Blogging the Hill: Garth Turner and the Canadian Parliamentary Blogosphere

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Abstract

Canadian parliamentarian Garth Turner was expelled from the caucus of the governing Conservative Party in 2006. Turner was ousted because comments on his blog allegedly breached caucus confidentiality. While political blogs are mainstream in American politics, the study of Canadian political blogs is in its infancy. This research addresses one aspect of political weblogs: blogging by Canadian parliamentarians through a case study of Garth Turner Unedited. While most current Canadian parliamentarians are online with their own web sites promoting the constituency and party activities, Garth Turner is only one of a few parliamentarians that embrace blogging in its full capacity. The research demonstrates that the blog has become a virtual community for political participation and expression.

Introduction[1]

Canadian parliamentarian Garth Turner was expelled from the caucus of the governing Conservative Party in October 2006. Turner was ousted because comments on his weblog allegedly breached caucus confidentiality. A claim he vehemently denies. The former Progressive Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) and cabinet minister returned to parliamentary politics as a backbencher in January 2006. Turner had been blogging long before his return to Parliament. The first entry on the blog is dated May 30, 2005, eight months before 2006 federal election. Blogging even played a role in his re-election campaign. Turner was one of 50 candidates blogging the campaign (Mason 2006). He had been outspoken on the blog from day one, speaking critically of David Emerson crossing the floor to the Conservatives shortly after the election. He even predicted his own suspension from caucus on the blog (Doskoch 2006). Garth Turner's online world is extensive. In addition to his blog, *Garth Turner Unedited* (henceforth *Unedited)*, he also has a web site and an online parliamentary news program called *MPtv*.2 Turner claims to be a strong proponent of harnessing the power of the Internet to connect with citizens and has even crowned himself "Canada's Digital Democracy Leader." While political blogs are mainstream in American politics, Turner brought blogs from the nether regions of cyberspace to the front pages of Canada's newspapers.

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According to Koop and Jansen (2006) the "study of political weblogs in Canada is in its infancy and, clearly, there is much more work that needs to be done" (16). This research addresses one aspect of political weblogs: blogging by Canadian parliamentarians through a case study of *Garth Turner Unedited.* The case study is guided by the following questions:

- The extent and nature of the Canadian parliamentary blogosphere – To what extent do current Canadian parliamentarians blog? What is the nature of MP blogs? Is *Garth Turner Unedited* different from other MP blogs?

- The nature of *Garth Turner Unedited* -- How does Garth Turner blog? Does *Garth Turner Unedited* allow for public participation?

The paper begins with a discussion of blogging and its (potential) relationship to public participation and the growing interconnection between blogging and politics in the United Kingdom, United States and Canada. It is followed by the methodology. The first set of research questions regarding the Canadian parliamentary blogosphere are addressed, followed by an in-depth case study of *Garth Turner Unedited.*

The Blogging Phenomenon

Like many components of the Internet, blogs are seen as potentially enhancing democracy. This is because the Internet "is seen to possess what may broadly be termed "democratic" potentials untraceable in the traditional media" (Bentivegna 2002, 54). Interactivity is especially relevant to discussions of the interconnection between the Internet and democracy. Unlike the traditional media, information moves in many directions. Each receiver is also a potential sender and vice versa. In the world of politics, this means that where public officials speak and citizens listen (or read) in the traditional media, on the Internet potentially both public officials and citizens can speak and listen. Political information can move top-down, bottom-up and horizontally. However, within the literature the debate over how the Internet will change democratic politics is "extensive and controversial" (Larson and Paystrup, 2005, 176). To radical cyber-optimists this means that the Internet can be used as a tool for plebiscitary democracy. Citizens can use the Internet to initiate, deliberate, and vote on policy options or for public officials. For less radical optimists, the Internet is a tool to rejuvenate practices of representative democracy. In cyberspace, citizens and politicians have easy access to one another. To some, blogs play a key role in this revitalization process. Klein and Burstein (2005), for instance, suggest "bloggers are transforming the political process itself – and more important, the ordinary citizen's relationship to it – in ways that seem likely to lead to a more representative and participatory . . . democracy" (5). Cyber-skeptics question the deterministic view of digital democracy presented by optimists. Internet politics, they argue, will be "politics as usual."

Blogs, short for weblogs, emerged in the mid-1990s. Blogs are a form of electronic discussion. Davis (2005) suggests that as the Internet has become more mainstream so too has electronic discussion. Estimates suggest that there were less than 50 blogs in 1999 (Drezner and Farrell 2004). Since then there has been a global explosion of the blogosphere. Approximately 112 million blogs (as of February 2008) are in existence according to blog-tracking company Technorati. comScore Media Metrix (2006) analyzed blog penetration in eight North American and Western European countries, and determined that among the countries examined, Canada had the highest penetration of visitors to blogs (in October 2006). Almost 60 per cent of Canadian Internet users had reported visiting a blog according to this study.

A blog is a web site featuring a frequently updated personal journal or diary accessible to the public. Several features typify the blog format (see Blood 2002; Drezner and Farrell 2004; Hansard Society 2004; Gill 2004): self-expression, editorial control, hyperlinking and interactivity. The presence of these features is important in analyzing a blog, for it "is this format that determines whether a webpage is a weblog" (Blood 2003, 61). Self-expression is the first feature. Gillmor (2004) notes that what blogs "have in common is voice – they are clearly written by human beings with genuine human passion" (29). Related to this, the author or blogger has complete editorial control over the content. There is minimal to no external editing. Frequency is another characteristic. Blogs should be regularly updated. According to Blood (2002) "most webloggers make a point of giving their readers something new to read every day" (9). Blog entries are presented in reverse chronological order with the most recent post first. Entries are usually date and time stamped. Third, blogs feature hyperlinks to other online content. "All blogs by definition link to other sources of information, including, most pertinently, other blogs (Drezner and Farrell 2004, 7). The success or visibility of a blog rests in the hyperlinks or links it has to other blogs and web sites. One common form of linking is the "blogroll." Found on a sidebar, the blogroll features a permanent list of blogs. Blogs regularly read by the blogger or blogs that share a common topic or theme are typically found on a blogroll. In essence, the blogroll situates a "blogger's interests and preferences within the blogosphere" (Drezner and Farrell 2004, 7). Bloggers may also include links to other documents, such as media articles, photos or videos, within a particular blog post. In-text hyperlinks contextualize what the blogger is discussing. Gill (2004) refers to the first type of linking as blogrolling and attribution as the second. Finally, blogs are interactive or conversational in nature. Most blogs allow site visitors to respond to the commentary of the blogger either by e-mail or through a comment system. Blood (2002) notes, "it is a long-standing tradition in the weblog community to actively solicit reader input and expertise" (17).

