Blogging is the hottest trend on the Internet. Any serious political junkie immersed in the 2004 election season was quickly initiated into the world of the weblog, or “blog.” Although blogs have existed since the late 1990s, persistent media buzz surrounding Howard Dean’s 2004 presidential campaign blog, Blog for America, and his blog-inspired “Internet Revolution” to harness grassroots support among young, tech-savvy voters only intensified interest in this innovation in communication.

For any given topic, there are probably several blogs presenting varying viewpoints about it. However mundane, absurd, controversial, or pedantic their themes may be, blogs have in common an unregulated and libertarian essence. Blogs are a modern manifestation of our First Amendment rights, providing both voice and audience for anyone with an opinion, including self-identified feminists and those engaged in women’s issues.

**What Is This Thing Called Blog?**

The term “weblog” is a portmanteau of “web” and “log.” In 1999, Peter Merholz split the word into the phrase “we blog” in the sidebar of his website. In March 2003, the *Oxford English Dictionary* sanctioned the terms *weblog*, *weblogging*, and *weblogger* further strengthening their presence in the English lexicon. Blog technology and its use can be traced to precursor electronic communities such as Usenet, email listservs, and electronic bulletin boards.

In short, a blog is a website format containing periodic time-stamped posts on a common Web page. It is an organic entity, usually — but not always — maintained by a single person who publishes entries or “posts” text, images, or other data formats on a regular basis. Blogs are either publicly or privately accessible on the Web, presenting theme-based discussions related to news, sports, fashion, entertainment, politics, popular culture, or other issues of personal significance. Some blogs present commentary on and link to other websites, while others serve as a creative outlet, presenting original writings, artwork, or music.

Content presentation and organization depend on the software or system used to create the blog. Most blogs include information about the blog owner, navigational links, Web links, an archive of previous entries, a listing of entries receiving recent comments, and a blog search function. The core content is dynamic, consisting of date-stamped posts often arranged by sub-topic, in some cases allowing user comments and ratings. These posts usually appear on the front page of the blog in reverse chronological order, with the most recent postings at the top. After a prescribed period of time, entries disappear from the front page and are usually archived on separate pages, organized by date or topic, for posterity. Most blogs note the number of comments received in reply to each post, allowing users to easily identify more active discussion “threads.”

Blog entries are usually short, maybe a sentence or a paragraph, and may reference other websites or entries on other blogs and include hyperlinks to them. Entries are most frequently the authors’ commentary on current events, politics, or their daily routines.

Two common blog features are ‘blogrolls’ and “comments.” Blogrolls are lists of another blog’s entries, often organized by topic, that create context for a blog by referencing similar or relevant entries. Reciprocal linking is also a common practice, as bloggers agree to reference each other’s blogs to increase Web traffic to their own sites. Brutal Women ([http://brutalwomen.blogspot.com/](http://brutalwomen.blogspot.com/)) presents an exceptional blogroll of other feminist blogs. This provocative personal blog offers discussion topics such as Plan B contraception, women’s body image, boxing, and other random musings of a young urban professional female living in Chicago. Alas, a Blog ([http://www.amptoons.com/blog/](http://www.amptoons.com/blog/)) also maintain exceptional blogrolls of sites focused on feminism and women’s issues.

The use of feedback comment systems allows readers to comment on an individual blog entry. Some blogs have regular postings by identified commentators whose contribution may increase the blog’s reputation or popularity, depending on the individual commenter and his or her relationship to the blog topic. For example, Bush vs. Choice ([http://bushvchoice.blogs.com/](http://bushvchoice.blogs.com/)) is a pro-choice, anti-Bush blog that provides active discussion on current reproductive rights issues. Regular contributors include National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) staff.

Blogs by women, about women, or presenting women’s issues are growing in numbers. Like most blogs, they vary in subject matter, degree of activity, and target audience. Nonetheless, these blogs share a common purpose — to provide a living forum for women’s issues. From stream-of-consciousness tirades to well-honed and fact-based political debate, from the hilarious and satirical political musings of Wonkette ([http://www.wonkette.com/](http://www.wonkette.com/)) to the self-described Thoughts of an Average Woman ([http://toaaw.typepad.com/](http://toaaw.typepad.com/)), feminist rhetoric thrives in the blogosphere.

