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To Blog Oneself Free, to Lock Oneself Up
(Re)negotiations of Blogs as Spaces for Power Structures, Social Relations and Eating Disordered Girlhood

Introduction

In research concerning blogging, blogs have been viewed as spaces in which people can be themselves, free of constraints, and able to say what they think and feel about everyone around them (Reed, 2005). In this article, I aim to problematize this view by discussing blogs as spaces that affect to power structures and social relations. I ask, how can girls who blog about eating disorders construct a space as their own, while they at the same time operate within given frameworks set by the moderators of an online community? I argue that girls who blog about eating disorders challenge questions concerning public and private space. While the topic can be considered private, the space can be considered public. The private and public dichotomy is, however, blurry.[1]

Space and agency have been discussed to a great extent in feminist studies on girlhood, and the focus has often been on a girl's need for a room of her own, within certain limits, and away from the critical gaze of the public space (see, e.g. McRobbie & Garber 1976; Oinas & Colliander 2007; Björk 2013). Studies have focused in particular on what kinds of cultural spaces are constructed by and for girls, what kinds of meanings girls give to these spaces and how girls are perceived or given space within a specific culture. In this article, I argue that eating disordered girlhood is constructed in a specific space and as a specific culture, one which consequently also uses a blog as a social space. The blog, as a space, facilitates and restricts the construction of eating disordered girlhood, and the construction is socio-spatial.

With respect to public spaces, Mitchell (1995, 115) argues that public spaces are spaces for representation, that is to say, that by claiming space in public, social groups become public. This type of blogging in a public space raises a number of questions connected to gender and online space. How are these girls constructing their blogs as spaces, while they are at the same time navigating power structures? How can a blog be understood when it is also part of an online community, such as *Ungdomar.se*? Consequently, how do social relations inform eating disordered girlhood on blogs?

In this article, these questions will be discussed through the use of five metaphors that are exemplified in the eight blogs studied. The metaphors include treating the blog as a (bed)room of one's own as well as an attic, a closet, a factory and a laboratory. By discussing these five metaphors in thematic sections, the aim is not to propose one single way of understanding the blog as a space, but rather to problematize the blogs as a virtual space. Space is, in this article, understood as a practiced place (de Certeau, 1984). The space is transformed into a place through the practice of blogging. In addition, space can be conceived of as an outcome, the product of an activity, which has a temporal dimension. Following this definition, the blog as a space is constituted by sets of social relations and power structures that cut across spatial scales. The blogs studied in this article are all written by Swedish girls and the discussion takes into account the issue of power in relation to gender as an analytical research tool, which is also central in cultural girlhood studies. Even if the girls primarily blog about eating dis-

orders, the purpose of this article is not, however, to discuss eating disorders to any great extent.

The popularity of blogs and the number of bloggers and blogs has exploded since they first started to appear in a Swedish context in the mid-1990s.[2] In addition, scholars have argued that the mid-1990s was a time when something happened with the sense of being a girl, since it was a time when the new image of a girl entered the public arena with a bang and raised questions about cultural expectations of what it means to be a girl, what it should mean or even what it could mean (Söderberg, Österlund & Formark 2013, II). Earlier Nordic research on girlhood and blogging[3] consists of, for example, Dmitrow-Devold's (2013) study on how girls who blog about fashion and beauty are portrayed in Norwegian media as popular but insignificant, trendsetting but irresponsible, savvy but vulnerable, while Zettermark's (2012) study focused on how gendered norms and discourses surrounding girls' blogging habits are created and negotiated with respect to their social surroundings. Furthermore, Lövheim (2010) has discussed the most popular blogs by young Swedish females as ethical spaces, while I have previously analysed the constructions of normativity and the tactics used in blogs on eating disorders (Palmgren 2014).[4] While these studies discuss the nexus of girlhood, norms and power structures in blogs, blogs as spaces have not been problematized to a great extent. Lövheim (2010) does, however, discuss the ethical issues that are raised by blogging and the connections between personal experiences and discourses with respect to young women's self-expression, social relations and position in society.