Interactivity, as a concept, lacks a clear definition. McMillan (2002) writes "interactivity means different things to different people in different contexts" (163). Interaction can occur with a text, the system or with other users. What this implies is that interactivity on the Internet can be more than a user interacting with other users, but also a user interacting with the Internet itself. For instance, an online poll on the web site of a politician would be an example of the latter as would hyperlinks. However, since this paper is concerned with blogging as a possible forum promoting political participation, we are more concerned with user-to-user than user-to-system interaction. Interactivity, for this paper, "concerns the relationship of the user with the communication supply and the relationships among the users themselves" (Bentivegna 2002, 54). It takes what Sundar and colleagues (2003) call the "contingency view" of interactivity.

> For communication roles need to be interchangeable for full interactivity to occur, and interactants need to respond to one another. This transfers the concept of interactivity from the perceptual to the behavioral realm, but more important, it stresses the idea of message *contingency* -- that subsequent messages are contingent or dependent on previous messages (35, emphasis in original).

Thus, determining the level of interactivity is crucial to determining whether Garth Turner's blog enhances public participation.

According to Barney (2004) public participation "can take many forms and be enacted in a variety of venues" (6). Public participation can include voting, involvement in parties and interest groups and involvement in decision-making activities. Here public participation focuses on political expression. The Canadian Election Study (Gidengil et al. 2004) team considers political expression as a variable in

participation. Political expression activities would include signing a petition, writing a letter to the editor, writing to a political official and/or talking with others about politics. As such, posting on a blog, especially the blog of a Member of Parliament, can similarly be considered political expression. A blog, as a form of electronic discussion, is a "virtual means of bringing participants together for discussion and opinion formation that sows the seeds of participation" (Mossberger et al. 2008, 70).

While there is a growing literature (both popular and academic) on the impact on blogs on media and electoral politics, there are relatively few studies on blogging by members of legislatures. Perhaps the small number of studies is related to the fact very few legislators are actually blogging. The Congressional Management Foundation (CMF 2007) found that in 2006 only 9 per cent of 100 Senator sites and 5.3 per cent of the 438 House Member sites featured a blog. A similar story is seen in Canada and the United Kingdom, where about 3 and 6 per cent of parliamentarians operated blogs in the respective House of Commons (Ward and Francoli 2007). This is despite the fact that the majority of MPs in both countries have web sites. Legislators in North America and the United Kingdom are online and wired in some capacity, but, in the case of blogging, opt against it.

There are several costs and benefits that a legislator should consider when establishing a blog. Ward and Francoli, for instance, suggest that blogging may impact the relationships between legislators and the electorate, party and the media. For instance, a blog might facilitate a "new form of communication" with the public that is "continuous, more informal, more personalised, more transparent and more interactive" (Ward and Francoli 2007, 2). Blogging may also impact party relations by providing the means for the legislator to be more independent from the party line or change relations with the media by allowing the legislator to by-pass the media and communicate directly with the public (Ward and Francoli 2007). At the same time, however, the CMF identifies several issues that a legislator needs to consider when establishing a blog. One consideration is resources; does the legislator have the necessary resources, especially time, to dedicate to blogging? Another is that given that blogs typically provide unfiltered, informal, and personal information, is the legislator comfortable with that style of communication? Finally, legislators also need to reflect on how open or conversational the blog will be to "make sure the medium is not abused or too one-sided" (CMF 2007, 71). Perhaps the low number of legislative blogs speaks to the disadvantages outweighing the advantages in the minds of legislators. What is clear, however, is that research in this area is in its infancy. Hence, this study is well positioned to address the lacuna in the literature.

Methodology

This analysis is based on primary data collected in May and June 2007. In order to assess the extent and nature of the Canadian parliamentary blogosphere, a content analysis of MP Web sites and blogs of the 39th Parliament was conducted. The Canadian parliamentary blogosphere would consist of the community of blogs created by Members of Parliament in order to engage their constituents and other individuals. All MP web sites were analyzed for the presence of a blog.3 An MP web site is defined as one under the control of the Member of Parliament in which he or she seeks to inform and/or communicate to his or her own local constituency. Web sites under the control of the local riding association were excluded, as were web pages on departmental or party sites. The Parliament of Canada web site was used as an authoritative source of information on MPs' URLs. Additionally, Google was used to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the list. Each individual MP site then was analyzed for a page entitled blog or weblog. Finally, any site entitled blog or weblog was analyzed and compared using the four features of a blog previously outlined (self-expression, frequency, hyperlinking and

interactivity). Using the archives, material on these blogs was analyzed from January 1 2007 to May 31, 2007. The argument here is sites that feature all or most of these features should be considered blogs, while others should be discounted from the Canadian parliamentary blogosphere.

This analysis is followed by an in-depth case study of *Garth Turner Unedited* in order to assess the way the blog allows for public participation The paper focuses on this particular blog for two reasons: first, as will be demonstrated, *Unedited* is unique in the Canadian parliamentary blogosphere. Second, the recent media attention on *Unedited* makes it a blog worth examining in a systematic fashion. This case study is based on a sample of Unedited during the first five months of 2007. One week of blog activity of each month was analyzed. A total of thirty-five days were examined, which represents 23% of the total analysis period. It should be noted that the sample was not a random sample. The House of Commons sat for 64 days during the first five months of 2007, the researcher did not want to over-sample from non-sitting days. Garth Turner posted all but two days during this sample period, which indicates that Turner blogged 94% of the days.4 Therefore, this analysis is based on a total of 75 blog entries and related user commentary. The findings are found in Appendix 1 and 2. The analysis assess the level of participation on the blog, how many people participate and how often, and patterns of interaction between posters and the blogger. While the focal point of the research is the analysis of parliamentary blogs, an interview was conducted with Garth Turner, in January 2008, to add depth and perspective to this research.

The Canadian Parliamentary Blogosphere

To what extent do current Canadian parliamentarians blog? What is the nature of MP blogs? Is *Garth Turner Unedited* different from other MP blogs? The current status of the Canadian parliamentary blogosphere is the focus of this section. This section demonstrates that the Canadian parliamentary blogosphere is exceptionally small. In comparing the blogs that do exist, it is evident that *Garth Turner Unedited* is unparalleled in the Canadian parliamentary blogosphere.

