should cater to their child's wishes, constantly monitoring its wellbeing and development. On the other hand, women are expected to be working professionals, leading Hays (1996) to conclude that today's discourse on motherhood includes an image of the mother who combines both unconditional motherhood and professional work: 'having it all'.

The same society that disseminates an ideology urging mothers to give unselfishly of their time, money, and love on behalf of sacred children simultaneously valorizes a set of ideas that runs directly counter to it, one emphasizing impersonal relations between isolated individuals efficiently pursuing their personal profit. (Hays, 1996, p. 97)

Likewise, Lopez (2009) argues that mothers are being divided in two camps: the professional working mother and the devoted stay-at-home mom. These two camps engage in debates on who is the better feminist, who is the better mother and who can 'have it all'. Like Hollows (2006), Lopez (2009) mentions the difficulties women can have in fulfilling the demands of motherhood along with the demands of femininity in itself and actually having it all. As Dobris and White-Mills (2009) suggest, women are often unable to truly 'get it right' as they are both condemned when failing as a mother, or failing as a feminist. Johnston and Swanson (2003) call this the *double bind* in their study of the representation of mothers in American magazines. In these magazines, women are less often shown as working mothers, and more as stay-at-home mothers. The representation of mothers promotes certain domestic motherly femininities, while at the same time stressing the inability of mother to reach such a femininity (Johnston & Swanson, 2003). Because to inhabit the role of the selfless and devoted 'good mother' women have to "effectively construct oneself as powerless" (Johnston and Swanson, 2003, p. 262), leaving them bound to the home. These contradictory representations of women and mothers suggest that there is nothing between the feminist and the housewife; the Madonna and the whore; the professional working mother and the stay-at-home mom. That there is no way of 'doing it right', because one identity will always influence the other.

Within this context, Lopez (2009) argues that mommy blogging can be understood as a 'radical act' of returning to the home and dismantling the stereotypical and/or romantic image of the ideal mother. As (young) mothers struggle with their identity as women and mothers, and the ambiguous expectations matching those identities, mommy blogs can serve to create communities of support and

identification. Moreover, mommy blogs can be spaces where women develop their own voice as a mother, possibly offering a counterbalance for idealized images in media and childrearing literature. As Powell (2010) argues, mommy bloggers can construct a fluid identity as they “present multiple subjectivities, interrupt their self-made dichotomies and resist the good mother/bad mother discourse” (p. 49).

What should be taken into account when concluding that mommy blogs can instigate another discourse on motherhood and femininity, is the fact that mommy blogging is a distinctly white and middle-class phenomenon (Powell, 2010; Lopez, 2009). Women with different socioeconomic backgrounds, and women of colour are not very well represented in the mommy blogging community (Lopez, 2009). This might affect the discourses on mommy blogs in some way. Also, critics have suggested that the economic incentives of some mommy bloggers, who use advertisements and sponsorship to monetize their blogging activities, might influence the content of these discourses (Friedman, 2010; Thompson, 2007). This is why it is important to make a distinction between mommy blogs with different levels of privacy. Morrison (2010) distinguishes between eight levels of accessibility ranging from password-protected weblogs which are only intended to keep relatives up to date, to commercial weblogs with magazine-like aesthetics designed to make revenue. The focus within this thesis will be on the blogs in the middle of the spectrum. The method chapter will discuss this in further detail.

Summarizing, mommy blogs are personal online diaries written by mothers, with parenthood as one of its main subjects. They provide possibilities of identity formation, identification, community formation and the re-establishing of notions of motherhood as women discuss their daily interactions as women and mothers. Therefore, within a community of mommy bloggers and their readers, specific discourses on motherhood might emerge that lend themselves for research. New domesticity is such a discourse, as it is closely linked to subjects of femininity and motherhood. These discourses will be the subject of this thesis answering the question: (How) do discourses of new domesticity feature in mommy blogs?

This theoretical framework has discussed the notion of new domesticity within a theoretical context. It has argued that new domesticity can be seen as a discourse, but should also be seen from a nuanced perspective that acknowledges the agency of the blogger. And finally, it has discussed existing theory on the medium of the mommy blog. Chapter 2 therefore has the function to introduce the concepts from the research question, without explicitly stating a hypothesis, but rather to sensitize the researcher in preparation of the analysis. The following chapter will explicitly discuss the units and method of analysis.

3. Research Design

As discussed in the previous chapter, this thesis explores the presence of discourses of new domesticity in mommy blogs, answering the research question “(How) do discourses of new domesticity feature in creative mommy blogs?” In the theoretical framework it was argued that new domesticity could be perceived as a new way of looking at life. New domesticity is a discourse that includes certain values considered to be important in life and giving meaning to life, including a focus on community, care, domestic skills, craftsmanship and creative skills. It includes narratives of simplifying life, downshifting to work less and care more, focusing on what is natural and honest and an importance of “time over money and people over things” (Matchar, 2013, p. 218). In this thesis, these values are considered to be a discourse closely linked to matters of feminine ideology, as new domesticity focuses on the importance of the private sphere. This discourse touches on the subject of the role of women in the private sphere, as they are still the primary performers of housework (Bianchi et al., 2000) and at the same time daughters of second-wave feminism and post-feminism. This subject matter will be discussed in relation to mommy blogs, as they are considered to be a medium that is able to transmit certain views on life. This chapter will discuss the specific mommy blogs used as units of analysis, the qualitative method used to research discourses of new domesticity in mommy blogs and the analysis of the gathered data. It will provide elaboration on the choices made to investigate the presence of discourses of new domesticity in mommy blogs and answer the research question.

3.1 Research method

This thesis uses qualitative content analysis to research the presence of discourses of new domesticity in mommy blogs. Firstly, qualitative research is the method of choice, because it allows this thesis to explore the concept of new domesticity (Boeije, 't Hart & Hox, 2009). The aim of this thesis is to investigate how new domesticity as a discourse can feature within a very specific part of society. In doing so it adds to the small amount of existing literature on domesticity by exploring and illustrating the concept. Second, qualitative method is useful in this case because it explicitly aims to investigate and explain the way in which meaning is culturally constructed. Discourses and ideology are concepts that are closely related to the production and distribution of these cultural meanings. Qualitative research methods that focus on analysing the way in which we use signs and language to socially construct reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), such as discourse analysis and semiotics, therefore inform the qualitative method used in this thesis: thematic analysis. This method in itself is used to analyse how human products, the blog posts, reflect and possibly transfer cultural values by addressing certain themes. Therefore, within this thesis the descriptive and rich nature of qualitative analysis is preferred.

This qualitative content analysis will be applied to the linguistic content of five creative mommy blogs. These texts are chosen as the subject of analysis, as they provide information on the way in which women talk about subjects of domesticity, motherhood and femininity. As discussed in the theoretical framework, mommy blogs are personal weblogs in which 'ordinary' mothers discuss their daily lives as women, wives and mothers on a regular basis. Subjects of these blogs include motherhood and parenting, but also lifestyle-centred subjects such as food, arts and crafts. The blogs that focus on the latter, the so called 'craft' mommy blogs, are the subjects of this research, as they are perceived to provide more rich information on the use of new domesticity discourse than the 'regular' mommy blogs, that cover a more extensive range of subjects and are therefore too complex for the scope of this research. It might be argued that by explicitly investigating creative mommy blogs, this thesis narrows down its research units in favour of its possible results. However, this thesis tries to research how a discourse of new domesticity features in creative mommy blogs, and not so much to which extent the discourse is used within the entire community. Therefore, this choice is made purposefully.

Mommy blogs serve as platforms to form and discuss an identity as a woman and a mother, engage in a community of likeminded women and with and among this community, re-evaluate notions of motherhood. Therefore, the content of these blogs reflects thoughts on values considered to be important in life. This thesis questions which topics are discussed in the blogs and more specifically, if and how values of new domesticity are reflected in the content. It questions how these topics relate to each other and to the concepts of ideology and discourse.

The content of the five selected 'craft' mommy blogs is analysed using *thematic analysis*, inspired by grounded theory. The former is "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Textual data are categorized and described, and often elements of the research topic are interpreted and explained through the categorization of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The specific steps that lead to the organization of the present content into themes are explained further in paragraph 3.3.2. First, I will elaborate on the methodological traditions that inspired this particular thematic analysis.

The analysis of the content is partly informed by grounded theory. Grounded theory has its theoretical basis in symbolic interactionism, which states that human interaction is essential in the creation of meaning. Symbolic interactionism therefore is "concerned about the generation, persistence and transformation of meaning and claimed that meaning could only be established through interaction with others" (Kendall, 1999, p. 744). Grounded theory uses these basic assumptions to formulate theory on (social) behaviour. From its original introduction by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 grounded theory aims for "the discovery of theory from data" (p. 1). By analysing data, the authors meant to generate theory, instead of first using literature to validate or confront existing theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Since the introduction of grounded theory, both Glaser and Strauss have developed separate views on the

execution of the method. This thesis is inspired by the three steps of data analysis as provided by Strauss and Corbin (1990): open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

With regard to the coding process opinions differ on the role of prior knowledge on the subject and the influence of the researchers' position on the analysis. The present thesis departs from grounded theory on this assumption, as academic literature is used in the theoretical framework to inform the researcher and provide a basis for the analysis. As there is no existent theory on new domesticity, and the exact subject of 'creative' mommy blogs (as opposed to 'regular' mommy blogs) has never been covered in academic research, literature was provided as a context for the thematic analysis. The definitions of and explanations on new domesticity, as well as the description of the definition and functions of mommy blogging therefore serve as sensitizing concepts that inform the analysis but do not direct it.

Glenn Bowen (2006) notes that the use of sensitizing concepts "might alert researchers to some important aspects of research situations, they also might direct attention away from other important aspects" (p. 14). However, as the research question of this thesis directly asks about the role of values of new domesticity in mommy blogging, a broad theoretical explanation on the subjects is justified here. The theoretical framework has identified a phenomenon which the analysis will further investigate. This thesis therefore does not aim to validate or reject existing academic theories as in a true deductive approach, but rather uses *sensitizing concepts* to come to a thematic analysis informed by grounded theory using the coding process provided by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Just ideological analysis will not suffice in this context, as ideology is not purposefully imposed on or by the bloggers, but they themselves actively construct meaning through their writing. These meanings, however, might be informed by ideology. Therefore, I have chosen to engage in a broad thematic analysis informed by grounded theory. This thematic analysis is broad in the sense that it also focuses on narrative elements and the way in which these bloggers talk about their (feminine) identity. This research focuses not just on what these women do, but also on how they describe and interpret their activities, and therefore: how they create meaning by performing an everyday activity. This thesis investigates which role values of new domesticity play in this process.

Finally, I would like to relate the method used in this thesis to the methodology of ethnography. Although this thesis does not use ethnographic methods, for example by engaging with the subjects of analysis and observing them, it does keep in mind the underpinnings of ethnography. For example, Marie Gillespie (2005) notes how persons should be seen as:

...moving through and between multiple identities and social spaces, intimate and public, in and out of different texts and genres. We aim to study how audiences use media in complex and unpredictable ways and how the meanings they create are neither determinate nor complete. (Gillespie, 2005, p. 152).

In relation to this concept, this thesis wants to refer to studies such as those conducted by Ien Ang (1982) and Janice Radway (1984). Although both studies are audience reception studies investigating in which ways (female) audiences receive and negotiate meanings presented to them by mass media, both studies also investigate explanations provided by the women consuming the product in order to see how they use their media consumption practices in their day-to-day lives. This research also investigates in which way the bloggers use their blogging activities and the discourses in these blogs in their day to day lives. For example, Radway stated “A good cultural analysis of the romance ought to specify not only how the women understand the novels themselves, but also how they comprehend the act of picking up a book in the first place” (1985, p. 8). To this respect, this thesis not only looks for discourses on new domesticity in creative mommy blogs, but also explores the act of creative mommy blogging itself.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1. Units of analysis: selecting the blogs

The units of analysis comprise the; linguistic content of twenty-five blog posts on five different craft mommy blogs: *Dana Made It*, *Aesthetic Nest*, *Hart & Sew*, *Make It & Love It* and *No Big Dill*. A pilot analysis of the linguistic and visual content of the first seven texts from the dataset, has shown that the images accompanying the blog posts are certainly interesting subjects to investigate, as they inhibit meaning as much as the linguistic content. However, in order to properly analyse one aspect of the blog posts within the scope of this research it was chosen to focus on the textual content. Moreover, in the textual content the bloggers more directly reflect on the values they hold, which makes it more suitable for this research. Therefore chapter 4 will primarily discuss the results from the analysis of the (textual) thematic analysis. However, it will also refer to the implications provided by the text analysis, with regard to the visual content of the blog posts.

Four of the five blogs were selected from the Babble Top 50 Mom Craft Blogs of 2013¹. Babble is a website and blogger network that focuses on providing advice for young urban parents on a number of lifestyle topics such as pregnancy, health, food, travelling and parenting. When acquired by the Walt Disney Company in 2011 Disney senior vice president Brooke Chaffin was quoted saying “With more than 3.9 million mom blogs in the U.S. alone, Disney Interactive recognizes and values the important

¹ The four blogs were selected from the Top 50 Mom Craft Blogs of 2013 at the beginning of April 2014. A month later, Babble.com went offline for several weeks due to “substantial infrastructure issues” (Babble, 2014) All previous content was lost, including the Top 50 used for the selection of the units of analysis for this thesis. Babble confirmed that they were unable to retrieve the content (Disney Online Support, personal communication, May 28, 2014). Because of this, the following short summaries of the selected blogs do not include a reference to their position in the Top 50.

and powerful role moms have taken on in new media” (Rusli, 2011). The background of this website, and therefore the possible commercial interests involved in the selection of the Top 50, have to be kept in mind. However, as the blogs are selected by a jury of “industry insiders” (www.babble.com), it can be assumed that the selected blogs can be seen as representative of the community.

Finally, the fifth blog, *No Big Dill*, is added because of its relation to the other blogs. A small network analysis (Appendix I), performed using network mapping software *Issue Crawler*, has shown that *No Big Dill* is related to both *Dana Made It* and *Aesthetic Nest* and vice versa. *Dana Made It* is the only blog to refer to *Make It & Love It*. This relation does not exist the other way around. *Hart & Sew* turned out not to be referring to any of the other blogs, nor do the other blogs refer to *Hart & Sew*. Therefore, the selection of the blogs as units of analysis first occurred using authoritative sampling, with Babble.com as the authority. The fifth blog was added using snowball sampling, because of the other blogs referring to this blog as one with similar characteristics. Before continuing to explain why these blogs were chosen for analysis, a short summary of the (characteristics) of the blogs will be provided in the insert below.

***Dana Made It* (www.danamadeit.com)**

Dana Made It is written by Dana Willard, a mother of three children living in Texas. Willard’s archives reach back to 2008. On her blog she writes about her daily life and the things she has made for her children or herself (including clothing, but also bags). Also, she shares instructions on how to make things (for example on how to make a garland) and tips on recipes. Willard is the initiator of ‘series’ and uses her blog to sell her patterns.

***Aesthetic Nest* (www.aestheticnest.com)**

Aesthetic Nest is written by Anneliese, a mother of two daughters. The last name of Anneliese is never mentioned. The archives of *Aesthetic Nest* reach back to 2006. Anneliese writes about the clothing she makes, mostly for her children, but sometimes for herself. She also engages in crocheting, and other forms of craft. She sells patterns and other instructions on how to make things in her online shop(s).

***Make it & Love it* (www.makeit-loveit.com)**

Make It & Love It is written by Ashley Johnston, a mother of three (soon to be four) children. The archives of *Make It & Love It* reach back to 2008. Since then, Ashley Johnston has blogged about her sewing projects, but also about recipes, home decorating, gift ideas and other types of crafting. Johnston shares instruction on how to make things in her tutorials and owns an online shop in which she sells patterns.

***Hart & Sew* (www.hartandsew.blogspot.com)**

Hart & Sew is written by Stacy Hart, a mother of two daughters. Although recently, Hart has mostly used her blog to document her current pregnancy and her daily life with her two girls, she also shares her sewing and DIY projects and some incidental recipes. Also, Hart uses her blog to show the new additions to her online vintage shop.

(continuation of the previous page)

No Big Dill (www.nobigdill.com)

No Big Dill is written by Katy Dill, a mother of six children. Dill's archives reach back to 2006. She mainly shares her sewing activities, which are often a result of a 'blog tour' Dill has initiated. She also shares recipes and regular posts about her daily life. No Big Dill features the most in-depth reflections on life.

Within this thesis I have chosen to analyse American 'craft' mommy bloggers, as the book that introduced the concept of new domesticity, and therefore partly served as a motivation for this thesis, is written in the United States of America. Although new domesticity could very well be present in other countries as well, Matchar (2013) wrote the book referring to a trend in American society. Furthermore, the article by Lopez (2009) discussing the radical nature of mommy blogging, which can be considered one of the first academic articles on the subject matter, explicitly focuses on the American blogging community. Therefore, because the theoretical basis for this thesis refers to American culture, American mommy blogs were chosen as the subject of analysis.

In relation to the distinction made by Morrison (2010) concerning the extent to which blogs are public or private, this thesis focuses on blogs in the middle of Morrison's (2010) scale being not completely private, but also not completely commercial. These blogs are all publicly accessible personal blogs that address an audience not known to the writer, either to engage in "building a community by reciprocal reading, linking and commenting" (p. 4), to maximize an amount of readers in order to be more attractive to advertisers or "commercial personal blogs operated as revenue-generating professional writings" (p. 4). These blogs 'in the middle of the spectrum' were chosen, because their either completely private or completely commercial nature would possibly influence the results to a larger extent than the blogs in between.

3.2.2. Units of analysis: selecting the blog posts

As a result of a first orientation on the five selected blogs, different types of blog posts were identified. In order to make careful decisions about which types of posts to analyse for this thesis, the following types of posts were distinguished:

- Introductions: each blogger provides the reader with a smaller or larger introduction on her own persona, introducing herself to the reader in broad terms or specific characteristics.
- Tutorials: blog posts in which the author engages the making of something (often a piece of clothing) and explains to the reader how to make it, step by step, illustrated with images.

- Projects: blog posts in which the author engages in a project herself, but does not provide instruction to the reader on how to perform the project.
- Reflections: blog posts in which the author reflects on aspects of or events in her life. These posts are more about general happenings, than about the engaging in a project.
- Giveaways: blog posts in which the author announces (the winners of) a giveaway. The blogger gives away (sponsored) products to readers who participate by reacting to the post.

All these types of posts were to a greater or lesser extent reflected in the five blogs. In the selection of blog posts for analysis, these types were kept in mind as criteria for selection, making sure the dataset had an even division of bloggers and types of blog posts. Therefore, from each of the five bloggers, five blog posts were selected. The set of posts for each blogger contained at least one introduction, one reflection (except for Dana Made It), one tutorial (except for No Big Dill), and two projects (except for Make It & Love It). Because the five blogs did not spend an equal amount of attention to all types of posts, in creating the dataset the division was made as equal as possible. This resulted in the selection of five introductions, five reflections, six tutorials and nine projects, reflecting the relative presence of each of the categories. The average amount of words of the selected blog posts in these categories are respectively 519, 591, 606 and 576. However, the entire dataset ranges in size from an introductory blog post of 62 words to a tutorial of 1087 words. Therefore, the dataset includes a varied range of blog posts, representing the complexness and richness of the material.

The time period covered by the blog posts in the dataset falls between September 12th 2012 and April 10th 2014. The aim was to research content from the year 2013, as Matchar (2013) introduced the topic of new domesticity in her book in that year. Therefore, it can be assumed that the discourse of new domesticity is something to be researched in the time period on which the book reflects and looks ahead. Therefore, most of the units of analysis are published in the year of 2013 (15 blog posts), one in 2012, four in 2014 and five are non-dated, as the introduction of the author is always present on the website.