**Blog Formats and Examples**

A number of blog types exist. It’s likely that a particular blog may be categorized as more than one type. In fact, some may fit into multiple categories. Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weblog](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weblog)) offers a description of common blog “types” including Personal,
Thoughtful, FriendBlog ("a distributed networked journal on the web, composed of short, frequently updated posts written by friends"). Topical, News, Political, Legal, Media, Literary, and Religious. Collaborative or collective (group) blogs are those written by more than one person, usually on a specific topic. Educational blogs are increasingly used by both students and instructors to create a living record of course curriculum and student activity and progress. Some of the most common types of blogs present information related to women's issues are **Personal, Topical, Collaborative, Political, Corporate, and Advice.**

The **personal** blog resembles an online diary or journal. One example is **Pinko Feminist Hellcat** ([http://pinkoanimalhellcat.typepad.com](http://pinkoanimalhellcat.typepad.com)), an active and intelligent personal blog that recently discussed spousal abuse, Ann Coulter, the gender gap in wage earnings, and misogyny in hip hop music. **CultureCat: Rhetoric and Feminism** ([http://culturecat.net/](http://culturecat.net/)) is an active personal blog with extremely compelling intellectual postings on the under-representation of women in op-ed pieces, Bust magazine, Plan B contraception, the gender gap in publishing and punditry, and writing. **Back to the Kitchen: Media, Culture, Politics and Women in a New American Century** ([http://www.backtothekitchen.org](http://www.backtothekitchen.org)) is a personal blog maintained by four women who have observed “a dismaying trend toward once again idealizing women’s role as wife, mother, and homemaker, and disregarding or even denigrating other equally legitimate, personally satisfying, and societally beneficial contributions that women may choose to make.” Recent topics include gender segregation in schools, Teresa Heinz Kerry, Catholicism and feminism, and parental notification laws.

**Topical** blogs focus on either a general or a specific theme, or both. **Black Looks: Musings and Rants by an African Fem** ([http://okrasoup.typepad.com/black_looks/](http://okrasoup.typepad.com/black_looks/)) is an excellent resource for discussions related to African women, gender violence, black women’s health, and human rights. It also includes book reviews, links to other blogs and sites discussing African authors, violence against women, refugees, female genital mutilation, and feminism in Africa. **Misbehaving.net** ([http://www.misbehaving.net](http://www.misbehaving.net)) is a self-described weblog about women and technology; a celebration of women’s contributions to computing; and a place to spotlight women’s contributions as well point out new opportunities and challenges for women in the computing field. Recent postings discussed Google’s attempt to recruit women, gender and website linking practices, and feminism and technology. **Reproductive Rights Blog** ([http://caraprop.com/reproductive_rights_blog/](http://caraprop.com/reproductive_rights_blog/)) is a highly active, intellectual blog discussing abortion issues in North America and Europe, contraception, Catholicism, and “Abstinence Only” policies.

**Collaborative** or **collective** blogs focus on a specific topic but are maintained by more than one person. A good example is **Blog Sisters** ([http://blogsisters.blogspot.com](http://blogsisters.blogspot.com)), an active community weblog of contributions by hundreds of loosely related women bloggers who share knowledge, ideas, stories, conversation, wisdom, and the occasional dirty joke, as well as more serious deliberations related to breast cancer, divorce, body image, international women’s issues, and human rights abuses. **Media Girl** ([http://www.medialargirl.org](http://www.medialargirl.org)) is a community of, by, and for women (and men, too) who are interested in the media, politics, culture, and feminism. Recent postings include a review of Lynne Cheney’s novel **Sisters**, information about emergency contraception, feminism and television, and female education in the third world. **XX** ([http://www.xxblog.com](http://www.xxblog.com)) is an active community blog concerned with gender issues, parenting, pop culture, feminism, and the Bush administration. Recent postings focused on women in politics, rape, fathers’ rights activism, abortion, black and white feminism, and gender in video games.