Table 1 shows that a significant number of Canadian parliamentarians are online. Eighty-one per cent of MPs had operational web sites. However, only 11 MP sites featured a page with a blog. That is, only 3.6% of all MPs. Blogging MPs come from two parties: the Liberals and the Conservatives.

Table 1: Web sites and Blogs of MPs in the 39th Parliament

Party	Web site		Blog	
	#	%	#	%
BQ (49)	12	22.4	0	0
Con (125)	117	94.3	3	2.4
Lib (100)	93	93.0	8	8
NDP (29)	26	89.6	0	0
Independent (3)	1	33.3	0	0
TOTAL (306)	**249**	**81.4**	**11**	**3.6**

However, most are from the opposition Liberals. Current Cabinet minister and former blogger, Chuck Strahl once suggested that "[o]pposition members have more time than a Cabinet minister to blog" (qtd. in Mason 2006, 9). There appears to be some truth in this. Strahl and other Conservative members including Monte Soleberg, Stockwell Day and Steven Fletcher all discontinued blogging once they

became part of the government. Despite having a significant number of the caucus online, there are no NDP bloggers. As well, not one member of the Bloc Québécois (BQ) caucus is a blogger. It is interesting that there are such a small proportion of BQ members online in general. Only 1 in 5 BQ MPs operate a web site. Previous research on electoral politics demonstrates that candidates from Québec are less likely to establish a campaign web site (Small 2006). In the 2004 election, fewer than 10 per cent of candidates from Québec had a web site compared to 84 per cent of candidates in the rest of Canada. The low adoption of the web during elections appears to be replicated in parliament. Further study is needed to determine why Québec federal politicians do not use the Internet at similar rates as those in the rest of the country. Overall, blogging remains a rare activity for Canadian parliamentarians, making the Canadian parliamentary blogosphere exceptionally small. But how does *Garth Turner Unedited* compare to the blogs of his fellow parliamentarians? One way to compare the 11 blogs is to use the characteristics of blogs previously outlined (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of Blog Characteristics

MP	Party	Name of Blog	Self-Expression	Frequency (/150)	Links	Interactivity
David Anderson	Cons	The Truth about Marketing Choice	Y	56	Y	Y
Carolyn Bennett	Lib	My Blog	Y	129	N	N
Dean Del Mastro	Cons	Dean's Blog	Y	10	N	N
Rick Dykstra	Cons	Rick's Blog	Y	19	N	Y
Hedy Fry	Lib	Hedz sez	Y	9	N	N
Laurie Hawn	Cons	Events Blog	N	30	N	N
Maria Minna	Lib	Maria's Blog	Y	6	N	N
Brian Murphy	Lib	Brian's Blog	Y	0	N	Y
Shawn Murphy	Lib	Shawn's Blog	Y	53	N	N
Glen Pearson	Lib	Glen's Blog	Y	3	N	N
Garth Turner	Lib	Garth Turner Unedited	Y	144	Y	Y

Personal reflection and self-expression should be the focus of any blog. E-democracy advocates Crabtree and Davies (2003) suggest that legislators must write their own blogs:

> A blog must sound authentic to work. For politicians this means ensuring that, if they run a blog, they must write their entries themselves. If they do not, people will know, and they will not be interested. Blogs are interesting to the extent that their author is actively involved, and any blogging MP must be too.

Ferguson and Griffiths (2006) note most blogging MPs in the UK do not write their own blogs. Yet, there does appear to be more adherence to Crabtree and Davies' words in Canada. Personal reflection was the focus of almost all of the parliamentary blogs. The lone exception was Laurie Hawn's *Events Blog*. The site features very short descriptions of Hawn's participation at events in his constituency. The posts appear to be written by someone other than Hawn, as the MP is always referred to by his first name. The other blogs are written in first-person, suggesting they are written by the MP. Indeed, Turner is adamant about this; he suggests that there is a "culture of trust around blogging" that would be broken

if someone else wrote his blog (Turner 2008). Canadian MPs see this space as a place for personal commentary.

While there are similarities between the blogs of Turner and his fellow parliamentarians on the criterion of self-expression, Table 2 shows this is where the similarities end. As noted, blogs should be updated regularly. Of campaign web sites, Gibson and Ward (2000) suggest that web sites that are "regularly updated will create more interest than those that are not. Sites that are stale would probably deter visitors" (308). It is reasonable to assume this would apply to blogs. To assess frequency, the number of days in which a blog was updated between the dates of January 1 to May 31, 2007 was recorded. Overall, Canadian MPs do not update their blogs with great regularity. Most of the blogs were updated less than half of the days examined. Then again, there is great variation. Garth Turner updates his blog far more frequently than the other MPs. *Unedited* is updated 98 per cent of the days examined. Only fellow opposition MP Carolyn Bennett writes as regularly, at 86 per cent of the time. At the other end of the spectrum, the blog of New Brunswick Liberal MP Brian Murphy was not updated a single time during the analysis period. In fact, *Brian's Blog* only features a single entry from November 2006. It may be fair to suggest that Murphy's blog has been abandoned. Murphy is not unusual in the blogosphere; a 2004 study showed over a million blogs were "one-day wonders, with no postings on subsequent days" (Henning 2003).

Canadian parliamentary blogs differ dramatically in their hyperlinking capacity. Usually blogs are heavily linked to other blogs and online documents including news reports, videos and photos. This is not the case for MP blogs in Canada*.* Blogrolling and attribution are absent from the most MP blogs. Only David Anderson has a blogroll. Anderson's blogroll features more than 150 generally conservative or right of centre blogs and web sites including *Blogging Tories* and *TheoCon*. Anderson's blog is also unique in its use of attribution. In specific posts, Anderson links to media articles and press releases. While Turner's blog has a space for a blogroll, no links are listed. Only sometimes does Garth Turner link to documents outside of his blog. More often, however, Turner pastes news articles into the main body of an entry. In this sense, it is Anderson's, not Turner's blog that is most typical of mainstream blogging. One explanation is Anderson's use of the popular blogging software Blogger that allows users to quickly drag and drop items into a site template. Another explanation why one may not make use of attribution and blogrolling is because it is a risk. As Foot and Schneider (2006) in their study of campaign web sites in the United States note outlinking involves a "calculation of risk and a release of control" (59). The original site has no control over the information posted on the linked web site and that information may be modified at anytime including removing the linked information. This may have a number of unintended consequences. A broken link or link rot may distort the message the politician was attempting to make. A 404 or "page not found" error may lead the visitor to question the competence of the politician. More problematically, if the information has been modified, it may create an association between the two sites that the politician may not want to convey. As Rogers and Marres (2000) note "to link is to recognize" (16). Moreover, outlinking may be detrimental to the original site producer by making it easy for visitors to leave the site. Foot and Schneider conclude that there is a desire among American campaigners to "maintain control of campaign messages and site traffic" (124). Indeed, there are good strategic reasons why Turner may choose to appropriate content into his blog rather than link to it.

