

# STORIED SELVES IN AMERICAN EXPATRIATE WEBLOGS

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*Sitting in a park in Paris, France  
Reading the news and it sure looks bad  
They won't give peace a chance  
That was just a dream some of us had  
Still a lot of lands to see  
But I wouldn't want to stay here  
It's too old and cold and settled in its ways here  
Oh, but California  
California I'm coming home*

*I met a redneck on a Grecian isle  
Who did the goat dance very well  
He gave me back my smile  
But he kept my camera to sell  
Oh the rogue, the red red rogue  
He cooked good omelettes and stews  
And I might have stayed on with him there  
But my heart cried out for you, California  
Oh California I'm coming home  
Oh make me feel good rock'n roll band  
I'm your biggest fan  
California, I'm coming home*

*So I bought me a ticket  
I caught a plane to Spain  
Went to a party down a red dirt road  
There were lots of pretty people there  
Reading Rolling Stone, reading Vogue  
They said, how long can you hang around?  
I said a week, maybe two,  
Just until my skin turns brown  
Then I'm going home to California  
California I'm coming home*

*Oh will you take me as I am  
Strung out on another man  
California I'm coming home*

*Oh it gets so lonely  
When you're walking  
And the streets are full of strangers  
All the news of home you read  
More about the war  
And the bloody changes  
Oh will you take me as I am?*

# STORIED SELVES IN AMERICAN EXPATRIATE WEBLOGS

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This study investigates a phenomenon that has yet to come under heavy scrutiny of psychological research: Identity narratives in weblogs. More specifically, this paper looks at self-presentations - and at how the experience of living abroad is narrated - in weblogs penned by ten American expatriates living in Europe. In this field lies the convergence of three prominent phenomena in our times: The increasing contact across cultures, the rise and central role of internet communication, and the widespread preoccupation with self-presentation. The rationale for this research rests on a syncretization of theories on narrative identity, inter-cultural sensemaking and the online presentation of self. A methodological approach that is particularly suited for exploring new phenomena was used, and narrative analysis from a grounded theory perspective enabled concepts to emerge from data. The methods used allow for exploratory, rather than conclusive results. Thus, the primary intent of this study was to provide a basis for future research. Three major findings are outlined: (1) Those who write for a well-defined audience of family and friends tend to be less personal than others. (2) The public nature of weblogs tends to be acknowledged with ambivalence, and the purpose of and motivation for blogging is created in an on-going transaction between author and readers. Finally, (3) story-genres tend to arise from a discussion within the weblog community.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Who am I? This is a question most of us have an intuitive answer to, even if we differ in the extent to which we are eager to ask it. What is identity? What is the self? Those who believe in the Christian god claim we have souls - immortal essences that with hard work and repentance will allow us to live forever. Buddhists, on the other hand, say that there is no self, or rather that everything is impermanent; that there is no *constant* self. Hermans (1996) listed a number of metaphors that various theorists have used in order to describe the self; likening it to a stream, a mirror, a looking glass, an acorn becoming an oak, an onion, an actor on a stage, a central region of a larger structure, a theory, a totalitarian state, and a galaxy. The scope of this study is restricted to a very specific take on identity: *Storied selves as they are presented in American expatriate weblogs.*

Questions of identity become even more complex when culture enters the picture. In this case the question is: How are selves narrated by expatriates online? This field of study is interesting as well as important. In it lies the convergence of three prominent phenomena in our times: The increasing contact across cultures, the rise and role of internet communication, and the widespread preoccupation with presenting a coherent self. The practice of presenting oneself online is not new, but doing so in weblog format did not settle into the mainstream until ca. 2004. It has been estimated that there are at least 70 million weblogs in existence (Riley, 2005), and new blogs pop up every day. Weblogs come in many types and forms, among which are the “expat blogs;” diaries written by expatriates chronicling their day-to-day experiences living in a foreign culture, inviting friends and strangers into their lives.

Research on weblogs is still relatively scarce. Some have studied them from a linguistic viewpoint (Nilsson, 2003; Anjewierden & Brussee, 2004), or as a new media phenomenon (Haas, 2005). Others have started to look at weblogs in terms of identity (Hevern, 2004; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005). This study is a first attempt at exploring

storied selves in expatriate weblogs. Because of the lack of pre-existing theory, this study has followed the grounded theory approach, generating theory from data. Thus, this study does not promise results that speak for the expatriate blog population as a whole. It does, however, attempt to describe meanings and genres within the sample that may become part of the tool-kit as research on weblogs is established in the social sciences.

In the following chapter a map is drawn of the theoretical foundations that inspired this study. Firstly, identity is discussed in terms of its narrative qualities, as well as its social and cultural connectedness. Secondly, inter-cultural contact is examined for its consequences for sensemaking in an expatriate setting. Thirdly, we look at some of the qualities of the weblog format and the implications these have for narrative research in general and the presentation of selves in particular. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological stance taken, as well as the methods and procedures of the research process, including sampling strategy, data collection and approach to analysis. Since it is, in this type of qualitative research, almost impossible to make a clear distinction between data and analysis, these will be treated inter-changeably in chapter 4. Chapter 5 sums up the findings and poses some questions for future research. Finally, chapter 7 gives the reader full access to the data material by listing the permalinks<sup>1</sup> of every post that have been directly used in the analysis.

Thus, the scene is set for a study that investigates sensemaking and storied selves in American expatriate weblogs. Emphasis is placed upon a study of culture as a mutual process of contact, and the ways in which issues of identity gain salience through inter-cultural encounters. Furthermore, identity is seen in terms of its narrative, multivocal, social and cultural aspects. The research questions that guided the research process were: *How is self narrated and presented in American expatriate weblogs? How does the weblog format influence stories told? How are stories of expatriate sensemaking narrated? How do genres converge or diverge within the sample?*

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<sup>1</sup> Permalink: A URL that points to a specific blog entry even after the entry has passed from the front page into the blog archives.

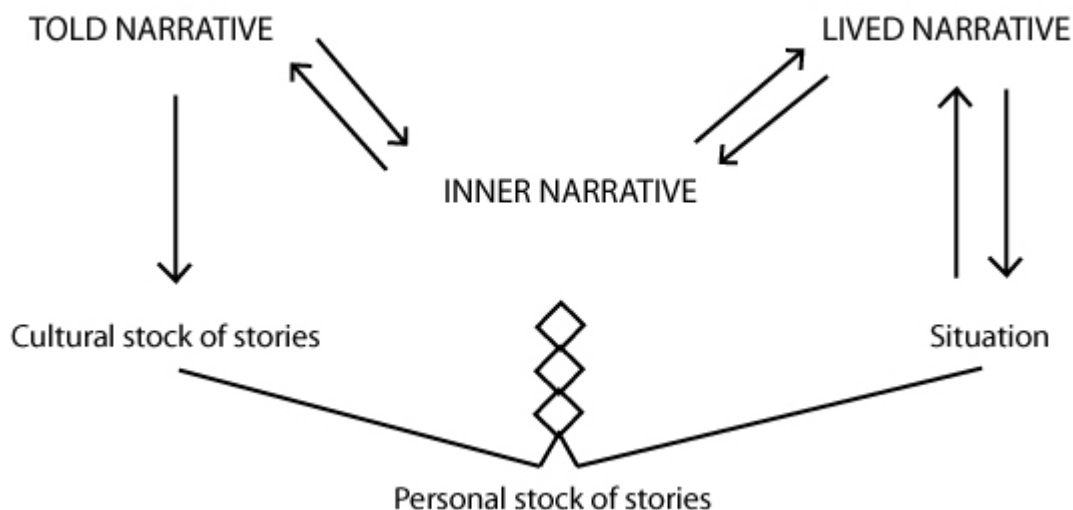
## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Narrative Identity

#### 2.1.1 Theoretical starting point

Thinking of identity in terms of its narrative qualities has become popular among several branches of social science. The starting point for such theories is often James' (1890/1902) description of *I* and *Me* as two main components of self. The *I* is the self-as-knower, continuously organizing and interpreting experience (Hermans, 1996). The *Me*, on the other hand, is defined as the self-as-known – the empirical self that is all that we consider “mine”, ranging from our bodies to our minds, cars, friends and reputations (Hermans, *ibid*). Dan P. McAdams (1996a) elaborates on the Jamesian concept in his theory of personality, viewing the *I* as a process of “selfing.” This involves constructing and authoring experience as one’s own, as well as appropriating, synthesizing, reflecting on, and observing experience as “mine”. The *Me* is the primary product of this process. Here is also where *narrative* enters the picture, as a part of the *Me*. It is, however, important to note that narrative identity is not the self. Rather, it is a *quality of the self* (McAdams, 1996b). We “have” identity to the extent that we are able to configure our stories into integrative narratives (Polkinghorne, 1996).

#### 2.1.2 The Told Narrative



**Model 1:** *The model of narrative circulation (Hänninen 2004)*



As identity itself, narrative identity is a construct very much of a theoretical nature, which makes it difficult to examine in real life. Therefore, its use should be approached steadfastly. One should always be careful not to promise more than the construct can cover. In this regard, Hänninen's (2004) model of narrative circulation makes a useful, hypothesized distinction between different narrative modes. *The lived narrative* is the narrative quality inherent in human life itself, based on the understanding that human actions are to be seen as enacted narratives (MacIntyre, 1981). *The inner narrative* can be grasped as a multitude of subnarratives, an organizer of experience - not necessarily fully verbal, but existing at the level of meaning rather than in verbal form (Hänninen, 2004).

The *told narrative* is what we encounter as an empirical phenomenon, and hence, the only mode of identity that this study can hope to tap into - the symbolic representation of a chain of human events. Elaborating on the relationship between the inner and the told narrative, Hänninen makes use of the distinction Lev S. Vygotsky (1962) made between external and inner speech. According to Vygotsky, the origin of inner speech is in the external speech. Further, the main difference between external speech and inner speech lies in their functions. The function of external speech is communication, whereas the function of inner speech is mastering one's own psychological processes. Thus, when concepts such as selfing, self-presentation, self-expression, or cultural selves are used in this article, they are meant to reference the told mode of narrative identity as illustrated in Hänninen's model.

### **2.1.3 The Social Connectedness of Narratives**

Narrative identity arises in a social environment. To Thorne and Latzke (1996), the I and the Me are not enough. We also need to include "the You," for the stories we tell are affected by the audience with which we try to communicate. Stories are 'co-authored' by the teller and the listener, Polkinghorne (1996) wrote. In the same vein, Atkinson & Delamont (2006) urge us to view narrative as a form of social action, with its indigenous, socially shared, forms of organization. McAdams (1996) writes that we are under demand to construct a coherent and unified 'telling' of the self, and that the most basic issue in this regard has to do with being understood in a social context (McAdams 2006). This is

not an easy task. Society does not offer ready-made identities for us to ‘wear,’ - we are expected to fit in on the one hand, but also to establish ourselves as unique individuals on the other. Thus, we have to deal with both separateness and connectedness - individuation and integration at the same time (McAdams, *ibid*).