The theoretical underpinnings of this article stem from the work of Foucault (1988) on the technologies of power, and on the body as a site of disciplinary, normalising practices. The relation between power and space is complex, since power is a network of relations between people that is negotiated within each encounter and since space is defined relationally and relatively. Following Foucault (1988), technologies of power determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or forms of domination. This, however, permits individuals to ef-

fect, either by their own means or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, thoughts and way of being so as to transform themselves and attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality (Foucault 1988, 18). The complex nexus of power and space creates different possibilities to understand blogs as space, which is discusses the analytical sections of this article. Another central concept in this article is gender, which is understood from a post-structural perspective and therefore performative. Following Butler (1990, 25), there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; therefore, gender is actualised through a series of ongoing performances. In this article, gender is exemplified by the construction of girlhood and the construction of eating disordered girlhood as a point of identification.

Material, research methods and ethics

The empirical data in this article consist of eight blogs from the Swedish online community *Ungdomar.se* [in English, *Youth.se*]. The blogs, written by Janet, Sandra, Monica, Helen, Anna, Sofia, Nilla and Maria,[5] share the joint characteristic of all being written in Swedish during the time period 2007–2011,[6] and of all focusing on eating disorders. The *Ungdomar.se* community is extraordinary in the sense that the moderators of the community present a list twenty-two rules from the outset,[7] of which one in particular, rule number ten, exerts influence over the girls whose blogs I study. This rule states that members are not allowed to publish 'thinspiration material', which includes pictures, calorie counters, daily routines connected with food and hints as to how to conceal eating disorders. If this kind of material is published on a blog, it is deleted by the moderators of *Ungdomar.se*. According to operations manager Erik Nahlén,[8] the rule was implemented because of the large number of food blogs already describing 'how much (little) the bloggers ate and how many calories the food contained'. The bloggers gave advices on how to carry on if one did not want to be hungry, uploaded pictures of extremely thin bodies and talked about how 'beautiful' they

were. Furthermore, Nahlén concluded that most of these blog posts were eliminated because of this rule. However, I discovered that this was not in fact the case, as will be shown in this article.

The research method used is close reading. Therefore, the blog posts are my starting point in the analysis, instead of theory or a hypothesis. I have first familiarised myself with the blogs, and later read the same blog posts time and time again. By this practice, I have identified *blogs as spaces,* as a theme for analysis. Following Strauss and Corbin (1990, 57–63), a systematic review of the empirical material has, furthermore, highlighted five metaphors within the same theme. This part of the study derives more from theory. The blogs has been deconstructed, systematised and reconstructed based on the five metaphors, some of which have been part of the analysis from the beginning while others only became clearer towards the end of the analytical process and my extensive reading of the material.

As Gajjala (2002, 184) states, categories such as public/private, producer/consumer, text/person and spectator/writer become blurred in online studies. This blurring of boundaries also affects ethical considerations that the researcher has to make. Questions concerning these categories also divide researchers who study online cultures. While researchers such as Eysenbach and Till (2001) and Walther (2002) argue that all material that is public is also free to use without consent, other researchers, such as Scharf (1999), argue that publishing texts online does not make them public since the writer may still perceive them as private. Following this discussion, the ethical considerations and ethical questions connected to this study have been numerous. For example, the questions have evolved around whether or not the material should be considered private or public depending on who can read the blogs. Should consent to cite be asked? Should it be asked from the bloggers? How about from the blog commentators? Should it be asked by the moderators of *Ungdomar.se*? I have decided to ask for consent from the bloggers, since we may have different takes on what is public and private, and what this means. Instead of asking for their consent via a comment, I chose to send

them a private message: all eight girls were willing to participate in the study. All of them have been anonymised, as an online nickname or blog name can be the same as a person's offline name.