Even though blogs should allow for conversation between the blogger and readers, the blogs of Canadian parliamentarians are generally not interactive. Less than half of the MP blogs allow for interactivity. Only four blogs allow readers to respond to the MPs posts (see Table 2). Indeed both Turner and Anderson make note of the conversational nature of their blogs in the taglines. Turner asks people to "Join Canadians in a conversation with Garth," while Anderson's tagline is "Answering the

Questions. Refuting the Lies." Given that interactivity is a key feature of blogs, the lack of it in the Canadian blogosphere may be surprising. Then again, legislators have been reluctant to embrace this feature of the Internet. Zittel (2004) found that in 2000, only a small minority of web sites of German, Swedish and the American legislators included forms of public dialogue such as discussion forums. Recent Canadian work confirms this; Kernaghan (2007) maintains that while the use of e-mail and online polls by Canadian parliamentarians has increased, there has been little change in the use of online chats, discussion forums and electronic town hall meetings on MP web sites. In this context, the foregoing findings are less surprising.

This comparison demonstrates that not all of the sites are created equal. Indeed, two key types emerge from this analysis: MP online diaries and MP blogs (Table 3). The Hansard Society (2004) reminds us that some web pages may resemble blogs, but are simply web sites built in a blog format. This is evident in examining this set of parliamentary blogs. Most MP blogs fail to meet most of the characteristics that typify a blog. Since these are simply blogs in name only, these sites would most appropriately be designated as an online diary, where MPs can write their day-to-day experiences as a parliamentarian. Six of the 11 sites examined fit into this category. This list does not include Laurie Hawn and Brian Murphy. The lack of self-expression of Hawn's *Events Blog* makes it difficult to categorize the site as an online diary let alone a blog. Since Brian Murphy's blog has been abandoned, it also seems improper to categorize. Why do MPs purport to have a blog when in reality it is not? As mentioned, political blogs have received considerable attention in recent years. Selnow (1998) has suggested that American candidates established campaign web sites in the 1996 election to be "with the times" (88). Campaigns wanted to demonstrate to voters that they were technologically savvy. Perhaps this desire to be "with the times" is at play here. By claiming to have a blog, MPs demonstrate a level of technological sophistication to their constituents.

Table 3: MPs with Online Diaries or Blogs

Online Diary	Blog
Carolyn Bennett	David Anderson
Dean Del Mastro	Rick Dykstra
Hedy Fry	Garth Turner
Maria Minna	
Shawn Murphy	
Glen Pearson	

The analysis shows that there are three genuine blogs. While Anderson and Dykstra's blogs lack the readership and attention of Turner's (to be discussed), all three do, by and large have the look and feel of an actual blog. Though it was suggested that 3.6 per cent of all Canadian parliamentarians were purported bloggers, this analysis shows that this number is indeed much smaller. Making the distinction between an online diary and a blog indicates that less than 1 per cent of MPs in the 39th Parliament can actually be considered bloggers. Moreover, it should be evident that Garth Turner is something of an anomaly when it comes to comparing what he is doing online to that of his colleagues. *Unedited* is truer to form than other blogs. It is also more extensive in terms of the time and effort dedicated by the MP.

A Closer Look at Garth Turner Unedited

It has been established that Garth Turner is one of a kind in the Canadian parliamentary blogosphere. What has been presented thus far essentially provides a functional assessment of *Garth Turner Unedited*. It shows that by establishing a genuine blog, Garth Turner has provided the necessary interface for public participation, one that most of his colleagues have not embraced. However, it tells us little about how Turner uses the blog, if Canadians use it, and whether or not interaction takes place. The purpose of this section is to move beyond this functional assessment by first, assessing the level of participation or the audience of *Unedited.* Patterns of interaction on the blog is considered next. First, however, a brief description of *Garth Turner Unedited* is necessary to provide context for the analysis that follows.

Garth Turner Unedited reflects on current political events in Canada. The blog lists "Canadian Politics," "Conservative Party," "Liberal Party," "Harper Government" and "Dion Government-In-Waiting" as the focus. As noted, the MP, *alone*, writes the entries (Turner 2008). Consistent with blog format, new entries are front and center on the homepage of the blog. Each blog entry includes a title, followed by who wrote the post, the date and time, and the number of comments received (i.e. posted by Garth Turner on @ 9:34 pm | 28 Comments). Each post also concludes with this information. Each entry has a relevant photograph or picture. Older entries are archived and can be retrieved by category, month or by a key word search. *Unedited* is also RSS (Really Simple Syndication) enabled.

One final item of note on the homepage is a request for financial support. The "A Call to All Canadians. Support Garth" icon links to a secured donation page which reads:

> Garth Turner, Liberal Member of Parliament for Halton, Ontario, invites all Canadians to contribute to his re-election success. As Canada's digital democracy leader in the House of Commons, Garth Turner is fighting effectively for values that matter to everyday taxpayers.

This is highlighted because Turner links his call for financial support to his role as "Canada's Digital Democracy Leader." It implies that by blogging, Turner is providing a broad public service, which benefits all Canadians beyond his role as a Member of Parliament. Another issue that arises from this statement is audience. In both the request for donations and the tagline, Turner refers to Canadians. The blog is open to all Canadians not just those who live in Turner's own riding. This runs contrary to previous findings on the use of the web by legislators. Johnson (2004) notes that most US congressional offices filter out electronic communications from non-constituents. However, he also notes that some American legislators who have developed a national following do attempt to communicate with the general public online. Turner appears to fit into this latter category.