**Political** blogs include **What She Said!** ([http://the-goddess.org/whatseshaid](http://the-goddess.org/whatseshaid)), an active politically themed blog exploring a range of current issues such as *Roe v. Wade*, Afghan women, contraception, conservative women bloggers, and women’s health issues. **Bitch / (S)Hitlist** ([http://www.bitchmagazine.com/blogtest/index.html](http://www.bitchmagazine.com/blogtest/index.html)) is an active blog associated with *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*, a print magazine devoted to incisive commentary on a media-driven world. Recent discussion topics include *Roe v. Wade*, women in boxing, *Ms.* Magazine, and female political columnists such as Maureen Dowd and Susan Estrich. **Feminist Bias** ([http://www.liberalfeministbias.blogspot.com](http://www.liberalfeministbias.blogspot.com)) is “a brazen, unapologetic, and biased liberal, third wave feminist, pro-women's reproductive rights, pro-racial civil rights, pro-LGBT civil rights, socio-cultural, political blog” with recent postings on breast implants, *Title IX*, the gender gap in earnings, pornography, and recently deceased feminist writer Andrea Dworkin.

**Corporate** blogs are associated with an organization or business entity. **Ms. Musings** ([http://www.msmagazine.com/blog/](http://www.msmagazine.com/blog/)) is a highly active and intellectually provocative blog associated with *Ms. Magazine*. Post topics include religion, the Mothers’ Movement, perspectives on women in advertising, and women’s bodies in popular culture. This blog also provides links to other highly regarded new sources and writers, focused on women’s issues. **Now What?** ([http://www.saveroe.com/blog/index.php](http://www.saveroe.com/blog/index.php)) is a highly active blog associated with Planned Parenthood Federation of America and presents informative and current discussions focused on all issues related to *Roe v. Wade*, reproductive rights, contraception, and other women’s health issues.

**Advice** blogs present fact-based information on a single topic. **The Well-Timed Period: At the Intersection of Medical Fact and Fiction** ([http://thewelltimedperiod.blogspot.com](http://thewelltimedperiod.blogspot.com)) is an active informational blog devoted to disseminating detailed and factual information related to contraception. Blog topics include birth control methods, book reviews, Plan B contraception in Canada, and the HPV virus. **Knife-Wielding Feminists** ([http://feministfoodies.blogspot.com](http://feministfoodies.blogspot.com)) is “a recipe spot for feminist foodies.” There’s nothing explicitly political here — simply an active archive of exceptional recipes from a gathering of self-described feminists.

**Find a Blog!**

The Perseus Development Group, a corporation focused on developing Web survey technologies, recently examined several major blog hosts such as Blogspot, Xanga, Pitas, and Typepad, and reported that there were currently 31.6 million hosted blogs, a number predicted to grow to a startling 53.4 million by the end of 2005. **6** Taking into account the vast quantity of non-maintained or abandoned blogs currently living in cyberspace, as well as others created for what Perseus COO Jeffrey Henning has called the "hanoaudience"—blogs rarely linked to by other blogs and created for a tiny target audience of family or friends **7** — it’s easy to question how one might discover topics useful, authoritative, and current blogs related to feminism or women's issues in general.
A search for “feminist” or “feminism” on the home page of any major blog site such as Bloglines (http://www.bloglines.com) or LiveJournal (http://www.livejournal.com) will result in a list of blogs hosted by these systems that focus on women’s issues. Perusing blog rings provides an overview of blogs organized under a specific topic. Much like Web rings, blog list other blogs maintained by those who share a common interest in the blog list theme. The Progressive Women’s Blog Ring (http://www.ringsurf.com/netring?ring=carla;action=list) is a “ring for women who blog on progressive or liberal politics.” Women Bloggers (http://ringsaround.net/womenbloggers/) is another blog ring whose member blogs focus on women’s issues. Finally, search the blogroll of a favorite feminist blog to discover related blogs.

Blog On!

Several websites, systems, and software packages facilitate blogging. Blog host sites and Web services that provide free Web-based editing and publishing include Blogger (http://www.blogger.com), LiveJournal (http://www.livejournal.com), and Xanga (http://www.xanga.com). Tech-savvy bloggers may choose to use server-side software tools such as Movable Type, Serendipity, WordPress, or bBlog to publish their own blogs, while others employ advanced programming skills to create blogs from scratch using an open source server-side scripting language such as Perl or PHP, or a server-side software system such as Common Gateway Interface (CGI).

