Moral Dilemmas in Blog Commenting
A Study on the Ethics Behind Comment Policies on Feminist Blogs

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This thesis titled

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A Study on the Ethics Behind Comment Policies on Feminist Blogs

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the ethical rules and regulations bloggers employ to protect their online communities. Rather than analyzing actual blog posts, as done by previous research, this paper focuses on comment policies in 100 feminist blogs to see how these policies reflect the ethical norms bloggers endorse and the ethical violations they encounter in the comments. Additionally, a survey of 113 feminist bloggers reveals how this subgroup of bloggers defines, communicates, and enforces the norms established in their comment policies. By comparing and contrasting the findings with existing research and theories, this study aims at answering the question of how comment policies get translated into reality and whether they appropriately address the moral dilemmas in this area. While the policies generally deal with relevant ethical violations, this study’s findings suggest that policies should particularly emphasize bigotry, prejudice based on privilege, and fat/slut/victim shaming.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my dear parents who have supported me unconditionally and my academic adviser Bernhard Debatin for his time and energy invested in helping me complete it.
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The beginning of blogging can be dated back to 1993, when Justin Hall created the first blog ever existed *Links.net* in 1994 (2006, Thompson). It was not called a “blog” until 1997 when Jorn Barger came up with “weblog”, a term of which was eventually shortened to “blog” by Peter Merholz in early 1999 (Blood, 2000). During these early days, blogging was no more than a list of links that were preselected and presented on the web by amateurs and enthusiasts (Blood, 2000). There were no easy tools to create a blog either. Only those with technical know-how were able to maintain and update a blog back then (2006, Thompson).

Early 2000s witnessed the rapid growth of blogs. User-friendly tools to create blogs were within easy reach. Free and convenient blogging platforms such as *Blogger* and *Groksoup* were invented (Blood, 2000). These new publishing tools enabled people with little knowledge of programming to write blogs as well. Topics of various aspects and depths were brought to blogs for open discussion (Chapman, 2011). The popularity of blogging has made it a profitable outlet for both individuals and organizations (Chapman, 2011). People have learnt to make blogging a career and many mainstream news organizations have adopted this format to add diverse opinions and perspectives (Chapman, 2011).

Blogging’s impact on today’s society is still expanding. According to data about the status of blogging collected by PEW Internet and American Life Project in June 2002, approximately 5 million netizens in the U.S. said that they created a blog so that others could read it (Smith, 2008). By the middle of 2008, the number was 27 million (Smith, 2008). In 2010, the number had reached 32 million (Zickuhr, 2010; National Vital
Statistics Reports, 2013). This shows a steady increase of Internet users who participate in blogging and it implies that blogging may have an impact on them.

The international growth of blogging is similar to that in the U.S. The development of Web 2.0 technology in the early 2000s greatly reduced the threshold of blogging and facilitated setting up and maintaining a blog on the Internet. User-friendly blogging software and platforms are within easy reach (Bausch et al., 2002). For example, *Wordpress* and *Tumblr* have become very common blogging tools worldwide. According to Technorati (2007), there were 75.2 million blogs on the Internet in 2007. By 2009, 127 million blogs were tracked, according to social media consulting company NM Incite (Prayiush, 2012). At the end of 2011, this number had grown to 181 million (Prayiush, 2012). By 2013, more than 152 million blogs existed and a new blog was created every half second (WPVirtuoso, 2013). Substantial evidence shows that user-friendly technology has made blogging an activity of everyday life.

The popularity of blogging suggests that people are beginning to feed on news from non-traditional news outlets (Debatin, 2011, p. 823-826). News-related blogging started to grow exponentially after the 9/11 terrorist attacks when people started to seek new outlets to express their feeling about the doubt and uncertainty at that critical time. Meanwhile, regular news readers also searched for information that was unavailable in the mainstream media (Drezner & Farrell, 2008, p. 23-27). The demand for alternative voices matched the continuing growth of blogging, which led, at the dawn of 21st century, to the evolution of blogging-based online communities identified as the blogosphere.
As this new phenomenon took shape and gradually gained influence especially at political (Debatin, 2011) and financial (Yang, Huang & Lin, 2009) levels, a number of questions have been raised concerning the nature of this new form of communication and many studies, which are detailed in the literature review, have been carried out to find answers to those questions.

Before diving into the analysis, it is necessary to clarify what some key terms, such as “blog,” “blogging,” “morality,” and “ethics,” refer to in this research so as to draw a boundary for the scope of this thesis.

The concept of “blog” itself includes multiple meanings:

First, it can refer to the particular media form, where blogging is understood as a technological platform in which blog posts are put in a specific order and are featured with interactive functions, such as leaving comments at the end of each blog article (Debatin, 2011, p. 826). In this understanding of the term, the emphasis is placed on the structure and layout.

Second, it can also refer to the activity of blogging that people willingly engage in to better communicate with one another (Debatin, 2011, p. 827). In this sense, the dynamics of community and interactivity are underscored. Blogging is “both a personal and mass communication” (Trammell, 2005, p. 17). Without non-verbal cues in the virtual environment of blogging, “a person must deliberately connect and communicate” (Trammell, 2005, p. 6). People must communicate intentionally and consciously, for what they write online conveys and identifies what kind of people they are. People involved in blogging can only make themselves heard by actively sharing information and getting
feedback in return. In this research, the term “blog” is mostly understood in the latter meaning as an instrument of communication.

After making clear of what “blog” means in this study, we need to understand what people intent to do with this communicative tool. According to Ruggerio (2000), there are four motivations behind media usage, which can also be applied in blogging. They are diversion, social utility, personal identification and surveillance (Ruggiero, 2000). Diversion refers to the emotional satisfaction people can obtain from blogging, which temporarily takes them away from the pressure of everyday life. Social utility refers to people’s need to gain social recognition via social interaction, in this case, blogging. Personal identification refers to the desire to emphasize one’s perspective and values via blogging. Surveillance refers to the need to gain new information about communities, political incidents and social events via reading blogs.

These motivations mentioned above are closely related to each other. With new media platforms developing so fast in the information age, people browse the internet with multiple purposes (Trammell, 2005). Papacharissi (2004) finds that social utility is the most common motivation among bloggers who blog in English. The social utility reveals people’s need to interact with each other. In other words, bloggers blog in order to attract traffic and comments to their blogs. Meanwhile, bloggers also struggle with the need to keep a civil atmosphere. The key to strike this balance is through comment policies.

As the focus of this study are the “morality” and “ethics” behind the comment and comment policies in the feminist blogs, it is imperative to address what these concepts
consist of in the context of this study. Morality, as defined by Tavani (2012) is “a system of rules for guiding human conduct and principles for evaluating those rules” (p. 36). The discussion of morality naturally brings about the concept of ethics, which involves “thinking about morality, moral problems and moral judgments” (Smudde, 2005, p. 36).

The difference between these two concepts — “morality” and “ethics” is subtle and philosophical, which is out of the scope of this research. For the purpose of this research, morality and ethics are used interchangeably to refer to the ethical norms and conduct in the blogosphere.

The ethics of the blogging activity is directly related to and a reflection of bloggers’ code of ethics. Blogging ethics embraces values that emphasize the preservation of community (Fink, 2012). While adopting some elements from journalistic codes of ethics, bloggers value transparency more than objectivity (Blood, 2002). Dube (2003) emphasizes bloggers’ awareness of responsibility to both people and society. He underlines four ethical principles, namely honesty, fairness, minimizing harm, and accountability (Dube, 2003). Taking into consideration the impact and limitation of new cyber technology and new publishing tools, Kuhn (2007) proposes that blogging ethics should include but not be limited to freedom of expression, truthfulness, transparency, and minimizing harm.

The conversation on blog spaces won’t keep going without an audience contributing to the comment section. Commenters who are a part of the blogging community should be held to the same ethical standards as mentioned above, because commenting works as a feedback feature, which complements the conversational
function of the blogging activity. In the context of this study, commenting ethics is generally understood as having an emphasis on responsibility and minimization of harm on the commenters’ part.

While many studies analyze blogging ethics from the viewpoints of bloggers (Debatin, 2011; Cenite et al., 2009; Kuhn, 2007; Wischnowski, 2009; Dube, 2003; Fink, 2012; Blood, 2002), this research focuses on the comment section, which is an integral part of blogging and a form of a variety of expressions (Ellcessor, 2009). The ethical beliefs shared within online communities may be too implicit and scattered to be captured, but explicit comment policies shed a clear light on the ethical norms bloggers endorse. Formal comment policies reveal ethical implications in written words. They may not be one-size-fits-all but they are indicative of bloggers’ value systems.

Blogging can be categorized based on the different functions it serves (Debatin, 2011, p. 829). In his blogging typology, Karpf (2008, p. 371-375) proposed four types of blogging based on its communicative features: personal, community, corporative and bridge blogging. The personal blog refers to a diary-like record of personal experience and usually has one person as the sole contributor. The community blog embraces many different viewpoints and has many contributors who are driven by a shared interest. The corporative blog serves as an affiliate to news organization. It usually has a very clear mission and is complementary to its parent company. Finally, the bridge blog is a combination of conventional media and community blog.

The samples in this research are drawn from all four categories in order to cover a variety of blogging types within the blogosphere. The first two kinds of blogging allow
more liberal and unscripted expression of opinions on the personal, cultural and political level without intervention from journalistic authority (Trammell, 2005; Hamilton, 2009). Community and bridge blogs sustain more complicated topics and have more traffic (Centie, et al., 2009). They also have some journalistic obligation to guarantee the quality of information they display on their sites. These two kinds of blogs are susceptible and sensitive to controversy and are tend to encounter boundary disputes. No matter what kinds of blogs they own, bloggers often have to deal with contested and complex opinions.

After determining the blogging types, a blog genre where heated debates and controversial opinions abound was selected as the subject of this study: feminist blogs. Feminism is of particular interest to this study because the feminist issue has gained much exposure and attention thanks to the Internet, which brings feminists together and gives them a voice that transcends geographic boundaries (Hamilton, 2009). Since the late 1990s, blogs have become a popular medium among feminists (Quiggin, 2006). Unlike traditional media, blogs suggest a promising future for feminists to freely express themselves without the risk of physical isolation or abuse (Hamilton, 2009, p. 91). To realize the promise of virtual feminism communities, people make full use of social media such as blogs to tell stories and campaign for their causes (Auza, 2013). The freedom of online expression enables feminists to gain more influence than before when their voices were sometimes misrepresented via mainstream media outlets. The blogosphere has helped the feminists expand their influence to the reality (Auza, 2013).
They are now able to empower themselves and stand up right before oppression of various kinds.

Feminist bloggers now have a space of their own where they can make good use of cyber tools, in this case blogs, to facilitate “networking, community-formation and debate” (Hamilton, 2009, p. 91). The blog space serves as a convenient platform for feminists to facilitate exchange of and debate about various topics and opinions. It is considered to be an ideal online forum for feminists to share their unique views on feminism-related issues and it seems that no other format of communication can match the open-mindedness of the blogosphere (Maestretti, 2008). Issues such as LGBTQ concerns, abortion, disabilities, women and pop culture are widely discussed and debated in feminist blog spaces. There is no unanimous answer to what feminist blogs should talk about, but it is exactly this kind of diversity that guarantees the multifaceted discussion on feminist blogs (Maestretti, 2008). People of various ethnic backgrounds and social strata, especially those from minority groups and those who suffer from oppression are encouraged to speak up. As such complex issues are often taken to the comment section for open discussion, controversy and ethically problematic arguments occur frequently. For example, some commenters tend to resort to obstructive, uncivil, flaming and disruptive discourse when they discuss controversial issues about feminism. This kind of language will give rise to ethical qualms.