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1. Operationalization

As mentioned, this thesis uses thematic analysis inspired by grounded theory to answer the main research question: (How) do discourses of new domesticity feature in creative mommy blogs? In order to answer this question, the concept of new domesticity first has to be made measurable or identifiable. The concept has been defined in the theoretical framework as "... a change in lifestyle that focuses on a nostalgic return to elements such as the authentic, the natural, the community, the manual and the meaningful" and also: "This nostalgia is characterised by a renewed focus on domestic skills and

practices and narratives of craftsmanship, community, care, cosiness and creativity”. Because new domesticity is considered as a discourse reflected in certain values and practices, it remains difficult to pin down the concept in one coherent definition. Therefore, to turn the concept into something measurable, a list was composed of the values and practices attached to new domesticity, as a tool for identifying the concept in the analysed content. This measuring instrument is presented in the following table.

Concepts	Signal words/topics
Hand-made creativity	Making things by hand, being creative, creativity as an important element of life, having creative skills, engaging in creative practices (sewing, knitting, crocheting, painting, drawing etc.), DIY, “Cute Aesthetic: focus on what is cute and sweet”
Authenticity/simplicity	Real, true, honest, authentic, back to basic, simple life, focusing on the small things in life, “time over money”, engaging in meaningful activities, doing what is “truly important”, the value of putting some effort into something (effort as more valuable than money)
Re-skilling (domestic skills)	Having interest in practical skills that are considered to be lost in the past generations: cooking, creative skills (sewing, knitting, crocheting), keeping house, raising children.
Self-reliance/frugality	Making this yourself, taking matters into your own hands, having the skills to DIY, resistance to large corporations, reaction to commercialism by making objects yourself/anti-industrial, being frugal/wanting to save money
Natural	Doing what is natural, a focus on the ‘natural’ way things go, focus on nature (green, flowers, gardens, forests, mountains, natural material such as wool, cotton and wood), resistance to technology
Community	A focus on community and connection with people, preferably the local community (family, friends, village), “people over things”, spending time with people instead of technology, the importance of investing time in relationships, localization
Downshifting	The narrative of cutting back in work hours and simplifying life. “people who make voluntary, long term, lifestyle changes that involves accepting significantly less income and consuming less” (The Australia Institute, 2003). For example by moving from the city to a rural idyll.

Figure 1: Characteristics of new domesticity

3.3.2. Method of analysis

The analysis of the content of the twenty-five selected texts occurred through thematic analysis inspired by grounded theory. The three steps of open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) were applied in an open and broad manner.

Step 1. Open coding

First, open coding was applied. The text under analysis was read thoroughly. Then codes were applied to segments of the text, preferably per sentence, with the following questions in mind:

- What does the author say about herself in this sentence? Which propositions does she make vis-à-vis her understanding of what is important in life, her ideas about motherhood and her understanding of femininity and domesticity?
- What does the text imply about the authors' understanding of the world?
(Which values does she find important; what does she like and dislike?)
- When is the author active and when is she passive? (This question is related to the activity of the author, referring to the analysis of transitivity in linguistics and discourse analysis).
- Which words are used (often) in the text that might describe beliefs about aspects of life related to domesticity, motherhood, femininity? For example, which words are used to describe the authors state of mind and are they used more often? Which subjects does the author cover often using specific words?
- Which words in the text connote or denote new domesticity?
(Using the operationalised concepts referring to new domesticity).

Although grounded theory implies that the researcher should start analysing directly from the data, without providing a theoretical basis and predefined concepts first, these questions were posed as sensitizing concepts to give the research direction as the research question is specifically about new domesticity and the role it plays in the way women talk about feminine identity. These questions, as well as the theoretical framework and the measuring instrument presented in table 3.1, served as guidelines and were not followed in a rigid way. As a result of this, the codes applied to sentences were not always straightforward, one-word codes, but rather broad themes and thoughts on what was said in the content. During the process of open coding, recurring codes, themes and thoughts were noted as a preparation of the process of axial coding.

Step 2. Axial coding

Once codes were applied to the sentences or segments in each text, all important or illustrative sentences and segments with similar codes were grouped into categories of corresponding meaning. Hereby, the codes applied in different texts were grouped to see if certain themes were recurrent throughout different texts.

Step 3. Selective coding

During the process of selective coding, all categories were put together to see if there was a possibility of grouping them into larger main categories. Although Glaser and Strauss initially indicated that a grounded theory analysis should not be informed by existing academic literature (Glaser & Strauss,

1967), the selective coding process was informed by the literature used in the theoretical framework, creating the three main categories on which the result chapter is based.

3.3.3. Validity and reliability

Finally, a few notes should be made with regard to the validity and reliability of this research and the method used. Because of its qualitative character, the validity and reliability of this research are not directly measurable. The nature of thematic analysis causes this research to be dependent on the interpretation of the researcher to a certain extent. Therefore, with regard to the internal validity, this chapter has explained the method as it was applied during analysis into detail. Furthermore, the theoretical explorations in Chapter 2 and the operationalization of the concept of new domesticity in this chapter have served to sensitize the researcher in preparation of the thematic analysis and show the reader how this information has informed the research.

Finally, investigator triangulation was applied in order to contribute to the internal validity of this thesis (Thurmond, 2001). To this end, twenty percent (five blog posts) of the existing dataset was coded by a fellow student. First, chapters two and three (up to paragraph 3.3.3.) of this thesis were read to inform the second investigator about the sensitizing concepts that have informed this research, as well as the method used for analysing the content. Five blogposts were chosen that reflect the entire dataset based on the types of posts (one project, one reflection, one tutorial and two introductions). Using the existing research design, the second investigator first open coded the blog posts applying codes to sentences and/or parts of sentences. This second open coding process has shown that similar parts of the blog posts sparked the second investigators interest. Also, the second investigator made similar notes. For example, one authors reference to the way in which her mother taught her how to sew (Aesthetic Nest, n.d.) caused both investigators to make a note about nostalgia and heritage. As a result of the axial coding process the second investigator distinguished four main themes: creativity, authenticity, community and positivity. These themes are all to a greater or lesser extent present within the three main themes distinguished in the following result chapter.

With regard to external validity it is clear that this research is not generalizable. By choosing to analyse the content of five blogs from the entire population of mommy bloggers, this research rather investigates discourses that might emerge in the broader population. However, one should be critical about this choice. For example, the blogs that were selected are understood to be five of the fifty 'best' blogs. This means that there is a large amount of blogs of 'lesser' quality. Therefore, this research should be seen as a first academic exploration of the concept of new domesticity. To further explore the subject additional research should be performed. These implications will be further discussed in the conclusion.

Summarizing, this chapter has explained which methods were used to answer the research question “(How) do discourses of new domesticity feature in creative mommy blogs?” This thesis analysed the linguistic content of twenty-five blog posts by five creative mommy bloggers, that were selected from the 2013 Babble Top 50 Mom Craft Blogs. It did so using qualitative content analysis in the form of a thematic analysis inspired by the three coding steps from Strauss’ & Corbin’s (1991) version of grounded theory, using sensitizing concepts from the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the method was inspired by discourse and ethnographic analysis, asking about the activities performed by the women and what meaning the bloggers attribute to their activities.

4. Analysis & Results

As a result of the thematic analysis based on grounded theory, several themes were deduced from the content of the twenty-five craft mommy blog posts on five blogs. The themes were all to a lesser or greater extent present in the texts, their differences in presence caused by the type of blog post (introduction, reflection, tutorial, project) and author of the post. For example, No Big Dill includes more blog posts reflecting on her identity and life than Dana Made It, which focuses more on project and tutorial types of blog posts. This may have an influence on the themes and topics addressed by Katy Dill, as opposed to those addressed by Dana Willard. However, the overarching themes that were selected as a basis of this result chapter are all to some extent present in the blog posts.

As a result of the axial coding process thirty-five themes were deduced from the texts of the blog posts. During the selective coding process, these were reduced to ten themes, from which three overarching themes could be distinguished. These themes are: identity, new domesticity and community. These themes refer to the subjects discussed in the theoretical framework, among others in the discussion on the purpose of mommy blogs. These were said to be giving women the ability to create and reflect on their personal identity, engage in discourses on motherhood and create a sense of community. The analysis has shown that instead of engaging mainly in discourses on motherhood, the women in the 'craft' mommy blogs were engaging in forms of a new domesticity discourse.

First, the authors create an online-identity for themselves or reflect on their identity in their blog posts. They do this partly by reflecting on their love for and interest in aspects of new domesticity. Finally, the authors engage in a relation with both the reader and the community of other bloggers. This community of readers and other bloggers recognizes and acknowledges the presented identity, and thereby 'invests' in both the identity of the blogger and the discourse of new domesticity. In the following, these three themes and their sub-themes, will be discussed in detail. First, each theme will be discussed and illustrated with an example. Then, the theme will be related to the literature provided in the theoretical framework.

4.1 Identity

The five bloggers use different ways to define and reflect on their identity in their blog posts. They do not just define themselves in their personal introductions and the reflections on their life, but also in the project and tutorial posts, in which they reflect on their personal choices and likes. By means of their actions and the way they describe their actions, the authors also engage in identity formation.

4.1.1. Ideas, wants, needs, preferences and choices

The authors reflect on what they think and do in several ways. They mention what they think, want, need, prefer and how they make choices based on what they like. They do this on an abstract level, reflecting on what they want from life, and on a practical level, describing which choices they make in for example making a piece of clothing to achieve something they want. On an abstract level, several authors reflect on the essence of life. They reflect on what they need to live life the way they want to. For example, Katy Dill describes how “I deserve to have a home that is peaceful and positive” (Dill, 2013, August 26). In this citation, a peaceful and positive life is not just something Dill needs, but actually something she deserves. In this sense, authors actively describe what they want and deserve:

(...) life exactly how I **want** to live it. **Simple and uncluttered**, being present with **my loved ones**, keeping up with the inevitable household chores with a **happy attitude** and a **grateful heart**. **Watching** my children play, **answering** their many questions, **listening** to them sing or cry, and **kissing** their bumps and bruises. **Reading books**, making and cleaning up **creative messes**, teaching **love** and **forgiveness**, and preparing **nourishing** food to eat - all the **simple small things** we did that morning could be rolled up into one big beautiful life. (Hart, 2014, February 26)

In this citation Hart describes the values she finds important in life, and the way she acts upon those to give her life meaning. She values thankfulness (which is presumably linked to her Christian religion), human interaction, creative activities and ‘nourishing food’. The fact that food has to be nourishing according to Hart, and not ‘just’ food, implies that food has have some kind of meaning. These elements valued by Hart in this citation are all linked to new domesticity, as Hart describes how she wants to ‘do the small things well’. She wants to focus on her basic necessities of human interaction, creativity and ‘good food’, and that is enough to live ‘the good life’. She chooses to focus on these elements, to be satisfied.

Ashley Johnston of *Make It & Love It* also describes how she reaches what she wants by choosing crafting over other activities such as cleaning the house or playing instruments (Johnston, n.d.). Katy Dill illustrates this narrative of what the author wants and deserves and the choices they make in order to reach what they want by saying “It’s what we choose to *do* with our time” (original emphasis) (Dill, 2013, July 11). Dill describes how one has influence on one’s mental state, by making specific choices about which activities to participate in. By choosing to participate in activities similar to those described in the citation of Hart, choosing to focus on human interaction and creativity (‘the simple things’) the authors satisfy themselves.

On a practical level, the authors describe what they want and how they make choices in order to reach what they want, when they create a piece of clothing in a project or tutorial. Some authors describe in a detailed manner which choices they made in order to give her ‘project’ the look she wants it to have. For example, Anneliese from *Aesthetic Nest* describes how she has chosen certain fabrics to

connote boldness and a vintage look (Aesthetic Nest, 2013, November 16) and Katy Dill describes how she decides on the colour of a dress based on the dramatic look she wants for it (Dill, 2013, September 27). On an even more practical level Hart states how she decided on the design of a dress in order to make it last longer on her child (Hart, 2013, July 27).

To this respect, the authors spend a great deal of their blogging time 'in their head'. They have ideas and inspiration, they want to make something or need something. Often, authors describe what they 'like' and 'love'. Therefore, in terms of transitivity, the authors often engage in mental processes. This might indicate that the authors are passive in their behaviour, not engaging in actual active material processes that result into something. However, the authors also make choices in order to make these thoughts more tangible. Their creative mental process results in something tangible: a dress or a shirt. They 'materialize' their abstract mental processes, by engaging in activities that fit the lifestyle they describe they want or need. They do this by engaging in practices associated with new domesticity: being creative, preparing 'nourishing' food and being interactive with their loved ones. These elements will be discussed later on. What is important here, is that the authors of these 'craft' mommy blogs show themselves to be women who engage in mental labour, but also women who are able and want to make choices with regard to their needs and be active in this process.

4.1.2. Working and entrepreneurship

The second element in the theme of identity reflected in the content of the 'craft' mommy blogs is a focus on working and entrepreneurship. The bloggers value creative domesticity. They sew, knit and crochet. They like preparing food and decorating the house with DIY creativities. When they describe their sewing activities, the authors engage in what I will define here as a *project-narrative*. The project-narrative defines the activities performed by the authors as work. This is reflected in the words the authors use to describe what they do. They often use the word project, a word that connotes business-like activities performed with a certain target in mind.

Especially on Aesthetic Nest and Make It & Love It activities are described as a "sewing project" (Aesthetic Nest, 2013, January 17) or the author has a "house full of projects" (Johnston, 2014, January 3). Dana Willard does not talk of projects, but of sewing as work by calling it something she is "working on". Also, these activities are given extra meaning by calling it 'creating' instead of for example making. Creating, in this context, sounds like something that took some creative effort and love. Combining these two, authors also talk of creative processes or creative projects, making their activities into work that requires creative effort, thoughtful consideration and certain skills.

That the authors have skills is reflected in their ability to instruct the reader in their tutorials. By using imperatives, the author instructs the reader on the best way to make an item, suggesting that the

author has the authority and the agency to do so. When instructing the reader, the bloggers sometimes use (semi-)professional terms such as “use a basting stitch” (Johnston, 2013, July 1) or “trace all of the seam allowances and add other important information such as the center fold” (Hart, 2012, September 12). They use their experience as authority, sharing their experiences with the reader and instructing how to do it better. For example, Dana Willard states:

The dress has **full lining** (because honestly, that’s the easiest way to sew a dress, rather than **creating facings** and **hemming sleeves**, etc. Plus it looks pretty). (...) I popped a **MADE tag** in the side. (Willard, 2013, August 27)

The project-narrative and the authority and agency of the bloggers combine in entrepreneurship. All bloggers use their efforts in some way to be an entrepreneur, and possibly earn some money in the process. Dana Willard, Ashley Johnston and Anneliese (*Aesthetic Nest*) create patterns that they make available for compensation, Stacy Hart owns an online vintage clothing shop, and all authors have at least some advertisements on the blog. Sponsored content is used in the giveaway posts that were not analysed in this thesis, but to which authors do refer sometimes. Willard and Johnston have their own clothing labels, which they use to add their mark to a piece of clothing (Johnston, 2013, July 1). This suggests some level of professionalism. Finally, activities such as sewing and making patterns are described as a business that requires talent and insight. For example, Hart states how one of her fabric suppliers is “‘obsessively selective’ when it comes to stocking her shop with only the best” (Hart, 2014, April 10).

This element of working and entrepreneurship suggests that even though these women are mainly stay-at-home mothers, they also engage in work-like activities. They do not just remain in the private sphere engaging in domestic activities. Through blogging, they engage in the public sphere, showing their agency and authority on a certain subject (sewing) by instructing readers and ‘selling’ their activities through shops and advertisement. Therefore, their domestic femininity is not limited to a fantasy or an escape from the demands of modern life, as Hollows (2003) suggested. These women engage in creative activities because they like it and because it pleases them, but also to show their skills and put them to use, displaying their agency.

4.1.3. Sewing and blogging as an escape from daily life

With regard to their identities as mothers, the authors acknowledge that day-to-day life can be hard. They mainly describe their daily domestic routines as very busy, chaotic and sometimes boring. Anneliese describes her daily routine as very busy and active “ (...) my days are currently filled with stair climbing (to change diapers and put away laundry) and sprinting (between school, lessons and appointments)” (*Aesthetic Nest*, 2013, January 17). Katy Dill describes all the activities she performs in

her day-to-day life and suggests that this includes things that are obligatory and boring by saying “We just got through a bunch of camps, 3 birthdays and an anniversary, not to mention getting the kids back in school which includes the obligatory school shopping” and the “daily drudgery of chores” (Dill, 2012, August 26). Stacey Hart acknowledges she does not always engage in the “inevitable household chores” (Hart, 2014, February 26).

Moreover, the authors imply that there is always more work to be done. Being the main responsible for domestic tasks and taking care of the children is an ongoing task, that is never really done. For example, Anneliese describes how it feels like she is running a marathon cleaning up messes and “it still doesn’t look picked up” (Aesthetic Nest, 2013, January 23) and Katy Dill states that her work is never really complete:

Now that we have the token 3 boxes left in our bedroom, **like a blister that just won't go away**, we have done more streamlining, and **I feel there is even more to be done**, and **that it's never really complete**, just like the laundry and the feeding of hungry mouths. (Dill, 2013, July 11)

When the authors reflect on their day-to-day lives, blogging and sewing are sometimes presented as a refuge of these daily tasks. Ashley Johnston literally calls her blog her “little refuge” (Johnston, 2014, January 3), Dana Willard engages in DIY to save her sanity (Willard, 2013, April 23) and Katy Dill states “We need to hold on to creative outlets that add to happiness” (Dill, 2013, August 26). The satisfaction and joy the authors derive from their sewing and blogging experiences was one of the bigger topics extracted from the analysis. What might be indicated here already is that the blog and the creative activities communicated through the blog serve the authors in creating an identity (writing about what they want and choose). They do not just reflect on their identities as busy mothers, but actively construct an identity as a creative entrepreneur. Their focus on creativity then becomes a coping mechanism, like Hollows (2003) suggested with the domestic fantasy of Nigella Lawson, to deal with their harried reality. The act of making clothing gives the authors time to focus on a single activity that is initially performed for themselves, because they like to sew and because it gives them authority when they blog about it and are able to instruct others. This refers very much to the research by Radway (1984) and Ang (1982), who suggested that the simple act of picking up a romance novel or watching *Dallas* gave their respondents the chance to escape from their daily lives and experiment vicariously with identities that were not theirs. It could be suggested that through sewing and blogging, the five bloggers engage in a similar activity. As with Radway’s (1984) romance readers, the women retreat from their real domestic tasks by performing a certain activity, in this case engaging in a more enjoyable task they themselves do not perceive as domestic. As Hollows (2003) suggested, practitioners of new domesticity select the pleasurable forms of domesticity, such as cooking and sewing, using it as a

temporal escape from reality. And like the readers of Radway (1984) the bloggers engage in a task that gives them the possibility to remain close to their families, even interact with their families by making clothing for them.

Contrary to Radway's (1984) readers and Ang's (1982) viewers, the five bloggers are active in their escape-activity. Instead of being consumers, they actively produce something: a piece of clothing and a blog. In the current case, the bloggers extract their agency from the active producing of a product, and becoming knowledgeable on this subject within a community. This recognition is also important, as this means that the authors do not remain passive in the private spheres of their houses. As discussed in the theoretical framework, the problem with 'women's work' was often that it took place in the private sphere and was not acknowledged as real work (Friedan, 1963; Hollows, 2008). These bloggers actively use their domestic environment to move into the public sphere. Paragraph three will discuss the manner in which the bloggers move their (new) domestic activities into the public sphere. First, I will further discuss the way in which the bloggers use their love for creativity and DIY as a defining element in their identity.