Hence, narratives should be analyzed, not merely as vehicles for personal or private experience. Instead of viewing narrative identity in terms of a univocal self, Hermans (1996) suggests that different voices come together in a multivocal dialog, by working together in the same self-defining conversation. The social dimension of narratives described here is especially salient to self-presentation in weblogs, which are created publicly, and constructed in a way that encourages reader feedback and dialog.

#### **2.1.4 The Cultural Connectedness of Narratives**

When McAdams (2006) proposes that the most basic issue of the telling of self is to be understood socially, he explains that this may refer both to the structure or form of a story, but also to its content. This way of thinking not only leads to implications on the social level, but also to the possibility of integrating stories in culture, which was illustrated through the concept of *cultural stock of stories* in the model of narrative circulation. Bruner (1991, p. 5) wrote: “*We organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative - stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on. Narrative is a conventional form, transmitted culturally and constrained by each individual's level of mastery [..]*” The story belongs to the person who tells it, but it is also rooted in cultural meaning (Polkinghorne, 1996). Life stories echo gender and class constructions in society and reflect prevailing patterns of hegemony in the economic, political, and cultural contexts wherein human lives are embedded (Franz & Stewart, 1994; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992).

It is often said that narrative data is too subjective, but in many ways, this cultural rootedness is what opens the door for viewing narratives as more than purely subjective accounts. For instance, Gordon (1999) suggests that individual cases can be generalized along three lines: Firstly, as ‘paradigm cases,’ emblematic of a particular type of story or

outcome. Secondly as ‘lived narratives,’ and finally, through ‘plot lines,’ as cases are compared according to the types of plots that dominate, which is the type of approach closest to how the weblog narratives are handled in this study.

We return to narrative form and analysis in chapter 3.2.3. For now, a note on identity in modern society: McAdams (1996b) claims there is nothing especially modern about the self. In his opinion, what is particularly modern is the widespread problematization of the Me in terms of identity. Arnett (2002) also stated that the central psychological consequence of globalization is that it results in transformations in identity. However, whereas the preoccupation with experiencing unity, purpose and coherence is not unknown to many societies, it is probably most prevalent in Western and modern societies that put a premium on individualism, and most typically among high-level socio-economic classes (McAdams, 1996b). From the outset, the potential participants in this study were expected to be highly inclined to such a “problematization of Me.” Firstly because they hail from exactly the type of society described above. Secondly, because the eagerness to keep online journals in itself stands witness to such a preoccupation with a presentation of self. And thirdly; (as we shall see in the following chapter) expatriation bears the potential to make issues of identity extra visible.

## **2.2 INTER-CULTURAL CONTACT**

The degree and intensity of connections among cultures have accelerated greatly in recent years. Unfortunately, gaining and forming knowledge on these issues is not a simple task. The concept of culture is far too elusive and simplistic when used in order to describe similarities *within* groups or differences *between* groups (Minami 2000). Hermans and Kempen (1998) suggest that more attention is given to *contact zones* instead of to the “core” of cultures. Thus, they call for a shift in research interests, from comparisons between cultures to the study of processes in the contact zones populated by people of different cultural origins. In this study, expatriate weblogs are interpreted as literary

products created in the midst of such contact zones, constituted of ongoing discussions and negotiations of cultural stories of self.

Furthermore, theoretical models are required that reflect real-life complexity, Haslberger (2005) states, as he borrows metaphors from complexity theory, hoping to better illustrate expatriate adaptation. One concept that his study has adopted from Haslberger, is the concept of *strange attractors*. A non-chaotic system is in constant flux between equilibrium and non-equilibrium. In this process, the former acts as an “attractor” towards the normal state. If equilibrium is not reached, it is because of unhealthy disturbances. This way of looking at a system is reflected in pathogenic models of expatriate adaptation. In this study, however, the “system” is viewed as chaotic: Non-linear, fluid and unpredictable. All hope is not lost – for chaos may also display order, Haslberger (ibid) writes, if it is analyzed in the right fashion. Chaos then shows orderly behavior around a strange attractor. In the field of adaptation, the question arises whether it may be possible to define a strange attractor as a *space* circumscribing the outcomes, rather than as a curve.

Categories cannot be applied to real life statements in a clear-cut manner. Our way of speaking does not fall automatically into predefined structures of mutually exclusive categories. Under a complexity paradigm, however, the need for simplifying is exchanged for a stance that allows the often fuzzy, complicated subjective spaces of meanings to prevail. As Haslberger (ibid) comments, this way of thinking does not allow prediction, but it may lead to a better understanding of dynamics and thus provide a half-way house between illusory predictability and the helplessness of giving in to complete chaos. In line with Haslberger’s ideas, the following chapters analyze these issues, not as curves or mutually exclusive categories or strategies of acculturation, adaptation, integration, assimilation, separation or marginalization, but as dynamic processes within *spaces* of meaning.

### 2.2.1 Inter-cultural Sensemaking

In *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Truman Capote describes an unlikely group of friends. The mysterious Holly Golightly, the baby-buttock faced Rusty Trawler, the ch-ch-chattering Mag Wildwood and the sophisticated Brazilian José Ybarra-Jaegar make an unmusical quartet in Capote's book. The latter seems "*as out of place in their company as a violin in a jazz band [...] Perhaps, like most of us in a foreign country, he was incapable of placing people, selecting a frame for their picture, as he would at home; therefore all Americans had to be judged in a pretty equal light, and on this basis his companions appeared to be tolerable examples of local color and national character* (Capote, 1958).

Life in a new culture can sometimes be confusing. Ludwig Wittgenstein once wrote: "*One human being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and what is more, even given a mastery of the country's language. We do not understand the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.) We cannot find our feet with them. **If a lion could talk, we could not understand him***" (Wittgenstein, 1958 p. 223, my emphasis). This aphorism suggests that having a dictionary of lionese would not suffice for us to truly understand the lion. If Wittgenstein's verdict is true, it does not bode well for cross-cultural understanding. Interestingly, Wittgenstein himself did not speak until he was four. It has been said that he often misinterpreted people's intentions, and in fact, it has been suggested that he suffered from Asperger's syndrome (Fitzgerald, 2000).

If the reader bears through another analogy: Contrary to Wittgenstein's defeatist position on inter-cultural understanding, in the science fiction novel *the Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* is to be found a more optimistic stance. The author describes the 'Nutri-Matic Drinks Dispenser,' an apparatus, which when asked to serve a cup of tea defines the drink as '*the taste of dried-up leaves boiled in water.*' Accordingly, the machine pours out a terrible-tasting sludge. But when tea-thirsty Arthur Dent tells the machine stories about India, about China and Ceylon, about broad leaves drying in the sun, about silver teapots and summer afternoons on the lawn, about putting in the milk before the tea so that it will not get scalded; on the delivery plate of the Nutri-Matic appears "*a small tray, on which*

*sat three bone china cups and saucers, a bone china jug of milk, and a silver teapot full of the best tea Arthur had ever tasted”* (Adams, 2002 p. 168). In other words: If a dictionary of lionese alone does not help us understand the animal, maybe acquiring a basic knowledge of the lion kingdom will?

Glanz (2001) explains sensemaking as the way in which active agents “structure the unknown” - a concept that provides a framework for the uncertainty and unstable environments encountered in the expatriate experience. Louis (1980) conceptualizes sensemaking as a thinking process that uses retrospection to explain surprise. We act on the basis of programmed scripts, he writes. In new situations, especially when meeting circumstances that appear similar to previous experience, we draw on these scripts as a resource to determine action. On occasion, a novel situation will fail to conform to our expectations, resulting in confusion between past and present understanding. Thus, sensemaking is the recurring process whereby conscious thought is used to reanalyze and bring order to surprise (Glanz, 2001).

According to Berger (1987) smooth, coordinated and understandable interaction depends on one’s ability to predict the behavior of one’s partner, and based on that, selecting from one’s repertoire those responses that will optimize outcomes. People belonging to the same culture get a head start in this “game,” because they have been socialized into similar role expectations, situational understandings, communication scripts and implicit theories of personality (Smith and Bond, 1998). Stressing sensemaking over terms such as ‘culture shock,’ adaptation or acculturation enforces a positive view of inter-cultural contact, that is, not as situations imbued with stress, shock and pathology, but rather as experiences with profound opportunities for communication, learning and personal growth.

How do we make sense of culture’s influence on us? The fish is often the last to discover water. Not only does inter-cultural contact present us with the potential to understand others. It also gives us the opportunity to learn about and understand ourselves. Inter-cultural contact offers a remarkable opportunity to reflect on the extent to which we are

shaped by our own culture. The emphasis placed on individualism in western cultures tends to add to our forgetfulness of the social dimension of understanding that we live in (Mountouri & Fahim, 2004). Phinney (1996) writes that most Americans of European background do not consider ethnicity a salient or important part of their identity. Many, in fact, do not think of themselves as “ethnic” at all. Supposedly, American expatriates to Europe master much of the “European repertoire”, given that the cultural differences they encounter are less marked than if they were to live in, say, a developing nation. However, it is often in the ordinary, mundane experiences of everyday life that we notice things do not work quite the way they do at home (Mountouri & Fahim, 2004). Thus, sensemaking for Americans in Europe may be particularly powerful in its own way, because cultural idiosyncracies in this case are less visible. In the next chapter we look more closely at demographics and motivations among Americans who live abroad.

### **2.2.2 American Expatriates**

An expatriate is defined as a person who is removed from residence in one's native land, embarking on a sojourn - a temporary stay in a new location (Ward et al, 2001). Expatriates (or sojourners) go abroad voluntarily and plan to return home after a more or less set period of time. Expatriates include business people, students, members of the armed forces, diplomats, missionaries, volunteers, or aid workers. They are typically more committed to their new location than tourists, but less involved than immigrants. Also, expatriates are often well educated and highly motivated (Ward et al, *ibid*). The number of American citizens abroad is estimated at roughly around 4 million, and the rate at which American citizens are leaving the US is on the rise (Bureau of Consular Affairs, 1999).

Motivations for migrating are diverse. Many relocate for employment and career opportunities. Some are sent by their companies, others find work on their own. Some leave to seek the reality of a dream life abroad. Steingart (2006) describes the US as home to the most optimistic and daring people in the world: “*America is the country that strives hardest for what is new - not just since yesterday (like Eastern Europeans) and not just for the last three decades (like the Chinese); rather from the very instant settlers*

*began arriving. Unabashed curiosity seems to be hardwired into the nation's genetic code.*” Jennings (1970) introduced the term ‘mobicentric man’ to describe the behavior of individuals who value motion and action very highly and who are constantly “on the move,” and Morrison and Wheeler (1976) used the term ‘pioneering personality’ to describe individuals who appear to like to relocate geographically.