Some of these ethical issues are common to all blogging communities, such as trolling, flaming and long rants. Others are quite specific to feminist blogs, such as degradation of sexual orientation, fat/slut/victim shaming and the sense of privilege and
superiority over those disabled and disadvantaged groups. Those terms are unique within feminist communities and are used to refer to unethical behaviors that are based on unfounded assumptions of sexuality.

In order to build a trustworthy reputation, bloggers respond to these ethical dilemmas by enabling the moderating function in the comments (Ullmann, 2014). Since ethical violations in comment sections have become a common problem, it is an opportune time to address this issue. That is why this study chose this particular blog genre as its subject.

A normative framework proposed by Debatin (2011) delineates the ethical territory and emphasis among different kinds of blogs. For the personal blog, which the author referred to as classical blogs in his study, transparency is highly regarded as the criterion for ethical judgment (Debatin, 2011, p. 838). The quality of the community blog, which he referred to as citizen and community blogs in his study, is best revealed through advocacy, in other words, the interactivity between blog readers and writers (Debatin, 2011, p. 836-839). Institutional blogs, which he referred to as newsblogs in his study, particularly those that aim at providing reliable news and information, place their emphasis on accuracy, the precision and clarity of information (Debatin, 2011). All these three norms are expected in journalistic blogs, which combines “values and practices of conventional journalism with the grassroots and community orientation of citizen journalism and the autonomy of the individual bloggers” (Debatin, 2011, p. 838). This normative model as shown in figure 1 is generalized from the observation of the ethical practices of a variety of blogs.
Blog owners may define their ethical guidelines differently based on the nature of their blog spaces. Personal bloggers tend to “follow their own ethical compass” (Debatin, 2011, p. 829). It is fair to deduce that personal bloggers may be inclined to be arbitrary when it comes to ethical obligations. Community bloggers tend to lay out detailed codes and missions especially if they are dealing with complex and controversial topics (Debatin, 2011, p. 830). Bloggers of collective blog spaces are more cautious and discreet as far as ethical issues are concerned. These different ethical inclinations among bloggers make it necessary to establish ethical standards case by case (Cenite et al., 2009). Given the complexity of the situation, it is necessary to take a closer look at specific blogs and see how those generalized rules apply to reality.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the focus of this research is on the ethical implications in the comment policies of feminists’ blog spaces, it is necessary to provide an overview of the history and ethical approaches behind feminist blogging and comment policies.

The research on feminism and online communication mainly focuses on the relation and tension between women and media usage. Harp and Tremayne (2006) use network and feminist theory to challenge stereotypical beliefs regarding women bloggers and suggest ways to improve women’s voices in the political blogosphere. Martin Munoz (2010), Roushanzamir (2004) and Worth (2009) look at women’s empowerment in the Middle East through the sophisticated use of media tools. They explore how Middle Eastern women make good use of various media forms to break the stereotyped prejudice in the Western world. Hamilton (2009) analyzes a group of anti-prostitution blogs to show how feminists use blogs to defend exploited women in the sex industry. She discovers that despite the new possibilities for feminists in this new platform of blogging, old stereotyped marginalization and exclusion still exist. These studies use feminist ideology to highlight women empowerment and activism via women’s active engagement with various new forms of media. However, these studies do not provide enough insight to the ethical aspects of feminist activities online.

Another school of thought focuses on the overall landscape of online feminism. A study exploring the feminist blogosphere in Canada concludes that blogs that are hosted by multiple bloggers and do not claim to be feminist blogs are more likely to update frequently compared with personal blogs and those that claim to be feminist blogs (Chiu,
This project also points out that personal bloggers often give up maintaining their blogs due to the great amount of energy dedicated to their comment sections where “trolling and derailing” happen a lot (Chiu, 2013). The project further states that the reason for this burnout can be that feminist blogs deal with controversial issues (Chiu, 2013). These findings make a study on feminist blogs’ comment policies even more relevant. In the New Feminist Solutions report presented by Martin and Valenti (2013), the authors discuss the future of online feminism and emphasize the roles of energetic and networked online feminist activists who provide unlimited opportunities for the sustainability in the digital world.

All these studies emphasize the lively interaction between women, media, and technology in detail. But they seldom look into the ethical implications behind their engagement with blogging technology. This research, with a specific focus on ethics in feminist blogs, intends to provide a new angle of research on online ethics by looking at the ethics of comment policies in the context of feminist blogs.

The first ethical code regarding blogging was created by the famous blogger Rebecca Blood in 2002. She emphasized six norms: truth, proper referencing, correction of misinformation, integrity of posting, disclosure of conflicts of interest and notation of questionable sources (Blood, 2002). The anonymous and uncensored nature of cyberspace makes it extremely vulnerable and susceptible to unethical and uncivil behaviors. Personal interests and absolute freedom of expression online have put the preservation of online civility in jeopardy (Shaffer, 2008 & Blood, 2002). Under these circumstances, Blood (2002) proposes these norms in hope of striking a balance between
free expression and information credibility online. These guidelines not only serve as catalyst to regulate the behaviors of Internet users but also as legitimate tools to moderate and exclude those who disrupt the conversation and fail to respect these rules.

The moral uncertainty of online communication led to an increasing debate over the establishment of ethical codes in the blogosphere. The debate reached a climax in 2007, when Tim O’Reilly who helped create the phrase “Web 2.0” (O’Reilly, 2005) and Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales drafted seven basic rules to prevent harmful comments that occurred frequently on blogs (Shaffer, 2008). This idea triggered a series of reactions among bloggers. Opinions both supporting and confronting the idea were brewing. No matter which side was taken, people were trying to balance between the freedom of online discourse and the preservation of the netiquette (O’Reilly, 2007).

One way to ensure the ethicality of comments in online environments is moderation of content. Online moderation can be both mandatory and voluntary. The Internet has a long history of content moderation that can be traced back to 1983 when Brian Redman established a small online community called mod.ber that published funny facts and events on the Internet (Shaffer, 2008). In his article delineating the story of a notorious cyber rape in the computer game LambdaMOO, Julian Dibbell (1993) put the issue of veiled identity in cyberspace in the spotlight. The traumatic impact of this incident to its victims made it urgent to address the question of online moderation and the establishment of rules that the members of an online community are expected to follow.

Studies on unethical practices in online communication show that this kind of virtual dialog has increased the possibility of disruptive behaviors (Lea, O’shea, Fung, &
Spears, 1992). A case in point is what happened to *The Los Angeles Times* when abusive messages paralyzed the discussion on the website (The Los Angeles Times, 2005). In 2005, *Los Angeles Times* started an editorial experiment by inviting readers to create their own editorials in an experimental site called “Wikitorial”. A week after the launch, they shut it down for profanity pouring into the site (The Los Angeles Times, 2005). In order to thwart this undesirable trend, the L.A. Times and many other online communities have adopted a variety of moderating procedures, which involve not only editors but also amateurs and volunteers (Poor, 2005).

As the virtual communities grow both in size and influence, the implementation of moderation features is inevitable (Lampe & Resnick, 2004). Many such communities encourage their users to act as voluntary watchdogs and participate in the moderating process. The most common form of participatory moderating is flagging, a function that enables users to mark an entry as not suitable and notifies the blog owner or moderator for consideration of further actions. Many online communities also allow some members to serve as moderators or system operators (also called “sysops”) with specific sanction privileges, such as deleting comments, reprimanding users, or banning them in case of repeated violations. Usually, the latter practice is based on detailed comment policies, spelling out ethical norms and explicit definitions of misbehaviors and unethical practices. In the interest of anxiety-free participation and of minimizing harmful content, voluntary online moderation is widely adopted among many online communities (Wise, Hamman & Thorson, 2006).
Newspapers and other professional news media have applied quite a few moderating procedures for their websites to protect their reputation (Ackermann, 2010). Measures include asking commenters to register and use their real name in order to add a comment (Wall Street Journal), involving readers to keep an eye on the quality of comments and report inappropriate comments by flagging them (Wall Street Journal), listing violations that are considered to be unethical and destructive (Portland Press Herald in Portland, Maine), or limiting the frequency of commenting privilege per user (Deseret News in Salt Lake City, Utah). The moderating system in the online discussion forums on the website Slashdot verifies that the collective effort plays an important role in evaluating and moderating comments (Lampe, Zube, Lee, Park and Johnston, 2014).

In addition to ethical self-regulation, there are also legal regulations to be considered. According to Section 230 of the Communication Decency Act, in United States bloggers are liable for defamatory language they publish on their sites rather than the Internet service provider (Communications Decency Act, 1996). However, bloggers are not legally responsible for the content posted by commenters: “Under the law, bloggers are not liable for comments left by readers, the work of guest bloggers, tips sent via email, or information received through RSS feeds. This legal protection can still hold even if a blogger is aware of the objectionable content or makes editorial judgments.” (Electronic Frontier Foundation, n.d.) This protection is applicable only in United States because the sophistication and popularity of blogging activity in United States entails special protection of its operators (Electronic Frontier Foundation, n.d.).
Different from the protection of CDA 230 in United States, many European counties have implemented more detailed and stringent decrees in terms of online information hosting. For instance, while guaranteeing the anonymity and confidentiality of communication, the European Directive on Electronic Commerce of 8 June 2000 also emphasizes the legal responsibilities of bloggers for the contents they host on their sites, even if some of those are posted by commenters rather than themselves (Directive on Electronic Commerce, 2000, specifically Article 14). In other words, if a person hosts a site or a blog, he or she can be held legally responsible for any content posted on it as long as they have the knowledge of it, even if it is not his or her own writing. The comparison between the United States and Europe in terms of online information service thus allows us to take a peek at the different landscapes of discourse protection on the Internet and the regulation of individuals’ online behaviors.

Notwithstanding ethical and legal regulations, blogs have become a dominant medium in the online community. To claim that they are the “barometers of online culture” is not exaggerated (Shaffer, 2008, p. 19). Blogs thus have a sentinel function, and it is no surprise that once people resort to abusive language to make a point, the consequences of their action may have an impact across the Internet (Shaffer, 2008, p. 19-20). Since so much is at stake, Shaffer (2008) suggests that a clear policy must be built in blog space that defines what is acceptable in commenting. Therefore, bloggers should have an ironclad hand on what is going on in their spaces.

Comments to blog entries allow people to socialize online. As an integral part of blogging, commenting allows audiences to interact with bloggers and promotes the
development of social interaction (Ellcessor, 2009; Trammell, 2005). It is celebrated as “one of the most progressive elements of online media and a potential boon to democratic society” (Ellcessor, 2009, p. 2). It is regarded as what motivates bloggers to run a weblog in the first place and an indication of achievement of blogging (Yang, Huang & Lin, 2009, p. 201). Commenting is very appreciated by bloggers, as – according to one study – 87 percent of bloggers welcome comments on their blogs (Lenhart & Fox, 2006) and see it as a chance to collaborate with their blog readers (Groves, 2011, p. 19). However, the lack of non-verbal cues in online interaction (Debatin, 2011), the possibility to leave comments anonymously (Gsell, 2009; Shaffer, 2008), the emotional variables commenters inject in their comments, (Groves, 2011, p. 25) and the “asynchronous form of many-to-many communication” (Ellcessor, 2009, p. 2) make it easy to create conflicts and disruption, which then may lead to ethical debate.