4.1.4. Craziness and obsession

Betty Friedan (1963) described the depression as a result of unchallenging housework in the 1960's as an illness (*The Feminine Mystique*), leading to some kind of hysteria. The thematic analysis resulted in one recurring subject that might be associated with this: craziness and obsession. The five bloggers under analysis refer often to these topics in relation to their identity. These topics can therefore mainly be found in the introductory texts. First, the topic of craziness is reflected in an extensive use of the word 'crazy'. There is a lot of craziness in the authors life (Johnston, 2013, August 16; 2014, January 3), something is driving the author crazy (Dill, 2013, June 26) and one has "crazy make-it-work moments" (Willard, n.d.) An interesting note can be made here about the reference Willard makes with "Make it work" to the popular television show *Project Runway*, in which contestants battle over who is the best clothing designer. By referring to popular culture Willard shows that she is a cultural omnivore.

First, authors (especially Ashley Johnston and Katy Dill) describe themselves in general as devious. Katy Dill introduces herself by saying "Hello, I am Katy, the mad hatter behind no big dill" (Dill, n.d.). By calling herself a mad hatter, Dill refers to the classic *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, hereby referring to her own cultural capital as she has knowledge of classical references, but also connoting eccentricity. Dill continues this madness-narrative by stating later "They're floating in the great abyss, along with many of my marbles, I suppose" (Dill, 2013, July 11). Ashley Johnston describes herself as deviant by calling her addiction to 'saving a few bucks' an illness.

The madness- and addiction narrative is mainly reflected in the bloggers' obsession with sewing and creating. Some bloggers call their hobby an addiction, others describe their actions in such a way as to imply: I am willing to do a lot for my hobby. For example, Johnston states:

And all someone has to do is **dare me**, and **I'm down and dirty** trying to figure out how to make something that I've seen in the store, or, well, is on someone that is walking down the street. **Watch out passersby!** (Johnston, n.d.)

Johnson implies she might harass a random person on the street, because she is that obsessed with making clothing. Willard thinks its "Worth it" (Willard, 2013, September 26) to dig her pattern designs from the trashcan and wipe chocolate cake off it and Hart declares she has "a slight obsession with tiny vintage clothing" (Hart, n.d.).

The authors who use craziness as a piece of their identity (Johnston, Dill and to a lesser extent, Willard) also use a certain type of language, reminding of slang or urban language, which I termed "cool talk". For example, Willard uses words such as "Doi" (80's urban language for 'No shit!' or 'Duh') and "Dude" (Willard, 2013, September 26). Dill too uses "Duh" (Dill, 2013, August 26) and Johnston writes "But I dare ya..." (Johnston, 2013, March 15).

The author's tendency to refer to themselves as crazy, obsessed or deviant first indicates that they want to portray themselves as really enthusiastic about their creative activities. It is not just their hobby, it is an essential part of their life and identity. It is as if they want to say "I am a special creative person". Instead of Friedan's negative hysteria, their obsession with their creative activities is turned into something cool as it is combined with a certain way of talking. However, the authors are all white middle-class (suburban or rural) ladies, who are in general not associated with urban language. Therefore, their connotations with craziness and cool talk transfers a sense of irony. This could be associated with the irony women in the post-feminist era use in order to handle their 'double entanglement' (McRobbie, 2004). In the classic theory, while they have grown up with the advantages of second wave feminism, women in post-feminism or post-feminist media discourses behave contradictory to second-wave feminist ideals by using their feminine sexuality and thereby reinforcing gender differences (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004). The subject is then handled with humour and irony in order to make it light.

The content of the bloggers (one more than the other) reflects a same sense of irony, but from a different perspective. These bloggers engage in domestic activities as their hobby or their passion. As stay-at-home mothers, they can also be considered as engaging in a lifestyle that is contradictory to second-wave feminism. It can even be questioned if these women go all the way back to (before) Betty Friedan-ism, spending their lives raising children, taking care of the household, engaging in hobby's such as sewing and house-decorating and being for some part financially dependent on their husbands. This

is not the public sphere post-feminism as described among others in research by Mosely and Read on *Ally McBeal* (2002), but some form of private sphere post-feminism in which women address their feminine identities in the private sphere and use irony to give their texts a light, humoristic and 'cool' connotation. Because although the bloggers do acknowledge that their day-to-day lives can be busy with dull domestic tasks, they choose to focus on something that makes them happy: sewing. And because they are knowledgeable and skilled in that area, they gain acknowledgement from outside. It is important to ask here to which extent their mommy blog businesses make these writers financially independent. Social recognition has value, but no financial value. If their blogging entrepreneurship brings these women possibilities for financial independence this would be another argument in favour of mommy blogging as a 'feminist act'.

When relating this to questions of domesticity and femininity, it might be indicated that as opposed to nineteenth century domestic femininities these women do not see it their task to serve the family in silence. In relation to second-wave feminism the authors do acknowledge that housework can be obligatory and laborious sometimes, but they talk in a light manner about this. The women are able to state what they want and need, and act upon it. As stated, this is similar to the post-feminist discourse of women who grew up with the advantages of second-wave feminism, but act upon these in ways that contradict the original second-wave feminist ideals. In this sense, the narrative in these blogs reflect the other side of the 'post-feminist coin'. It inhibits elements of the post-feminist sensitivity as proposed by Gill (2007), including a focus on individualism in a discourse of choice in the blog posts, and a renewed focus on the sexual differences between men and women and a focus on self-surveillance through blogging and sewing. But instead of focusing on public sphere post-feminism (Hollows, 2006), these stories have their basis in the private sphere.

In this thesis I want to argue that the self-surveillance and self-management applied by the bloggers occurs for some part through an association with values of new domesticity. Therefore, this chapter will further discuss the elements of new domesticity reflected in the five 'craft mommy blogs' that were analysed using thematic analysis.

4.2 New domesticity

From the thematic analysis of the twenty-five blog posts, three main subjects associated with values of new domesticity were extracted. These main subjects relate to three levels of behaviour: values (abstract), behaviour (application) and aesthetic (representation). These subjects are: new domesticity values, handmade creativity and a nostalgia aesthetic.

4.2.2. New domesticity values

The themes extracted from the thematic analysis in relation to new domesticity were mostly present in the introductory texts and reflection. This can be explained through the nature of new domesticity as a sensibility or a discourse. When reflecting on their lives and identities the authors of the five blogs used values of new domesticity. In these reflections, the element of authenticity and simplicity was the most important. The discussions of the bloggers focus what brings value and meaning to life. Notable in these discussions is a focus on 'the small things' that add happiness to life. Value, according to the authors, is not in money or things but in investing time in doing the small things well and engaging in meaningful human interaction. This narrative transfers a sense of "quality over quantity" and reflects the sensibility of new domesticity Matchar (2013) summarized as "time over money and people over things" (p. 218).

The bloggers describe this sensibility by focusing on descriptions of details of moments on a regular day. They note that these small moments may be "significant or silly" (Hart, n.d.), but that these are the moments that give life meaning. They note that "value is beyond price" (Dill, 2013, August). Katy Dill for example describes how the small things give her life more meaning:

I usually **thrive on the small details** of life. Like **rainbowtizing** the books (...) **The details that make my heart race**, just a little, because I **find them exciting and flavorful** (...) One of my favorite things is how Drummer does his squeaky toy laugh, although it's more like a squeaky toy in need of repair, with a bit of a wheezing sound, when he's particularly amused, like when he dumps cold water on my feet in the shower and I squeal with shock (Dill, 2013, July 11)

Especially Katy Dill and Stacy Hart focus on a desire to simplify their lives, as they focus on quality instead of quantity. They want to remove the superfluous (Dill, 2013, July 11). What is exactly meant with the superfluous remains unclear. On a less abstract level, Willard's desire for simplicity is not explicitly stated, but reflected in her love for simple designs and simple colours.

Anneliese states that she finds meaning in beautiful things that are "labors of love" (Aesthetic Nest, n.d.) and require some kind of effort which gives it value. She makes a distinction between true beauty and false beauty. True beauty, according to the author, creates happiness (Aesthetic Nest, n.d.). This distinction between what does create meaning and what does not is made by more authors. For example, Dill reflects on her skills as a video gamer as 'useless skills', because she cannot use them for a meaningful purpose. Video gaming leads to nothing. The author then states that she would rather invest her time in interaction with her children. Human interaction therefore is considered to be more valuable than other activities.

The idea that adding love and effort creates more meaning is also reflected in the authors crafting activities. It is represented by the idea that you can re-use existing pieces of clothing by just adding a little love and care. Johnston reflects this by saying that when she is looking for an old piece of

clothing to use for a project she looks in her own closet for “un-loved pieces of clothing” (Johnston, 2013, March 15). And even though the remaking of an old piece of clothing might take her more time than just buying a new one, she finds it more satisfying to invest time and effort. More on this will be discussed in the following paragraph.

Therefore, the sensibility of creating meaning by investing time and effort in people is the most important value of new domesticity found in the content of the mommy blogs. New domesticity attributes such as the downshifting narrative and frugality are present in a much lesser extent. The topic of frugality remains limited to the texts by Johnston, who has a self-proclaimed addiction to saving money. However, the notion of frugality is reflected in the discourse of simplifying. The downshifting narrative in its literal form (including a shift in lifestyle) can only be found in the texts on Aesthetic Nest. Anneliese is the only blogger who mentions her former career in marketing and reflects on her shift from working professional to stay-at-home mother. The other bloggers do not describe or never made a shift in lifestyle to engage in domestic activities. For example, Dill and Johnston describe how they learned to sew early in their lives and made the choice to be a stay-at-home mother at an early age.

Therefore, the reflection of new domesticity in the researched blog posts is not reflected in the story of “Urban working women moving to the country to engage in knitting and canning peaches” as described by Matchar (2013). The stories of the five bloggers do not reflect such a shift, as the bloggers represent a stable domestic identity to this respect. However, they do use values associated with new domesticity when reflecting on their lives and identities. They value the small things in life, and therefore aim to simplify. They focus on community, mostly the close community of their own family, and value the interaction between humans. They think investing effort and time is more valuable than investing money, and they choose quality over quantity. This reflects what Campbell (2001) stated about giving meaningless consumption rituals meaning. Campbell discussed the similarities between Betty Friedan’s (1963) women suffering from depression because their domestic activities no longer involved skills, and the re-valuation of domestic skills in current times. Campbell (2001) stressed the need of contemporary people to give their activities meaning, for example by making a pizza from scratch instead of ordering it. The craft mommy bloggers investment of time and effort serves a same purpose.

4.2.2. Handmade creativity

The authors of the five creative mommy blogs engage in creative activities, as this is the main focus of their genre. The authors are mainly sewing, but also knitting, crocheting, decorating and cooking. Their topics are more focused on lifestyle, with some reflections on life as a mother in between. ‘Regular’ mommy blogs are interested in a more wide range of topics and have motherhood as a more important

subject, while 'craft' mommy blogs focus on the creative endeavours of their authors. Two main themes with regard to creativity are found in the content.

First, the authors use words that describe crafting as an adventure. A project might be described as 'rough', an author might be 'hunting' for a perfect denim shirt or wanting to 'tackle' another project. In the citation earlier Johnston described how she goes "down and dirty trying to figure out how to make something" (Johnston, n.d.). Furthermore, the results of the creative efforts of the authors, the clothing, can be bold and trendy (Aesthetic Nest, 2013, November 16). By employing a language that describes crafting and DIY as adventurous, the authors actively contradict the idea that crafting is boring. Crafting and being creative is being made into something cool, which was also reflected in the use of words like 'crazy' and the use of 'cool talk', as described earlier in this chapter. In fact, not crafting is bad or boring. For example, when Dana Willard has not been crafting for a while, she excuses herself for being "so lame" (Willard, 2013, September 26) and Stacy Hart admits that she was glad she "finally" got back into the sewing room (Hart, 2013, July 27).

Crafting is not only described as cool, but also as easy. The authors make it sound like sewing is very simple. They use verbs that make the process sound easy such as 'whip up' or 'sew up', and state that a project was simple or "a doozy" (Dill, 2013, September 27). Through their words the authors carry a sense of nonchalance. They will figure it out as they go along. This nonchalance is also reflected in a narrative of setback and positivity. When the author encounter a setback, the sewing machine breaks or there is not enough fabric to make what she wants, she handles the situation in a flexible manner and turns it into something positive. This happens on a practical level, she makes some adjustments in her clothing design, but also on a more abstract level. For example, when Willard (2013, April 23) encounters some trouble in the petulant mood of her youngest daughter, she engages in a sewing project to make it better. She makes a t-shirt with the lyrics of the song *Don't worry be happy*, that actually reflects the narrative employed in some blog posts.

In every life we have some trouble. When you worry, you make it double. So.... **[Don't worry, be happy]** I'm hoping the lyrics rub off on me (...) And **try to be happy** that no matter who wakes up in the middle of the night....this one, or this one. **I'm lucky to be her mom.** (Willard, 2013, April 23)

This tendency to approach setbacks in a flexible and positive manner is reflected in the content of the other bloggers too. There might be some difficult times, but these have to be approached with thankfulness and enjoyment. But the authors are not completely passive, accepting the status quo as it is. One way of encountering situations is by re-evaluating or re-inventing something.

The authors re-evaluate and re-invent by making alterations to make something to their liking. They alter, change, add, embellish and adjust. Also, they reinvent their ideas by making adjustments to

their own designs and the designs of others. Furthermore, they do not just reinvent ideas but also materials, by using existing pieces of clothing to create something new. Looking at things in a different way is therefore a strategy applied by the authors very often.

But most importantly: sewing makes the authors happy. They state that a project was fun or that “Sewing is amazing” (Willard, 2013, August 27). The authors derive joy from making something with their own hands. For example, Ashley Johnston states that it gives her a kick to make things “I love that simple joy of surprising myself with my favorite, “*hey, I made that!*” feeling” (original emphasis) (Johnston, 2014, January 3). Willard explains how she loves it that she can make a wearable piece of clothing out of a 2-dimensional piece of fabric (Willard, 2013, August 27) and Anneliese derives her pleasure from seeing something she has made used (Aesthetic Nest, n.d.). As quoted earlier, Katy Dill states that creative outlets contribute to happiness. This indicates that creativity is not just part of an identity, but also a tool for these women to relax and enjoy themselves. For them, using their skills to make something tangible and seeing it used is satisfying and makes them happy.

Hollows suggested as a result of her research on domestic femininity represented by Nigella Lawson that women engage in for example (extensive) cooking to temporarily remove themselves from “the demands of modern life” (Hollows, 2003, p. 185). An investment in new domestic activities and values, according to this theory, serves to comfort the self rather than others. This is also what can be found in the bloggers’ investment in creativity. Of course, they make clothing to be worn by their children or gifted to others, but the process of making is aimed at personal satisfaction. It is meant to keep things going. To have the bloggers actively thinking about a creative process, engaging in a ‘creative adventure’ that requires flexibility and results in a tangible product that provides them with satisfaction. Related to what Campbell (2001) stated, the creative process in which these women engage has meaning.

4.2.3. Nostalgia Aesthetic

Before continuing to discuss how the aspect of community relates to the aspects of identity and new domesticity I would like to discuss a topic that was extracted with the thematic analysis and reflects values of new domesticity, but was not as present as the more abstract themes of simplicity and reinvention. However, it does relate to the aspect of reinvention, as the nostalgia reflected in new domesticity can also be called a reinvention of old domestic values. This subject I termed *nostalgia aesthetic* is about references to past times and is reflected in elements that are connected to nostalgia, romanticism, heritage and classic culture.

The topics in which the nostalgia aesthetic theme is reflected differ per author. Stacy Hart is the most notable example of a focus on a nostalgic theme. She often mentions the word ‘vintage’, that she

uses as an attribute to her identity. For example, in her introduction she states she has a “vintage style” (Hart, n.d.). As opposed to Ashley Johnston, who calls it “thrift store shopping”, Hart explicitly uses the word vintage to connote a certain style that includes references to design from past times. A style which is also reflected in the pictures that accompany her texts. As mentioned, Ashley Johnston is also fond of second-hand clothing, but she terms it in a different way as “thrift store shopping”, reflecting that she does not buy second-hand because of its hip reputation, but because she likes saving money. Finally, Anneliese also states “Vintage-inspired is always a great look” (Aesthetic Nest, 2013, November 16), implying that a vintage style is timeless.

Second, nostalgia is reflected in references to heritage by romanticizing the knowledge and skills of parents. Anneliese discusses in her introduction how her mother taught her to sew, and “(...) wise as she was, told me we could get the materials for the next project once I finished the first” (Aesthetic Nest, n.d.). Katy Dill reflects on her heritage by describing how her creative genes come from her artist parents. In these citations the creativity and knowledge of parents is celebrated.

Finally, nostalgia is reflected in references to classic works or classic style. For example, in one text Anneliese uses a pattern called *Juliet Capulet* to create a piece of clothing for her daughter and she notes “love that clever reference to The Bard in that name” (Aesthetic Nest, 2014, February 7). The fact that she knows that it is a reference to Juliet Capulet from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* is already telling, but she also calls Shakespeare by his nickname. This implies that she has some knowledge of classic culture, hereby displaying her cultural capital to some extent. Moreover, the reference to Shakespeare fits the authors general preferences for classic style (for example, she mentions that she likes classic shapes) and romanticism (reflected in the images). This preference for “the classics” and romanticism is also reflected in the texts by other bloggers. Dana Willard likes *Curious George* because it’s “an all-time classic” (Willard, 2013, July 22) and Katy Dill likes the magic of pop-up books (Dill, 2013, June 26). Furthermore, the word “cute” is often mentioned by the authors, implying that sweetness and romanticism is important.

First, these nostalgic preferences might coincide with a discourse of new domesticity. A focus on vintage, classic and romantic elements reflects a discourse that focuses on nostalgia and feminine qualities (sweetness and cuteness). Second, implying that you like vintage and referencing to classic works might be a way to display symbolic and cultural capital. These women do not just sew, they have knowledge of style and know their references.

As a test run for the thematic analysis, the first six blog posts in the dataset were not just analysed by their texts, but also by their images. This test suggested that an analysis of the images accompanying the blog posts might yield interesting results, especially in relation to this *nostalgia aesthetic*. For example, in the image on the following page the child wears a top with ruffles, referencing to romanticism, and a skirt with retro lining, suggesting a vintage feel. The print on her blouse as well as

the surroundings in which she is photographed suggest nature, depicting flowers, butterflies, snow and mountains. The white of the snow might symbolise innocence. In terms of transitivity, the child is not engaging in a specific activity aimed at reaching a certain goal. Also, she acknowledges the viewer, which does not make this an image that depicts a certain situation, but rather a symbolic picture of a girl performing an activity. The picture suggests that this is a comfortable (yet fashionable) outfit to be active in. The image also suggests that although the child is at the centre of the image, she is rather a carrier for the clothing. The test-analysis of six blog posts suggested that this is often the case. The images serve to transmit a certain feeling (a focus on nature or bright colours). The images often depict a child posing, not engaged in a specific activity, although most images are offering the viewer a look into a certain situation. Therefore, the test-analysis suggested that these images are symbolic pictures of children wearing clothes, implying that it is not about the children, but about the clothing. It would be an interesting addition to this research to analyse the images accompanying the blog posts.



Image 7. (Aesthetic Nest, 2014, February 7)

4.3 Community

Finally, the third main topic extracted with the thematic analysis consists of themes associated with community. The authors are embedded in two important communities that are of influence on the content of their blogs: their family and their community of fellow bloggers. Also, the authors of the five blogs do not write their content just for themselves or their direct community, they share their stories with an audience of unknown (likeminded) readers.