Conclusion

From their humble beginnings as online soapboxes for personal rants to their status as White House-accredited media organs — contributing editor for Washington media blog FishBowlDC, Garrett M. Graff, was invited to attend the White House press gaggle in March 2005 — blogs have come a long way in a short time. They’re beleagured by some tech industry professionals as the “e-flavor of the month” while others rally to support blogs and “bloggers” for “enabling true democratization of the information age.” But it may be too soon to predict the blog’s longevity and ultimate influence in a world where information is increasingly ubiquitous. For now, it’s enough to know that women and those interested in women’s issues are actively contributing to this ever-growing blogosphere of information!

This article is the first in a series presenting information about blogs and women’s issues. Future articles will focus on using blogs as academic resources and classroom tools, present criteria for evaluating blogs as research resources, and offer reviews of additional blogs related to feminism and women’s issues.

Notes


A Sampling of Blogs by Women, for Women, and/or Discussing Women's Issues

The sites listed below are a representative sample of blogs that present women's issues. They vary greatly in quality and quantity of content, level of activity, and target demographic. Urban, rural, white, black, straight, gay, mothers, daughters, local, international — they all share a common desire to provide an active forum for discussing women's issues. From stream-of-consciousness rantings to well-honed political debate, feminist rhetoric abounds in the blogosphere!

Abortion Clinic Days
http://abortionclinicdays.blogs.com/
A personal blog maintained by two abortion service providers. Discussion topics include abortion experience, abortion politics, women's lives, counseling, reproductive health, and reproductive law and policy.
Bitch, Ph.D.
http://bitchphd.blogspot.com/
"Least likely to pacify social conservatives." A left-leaning personal blog exploring a range of political and social issues related to women, including reproductive rights, pro-choice politicians, immigrants' rights, and general comments on being a female blogger in NYC. Includes a link to the "Feminist of the Day" website.

Black Feminism
http://blackfeminism.org/
A moderately active community weblog focusing on how race and gender intersect in the realms of education, culture, health, and general life. Recent discussion topics include HIV care for black women, the gender gap in education, women in IT roles, and black women and body image.

Body and Soul: The Body Politic, the Human Soul, and Billie Holiday
http://bodyandsoul.typepad.com/
An active personal blog with highly provocative discussions on topics including the Bush administration, civil liberties, poverty, the Middle East, and a range of women's issues. Provides links to a bevy of intellectual left-leaning websites and blogs.

Bohemian Mama
http://www.bohemianmama.blogspot.com/
"The Point of Revolution is to get away with it!" A personal blog professing opinions and activism by radical, leftist mothers. Recent discussion topics include Iraq, women in the Middle East, and Social Security.

Des Femmes
http://desfemmes.blogspot.com/
A marginally active personal blog. Recent postings focus on female military veterans, violence against women, sexism, and homophobia. Provides a useful listing of other websites and blogs focused on women's issues.

Feminary
http://feminary.blogspot.com/
“What happens when a socially liberal theologically conservative inclusive tolerant feminist Episcopalian goes to one of the world's top evangelical seminaries?” A moderately active personal blog featuring discussion of religion, feminism, politics, Christianity, and more.

Feministe
http://www.feministe.us/blog/
A provocative and highly intelligent personal blog maintained by a Midwestern single mother. Recent discussion topics include feminism, body image, fathers' rights, sexism in hip hop music, rape culture and masculinity, the Kobe Bryant trial, and stereotypes depicted in “Desperate Housewives.”

Feminist Blogs
http://www.feministblogs.org/
A community of blogs by self-identified feminists, women's liberationists, womanists, and pro-feminist men providing an “independent alternative to the 'malestream' media.”

Girl in the Locker Room! ...and other women's tales from back then
http://blogs.salon.com/0003945/
Hosted by Salon.com and maintained by a woman who worked as a sports reporter for the New York Times in the 1970s, this blog includes anecdotes from readers about dating, eroticism, politics, health, and sports. Recent blog postings include persuasive commentary on contraception, feminism and Judaism, sexuality in music videos, and women's health issues.

GrannyRant
http://grannyrant.blogspot.com/
“Adjust your TinFoil Bonnets, Granny is on a Rant.” A marginally active, left-leaning, personal blog discussing Social Security, Baby Boomers, Roe v. Wade, and the Christian Coalition.