Certain violations, such as trolling, appear particularly frequently in the comment section (Ellcessor, 2009, p. 2). The asynchrony of online communication gives rise to the lag in dealing with online deceptions (Ellcessor, 2009, p. 3). It makes those particular violations more difficult to detect. The emotional instability and the desire for catharsis make it easy for the audience to vent personal grievances regardless of community norms (Groves, 2011, p. 25). There are many problems that are specific to the comment section and these issues are not addressed comprehensively in previous studies. Therefore, this study observes the comment policies in real blog spaces and investigates the current situation and whether or not it corresponds to studies in this field. This study analyzes the ethical implications of comment policies rather than the actual content of problematic
comments because a lot of blogs have developed a moderation system that will not even allow those problematic comments to occur in their spaces before they edit them. This means that ethical violations are more traceable and identifiable through the norms established in actual comment policies. By pinpointing the ethical violations mentioned in comment policies, one can deduce and understand the ethical norms those violations represent. To see which ethical norms are embodied in comment policies, I put forward my first research question:

RQ1: a) Which specific potential ethical violations can be observed in the comment policies of feminist blogs?

b) Which ethical norms do these ethical violations reflect?

Although ethically questionable statements may appear from time to time in comments, the benefit of having a comment section outweighs the collateral damages to the dialog, for it enables bloggers to involve audiences and further communication (Groves, 2011, p. 19). What is more, violations that “disrupt the norm of a community can illuminate exactly what those norms are” (Ellcessor, 2009, p. 4). Most blogging platforms allow bloggers to enact comment moderation, a strategy against violations in cyberspace (Ellcessor, 2009). It can therefore be assumed that comment policies, as a channel to enact and regulate comment moderation, reflect not only the ethical norms in the online community but also the intentions of the blog owners. Thus my second research question is:

RQ2: What purpose do feminist bloggers intend with their comment policies?
To give the moderation system a regulatory and mandatory force, it would be beneficial to analyze the theoretical grounds and instruments used to build the comment policies. While there are many approaches to address this issue, this study employs discourse ethics and affinity theory because they both emphasize the role and the collective force of community in determining the key ethical values they respect and adhere to.

Building upon the approach of discourse ethics, originally developed by Jürgen Habermas (1990), Glasser and Ettema’s “dialogue approach” suggests that ethical decisions should be made through sound moral agreement among all community members (Glasser & Ettema, 2010). Discourse ethics places ethics and ethical decision making in the community rather than a single person or authority (Glasser & Ettema, 2008, p. 528). It celebrates the spirit of free and open debate within which everyone has the right to contribute regardless of their status in the community (Habermas, 1990, p. 524). This kind of dialogue guarantees that every opinion is regarded equally and that “better argument can prevail on its merits” (Cenite & Zhang, 2010, p. 296). It is also a “commonsensical” and “public spirited” debate that takes every member’s opinion into account (Cenite & Zhang, 2010, p. 296). This “debate” fosters the formation of an agreed-upon and sensible ethical decision, a result of a dialogue between bloggers and audience.

In her study about online community members’ fights against trolling, Ellcessor (2009) discovered that shared identity and affinity among commenters result in the formation of a sense of consensus (Ellcessor, 2009, p. 22). This sense of consensus
emphasizes a commonly shared value system that is formed through equal discussion of a shared interest and an agreed-upon topic. Thus, audiences will establish a strong connection and empathy with the bloggers and reach an agreement about what kind of community they are in (Ellcessor, 2009).

These studies demonstrate the interactive and communicative function of the comment section, as it promotes effective and meaningful exchange between bloggers and audience. They suggest certain standards and norms as the basis for comment policies. When drafting a comment policy, one needs to take into consideration the many voices and forces within the community. Although individual bloggers may not be aware of this when crafting comment policies, discourse ethics and Ellcessor’s affinity theory can provide a solid ethical backbone for comment policies: a regulatory function fighting against ethical challenges in the comment section. It leads to my third research question: RQ3: Which general ethical principles are behind the comment policies and how much can they be traced back to discourse ethics and affinity theory?

Finally, we must also understand if and how much the ethical norms in comment policies are being followed by the users. Since this is difficult to determine directly without conducting a content analysis and the main method employed by this study is a quantitative survey, this study attempts to find an answer to this question by analyzing the blog owners’ perceptions of this issue. This leads to my fourth research question: RQ4: What is the bloggers’ perception of effectiveness of their comment policies? Cenite and Zhang (2010) noted there is much potential to be explored in the comment section (p. 294). Comment sections offer an important insight into the interaction
between the blogger and the audience. It is an ideal place to discuss “highly contested” issues (Cenite & Zhang, 2010, p. 302). Given the importance of the comment feature, it is necessary to fully realize its potential in order to advance the communication between bloggers and audiences. Cenite and Zhang (2010) recommended that a moderation system be established to screen off irrelevant and abusive comments and maintain a civil environment in the journalistic blogosphere. Although their analysis only focuses on institutional and journalistic blogs, Cenite and Zhang have raised some very constructive questions. According to them, policies should include whether and when to open an online feedback section, whether every story should have a comment section, and when moderators should step in (Cenite & Zhang, 2010, p. 298). These policies should also state to green-light criticism that is relevant and reasonable (Cenite & Zhang, 2010, p. 302). Hopefully, this research will further Cenite and Zhang’s research by expanding their discussion to the specific situations in all four blogging types.
CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This research delves into how bloggers report about ethical violations in comment policies using a blog genre that has the potential to stir up emotional discussion: feminist blogs. Firstly, it qualitatively and analytically examines the comment policies of 100 blog spaces with a feminist perspective; secondly, it surveys feminist bloggers in order to gain more insight into this issue.

The qualitative part of this study is primarily based on Grounded Theory, a qualitative methodology that “allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data” (Martin & Turner, 1986, p. 141). As a widely applied research method in the study of human behavior, grounded theory allows me to explore feminist bloggers’ ethical practices and habits from the systematically gathered and analyzed data.

This research uses snowball sampling, a method of data gathering based on multiplicity sampling also known as network sampling to sample the targeted population. This method excludes probability sampling since it is impossible to account for all feminist blogs online (Li & Walejko, 2008). I started generating this sample of 100 blogs by typing in key words: “feminist”, “blog” and “comment policy” in Google search. Google generated several results as a good starting point for me. Then I used blog rolls — lists of hyperlinks to other blogs posted by a blog owner — that I found in the first batch of feminist blogs to search for more blogs that were eligible until the targeted population was large enough to guarantee randomness (Li & Walejko, 2008, p. 288). Next, I selected 100 blogs from this population that had explicit comment policies. The
limitation of snowball sampling is that it is a purposive and convenient sampling process, which introduces an element of contingency and makes it hard to generalize the results to the blogosphere as a whole.

After reading the 100 comment policies in these blogs, I identified eleven key ethical violations. I chose these eleven key terms because they are the most prominent ethical violations within the comment policies and they are specifically stressed — either bullet-pointed, boldfaced, underlined, italicized or emphasized using normative language. These eleven key terms are:

• Bigotry: misogynist/racist/sexist/homophobic/transphobic or any kind of behaviors that prevent comments by specific groups or people; discriminate against any group of people (Feministe & Everyday Feminism).

• Victim/fat/slut-shaming: blame women or other marginalized groups for abuse, violence, and discrimination of any kind or any other crime (Borderhouse Blog).

• Prejudice based on privilege: biases based on the advantages you have that you think are normal and consider others are being the deviation from the normal (Borderhouse Blog).

• Trolling: posting inflammatory comments in hopes of baiting others into responding (Webopedia, 2007).

• Derailing the thread: off-topic or leads the discussion in a completely different and unproductive direction (Feministing).

• Excessively frequent/long comments: dominate a comment thread; lecture in the comment threads; do not allow other people to speak and do not listen to others
(Disabled Feminists).

- Abusive/flaming language: attack people rather than arguments; using vulgarity and intentionally provocative or inflammatory statements (Love Joy Feminism).
- Silencing others: telling people they are wrong, they are too sensitive, they need to get a life, they need to stop saying what they say (Racialicious).
- Threatening comments: death threats of violence/hate speech to blog contributor or commenter (Feminist Current & Borderhouse Blog).
- Libel/defamatory: knowingly false or misrepresent another person (BlogHer).
- Infringement upon copyright/trademark/patent: when quoting or excerpting someone’s content, never provide proper attribution to the original author (BlogHer).

Using the Grounded Theory approach, these key terms were typologically further categorized into four major behaviors: (1) discrimination which contains bigotry, victim/fat/slut shaming and prejudice based on privilege; (2) disruptive behavior which includes trolling, derailing the thread and excessively frequent/long comments; (3) abusive behavior which consists of abusive/flaming language, silencing others and threatening comments; (4) illegal behaviors which include libelous/defamatory comments and infringement upon copyright/trademark/patent. Based on this classification, a spreadsheet was constructed to track the frequencies of each ethical violation written down in the policy page. This process is designed to answer research question 1.
A quantitative survey inquiring how comment policies are observed in those blogging spaces was designed and sent to the owners and moderators of 237 feminist blogs with comment policies, using email addresses posted publicly on their contact page or at the end of their comment policies. Before they were directed to the survey, they had the chance to see a short description about the study and their rights, as required by the IRB approval.¹ The survey was constructed using Qualtrics. The response rate of this survey was 48 percent (113 respondents). The survey was used as an investigative tool because it is inexpensive, effective, and also it protects participants’ privacy, especially when people are asked about the sensitive ethical topic.

The survey consists of two parts. The first part asks three demographic questions: the role of the participants in their blogs, for how long their blogs have existed, and the function of their blogs. These questions aim at gathering some basic information about the blogs and the people who maintain the blogs. The second set of questions asks bloggers how frequently they update their comment policies and how often they detect a violation. These questions aim at exploring the effectiveness of bloggers’ current comment policies. Then bloggers are asked to estimate the frequency of each violation that appears in the comment section according to the eleven ethical violations identified in the qualitative analysis. Participants are asked to rate the frequency of each type of violation on the 5-piont Likert scale where 1 represents “hardly ever” and 5 represents “almost always”. The same 5-point scale is used to examine bloggers’ perception of

¹ The study was granted IRB approval on May 14th 2014, #14E167. Participants are rewarded with a copy of the study and each participant was part of a raffle of five Amazon gift cards ($10 each).
seriousness of the eleven ethical violations, where 1 represents “not serious at all” and 5 represents “most serious”. These two questions are meant to measure whether the ethical violations that actually occur in the comment section correspond to bloggers’ perception of those violations that appear in comments. The 5-point scale is also used to measure the perceived comprehensiveness, effectiveness, and need for improvement of their comment policies, where 1 represents “strongly disagree” and 5 represents “strongly agree”. The goal of these questions is to give bloggers an opportunity to evaluate their own comment policies and – in the long run – to encourage them to adjust and improve their current comment policies. These three questions aim at answering my research question 4. The remaining three questions ask bloggers ways to improve their comment policies, the objective of their comment policies, and whether their comment policies are grounded in ethical principles. These three questions are multiple choice questions with the option to write in an open answer. They aim to answer research question 2 and 3 listed in the literature review.