4.3.1. Family community

As suggested in the aforementioned test-analysis of the images, although the children of the authors play a significant part in the authors lives and reflections on their lives, the children in the blog posts seem to play a carrying role in the blogs rather than an active role. Sometimes, they do have something to say about the process. For example, Dana Willard (2013, August 27) describes how her daughter picked the fabric and button for her dress. However, most of the time, the children are only at the receiving end of the process. All project and tutorial posts have a child as the recipient. Notably, at the end of many of these posts the author exclaims a statement as “And she’s happy as can be!” (Aesthetic

Nest, 2013, November 16), “So I made Lucy a kite dress. She loved it” (Willard, 2013, July 22) or “So she’s happy as a clam!” (Johnston, 2013, March 15). This might indicate that the authors want to describe how their creative activities help to make their children happy. Which in turn, makes them happy and gives them satisfaction.

The husband of the authors is only mentioned in the introductory texts. Stacy Hart and Dana Willard only mention their husbands, while the other bloggers describe their husbands position. All three describe their husband as affected by their obsession for creativity and crafting. The husbands are patient and supportive.

I also have a husband who is very **patient with my late night creativity** and who kindly, and often, but not always successfully, **reminds me to go to bed!** (Aesthetic Nest, n.d.)

I am wife to Mr. Dill who shares his closet with a ridiculous stash of fabric and **never complains** that it is encroaching on his side. That says a lot. (Dill, n.d.)

The passive positions of the children as recipients and the husbands as affected implies that the creative DIY activities of the authors are performed mainly for the authors own enjoyment and relaxation. The fact that it makes their children happy is a nice result. As explained earlier, sewing and being creative around the house is not a domestic activity in service of the family, but an activity performed for the authors own pleasure. This is similar to what Hollows (2003) suggests when discussing *How to be a domestic goddess* by Nigella Lawson.

4.3.2. Community of bloggers

The authors of the five blogs often refer to other bloggers from their blogging community as a reason for blogging and being creative or to the friendships that result from their blogging activities. In the first place, in nine of the fifteen project and tutorial posts the blogger was participating in or initiating a blogger series or pattern tour. These are contests organized by one blogger, without the competitive element, in which different bloggers try their hands at the same assignment. For example, Katy Dill organized *Once upon a thread*, for which she asked other bloggers to make a piece of clothing inspired on their favourite children’s book. Two authors participated in *Kids Clothing Week* and two more participated in a pattern tour, in which the creators of patterns ask bloggers to try them out for them.

In the second place, the five bloggers are often inspired by other bloggers from the community. They describe other bloggers as inspirational geniuses. For example, both Anneliese from Aesthetic Nest and Dana Willard explain how one cannot say no when Katy Dill asks you to participate in a series. The series is fantastic and, according to the other authors, Dill constantly outdoes herself. Moreover, the work of others can also serve as an inspiration.

I was **inspired** by this post on One Little Minute where **Miranda created a cool piece of fabric art** to hang over her bed (and has some **cool** stop-motion photos to go along. **You gotta check it out**). (Dana Made It, 2013, April 23)

Finally, Ashley Johnston and Anneliese also reflect on the friendships the community of fellow bloggers has brought them. Johnston calls her blog her refuge to create freely and share with others. Anneliese stresses the possibilities blogging gives her to connect with women she would never meet in person, but who have similar interests. Blogging therefore gives these women the opportunity to engage in activities they enjoy, and share their enjoyment with others who have similar interests. As suggested in the literature on blogs (Li & Chignell, 2010; Schmidt, 2007) (perceived) similarities form an important role in the formation of blogging communities. The authors are all white mothers of small children, who are in their twenties, but mostly thirties and enjoy sewing and being creative. According to the theory on cultural dissemination (Axelrod, 1997), this would provide an ideal situation for the distribution of ideas and ideologies. This dissemination of certain values or ways of talking then, would not only occur through the community of bloggers, but also the readers of these blogs. The following paragraph will therefore discuss one of the biggest themes extracted with the thematic analysis: the sharing with readers.

4.3.3. Sharing with readers

Finally, the biggest theme found in the content of the five blogs under analysis is the sharing with readers. The authors engage with their readers in several ways, hereby creating a sense of community. The ways in which the bloggers connect with their readers are discussed shortly in this paragraph.

First and foremost, the authors employ a narrative of sharing projects, ideas and inspiration with their readers. They share their interpretations of a pattern (Aesthetic Nest, 2013, November 16), their creative activities (Johnston, 2014, January 3) and the things that are inspiring to them (Aesthetic Nest, n.d.). These creative activities and the creative process are something the reader can join in. The authors invite their readers to join and create something themselves, or they ask the reader for their input and opinion. For example, Dana Willard asked her readers to advise her on the name of a pattern she is about to share (2013, September 26) and Anneliese asks her readers for their opinion on you and your child wearing matching outfits (2013, January 17).

On the other hand, authors also give their readers advice. Not only the type of advice they provide in their tutorials, advising how to make a project, but also practical lessons or life lessons. The blog posts in which Dana Willard explains to her readers that she has been absent because of her computer crashing is an illustrative example of this (2013, September 26). First, Willard excuses herself for being 'lame', implying that there is a relationship between author and reader that requires frequent sharing of information. Willard finishes this post by giving the reader some take-home advice: "Stay

tuned! And have a great Thursday. And don't go to bed without backing up your computer." (2013, September 26). This illustrates how authors share their stories with their readers, to give them advice or share their knowledge.

This is also done by using a language that engages the reader in the situations addressed by the author. Bloggers address the reader on situations they might recognize, enhancing the relationship because of their similarities. For example, in the blog post by Dana Willard discussed before, she states:

Remember that time **you** didn't back up your hard drive for 3 months and **you** started working on a new pattern, and after 3 days of progress in Illustrator **your computer froze** on a gray screen and never came back to life? And it turns out your hard drive was mostly dead? That time? Yea. That just happened me. (Willard, 2013, September 26)

By addressing 'you' instead of using the I-form, Willard implies that 'we all experience these kind of situations'. The reader is supposed to recognize this situation, and therefore empathise with hers. The author assumes that her readers know about the effort it takes to work on a pattern in Illustrator for three days. She also assumes that her readership forgets to back-up their computers. This implies that the author assumes her readers are similar to her. This is also reflected in other blogs in which the authors state this assumption directly. For example, Ashley Johnston states "But some of you may be like me... And thought we were still in May" (2013, March 15). These two citations might both suggest that these mothers are so busy with their day-to-day activities that they forget to back-up their computers, or even forget time all together.

Finally, the authors not only address their readers on situations their might recognize, but also on elements of their own identity the reader is supposed to recognize. For example, Ashley Johnston writes "Because you guys know I love an excuse to make a new outfit for the kiddos" (2013, July 1) suggesting the authors know that she will take any chance of making something. Another illustration of the author addressing the reader on knowledge of her identity is when Dana Willard describes to the reader why she chose the book *Curious George* as an inspiration for her sewing project: "My favorite page is the hot air balloon race. Too many fun colors. We each take turns picking out OUR balloon. Can you guess mine?". Willard assumes that her readers know she likes stripes and bright colours such as yellow, orange and bright blue. By suggesting that her readers know about her characteristics, likes and dislikes, the authors suggest that there is a relationship between them and their readership that leads them to know and understand each other. This understanding attributes to the sense of community and leads to recognition of the identity and activities of the author.

Recognition is therefore the final, and one of the most essential, topics to be discussed here. In their introductions, Anneliese from Aesthetic Nest and Ashley Johnston directly discuss the impact the

involvement of their readers has on them. They enjoy it when they know readers are inspired by them, and started a project by themselves based on their blogging. For example, Johnston states:

YES!!! I **love to see what you create**. I have to tell you that **one of my favorite things**, is to hear that you've dusted off your sewing machine, pulled out your sponge brushes, sharpened those scissors and/or heated up that glue gun.....and are **making this or that right along with me**. (Johnston, n.d.)

This indicates Johnston wants to inspire other by sharing her projects, and that participating readers serve as recognition of her work. Anneliese suggests the same when she notes that "it makes her day" when readers are inspired to make something based on her posts (Aesthetic Nest, about me). The fact that they describe this in the introductory texts might suggest that it is an essential part of their blogging experience to inspire others (and be inspired).

Summarizing this paragraph, the authors of the 'craft' mommy blogs are embedded in communities that are of great importance to the creation and recognition of their identities. First, they are part of a family. Their children, and to a lesser extent their husbands, define their identities as mothers and wives. However, these roles do not completely define their personal (feminine) identity. Their creativity is an important element of their identity as well. They share this identity with other women. They share it with other bloggers who discuss similar subjects and engage in similar activities, thus leading to "the emergence and sustaining of communities of shared interest and subcultural identification" (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1410). This also counts for the relationship between the author and her unknown audience. These readers visit the blog because there are perceived similarities (Li & Chignell, 2010).

As shown in the analysis, authors address these similarities to create a relationship with the readers. Although the authors do use their identities as mothers as corresponding characteristics, describing their day-to-day lives as mothers, the most important binding element is the activity they use to retreat from day-to-day life while at the same time retaining a connection to their children: DIY. Therefore, the discourses on these blogs are not so much the discourses on motherhood, supporting the author in defining her identity as a mother (Lopez, 2009; Morrison, 2010, 2012), but more a discourse on creativity as an element of the authors identity. Because creative living, or 'doing it yourself', is an important element of the new domesticity sensibility, they engage partly in a discourse of new domesticity.

The blog serves the purpose of connection to the outside world, as described by Morrison, 2010. The blogging and blog-reading communities thereby serve motivation and recognition of the work of the writing mother. Their creative activities, that otherwise might be dismissed as a housewife hobby, are acknowledged by their readers when they engage in creativity as a result of the bloggers' posts. The

community therefore serves to validate the identity of the author, sharing the discourse of simplifying, authenticity and creativity.

4.4 Summary results

Summarizing, this result chapter has discussed the themes that were extracted from the linguistic content of the twenty five blog posts by five different creative mommy bloggers. The sub-themes were grouped under three main-themes: identity, new domesticity discourse and community.

The *identity* theme consists of four sub-themes, that cover different aspects of the identity the bloggers present in their writing. First, the authors reflect on their blogs on what they want and need. On an abstract level they engage in mental processes discussing the values they find important in life, while on a practical level they constantly overthink which choices to make regarding their sewing efforts. Second, they present themselves as 'real' mothers, who are very busy with taking care of children and the household. They admit that the work never seems to be done and that taking care of domestic tasks can be obligatory and boring. They use their blogging and sewing activities as a coping mechanism, as they like to be creative and see it as a refuge or relaxing task. But also because it provides them with an activity they can perform for themselves while keeping a connection to their families. At the same time, their blogging and sewing activities provide them with agency, because they come to have authority on the subject of home sewing as their work is recognized by a larger (unknown) audience. Their creative blogging experience becomes a form of labour, as they apply a for example project-narrative. Furthermore, in describing their love for creativity, the authors also apply a narrative of craziness and coolness. Sewing is not described as 'degrading work for the housewife'; it is portrayed as something cool and an adventure that requires creativity and a touch of craziness.

Within the discussion of their identity, the women apply *discourses of new domesticity*. This constitutes the second main-theme. First, they focus on new domesticity values as they discuss what they find important in life: focusing on doing small things (well), "time over money, people over things", wanting to simplify and focusing on 'labours of love'. They do so, because it gives their lives meaning. They also translate this into concrete activities, engaging in their creative projects. The bloggers consider sewing an adventure in which they can engage easily, and which requires flexibility and creativity. The creative process requires them to think and make aesthetic choices, which ultimately leads to satisfaction and happiness when a product is finished. (This satisfaction will be enlarged when the readers acknowledge the work of the other in the third theme). Finally, on an aesthetic level, the third sub-theme is related to a vintage 'feel'. Related to values of new domesticity the bloggers, each in their own way, focus on a vintage, second-hand, romantic or classic aesthetic. Each of these styles refer to past times, revealing a kind of nostalgia.

The third and final theme was termed *community*. This is where the first two themes come together as the authors are supported by their family and their work becomes acknowledged by a community of colleague 'craft' mommy bloggers and a community of unknown readers. The children and husbands of the bloggers are mainly affected by the passion the author has for sewing. The children are happy to wear the clothing, while the husbands are patient with the blogger and supports her creative outlets. At the same time, a community of likeminded bloggers serves as an inspiration and motivation for blogging, as communities of women with similar identities are formed that recognize the work of the blogger. Finally, their work is also recognized by a community of (often) anonymous readers with whom the author shares her ideas, activities and ultimately: her identity.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Discussion of results

Summarizing, the five bloggers actively create an identity for themselves in their blogs. They express this identity by describing what they want and what they do. They want a simple life, in which they focus on small and important aspects. They want to focus on quality over quantity and invest time in meaningful activities. They are mothers, who live busy lives taking care of children and a household. And they have a passion for creativity, in which they invest a lot of time. This creativity does not only provide them with joy and satisfaction, it also provides them with agency, as they become experts in the field of home-sewing and develop into entrepreneurs as they make their blogging into a small business. These aspects that function in the creation of the authors' identity, focusing on simplicity and (homemade) creativity, are values of new domesticity. Another new domesticity value found in the content is a focus on vintage and classic aesthetics. Their engagement in these values of new domesticity provides the authors with enjoyment, satisfaction and ultimately: recognition. They communicate their identities to the outside world through blogging and gain recognition as they are adopted in a community of likeminded bloggers, and are respected by a group of readers. This recognition serves the creation of their identity.

5.2 Theoretical reflection and research question

With regard to the academic literature presented in the second chapter, a few important notes can be made. With regard to their (feminine) identity, these bloggers engage in post-feminist discourses of self-surveillance (through blogging and being creative), personal choice (a narrative of choice and need, and actions based upon that) and a renewed focus on the sexual differences between men and women (but in a different way). However, these women engage in this discourse with the private sphere as a starting point, instead of the public sphere post-feminism. In doing so, their descriptions of motherhood in some respects matches Gilligan's (1982) ideas on domestic feminism, displaying women as naturally more caring than men. This, in turn, refers to Victorian ideas on women as naturally more suitable for housekeeping. However, these ideas assume that women are selfless, aimed at caring for others, passive, and in no need of (financial) recognition. This is not the case for the five creative mommy bloggers, as they perform their activities in the first place for their own enjoyment and relaxation, and aim to gain recognition from it as well. This is what makes this research scientifically relevant, as it shows that post-feminist sensibilities are not restricted to the public sphere, but are reflected in a sort of private sphere post-feminism.

Further related to the private and public sphere distinction are the activities performed by the authors. Domesticity is something that has been historically associated with the private sphere. Domesticity was either imposed on women to keep them from the public sphere, or described as a way for women to distinct themselves from the masculine public sphere (Hollows, 2008). Domesticity was never considered as something that could be a part of the public sphere. Increasingly, this seems to be the case. In this specific case, the bloggers use their discourse of new domesticity to move into the public sphere by blogging about it. As opposed to Betty Friedan's (1963) housewives suffering from 'the problem with no name' due to a lack of recognition, these bloggers actively seek recognition by blogging about their sewing. According to Friedan (1963), housewives would never be truly fulfilled as they were constantly engaged in the identity creation of others and did not engage in meaningful work. The bloggers in this thesis are very aware of their own identity creation and even more aware of engaging in activities that create meaning. And meaning, according to the discourse of new domesticity, can be found in different things than an office job and earning money. This engagement in domestic activities within the public sphere, for example through media, I would like to call public sphere domesticity.

Several critical notes can be made with regard to this conclusion. The liberal feminist might ask about financial independence. What happens when these bloggers have no husband facilitating their investment in creativity? Because social recognition does not buy you bread. Would they make it with the profits from their sponsorships? Critical scholars would ask about class. Because isn't this private sphere post-feminism something that is retained to white, middle-class women? These are all important questions. The theoretical framework to this thesis has discussed implications of new domesticity. It has asked about the implications of a discourse that prefers old fashioned domestic values and seems to aim for a return to pre-feminist times, reinforcing existing gender relations. It has discussed how new domesticity might neglect needs of society at large, because of its focus on the local community. It has discussed how the stay-at-home mother, constantly involved in the nurturing of her child, might raise the standards of motherhood. Also, Campbell's (2001) work suggests that new domesticity still involves consumption, but a different form of consumption. Buying biologic food and 'honest' clothing is more expensive than regular clothing, which might become reflected in commercial interest. Therefore, from an ideological perspective, new domesticity could become a discourse that is related to power relations.

But although the theoretical basis of this thesis had all these critical questions in mind, the answer that arose from the thematic analysis was a different one. The themes resulting from the analysis reflected a story similar to those analysed by Radway (1984) and Ang (1982). And although this thesis did not use the kind of ethnographic audience studies' method these authors performed, it could be placed in the same tradition of (American) feminist cultural studies. Simultaneously, the theories by Morrison (2010; 2012) and Lopez (2009) on mommy blogging as a radical act were reflected, implying that in some way the act of mommy blogging alone can be considered as radical and feminist. This thesis

has shown that the act of engaging in new domesticity, in this case engaging in the act of sewing and blogging about it, can be a way for a stay-at-home mother to retreat from her daily activities (while retaining a relationship with her family) to do something she likes, because she wants it and it gives her agency. In a way, she takes matters in her own hands by making something based on her own personal choices, taking the time to do something she likes. In the process, the blogger becomes an expert in the field, and gains recognition from the outside. Now the main question is, how should we see the discourse of new domesticity within this context?

When answering the main question “(How) do discourses of new domesticity feature in creative mommy blogs?” one therefore has to focus on **the values of new domesticity as a link between identity and community**. Discourses generally serve to transmit certain beliefs about society: ideology. The mommy bloggers who were analysed in this thesis focus on values linked to new domesticity. They value a simple life, they value quality over quantity, they value time over money and most of all: they value creativity because they assert that creativity brings joy. These values are part of their identity, but they are also binding factors between the authors and their blogging and blog-reading community. The members of these communities value similar things, and by acknowledging the bloggers as inspiring colleagues or acknowledging them by reading the blog posts, the community provides input for the identity of the single blogger in the form of recognition. Therefore, discourses of new domesticity in mommy blogs feature as a carrier. They provide chances for identity creation and sustenance, as well as community creation and sustenance.

This confirms the existing literature on the purposes and effects of the act of mommy blogging, which has shown that the main functions of mommy blogging are identity formation and community formation (McDaniel et al., 2012; Morrison, 2010; Webb & Lee, 2011), as well as the re-establishment of existing discourses on motherhood (Lopez, 2009; Morrison, 2010). This thesis has added to this literature by explaining how a discourse of new domesticity can function as a tool for self-management and community formation within creative mommy blogs. The focus in these craft blogs is not so much on discussing motherhood but on discussing a handmade lifestyle. They rather reflect the identities of their authors as creative individuals, than their identities in relation to others (as wives and mothers).

Within this process elements of the discourse of new domesticity, such as a focus on handmade items, nostalgia (reflected in a love for vintage and classic culture), community and authenticity, serve as tools for identity management. The bloggers use their creative activities as a temporary getaway from the demands of daily life. An illustrating example is the title of one of the blog posts: “Sewing for my sanity” (Dana Made It, 2013, April 23). On this level, this thesis underscores theories by Hollows (2003) and Campbell (2001) on the purpose of new domesticity as a way of dealing with contemporary reality. Rather than defining themselves according to the consumerist adagio “You are what you buy”, the bloggers seem to engage in activities that provide them with an escape from their daily lives as well as

an opportunity to define their identities according to a new statement: “You are what you make”. In doing so they prefer to put effort in an activity, to give it meaning.

Therefore, regarding their feminine identities, the authors engage in what I have called private sphere post-feminism, using elements of new domesticity in their process of self-surveillance. At the same time, the authors engage in what I have called public sphere domesticity. They use their investment in new domesticity as something cool and a device for identity creation, to move into the public sphere through blogging and gain social recognition from an unknown audience.