Hot Flash Report
http://www.hotflashreport.com/
“Opinionated liberal views of the wrongs of the right.” A highly active personal blog associated with the Progressive Women's Blog Ring and maintained by two professional women involved in women's health issues with the National Women's Health Organization. News contributors are published authors, editors, political analysts, and intellectuals, with topics including from reproductive rights to Roe v. Wade, the 2004 election results, and Iraq.

I Am Dr. Laura's Worst Nightmare
http://gracedavis.typepad.com/
“Botox-free at 50!” A moderately active personal blog with discussion on a range of issues including conservative pundit Ann Coulter and popular culture and other personal rants.

Liliputian Lilith
http://www.liliputianlilith.com/
An intelligent and literary blog providing personal musings on a multitude of topics related to women, including women in science and...
technology fields, education, religion, and personal discovery.

Many United for Feminism
http://muff.ws/
A highly active blog for MUFF (Many United for Feminism), an organization whose meeting topics include body image issues, women's health, women in media, female sexuality, and women's rituals.

Netwoman
http://netwomen.ca/Blog/
“"This g’url’s blog discusses gender with a focus on technology and the Internet plus other digital divides and ‘isms.” An active and academic blog whose recent postings discuss the digital divide, gender and technology, and African women.

Raging Feminist: Angry Dyke on the Loose
http://ragingfeminist.crimsonblog.com/
An active personal blog with recent postings related to The L Word and presentation of lesbian lifestyles on television, the Equal Rights Amendment, and women’s health issues.

Redneck Feminist
http://redneckfeminist.blogspot.com/
An active personal blog by “a rural-dwelling, gun-owning feminist strongly opposed to racism and other forms of bigotry.” Recent discussions include the Terri Schiavo case and marriage law, female boxing, and “men’s rights” activism.

Sisters Talk
http://sisterstalk.tblog.com/
An active and provocative personal blog focusing, in general, on LGBT issues, sex and sexuality, pop culture, and politics. Recent discussions include women of color, Condoleezza Rice as a role model, breast cancer, and domestic abuse.

Tennessee Guerilla Woman: Challenging the Conservative Politics of Sexism, Homophobia, Racism and Classism
http://www.guerillawomentn.blogspot.com/
An active and thoughtful personal blog discussing women in Iraq, gender gap in wage earnings, gay marriage, Southern women, and religion.

Thoughts of an Average Woman
http://cepetro.blogspot.com/
“Targeting issues and policies harmful to women, working families and other rhetoric.” An active personal blog with engaging discussions on proposed legislation related to unborn children and pregnant women’s health care, breast cancer, Condoleezza Rice’s political agenda, and the education gender gap.

Utopian Hell
http://www.utopianhell.com/
An active independent blog presenting personal views related to media perceptions of women, gender roles and relationships, and pay equity.

We Have Brains (and We Use Them): A Feminist Discussion Project
“[A] collaborative project aimed at feminists and the feminist-curious.” An active and intelligent blog presenting news and discussions related to women’s issues worldwide. Recent postings include gender apartheid in the Middle East, lesbian health care, Martha Stewart, rape, and breast cancer.

Women as Mothers
http://womenasmothers.blogspot.com/
An active personal blog committed to disseminating information that counters “the current media attack against women in their role as single mothers.” Postings include divorce and pregnant women, the Terri Schiavo case and marriage law, and rape.

[Vicki Tobias is a Digital Services Librarian for the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections Center. She attended the University of Washington–Seattle (B.A., Chinese, 1997) and the University of Wisconsin–Madison (M.A., Library and Information Studies, 2003). Vicki maintains active interests in information technology and its application to libraries and in women’s issues.]
Out of the blogs out there, what criteria makes a blog feminist? What separates a "feminist" blog from a gender-centered "liberal" blog? What criteria do you have for what makes a writer a "feminist?" Then, I got thinking about the larger blogosphere and the power of the internet. Is the feminist blogosphere any different than other blogosphere? Do we have any joined purpose or any points of unity? As soon as I asked myself that, horrid memories of past blog wars and division came to memory. For sanity's and this post's sake, I shirked them off quickly a