After collecting the data from the spreadsheet and the survey questions that are based on a Likert scale, I applied statistical calculation to analyze correlations among the data. The data gathered from the spreadsheet and survey questions that are based on a Likert scale were analyzed separately, for they were of different measurement levels. The multiple choice survey questions were analyzed according to frequency.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In the spreadsheet, I listed the eleven most highlighted ethical violations in the 100 comment policies of the feminist blogs I examined. Then I went through the 100 comment policies and tabulated the frequencies of each violation that appeared in those policies. If certain violations were mentioned more frequently than others in the comment policies, it suggests that these high-profile violations are more likely to have occurred in actual comments. This analysis answers my research question 1. The result is shown in table 1 below:
Table 1

*Ethical Violation Frequency in Comment Policies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Violation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>bigotry</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>14.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fat/slut/victim shaming</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>prejudice based on privilege</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive Behavior</td>
<td>trolling behaviors</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>13.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>derailing the thread</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>14.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>excessively frequent/long comments</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive Behavior</td>
<td>abusive/flaming language</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>26.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>silencing others</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>threatening comments</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal Behavior</td>
<td>libelous/defamatory comments</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>infringe upon copyright/trademark/patent</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: n=100*

The table shows that abusive and flaming language is mentioned 89 times, accounting for 26.41 percent of the whole sample as the most frequently occurred violation in bloggers’ comment policies. The next most prominent violations are bigotry, derailing the thread and trolling, which occurred respectively, 49, 48 and 46 times, accounting for 14.54 percent, 14.24 percent and 13.64 percent of the whole sample,
respectively. Among the less frequently mentioned violations, fat/slut/victim shaming appeared 21 times (6.23 percent), threatening comments appeared 19 times (5.64 percent), prejudice based on privilege appeared 17 times (5.04 percent), silencing others appeared 14 times (4.15 percent), libelous/defamatory comments appeared 13 times (3.86 percent), excessively frequent/long comments appeared 12 times (3.65 percent) and infringement upon copyright/trade mark/patent appeared 9 times (2.67 percent).

Note: n=100

Figure 2. Ethical Violation Frequency in Comment Policies.

The histogram above, figure 2, gives a graphic demonstration of the numbers listed in the table. In ranking the four major behavior categories, abusive behavior emerges as having the highest total number of violations which makes it the most
common offense. Such behavior is mentioned 122 times within the 100 comment policies in the blogs I sampled. The second highest total number of violations is the category of disruptive behavior. This behavior is mentioned 106 times. The third highest total number of violations is the category of discrimination, which occurs 87 times. The lowest total number of violations is the category of illegal behavior, occurring 22 times.

It is also worth noting that within each category, certain violations are more prominent than others. Within discrimination, bigotry is mentioned more than twice as often as fat/slut/victim shaming and prejudice based on privilege. It indicates that bigotry is a prominent violation in the group of discrimination. Within disruptive behavior, trolling and derailing are almost four times more frequently mentioned than excessively frequent/long comments. These two ethical violations are very notable within this category. In abusive behavior, abusive/flaming language is dominant for it occurs almost five times more frequently than silencing others and threatening comments. In illegal behavior, libelous/defamatory comments and infringement upon copyright/trademark/patent occur relatively less frequently compared to the violations in other groups. But infringement upon copyright/trade mark/patent occurs the least frequently in comment policies.

From the observations stated above, it is reasonable to deduce that there may be a relationship between the frequencies of each violation that appears in the comment policies and the actual offenses that happen in the comment section. To test the feasibility of this inference and answer my other research questions, I examined the answers to the survey and analyzed the relationships among the data using statistical calculation.
Demographics

Out of 237 bloggers who received the survey, 113 responded, which is a response rate of 48 percent. Of the 113 participants, 81 (73 percent) answered they are blog owners. Sixty-three (56 percent) answered they are editors. Sixty-three (56 percent) answered they are moderators. Forty-three (38 percent) answered they are administrators. While 30 (27 percent) answered they are the main contributors, six (5 percent) respondents answered “website developer”, “founder”, “I am part of a few blogs and my roles are depending on the site”, “journalist”, “sometimes contributor” and “chapter organizer” for the “Other” category.

Fifth-seven (50 percent) participants answered they have maintained their blogs for more than two years. Twenty (18 percent) answered one to two years. Twenty-one (19 percent) answered six months to one year. Fifteen (13 percent) answered less than 6 months. Half of my sample has had a blog for more than two years.

When asked about the function of their blogs, 47 participants (42 percent) see their blogs as spaces that create a sense of community where conversation/comments occur. Thirty-four (30 percent) answered their blogs do not get much feedback/comments from readers. Twenty-four (21 percent) answered their blogs have many opposing arguments and conflicts. Eight respondents (7 percent) stated specifically that his or her blog contains both conversation and opposing arguments and conflicts, depending on the specific topics and threads. These bloggers who answered “Other” also pointed out that interaction between bloggers and commenters tends to happen in their social media platforms such as Tumblr and Facebook.
Survey Questions

When asked about the frequencies in which they update their comment policies, 37 participants (33 percent) answered one to two years. Thirty-four (30 percent) answered more than two years. Twenty-seven (24 percent) answered six months to one year. Fifteen (13 percent) answered less than six months. This result is shown in figure 3.

![Figure 3. Frequencies of Updating Comment Policies.](image)

When asked about how often they detect an ethical violation in their comment feature, 27 (24 percent) answered less than a month, 25 (22 percent) said one to three months, 25 (22 percent) answered three to six months, 21 (19 percent) stated every month, while 15 (13 percent) said more than six months. This result, shown in figure 4, shows a tendency that even though bloggers don’t update their comment policies very often, they do detect ethical violations in their comment section on a regular basis.
Questions 3 and 4 enable me to measure frequencies of actual offenses that take place in the comment section, bloggers’ perception of seriousness of these offenses and the relationship between the two. Using the eleven key ethical violations from the spreadsheet, bloggers were asked to give their ratings on the 5-point scale with 5 meaning almost always and 1 meaning hardly ever. Based on the mean value of the rating of each ethical violation, I am able to make an initial comparison among the eleven items. For the answers to question 3, bigotry (3.02), trolling (2.98), prejudice based on privilege (2.95), fat/slut/victim shaming (2.81) and abusive language (2.57) are rated as greater than the mean score 2.5 out of 5. The less frequently appearing items (with values less than 2.5) are derailing (2.49), silencing others (2.28), excessively frequent/long comments (2.14), threatening others (2.04), libelous/defamatory comments (1.95) and infringement upon copyright/trade mark/patent (1.76). This result is shown in figure 5.
Comparing the rankings above with the frequencies of the ethical violations mentioned in the comment policies, I detect an obvious change of emphasis. While abusive language is rated as the most frequently appeared violation in comment policies, it ranks only as the fifth most frequent violation among bloggers. Bigotry, while rated as the second most frequent violation in comment policies, appears to be the most frequent violation in actual comments according to bloggers’ answers. Privilege is mentioned only seventeen times in the comment policies but appears to be the third most frequent violation in the survey. Fat/slut/victim shaming is mentioned only twenty-one times in comment policies, but appears to be the fourth most frequent violation in the survey. While derailing the thread is ranked as the third most frequent violation in comment policies, it is among the ethical violations that scored below the mean of 2.5. The analysis above shows the shift of focus when comparing the answers to the survey with results.
shown in the spreadsheet. It suggests that the frequencies of each violation that appears in the comment policies may not truly reflect the actual offenses that happen in the comment section.

For the answers to question 4, bigotry (3.51), fat/slut/victim shaming (3.49), trolling (3.19), threatening comments (3.13), prejudice based on privilege (3.12), abusive language (3.11), silencing others (2.84), libelous/defamatory comments (2.81), infringement upon copyright/trade mark/patent (2.55) and derailing from the topic (2.50) are all rated greater than the mean value of 2.5. Only excessively frequent/long comments (2.09) was rated less than 2.5. Comparing bloggers’ perception with the frequencies of these ethical violations, the perception reveals that bloggers have stronger feelings about the seriousness of these violations than they do about the frequencies in which they occur. This result is shown in figure 6.
As data were gathered according to question 3 and 4 are scale variables, I am able to run a t-test and correlation to see the significance of their differences and whether or not they are significantly related to each other.

As I have grouped the eleven violations into four main behaviors, I first run a t-test among the four categories to see whether the differences of frequency that each violation appears in the actual comment section (Q3) and bloggers’ perception of seriousness of these violations (Q4) are significant. The frequencies that the four categories appear in the actual comment section are coded as: F_Discrimination; F_Disruptive_Behavior; F_Abusive_Behavior; F_Illegal_Behavior. Bloggers’ ratings of these violations based on their perceptions are coded as: R_Discrimination; R_Disruptive_Behavior; R_Abusive_Behavior; R_Illegal_Behavior. The results are shown in table 2 and table 3:
Table 2

*T-test for Mean Differences in Reported Frequencies for Different Ethical Violation Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>T Value</th>
<th>Degree of Freedom</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1: F_Discrimination – F_Distruptive behavior</td>
<td>.38938</td>
<td>.83678</td>
<td>4.947</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2: F_Discrimination – F_Abusive Behavior</td>
<td>.63127</td>
<td>.86644</td>
<td>7.745</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 3: F_Discrimination – F_Illegal Behavior</td>
<td>1.07227</td>
<td>1.12089</td>
<td>10.169</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 5: F_Disruptive Behavior – F_Illegal Behavior</td>
<td>.68289</td>
<td>.96798</td>
<td>7.499</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 6: F_Abusive Behavior – F_Illegal Behavior</td>
<td>.44100</td>
<td>.74199</td>
<td>6.318</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T-tests were conducted to analyze mean differences between reported frequencies of four categories of violations. Six t-tests were conducted. They are all statistically significant. Results from the first t-test showed discrimination (M = 0.39, SD = 0.84) has a higher reported frequency mean than disruptive behavior, t (112) = 4.95, p<0.05. The second t-test results showed discrimination (M = 0.63, SD = 0.87) has a higher reported frequency mean than abusive behavior, t (112) = 7.75, p<0.05. The third t-test results showed discrimination (M = 1.07, SD = 1.12) has a higher reported frequency mean than illegal behavior, t (112) = 10.17, p<0.05. The fourth t-test results showed disruptive behavior (M = 0.24, SD = 0.82) has a higher reported frequency mean than abusive behavior.
behavior, t (112) = 3.13, p<0.05. The fifth t-test results showed disruptive behavior (M = 0.68, SD = 0.97) has a higher reported frequency mean than illegal behavior, t (112) = 7.50, p<0.05. The sixth t-test results showed abusive behavior (M = 0.44, SD = 0.74) has a higher reported frequency mean than illegal behavior, t (112) = 6.32, p<0.05.

Overall, these results indicate that discrimination is the most frequently mentioned ethical violation among feminist bloggers who took the survey. Disruptive behavior comes next to discrimination. Abusive behavior ranks as the third most frequent ethical violation while illegal behavior is the least frequent among the four categories.