Taylor (1969) described three major types of migrants. For one, there are the *aspirerers*, those who leave in the hope of doing better for themselves and their children. Secondly, there are the *resultant migrants*, those who are pressured by situation to move. This type may not be directly applicable to American expatriates, however, in some cases dissatisfaction with the political climate may play a role in the motivation to leave. Dr. of Geography Audrey Kobayashi notes that in the twenty-four hours following George W. Bush's 2004 victory, the Canadian government's Department of Citizenship and Immigration website received six times the average daily number of hits (Kobayashi, 2005). Taylor's (1969) final type, the *dislocated migrants* includes those who choose to migrate because of dislocation from their primary group, such as those who join their foreign partners in their country of origin.

What can American expatriates expect when they make the move? The Pew Global Attitudes Project (PGAP, 2005) has for the past four years measured international sentiment towards the US. In a resulting report they state that anti-Americanism did not originate in the aftermath of 9/11, but that it is now deeper and broader than ever before. Problem areas include ‘the war on terror,’ US business practices, Americanization, complaints that the US acts to increase the gap between the rich and the poor and that their foreign policy is unilateral. These criticisms are most acute in Muslim nations, but anti-American sentiment is a growing phenomenon all over the world. Furthermore, studies have traditionally shown that people tend to make a distinction between the country and its citizens, meaning that Americans are often rated more favorably than is “the USA.” This distinction is now fading, as respondents in only 13 out of 43 countries expressed more positive attitudes about Americans than about their country. The French for instance, have soured on the American people to the degree that positive assessments



declined from 71% to 53% in only two years (PGAP, *ibid*). Another interesting theme that emerged from the findings of the Pew Global Attitudes Project is the stark contrast between global opinion *of* the US and public opinion *within* the US. 79% of Americans reported that the spread of American ideas, style of democracy and business practices around the world is a good thing, while people in most other countries tend to give a lukewarm reception to the idea of adopting American customs (PGAP, *ibid*).

## 2.3 WEBLOGS

Giddens (1991) proposed that the growing popularity of keeping journals, diaries and other autobiographical devices runs parallel to the rising occupation with making sense of the modern self in the West. With the invention of easily accessible publishing tools, public diary writing has become an immensely popular pastime to internet users worldwide. There are certain aspects particular to the weblog format and the online environment which can have novel psychological consequences. For instance, if the weblog can be seen as a descendent of diary writing, what are the implications of personal journaling going public?

### 2.3.1 The diary on the web – Identity in text and format

In the most basic sense, the weblog is a format, a website containing a series of entries arranged in reverse chronological order. Each entry typically carries a link to a comment field, allowing feedback from readers, and the practice of linking to other blogs creates opportunities for shared expression within weblog communities. Entries are usually archived in a way that makes it possible to scaffold on previous observations; thus, constructing identity can be a continual process for the blog author (Huffaker and Calvert 2005). Further, blog authors can create links between relevant posts, thereby putting singular events in context (McNeill, 2003).

Weblogs are used for many different purposes, but often as personal journals or as ongoing commentaries about oneself. Thus, blogging can itself be viewed as a project of creating and presenting identity (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005). Hevern (2004) explains

weblogs as displays of multiple and shifting positionings in the form of ongoing, personally meaningful, and hypertextually threaded themes, similar to Herman's (2001) model of the multivocal self. Often almost absurd parodies of the stereotypical diary, many weblogs are fragmented narratives that jump disconnectedly from topic to topic. They focus on the quotidian and the personal, foregrounding the diarist's experiences and emotions, McNeill (2003) writes, and goes on to comment that these aspects build on the diary-as-scrapbook tradition, turning textual self-portraits into three-dimensional virtual experiences that allow the reader to take a guided tour of the diarist's "life."

Several have used Goffman's theories in order to illuminate self-presentation on the internet (Miller, 1995; Robinson, 2007; Bargh et al, 2002). Of course, the richness and depth of interactions in real life puts a limit to the use of this analogy. But, as electronic communication establishes expressive resources that can replace "real life" cues, internet interaction in many ways mimics its offline counterpart. Robinson (2007) likens online self-presentation to offline selfing in that they both are rooted in interaction between the I, the Me, and the Other. Miller (1995) did research on self-presentation in web pages, and found that the selves presented online were not qualitatively different from selves presented in other ways.

Even if online identity is in many ways an extension of offline selfing, the internet facilitates self-expression in such a way that it becomes an interesting new medium with its indigenous problems and opportunities. What happens to self-presentation when we become disembodied and, in some cases, anonymous? What are the consequences of this particular frame for interaction? What is the nature of weblogs as loci for the electronic self? These are some of the questions that this study attempts to explore.

### **2.3.2 The diary as public communication**

Within online communication, anonymity can strongly influence which stories are told and how they are presented (Turkle, 1995). Even if the author chooses to post anonymously, knowing that your diary will be read by someone makes you acutely aware of your readers, whose desires, expectations, and reading practices shape the texts that

authors produce. Weblogs thus stand out in the way that the authors of blogs, although they may retain some of the internal motivation inherent to traditional diary-keeping, also write with an awareness of and a desire for an audience (McNeill, 2003). Weblogs blur the distinction between online and offline lives, and most intriguingly for autobiography studies, between the life and the text, McNeill (*ibid*) claims. Journal writing is an activity requiring time, thought, and meditation—a characterization that reflects traditional uses of the diary as a spiritual exercise, personal therapy tool, and literary production. Despite the public nature of the online journal, it is still focused on the personal and introspective (McNeill, *ibid*).

In some ways the public nature of blogs makes them even more significant in terms of identity formation than traditional diaries are. For all but the most disarmingly frank writers, much of the therapeutic aspect is lost, Ewins (2005) comments. However, the most private elements are substituted for an outward focus that is often missing from a diary. A blogger's commentary helps to define his or her self in relation to the wider environment. A weblog is a public face, a presenting of oneself and one's thoughts to an audience, which significantly changes the nature of its writing and creation (Ewins, *ibid*). These observations emphasize the social connectedness of narratives mentioned earlier in this article.

### **2.3.3 The narrative qualities of weblogs**

What can be said on the narrative qualities of weblogs? Some insight may be found in Georgakopoulou's (2006) discussion of *prototypical narratives vs. small stories*. By the former she refers to personal, past experience stories of single, non-shared events. Small stories, on the other hand, is used as an umbrella-term that covers a range of narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, or shared events. In this paper, weblogs are seen as sharing characteristics with both these narrative types. Its fragmented nature makes the weblog genre similar to 'small stories.' Also, the public nature of weblogs makes them more conversational than textual life stories typically are. Furthermore, small stories are usually about very recent events, immediately reworked slices of life (Georgakopoulou, *ibid*), in many ways more dynamic

than “grand narratives” are. Blog authors usually report their experiences on a more or less daily basis, sometimes almost simultaneously to the events to which they are referring. Similarities to the small story concept notwithstanding, if one looks at the totality of entries in a weblog, one can possibly also decipher grander forms of narrative: Overarching story lines, major plots, and attempts at coherence and closure. Furthermore, we shall see how individual posts sometimes contain grander types of narrative, in what is later coined “big stories.”

### **3. METHODOLOGY & METHODS**

#### **3.1 Methodological approaches**

##### **3.1.1 Grounded Theory**

The initial literature search revealed massive amounts of research on expatriation, a fair amount on narrative identity and to a lesser degree studies on weblogs in terms of self-presentation. No studies were found that matched all three criteria. Therefore, a methodology was chosen that is particularly suitable for fields that lack pre-existing theory. In the grounded theory approach, theory is generated from data. According to Glaser & Holton (2004), the analyst should not conduct extensive pre-research literature reading, so that a theoretical sensitivity and transcendence is maintained when analyzing, collecting and coding the data. Concepts should then evolve in a dialogic process between data collection and analysis until categories are saturated. In grounded theory, the *method of constant comparison* generates initially substantive, and later theoretical, categories. As the process of constant comparison proceeds, core categories begin to emerge that appear to account for most of the variation around the concern that is the focus of the study. This becomes the focus of further selective data collection and coding efforts. This core variable can be any kind of theoretical code - a process, a condition, two dimensions, a consequence, or a range (Glaser & Holton, 2004).

The constant comparative method involves three types of comparison. Incidents (in this case narratives) are compared to other incidents so that underlying uniformity and its

varying conditions is established. These findings in turn become concepts and hypotheses. Next, concepts are compared to more incidents in order to generate new theoretical properties and more hypotheses. This process also serves the purpose of theoretical elaboration, saturation of categories and verification of concepts. The last step is to compare concepts to concepts in order for them to be integrated into hypotheses, which finally becomes the grounded theory (Glaser & Holton, *ibid*). How exactly this process took place in the study at hand is described in chapter 3.2.3. First a few words on the trustworthiness of grounded theory research.

### **3.1.2 External and Internal Trustworthiness**

The sampling strategy common to grounded theory is geared towards the generation of theory. This means that participants are included - not for a representative capture of all possible variations particular to a population – but for a deep understanding of the properties of certain categories used in the population. Also, beyond the decisions made in the initial collection of data, further collection cannot be planned in advance of the emerging theory. Only as the researcher discovers concepts do the successive requirements for data collection emerge, both regarding which categories are to be sampled - and where to collect more data (Glaser & Holton, *ibid*). Rather than attempting external generalizability, research through grounded theory focuses on gathering a sample that is appropriate for the phenomenon at hand. Participants are included for additional information, and for generating new conceptual categories. Thus, this study does not attempt to speak of the expatriate blog population as a whole, but rather explores properties found through this theoretically grounded process of sampling and coding.

Neither does this study attempt to speak directly of the *identity* of the person behind the blog, nor of the *events* represented in narratives, which was also noted in the distinction made earlier between levels of narrative modes. This study explores *storied selves* in weblog format. Even so, how can we know that weblogs are not complete fiction? First of all, a researcher should never take subject's statements for granted. Narrative data, or any other type of data, should never be taken at face value. Narratives should be carefully interpreted. The researcher's task is to reflect on the intentional meaning of the subject's

statements. “*Validity is not an intrinsic property to a particular kind of data. Rather, validity is relative to the inferences being made,*” Averill (1983:1154-5) wrote.