The blog as a (bed)room of one's own

Feminist cultural research on space and gender often calls attention to the expression *a room of one's own*. The expression is rooted in Virginia Woolf's essay 'A Room of One´s Own'[9] (1929), and it refers to the fact that women need money and a room of their own to be able to write. Among scholars studying girlhood, McRobbie and Garber (1976) have referred to the concept of *bedroom culture* when describing how girls, together with friends, pal around in the room. One metaphor for unpacking the blog as a space is to connect the two issues of the blog and bedroom culture. I want to argue for the importance of using this metaphor by referring to a comment that the blogger Janet received after writing about how she felt about *Ungdomar.se*. The blog reader commented:

> I became a member [of the online community *Ungdomar.se*] the same exact way as you did! As soon as [doing] one search with words like 'calories', this site can be found. Sick. And yes, of course this has contributed a lot of negative things, but just like you, I also feel the positive things really outweigh [them]. I'm so incredibly happy that I have all of you here.

Both the blog post and comment show how the blogs have formed a sense of community for girls with eating disorders. In the comment, the word community refers to both the online community Ungdomar.se and also to community as an analytical concept. The definition of community has changed constantly during its long academic history, and the concept varies in terms of denotation and connotation. In this article, the concept refers to feelings of solidarity, with normative dimensions. As Fernback (2007, 49) argues, members of virtual communities speak of mutual respect and caring, but demur at the notion of true closeness; hence, the metaphor

of an online community is one of convenient togetherness without real responsibility. Even if I focus in particular on eight blogs, the number of girls connected to these blogs is much larger since the material also includes comments by readers and other bloggers. One way to interpret a blog comment is to understand the blog as a room for the eating disordered girl. While Hodkinson and Lincoln (2008) use the term *individual bedroom* to describe how blogs can symbolise a room of one's own, a room that can be controlled, I will stress the opposite: the blog as a shared (bed)room. The blog comment, written by a blog reader, suggests that Janet is by no means alone. In addition, this is also illustrated by a second comment by another blog reader:

I also found my way here after googling calorie intake. We are really not the only ones here, which is sad :/

Because of this expressed feeling of fellowship, I suggest that the expression *a (bed)room of one's own* could be used in relation to the blogs instead of *a room of one's own*. This expression illustrates a sense of community among the eating disordered girls blogging and reading blogs on *Ungdomar. se*. This community could also be expressed as a multi-dimensional social and cultural space constructed through, among other things, speech, opinions and ideas. As the comments suggest, the girls choose to search for such topics; they do not stumble upon sites about calories or eating disorders by accident. This suggests that they probably identify themselves as eating disordered girls even before starting a blog or starting to read a specific blog. The blog is their room.

This does not, however, suggest that there is an absence of norms in the shared blog room. The norms, or more precisely, by following a set of norms, the girls create a *we* and a *they*. This is exemplified especially in a blog post by Sandra:

My beloved little girls, how are you feeling? I miss you so much! I hope everything is okay with you.

In this quote, it is clear that Sandra imagines that girls are reading her blog. Who these girls are,

however, is never defined. My reading is that it is not a matter of imagining particular girls that Sandra could name by their first names; it is rather a general group of girls. Writing and publishing a blog post does not, however, automatically create a feeling of community or of belonging. It is when blog readers express a sense of togetherness by commenting that a shared room is created and the group is made visible. This is illustrated by the comments that Sandra received:

[Comment 1] That is exactly how I feel! It is crazy how many nice people exist there, and it is really crazy how many of them I have established contact with! I love [the online community] because of this. We are, without a doubt, the most fierce girls in the world <3

[Comment 2] That is exactly how I feel! You are all so nice, and without all the comments and texts one would have been so much more worn down. You are so nice! <3 <3 <3

[Comment 3] Oh, the unity in this place is so incredibly great. And so are you! <3

Here, and explicitly in the third comment, the blog as a room can be understood as a space for sharing mutual feelings and experiences, and as generous and big. In addition, by Sandra referring to 'beloved little girls', she is helping construct it as a girls-only space. This makes the blog room into a safe space, one where private thoughts can be shared, as illustrated by this example from Monica's blog:

My head is a mess at the moment. I do not know how come, maybe there is some kind of re-organisation going on. I do not understand myself. I am left in some kind of imaginary world, in a sense of security. But I think that this has to change. I am scared to death. [...] What one does defines who one is, or is it who one is that decides what one does? No, it is how one does something that is important. I am confused. [...]