Table 3

*T-test for Mean Differences in Reported Perception for Different Ethical Violation Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair 1: R_Discrimination – R_Disruptive behavior</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>T Value</th>
<th>Degree of Freedom</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.77876</td>
<td>1.03281</td>
<td>8.015</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2: R_Discrimination – R_Abusive Behavior</td>
<td>.34513</td>
<td>.61226</td>
<td>5.992</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 3: R_Discrimination – R_Illegal Behavior</td>
<td>.69469</td>
<td>1.11401</td>
<td>6.629</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 4: R_Disruptive Behavior – R_Abusive Behavior</td>
<td>-.43363</td>
<td>1.04168</td>
<td>-4.425</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 5: R_Disruptive Behavior – R_Illegal Behavior</td>
<td>-.08407</td>
<td>1.12712</td>
<td>-0.793</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 6: R_Abusive Behavior – R_Illegal Behavior</td>
<td>.34956</td>
<td>.94201</td>
<td>3.945</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
T-tests were conducted to analyze mean differences between reported perceptions of four categories of violations; 1. discrimination, 2. disruptive behavior, 3. abusive behavior, and 4. illegal behavior. Six t-tests were conducted. Results from the first t-test showed discrimination (M = 0.78, SD = 1.03) has a higher reported perception mean than disruptive behavior, t (112) = 8.02, p<0.05. The second t-test showed discrimination (M =0.35, SD = 0.61) has a higher reported perception mean than abusive behavior, t (112) = 5.99, p<0.05. The third t-test showed discrimination has a higher reported perception mean than illegal behavior, t (112) = 6.63, p<0.05. The fourth t-test showed disruptive behavior (M = -0.43, SD = 1.04) has a lower reported perception mean than abusive behavior, t (112) =-4.43, p<0.05. The fifth t-test showed an insignificant relationship between disruptive behavior and illegal behavior, t (112) = -0.79, p>0.05. The sixth t-test showed abusive behavior (M = 0.35, SD = 0.94) has a higher reported perception mean than illegal behavior, t (112) = 3.95, p<0.05.

Overall, these results indicate that discrimination is the most serious ethical violation in the perception of feminist bloggers who took the survey. Abusive behavior follows discrimination. Illegal behavior and disruptive behavior come next to abusive behavior, but there is no significant relationship between them.

To test whether the four categories are correlated to each other, I run a correlation test. The result is show in table 4 and table 5:
### Table 4

**Pearson Correlation Coefficients of the Frequencies of the Four Unethical Behaviors**

(N= 113)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Discrimination</th>
<th>Disruptive Behavior</th>
<th>Abusive Behavior</th>
<th>Illegal Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.620**</td>
<td>.605**</td>
<td>.373**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive</td>
<td>.620**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.629**</td>
<td>.513**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive Behavior</td>
<td>.605**</td>
<td>.629**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.722**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal Behavior</td>
<td>.373**</td>
<td>.513**</td>
<td>.722**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The frequency of discrimination is significantly related to disruptive behavior, r (122) = 0.62, p<0.05. If discrimination appears more frequently, disruptive behavior tends to also appear frequently. The frequency of discrimination is significantly related to abusive behavior, r (122) = 0.61, p<0.05. The frequency of discrimination is significantly related to illegal behavior, r (122) = 0.37, p<0.05. The frequency of disruptive behavior is significantly related to abusive behavior, r (112) = 0.63, p<0.05. Disruptive behavior is significantly related to illegal behavior, r (112) = 0.51, p<0.05. Abusive behavior is significantly related to illegal behavior, r (112) = 0.72, p<0.05.

Overall, the correlation shows that all four behaviors are significantly correlated to each other. It means that if one behavior increases, it will affect the other behavior to change accordingly.
Table 5

Pearson Correlation Coefficients of Bloggers’ Perception of Seriousness to the Four Unethical Behaviors (N = 113)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Discrimination</th>
<th>Disruptive Behavior</th>
<th>Abusive Behavior</th>
<th>Illegal Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.415**</td>
<td>.821**</td>
<td>.546**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive Behavior</td>
<td>.415**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.436**</td>
<td>.514**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive Behavior</td>
<td>.821**</td>
<td>.436**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.689**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal Behavior</td>
<td>.546**</td>
<td>.514**</td>
<td>.689**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The perception of discrimination is significantly related to the perception of disruptive behavior, r (122) = 0.42, p<0.05. If discrimination is considered very serious, disruptive behavior is also considered to be a very serious ethical violation. The perception of discrimination is significantly related to the perception of abusive behavior, r (122) = 0.82, p<0.05. The perception of discrimination is significantly related to the perception of illegal behavior, r (112) = 0.55, p<0.05. The perception of disruptive behavior is significantly related to the perception of abusive behavior, r (112) = 0.44, p<0.05. The perception of disruptive behavior is significantly related to the perception of illegal behavior, r (112) = 0.52, p<0.05. The perception of abusive behavior is significantly related to the perception of illegal behavior, r (112) = 0.69, p<0.05.

Overall, the correlation test of bloggers’ perception of seriousness of the four categories suggests they are all significantly correlated to each other. It means if bloggers perceive one behavior to be serious, they are also likely to consider the other behavior serious.
To compare the actual frequencies with bloggers’ perceptions, I run a correlation test to see if the two are significantly related to each other. The result is shown in table 6, 7, 8 and 9:

Table 6

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Frequency and Perception of Discrimination (N= 113)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F_Discrimination</th>
<th>R_Discrimination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F_Discrimination</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.333**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R_Discrimination</td>
<td>.333**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 suggests a significant relation. The frequency of discrimination is significantly related to bloggers' perception of seriousness of discrimination, r (112) = 0.33, p<0.05. It means that bloggers who report discrimination to be frequently appearing in the actual comments are more likely to rate it serious and vice versa.

Table 7

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Frequency and Perception of Disruptive Behavior (N= 113)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F_Discoruptive_Behavior</th>
<th>R_Discoruptive_Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F_Discoruptive_Behavior</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.406**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R_Discoruptive_Behavior</td>
<td>.406**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Table 7 suggests a significant relation. The frequency of disruptive behavior is significantly related to bloggers’ perception of seriousness of disruptive behavior, $r (112) = 0.41$, $p<0.05$. It means that bloggers who report disruptive behavior to be frequently appearing in the actual comments are more likely to rate it serious and vice versa.

Table 8

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Frequency and Perception of Abusive Behavior (N=113)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F_Abusive_Behavior</th>
<th>R_Abusive_Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F_Abusive_Behavior</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.248**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R_Abusive_Behavior</td>
<td>.248**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 8 suggests a significant relation. The frequency of abusive behavior is significantly related to bloggers’ perception of seriousness of abusive behavior, $r (112) = 0.25$, $p<0.05$. It means that bloggers who report abusive behavior to be frequently appearing in the actual comments are more likely to rate it serious and vice versa.
Table 9

Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Frequency and Perception of Illegal Behavior
(N= 113)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F_Illegal_Behavior</th>
<th>R_Illegal_Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F_Illegal_Behavior</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.194*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R_Illegal_Behavior</td>
<td>.194*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 9 suggests a significant relation. The frequency of illegal behavior is significantly related to bloggers’ perception of seriousness of illegal behavior, r (112) = 0.19, p<0.05. It means that bloggers who report abusive behavior to be frequently appearing in the actual comments are more likely to rate it serious and vice versa.

To see whether the frequencies of the eleven ethical violations are significantly different to bloggers’ perception of them, a t-test is executed and the result is shown in tables 10 to 20:

Table 10

Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Frequency and Perception of Seriousness of Bigotry (N = 113)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>f_bigotry</th>
<th>r_bigotry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>f_bigotry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.332**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r_bigotry</td>
<td>.332**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Table 10 suggests a meaningful relation. The frequency of bigotry detected in the comment section is significantly correlated with blogger’s perception of seriousness of bigotry, $r (112) = 0.33$, $p<0.05$. It means that bloggers who report bigotry to be frequently appearing in the actual comments are more likely to rate it serious and vice versa.

Table 11

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Frequency and Perception of Seriousness of Fat/Slut/Victim Shaming (N = 113)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>f_shaming</th>
<th>r_shaming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>f_shaming</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.269**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r_shaming</td>
<td>.269**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 11 suggests a meaningful relation. The frequency of fat/slut/victim shaming detected in the comment section is significantly correlated with blogger’s perception of seriousness of fat/slut/victim shaming, $r (112) = 0.27$, $p<0.05$. It means that bloggers who report fat/slut/victim shaming to be frequently appearing in the actual comments are more likely to rate it serious and vice versa.
Table 12

_Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Frequency and Perception of Seriousness of Prejudice based on Privilege (N = 113)_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>f_privilege</th>
<th>r_privilege</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>f_privilege</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.296**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r_privilege</td>
<td>.296**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 12 suggests a meaningful relation. The frequency of prejudice based on privilege detected in the comment section is significantly correlated with blogger’s perception of seriousness of prejudice based on privilege, $r (112) = 0.30$, $p<0.05$. It means that bloggers who report prejudice based on privilege to be frequently appearing in the actual comments are more likely to rate it serious and vice versa.

Table 13

_Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Frequency and Perception of Seriousness of Trolling (N = 113)_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>f_trolling</th>
<th>r_trolling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>f_trolling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.298**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r_trolling</td>
<td>.298**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 13 suggests a meaningful relation. The frequency of trolling behaviors detected in the comment section is significantly correlated with blogger’s perception of
seriousness of trolling, $r(112) = 0.30$, $p<0.05$. It means that bloggers who report trolling behaviors to be frequently appearing in the actual comments are more likely to rate it serious and vice versa.

Table 14

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Frequency and Perception of Seriousness of Derailing the Thread (N = 113)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$f_{\text{derailing}}$</th>
<th>$r_{\text{derailing}}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$f_{\text{derailing}}$</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.385**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$r_{\text{derailing}}$</td>
<td>0.385**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 14 suggests a meaningful relation. The frequency of derailing the thread detected in the comment section is significantly correlated with blogger’s perception of seriousness of derailing the thread, $r(112) = 0.39$, $p<0.05$. It means that bloggers who report derailing the thread to be frequently appearing in the actual comments are more likely to rate it serious and vice versa.
Table 15

Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Frequency and Perception of Seriousness of Excessively Long Comments (N = 113)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>f_long_comments</th>
<th>r_long_comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>f_long_comments</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.427**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r_long_comments</td>
<td>.427**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 15 suggests a meaningful relation. The frequency of excessively long comments detected in the comment section is significantly correlated with blogger’s perception of excessively long comments, r (112) = 0.43, p<0.05. It means that bloggers who report excessively long comments to be frequently appearing in the actual comments are more likely to rate it serious and vice versa.

Table 16

Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Frequency and Perception of Seriousness of Abusive/Flaming Languages (N = 113)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>f_abusive_languages</th>
<th>r_abusive_languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>f_abusive_languages</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.357**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r_abusive_languages</td>
<td>.357**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 16 suggests a meaningful relation. The frequency of abusive/flaming languages detected in the comment section is significantly correlated with blogger’s
perception of abusive/flaming languages, $r (112) = 0.36, p<0.05$. It means that bloggers who report abusive/flaming languages to be frequently appearing in the actual comments are more likely to rate it serious and vice versa.

Table 17

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Frequency and Perception of Seriousness of Silencing Others (N = 113)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$f_{silencing}$</th>
<th>$r_{silencing}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$f_{silencing}$</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.354**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$r_{silencing}$</td>
<td>.354**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 17 suggests a meaningful relation. The frequency of silencing others detected in the comment section is significantly correlated with blogger’s perception of silencing others, $r (112) = 0.35, p<0.05$. It means that bloggers who report silencing others to be frequently appearing in the actual comments are more likely to rate it serious and vice versa.

Table 18

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Frequency and Perception of Seriousness of Threatening Comments (N = 113)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$f_{threatening}$</th>
<th>$r_{threatening}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$f_{threatening}$</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$r_{threatening}$</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

49
Table 18 suggests the relationship between the frequency of threatening comments detected in the comment section is not significantly correlated with blogger’s perception of threatening comments, $r (112) = 0.09$, $p>0.05$. It means that bloggers who report threatening others to be frequently appearing in the actual comments may not rate it serious and vice versa.