The interview data confirms this. *Unedited* is meant to target multiple audiences: constituents, colleagues and other officials, the media and average Canadians. The blog is a "report mechanism" that allows Turner to report to his constituents daily (Personal Interview, 2008). Blogging is also a way for Turner to influence opinion leaders within the House of Commons and the media. He suggests the blog has a "high readership of the Parliamentary Press Gallery. Turner says "it happens quite a bit where I open up the *Globe and Mail* or the *National Post* and I'll see a comment from my blog included in an article that, of course, I was never contacted for" (Personal Interview, 2008). Finally, the blog allows Turner to have a relationship with individual Canadians. Turner describes this broad relationship as "so unique and so powerful" (Personal Interview, 2008).

Examining the sample indicates that in addition to blogging regularly, Turner often writes more than one post on a given day. Turner writes an average of 2.1 blog entries per day. The average entry is 365 words in length (appendix 2). Some posts consist simply of a few links to media headlines to long post of over 800 words. Some posts simply provide a description of current events and policy. The budget, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms'* 25th anniversary and the Conservative Party ads targeting Liberal leader Stéphane Dion were some of the topics addressed in the sample. The blog also features Turner's musing on politics. Such posts feature very candid personal opinions often with a hint of sarcasm. Consider the following:

> Wajid Khan made a telling statement when he attacked his former leader, Stephan Dion, who he said has no foreign policy, no economic credentials and no commitment to "family values." This, of course, is all code. And it's ugly. It is a verbalization of intolerance and, as such, Mr. Khan should be completely at home within the Tory caucus that I left ("Tory Hormones").

The blog entries also consist of press releases, links to videos, the text of e-mails sent to Turner, or the text of or links to current media stories. As noted, Turner blogs nearly every day, and more than once a day (see table 2 and appendix 2).

Garth Turner Unedited: A Virtual Community

This section shows that *Garth Turner Unedited* is a virtual community made up of a small but committed group of participants and a substantial number of readers. An often cited definition of a virtual community comes from Howard Rheingold (1994): a "virtual community is a group of people who may or may not meet one another face to face, and who exchange words and ideas through the mediation of computer bulletin boards and networks" (57–58). One way to assess the size of the *Unedited* community is to examine the number of individual comments received. More than 5000 comments were received during the 33 days examined. If Garth Turner posts something, without fail, people respond. There is an average of 73 comments per post (appendix 1). There is a wide variation in response rates however; there are only four comments submitted for *How we vote, Pt.2* compared to the 207 comments received on Turner's opine on the Stéphane Dion attack ads. Given that Turner often posts more than once daily means that there are sometimes more opportunities to participate. The average number of individual comments per day is 163. While this is considerably less than the 2000 to 4000 comments per day that Howard Dean's *Blog for America* received (Stromer-Galley and Baker 2006), it is substantial amongst parliamentarians nevertheless. *Unedited* receives considerably more comments than the other blogs considered in this study. Between January and May 2007, Rick Dystra's blog received a total of 6 comments, while David Anderson's received a total of 126 comments. This means that a single *Unedited* post garners more comments than the total number of comments combined on the other two genuine blogs. Ward and Francoli found in their study of British and Canadian parliamentary blogs that "nearly 40 per cent of the blogs received an average of less than two comments per posting" (12). The audience for Turner's blog, as measured by comments, is not insubstantial. Turner is not only more open to interactivity than other MPs, he also interacts with substantially more people than the other MPs. This provides more reason to see Turner as a leader in the Canadian parliamentary blogosphere.

The average number of comments per blog entry or day only tells part of the story however. Unlike Ward and Francoli, this analysis goes beyond comments as an indicator of participation levels. Indeed, the size of the *Unedited* community is both smaller and larger than this number implies. The reason for this contradiction has to do with the fact that participants in any type of electronic discussion forum consist of two groups: "those who speak out and those who do not" (Davis 2005, 85). The former are

called "posters," while the latter are known as "lurkers." Posters are "the visible members of the online community" (Davis 2005, 85) who provide the substance of electronic discussions. Lurkers are those who "never posted in the community to which he/she belongs" (Preece et al. 2004, 202). Lurkers participate in the online community by simply reading the blog and following the discussion. In the blogosphere, posters and lurkers are also known as "the commentariat" and "blurkers", respectively.

According to Preece and colleagues (2004) "a small core of participants generates most of the responses" in an online community (202). The evidence here supports this contention. Even though the sample shows an average of 73 comments per entry on *Garth Turner Unedited*, looking more closely at who actually participates and how often provides a more accurate assessment of the level of participation. Appendix 1 presents the blog entries examined in this analysis. The column entitled "Number of Comments" indicates that the total number of comments per entry written by Turner. The next column, "Number of Posters," notes the total number of individual posters. Since each comment includes a name, this number was determined by noting the first instance of each name.5 It is important to note that the number of posters is always considerably smaller than the number of comments. For instance, 25 individuals account for the 65 comments to the entry "The family tax return." Overall, if the average blog entry receives 73 comments, an average of 31 individuals are actually responsible for those comments. This implies the commentariat of *Unedited* is actually made up of a small number of individuals.

The final three columns provide us with more detail about the commentariat. The third and fourth columns make a distinction between those who commented more than one time (multiple posters) and those who post a single comment (single posters). Returning to "The family tax return," eleven individuals were coded as multiple posters while 14 individual commented a single time. This post is typical of the overall sample where 38 per cent of individuals post more than once compared to 61 per cent of single posters. The final column adds another interesting dimension to our understanding of the *Unedited* commentariat. This column presents the total number of comments made by multiple posters. In the case of "The family tax return," multiple posters account for 51 comments. This means that a minority of posters authored most of the comments. For instance, a poster called "Geoffrey L" commented 14 different times over four hours. This finding is consistent throughout the sample: a small core group of participants are responsible for much of the discussion on this blog. Overall, multiple posters make up almost 75 per cent of the contribution of the commentariat. Clearly, there is a core of individuals who are very active, dedicated participants in this virtual community.

The reason it is suggested that the *Unedited* community is perhaps larger than the total number of comments indicated is because lurkers essentially leave little trace of their participation. Preece and colleagues' study of lurkers reveals that there are many reasons why individuals lurk including "thinking that they were being helpful by not posting; not being able to make the software work (i.e., poor usability); and not liking the group dynamics or the community was a poor fit for them" (201). Perceptions of an online community can be skewed since there are far more lurkers than posters (Katz 1998). Determining how many people lurk is difficult and the results are varied. One study reports that lurkers make up over 90% of some online groups (Katz 1998). Another found that lurkers vary by group type; lurkers comprised 46 per cent of health support communities and 82 per cent of software support communities (Nonnecke and Preece 2000). There are a considerable number of blurkers on *Garth Turner Unedited*. According to Turner the blog consistently receives about 2 million hits per month. However, the number of unique visitors varies to 70,000 depending on the issue. *Garth Turner Unedited* conforms to other findings about virtual communities; there is a small core of people that speak and a substantial number of those who do not.