5.3 Strengths and limitations

There are several critical notes to make with regard to the argument made in this analysis. First, the discourse of new domesticity as described by Matchar (2013) includes a significant shift in lifestyle. It includes highly educated women (who may or may not already have a career), who make the deliberate decision to cut back in hours and simplify their lives by focusing on domestic tasks such as cooking and taking care of children. Although the authors of the five mommy blogs that were analysed in this thesis do not specifically mention their educational background, it could be assumed that these women never made the actual shift. This does not mean the five women are not intelligent, it means that they never had the intent to focus on a career. Anneliese from Aesthetic Nest is the only author who mentions a former career as a marketing professional. However, in giving their lives meaning the bloggers do reflect on values of new domesticity and they also engage in practices and use aesthetics that match new domesticity.

Still, with regard to the ‘craft’ mommy bloggers, new domesticity in this thesis has to be understood as a discourse, not as a narrative. The downshifting narrative focuses on the cutback in work by highly educated women. The new domesticity sensibility describes, on a broader level, a sensibility in society that focuses on authenticity, quality, investing time, simplifying, re-learning skills to make things yourself and a nostalgia reflected in an interest in vintage and second hand. Elements of this sensibility are present in the ‘craft’ mommy blogs under analysis. They might not say as much about the implications of highly educated women focusing on domestic tasks, but they do say something about the way in which this discourse is present in society and functions in defining identities and communities.

A second critical note concerns the religion of the five women. They do not mention it in their introductions, but the content of blog posts that were not analysed suggest that the authors are religious. This is assumed as a small search showed that all authors mention at some point that they go to church. This might put the results in a different perspective. The women’s focus on family, gratitude and simplicity might be a result of their religion, not of a discourse of new domesticity. The bloggers

might see themselves as the most suitable for guarding Christian values and thereby derive their power from their roles as “natural” guardians of the home (Davidoff & Hall, 2002; Williams, 2000). For example, in Katy Dills blog post *A woman’s gift* (2013, August 26) she celebrates the gift women have to control what is inside the house. This might refer to traditional ideas of the woman as the keeper of the house, and ideas from domestic feminism as presented by Gilligan (1982).

This critical note mainly refers to the values the bloggers discuss they find important in life. On an abstract level, it might nullify the complete argument made in this thesis as religion is what gives their lives meaning. But religion does not explain the bloggers’ interest in sewing, and their nostalgic aesthetic. Also, the bloggers still use their activities as a link between identity and community. In this sense, religion becomes a characteristic to them that helps in the creation of community and the distribution of a certain discourse.

Thirdly, what should also be noted is that the bloggers in this thesis are selected from the top 50 most popular craft mom bloggers. This means that there is a large amount of non-top 50 bloggers out there, who might not receive as much recognition as these bloggers. These bloggers might still find an opportunity for identity creation, using elements of new domesticity in the process, in their blogging, but they do not receive recognition from an equally large group of readers. In this case, the argument remains that the acts of blogging and sewing themselves provide the bloggers with agency, such as in the cases of Ang (1982) and Radway (1984).

5.4. Recommendations

On a methodological level this thesis also has its limitations as it has analysed only a small amount of texts. It could be argued that the amount of twenty-five texts is not sufficient to make valid conclusions. Therefore, this thesis should be seen as a beginning of further research as it is the first to investigate the discourse of new domesticity. It would be interesting to analyse the discourse further.

As suggested in the results chapter of this thesis, images on blogs are very interesting subjects to analyse for elements of the discourse of new domesticity. Such an analysis would further investigate the aesthetic used in new domesticity. For example, the pilot analysis has shown that images on the blogs include subjects relating to nature or sweetness.

With regard to the subject of mommy blogs it would also be interesting to further research the motivations by creative mommy bloggers by interviewing them, having them write an explanation or observing them in the styles of Radway (1984) and Ang (1982). This would provide more insight into people’s reasons to engage in new domesticity. Also, it would be interesting to research other subjects in further defining the concept of new domesticity. This could be done with a comparative study that analyses for example Dutch mommy blogs, to see if there are cross-cultural differences in the presence

of a discourse of new domesticity. Also, the sensibility could be analysed within the context of other forms of media. For example, by analysing content that is more connected to the new domesticity lifestyle narrative in magazines such as the Dutch *VTwomen* and *Flow*.

Having discussed its flaws and opportunities, this master thesis can be finished by saying that it has made a next step in scientifically researching the current trend of new domesticity. It has answered the research question “(How) do discourses of new domesticity feature in creative mommy blogs?” by discussing how the authors of the five blogs under analysis use elements of new domesticity in defining their identity as women and also in finding a connection with a community of likeminded bloggers and readers who, in turn, are of influence on the bloggers identity by giving them recognition. It has attributed to existing literature by showing how the acts of being creative and blogging about being creative function in the daily lives of the bloggers, by giving them a chance to have some time to themselves and also by providing their lives with more meaning.

I would like to conclude by saying that I believe the discourse of new domesticity will remain an interesting subject for analysis in the years to come. Although its temporal and trendy applications in the form of flowers in a mason jar, knitted scarves and men with impressive beards will vanish in some time, the discourse reflects a broader sensibility in society. It reflects a need of people to give meaning to their lives by investing in things that take effort. One might even say that it reflects the sensibility of a new generation. A generation flooded by choices and information, trying to find the essence of life in the small things because they cannot oversee the big picture, and thereby risking to ignore the big picture. The sensibility of new domesticity can be seen from many different perspectives, this thesis has offered one.

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Appendix I: Network analysis

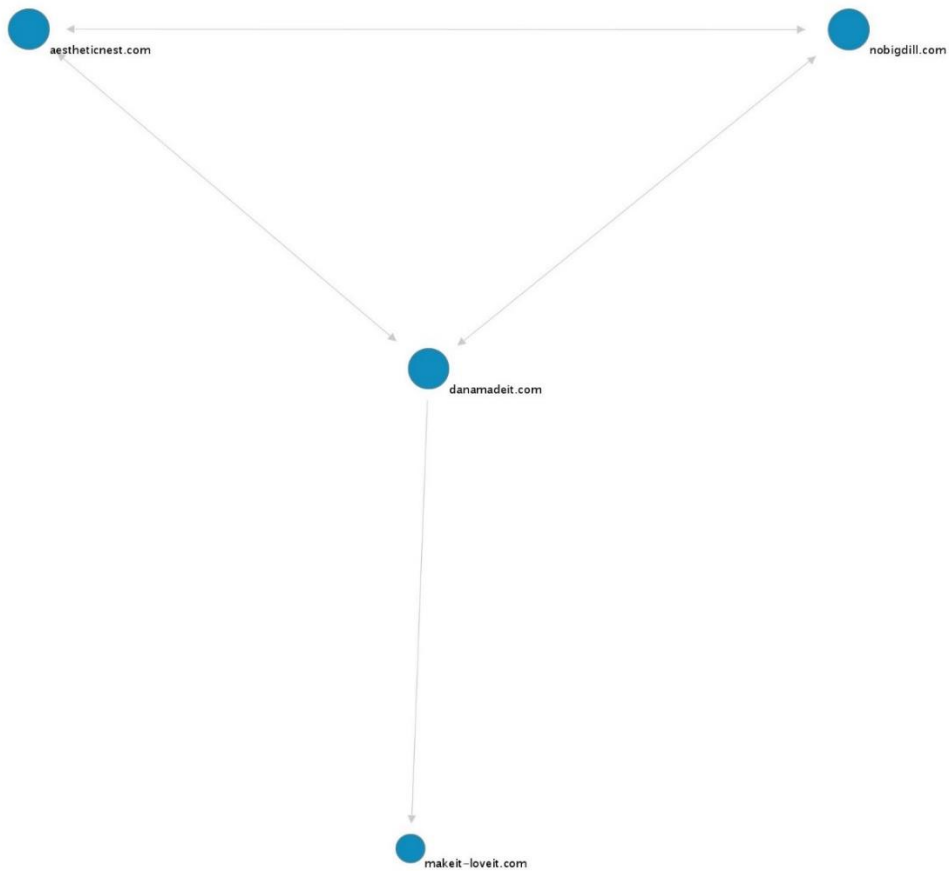


Figure 2: Network analysis² Aesthetic Nest, No Big Dill, Dana Made It, Make It & Love It and Hart & Sew³

² The network analysis was performed with the network mapping software Issue crawler (www.issuecrawler.net)

³ Hart & Sew is not included in the visual of the network analysis as the blog did not show a link to any of the other blogs

Appendix II: Data-matrix

Textnr.	Date	Blog	Title	Type of blogpost	Amount of words
Text1	07-02-2014	Aesthetic Nest	Sewing: 'R' is for Romantic, Ruffled and Rose	Project	459
Text2	16-11-2013	Aesthetic Nest	Sewing: Winter Wonderland Kid Style	Project	568
Text3	27-07-2013	Hart & Sew	The Edelweiss Dress	Project	310
Text4	10-04-2014	Hart & Sew	Handmade (squirrel) Easter Dresses	Project	375
Text5	26-09-2013	Dana Made It	Stalling and Sewing	Project	536
Text6	01-07-2013	Make It & Love It	Keepin' it Cheap...for the 4th of July	Tutorial	910
Text7	26-08-2013	No Big Dill	A Woman's Gift	Reflection	720
Text8	15-03-2013	Make It & Love It	The 15 MINUTE "Thrift Store Skirt" to "Girl's Dress" Refashion	Tutorial	853
Text9	23-01-2013	Aesthetic Nest	FIY: The Grass Is Green	Reflection	120
Text10	17-01-2013	Aesthetic Nest	Sewing: Pull-on Mini Skirt (Tutorial)	Tutorial	1087
Text11	26-02-2014	Hart & Sew	Be Together	Reflection	318
Text12	12-09-2012	Hart & Sew	scallop yoke tutorial (with a bonus!)	Tutorial	665
Text13	03-01-2014	Make It & Love It	A refelction of 2013... and My Favorite Blog Projects	Reflection	614
Text14	16-08-2013	Make It & Love It	Re-purposing: Long Sleeve Shirt into Short, with Floppy Bow Shoulders	Tutorial	806
Text15	23-04-2013	Dana Made It	sewing for my sanity	Tutorial	568
Text16	22-07-2013	Dana Made It	the Kite dress	Project	453
Text17	27-08-2013	Dana Made It	First-Day Dress	Project	442
Text18	11-07-2013	No Big Dill	A Life of Wabi	Reflection	835
Text19	28-06-2013	No Big Dill	OUT Chapter 4: Me!	Project	498
Text20	27-09-2013	No Big Dill	Sew all 26: D	Project	723
Text21	n.d.	Aesthetic Nest	About me	Introduction	914
Text22	n.d.	Hart & Sew	About	Introduction	62
Text23	n.d.	Make It & Love It	About	Introduction	1028
Text24	n.d.	No Big Dill	who is no big dill	Introduction	338
Text25	n.d.	Dana Made It	About	Introduction	164

Figure 3: Dataset

Appendix III: Data

Characteristics Text 1

Title Sewing: "R" is for Romantic, Ruffled and Rose
Blog Aesthetic Nest
Date February 7, 2014
Type Project

When the incomparable Katy Dill hosts a series and asks one to join, the answer has to be yes! Have you been following her "Sew All 26" series? How could you not? Every time she posts something I think she can't possibly outdo herself and yet she does!

I chose the letter "R." Not because it has any special meaning, but because when I was presented with the opportunity it gave me what should have been plenty of time and a few ideas I could play with.

It all started with: Romantic, Ruffled, Rose...

And then R stood for "Ran out of fabric." So much for advance planning. So I sewed a blouse instead of a dress.

(I think this is seriously gorgeous fabric from Anna Maria Horner--LouLouThi Clippings Passion)

And to Reinvent my idea, I sewed a Retro skirt with Rounded pockets...

The pockets are a Reappearance from a dress I sewed about a year ago for another fun series. I was going to put them on the Romantic Dress, which was also inspired by that project, had it been a dress, but I've also been thinking about the pockets on a seamed a-line skirt like this. I've had this skirt in my head for a while. I was going to make one for myself but sewing for myself never seems as pressing. Now that I have the pattern worked out maybe I will make one. (Right...)

I made the skirt out of grey boiled wool I purchased here last year and lined it with some scraps of the Anna Maria Horner cotton. I wish I'd had more of that fabric because I'd love it for all the lining. As it is, it's in the pockets and waistband and the rest of the lining is offwhite.

Finally R is for a reversible shrug.

This is my Winnie Shrug (Update: the pattern is available [here!](#)) and I wish I'd taken a photo of Audrey wearing it with the printed side out. For that matter, I wish I'd taken photos of the blouse and skirt without the shrug too. That may be my favorite combination. But I was already pushing my luck.

My camera battery died right after I took this shot. And did I mention my sewing machine broke while I was in the middle of sewing the skirt? But that I just happened to have a neighbor's machine sitting in my sewing room? It was unbelievable really. A bit Rough!

But R is also for Recovered, Resistant, Rallied and so Relieved. This project made it! And Audrey was a trooper too with her Rosy cheeks.

Thank you Katy for the inspiration and the Reason to sew. It was so much fun! I would sew with you anytime.

Characteristics Text 2

Title Sewing: Winter Wonderland Kid Style (Pattern Anthology Review)
Blog Aesthetic Nest
Date November 16, 2013
Type Project

Don't you just love the Winter Wonderland Pattern Anthology? It's such a great concept to introduce a bundle of coordinating patterns at an incredible price. This collection of eight patterns is available at 40% off through November 18--just two more days!

The talented team behind Pattern Anthology put together a great tour of bloggers to introduce Winter Wonderland. You can see all their interpretations in the Gallery here. And today I'm sharing mine.

I chose two of the patterns to sew for my girls' Fall wardrobe. The first is the Juliet Capelet (love that clever reference to The Bard in that name) by See Kate Sew. I fell in love with the pixie hat version of this cropped cape and thought it would be a trendy topper in a bold plaid.

Plaid seems to always be a stylish option but this season it seems an especially popular look. I happened to have this great tan, black and red fabric in my stash. Looks like the British plaids I am so fond of. I love a mix of textures so I paired it with a cotton chenille for the lining. It's cozy and peeks out along the edges. And, I decided to add a classic reference with a bright red "leather" button at the neck. It's actually a vintage wood button I found at this Etsy shop.

Tess is wearing her Capelet with denim skinny jeans (a staple for her) and tall black leather boots. (Wouldn't this Juliet Capelet look fabulous with leather pants or a skirt?)

And she's as happy as can be!

Next, I sewed Scarlett the Holly Trousers from Go to Patterns (The Train to Crazy blog). I love the narrow silhouette of these Holly (Golightly!) Trousers and the retro pleats at the top. I hemmed them a bit shorter and they fit her just perfectly! I will have to sew her another pair.

I wanted to try them in a bold floral print fabric I received from The Fabric Store (I am dying to visit their new store in person!). I love all the bold, bright prints for Fall and this one has the trendy jewel tones: emerald, teal, gold, and amethyst. I couldn't believe it when these colors came back, but now of course I've embraced them (I personally can't get enough teal). There's a bit of animal print thrown in this mix too! This is such a beautiful fabric--it's a stretch cotton twill with a very silky feel.

I like to keep the rest of an ensemble a bit simple when there's a bold print involved, so I paired these with a cropped wool shrug (The Winnie Shrug pattern is available here) in a teal boiled wool, but I did pick another more restrained pattern in amethyst for a silky head turban. This accessory is a dressed up version of the one Holly Golightly wore while playing guitar in Breakfast at Tiffany's. It's made from a silky print that caught my eye at Joann: 1/4 yard and done!

Scarlett is wearing these trousers with gilded loafers I bought last season from crewcuts. This Fall it seems everything has a bit of gilding...

Vintage-inspired is always a great look. But wouldn't these Holly Trousers look fabulous with another classic--the denim shirt? I'm hunting for the perfect one....

For more information about these patterns and the whole collection visit [Pattern Anthology](#) here.

Characteristics Text 3

Title	The edelweiss dress
Blog	Hart & Sew
Date	June 27, 2013
Type	Project

Today I am joining the Hey June pattern tour of the Edelweiss dress. Adrianna of Crafterhours invited me along and I am so happy she did because a) it inspired me to finally get back into the sewing room, and b) I love this pattern! It is just the right amount of sweet and the options are pretty much endless of how it can be switched up with different fabrics, a pieced bodice, or by making it tunic or dress length. I already have so many ideas of different 'looks' I want to sew up.

When I first saw the pattern I knew immediately what style of dress I wanted to sew. It reminded me of this vintage pinafore I had been wanting to try and recreate for some time and so my inspiration was set from the beginning. I found the solid colors in my fabric stash and started piecing them together to make the triangle pattern first. As I went along I decided if I was going to do all of this tedious piecwork then I wanted to have the triangles go all the way around the dress for a bigger impact. So, I altered the pattern a little by merging the three bodice pattern pieces into one - that way the triangles could be one continuous piece. I also added a lining to the skirt since I chose white. I am asking for it, I know, but doesn't every little girl need a white dress for summer? ;)

I love the off center buttons in the back and the fact that I can move them over to loosen the bodice so she can fit into the dress longer.

This just might be my favorite piece of clothing I have made to date. I really love how it turned out, and a great pattern can make all the difference!

Characteristics Text 4

Title Handmade (squirrel) Easter dresses
Blog Hart & Sew
Date April 10, 2014
Type Project

You may remember that instead of having the girls wear vintage this Easter I mentioned that I wanted to sew them dresses, and I am SO happy that I made the time with a little motivation from KCW - I love how these turned out!

I used a vintage pattern but made some alterations, like changing the zipper up for an open button closure in back, skipping the peter pan collar so they would read a little more modern, and using piping on the bodice instead of bias tape. Since vintage patterns only come in one size I was lucky that I had a size 4 which is right between LM and Lark's sizes. Having sewed vintage patterns before I knew they run a little big (at least on my girls) so I was pretty sure that I could make two size 4 dresses and it would fit them both. Luckily, I was right!

I would have added length to LM's skirt, but I had *just* enough of this darling squirrel fabric to eek out both dresses. The purple chambray is from a Target shirt I found at the thrift store in the XXL section. I used almost every inch of that as well, including using the sleeve cuffs as one of the dress belts.

I received the organic cotton squirrel fabric c/o Sew Fine Fabric. Squirrels are totally the new Easter bunny, right? ;) But seriously, this fabric was such nice quality and sewed like a dream! I believe the main difference between your sewing project looking more professional versus homemade (I don't really want to put a negative spin on that word, but you know what I mean, right?) is all in the fabric choice and Jodi is 'obsessively selective' when it comes to stocking her shop with only the best. I have my eye on all of these fantastic prints 1/2/3/4/5 and am thinking about using one in particular for a baby boy quilt. And... I just now realized I have never sewed anything for a boy before, ha. That will be different!

The girl's and I almost can't wait for Easter now that they have these new dresses to wear - bring on the egg hunt!

See all of my KCW projects here.

Characteristics Text 5

Title Stalling and sewing
Blog Dana Made It
Date September 26, 2013
Type Project

Instead of sharing a house update or “how to turn [Kid Shorts](#) into pants” today....

let me just tell you why I’m so lame.

Remember that time you didn’t back up your hard drive for 3 months and you started working on a new pattern, and after 3 days of progress in Illustrator your computer froze on a gray screen and never came

back to life? And it turns out your hard drive was mostly dead?

That time? Yea. That just happened me.

The good news is, I backed up everything in June.

The bad news is, I backed up everything in June.

And the takehome lesson is....don’t feel sorry for me. This is something we all have to learn and remember. It’s so easy to just click on that little time machine every night and send stuff over to the external drive. Doi. It’s the little things that can be hard sometimes, right?

So now my laptop is at the data extraction doctor....because 3 months of data was more than I could part with. Have you ever gone to one of those? The kind of extraction place that actually opens up the drive in a “clean” room with hazmat suits and junk like that? It’s kind of crazy. I was expecting a normal computer store front with apple-y signs in a small strip mall. Instead I pulled up to a medical building, found the company name on the lobby placard, and took the elevator to their waiting room.