Table 19

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Frequency and Perception of Seriousness of Libel (N = 113)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$f_{\text{libelous}}$</th>
<th>$r_{\text{libelous}}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$f_{\text{libelous}}$</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$r_{\text{libelous}}$</td>
<td>.146</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19 suggests the relationship between the frequency of libel detected in the comment section is not significantly correlated with blogger’s perception of libel, $r (112) = 0.15$, $p>0.05$. It means that bloggers who report libelous/defamatory comments to be frequently appearing in the actual comments may not rate it serious and vice versa.
Table 20

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Frequency and Perception of Seriousness of Infringement upon Copyright/Trade Mark/Patent (N = 113)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>f_infringe_upon_copyright</th>
<th>r_infringe_upon_copyright</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>f_infringe_upon_copyright</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.228*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r_infringe_upon_copyright</td>
<td>.228*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 20 suggests a meaningful relation. The frequency of infringement upon copyright/trade mark/patent detected in the comment section is significantly correlated with blogger’s perception of infringement upon copyright/trade mark/patent, r (112) = 0.23, p<0.05. It means that bloggers who report infringement upon copyright/trade mark/patent to be frequently appearing in the actual comments are more likely to rate it serious and vice versa.

Survey questions 5, 6, and 7 asked bloggers the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of their comment policies and if they see a need for improvement. As for question 5 asking the comprehensiveness of their comment policies, 41 bloggers (36 percent) stated they agree that their comment policies are comprehensive. Thirty-nine (35 percent) checked no opinion or uncertain. Seventeen (15 percent) said they disagree. Fifteen (13 percent) answered they strongly agree. One (1 percent) strongly disagreed. As for question 6 asking the effectiveness of their comment policies, 49 (43 percent) answered no opinion or uncertain. Thirty-seven (33 percent) said they agreed. Thirteen (12 percent) answered they disagree. Twelve (11 percent) strongly agreed. Two (2
percent) stated they strongly disagree. For question 7 asking them the need to improve their comment policies, 42 (37 percent) answered they agreed. Thirty-seven (33 percent) had no opinion or were uncertain. Twenty-five (22 percent) said they disagreed. Five (4 percent) answered they strongly agree. Four (4 percent) strongly disagreed.

In order to see whether there is any relationship among them and the overall frequencies of the ethical violations that appear in the comment section I run a correlation test among the four variables. The result is shown in table 21:

Table 21

Pearson Correlation Coefficients among Overall Frequency of Ethical Violations, Comprehensiveness and Effectiveness of Comment Policies and Need for Improvement of Comment Policies (N= 113)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall Frequency</th>
<th>Comprehensiveness of Comment Policy</th>
<th>Effectiveness of Comment Policy</th>
<th>Need for Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Frequency</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>-0.052</td>
<td>0.220*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensiveness of Comment Policy</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.501**</td>
<td>-0.301**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of Comment Policy</td>
<td>-0.052</td>
<td>0.501**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Improvement</td>
<td>0.220*</td>
<td>-0.301**</td>
<td>-0.164</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results in table 21 answer my research question 4. The results suggests that if the frequency of ethical violations increases, bloggers tend to think they have the need to
improve their comment policies and vice versa, $r (112) = 0.22$, $p<0.05$. If bloggers think their comment policies are comprehensive, they also tend to think their comment policies are effective and vice versa, $r (112) = 0.50$, $p<0.05$. If bloggers think their comment policies are comprehensive, they do not think they need to improve their comment policies and vice versa, $r (112) = -0.30$, $p<0.05$.

Question 8 in my survey asked bloggers how they may further improve the performances of their current comment policies. Forty-three (38 percent) answered, “To give more examples as to how to comment on my site”. Sixty (53 percent), the majority of my sample, said “To draft a comment policy that is more detailed than my current comment regulation section”. Forty-one (36 percent) stated, “To use more graphic assistance, i.e.: photos to show my point, in explaining the rules”. Twenty-eight (25 percent) answered, “To quote the terms that I deem to be more accurate in other bloggers’ comment policies”. Twenty-six (23 percent) chose “Other”.

The bloggers who selected “Other” had quite diverse opinions. Blogger 1 said that he or she “enforces comment policy on a case-by-case basis, so it needs to be broad.” Blogger 2 pointed out that people do not read comment policies in advance. Blogger 3 said, “Comment policy needs to be improved as and when new types of violations necessitate an update.” Blogger 4 stated, “It's arbitrary as the blog posts contain only my personal views, therefore I see no need to update the policy.” Blogger 5 said, “I’m not sure at this point – I’d have to do a more in-depth reflection in order to determine this.” Blogger 6 stated, “I’m not concerned about improving my comment regulation, as I simply do not permit comments that are offensive/ antithetical to the feminist concerns of
the blog.” Some bloggers displayed a more carefree attitude. Blogger 7 said he or she is “unafraid to have it out in the comments with anyone who disagrees with me, even if they’re being bigoted in some way, but as long as there are no PERSONAL attacks, I will let the conversation happen.” Blogger 8 stated, “It doesn’t matter what I say in my comment advice, I will still get the rape and death threats and everything else.” All the others indicate that they are pretty happy with their current comment policies. Admittedly, there are ethical violations every now and then but they do not think they can do anything to help improve the current situation in their comment sections. Blogger 9 pointed out, “We have an excellent comments policy, and someone who really looks after it but it’s the boneheaded commenters at time who are at fault. We had to ban someone and remove his posts this week: he had just been set up as a blogger and went ballistic on another post. He refused to move on, started attacking the website and the managing editor. We removed his comments and revoked his posts and took him off the author’s list.”

Question 9 asks the objectives bloggers try to achieve with their comment policies. This question aims to answer my research question 2. Seventy-three (65 percent), the majority of my sample, answered, “To promote civil and respectful debate”. Fifty-one (45 percent) stated, “To enable contested opinions to coexist”. Fifty (44 percent) said, “To provide an opportunity to free expression regardless of social identity”. Thirty-four (30 percent) answered, “To educate people about feminism knowledge”. Thirty-six (32 percent) checked, “To increase people’s awareness of feminism issues”. Twenty-eight (25 percent) said, “To encourage activism”. Forty-six (41 percent)
answered “To empower women who suffer from marginalization”. Twelve (11 percent) selected “Other”.

Some of the answers that belong to the category of “Other” displayed overlapping viewpoints that revealed the same ideas as the given options. All the other opinions emphasized that the need to build a safe space is what makes them provide a comment policy in the first place, so that people can have a reference whenever they violate the ethical norms.

Question 10 asks the standards and norms bloggers’ current comment policies are built upon. This question aims to answer my research question 3. Sixty-one (54 percent), the majority of my sample, answered, “Equal opportunity of expression”. Fifth-two (45 percent) chose “Fair use of language during communication”. Thirty-two (28 percent) said “The establishment of shared identity and affinity among commenters”. Thirty-nine (35 percent) answered “Development of social interaction”. Seven (6 percent) checked “Consensus among all community members”. Fifteen (13 percent) answered “I don’t have any theoretical support for my comment policy”. Nineteen (17 percent) selected “Other”.

All bloggers who used the “Other” option to question 10 emphasized the creation of a safe space where people can freely express their opinions without feeling threatened. Bloggers in feminist blogs want people to understand them and try to think in their shoes. They hope people can stop the hatred and oppression toward each other. They think people should not be blamed simply for who they are and what they experience.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study focuses on the ethical issues reflected in the comment policies of feminist blogs and aims to find out why feminist bloggers have a comment policy, how feminist bloggers execute their power of moderation through the implementation of comment policies, what ethical norms feminist bloggers consider to be important, and how comment policies take effect in the actual commenting environment. My results provide some tentative answers to these research questions, but they also have some limitations.

This research combines qualitative and quantitative analysis in order to analyze the comment policies in a more comprehensive way. The qualitative part of this research aims to discover the specific ethical norms that can be directly observed in the comment policies. By ranking and comparing the frequencies of the eleven key ethical violations, I find that abusive languages, bigotry, off-topics and trolling are mentioned noticeably more times than the others. This finding indicates that these four violations are the primary ethical concerns when these bloggers draft their comment policies. This distinction is worth exploring, which is why I introduced a quantitative analysis into my study by designing a survey.

The survey question 3 and 4 further explore this trend I find in the comment policies. A change of emphasis is detected when comparing the ranking of frequencies of ethical violations in the comment policies to the ranking of frequencies of these violations revealed in survey question 3. This inconsistency may suggest that bloggers do not have a good understanding of issues happening in their comment sections and their
comment policies may not completely reflect the situation in reality. This speculation is consistent to what table 1 and 2 suggest.

Another explanation to this inconsistency is that commenters do follow the guidelines in the comment policies, especially those that are specifically emphasized and frequently mentioned. However, when they pay attention to these guidelines, they may tend to neglect other less frequently mentioned but equally important ones. This may cause bloggers to feel that the frequently mentioned ethical violations are less frequently committed, while the less frequently mentioned ethical violations are more frequently committed. This would explain why there is a difference between the frequencies of ethical violations in the comment policies and bloggers’ rating. It would suggest that the comment policies do have an effect on commenters.

The survey question 4 asks bloggers’ perception of the seriousness of these eleven ethical violations. The results suggest that bloggers’ feelings are strong. They rated the seriousness of these ethical violations more emotionally than they do with the frequencies of the appearance of these same ethical violations. The mean value of blogger’s rating of frequencies is 2.45 while the mean value of their rating of seriousness is 2.94. This result is not unexpected since some feminist bloggers deal with comments that violate ethical norms on a regular basis. They must feel very frustrated whenever the same ethical violations appear over and over again. So it is no wonder that they tend to rate the seriousness higher than the frequencies.

As to the internal relations among these four unethical behaviors, which are revealed in table 4 and 5, despite the fact that some of them are rated to be appearing
more frequently or to be more serious than other violations, they are all very significantly related to each other. This indicates that when bloggers think a certain type of behavior is likely to appear, they don’t deny the possibilities that other behaviors are likely to appear as well. When bloggers think a certain type of behavior is serious, they don’t deny that other behaviors can also be serious. It may likely be the case because bloggers want to be balanced in judgment. They don’t want to be absolute or opinionated. They don’t want to say one behavior is absolutely the number one violation among all the other behaviors or that they are all mutually exclusive. It appears that they want to leave some room in their assessment. After all, their answers to the survey question also depend very much on their perceptions and people’s perceptions can be very different according to their unique experience.

However, the tension of these relationships among the four categories has a noticeable difference in strength. As to the frequencies of ethical violations that appear in comment sections, the correlation between discrimination and illegal behavior is weak (Pearson value 0.38). The correlations between disruptive behavior and discrimination (Pearson value 0.62), abusive behavior and discrimination (Pearson value 0.61), abusive behavior and disruptive behavior (Pearson value 0.63), and illegal behavior and disruptive behavior (Pearson value 0.51) are strong. The correlation between illegal behavior and disruptive behavior (Pearson value 0.72) is very strong. This turbulence in strength suggests that these feminist bloggers think that there is some similarity between illegal behavior and disruptive behavior, disruptive behavior and discrimination, abusive behavior and discrimination, abusive behavior and disruptive behavior and illegal
behavior and disruptive behavior. This shows that there is hardly a clean-cut distinction between these ethical problems. It also shows a limitation of this study: it is very difficult to quantify an abstract concept and measure it in numbers.