Giving Canadians a Voice: Interactivity on *Garth Turner Unedited*

In expounding the Canadian parliamentary blogosphere, it was argued that *Unedited* was unique in part due to its conversational nature. Of this Turner says:

> by letting comments on to the blog, I am actually giving people voice, and I am saying . . . you matter . . . The comments are absolutely integral to what I am doing and I can't imagine doing it without having the audience there, and giving them a chance to stand up and speak (Personal Interview, 2008).

The blog features a conversational and confrontational tone. Posters often speak directly to Turner, using his first name, taking specific issue with his comments and asking questions. Posters also cut and paste specific passages from Turner's entry and make reference to it in their reaction. Here are two examples from regular posters to the blog entry "Whatever it takes,' which questions Prime Minister Stephen Harper's honesty:

> Garth, You are obviously of the opinion that any MP who is kicked out of their party, regardless of their own actions, should be immune from promises made to their own constituents? Thus, why should Harper be held to any different standard? Why dont you explain why YOU think Harper broke his word on income trusts, and compare it to why YOU broke your word to your constituents? It would be an interesting juxtaposition, wouldnt it? By Truth on 05.07.07 5:03 pm

> When in doubt, go back to income trusts, eh Garth? I won't join you in beating this long deceased horse but I will take exception to just one of the distortions in your latest reiteration . . . By Lawrence Garvin on 05.07.07 12:44 pm6

This is evidence of contingency interactivity. In many cases, there is message dependency -- Turner uploads his entry, and posters react with specificity.

The level of interaction does not end at the ability and take-up of the comment system. Indeed, information flows in many directions on *Unedited*. Not only does Garth Turner blog regularly, the MP monitors, reads and responds to the comments;

> When people take time to sit down and read an article I've written and post a response, that is pretty gratifying. So I owe it to them to read it and by posting comments from time to time I am trying to let people know that I am there and I am watching and listening (Turner 2008).

If Turner responds, his response is located at the completion of that post. The comment is usually italicized and always signed with *"— Garth*." The responses are always brief, rarely more than a few sentences. Some responses provide clarification of subject matter, often in response to a question. For instance when a poster named Kiara asks "who is pvl?," Turner responds "*Peter Van Loan - Conservative MP and newly-appointed cabinet member (House Leader)*." However, Turner's responses are far from what one might expect. Like his blog entries, the responses are very candid and even antagonistic. Consider the following exchange between a poster named Morris Lewicky and Turner:

> I saw the whole debacle on the late night news. I saw you sit there looking around at your new found friends screaming their heads off and then you meekly stood up. But no screaming from you. Only a stunned look on your face. So these are my new friends ???? Morris (You know who) By Morris Lewicky on 02.22.07 7:21 am

> *Stuff it, Morris. I do not "scream" in the House of Commons. — Garth*

This not the type of language you might expect from a Member of Parliament in a public forum. Politicians are often accused of speaking in sound bites for the media or towing the party line in their public commentary. Turner's tone on the blog certainly challenges that type of communication style. It also brings to the forefront that *Unedited* attracts both supporters and critics of Garth Turner and the Liberal Party of Canada. To employ blog jargon, the *Unedited* commentariat contains a number of "blogroaches." A "blogroach" is a poster that constantly disagrees with posted content. This makes this web site quite different from the typical web sites of legislators, which are promotional. By and large Turner does not edit comments. He accepts that people will "trash him" on the blog, but does not avoid such comments because it demonstrates "a willingness to listen to all voices" (Turner 2008). *Unedited* allows for a free exchange of commentary on Canadian political issues. This unfettered nature sometimes results in hostilities between Garth Turner and posters and posters with other posters.

The exchange between Morris Lewicky and Turner also helps to demonstrate contingency interactivity that exists on *Unedited.* Garth Turner regularly responds to comments made by posters. Of the 75 entries, Turner responds, at least one time, all but 12 days, which means that he responds at least 87% of the time (appendix 2). The number of responses does vary. If Turner responds, he does so an average of five times per blog entry. Overall, the response rate of *Unedited* is 5.8 per cent.

This number may appear small, but it should be noted that not all comments necessitate a response from Garth Turner. For instance, some posters post hyperlinks to related content while others write things like "Garth Rocks." Moreover, examination of the comments indicates considerable horizontal interaction between posters. That is, posters not only respond to Turner but to one another. Consider the exchange between two posters M. W Thornston and Judy on February 22, 2007:

> "There is no role and no voice for individuals MPs." Well said. The 'indiviual' corrupt Liberal MP's were free to siphon off as much adscam cash as they could steal from taxpayers. Then these arrogant MP's feign indignation whenever their integrity (lol) is called into question. By M. W Thornston on 02.22.07 12:42 am

> Thornston: Please be specifice. Which currently sitting corrupt Libeal M.P.'s are you accusing of siphing off money? You should phone the police and inform them. That would be the right thing to do. By Judy on 02.22.07 9:21 am

This particular exchange continued with subsequent messages. Again, message contingency is evident. One individual reacts to Turner, and another reacts to them. Indeed, a very controversial poster can elicit numerous reactions from others. The antagonistic tone seen between Turner and posters is also evident in this type of exchange. Earlier it was noted that nearly 40 per cent of individuals posted more than one comment and that multiple postings make up the bulk of the contribution to the blog. Therefore, it can be suggested horizontal communication between posters provides one reason for the large proportion of multiple posts. Individuals are going back and forth, having mini-conversations within the context of the larger blog. Further research is needed to assess the level of horizontal communications on the blog.

Garth Turner Unedited is not just a space for interaction in function, but in reality as well. A small, core of posters interact on the blog in a number of ways. First, and in the simplest way, individuals do so by making use of the comment system. Garth Turner writes a blog entry and many individuals react. Additionally, there is horizontal communication between individuals. Posters do not just react to the MP, but to the comments of others. Significantly, it was also found that Garth Turner, on occasion, reacts to the poster comments. Turner does not just write his blog entries, he also monitors and responds. True to form, this blog has a conversational character. The blog comments are not soliloquies. Rather posters read, reflect and react to both the blogger's entries and also to the comments of fellow posters. This is similar to the conclusion of Koop and Jansen's (2006) study of political blogs in Canada; they found that blogs "are not simply soapboxes for people to spout off. People's ideas are read, debated, and discussed" (16). Neither the commentariat nor the blogger use *Unedited* as purely a soapbox. This blog demonstrates the Internet at full capacity, with information moving in all directions – top-down, bottom-up and laterally.