Funny.

And reassuring. I have high hopes that surgery will go well.

And in a week I should be back up and running.

In the mean time, I’ll just keep testing my own pattern! [The First Day Dress](#)

Thankfully I had printed one black and white copy of the semi-completed pattern (and rescued the pages from the outside trashcan. And wiped melty chocolate cake off of the front. Worth it)

Dude. By the time this thing comes out you’re gonna be sick of it...or itching for it! But I really think you’re going to like it!

And thank you for the input on the pattern name. You talked me into keeping it as-is. Because the First Day of anything deserves a special Dress or Top. Then every time you wear it, you’ll remember that first day excitement all over again.

This time around I used the pattern to make two Tops for Lucy.

And we both loved them!...despite the fact that I sewed the sleeves on wrong.

Whoops.

I sewed the hem side into the armholes which makes the sleeves flare out more than they should. But eh. It works.

I added an extra inch of length to the sleeveless version, since the gray one seems a bit short.

And finished it off with a nice lining and folded hem.
I seriously love this thing.

and I hope you will too.

Stay tuned!

And have a great Thursday.

And don't go to bed without backing up your computer.

The **Little Mermaid Giveaway** is still happening from now until 10/15. Enter [HERE](#) if you haven't already!
Plus, check out other bloggers who are hosting similar giveaways for more chances to win (links at the bottom of the giveaway).

Characteristics Text 6

Title Keepin' it Cheap...for the 4th of July {Turn a Tshirt into Dress w/ Braided Collar}
Blog Make It & Love It
Date July 1, 2013
Type Tutorial

Are you kidding me?!?! 4th of July is THIS week?

Anyone else wondering who's been messing with the calendars lately?!? I swear it's still May.

But if it has to be July, I might as well enjoy it. Because you guys know I love an excuse to make a new outfit for the kiddos. So hooray for the 4th!! But I didn't feel like paying too much for fabric this year. (*Especially because we have more wall paint and baseboards to buy. :)*) So, I went my favorite route.....thrift store fabric shopping! You know, to turn someone's OLD, into our NEW. Sometimes I just shop in my own closet for un-loved pieces of clothing that I can chop up. But I didn't have enough patriotic colors that I was willing to cut up. So, off to find a few treasures.

And instead of spending more than necessary on fun new patriotic outfits for the kiddos (*you know what I'm talking about.....they're all over the stores. And yeah, are cute and really tempting...*), I made a new little outfit for Chloe for almost nothing.

And yeah, I know the 4th is only 3 days away. But some of you may be like me.....and thought we were still in May. So join me, and whip up a few patriotic items for the kiddos. (You won't find many ready-to-wear items in the store anyway. It's only 3 days away, remember??)

Or, save this for another rainy day. Because it would look cute in any ol' color. :)

.....

Ahhhhh, old into new. I love it. E v e r y. T i m e.

Do you recognize that collar? Yep, I made an almost identical Braided Collar Dress, when she was only a few months old.

The only difference this time.....are the rounded pockets. Which, she LOVES.

And, you betcha. I added in my little mark. (*More on my clothing labels.*)

Oh, and in case you're wondering, yep, she likes when whatever I'm sewing, goes to HER.....and NOT her big brother or sister. She looked at this dress when it was all finished and said, "***dat's MY dress!***" Yes, Coco.....it is!

(Anything else she sees is always HERS too. "Dat's MY brush!" and "Dat's MY doggy!" and "Dat's MY shoe!" Even if they're not hers. Ha. She's definitely a territorial youngest child...)

Sweet girl. Please keep that little fire you've got. Well, I guess you can turn it down when you're 15... But until then, I'm gonna enjoy the random, sometimes shocking things that come out of that little mouth, all I can.

I guess we can finally admit the 4th of July is on its way. Chloe is ready to partaaaay. Check.

Now, onto a little something for Elli and Connor. I guess you'll have to wait until tomorrow (*because I haven't made theirs yet.*)

Do you want to see how I made this dress with the pockets??

This dress technique is exactly the same as the Tshirt into Dress with Braided Collar I made over a year ago. The only difference, are these sweet pockets.

They add such a fun look, so don't even think about skipping out on them. :)

So, cut out your dress pieces first.....using an existing dress or Tshirt as a guide. And also, be sure to use the bottom Tshirt hem, as the hem for your new dress.

And then set them aside.

For the pockets, just cut out a pocket shape out of paper. Then hold it up to your front dress piece, imagining two of them. Adjust the size if necessary.

Then, use the paper as a pattern to cut out a pocket from the sleeve of a Tshirt. The hem of the sleeve will be the top hem of the pocket. I'm all about saving time around here! :)

Just be sure to cut an extra 1/4 inch around the curve of the pocket. (Or make your pattern piece bigger to begin with, to allow for that seam allowance.)

Then, use a basting stitch and sew all the way around the curved edges of the pocket. Leave tails at both ends. (Need help with the basting stitch and gathering?)

Now pull the top string and gather in the fabric just a bit.

Create an even and ever-so-slight gather around the edges. The purpose in this, is to help fold under the curved edge, nice and even. I promise, you'll love how well it works! :)

Then, iron it flat.....raw edges folded towards the back side.

Repeat with the other pocket and place them both on the dress FRONT piece.

Sew them in place, stitching around the curved edges only. Sew about an 1/8 of an inch from the outer edge. Add a second line of stitches inside of that, to really help secure the pocket in place.

In the original tutorial, I sewed the front dress and back pieces together first before adding the strips of folded fabric to the arm holes. It's actually a little easier to sandwich the strips of fabric around the arm hole openings individually. Both ways work, but sometimes it's a little easier to break it down a bit more. Just thought I'd share.

The rest is just like the Braided Collar Dress from over a year ago.

Ahhhhh! Miss Chloe is all ready to celebrate our country's freedom in her patriotic RED, WHITE, and BLUE!!!!

We'll talk again soon.

Probably tomorrow.

-Ashley

Characteristics Text 7

Title A Woman's Gift
Blog No Big Dill
Date August 26, 2013
Type Reflection

Hello blogging world! Is it just me, or is life busy? I've missed regular blogging, and thank you to those who've inquired if I still plan on blogging. While I haven't given you much confidence here, yes, I'm not giving up on this creative outlet. We need to hold on to creative outlets that add to happiness.

We just got through a bunch of camps, 3 birthdays and an anniversary, not to mention getting the kids back in school which includes the obligatory school shopping.

I actually did the back to school shopping over a month ago and was so proud of myself as I loaded the bags of paper, pencils, and a plethora of back-to-school smelling supplies. I was driving home, perhaps doing a little nail shine and glance when I realized: Clover. Is. In. Kindergarten.

I guess not so much a realization, because I've known since she was born, duh, but how did I entirely skip her list that I even had in my hand. Not so much as a pencil-top-eraser.

I slumped down in my seat, sighed a big sigh, and rolled my eyes and laughed. There might have been hysterical laughing, the kind where you pull up to a red light, look over to the car next door, and wonder what in the world is so funny to that person sitting all alone in their car.

Something needs to change, I thought. I used to blame it on moving and changing schools and and and. But we don't have any new schools this school year, the boxes are unpacked (except for that one pesky one that nobody wants to deal with) and the chaos in my mind and in my house are still very present.

What do I need? More storage containers? More ways to organize? More systems? More lists?

I was at the library and stumbled on a book *Zen and the Art of Housekeeping* by Brownell, while looking for cookbooks, checked it out and renewed it once already. I'm inspired. The maintenance is just a small portion of my new quest to gain control and peace in my life.

I haven't had time to sew and do other things that are passions because too much gets in the way. Less, less, less, less is what I need more, ironically. I just finished *Zen and the Art of Housekeeping* last night and will start it again, because, as Brownell puts it, *Whether or not my work is figured into the gross national product, I deserve to have a home that is peaceful and positive. My husband deserves it. My children deserve it.*

I've got two more books in the queue that have revved my engine for my desire of simplicity, that I will share if they are noteworthy.

I have big plans.

It's even part of the Back To School Theme: ...A House of Order...A House of Prayer...

"As keepers of the home, we have an incredible opportunity to make an enormous impact on the quality of the lives we live and the lives of those that we love.

This impact can best be felt by doing small things well--the things that make life worth living, that give our existence its depth and its richness.

In my case, I may not be bringing home the bacon. But I am the one who knows exactly how much mayo to put on the bread of each and every member of my family in order for them to have the perfect BLT." – Brownell

That went straight to my heart while my head wanted to yell Yes! Yes! YES!

What we do as mothers may not be directly deposited in a bank account, but the value is beyond price.

I forget that sometimes and drag my feet through the daily drudgery of chores.

It's a gift, the raising of these souls, and I want them to feel and know that when they are home they are standing in holiness, where they are loved above any other place, and where they are met with acceptance, but also the challenge to be a finer human being.

I'm excited. It's a great gift for a woman to give herself control of her life.

ps I'm planning on starting the Weekly Alphabetical Sewing next week for those who are planning on sewing along.

Characteristics Text 8

Title	The 15 MINUTE "Thrift Store Skirt" to "Girl's Dress" Refashion
Blog	Make It & Love It
Date	March 15, 2013
Type	Tutorial

Elli's growing like a stinkin' weed. Most of her dresses are getting awkwardly short on her. Her skirts, well, those can always sit a little lower on the hips and can last a little longer. ;) But the dresses.....I keep telling her she can't wear the awkward-short ones any more. Yeah, sad day for Elli. (Remember how she's obsessed with skirts and dresses??) I have been telling her for several months now, that I would buy or make her some new dresses. But at the store.....the dresses in her size are either super teeny-bop (high school musical, hannah montana, etc.) or super blah.

So.....off to the thrift store for some inspiration. :)

Sometimes, I have an "unlucky thrift store" day and can't find a thing. But I can almost always find something for something else. Let me tell you a secret, I usually find the best stuff when I'm not even looking for it. Because last week when I was at the thrift store, looking for some knit shirts for a different project.....I found a swishy lady's skirt with a funky print. And I immediately thought of Elli's dress dilemma. See? Lucky. ;)

One more thing.....I'm going to share with you the best types of skirts to use to turn this project into a 15 MINUTE project. Simple.

Cute skirt. But even cuter dress for Elli. (And all it took was a little adjusting of the width and adding straps. Done.)

And you know, we never would have found this print OR texture at the fabric store. So it's completely unique.....and she LOVES it! :)

It moves nicely and the color gives it a nice punch. So she's happy as a clam! (Especially because it's a little longer and will last a while before becoming awkward-short like her current dresses.)

But I dare ya.....head to the Thrift Store (or your closet) and start looking at those old skirts a little differently. Those weird length skirts or funky-cut ones may look terrible on you.....but they may be just what you need to create a darling little dress!

The best ones to find?? Ones with an elastic waistband. They make this whole process a lot quicker. And easier. (But you can transform a fitted-waistband too. No worries!)

And because you'll most likely need to make the skirt a bit more narrow so it will fit around your subject's chest, you'll have leftover fabric to create some straps. Perfect.

Oh, and if you'd like to add a little something to the front.....add a [Shirred Fabric Flower](#) to the strap. I experimented with Elli's hair clip and LOOK!! Cute, right? :)

Whew. Glad I finally kept my word and made this little nut a dress that fits. And for \$2.50 (the cost of the skirt at the thrift store).....I'm just as happy! :)

Would you like the Simple Skirt into Dress Instructions??

First of all, head to the Thrift Store. Or your closet. And look for a skirt that has a little (or a lot) of fullness to it.

Now, finding an elastic waistband will make this project the easiest.....but you don't have to use an elastic waistband. However, this tutorial isn't going to go into detail of how to make alterations to a skirt that DOESN'T have an elastic waistband. (Another day??)

First, measure the skirt around your subject's chest (up high, even with the arm pits) and place a pin at the spot where you need to take it in. Then, turn the skirt inside out and create a line of pins all the way down the skirt where you need to take it in. (Keep in mind, you'll need to angle your line outward to keep both sides symmetrical.) Then sew a line down the skirt, right where you placed your pins.

Then, cut the extra fabric away, about a 1/4-1/2 inch away from the seam. Then zig-zag or serge the raw edge.

Now, you can make straps with completely fabric or use the scraps from the extra skirt fabric that you cut away. The width of your straps can be and size you'd like.....but I cut strips that were about 1.5 inches wide and then sewed them into tubes (1/4 inch seam allowance), and then turned them right side out. (Just be sure that they are long enough to fit over the shoulders and have room to be sewn to the dress.) If you want to keep it even simpler, use wide ribbon as your straps.

Something I forgot to do and had to go back and do after, was to zig-zag (or serge) the raw edges of each strap end. So, you won't see them finished in my photo below. But do that now, before going on.

Now, try the dress on your subject to find the best strap placement and pin the straps in place. Then take it off and sew each strap end in place with two lines of stitches (to keep it secure).

And there you have it.....a 15 Minute Dress. Easy and cute!

Now, you'll never look at an ill-fitting skirt the same way again. Ever! :)

-Ashley

Characteristics Text 9

Title FYI: The Grass is Green
Blog Aesthetic Nest
Date January 23, 2013
Type Reflection

The other morning I went to drop off Scarlett at her preschool and noticed a young mother dropping off her daughter at the same time. On a snow day she was wearing heels and hose, a great coat, and accessories. Her hair was blown straight and she had on full makeup. Clearly she wasn't schlepping between a gradeschool carpool and a pre-shower workout. She was on her way to work.

I slid some tinted lipbalm over my lips and adjusted my ponytail and thought for a minute that I would likely feel better about myself if I were all made up and on my way to an office. Then I remembered when I was similar to that woman and would drop off my oldest at preschool on my way to the office. At that time I looked more than a bit enviously at the mothers in jeans and flipflops or workout clothes and thought I would likely feel better about myself if I were home full time and squeezing in a workout or a few errands during the preschool hours.

So I am trying to remind myself that the grass is pretty green right here, in this stage I'm in right now. I feel I am running a marathon of picking up after a suddenly full house (what happened!?) and it still doesn't look picked up. I seem to be falling further from my expectations when it comes to completing creative projects. There are always things I could be doing better as a mother and a neighbor. And maybe it will be a bit easier in a few years, when I'm out of the little kid stage. But then I'm sure there will be something else. And I'll miss the little kids.

I really like the advice "if everyone were to throw her problems out into the street for a swap you would look at all the others' and run as fast as you could to collect yours again." We each have our own blessing, opportunities, challenges, and sorrows. I am trying to enjoy those that are mine. It's so tempting to exhale through the day and think about what things might be like... But I am trying not to. Because with a little perspective on today I will likely realize the grass was greener. That's what does it, isn't it? A bit of perspective.

Hope you are enjoying yours.

My "FYI" posts share news or a perspective about something that's been on my mind. You can read them all [here](#).

Characteristics Text 10

Title	Sewing: Pull-on Mini Skirt (Tutorial)
Blog	Aesthetic Nest
Date	January 17, 2013
Type	Tutorial

It's about this time of year I get really sucked into those athletic women's clothing catalogs (Title Nine and Athleta, specifically). You know, the ones where all the models are real women who split their time between surfing and yoga, when they aren't rock climbing. And who run to the grocery store, or take a weekend trip dressed like they are ready to go hiking if they find a spare ten minutes. "Gosh," I need to step it up, I think to myself. But it's difficult to fit in those kinds of interests when my days are currently filled with stair climbing (to change diapers and put away laundry) and sprinting (between school, lessons and appointments). I am a big believer in "there is a time and season..."

So, then I thought, why not just dress a bit like these adventurous women? But activewear doesn't seem like it should be my full-time wardrobe unless it is serving a real function (anyone else feel hopelessly honest in this way?) such as clothing me for a workout. Especially given the price tag. So I sewed myself a sporty pull-on mini skirt instead. I think the women in these catalogs throw them on over their yoga clothing to and from the studio, but I wear mine with tights and tall boots and it's kind of a fun switch from wearing jeans to run the daily carpool. Simple, and inexpensive too so I can try out the look without committing too much.

I decided to make one for Audrey too when I saw this chevron fabric. The benefits of a pull-on mini skirt work for girls of all ages: easy and comfortable and a little bit flirty. This particular version (fabric purchased at Joann last Fall) is soft and fuzzy, and the bold pattern suits us both.

I have been trying to do a better job of predicting what Audrey will wear and this ensemble seemed like a sure thing to me. She likes things a bit more tailored, and prefers bold patterns over pastels and florals.

I even lined the top and skirt with soft knits to be certain they were comfortable to wear. (We're not quite agreed on how comfortable these pieces are but I did get her to wear them, so that's something!)

The Bateau Neck Top is from a pattern I've got in the works. I really like the classic shape with covered buttons up the back and the patch pockets in the front. And it's classic Audrey, to me.

I think the skirt and top are a nice, dressier combination for her, but I'm sticking with the casual take on this skirt for myself. Oh, and I should mention that even though I couldn't resist taking a photo together, I don't plan to go out in the matching outfits. I'm not entirely opposed to the idea of matching but it would have to be just the right outfits, and occasion. That topic could be a whole post in itself, right? Would love to hear your take on the controversial subject...

So The Bateau Neck Top pattern is in the works (UPDATE: It's now available [here](#)), but the Pull-On Mini Skirt is a tutorial I've got right here. In women's and girl's sizes. It's about the easiest sewing project there is, so even if you are new to this craft give this a shot!

Click through to take a look.

PULL-ON MINI SKIRT TUTORIAL

You'll need:

1 to 1.5 yards of fabric (wovens or knits will work); more if you are matching patterns

One yard or less of lining, if you choose to line it

3/4" elastic the length of your (or your girl's) just-below-the-waist measurement

Coordinating thread

Start by making a pattern for cutting out the skirt by referring to the diagram below and the spreadsheet for suggested sizing. You can use a piece of wrapping paper, or butcher paper--whatever you have around that is large enough for the measurements. Or you can draw directly on the wrong side of your fabric.

There is just one piece for both the front and the back of the skirt. You will want the waist of the mini skirt (which I prefer to sit just a bit below the waist) to be large enough to pull on over the hips, so if you want to check the fit make certain your hip measurement is not more than twice the "(B) Waist" measurement less 1" for seam allowances. Or you can generate your own "(B) Waist" measurement by measuring your hips, adding an inch for seam allowances and then dividing that number in two. The width of the hem should be 10-25% greater than the "(B) Waist" measurement, depending on the amount of flare you prefer. And the length of the skirt should be the length of wherever you would like the waistband to sit to just about the kneecap, plus 2" for allowances.

Cut two of the skirt pieces, on the fold. If you are using a boldly patterned fabric take the time to do your best matching the pattern at the top and bottom so that the side seams look nice. If you would like to line the skirt, cut two on the fold of the lining fabric as well.

If you are lining the skirt, baste the lining fabric to the skirt fabric along the side seams with wrong sides together. Baste using a .5" seam allowance or less.

Next, lay the two skirt pieces (lined or not) right sides together and pin along the side seams. Then stitch the two skirt pieces together with a .5" seam allowance.

This is a good point to slip on the skirt and see how it fits. If it is too roomy you can take it in by stitching parallel to one of the side seams. I tried mine on and ended up taking it in another .5" along one of the sides.

When you are certain it fits, trim the seam allowances to .25" and zigzag stitch or serge to finish them.

Turn under both the top and bottom edges of the skirt and zig zag stitch them in place.

To form the elastic casing at the waist, turn the top edge of the skirt down 1" and top stitch close to the bottom edge of the casing.

And finally, finish the hem on the skirt by turning the bottom edge up .5". Top stitch close to the top edge.

It doesn't get much easier than that, right?