The correlation between the frequencies of appearance and perceptions of seriousness of the eleven key ethical violations enables me to evaluate the relationships between frequencies and seriousness of these ethical violations. The result suggests significant relations among all ethical violations except for threatening comments and libelous/defamatory comments. This indicates that threatening comments and libelous/defamatory comments are the exceptions to the assumption that the frequencies of ethical violation reveal the seriousness of those violations while the seriousness of the violations reflects the frequencies of those violations. Although this assumption may not apply to threatening comments and libelous/defamatory comments, it is still a valid claim for all the other major ethical violations.

The results of demographic information in the survey reveal that bloggers who moderate the comments that appear in their blogs are mainly the owners (73 percent) of blogs. This is because owners have the absolute control over what they write and post on their personal spaces. They are the only authority of their blogs. Since they are the owners, they understand the purpose of their blogs and this helps bloggers to better execute their role as moderator. The majority of these bloggers have maintained their blogs for more than 2 years (57 percent). It indicates that they are very experienced and savvy, so they know very well about their moderating routines and obligations. Their blogs’ function is mainly to create a community where conversations happen a lot (47
percent). This is because of the nature of feminist blogs. They want to create a space for those who are oppressed and marginalized. They want the minority to have a safe space of their own so that they can give their opinions a voice. They also want to promote interactivity and foster communication among feminists. This finding is consistent with Hamilton (2009), Auza (2013) and Maestretti’s (2008) studies as discussed above in the literature review. Overall, the results indicate that feminist bloggers I surveyed are very seasoned and knowledgeable. They take comment moderation very seriously and they are familiar with the moderating process due to all these years of practice. They want their blogs to function as a safe haven and a community to boost conversation among the feminists.

The surveyed feminist bloggers do not update their comment policies very often because once they draft their comment policies, they expect them to serve their purposes, and updating them too often seems not worth the time and energy. However, they do detect ethical violations in their comment sections very often. This could be because people do not take a look at the comment policies before commenting and when people get emotional, they may not remember or care that they have rules to follow. It may also suggest that the comment policies do not work very well or are not effective and that they need improvement. This finding verifies my analysis that the comment policies do not always truly reflect the situation in reality.

This finding is supported and reinforced by comparing the results of the answers to survey questions 3, 5, 6 and 7. If the frequency of ethical violations increases and if bloggers think their comment policies are not comprehensive, bloggers tend to think they
have the need to improve their comment policies. The results suggest that the comprehensiveness and the actual frequencies of ethical violations that appear in the comments will influence the need for improvement to the comment policies. Although more respondents rate their comment policies to be broad and comprehensive than those who do not rate so, a lot of the respondents are uncertain about this. It indicates that they need to take some time to have a good look at their current comment policies.

As to how to improve the comment policies, the answers to question 8 shed some light on it. The majority of my sample suggests that a more detailed comment policy is needed. The other options also get a decent amount of votes, which indicates that these bloggers who took the survey agree that there are many ways to improve their current comment policies. Giving more examples on how to comment gets the second most votes. Using graphic assistance and quoting other bloggers’ comment policies come next. There are also bloggers who are satisfied with their current comment policies and do not think they need to improve them. Some of them also indicate that to improve their comment policies is not the ultimate solution to thwart unethical behaviors once and for all. They do not think it is possible to erase all the ethical problems on their blogs so they have become used to the current situation.

As for the purposes and objectives of drafting comment policies, my findings correlate with the viewpoints I mentioned in the literature review. Shaffer (2008) points out that in order to prevent hurtful, abusive and illegal comments, bloggers should be encouraged to post a comment policy on their blog page. O’Reilly (2007) also suggests that comment policy can help maintain freedom of online discourse while preserving
netiquette. The findings from my survey suggest similar ideas. More than half of the participants in my sample voted for promotion of civil and respectful debate as the purpose of their comment policies. Half of the participants in my sample voted for freedom of expression.

The principles of regulating online behaviors I mentioned in my literature review directly reveal the objectives implied in feminist bloggers’ comment policies. Similar to the six norms Blood (2002) emphasized about weblog ethics, my findings reveal that feminist bloggers’ objectives of draft comment policies are enabling contested ideas to coexist and free expression of ideas. O’Reilly’s (2007) seven basic rules, which he mentioned in bloggers’ code of conduct, also correspond to my finding that a comment policy enables people to comment with respect and civility.

My findings also suggest some specific objectives that are unique to feminist communities, such as feminism education, activism encouragement and women empowerment (see question 9 in the survey). Feminist bloggers have their own unique purposes of drafting comment policies that are tailored to the need of feminist communities. These objectives help people better understand feminist communities.

As to the philosophical support of the comment policies, my findings correspond to Glasser and Ettema’s (2008) research on discourse ethics and Elcessor’s (2009) research on affinity theory. Discourse ethics emphasize the strength of community. Everybody’s opinion is counted. It embraces free and open discussion within a community. Affinity theory emphasizes shared identity within the community and emphasizes that a shared value system will form if the members in the community share
the same interest (Ellcessor, 2009). Thus, people can reach a consensus on what kind of community they wish to build. According to the answers to survey question 10, these principles are applied when feminist bloggers draft the comment policies. Besides these standards, my findings suggest something more. Bloggers also support fair use of language and this option gets the second most votes. Though bloggers say that do not mind language usage as long as commenters have a point to make, they do emphasize that they prefer people to keep in mind what language they use when commenting. It is also noteworthy that fifteen bloggers respond that they do not have any theoretical support for their comment policies. Even though I did not test what role theoretical support plays in the effectiveness of comment policies, it is highly possible that a lack of theoretical support may be a reason for why their comment policies are not effective, for without a clear idea of what standards to follow, comment policies can be random and weak. It may be beneficial for future studies on blogs’ comment policies to compare the different effects of comment policies that are drafted with a theoretical guide to those without such guidance.

Overall, by observing feminist blogger’s comment policies and analyzing the results in the survey, I find that the purposes of having a comment policy are consistent with the scholars’ viewpoints from the literature review. My findings also suggest some unique objectives that are specific to feminist blogs. Comment policies do have theoretical foundations but they are not limited to what was mentioned in the literature review. The specific ethical problems that frequently occur in feminist comment are the eleven key ethical violations I observed in the comment policies of 100 influential
feminist blogs. However, the perception of effectiveness of these feminist blogger’s comment policies may be debatable. This is directly shown in bloggers’ answers to survey question 6, which asks about the perception of effectiveness of their comment policies. Forty-nine bloggers answer they are not sure about the effectiveness. This is the option that gets the highest vote for this question. However, it is difficult to give a definite answer about the effectiveness of blog policies without also surveying bloggers who do not have a comment policy.

When I compare the frequencies of ethical violations in the actual comment policies with bloggers’ ratings of frequencies of the same ethical violations, the results signal a shift in emphasis. While this may suggest comment policies are not working as planned, it may also imply that comment policies have helped to reduce certain ethical violations from reappearing. However, commenters are then prone to commit other ethical violations that are less frequently mentioned in the policies.

Most of bloggers agree with the statement that they need to improve their comment policies. This may reflect an actual lack of effectiveness or it could be caused by the above-mentioned possibility that policies have helped to reduce certain ethical violations, while leaving others less addressed.
CHAPTER 6: LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are some limitations to my study. My sample size is small because my research targets a very specific group of people, feminist bloggers. As they are devoted to a topic that is sensitive and controversial, feminist online communities tend to be very self-protective and cautious about taking a survey, which aims at studying their behaviors. Some of the feminists were unwilling to reveal their thoughts on my research topic and some of them stated that they will not open links from people they do not know. More contact between the survey participants and me might have helped to gain their trust and willingness to participate.

It is unknown to what extent I can generalize the result of this research to the blogosphere as a whole. The convenience sampling and the low number of participants make it difficult to draw reliable generalizations from this research. This is also true for my findings about the objectives of blogging. Since most of the purposes I have in my survey are specially targeting the feminist community, I cannot generate the purpose of having a comment policy to other blogging communities. As this study focuses only on feminist blogs, it is inevitable that it neglects other blog genres. Different blogs may have different problems in their comment sections. They may have very different policies and may serve very different purposes, depending on their themes and constituencies.

This thesis suggests future research should be conducted as comparative studies based on different blog genres, topics, or even genders and geographic boundaries, in order to increase the generalizability. To expand the sample size and to gain an additional comparative perspective, future studies on comment policies of blogs should include
blogs that do not have comment policies as well. This way, researchers would have a control group when testing the effectiveness of comment policies and whether or not they should be improved. A control group would make it easier to evaluate the effectiveness of comment policies in thwarting the unethical behaviors in comments.

Researchers may be able to get more in-depth information about this topic if they have an opportunity to conduct in-depth interviews with participants or to study focus groups. One-on-one interviews and focus groups would enable researchers to get more information about participants’ perceptions and attitudes. In this research, it would have added qualitative data and greater insight into the participants’ thoughts and opinions regarding the comment policies and ethical violations in feminist blogs.
CHAPTER 7: IMPLICATIONS

Comment policies serve two main functions: One is to prevent ethical violations from appearing, while the other is to serve as a normative framework for moderation. My suggestions are mainly based on the first function of comment policies. I suggest that feminist bloggers may consider improving their comment policies. Admittedly, most comment policies are very suitable for raising ethical awareness, but since ethical violations still occur on regular basis, some bloggers may want to reconsider whether their current comment policy is sufficiently effective and is taken seriously by the commenters.

The other function of comment policy is to act as a legitimate and reasonable tool for moderating, including the possibility of deleting comments or banning commenters who fail to follow the guidelines in the comment policy. This function was not the focus of this study because many moderators will edit every comment before they appear at their pages. It makes it difficult to tell whether this function has been strictly performed without asking bloggers and moderators directly. An investigation of this function would require an entirely different research design.

By comparing the frequencies of the eleven key ethical violations in the actual comment policies with bloggers’ ratings, I detect a shift of focus. Thus, I suggest feminist bloggers may want to pay attention to this finding. Based on these findings, I believe bloggers should emphasize bigotry, prejudice based on privilege and fat/slut/victim shaming in their comment policies since these behaviors appear to have become prominent according to the their ratings. However, this is again based on these bloggers’
perceptions, which could be inaccurate or simply a reaction to the possibility that commenters may adjust their behaviors to existing comment policies.

Bloggers may also look for additional tools to regulate commenters’ behaviors, such as putting their comment policies in more obvious places, making their spaces a private place to exclusive members only, and taking advantage of new Internet technology that automatically blocks out unethical comments. Most importantly, bloggers who draft comment policies should have a clear idea of what they hope to achieve with their policies, how they can improve commenters’ performance via effective comment policies, and what ethical principles they want to base their comment policies on.

Bloggers may also draw inspirations from existing comment policies in other online media platforms and outlets, for example, the moderation systems in newspaper websites. These professional news websites have a lot of insights and perspectives to offer when it comes to moderation. As seen in the literature review, their moderation tools range from applying real-name registration systems, to flagging inappropriate comments, to limiting the commenting privilege granted to users.

Since the perceived effectiveness of comment policies among the feminist bloggers I surveyed is yet to improve, I suggest bloggers to pay closer attention to what stimulated them to blog in the first place. The need to connect and converse with people and to explore the topics and interests they share encourage people to start writing their blogs. In order to facilitate the conversation, the moderators of comment policies should do their best to guarantee the effective information flow among bloggers and
commenters. In this case, comment policies serve as a filter that can make sure what goes through is contributive to the conversation.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Starting from a list of links that a web enthusiast posted online to short diary-like commentaries to articles on various subjects followed by comments, feedbacks and discussions, the landscape of blogging has become more and more sophisticated and user-friendly.