Participants’ descriptions of an experience are reports on their awareness of the results of a series of cognitive operations, not on the operations themselves. Hence, in narrative research we deal as much with the subject’s reflective consciousness of the experience as with the experience reflected on by the subject (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977). A narrative analysis can never purely deal with that to which the story refers. It is an analysis of the *telling of the story* (Churchill, 2000). Instead of being distortions, denials or escapes from reality, Carr (1986) observes, they are extensions and configurations of reality’s primary features. So, even if we do not reach a “core of being” through narratives, it should not be unreasonable to say that they can be revelatory of the meaning or “intentionality” of human experience (Churchill, 2000). In this study, we ask how meaning is mediated in weblog format. In this regard, inconsistent or contradictory narratives are not seen as detrimental to internal validity - as lies, falsehoods or skewed presentations – rather, such findings are seen as interesting in and of themselves.

### **3.1.3 Ethical Considerations**

One important consideration that needs to be made clear before undertaking a study of weblogs is whether or not to consider these as a part of the public domain. Weblogs are publicly available; hence this type of research could be exempt from the obligations to obtain informed consent and to protect individual privacy and confidentiality. However, even though the information is public, communicants may perceive a degree of privacy, or not be aware of - or sufficiently protected from the potential accessibility to their personal information by others (Frankel and Siang, 1999). There is also a potential for psychological harm when authors are unaware that their writing is being used for purposes they may not have intended until the results of the research are published. Since this study neither deals with typically sensitive issues nor employs under-age participants, the decision was made to follow the definition of weblogs as part of the public domain, hence consent was not obtained.

## 3.2 METHODS & PROCEDURE

### 3.2.1 Sampling and Data Collection

The first step was to collect a wide selection of expatriate weblogs, reading as much as possible in order to get acquainted with the population. Weblogs do indeed offer tremendous amounts of data for research. Locating the data, however - and making up an impression of the pool of possible participants - is a time consuming process. As the web itself, the blogosphere is vast and disorganized. Many are listed by topic in directories, but others exist solitarily, on the outskirts of the “expat blog community.”

The first phase yielded a list of roughly 300 weblogs, which were extracted from both general and expat-specific directories, by searching web engines for relevant keywords, and by following links from already chosen blogs (snowballing). From the initial list weblogs were discarded or included according to the following criteria: (1) Blogs that had not been updated within the previous two weeks were excluded, as were (2) blogs that showed a history of irregular activity. Blogs were excluded that (3) consisted of a high degree of off-topic posts, and (4) whose entries were generally short. Blogs were included if they (5) dealt with a high degree of expat-focused themes and (6) self-related stories.

The observations on American expatriation made in chapter 2.2.2 ran through the entire research process. Firstly, effort was made to include a diversity of backgrounds and motivations in the sample. Secondly, in the forming of concepts, topics were given weight that dealt with reflections on how attitudes and stereotypes towards Americans affect self-reflection presented in weblogs. As concepts started to emerge, additional participants were recruited for contrast, richness and multitude. After several rounds back and forth in this process, full text was extracted from ten blogs. Within this sample, posts were excluded that were not directly relevant to issues of expatriation and identity. Left were ten collections of text excerpts with an average word count of 30345<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Range from 8000 to 65000 words.

### 3.2.2 Characteristics of the Sample

Name	Origin	Destination	Arrival	Blogged since	Motivation
Karla	Texas	Norway	2002	2004	TS
Emily	Iowa	Norway	2006	2006	TS
Sedulia	Louisiana	France	1990	2005	M
Philippa	San Francisco	France	2005	2005	M
Frank <sup>1</sup>	Ohio	Belgium	1991	2005	M
Tim	Tennessee	Norway	2001	2005	M
Mona <sup>2</sup>	New York	UK	2001	2005	M
Alexis	Chicago	Holland	2006	2006	W
Francis	Chicago	Sweden	1999	2001	M
Philip	California	UK	2006	2006	S

**Table 1:** TS- traveling spouse; M: married to a native resident; W: work expatriate; S: student.

As previously stated, the focus of this study is on *storied selves* rather than on the individual author. Hence, detailed information regarding characteristics or backgrounds within the sample is not considered necessary. The table above lists the most basic characteristics, including geographic origin, destination, duration of stay and journaling, as well as type of reason for expatriation. Degree of disclosure of personal information varied greatly within the sample. For instance, some did not inform of age at all. It would, however, be very surprising if participants were outside the range from mid-twenties to mid-forties. Also, information on vocation turned out to be difficult to find, but it seems that most participants are employed, apart from some of the traveling spouses.

### 3.2.3 Approach to Analysis

Bruner (2002:63) stated that the self is a “*surprisingly quirky idea - intuitively obvious to common sense, yet notoriously evasive to definition.*” This “felt meaning” of identity cannot be expressed directly through language. It has to be converted into literary form and, thus, comply with the requirements of grammatical structures and sign systems (Gendlin, 1991). Like any story, identity has certain recognizable features of structure and content. Like any story, furthermore, identity comes out of a set of literary traditions

<sup>1</sup> The person behind “Bexpat Perspective” is anonymous, and is called “Frank” here for convenience.

<sup>2</sup> The person behind “MrsMogul” is anonymous, and is called “Mona” here for convenience.



(McAdams 1996a). The approach used in this study is *the life story method* as described by Riessman (1993). Here, the subject's account is constructed and retold by the researcher. Narrative analysis then examines how accounts are emplotted, and which genres are drawn on. Plot lines may then be contrasted across subjects.

As an example of narrative analysis from research on tourism, consider how Noy (2004) explored Israeli backpackers' self-change narratives and identified two major discourses; distinct and pervasive genres of transformation in contemporary Western society. In the *romantic-adventurous narratives*, backpackers search for exoticism, authenticity, and "virgin" territory, which, when amalgamated in the experience of Western backpackers, entail and evoke imperialist and neocolonial themes. In the *religious-pilgrim narratives*, which demonstrate a significant resemblance with the stories told by backpackers, events are imbued with profound meaning and significance. Events are subjectively interpreted as indicating divine intervention. For instance, religious discourse designates sites in which the divine is said to be present in a more "condensed" form. Modern tourists, although by and large secularized, can also be said to travel within a symbolically religious universe, Noy (ibid) concluded.

The starting point for this study was an interest in exploring how bloggers present themselves online, and how they narrate their expatriate experiences. At the outset, questions and hypotheses were tentative, open and exploratory. As analysis progressed, questions were narrowed down and genres were fleshed out. The research questions from chapter 2.4 were used as guidelines through this process. Firstly, the sample was examined for possible answers to the question "*How is the self narrated and presented in American expatriate weblogs?*" This phase quickly revealed a practice of stating one's purpose for blogging, and resultantly yielded the three categories we shall see listed in chapter 4.1. The question of *how expatriate sensemaking is narrated* guided the next phase. When they write about living abroad, or being American, what is it that they try to express? Are there themes or topics common to the participants? Or also, how do such stories differ across the sample?

A concrete example of how the analysis was carried out is illustrated through a particular finding that was made early in the process. One of the participants wrote about how he saw himself as changed as a result of being an expatriate. Next, the other blogs were browsed for stories dealing with change. Both divergent and convergent plot lines were found, and the analyses of these lead to the classification of two major narratives: “Losing oneself” and “finding oneself.” As the analysis proceeded, new topics emerged and the sampled blogs were contrasted for topics such as: Stories about being representations of Americans, stories about looking back, stories about longing and homesickness. After categories were saturated, meaning that no more information contributing substantially to the understanding of a concept could be found, the genres were analyzed for the final research question: *How does the weblog format influence storytelling? Or more specifically: How does having an audience affect the stories told? How does reader feedback affect the narratives? What are the implications of having a public diary?*

## 4. FINDINGS

Findings from the studied weblogs can be organized in two overarching spaces of meaning. In the first, (1) *Presentations*, we look at how selves and weblogs are introduced and presented, within which three main genres of presentations were found: (a) *Virtual postcards*, (b) *Virtual diaries*, and (c) *Speaker’s corner*. Chapter 4.2 deals with the (2) *Narration of cultural selves*, within which three genres were found: (a) *Representations*, (b) *Looking back-posts*, and (c) *Change*.

In the following, excerpts from the ten sampled weblogs are presented and retold in order to illustrate both typical as well as divergent story lines. The narrative data presented in this section appear according to APA standards. Longer quotations are cited in free-standing blocks, shorter quotations appear in italic type. Each excerpt is referenced with a letter corresponding to the sampled weblog as well as with a number that corresponds to

the particular post where the text was collected. A full list of referenced material is found in chapter 7.

## 4.1 Presentations

URLs
<a href="http://karlastories.blogspot.com">http://karlastories.blogspot.com</a>
<a href="http://emilyontopoftheworld.blogspot.com">http://emilyontopoftheworld.blogspot.com</a>
<a href="http://www.ruerude.com">http://www.ruerude.com</a>
<a href="http://sfgirlinparis.com">http://sfgirlinparis.com</a>
<a href="http://bexpat.blogspot.com">http://bexpat.blogspot.com</a>
<a href="http://tnrin.wordpress.com">http://tnrin.wordpress.com</a>
<a href="http://mrsmogul.blogspot.com">http://mrsmogul.blogspot.com</a>
<a href="http://alexisinamsterdam.blogspot.com">http://alexisinamsterdam.blogspot.com</a>
<a href="http://francisstrand.blogspot.com">http://francisstrand.blogspot.com</a>
<a href="http://fliptomato.wordpress.com">http://fliptomato.wordpress.com</a>

**Table 2:** *List of sampled weblogs*

TITLE	SUBTITLE
Tales of a Texpatriate	From Austin to Oslo and places in between. A travelin' gal tells her tales.
Emily on top of the World	From the prairie to the fjords (with a few stops along the way.)
Rue Rude	I am an American in Paris
SFgirl in Paris	Someone else is living your Parisian dream
Bexpat perspective	
A Tennessee Redneck in King Harald's Court	
Mrs. Mogul	Dishing out the juice
Alexis in Amsterdam	
How to learn Swedish in 1000 difficult lessons	
An American Physics Student in England	

**Table 3:** *List of titles and subtitles in sampled weblogs*

#### 4.1.1 What is in a Name?

What is the significance of choosing the title for your blog? Considering the definition of the weblog as a locus for the electronic self, can one say that the title is meant to convey something about the intent and the tone of the blog and its author? Most URLs in the sample hint at the names (real or pseudonym) and/or the whereabouts of the authors<sup>1</sup>. All blogs have titles, five also have subtitles.

URLs and titles such as *SFgirl in Paris*, *Alexis in Amsterdam* and *An American Physics Student in England* simply describe the ‘who’ and the ‘where’ of the author. *Tales of a Texpatiate - From Austin to Oslo and places in between, a travelin' gal tells her tales* and *Emily on top of the World - From the prairie to the fjords (with a few stops along the way)* serve the same purpose, albeit with a little more artistic elaboration. Emily explains on her front page: “As for the title of my blog, although we are a little bit south of the Arctic Circle, we're still really, really far north, and sometimes it does feel like we're at the ends of the earth...I thought that ‘Top of the World’ had a nicer, less doomsday ring to it, though!” (B1) This statement suggests that Emily with her title, as well as with her blog, aims to portray a positive and inviting image of her new life.