Conclusion

On the blog, Garth Turner claims to be "Canada's Digital Democracy Leader." This analysis shows the claim is not without merits. Though Turner readily admits the claim is aggrandizing, he is very clear about his desire to "lead by example" in Canadian parliamentary politics. This examination suggests that he is certainly achieving this goal. In terms of being a leader, while most current Canadian parliamentarians are online with their own web sites promoting the constituency and party activities, Turner is only one of a few parliamentarians that embraced blogging in its full capacity. Even when compared with genuine blogs, *Unedited* outperforms. Given the small proportion of legislators in the United States and United Kingdom that blog, what Garth Turner is doing is striking. He does not just present the opportunity or the interface for Canadians to engage with him, Canadians actually do so. *Unedited* allows for exactly what it says it does, unfettered discussion between posters and the blogger. For the virtual community that has developed, *Unedited* is a space for such participation and expression.

The corollary of the finding that Garth Turner is unique because of his blog, is that few Canadian Members of Parliament are blogging. Blogs have become crucial to many other areas of politics, but legislative politics is not one of them. Future research should consider why legislators in Canada, and elsewhere, establish web sites but avoid blogging. One potential reason may be workload. Stillborn (2002) suggest that modern Canadian MPs perform a myriad of tasks as part of their parliamentary responsibilities including legislative activities, surveillance and constituency service activities and party responsibilities. Done with any frequency, blogging is a time consuming activity. For instance, Ganim Barnes' (2006) study of business bloggers show that time is "the major drawback to running one" (6). Turner notes that it takes about 60 to 100 minutes to "think about, research and write" an entry. Moreover, as the analysis showed, Turner also reads and responds to reader comments. So in spite of his regular parliamentary activities, Turner still finds time to blog. Given this, it may not be surprising that blogging is not a top priority for Members of Parliament.

Another reason comes from renowned Internet politics scholar, Stephen Coleman (2005):

the problem facing politicians who blog is that they are professionally implicated in the very culture that blogging seeks to transcend. Politicians live in a world of certainty and tribal loyalty which is at odds with the blogging ethos of open-mindedness and knowledge-sharing. As long as politicians are expected to be never in doubt and ever faithful to catechistic party messages, their blogging efforts are always likely to look more like simulation than authentic self- expression" (Coleman 2005, 276).

This suggests that party politics and blogging may be antithetical. One requires secrecy and solidarity and the other requires openness and self-expression. Garth Turner's own comments concur:

I think that I am the only MP that does this because most people think they are going to get their asses shot off . . . because they are opening themselves up to profound criticism and profound comment. And most times that really scares people; it really frightens politicians because the negative is something you are always trying to avoid (Personal Interview, 2008).

Indeed, Turner's own attempt to transcend the confines of party politics came at a cost, his expulsion from the Conservative Party. This may be a cost that is too much for many politicians. If Coleman's assessment is correct, then blogging may never take hold in Canadian parliamentary politics in the way it has in other political realms.

Although Turner concurs with Coleman, he remains a cyber-optimist and sees the future of blogging and the Internet in Canadian politics differently. Turner believes that politicians that avoid communicating with the public through technology "will pay a heavy price." This is because Canadians, especially young Canadians, are wired. In fact, Canadians under the age of 35 are likely to use the Internet to find political information (Gidengil et al. 2004). A new generation of citizens, well versed in technology, may expect some level of communication on the Internet from political actors in the future. Accordingly successful politicians will need to learn how to make the most of the Internet.

Explicitly or implicitly much of the Internet politics research addresses whether the Internet will greatly improve the quality of democracy. This research does gives cyber-optimists something to cheer for as it demonstrates what is possible when a politician blogs. A virtual community can be created that allow for political participation and expression, both of which are important to democratic practice. However, the premises of cyber-optimists are also challenged by this research given that so few Canadian Members of Parliament are actually blogging. Blogging cannot be said to have rejuvenated practices of representative democracy in the Canadian parliament. *Garth Turner Unedited* is the exception not the rule.

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Appendix 1: Participation on *Garth Turner Unedited* Defined by Comment

Date	Entry Title	Number of Comments	Number of Posters	Multiple Posters	Single Posters	Number of Comments by Multiple Posters
1/11/07	House cleaning!	41	17	6	11	30
1/11/07	The family tax return	65	25	11	14	51
1/11/07	Blog this	33	22	3	19	14
1/12/07	Weekend Update	65	19	10	9	56
1/12/07	Tory Hormones	49	33	10	23	26
1/13/07	On the Wrong Side	78	24	12	12	66
1/14/07	No Khan do?	23	15	5	10	13
1/15/07	The Ballot Question	7	7	0	7	0
1/15/07	Monday January 15	2	2	0	2	0
1/16/07	Well, Here we go	59	31	9	22	37
1/16/07	Tuesday January 16	40	13	7	6	34
1/16/07	MP Advisory	18	11	5	6	12
1/17/07	GTA Strategy	55	26	9	17	38
1/17/07	How we vote	4	3	1	2	2
1/18/07	How we vote, Pt. 2	8	6	2	4	4
1/18/07	Oily John	57	25	9	16	41
1/18/07	Thursday January 18	18	9	4	5	13
2/19/07	Hell no, we won't go!	58	44	7	37	21
2/20/07	Election mania	28	15	7	8	20
2/20/07	Budget Day March 19th	49	30	10	20	29
2/20/07	Join the Resistance	83	48	16	32	51
2/20/07	Jimonomics	79	37	12	25	54
2/21/07	Too much a Tory	41	25	6	19	22
2/21/07	Shame, Shame	130	63	23	40	90
2/21/07	The Constant Campaign	135	61	22	39	96
2/22/07	Dear PMSH	159	75	27	48	111
2/22/07	Into the Vortex	45	25	10	15	30
2/22/07	A QP to remember	16	11	3	8	8
2/22/07	Why he did it	184	72	26	46	138