Blogging penetrated mainstream in mid-2000s. Mainstream media outlets take advantage of blogs to provide in-depth reports and editorial commentaries that complement the mainstream coverage (Chapman, 2011). While blogging is saturating the mainstream, it has also attracted many individuals who share the same interest. Blogging is gradually becoming a “niche medium” for specific communities and subcultures. A case in point is communities that blog on feminism issues. Blogging has made it convenient for groups of people who share the same interest to communicate easily.

As social media become popular and mobile devices and tablets are more available among people, new possibilities and variations of blogging are taking shape. New blogging forms such as video blogs and podcasts are playing a bigger role in the blogosphere. The mobility of tablets has elevated the convenience of blogging to another level. People do not need to sit in front of a computer to gain access to internet any more. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Tumblr are able to accommodate for various forms of blogging styles and presentations and their potential is still expanding.

Such development and evolution give rise to questions such as can comment policies react to more volatile forms of blogging, where harmful comments may appear for a short time but do a lot of damage? Are our ethical assumptions (e.g. the principles
of discourse ethics) still valid within this context or do they need a “digital update”? These are the questions that are worth exploring, for they will be the key for the future development of ethical self-regulation of online communication.

The blogosphere has gained much power and influence in the digitized world. The interactive nature of blogging has invited an increasing number of people to join the conversation. As the convenience of communication shortens the distance among people, new problems appear. Unethical behavior in virtual communication, often behind the veil of anonymity or pseudonymity, is one of them.

This problem can be as small as a little bicker between two commenters who disagree with each other, or it can be as serious as a heated dispute that completely disrupts an online community. Given the severity of this issue, bloggers and commenters should work hand in hand to reduce misunderstanding and to maintain a civilized online society that facilitates communication and understanding.
REFERENCES

Ackermann, K. (2010). Do you kiss your mother with that mouth? Editor & Publisher, 43-45.


APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Demographic Questions:
1. What is your responsibility in this blog? (Check all applicable answers)
   A. blog owner   B. editor   C. moderator   D. administrator   E. main contributor
   F. Other__________
2. How long have you been maintaining this blog?
   A. less than 6 months   B. 6 months – 1 year   C. 1 year- 2 years   D. more than 2 years
3. Thinking about your blog, would you consider it as a place
   A. That creates a community where a lot of conversation/comments occur
   B. Where a lot of opposing arguments and conflicts occur
   C. Where your blog entries don’t get much feedback/comments from your readers
   D. Other____________________________

Survey:
1. How frequently do you update your comment policy?
   A. less than 6 months   B. 6 months – 1 year   C. 1 year- 2 years   D. more than 2 years
2. Approximately how frequently do you detect a comment policy violation?
   A. Less than a month  B. every month  C. 1-3 months  D. 3-6 months  E. more than 6 months
3. How frequently do comment policy violation appears in your blog? Different types of violations are presented below. Please rate the frequency of each type of violation on the following scale where 1 represents "hardly ever" and 5 represents "almost always".

   a. bigotry [ie: mysogynist/racist/homophobic/transphobic/anti-feminist etc.] (if one or more applies)
      hardly ever occasionally somewhat frequently almost always
      1 2 3 4 5

   b. fat/slut shaming/victim blaming (if one or more applies)
      hardly ever occasionally somewhat frequently almost always
      1 2 3 4 5

   c. prejudice based on privilege
      hardly ever occasionally somewhat frequently almost always
      1 2 3 4 5

   d. Trolling behaviors
      hardly ever occasionally somewhat frequently almost always
      1 2 3 4 5

   e. hijacking threads/off-topic (if one or more applies)
      hardly ever occasionally somewhat frequently almost always
      1 2 3 4 5
4. Please rate the comment policy violations on your blog in terms of their seriousness. Please rate the violations on the following scale where 1 represents "not serious at all" and 5 represents "extremely serious".

a. bigotry [ie: misogynist/racist/homophobic/transphobic/anti-feminist etc.] (if one or more applies)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>not serious at all</th>
<th>somewhat serious</th>
<th>serious</th>
<th>quite a bit serious</th>
<th>extremely serious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. fat/slut shaming/victim blaming (if one or more applies)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>not serious at all</th>
<th>somewhat serious</th>
<th>serious</th>
<th>quite a bit serious</th>
<th>extremely serious</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

c. prejudice based on privilege

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>not serious at all</th>
<th>somewhat serious</th>
<th>serious</th>
<th>quite a bit serious</th>
<th>extremely serious</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

d. Trolling behaviors
   - not serious at all
   - somewhat serious
   - serious
   - quite a bit serious
   - extremely serious
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

e. hijacking threads/off-topic (if one or more applies)
   - not serious at all
   - somewhat serious
   - serious
   - quite a bit serious
   - extremely serious
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

f. excessively frequent/long comment (if one or more applies)
   - not serious at all
   - somewhat serious
   - serious
   - quite a bit serious
   - extremely serious
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

g. abusive/obnoxious/ offensive / foul language (if one or more applies)
   - not serious at all
   - somewhat serious
   - serious
   - quite a bit serious
   - extremely serious
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

h. silencing others
   - not serious at all
   - somewhat serious
   - serious
   - quite a bit serious
   - extremely serious
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

i. threatening comment
   - not serious at all
   - somewhat serious
   - serious
   - quite a bit serious
   - extremely serious
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

j. libelous/defamatory (if one or more applies)
   - not serious at all
   - somewhat serious
   - serious
   - quite a bit serious
   - extremely serious
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

k. infringe upon copyright/trade mark/patent (if one or more applies)
   - not serious at all
   - somewhat serious
   - serious
   - quite a bit serious
   - extremely serious
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
Instruction: Please indicate a number from 1 to 5 for the series of statements below, depending on the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

5. My comment policy is broad enough to capture all possible violations.

6. My comment policy is effective in thwarting ethical violations.

7. I need to improve my comment policy.

8. How do you think you can improve your comment policy so that it will be more effective in regulating the ethical violations in comment feature? (Please select all that apply)
   A. To give more examples as to how to comment on my site
   B. To draft a comment policy that is more detailed than my current policy
   C. To use more graphic assistance, i.e.: photos to show my point, in explaining the rules
   D. To quote the terms that I deem to be more accurate in other bloggers’ comment policies
   E. Other: ____________________________

9. What are the MAIN objectives of your comment policy? (Please select all that apply)
   A. To promote civil and respectful debate
   B. Enable contested opinions to coexist
   C. Opportunity to free expression regardless of social identity
   D. To educate people about feminism knowledge
   E. Increase people’s awareness of feminism issues
   F. To encourage activism
   G. To empower women who suffer from marginalization
   H. Other: ____________________________

10. What standards or norms is your comment policy built upon? [Do you have theoretical/philosophical support for your comment policy?] (Please select all that apply)
    A. Equal opportunity of expression
    B. Fair use of language during communication
C. The establishment of shared identity and affinity among commenters
D. Development of social interaction
E. Consensus among all community members
G. I don’t have any theoretical support for my comment policy
H. Other: ___________________
APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Title of Research: Fostering Communication in Blogosphere. A Study on the Morality Behind Comments and Comment Policies on Feminist Blogs

Researchers: Meng Liu

IRB number: 14E167

You are being asked to participate in my research project on comment policies in feminist blogs. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to check the “I agree” box. This will allow your participation in this study.

Explanation of Study

This study will focus on comment policies in feminist blogs — to see how the monitoring of feedback in the comment sections reflects the ethical norms bloggers endorse. I will analyze the ethical implications in their comment policies and find answers to how and why bloggers draft comment policies.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take a web-based survey and answer 13 multiple choice questions.

You should not participate in this study if you are below the age of 18 or if you don’t host a feminist blog

Your participation in the study will last for about 15 minutes.

Risks and Discomforts

No risks or discomforts are anticipated

Benefits

For you as a participant, it may help you to moderate the comment section more efficiently and maintain a civil commenting atmosphere in the community. It will also help in raising ethical awareness in society.
This study is important to science and society because the scientific community will gain an additional understanding of the ethical dimensions of comment policies in blogs, a field that has not been studied much before. The blogging community will learn more about the role of comment policy and its impact of regulating commenting behaviors.

**Compensation**
As compensation for your time/effort, each participants will be:
1) rewarded with a copy of the study as an incentive
2) become part of a raffle with 5 Amazon gift cards ($10 each). An individual participant’s odds of winning will be 1 out of 20.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact meng.somosnovios@gmail.com

By checking the “I agree” box, you understand and agree that you have read this consent form you are 18 years of age or older your participation in this research is completely voluntary the data collected from your answer to this survey are anonymous you can terminate your participation at any point during filling in the questionnaire.
APPENDIX C: LIST OF BLOGS FROM WHICH THE COMMENT POLICIES WERE HARVESTED

Feministing
Feministe
Jezebel
Feminism 101
Bitch Media
Shrub
Fugitivus
Blog Her
Shakesville
Media Girl
Womanist Musings
Too Much To Say For Myself
Pickled Think
In a Strange Land
Bluebec
Alas, a Blog
Feminist Philosophers
Ideologically Impure
The News With Nipples
Autostraddle
Fbomb
Women's Glib
Racialicious
The Crunk Feminist Collective
Feminist Peace Network
Written World
I blame the Patriarchy
Disabled Feminists
Zero at the Bone
Are Women Human?
Skepchick
Gladient Lair
A Radical Profeminist
Appetite for Equal Rights
Female Impesonator
Feminist Law Professors
Feminists for Choice
Gender Across Borders
The Mongoose Chronicles
Small Strokes Fell Big Oaks
The Nice Feminist
TransGriot
Feminist Current
Feminist at Sea
Nerdy Feminist
Flyover Feminism
Alexandra Moffett-Bateau
The Feminist Librarian
Love Joy Feminism
Christian Feminism Today
New Feminism
Another Feminist Blog
Women Against Men
Feminist Ire
The Feminist Skeptic
Metis' Blog on Muslim Feminists
Feminism and Religion
Fuck Yeah Feminists!
Everyday Feminism
Closet Feminist
Lee's Bookshelf
Fair Feminist
Free Methodist Feminist
Dianna E. Anderson
Man Boobz
Feminist Critics
BattyMamzelle
Ordinary Times
Geek Feminism
Shadow's Crescent
Ego Ego Ego
Angry Black Lady Chronicles
Nth Wave Feminism
Consider the Tea Cozy
Blag Hag
Greta Christina's Blog
Guerrilla Feminism
Fully Engaged Feminism
Curvature
Acid for Blood
First the Egg
Cork Feminista
The Feminist Wire
What a Radical Notion!
Kafila
Lashings
Make me a Sammich
Penny Red
Feminist Action Cambridge
Ham Blog
Coquettish Colloquies
Counter Currents
Godless Bitches
BCRW Blog
Border House Blog
Luna Luna
Lady Business
Emily Joy Allison
Fembot
Echo in the City
APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL

A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2: research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

Project Title: Fostering Communication in Blogosphere. A Study on the Morality Behind Comments and Comment Policies on Feminist Blogs

Primary Investigator: Meng Liu

Co-Investigator(s):

Advisor: Bernhard Debatin

Department: Journalism

Date: May 14, 2014

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved (as an amendment) prior to implementation.