Similarly, Sedulia’s title; *Rue Rude* (French for “Rough Street”), subtitled *I am an American in Paris*, as well as Philippa’s title: *Someone else is living your Parisian dream* stress their identity as expatriates. Philippa writes:

Here to mess with your romantic dreams of life and amour in “The City of Lights”; debunking myths, perpetuating old prejudices and conjuring new stereotypes about the French daily. This is a sliver of reality for those blind and silly in Paris-love who have “always dreamed of living in Paris” and “would-move-in-a-heartbeat!” Newsflash: She’s living in Paris and she’s not eating bon-bons, that’s for sure. She does; however, buy baguettes almost daily from the boulangerie around the corner and wears jeans everywhere (D1).

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<sup>1</sup> “Tnrin” and “fliptomato are variations of the authors’ names.

Sedula and Philippa make use of, but also criticize the dreamy and romantic ideas many Americans may have about Paris. Nobody visiting a city for the first time is a stranger, especially to Paris, a place we have visited so often in imagination, influenced by art, literature and movies. These two titles reference a vision of Paris originating in the 1920s, when the “Lost Generation” of American writers, artists and intellectuals migrated to Paris *en masse*. Sedulia’s subtitle is possibly inspired by the movie *American in Paris*, set in this age.

Tim says about his title *A Tennessee Redneck in King Harald’s Court*, that he is not a redneck, but that he likes to catch people’s attention (F1). Nevertheless, this title possibly draws on the stereotype that Europe is more “sophisticated” than the US, and thus emphasizes the author’s status as an outsider. *Bexpat Perspective* plays on his unique perspective as an American in Belgium, and Francis’ initial intention for his blog was to “keep a record of my painful struggle to learn Swedish” (I1) - and he accordingly named it *How to learn Swedish in 1000 difficult lessons*. Perhaps does this title not only relate to language learning, but also to culture learning?

*Mrs. Mogul - Dishing out the juice* is a title that, at first glance, does not quite fit in with the rest of the sample. She explains her choice of title first by defining a mogul as “an important or powerful person,” explaining that it is meant to be empowering. Further, she comments that the typeface would look nice on carrier bags (G1). *Dishing out the juice* indicates that this is a place for gossip and scandalous information. This type of title is similar to *Bexpat Perspective* and *Tales of a Texpatriate* in the way that they put weight on being “unique.” Thus, typical to the titles in the sample is that they tend to construe the blog as the voice of someone who is *removed* from something, someone who is now placed in a new context, as people who struggle with the unfamiliar and have “tales to tell” that others would find interesting.

### 4.1.2 Statements of Purpose

Why do people keep weblogs? Which reasons do we find in the sample for spending so much time and effort on this hobby, and how are the issues of keeping a public journal problematized and resolved? All ten authors in the sample give “statements of purpose” of different types, in which three major genres of motivation emerged, coined as (1) Virtual postcards, (2) Speaker’s corner, and (3) Virtual diaries. “Statements of purpose” are often presented in separate about-pages that provide general information on the blog and its author. Other times a presentation of the blog’s purpose is given in the first post, but often these texts appear after some time - a finding that indicates that purpose becomes clearer and is created along the way.

#### 4.1.2i Virtual postcards

In what is here called *virtual postcards*, the blog is construed as a way of communicating with people back home. Alexis states on her front page that her blog is an open email to friends and family who want to keep track of her adventures (H1). Emily writes that the whole point of her blog is to entice friends to come visit her (B2). In her very first post, Karla writes: “*Since my friends and family seem to want to know about my experiences, I thought I might post my stupid stories and embarrassing happenings here rather than bug them all the time with mass emails and such. That way they can check in when they want, and see what's up*” (A1).

It seems that even if the primary audience is explicitly targeted as family and friends, the authors nonetheless anticipate outside readership. If these statements fully covered the authors’ motivations, why, then, include personal information that family and friends would surely already know about? For instance, Emily and Karla both disclose their age, origin, whereabouts, and reasons for expatriation. Alexis mournfully acknowledges the public nature of blogs, and writes: “*There are plenty of tween girls out there who'd loooove for you to increase their readership and their lives are probably more interesting than mine. As such, I ask any stumblers on the page to introduce themselves*” (H1).

Even if Alexis is reluctant to advertise her blog to newcomers, her statement does not necessarily simply express a wish to stay out of the radar of a wider audience. It does not take much internet experience to learn that blog readers are often eager to criticize as well as painfully honest in their choice of words. Thus, such a statement could perhaps be interpreted as an effort to safeguard against criticism. By clearly stating that one's blog is meant for acquaintances only, one is, or hopes to be, exempt from criticism, exactly as the diary in one's desktop drawer would be. Still, if the blog was meant to be strictly private, one would think it more efficient to install a password protection and give access only to the desired audience.

Of course, motivation can also change over time. What was initially meant for friend's eyes only can quickly turn into something quite different as the blog begets comments from strangers, or as one becomes increasingly involved in the expat blog community. So, it seems that the virtual postcard-type of motivation is not clear-cut, but manifold, and that there is a balance to seek - between communicating with friends and family on the one hand, and on the other, catering for a wider audience.

#### **4.1.2ii Speaker's Corner**

Some authors openly state that general readership and discussion is their primary motivation for writing. These tend to have a more or less clearly defined agenda, and often post on specific topics. Frank introduces his blog by writing: *"Being an American in Belgium is not always easy. My upbringing and culture give me a different outlook on things than the people of this country. However, a decade and a half of living in Europe also has given me a perspective that separates me from my family and friends back in the States. Adapting to your surroundings without forgetting who you are. That's the secret"* (E1). He continues: *"Expect me to vent every now and then about how little some people seem to understand. This is my outlet. This is my sanity."* (E2).

Frank portrays himself as unique both from a Belgian and an American viewpoint, a combination that should be interesting to readers. He further writes that the aim of the blog is to compare cultures and discuss. Sedulia states that she is here to debunk myths,

perpetuate prejudice and conjure new stereotypes about life in France (D1). This can be understood similarly to what Frank writes - that she has a unique take on things and that she writes for the purpose of educating those who do not have access to the same experience. Francis, although he mostly falls into the virtual diary-type of motivation, has a series of posts where he writes about Swedish culture in a way that falls into the Speaker's corner-genre.

#### **4.1.2iii Virtual Diaries**

Some authors state that they write as a way of “*documenting experience*” (J1), “*to express thoughts, dreams, whatever that might be entertaining to read*” (G1), or simply, to “*learn how to make a blog [...] and amuse myself*” (C1). This type of motivation differs from the virtual postcards in that the message is usually not tailored for a specific receiver. Instead, these authors claim more personal agendas - self-expression over communication. These blogs also seem to have more therapeutic functions, as they generally employ what is later termed *bigger* rather than *small stories*, by the use of a level of abstraction and literary devices that is not found to the same degree in typical “postcard-blogs.”

In fact, some authors within the virtual diary-genre discredit the importance of readership. Communication is often narrated as less important than creating something, than sending something “out there.” However, this does not mean that feedback is not appreciated. Francis' blog is one month old when he writes:

It's time for me to answer (for myself) the question: what the hell is this about, or rather, why am I writing this, why does anyone write these online diaries, why would anyone read them or want to read them, why do we (me and the other people who write these things) have such exhibitionist tendencies? At the beginning, I told myself that I was writing this to keep a record of my painful struggle to learn Swedish, that I would be motivated to keep it up if I did it so publicly and with the attendant rewards of being read by people I don't even know. How that is supposed to be a reward, well, I guess anyone reading this would understand.[..]



Why would anyone want to read this? I honestly don't know. I don't know if I would read this. And, while I know I would like to have people read it, on some level it doesn't matter. So, maybe I can just skip to the next question. Which is: Why am I such an exhibitionist? I guess it's an American thing. Andy Warhol and the whole '15 minutes of fame concept,' which the Internet seems to have changed into 'famous to 15 people who would normally not know you' (II).

We have now seen three different types of motivation for blogging emerging from the sample. Another example of the previously mentioned balance between the private and public dimensions of the weblog is found in the way authors deal with readership, in this case "unwelcome intruders." The following excerpt is from a blog that leans on both the postcard and the diary-genre, but the same approach is found also in the speaker's corner-genre. In one post, Karla expresses her dissatisfaction with the Norwegian weather: "*Enough already! I am SICK OF SNOW. I am TIRED OF SNOW. Snow is NOT FUN*" (A2). Shortly after, the comment field's usually jovial tone is breached by a number of critical voices, among which this delightful remark: "*Why are you in Norway since you hate it so much? Maybe you should get a job or something. Interesting how all these expat wives don't do anything. I say, get a job and quit your whining!*" (A3).

The following day, Karla posts a reply. After explaining that, contrary to opinion, she does not hate Norway, and giving arguments to justify her unemployment, she writes: "*Why on earth are you wasting your energy on posting to my website if you don't like it? Why are you spending your time on me if you don't like me?*" (A4). Interestingly, Karla has redesigned the hyperlink that leads to the comment field. By default it simply says *comments*. Now, it reads: *You like me! You really like me!* To a blogger, the number of comments indicates level of popularity, and Karla's label suggests that giving comments is an act of affirmation of the blog – and ultimately of her.

One could say that there is always a certain degree of exhibitionism involved in keeping a diary-type weblog. Authors want to be read, or at least take part in the social aspects of blogging, or they would not bother to make their thoughts public. However, Karla's

request that those who disagree should go elsewhere is not the only way to construe one's "online locus of self." Another type of exhibitionist would perhaps think that all PR is good PR, which there may very well be a covert element of in this example. One could, after all, ask Karla why she is wasting her energy on posting a reply to these comments, rather than simply removing them from her web page. This way of greeting outsiders, especially in instances where outsiders are not supportive of the author, suggests that blogs are construed - not as democratic forums, open for a general public, as spaces for exploration, dissent and change - but more along the lines of "virtual altars of the self," as personal spaces for social support.

## **4.2 AMERICAN ABROAD: NARRATION OF CULTURAL SELVES**

The previous chapter looked at intentional and explicit self-presentations, although unintentional and implicit meanings were also discussed. Other self-narratives, however, were less explicit, and to a greater degree communicated between the lines. The next part of the analysis was an exploration into the narration of expatriate sensemaking, into the ways in which authors tell their stories of selves from a cultural perspective. Three genres of posts emerged from the sample: (1) Representation; (2) Looking back; and (3) Change.