2/23/07	Freedom of Speech	54	26	11	15	39
2/24/07	Town Halls 22, 23 & 24	79	34	16	18	61
2/24/07	The Big Lie	117	43	25	18	99
3/26/07	Next Battle Looms	135	55	24	31	104
3/26/07	Quake in Quebec	46	26	10	16	30
3/27/07	Romantic Notions	162	62	23	39	123
3/27/07	On the Brink	11	10	1	9	2
3/27/07	Blowing in the Wind	82	43	18	25	57
3/28/07	Another Day, un autre sondage	69	25	11	14	55
3/29/07	Dion Speech	65	36	13	23	42
3/29/07	What I stand for	91	44	13	31	60
3/30/07	Not done yet	160	64	21	43	117
3/31/07	Worth it	144	50	24	26	118
4/1/07	Voting, Jim style	178	75	37	38	140
4/1/07	Con Attack	88	36	15	21	67
4/1/07	Do you hate us?	48	23	0	23	25
4/2/07	Smear	207	72	27	45	162
4/3/07	Negativity	178	56	24	32	146
4/3/07	Make my day	51	28	9	19	32
4/4/07	Miracle on Bay	182	38	21	17	165
4/4/07	Sad but true	69	36	11	25	44
4/5/07	Nobody left behind	47	21	12	9	38
4/6/07	Ground Zero	124	47	22	25	99
4/7/07	Easter	83	32	15	17	66
5/5/07	Yukon gold	19	10	4	6	13
5/5/07	Kids	37	15	6	9	28
5/6/07	Local column	34	19	3	16	18
5/6/07	Lie. Conceal. Fabricate.	85	25	7	18	67
5/6/07	What we want	30	24	4	20	10
5/7/07	Jim redux	83	33	13	20	63
5/7/07	Local talent	22	15	4	11	11
5/7/07	Under assault	27	17	4	13	14
5/7/07	Whatever it takes	94	38	18	20	74
5/8/07	French Kiss	122	45	19	26	96
5/8/07	Lest we forget	5	5	0	5	0
5/8/07	Jucied	36	10	7	3	33
5/8/07	Boisclair chokes	23	18	3	15	8
5/8/07	Nik on the numbers	52	17	44	9	35
5/9/07	Charter Challenge	74	21	11	10	64
5/9/07	Time to Fight	147	27	13	14	133
5/10/07	The leaker	116	53	20	33	83
5/10/07	Boomer bust	12	11	1	10	2
5/10/07	Ride to redemption	73	31	14	17	56
5/11/07	Deep furrows	106	24	18	6	100
5/11/07	Ruby's passion	131	33	18	15	116
	Average	**73.3**	**30.6**	**12.2**	**18.9**	**54.4**

Appendix 2: Garth Turner Involvement on Blog

Date	Post Title	Word Count of Blog Entry	Number of Responses
1/11/07	House cleaning!	93	0
1/11/07	The family tax return	57	6
1/11/07	Blog this	595	5
1/12/07	Weekend Update	57	2
1/12/07	Tory Hormones	630	4
1/13/07	On the Wrong Side	843	3
1/14/07	No Khan do?	130	2
1/15/07	The Ballot Question	769	1
1/15/07	Monday January 15	83	0
1/16/07	Well, Here we go	799	6
1/16/07	Tuesday January 16	28	3
1/16/07	MP Advisory	221	3
1/17/07	GTA Strategy	658	2
1/17/07	How we vote	79	0
1/18/07	How we vote, Pt. 2	93	1
1/18/07	Oily John	821	4
1/18/07	Thursday January 18	15	1
2/19/07	Hell no, we won't go!	443	14
2/20/07	Election mania	240	2
2/20/07	Budget Day March 19th	219	5
2/20/07	Join the Resistance	310	6
2/20/07	Jimonomics	534	2
2/21/07	Too much a Tory	427	2
2/21/07	Shame, Shame	424	14
2/21/07	The Constant Campaign	648	2
2/22/07	Dear PMSH	356	9
2/22/07	Into the Vortex	172	5
2/22/07	A QP to remember	66	3
2/22/07	Why he did it	430	22
2/23/07	Freedom of Speech	150	6
2/24/07	Town Halls 22, 23 & 24	445	7
2/24/07	The Big Lie	806	19
3/26/07	Next Battle Looms	582	3
3/26/07	Quake in Quebec	209	1
3/27/07	Romantic Notions	581	3

3/27/07	On the Brink	138	0
3/27/07	Blowing in the Wind	855	0
3/28/07	Another Day, un autre sondage	97	2
3/29/07	Dion Speech	7	0
3/29/07	What I stand for	1119	0
3/30/07	Not done yet	824	8
3/31/07	Worth it	507	13
4/1/07	Voting, Jim style	226	11
4/1/07	Con Attack	357	6
4/1/07	Do you hate us?	157	1
4/2/07	Smear	659	9
4/3/07	Negativity	41	16
4/3/07	Make my day	470	3
4/4/07	Miracle on Bay	707	9
4/4/07	Sad but true	541	9
4/5/07	Nobody left behind	105	2
4/6/07	Ground Zero	626	2
4/7/07	Easter	156	0
5/5/07	Yukon gold	178	3
5/5/07	Kids	174	2
5/6/07	Local column	685	11
5/6/07	Lie. Conceal. Fabricate.	89	2
5/6/07	What we want	684	1
5/7/07	Jim redux	544	4
5/7/07	Local talent	151	0
5/7/07	Under assult	139	1
5/7/07	Whatever it takes	587	15
5/8/07	French Kiss	592	5
5/8/07	Lest we forget	153	0
5/8/07	Jucied	152	1
5/8/07	Boisclair chokes	99	1
5/8/07	Nik on the numbers	186	1
5/9/07	Charter Challenge	180	1
5/9/07	Time to Fight	310	4
5/10/07	The leaker	721	1
5/10/07	Boomer bust	208	1
5/10/07	Ride to redemption	188	2
5/11/07	Deep furrows	218	1
5/11/07	Ruby's passion	138	2
	Average	**346.6**	**4.3**

Endnotes

1 Acknowledgements: My thanks to the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments, and Andrew Blencowe for his research assistance.

2 The URL for Garth Turner Unedited is www.garth.ca/weblog

3 There are 308 MPs in the House of Commons. However, two seats were vacant in May 2007.

4 There were no blog entries on January 13, 2007 and February 23, 2007. Accordingly, they are excluded from the analysis in Appendix 1 and 2.

5 All quotations from Garth Turner Unedited (blog entries and poster comments) are verbatim. Spelling errors have not been changed

6 The researcher recognizes that a single individual could have posted under several names, however, there was no way to account for this.