Characteristics Text 11

Title	Be together
Blog	Hart & Sew
Date	February 26, 2014
Type	Reflection

And here we have my children playing together on my bed one morning after I had just finished folding and putting away the laundry. Just a moment of our day-to-day life captured as I was contemplating whether or not we should sand and re-stain the eaves outside our house or perhaps paint them for a similar look to [this](#). I wasn't totally engrossed in this moment watching my children interact, it was just a snapshot, but sometimes seemingly unexceptional photos can end up speaking to your heart.

We spent the morning doing nothing in particular besides being together which I thought was quite lovely, so during nap time I posted this picture to Instagram (find me [@stacyhartsew](#)) to document my thoughts -

"My favorite mornings are the ones when we stay home and don't do a whole lot other than be together."

And then I thought about it some more. And then I mulled over it all during nap time and while I was falling asleep that night, and suddenly this ordinary snapshot was absolutely beautiful to me. More than just documenting how we spent a lovely low-key morning together, but capturing life exactly how I want to live it.

Simple and uncluttered, being present with my loved ones, keeping up with the inevitable household chores with a happy attitude and a grateful heart. Watching my children play, answering their many questions, listening to them sing or cry, and kissing their bumps and bruises. Reading books, making and cleaning up creative messes, teaching love and forgiveness, and preparing nourishing food to eat - all the simple small things we did that morning could be rolled up into one big beautiful life.

Our mornings are not always this lovely, and my mind set about household chores is not always grateful, and sometimes we need our space from each other, but man, that life is there ready to be lived.

Characteristics Text 12

Title	Scallop yoke tutorial (with a bonus!)
Blog	Hart & Sew
Date	September 15, 2012
Type	Tutorial

Hello! I am bringing home this tutorial I did for [Skirt as Top](#) for the [Vintage May](#) series... Hope you enjoy (possibly again)!

Hello! Today I am going to show you how to alter a dress pattern to add a sweet vintage-inspired scalloped yoke. First, of course, you will need to choose a pattern - I chose a simple vintage sleeveless jumper for mine.

Find the dress front pattern piece. We are going to use it to make our yoke pattern pieces. Using paper you can trace with (I used freezer paper), trace the outline of the top shoulder to about 2" past the sleeve opening, then draw a straight line across the bottom. Trace all of the seam allowances and add other important information such as the center fold as well.

Cut out your new yoke pattern piece and it should look similar to this:

Next, we are going to make a yoke facing pattern piece. Lay your tracing paper on top of the yoke pattern piece you just made, and trace around the bottom going 4" up the sides. Draw a straight line across the top. Remember to transfer over any important information on this piece as well.

Now you should have yoke and yoke facing pattern pieces that look similar to this:

Now, we will add the scallops to the yoke facing piece. Starting on the side with the center fold, measure 1 1/2" up from the bottom and draw a large dot. Then measure 3" over and add another dot, and again a dot 3" over one more time (these measurements may be adjusted depending on how many/what size you want your scallops to be, these measurements worked perfectly for a size 4 pattern).

Next, draw the scallops connecting them at the top with the dots and making sure to leave yourself a seam allowance at the bottom (in other words, do not go all the way down to the bottom edge of the pattern). Now the yoke facing piece is complete.

The last pattern piece we need to make is the bottom part of the dress front piece, or the skirt. To do this place the yoke facing piece on top of the original dress front pattern piece. Using the tracing paper trace around the top of the yoke facing piece, then trace around the rest of the pattern down to the hemline without making any additional changes. Essentially, you just want to chop off the top.

Congratulations, you now have three separate pattern pieces where you originally had one! A yoke piece, a yoke facing piece, and a (decapitated) dress front piece.

Cut out your fabric pieces now. On the yoke facing piece you may want to add thread markers on the large dots as I did in red thread, but this is optional. Open it up, and using your choice of fabric marker draw the scallops on the WRONG side of the fabric all the way across.

Then pin the yoke facing piece to the yoke piece RIGHT sides together.

Sew along the scallop markings.

Trim the seam and clip curves.

Then turn the yoke facing right-side out. A little trick to get smooth curves is to poke a crochet hook or something similar in the scallops and push out along the edges. Iron flat.

Next, open up the yoke piece and pin the yoke facing to the dress front piece RIGHT sides together.

Sew along the top edge.

And, you're done! Okay, maybe not entirely done, but your new dress front piece with a darling scalloped yoke is done. Continue to sew your dress per your patterns instructions.

And, here is my finished dress! I embellished mine with fabric buttons on the scallops as well as two [pleated pockets](#).

And, I think she likes it!

BONUS!!! Use these same instructions to make a jagged yoke dress!

Using the same measurements (1.5" up, 3" over), simply draw a jagged line on the yoke facing piece instead of scallops:

Characteristics Text 13

Title A reflection of 2013.....and My Favorite Blog Projects!
Blog Make It & Love It
Date January 3, 2014
Type Reflection

*First of all, those of you who submitted forms in response to the [Bloggers Wanted](#) post that I put up last month, don't worry, I haven't forgotten about you. There were so many of you who submitted forms. As in hundreds. **I know.....wow!!** I'm so excited for some of you to join in on the fun.....I can hardly stand it. Truly! So here's the deal.....I will contact a few of you for now but will keep everyone's name in a spreadsheet and will save it for upcoming months and special projects. Thanks again...*

Oh, and if you're looking for the Quiet Book Patterns, 3 Book Giveaway.....[GO HERE](#). Closes January 6th, 11:59 p.m. (MST)

.....

I've been thinking about this blog a lot lately and have been so amazed at the changes and the crazy opportunities that have come because of it. Also, the friendships.....oh, the friendships!! :) This blog has been my little refuge. My place to create freely. And then share. The theme of this blog changes often and while looking back over the past year, I could see that my projects were catered around what was going on in our personal life. And that's why I love this blog. It usually tracks exactly what we're going through (life changes, holidays, illnesses, vacations, big moves, etc.).....and just ebbs and flows with our life. And I love that about this little ol' blog. Thank you again for adding to that joy.

Truly, 2013 was a great year for me. And my family. Yes, a lot of craziness.....big moves, [a book](#), a crazy house full of projects, illnesses, a few obstacles.....and dare I say, some tears? Yes, plenty of those. Ha! But it really was a great year. I have a list of things that I'd like to work on and improve....but 2013 was fun to look back on and think, "*whew, so many really great things happened this year!*"

These little knuckle heads make me so happy. Especially that grown one! ;)

While doing so, I had to flip through different projects here on the blog that were my favorites. Maybe they were some of yours?

Good golly, I get a kick out making things. I was looking at some of these pictures with Elli and she said, "*hey, I remember that shirt. Can you make me another one? It doesn't fit.....but I miss it!*" Ummmmmm. See why I keep sewing clothes for that girl?!! Ha. She's pretty easy to please. (*And doesn't have curves yet.....so she's pretty simple and quick to sew for! In fact, all three kiddos are fun to sew for.*) But I think that's why I still make things, even though, yeah.....sometimes it would save me some time to just buy these things. I love that simple joy of surprising myself with my favorite, "*hey, I made that!*" feeling.

So yes, it was good to look back on 2013. Here are some of my very favorites from the year...

Butterfly Sleeve Tunic (the shirt that Elli has outgrown....and asked me to make another. Done!)

Adding Pockets

Envelope Closure Pillowcase

DIY Fabric Dolls

T-shirt Circle Dresses

Painting Old Chandeliers

Turn Tights into Leggings

Elastic Shoelaces with Attached Bow

Two-Tone Fabric Totes

DIY Fireplace Mantel and Hearth

Attached Peter Pan Collar

No-Sew Lamp Shade with Cover Buttons

Re-Upholstering 101

Tangled Costumes

Trimming a Window

30 Minute Stretchy Tube Skirt

So much fun looking back! ([***Project Archives found here.***](#)) Thanks for joining me all along the way. :)

I hope you are able to find the highlights of your 2013. It certainly makes a heart full and happy! :)

See you next week for some brand new things!

-Ashley

Characteristics Text 14

Title Re-purposing: Long Sleeve Shirt into Short, with Floppy Bow Shoulders
Blog Make It & Love It
Date August 16, 2013
Type Tutorial

For those of you reading my posts in an email or RSS feed, I'm so sorry for all the craziness lately. The feed was chopped, the pictures were removed, then a whole bunch of blog blurbs have been showing up. Ack.....what a pain!!! With some help, I've been trying to iron it all out so that it works a little better. How is it showing up today for you today? Any better? I'm just trying to make things work a little better for everyone and am tweaking some things.....so I'd love to hear your feedback. -Ashley :)

I have been going through some of Elli's old clothes and putting "too small" items in boxes and pulling out "too big" items that have been stored away and have been hanging them in her closet. (*Are any of you "sale shopping fans" like I am and will even buy sizes a couple years ahead, if it means that you'll save a few bucks? Yeah, it's an illness!*) Well, I found several long sleeved shirts that she wore last winter but still fit her right now (*even though the sleeves are millimeters away from being too short*) but probably won't last through this upcoming winter.

I considered just packing them away for Chloe to use later on.....but remembered Elli didn't have any grey Tshirts for school starting this month. Not that she has to have a shirt in every color.....but having a grey shirt seems to be a staple. Like having a white one. Anyway, I chopped those little sleeves off and turned them into little floppy bows that now sit on her shoulders.

Here's the old "*2-seconds-away-from-being-too-short-in-the-sleeves*" shirt.....aaaaaaand the transformation.

It'll work great for a few months. And who knows, maybe it will still fit next spring. It wasn't the shirt length that was the problem.....it was those darn sleeves. :)

This little chickie is growing so fast.....and those long string bean arms and legs are becoming hard to keep up with. I guess chopping off the sleeves works while it's warm! :)

This transformation was simple and pretty quick. Glad we were able to squeeze a little extra time out of that shirt.

Do you have long-sleeve shirts you want to extend the life of??

First of all, grab an old long-sleeved knit shirt. (Knit doesn't fray.....that's why we're going with a knit Tshirt.)

Cut off the sleeves, right next to the shoulder seam, all the way around the sleeve. And that's how we'll leave that shirt opening; raw.

With the sleeve scrap, cut it open right along the seam that runs all the way up the arm. Cut off the ends and the tapered sides of the sleeve, to create an even rectangle. Just be sure to leave enough of a scrap to

make the center section of the bow. (Also, the size of rectangle you cut will determine how big/small your bow is.....so play around with it. I just used the whole scrap.....but all sleeves are different sizes.)

Fold the rectangle in half lengthwise (with right sides together) and sewed the two side edges together, with a 1/4 inch seam allowance. I also increased the seam allowance to almost the longest it would go, simple because sewing longer stitches is easier in knit and this seam is only to hold the fabric together.....it's not for strength at all.

Turn the tube right side out and line up the seam along the center of the side facing up.

Then, fold over the two ends, overlapping them by about a 1/2 inch. Then sew a seam right down the middle, securing all layers together.

With the other scraps, cut a smaller rectangle that's wide enough to fold under the two sides and then long enough wrap around the center of the bow. (Again, the size of this center strip depends on your bow size.....so play around with it and see what looks proportional.) Pin the sides under with pins, to help hold them in place.

Grab the bow section and pinch the center in tight, right where the seam was.

Then, wrap the folded strip piece around the center of the bow (removing the pins as you do so), with the folds tucked under and against the bow.

Then, slide the ends of the strip under the sewing machine and sew them together.

Now, your bow will stay cinched in.

Trim off the excess ends of the center strip...

Attach the bow to the shoulders, using a needle and thread. (I just sewed the center section of the bow down to the shoulder of the shirt.)

Then, tack the tips of the bow down to the shirt with a needle and thread, to help keep them in place as well. (Need help with [hand sewing?](#))

And that's it. Long sleeves into short.....with big floppy bows!!

Enjoy!

-Ashley

Characteristics Text 15

Title	sewing for my sanity
Blog	Dana Made It
Date	April 23, 2013
Type	Tutorial

Clara has been a bag of emotions this past month.

I would chalk it up to teething (which some of it is)...and being sick (she and I had horrible stuffy colds this weekend)...and randomly waking up in the middle of the night for hours and pretending it's play time in her crib (UGGGGGH), but it's more than that.

She's starting to throw little tantrums. The kind of tantrums that you can't really reason with or give a time-out for because she's too young to understand. Simply changing her diaper is a pure battle of wills and often strength. And she's totally perfecting the fake cry. At 14 months! Oh Clara.

I know. I'm being over-dramatic. She's just your run-of-the-mill kid and you'd think that after having two kids already I'd remember how it all works. But somehow our brain forgets.

And that's how we get pregnant.

So.

To save my sanity I decided to give myself a visual pep-talk, and tackled a sewing project.

I was inspired by [this](#) post on [One Little Minute](#) where Miranda created a cool piece of fabric art to hang over her bed (and has some cool stop-motion photos to go along. You gotta check it out). So I did a little spin on the Keep Calm and Carry On craze and went back to good old Bobby McFerrin:

In every life we have some trouble.

When you worry, you make it double.

So....

I'm hoping the lyrics rub off on me.

Maybe they'll rub off on you too (or you'll have that blasted song stuck in your head all day. Sorry).

I made the shirt from a women's tee and based it on the [Basic Tee](#) pattern and tutorial (creating a smaller size using one of her other shirts for sizing)

Shirt front, Shirt back, two sleeves, and a collar, ready to sew:

But before sewing, I added the phrase. I was inspired by my [Miranda's](#) font as well and decided to hand-letter the words...something I haven't done forever and really love to do. If you'd like to use my letters for your own project, download and print it [HERE](#). I traced the words to Freezer paper (check out my full tutorial on Freezer Paper stenciling [HERE](#)). I prefer printing to Freezer Paper, rather than tracing, but my printer was being emotional as well. Then I cut it all out with a craft knife,

...ironed one set of words to the front, one set to the back, painted with craft paint, dried it with my blow-dryer, peeled it off, and...

Don't Worry, Be Happy!

I paired it with knit shorts from Target and a scrappy headband and the happy Clara was set.

I know it seems silly.

But I'm truly hoping the shirt makes me laugh. And helps me roll with the punches of mom-life. Because each stage has its different challenges. I might need to make this every year.

When life throws you lighting-bolts,

Find the sunshine.

And try to be happy that no matter who wakes up in the middle of the night....this one:

Or this one:

I'm lucky to be her mom. And wouldn't trade these moments for anything.

Okay, break.

Go team. Go.

You can make it through your day too...

And if you want all sorts of inspiration, check out the current [Kids Clothes Week](#) on [Elsie Marley](#). I'm adding this as my meager contribution for the season.

Characteristics Text 16

Title the Kite dress
Blog Dana Made It
Date July 22, 2013
Type Project

We interrupt the love of [Shorts](#) to bring you....a DRESS!

Last month Katy of [No Big Dill](#) asked me to participate in her fantastic series [Once Upon a Thread](#). And it doesn't matter how busy life is when Katy comes an-emailing.....because I just can't say no to Once Upon a Thread. Yes Katy! It's a YES! I'm sure you feel the same! The books are marvelous, the interpretations are brilliantly fun, and the only hard part is narrowing down the book selection....because there are so many I'd love to tackle.

My favorite children's books are those that draw me in artistically, through illustration. So this time I went with an all-time classic because Curious George pretty much sums up my favorite design style.

It's a smorgasbord of simple colors and shapes popping on a white background.

Lemon yellow, turquoise blue, checkers, dots, and stripes!....oh the stripes! (even the Christmas trees have them. Cute)

I had to create something stripey something for my own little monkey.

Of course it was hard to narrow down which Curious George story to draw from, since we read these books so frequently and each have our favorites. My favorite page is the hot air balloon race. Too many fun colors. We each take turns picking out OUR balloon. Can you guess mine?

Owen and Lucy love the chocolate factory and like to point out all the faces on the machinery. Then we take turns choosing our favorite chocolate pieces as well.

But I went with one that the kids seem to choose often since there's inspiration everywhere:

The story starts out with George, sitting in the house, just begging to be curious (and hanging out by some pretty awesome curtains)

He spies a garden from his window and decides he must know what it feels like to hold a bunny. So he roams through a field of flowers.

He tries fishing.

And goes head-first into the fishing.

And eventually he runs into Bill, wearing stripes, and flying his stripey kite.

So I made Lucy a kite dress.

She loved it.

...and spent the next 10 minutes running and jumping around the house declaring to everyone:

That made me happy.

The dress is a simple A-line pattern I've been working on (and have in-queue to share, hopefully sooner than later!) I created the striped fabric first, sewing long 4-inch wide strips together...since good striped fabric is always harder to find that one would think. Please. Please designers. Give us more cabana striped fabric!

I sewed the dress with a white lining, gave it little petal sleeves, and a red polka dot button in the back.

I must say, she makes a pretty good kite.

Thanks Katy for having me!

Characteristics Text 17

Title First-Day Dress
Blog Dana Made It
Date August 27, 2013
Type Project

The good news about not sewing all summer is that my sewing room has stayed spotless! Mmmm.

I've loved walking in there and breathing that fresh, clean, organized scent. The bad news, however, is that I've missed it.

And it only takes one project to remind you how fulfilling it is to take a 2-dimensional piece of fabric and create it into something wearable, and cute!

News flash: sewing is amazing.

Okay maybe that was more of a reminder. But it's good to have those...like the previous post....you know, being away from your kids for a weekend (or your machine for the summer) so that you're extra happy to reunite?

Well with a new school year coming up I did what I do every year: freak out that I waited till the last minute to sew a new outfit and started rummaging through fabric. I showed Lucy a few fabric options, she picked her favorite (which I think is from Joanns?), and I sewed it up:

My dainty little 2nd grader.

The pattern is a spin on the KITE dress I've been working on for a while now. And when I say spin, it really spins! I used the bodice from the kite dress pattern and added an almost circle skirt to the bottom (creating it from 2 "semi" circles)

Lucy totally loved it.
I wanna spin like that!

Some of the added details....

The dress has a full lining (because honestly, that's the easiest way to sew a dress, rather than creating facings and hemming sleeves, etc. Plus it looks pretty)

I popped a MADE tag in the side.

Lucy picked a yellow button for the back closure (which was my pick too! I love it when we're on the same design page. It's funny how often that happens)

And I went back and forth on the hem...should I attach the lining to the dress hem, keep them separate? Make the lining hem longer so it shows? So many options. I decided to keep them separate which seems to make the skirt a bit fuller (and twirlier?)

And if I pull the dress inside out, you can see how fun it would be to leave the lining a bit longer than the dress so it pokes out a bit. Maybe on the next dress.

We pulled it all together with a few accessories,

...and some hidden accessories for those kind of moments (yay KID Shorts!)

And just like that, my baby is ready for another year of learning and excitement.

Do you ever drop your kids off at school and wish you could be them?

Being a kid is the life.

Characteristics Text 18

Title A Life of Wabi
Blog No Big Dill
Date July 11, 2013
Type Reflection

I had this whole post written in my head last night as I tried to fall asleep.

It was brilliant.

Then I woke up and all my precisely picked wording was gone.

They're floating in the great abyss, along with many of my marbles, I suppose. So, I will start again, because that is what one does, especially when one has children who have a tendency to help facilitate the practice of re-doing what was once done.

I've just finished reading *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* and have latched onto the idea *wabi*, which means "*an understated form of beauty, a quality of refinement masked by rustic simplicity.*"

It seems that once a week I tend to re-evaluate some aspect of my life. Not so much conscientiously, but nudged by a thought of my own or of someone else. Usually it happens on Sunday when a discourse or verse moves me to make changes. Sometimes it happens mid-week, after a catalyst of a mundane nature helps me realize, *this isn't working*.

This week it was about minutia. Which is a very touchy subject indeed, for me. I usually thrive on the small details of life. Like rainbottizing the books. Does it *truly* matter in the scheme of this life?