We shall see that stories vary in degree of depth. Here, the concept of *small stories* is meant to encompass narratives that tell of practicalities, which are often posted list-style, recounting incidents that may seem like minor details to an outsider, but which nonetheless are narrated as important by the person in question. The concept of *big stories* is meant to encompass narratives that go deeper in self-reflection and are less "generic" than the small story narratives.

### 4.2.1 Representation

In chapter 2.2.3 we saw indications that anti-Americanism is on the rise. This phenomenon also preoccupies the attention of the sampled bloggers, a finding Philip exemplifies by writing: *“Americans have a reputation (perhaps multiple) around the rest of the world. As an American student abroad, one cannot help but be cognizant of this. However, what’s slightly more subtle is the cognizance that one is a **representation** of this reputation”* (J2, my emphasis). In this particular post Phillip gives a humorous classification of American students abroad: *The American-in-a-bubble, the Ugly, but well meaning American, the Intelligent American, and the Subtle American* (J2). He does not explicitly place himself within a group, but the way in which he describes the *Intelligent American* may give an indication of how he sees himself as an expatriate: *“[...] Once in a while there is an American student who doesn’t need someone to explain to them that Ireland is a different country (yes, a different country) than the U.K. These Americans usually don’t realize that it is a compliment when people repeatedly ask if they’re Canadian”* (J2).

Shortly before the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11, Tim posts an inflammatory comment on American patriotism: *“Well, enough is enough! I’ll no longer sit by and let these people define for me what it is to be an American. Who are they to tell me what it is to be patriotic? Who are they to tell me that I am a traitor because I do not support these things?”* (F2). The narration of representation suggests that the majority of the sample is eager to establish a distance between themselves as Americans and the stereotyped “American-ness”. For example, Sedulia writes: *“We Americans abroad [...] are ambassadors for our country. You are a walking, talking Uncle Sam, whether you like it or not [...] Which is why it annoys me when I see American children rolling around on the floor of Charles de Gaulle Airport, or when two loud American voices are the only ones you can hear on a crowded bus, or when a fat person in a purple nylon jacket waddles up to a stranger with a huge smile and you just know what accent you are going to hear”* (C2).

There are, however, those who have a different take on the issue of representation. For instance, Mona writes: *“From my conversations with English people, they do think Americans are dumb. I always thought that was really rude for them to say that out loud. Some of the English are pompous and some are really cool, just like everywhere else in the world”* (G2). Philippa also provides an example to the contrary in a post where she writes about how some Americans *“try to be über-cool,”* and how *“they point out other Americans with whom they may otherwise be associated; creating a valley between Me and Them of ‘I’m a **different** type of American, don’t you see?[..] Do the majority of Americans or Europeans ever bother to ‘blend in’ by these same definitions anywhere else in the world,”* she asks (D4). Further, she says that this particular post was inspired by a short film where an American tourist spoke a severely American-accented French, and comments that the accent was still *“300x better than mine”* (D4). Perhaps Philippa sees herself as personally afflicted by attitudes such as those Philip and Sedulia proclaim? Yet another example is found at “Bexpat Perspective,” in a post where Frank writes about how he seeks social support in an association for American men that he is member of: *“For me, my club in Antwerp is a luxury. An oasis where I can be completely myself without worrying about people writing me off because of my nationality”* (E4).

Another interesting example of how expatriate sensemaking has the potential to influence reflection on representation and the consequences this has on a personal level is found in Philip’s “big story- account” of his visit to a war memorial:

Nestled about three miles West of Cambridge is a small American Cemetery dedicated to Americans who died in the Battle of the Atlantic or during the air bombardment of Northwest Europe. I went to go visit this morning, perhaps idly looking for perspective on my own position as an American studying in the UK [..]

I wish there were something poignant I could contribute to the visit, though perhaps there isn’t much to say. The US and the UK are again fighting in a war, but this is further away from each country in more ways than geography. People are dying who are the same age as those servicemen buried at the memorial. These are people who are the same age as me.

And so here I am, a guest of a country that houses monuments such as these and with citizens who, day in and day out, tend to those monuments, raising and lowering the US flag in commemoration of sacrifices many decades ago. The fellowship under which I'm enabled to study in the UK is another manifestation of a country's gratitude for the good deeds of another after that war (the Marshall Plan). In this respect it was perhaps appropriate that I visited the cemetery [...] And so there I was, an American student who has found himself in a war memorial in Cambridge rather than in a war in Iraq. And I wondered: How am I going to live up to that? (J5).

The majority of posts that deal with representation narrate this phenomenon as bothersome and negative. But stereotypes are not always denigrating, an observation Karla makes in an episode where she lends a helping hand to a woman on a train ride: *"As we reached our destination [...] she again thanked me profusely, and I answered in my American accent, 'You are most welcome. Happy to help.' She said, 'Oh! American! That's why you are so nice!'"* (A5) Positive stereotyping, however, does not receive the same amount of attention in the sampled blogs as its negative counterpart does.

Thus, we see two major lines of discourse in the representation-genre. On one hand, there are those like Philippa, Frank and Mona who are very critical of negative sentiments towards Americans, and who try to point out that these stereotypes are not true. On the other hand, there are those like Tim, Philip and Sedulia who seem to largely agree with the stereotypes and who try to present themselves as "different types of Americans."

#### **4.2.2 Looking back**

The second genre found within the narration of cultural selves is in the following coined "Looking back." These posts are often preceded by trips home, or written in connection with celebrations, holidays and other events that inspire the bloggers to look back - and often, resultantly - to reflect on how they have changed. Observations on change are reserved for the final chapter on cultural selfing, for now we focus on different types of looking back-posts. We begin with Francis, who has just recently returned to Sweden when he writes:

I've somehow managed to get knocked from my usual happy orbit. I blame the United States. I can't seem to recover from the recent two weeks in the Great Midwest. I'm all 'What happened to my center of gravity?' America seems more and more foreign. Those awful star-spangled magnetic ribbon things on the back of all the cars, waiters and waitresses telling you their names, the incredible inequity of the suburban idyll of Oak Park pressed up against poverty-stricken Austen in Chicago. The obvious things. And the less obvious things, like girls in the Meijer saying 'I love your hair' to each other, as if there could be a good reason for them to actually love each others' hair and making you wonder if they also love their mothers and their nasty little brothers. I feel so confused by the strange aura of unquestioning self-assurance that Americans have, which is part of their charm. And no doubt has been part of my charm [...] I feel out of sorts, rudderless and unsure and old and ugly, wondering what in hell my husband sees in me, and paradoxically, in the grip of a powerful desire to become a father. I hate this shit (I2).

Francis' rather somber tale stands in stark contrast to how Philip writes about looking back: *"I love the United States. I love its wide streets, its doughnuts, its hugeness, its multiculturalism. I love its food, its service, its value for money. I love its conspicuous consumption. I love its steaming manholes. I love that my grandfather is buried in California. I love American tourists. I love how much they love Britain. I love New York. I love Disneyland. I love square dancing in Texas"* (J3). Mona has a similar take on her native country: *"I am happy to be back living in America [...] Living in London was not so great. The streets were dirty, people push you on the sidewalks, and meeting people was not as easy as they are very reserved"* (G2).

#### **4.2.2i Missing things**

As a subgenre within the Looking back-posts we find the narration of homesickness and longing. Both divergent and convergent story lines are found in these narratives, ranging from the 'smaller' to the 'bigger' stories. Most typically the authors comment on missing certain brands of foods: Bagels, candy corn, cherry lemonade, etc. For some the story ends there, but others, like Philippa, goes one step further in how she elaborates on not

only missing specific types of food, but also the “culture of eating” that she was used to back home. Furthermore, bloggers from the southern parts of the US often write about missing hotter climates, or certain types of nature that is not found in their new locations.

For some, these observations lead to deeper accounts of how they miss a lifestyle (casual, active, easy living (D2), or how the weather affects them, as in the following example: “..I’ve noticed my general disposition oscillate [...] I don’t have Jekyll/Hyde moments like the climate, but I have a tendency to become more frustrated by small things when it’s cloudy than when the weather is sunny and Californian [...] I’m working on decoupling my emotions from the climate, but for now I’ll have my ups and downs. To be sure this aspect of my expatriate experience has tremendous potential for personal growth” (J4).

Philippa (D2) and Karla (A6) both narrate missing people in their lives, the former in terms of family and friends back home, and the latter in terms of the uncertain environment for making new friends the expatriate situation can be:

Only those who have done it know that there’s more involved than just a list of tangible things we ‘miss’ from ‘home’. Family bonding, nephews and nieces who will not know us, our own children who are distant and who will be very different from extended family and cousins, memories of wonderful times of the past that could be repeated over and over again with equal joy each time for their simplicity. We acknowledge with a bit of pain that our relationships with close ones will develop differently or sometimes not at all, due to distance and lack of personal contact.. But I’ve never doubted that in the end, it would be worth it. I’ve never regretted for a moment that I am here, though it has been difficult (D2).

I just got news that a good friend of mine here is moving to Houston. This, after finding out a month or so ago that another good friend is moving as well. That is the serious downside of being an ‘expat trailing spouse’ [...] Just when you feel like you are a bit settled, when you have a nice group of pals, some folks to hang with every so often, someone has to move [...] It’s very unsettling, really, I know I feel constantly under the gun and a little wary of developing a friendship too deeply, as I am always afraid that person might

have to go [...] So whenever one of 'my girls' has to go, it hurts, and honestly, it makes me pull back into my shell just a little bit deeper (A6).

Some narratives about missing things are less clear cut, more ambivalent. For instance, at her return after spending Christmas in the US, Emily writes: *"Neither New York nor Norway feels completely like home, but somehow I'm homesick for both. There's always a knot in my stomach, a nagging feeling that no matter where I am, I'm missing something or someone"* (B3). Alexis, having returned from a short trip to Chicago, writes: *"It was funny going back to Chi-town after such a short time. I have missed my friends and family there for sure, but the city itself has ceded its power over me. Now it seems Amsterdam has captured my attentions, especially now that the weather is turning fine"* (H2). Furthermore, issues of longing are expressed in most blogs, but not all. Francis states several times that he does not miss the US at all, of which this excerpt is an example: *"At I.'s dinner party last night, the English mathematician living in Germany - he's lived there for 14 years - said to me, "You don't miss home yet, do you." He was right, I haven't really missed the States. And I'd always figured that if I don't miss it by now, I'll never miss it"* (I3).

In the paragraph above, we saw how Francis claimed he did not miss anything. However, he continued: *"But maybe I've been wrong. I wonder if part of my being happy has to do with not knowing the language, that when I really start to use Swedish relatively exclusively, I'll lose part of myself"* (I3, my emphasis). In the next chapter we take a look at how insights in looking back-posts mediate the narration of change, through a genre termed *stories of change*.

### 4.2.3 Stories of Change

One of the most interesting findings in this study was to see the diversity of criteria and narratives used to judge and narrate the feeling of having changed or gained new insights from expatriate life. Similar to the looking back-genre, change narratives emerged in the form of small or big stories. Small stories of change were found both in the first phase of expatriation, for example when Emily comments on beginning to learn the language,



eating exotic Norwegian hot dogs and figuring out the intricate ways of the garbage removal system (B4). However, small stories are not restricted to the early days of expatriation, they also appear in looking back-posts well into the expatriate “career”. For instance, after four years in Norway, Karla talks about how she now wears scarves “the European way,” and how she has come to see the brilliance of wool socks. Mona talks about change in terms of learning how to drive (G3), how to cook (G4), becoming a vegan (G5), and seeing “rabbit poo” for the first time (G6), and Alexis explains how she has learned about customer service, Dutch humor and frugality, and that she now knows where to get good bread (H4). These are entertaining stories, but the big stories of change are even more potent, and thus deserve the remainder of the attention in this chapter. Change narratives were analyzed according to two lines of storytelling. The first, “losing oneself,” refers to a genre of post that dealt with confusion and stress. These posts were usually followed-up and resolved in what is conceptualized in the next chapter as, “finding oneself.”

#### **4.2.3i Losing oneself**

In chapter 4.2.2 we saw how Francis felt “*out of sorts, rudderless and unsure*” (I2). Further, in chapter 5.1.1i he worried that he would “lose himself” if he started to speak Swedish exclusively. Similarly, Philippa writes: “*I have a deep concern that my children will not speak English well. I am concerned that they will favor France, rejecting my own stories of having been raised in an America that treated my family well. I’m afraid that they won’t want to speak English, in the same way that I didn’t want to speak any non-local languages as a child, thus layering upon yet another generation of language and cultural gaps. Not understanding me or my personal culture*” (D5).

In another example, Mona expresses similar thoughts:

I think when one moves away from friends, she or he is the one that thinks about home most of the time. People that are left behind just deal with it and move on. When I do visit New York, I do see almost all the friends and notice that their lives stay pretty much the same. I, on the other hand, have changed so much since I moved here in late 2001. Or perhaps it's just the culture shock that I am experiencing that makes me feel different. Maybe it's the hormones acting up and I am over analyzing everything too much [...] Why am I in

London and not Los Angeles? Who's on first? Is Vanilla still America's favorite ice cream flavor? (G7).

Sedula (C3) writes about feeling at home as an expatriate and the limits to how much an “outsider” can understand:

I have often thought that the real test of whether you feel at home in a foreign country (or maybe even your own) is whether you understand the most ordinary citizen and his or her beliefs, prejudices and tastes. By this test, I am very American. I do understand rednecks and people who support the NRA, hillbillies and people who don't believe in evolution, working-class New Yorkers, policemen, messengers, grocery clerks. I grew up with them, I worked with them, I lived with them [..]

With the years I have spent in France, I have learned a lot about the average French man or woman. I know why Le Pen came in second in that election (it wasn't anti-Semitism). I know why the jeunes rioted in November (it wasn't Islam) [..] **But I never will understand the French profoundly**, the way I deeply understand my compatriots in Wyoming or Louisiana (C3, my emphasis).

Karla (A7) recounts her feelings attending a July 4<sup>th</sup> festivity in Oslo:

I don't know why I go when, honestly, I am sort of disappointed every year, though I am not sure why [..] Maybe it's because I expect all the Americans I meet to just be a bit more fun or outgoing. It's not that they are not nice, but I feel sometimes it should be hugs all around and -Woo! American! Hi! How are YOU?! I always think that as expats we should all be sort of joined together in expat-edness, but it's really all just people and the usual normal peopleness. I never really get that ‘Hail Fellow Well Met’ feeling. There's no cool bonding or high-fiving or anything (A7).

This type of theme - the construal of oneself as “not at home”, “different” or “lost” is found in the narration of change across the sample. Interestingly, these narratives do not only deal with being lost within the new culture. Karla's story is an extension of the

findings in the previous chapter - of a story line that construes the blogger as an outsider who is lost or unfamiliar within the native culture as well.

#### **4.2.3ii Finding oneself**

The *Losing oneself-genre* portrays expatriate life as difficult and draining. When time comes for the author to draw conclusions to these change-narratives, though, the positive aspects of learning and growth are often given weight over hopelessness, confusion and stress. Francis, for instance, resolves his feelings of strangeness in this way: “*..But have I lost it? Sweden seems just as foreign, to be honest. Despite my Swedish passport, I'll never be a Swede, I'll always be an outsider. Which I usually find perfectly comfortable. After all, if one is aware from a fairly young age that one is gay, being an outsider is more than even second nature, it's an elemental ingredient of the self, the preferred status*” (I2).

Karla remarks that she does not hurry as much as before, and that she feels more self-reliant (A8). She has also changed politically, she says: “*From a middle of the road liberal to crossing the line to the left, almost off the shoulder*” (ibid). She continues:

I don't take anything, or anyone, for granted anymore. It can all go away in a minute. Friends move, plans change, your life can change on a dime. Life is not the goal, it's the journey. Stop and enjoy the journey. It's the only one you've got. My Southern manners have given way to a more brusque approach. No more saying 'hi' to everyone who looks at you for more than a second, like we do in Texas. People here will just stare at you, but won't actually acknowledge your existence even if you say hi. They'll just look away. It's a bit startling still, at times, but also relaxing as I can just go about my business and ignore people around me instead of making eye contact and saying hi to folks (ibid).

Similarly, Frank talks about how the Flemish mentality has rubbed off on him, and how he does not let things truly bother him anymore. For example, in one particular post, he comments on seeing a news report on a photography project involving large groups of

nude people. Growing up in a Baptist home, he writes, he would have died of embarrassment just seeing the report on the news. But now, he says:

I found myself [...] just smiling a bit as these silly people paraded around a historic city with nothing on. It all seemed harmless enough. Now I have to ask myself if my values have actually changed or if I have just learned to temper my reactions for those situations where I might actually make a positive impact. As much as I want to believe it is the latter, I have to admit not being sure and it is becoming a serious episode of soul-searching for me to figure out where I really stand on these issues (E5).

In an interesting example of the big story-type, Philippa, in the midst of what she calls the “trauma of pregnancy” writes about how her expatriation has led her to new insights. First she recounts that Paris was not at all a part of her plans, she only moved there to be with her husband. This put a strain on the relationship, she says:

..I packed in my Paris-bound baggage with quite a bit of resentment and insecurity as I left a very secure life [...] I needed to be fair and to make an attempt at adjustment to life. For us. Accept that this is a different place. But I wasn't fair [...] I continued to make my way around Paris with blinders and a tin heart. Nothing was good enough because it isn't California with the sun smiling down warmly on a sunkissed back, outwardly friendly people with offers of genuine smiles - friends-to-be or not, or the oceans or mountains surrounding me. I felt exposed to all elements of the city. Vulnerable. Like an outsider. Like the Goldilocks story, nothing was quite right. Too cold. Too hot. Too hard. Too soft... (D2).

Later she explains how this phase came to pass: “*Perhaps it took the fear and devastation of losing the most important pieces of my life. Perhaps it's that my friendships here are growing [...] Perhaps it's that I have work lined up [...] Perhaps it's that my French is getting better slowly*” (ibid). Establishing friendships, finding work and learning the language are crucial factors that will surely improve well-being for most people in an expatriate situation. Yet, interestingly, she looks for a more poetic narrative than just the

practical details first mentioned, a narrative more along the lines of the romantic view of Parisian life we saw her reference in chapter 4.1.1:

Perhaps it was even that little moment on Christmas night, as I looked down Champs Elysee on our way home from The Parents and remarked, ‘God, that is beautiful’ only to have My Husband respond somewhat teasingly, but serious, ‘No it’s not. You hate Paris.’ That’s the impression that I’ve drilled into him over and over again. No. The truth is that I didn’t like **me** in Paris. I don’t hate Paris. I’ve hated the uncertainty and insecurities of my place in Paris” (ibid).

Further, she writes that she has realized she cannot have “it all:”

My innate happiness has come with sacrifices. Having learned one of the most important lessons of my life on how my outward attitude affects those around me, I no longer think of leaving Paris. Instead, I think more of how to make my life here [...] After some deep thought and introspection, I became comfortable with the fact if I were forced to choose my preference for a city instead of merely asked, I would choose Paris. The words don’t feel comfortable on my tongue yet, but my actions fill the silence (ibid).

From the above accounts we can draw out two major ways of narrating the expatriate experience. Some narrate “home” as a place they have left, (Karla, Mona, Frank), yet others focus more on “home” as a place they are in the process of creating (Alexis, Tim, Philip, Francis, Sedulia, Philippa). Common to most narratives, however, is that the authors tend to interpret change as positive, even if the circumstances that lead them to change were unpleasant.

## 5. FINAL NOTES

In the previous we have seen that the majority of authors in the sample presented themselves as removed, as disconnected from their native cultures and as adventurers to their new locations. Their position as “in-betweeners” enabled them to take on roles as messengers bearing unique perspectives which they argued would be interesting for an audience to read about. Further, we have seen that types of motivation for blogging were found in three major genres. Motivation ranged from the strictly private to the outwardly communicative. Some stated that they keep weblogs in order to document experience, as a form of self-expression, or for therapeutic reasons, as a way to vent frustration. Others emphasized the opportunity to communicate with loved ones, with other American expatriates, or for discussion of topics relevant to their expatriate situation.

The motivation for giving the expatriate voice an outlet in weblog format varied between authors (some relied more heavily on one genre than others, who used genres interchangeably), but motivation also seemed to develop individually - over time and according to situation. A blog written primarily for political discussion could have therapeutic aspects, and vice versa. Rather than choosing a genre and sticking to it, authors experimented with self-presentations and motivations, learning and changing as the writing proceeded. In this way, the storied self in weblog format is reminiscent of Herman and Kempen’s (1998) previously mentioned concept of the multi-vocal self.

Motivations and presentations also seemed to change according to reader feedback. A blog that started out as a virtual postcard could quickly swap into another genre as readership grew to reach outside the circle of close friends. Sometimes, feedback from readers elicited the opposite process. Even if a blog is initially presented with a very public outlook, as soon as a reader voices a critical opinion, the author can pull back to the original statement and claim that the blog is their private space - not a place for strangers to use as they please. Furthermore, the initially stated purpose could change from positive feedback as well. When, for instance, Francis speculates that perhaps it is not important whether or not his blog is read, this may not mean that blogging is a purely

selfish activity to him. Rather, it seems that motivation for blogging is closely intertwined with reactions from readers, and that purpose often arises after-the-fact: If people like it, the author can attribute his/her reason for writing to communication. If readers do not respond positively, on the other hand, the author can attribute his/her reason for writing to strictly personal purposes. So, it seems that even if the weblog is, by nature, a public publishing tool, authors often enter into this activity with an unclear notion of why and for whom they write. Thus, there is a dualism found that seems typical to the weblog format – a delicate and difficult balance between the blog as a personal therapy tool (McNeill, 2003), and the blog as a vehicle for communication. This ambivalence between the public and private dimensions may constitute a unique and interesting signifier of the weblog format which sets it apart from traditional diary-writing.