Probably not. But, does it matter to me? This one does. I believe it adds to the fullness of my life. My house is my workspace, my place of creativity, my office. If it doesn't inspire and bring joy, then it needs to change.

Particularly when I sew, I like the details. The little extras that are frequently not part of the initial plan, but come to me as I'm working. The details that make my heart race, just a little, because I find them exciting and flavorful.

But, then. Aren't there always the *but, thens* in my posts?

When we moved to Magnolia Manor we made the conscientious decision to get rid of the superfluous. Once we unpacked, we got rid of more. Now that we have the token 3 boxes left in our bedroom, like a blister that just won't go away, we have done more streamlining, and I feel there is *even more* to be done, and that it's never really complete, just like the laundry and the feeding of hungry mouths.

But it's not just the stuff I reference, although a clutter-free space can do more for inspiring the creative mind than most sources, it's what we choose to *do* with our time.

My kids like a game called Temple Run 2. I resisted even trying it because, well, I know me. But after

weeks of reporting their scores and successes, I gave it a shot.

One of my less useful skills is that of a video-gamer. Growing up with a garage full of coin operated video games, I am good at the nimble finger movements required for high scoring. A most useless "skill" in the real world.

But, I found myself spending too much time, running toward a goal that didn't really exist. Waiting for the pasta water to boil, I'd take it out and play. Waiting for the iron to warm up, I'd take it out and play. So, when the thought flashed in my mind, I took out my phone and deleted it entirely. Remove the temptation. As insignificant as this example is, it helped open my eyes to other changes I could make.

Pearl was sitting next to me, in church, when I erased the game. I was glad she saw me. She looked at me like *What have you done?!* I told her I decided there was a plethora of other things I'd rather be doing with my time.

Because there are. Like these 6 faces. (Plus Ryan, of course.)

Even if it's getting down on the floor to laugh more.

One of my favorite things is how Drummer does his squeaky toy laugh, although it's more like a squeaky toy in need of repair, with a bit of a wheezing sound, when he's particularly amused, like when he dumps cold water on my feet in the shower and I squeal with shock.

Or spending an extra few minutes tucking in and snuggling with each child, learning what their thoughts are from the day, because sometimes there is so much demand for attention during the day from everyone that someone is bound to miss out.

Or even just spending a few minutes alone on the porch swing with my own thoughts. And maybe the mail ;).

I want to delete the superfluous minutia that is sucking my time, the *only* time I have.

I know there will be always be metaphorical apps that I struggle to delete from my life,

but I think as long as there a frequent re-evaluations, perpetual refinement, and intentional decisions about what I do with my time,

I will find more fulfillment and contentment.

I think I will achieve *wabi*,

that *understated form of beauty, a quality of refinement masked by rustic simplicity.*"

Characteristics Text 19

Title OUT Chapter 4: Me!
Blog No Big Dill
Date June 28, 2013
Type Project

What amazing guests I've had! I feel like I should be extending OUT another month with all the inspiration instead of shutting the book. Also, I feel like I need to start quilting now, an urge that has never had fruits before (thank you very much, Astrid!) I was just going through the Flickr group and was so impressed with what you guys have been doing! There's even another version of Stuck! Load your photos if you haven't yet so I can close this out with your projects on Monday.

I had so many books I wanted to do, but as usual, my ambitiousness was cut short. I settled on one Red Dot, a pop-up book that I keep under lock and key with the rest of my pop-up books. Just kidding. Sort of.

Divine was the recipient since the other 4 girls just had something made for them. Each page of the book has some elaborate pop-up structure with one red dot somewhere hidden. So we put a dot on her toes.

and of course one GIANT red dot on her dress!

The fabric is Prince Charming Snail Scallop and I just used the fabric upside down (don't tell the snails!) and followed the scallops along the bottom, adding baby piping.

★Tip: How to put piping around scallops ★

- ① Trace and cut scallops along outer edge of hem or neckline.
- ② Cut piping down to seam allowance size, so you can just line it up along the edge of the fabric and clip every 1/2" or so.
- ③ Pin along edge of scallops.

- ④ It's easiest to use a foot that has a groove for the piping to follow, or a zipper foot that allows you to sew right along the cord of the piping.
- ⑤ Once your piping is sewn on, sew on the facing (right sides together) but have the garment side facing up so you can follow the stitching line you've already created.
- ⑥ I find it's easiest to adjust the thread length to 2mm or even 1.5mm which allows to you turn curves more easily. Also, keep your needle in down position so you can pivot at the points of the scallops.

It's a self drafted pattern that took some adjusting along the neckline to get the front and back scallops lined up just how I wanted them.

The dots? Just covered buttons! I love those giant ones. I show you how to use them here.

And yes, that thread hanging from the hem is driving me crazy.

Such a fun book that we like to pull out every once in a while to enjoy! You can see someone else who wanted to get in on the action.

Pop-up books are a bit magical, don't you think? Do you have any favorites?

Don't forget to add your Once Upon a Thread photos to the Flickr group this weekend!

Happy weekend and we'll see YOU on Monday! ●

Characteristics Text 20

Title Sew All 26: D
Blog No Big Dill
Date September 27, 2013
Type Project

My dear, darling Divine is in the limelight once again. And if you're keeping track, it hasn't been even dispersement of sewn goods among my children, but it will all even out in the end, so please don't despair.

The advantage of being the oldest is ALL NEW CLOTHES, except when they're mine and I pass them down to her, but the disadvantage is that she usually has a more minimal wardrobe. There's just so many of them, you know?

This one was a doozy. (Do I say that about everything I sew?) I cut this out almost a year ago, but then it was lost in the shuffle of our move and I only happened to find it because I needed both my sewing machines for a youth sewing activity and I had packed in with my old machine. Don't try to solve and understand my packing methods. It made sense at the time.

When I sewed up the bodice...it didn't fit. Now, it's very likely that it didn't fit to begin with, because I cut it out one night using one of Divine's t-shirts as a general guide, and sometimes when I do that I fail to account for stretch. Or lack of.

But, it did fit Olive quite nicely. Although Olive doesn't start with D, now does it? I considered calling her Dolive for the week only momentarily. My solution: I decided to add a placket in the back. I was going to do it in the contrasting green color, but didn't want to take away from the drama of the longer skirt back.

Do you like to hear about my sewing processes? Well, too bad, because I'm going to tell you anyway, because I'm the type of person that sometimes forgets to listen to a conversation because I'm busy dissecting the details of what you're wearing.

Back to the placket. It needed to be larger than normal to fit Divine, and I didn't think it was going to look great, in fact my whole execution on this was a bit shoddy and my expectations for a solid finish were low, very low. But when I got the placket pinned, I really liked the look of it. Rather vintage-y. Then I went to decide on buttons. These buttons. I ordered some amazing glass buttons a couple of years ago and these came as a mistake, substituted for something else I ordered. I was so disappointed and thought "BLECK!" when I took them out of the box. I was going to send them back, but they came from Europe and the cost of shipping wasn't worth it. So they were stashed in my button stash.

But (you knew that was coming, right?) I pulled them out for this and it's like they were *made* for this dress. They fit the vintage-y look. But of course I didn't have enough for the placket all the way down the back, so I just put them on the bodice and sewed the placket shut down the skirt.

The shoulder portion of the bodice looks like it's just lace, but I actually split the lining and added flesh colored lining, so it's not just hanging from the lace. (The sleeves *are* just lace.) If you know me in real life, please do not inspect this too closely. I lowered the neckline 3 times (and it's still high!) after I topstitched the lining and lace together. Yep. I broke many sewing rules on this one. Don't tell my High School sewing

teacher. I just added piping and flipped it under, a little in-a-pinch-trick.

But, I think Divine looks beautiful in it. It's very flattering on her, and there's no need for ironing, which is flattering *to me*. Desirable indeed.

And, in honor of *Sew All 26 D Week (and my other D child ;)*, I have a coupon code for my parents' star shop, Piggy & Dirt to get 20% off your order! Use code DRUMMERSTAR at the checkout page. They have some new, incredible Halloween stars. Also, they're running a giveaway for \$150 worth of stars over at the lovely Stephanie Nielson's blog, Nienie Dialogues. Click on over for details, and say hi to my sweet friend.

ps I've loved hearing your thoughts on self-esteem for girls over here.
Add your D inspired sewing projects!

Characteristics Text 21

Title	About me
Blog	Aesthetic Nest
Date	N.d.
Type	Introduction

When I was a young girl learning to sew, I always wanted to load up on projects at the fabric store--there were so many I wanted to make. My mother, wise that she was, told me we could get the materials for the next project once I finished the first. Makes sense. Little did she know what a "finisher" I would become. I think some artists and other creative types enjoy making something purely for the process and while I do enjoy the making, nothing compares to the finishing! Not only because it is so satisfying to see the thing I've created worn or used or gifted, but also because it clears the way for the next project! I have more lists of things to make than hours...

I began this blog as a way to cross things off my list. Finished is finished. But blogged is even better! So this is my creative journal where I post about things I make: sewing, knitting, crochet, cooking, painting (not often enough), room decorating, party designing. I should clarify: I post about things I finish making. It's a better incentive for me to work through the list.

Since making this blog public mid-2010 I have enjoyed connecting with a community of creative women. There are so many amazing women out there and no way to meet them all in person, or invite them over for a knitting night. I love being able to find those who get as excited as I do about a swatch of fabric or great yarn or darling dress! My mother was the one I could always count on to share my enthusiasm for a project. I lost her in 2007 and in many ways this blog is about her. It's compensating a tiny bit for not being able to share these things with her--she would have loved, loved, loved them--and in fairness, she just about singly taught me all the tricks I know.

A college professor I loved once began his class with a quote from Stendhal, "Beauty is nothing else but a promise of happiness," and it was a moment of epiphany for me. "That explains it!" I thought. That is why I am so driven to beautify the space around me. That explains Helen of Troy and so many other less heroic efforts. That is the key to modern marketing (my profession of many years). So many times we humans fall for false beauty, but I believe being surrounded by true beauty does create happiness. I think the most beautiful things are those that are labors of love: children, things created for and by people you love, authentic art, an experience (a dinner, a party, a playdate...) that took some creative effort. Perhaps that is why most of my efforts are geared towards my home and the people around me rather than a larger audience of customers. I love making (beautiful I hope) things for people. Always have. Always will.

So "finishing" is why I post, but "beauty" is what I hope to post at Aesthetic Nest. A good friend suggested the discipline of three words as a filter for governing decisions about a thing. My three for Aesthetic Nest are: Creative, Authentic, and Inspiring.

Creative: I post about things I create. I most enjoy things I create "from scratch," ideas that pop in my head, recipes I've developed, or patterns I've worked out, but I also like to work from others' inspiration and give it my own take.

Authentic: I try to offer my point of view and use this creative log as a way to refine my aesthetic. I use photos I've taken myself (except for those wherein I'm the subject) rather than found on the Web (even though there are so many gorgeously tempting photos out there).

Inspiring: I don't post every thing I do, but want to share those things that might be inspiring to others, and the things I've found inspiring myself. Being inspired is what I've most enjoyed about following blogs and I'd love to reciprocate. It makes my day when someone reading here lets me know they tried something based on one of my posts! I love sharing things I am excited about so I try to include links to all the related resources.

That should keep me honest. Thanks for reading.

-Anneliese

P.S.

If you are interested in more about me you can read recent interviews [here](#) on D.C. Metro Mommy and [here](#) on Maker Mama and [here's](#) a post I wrote about journaling.

I don't post much about my personal life (though this all seems very personal) but I do post a few details occasionally. [Here](#) is a list of "personal" or FYI posts. It is evident quite quickly if you've been reading my blog that I am a mother of three young girls, my muses. I also have a husband who is very patient with my late night creativity and who kindly, and often, but not always successfully, reminds me to go to bed! In my worklife I did strategic planning for clients of McCann Erickson--mostly business-to-business marketing for technology companies. I still do some freelancing in this area. I was concerned mostly with understanding the environment for a brand, it's target customers, and developing the appropriate messaging for communicating with them. Oh, and I lived and breathed Microsoft Powerpoint--more often than not still my design tool of choice! Sometimes I still think in "slides."

Characteristics Text 21

Title	About
Blog	Hart & Sew
Date	N.d.
Type	Introduction

Welcome! My name is Stacy. I am a wife, mama, and shop owner. I have a slight obsession with tiny vintage clothing and I love to sew, mostly for my two sweet girls Little Miss (LM) and Lark. Here I document my crafty endeavors, our vintage style, and the little moments of our life whether significant or silly.

Please do say hi!

Characteristics Text 23

Title	About
Blog	Make It & Love It
Date	N.d.
Type	Introduction

Hi, I'm Ashley.....welcome to my crazy little corner!

I am a mom to 3 wiggly kiddos and a wife to a very patient (*with my craft clutter*) husband. This is my little space to share my latest project; some sewing, a bit of crafting, a lot of trial/error, and sometimes even some recipes. And in case you're wondering.....yes, I can ignore a dirty bathroom while I finish my latest project. :)

My little family is my main inspiration for what I create.....whether they want to be or not! And all someone has to do is dare me, and I'm down and dirty trying to figure out how to make something that I've seen in the store, or, well, is on someone that is walking down the street. Watch out passersby!

Sometimes these projects saves us a little money.....and other times, it is purely, well, just for fun. Because, hands down, nothing beats the thrill of creating something with your own two hands, and then being shocked that it actually worked out. Haha.....I can't tell you how many times that has happened to me. So join in, make a little something, surprise yourself with the outcome.....and then love it! You'll be so happy you did.

Extra little tid-bits about me:

(*Commonly asked questions*)

Yes, I'm tall (5'11").....and yes, my feet are really large (size 12...boo). Okay, and my thumbs are stumpy. (Through blogging, I found out they are called clubbed thumbs. Ha!)

Oh, what? You heard I had big babies? Yep, the third and largest weighed in at 11 pounds even. However, for some reason she was the easiest delivery of the 3.

My husband (who is 6'5"yay, I can wear heels!) and I were married in 2005, in Idaho. Our children/monkeys/little lovelies are 6 years old (Elli), 4 years old (Connor), and 2 years old (Chloe). They are all spicy in their own little way....but we completely adore them all! :)

I first started this blog while we lived (*and my husband was finishing up his undergrad*) in Rexburg, ID. Then we moved to Georgia for my husband to attend P.A. school. He finally finished in April of 2012 (*hallelujah!*) and we are now living in Colorado, as real-life grown ups, with an actual job with insurance. Yeah, I'm still in shock the school days are finally over!

I learned to sew very basic things from my mom as a young girl. She used to make us Easter dresses every year (I have 4 sisters) and we would go the fabric store, pick out a pattern, then fabric and notions, and we would watch her as she stitched together some of my very favorite dresses. My interest grew and I would sew skirts and pajama pants as a teenager.....with a patient mom answering my questions. When I went to college, I took a basic sewing class and learned how to make the inside of my clothing just as beautiful as the outside. Do I follow those lessons now? Sometimes. I like a quick project.....so if I can get away with

taking a few shortcuts, I will.

I don't use patterns much anymore. I like to slap down an article of clothing that already fits, on top of some fabric, and pretty much cut around it. Well, almost. ;)

Hmmmm.....what else do I get asked a lot?

Oh yeah, no I don't have a perfectly clean house, and yes, I feed my children. Haha.....yeah, I often get asked how I have the time to keep this blog going. Like I mentioned above, I choose crafting over an immaculate house. Or organized linen closets. Or writing poetry. Or family journals. Or playing musical instruments. Nap time is sacred in our house.....because that's my time to finish things up, upload pictures, etc. I also get up earlier than the kiddos most days....and sometimes I stay up late. But it depends on the project. If I'm super excited about it, it's like a drug. And I can't get it out of my brain until I find some time to finish it. So yeah, with any free time, you can usually find me creating in my little crafting corner.

Yes, I do run out of ideas sometimes. And when that happens.....I get out of the house. I walk through stores, I people watch, I take mental notes of things that I like while watching a movie, etc. Ooooh, I often times use my phone to take a picture of something I'd like to duplicate.....to be sure I don't forget.

If you have read this blog for very long.....you'll know that my passions are my sweet babies, my dear husband, a few supplies to create with.....and sugar. Sugar in all forms. (*Candy related gifts are always welcome!*) Some days, I can't get enough chocolate, nuts, and caramel. While other days, I put myself into sugar shock consuming all of the chewy and fruity goodness that I can get my hands on. I know, I know.....I'm working on this. Everyone has compulsive behavior. Eating sweets is mine. :)

YES!!! I love to see what you create. I have to tell you that one of my favorite things, is to hear that you've dusted off your sewing machine, pulled out your sponge brushes, sharpened those scissors and/or heated up that glue gun.....and are making this or that right along with me. Creating new things is just as addicting as the fattest bar of chocolate. And THAT is an equal comparison. (So upload your projects to the flickr group [here](#).)

If you have questions, comments, suggestions, or just want to chat.....send me an email or leave a comment beneath any posts on the blog. But if you're looking for a response back, send me an email.....it's easier for me to get back to you that way.

~Ashley

Emails:

General Questions/Comments, email me [here](#).

Advertising Inquiries, email [here](#).

Order Questions/Comments, email [here](#).

*(**Project ideas are for personal use only...NOT for resale or re-distribution. Do not use photos without permission.....unless you are using a photo or two as a reference on your own blog, with a link over to my site for the full tutorial/post. Thanks!)*

Characteristics Text 24

Title	who is no big dill
Blog	No Big Dill
Date	N.d.
Type	Introduction

Hello, I am Katy, the mad hatter behind no big dill. I wear lots of hats, both figuratively and literally. I like to change things up. I am wife to Mr. Dill who shares his closet with a ridiculous stash of fabric and never complains that it is encroaching on his side. That says a lot. I am mother to 6 baby Dills. 5 of those are my girlies and our little exclamation point at the end of those beauties turned out to be a boy! I had my doubts that was possible.

I am the daughter of two artists, so creating was bound to be in my genes. My mom says I got the best of each of them. I have my mom's ability to do fine detail work and share her love of all things fiber. I also love to dabble in lots of different genres of creating, which my dad does well.

Want to know more? I started sewing as far back as I can remember, with a needle and thread in my hands. I always wanted to go to design school, but designed some pretty fantastic kids instead. Mrs. Price was my sewing teacher in High School who really gave me some great skills to start with and that's when I really fell in love with my sewing machine and it became a passion.

I enjoy playing the harp and the piano (and hope to own a baby grand Steinway one day), baking, the color orange, startling my kids by crouching behind a wall and jumping out as they come around the corner, artichokes dipped in butter, freshly cooked in-the-shell pine nuts, tickling Clover, growing herbs, arranging flowers, fiddling around with the camera, installing new vacuum bags, really hot showers, bee themed items (I aspire to own my own apiary), arranging my books, beads, buttons, thread, and fabric by rainbow colors, and last but not least, the sound of the dishwasher running.

Did I miss something? Ask me yourself: nobigdillblog {at} gmail {dot} com

Characteristics Text 25

Title	About
Blog	Dana Made It
Date	N.d.
Type	Introduction

Hello!

I'm Dana. Welcome to MADE.

I'm a 36 year-old mom of 3 kids living in Austin, TX with my husband Casey.

I love to sew, make, DIY, photograph, write, and share. So blogging is the perfect marriage of tricks for me.

I've written a book called [Fabrics A to Z](#), which every sewist and fabric enthusiast should own.

I've got a slew of [Tutorials](#) and [Recipes](#) for you to try out.

And if you just need a cheer of encouragement that's totally what I'm here for! My goal with MADE is to help you realize that YOU CAN DO IT, using everyday items from around the house, with or without patterns, and with crazy make-it-work moments.

Never tried sewing? You can learn.

Think you're not creative? Nonsense.

There's a creative spirit in everyone! And the best way to find it is by just getting started.

Never fear. Just do.

And figure it out as you go along.

Thanks for stopping by!

- Dana