When the sample was browsed for meaning-making that had to do with the authors' positions as expatriates, a number of genres emerged. Authors often wrote about (1) what it meant to be a representation of Americans, about (2) looking back to what was left behind, and about (3) how they have changed as a result of being expatriates. What became of primary interest to this study was not what, specifically, the authors used as criteria for change, what exactly it was that they missed, or which strategies they used for dealing with being stereotyped. What emerged as most interesting were the ways in which these stories were narrated. Hopefully, however, this study has also pointed to some concepts that future research on expatriate identity can build on. The “big change narratives” in particular should lend themselves well to expatriation studies.

In the accounts of cultural selves, two major types of narratives were found, similar to the distinction made by Georgakopoulou (2006) in chapter 2.3.3. On the one hand there are *small stories*, narratives that consist of straightforward and informational, rather than emotional, updates on the daily life of an expatriate. On the other hand there are also *big stories*, narratives that tend to go deeper, and explicitly, into self-reflection, often by putting personal experience in grand perspective, and sometimes by looking back at observations made earlier in the weblog, thus creating a coherent story of expatriate self.

Judging from the sampled weblogs, it seems that authors who subscribe mainly to the virtual postcard-genre generally employ less of the big story-form than weblogs relying heavily on other genres. This finding may suggest that those who write for a well-defined audience of family and friends tend to be less personal in their narratives than others. Perhaps is experimentation and exploration within self-expression less important, or less opportune, to authors who write mainly for family and friends. Further, this finding suggests that the presentation of storied selves online is, indeed, shaped and restricted according to targeted audience, which thus confirms the predictions made in chapter 2.1.3 about the importance of including the recipient as co-author of narrative identity.

In a previous chapter, we saw Ewins (2005) claim that much of the therapeutic aspect is lost as the diary transgresses from the private to the public dimension. Philippa, however, explains that her motivation to write a specific post stemmed from reading another blogger describing very similar emotions, obstacles and turmoil. This, Philippa says, helped her to know that she is not alone in this, that she did not invent these issues that she encounters and that she will not be the last to go through them (D2). Hearing about others in similar situations, getting new friends when one is cut off from the old and has problems with language is an important motivation and function of expatriate blogging. In this way weblogs potentially offer social support and “therapeutic aspects” that one would certainly not achieve from keeping a pen and paper-diary. We also saw in chapter 4.1.2iii, judging from the way in which “intruders” into the authors’ personal space were greeted, that social support was something the authors expected to gain from their weblogs.

Earlier in this paper, Bruner (1991) was quoted on the cultural rootedness of narratives, defined as conventional forms that are transmitted culturally and constrained by individual mastery. One could, perhaps, say that weblog narratives are similarly transmitted within a “culture of weblogs.” The inspiration to post on certain topics was often found to come from authors reading about other expatriates in similar situations. In this way, story-genres emerge in response to on-going conversations within a community of weblogs. As a result, one may say that newcomers are offered “templates” for how



storied selves should be presented in weblogs - and thus genres for posting take shape. Perhaps could these “templates” also eventually outline structures for offline sensemaking, where blog communities define which stories become parts of the expatriate “library” and how these stories are narrated? That, however, is a question for another study.

In his 2005 article, Haslberger made a call for a fuller understanding of the complexities of expatriate adaptation through means of qualitative research, thick descriptions and the use of the sensemaking approach, for example through collecting information from expatriate’s diaries. In an article on expatriate sensemaking, Glanz (2001) also pointed out the major importance of the growth of information, advice, and recollection of experience available via the Internet. In an international field where geographical boundaries are particularly important, Glanz (ibid) wrote, a resource that crosses those boundaries provides a major input in the experience of expatriation, but its academic relevance has not yet been fully explored.

This study has been an attempt at exploring some ways in which expatriate weblogs could be relevant to psychological knowledge-building. If Haslberger (2005) and Glanz’ (2001) requests were to be picked up, and weblogs were to be used as sources of data for future research on expatriates, the findings of this study suggest that factors such as (1) motivation for writing, (2) targeted audience, (3) the transactions between writer and reader, and (4) the emergence of genres within the community of blogs, are taken into account.

As is the nature of exploratory research, questions initially posed have sparked even more questions. For instance, what is the relation between online and offline storied selves? Who are the people behind these blogs? What is the difference between expatriates who blog and those who keep their stories to themselves? Would it be possible to gather narrative data also for large-scale quantitative studies, for studies that could achieve statistical representation? What would one find if one were to conduct longitudinal studies of the narrative development within a single weblog? What would be the result of

examining discussions in comment fields exclusively? Weblogs do indeed have a lot to offer narrative research. Hopefully, the future brings solutions to technical issues in sampling procedures and the extraction of data, so that this field becomes popular and fruitful for study.

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## 7. REFERENCED MATERIAL

All hyperlinks to the sampled weblogs were confirmed in working order as of April 16<sup>th</sup> 2007. If, in the future, links should be broken, consult the Wayback Machine at URL: <http://www.archive.org/index.php> A list of blog urls is also found in table 2 on page 22.

### **Excerpts from "Tales of a Texpatriate:"**

A1: <http://karlastories.blogspot.com/2004/06/god-save-us-im-blogger.html>

A2: <http://karlastories.blogspot.com/2006/02/enough-already.html>

A3: <http://www.haloscan.com/comments/karlakp/114025123509058567/>

A4: <http://karlastories.blogspot.com/2006/02/mean-people-suck.html>

A5: <http://karlastories.blogspot.com/2006/12/good-deed-girl.html>

A6: <http://karlastories.blogspot.com/2005/05/random-crapiosity.html>

A7: <http://karlastories.blogspot.com/2006/07/not-really-fair.html>

A8: <http://karlastories.blogspot.com/2006/10/stuff-i-do-differently-having-lived-in.html>

### **Excerpts from "Emily on Top of the World:"**

B1: <http://emilyontopoftheworld.blogspot.com>

B2: <http://emilyontopoftheworld.blogspot.com/2006/11/vikingskipshuset.html>

B3: <http://emilyontopoftheworld.blogspot.com/2006/11/goodbye.html>

B4: <http://emilyontopoftheworld.blogspot.com/2006/11/rubbish.html>

**Excerpts from "Rue Rude:"**

C1: [http://www.ruerude.com/2004/09/my\\_first\\_post.html](http://www.ruerude.com/2004/09/my_first_post.html)

C2: <http://www.ruerude.com/2005/12/lambassadorice.html>

C3: [http://www.ruerude.com/on\\_being\\_an\\_expatriate/index.html](http://www.ruerude.com/on_being_an_expatriate/index.html)

**Excerpts from "Someone Else is Living your Parisian Dream:"**

D1: <http://sfgirlinparis.com/about/>

D2: <http://www.sfgirlinparis.com/archives/423>

D3: <http://www.sfgirlinparis.com/archives/366>

D4: <http://www.sfgirlinparis.com/archives/336>

D5: <http://www.sfgirlinparis.com/archives/362>

**Excerpts from "Bexpat Perspective:"**

E1: <http://bexpat.blogspot.com/>

E2: <http://bexpat.blogspot.com/2005/09/little-bit.html>

E3: <http://bexpat.blogspot.com/2005/03/belgium-to-americans.html>

E4: <http://bexpat.blogspot.com/2005/03/joining-club.html>

E5: <http://bexpat.blogspot.com/2005/05/spencer-tunick-in-bruges.html>

**Excerpts from "A Tennessee Redneck in King Harald's Court:"**

F1: <http://tnrin.wordpress.com/about/>

F2: <http://tnrin.wordpress.com/2006/09/08/patriotic-ignorance/>

**Excerpts from "Mrs. Mogul – Dishing out the Juice:"**

G1: <http://mrsmogul.blogspot.com/2005/02/introduction.html>

G2: <http://mrsmogul.blogspot.com/2006/12/leave-gwyneth-paltrow-alone-shes.html>

G3: <http://mrsmogul.blogspot.com/2005/02/driving-dyslexia.html>

G4: <http://mrsmogul.blogspot.com/2005/02/other-day-i-baked-banana-bread.html>

G5: <http://mrsmogul.blogspot.com/2006/08/raising-meat-free-child-probably-like.html>

G6: <http://mrsmogul.blogspot.com/2005/06/things-i-learned-last-week.html>

G7: <http://mrsmogul.blogspot.com/2006/01/i-had-sex-in-city-and-now-looked-what.html>



**Excerpts from "Alexis in Amsterdam:"**

H1: <http://alexisinamsterdam.blogspot.com>

H2: <http://alexisinamsterdam.blogspot.com/2006/06/back-in-business.html>

H3: <http://alexisinamsterdam.blogspot.com/2006/05/three-month-check-in.html>

H4: <http://alexisinamsterdam.blogspot.com/2007/01/2006-top-3s.html>

**Excerpts from "How to learn Swedish in 1000 difficult lessons:"**

I1: [http://francisstrand.blogspot.com/2001\\_09\\_01\\_archive.html#5422770](http://francisstrand.blogspot.com/2001_09_01_archive.html#5422770)<sup>1</sup>

I2: [http://francisstrand.blogspot.com/2005\\_08\\_01\\_archive.html#112367832611963109](http://francisstrand.blogspot.com/2005_08_01_archive.html#112367832611963109)<sup>2</sup>

I3: [http://francisstrand.blogspot.com/2001\\_12\\_01\\_archive.html](http://francisstrand.blogspot.com/2001_12_01_archive.html)<sup>3</sup>

**Excerpts from "An American Physics Student in England:"**

J1: <http://fliptomato.wordpress.com/about/>

J2: <http://fliptomato.wordpress.com/2006/12/06/faithful-representations-of-a-semi-simple-group/>

J3: <http://fliptomato.wordpress.com/2006/10/11/british-newspapers/>

J4: <http://fliptomato.wordpress.com/2006/09/29/a-californian-considers-cambridge-cloudy/>

J5: <http://fliptomato.wordpress.com/2006/12/08/the-cambridge-american-cemetery-and-memorial/>

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<sup>1</sup> Archive listing only – Post dated: September 01, 2001

<sup>2</sup> Archive listing only – Post dated: August 10, 2005

<sup>3</sup> Archive listing only – Post dated: December 29, 2001