The fact that the blog exists and that Monica is able to write in the way she does can be under-

stood when viewing the blog as a room where she is not judged and where her words can take up space. Regardless of whether or not her thoughts are structured, they are still allowed. Nonetheless, when the blog post is read in relation to the blog comments, the blog is not merely a room of Monica's own, but again a shared room. One blog reader commented:

I really love how you write, even if the content is not always positive.
    But I do relate a lot. You are good.

The above example as well as the earlier ones demonstrate it is quite common for blog readers to express mutual feelings. In fact, it is the possibility to comment that makes it into a room of their own.

How to make the blog into a public bedroom

In feminist research, the expression *a room of one's own* covers an ambivalent tradition, one which defines an indecisiveness between the right to privacy, difference and identity as well as the risk of being excluded, imprisoned and made invisible (Widegren 2010, 178). This ambivalence is also applicable to blogs as spaces. So far, my main argument has been that the sharing and sense of community construct a shared private space. In the following section, this argument and interpretation will be problematized, since the blog is a public medium.

When Janet began writing her blog, she expressed in her first blog post ever that she does not know why she started. Nonetheless, she continued by stating that she thinks that it may be because it is good to put words to her thoughts, and especially because she does not have a friend that she can talk to or who knows what she is going through. If a girl's room is understood as a room where girls can share secrets with friends in private, then the blogs in this study can be understood in the same way, as I have already discussed. But since a blog is public, free for whomsoever to visit, read and comment on, then there is also

a great possibility for other girls to find, for example, Janet's blog. But even if a blog can be understood as public and as a room that makes new formulations of girl culture and also new forms of communication possible, then the online world is very much a part of the girls' everyday lives, and vice versa. Therefore, life online does not necessarily differ from a girl's life away from the keyboard. Of course not every girl blogger will find friends or a sense of belonging online or through the practice of blogging. However, the chances of girls finding others who are will to listen increase through the practice of blogging. In the case of Janet and her initial indication of a desire to find friends or readers who would know what she is going through, her desire was fulfilled through her blog. Several others were already blogging about eating disorders on *Ungdomar.se* when Janet began her blog; later, she claimed that she found a sense of togetherness both with the other bloggers and also with the blog readers who commented on Janet's blog posts. She thanks them for this support.

As the blogs are part of a larger online community, the numerous bloggers and readers on *Ungdomar.se* have found another way of creating a shared room, or a community within a community, via visual means. Even though popular culture and the aesthetics of girls' bedroom culture have been defined through a sense of excess, a commercially constructed dream landscape for princesses, glitter and trimmings (Sparke 1995), and even though Fakatsa[10] girls' blogs are dominated by the colour pink and decorated with celebrities, kitsch and Japanese iconography (Vaisman 2011), none of these possibilities are available on the *Ungdomar.se* site. The bloggers posting on the *Ungdomar.se* site do not have the possibility to change the appearance or the colours of the page, and very few include pictures. Instead, typography and orthography are used to change the aesthetics of the blog, as can be seen in a blog post by Helen:

Yesterday was most probably the suckiest day, and today I just want to die.
    I will never[11] ever be in my boyfriend's proximity when he is drunk.

Every dream, goal and hope was smashed in one fucking talk and I feel so empty. I do not understand how one can destroy so much by just opening one's mouth. And this is how it always goes. […] I am thinking about taking a shower, but I do not want to see my disgusting body. All evening, yesterday, my boyfriend grabbed my f.a.t and called it chubb and then he said that he will buy us a work-out-machine.

Invisible text: Yes, I would love that, maybe one would then be able to get control over one's disgusting f.a.t.s.o body […]

In the blog post, the words fat and fatso are spelled with punctuation in the middle of the word. This is not an uncommon practice in the blogs that I studied, and the words are most often related to the body, eating and weight. By punctuating the words in this manner, Helen's blog post cannot be found if the moderators happen to use the online community's search engine to search for these two words. Therefore, this revolutionary way of spelling can be interpreted as a tactic used to subvert rule number ten; it is a form of resistance. This is both a good example of how eating disordered blogging girls demonstrate resistance, but it can also serve as an example of how the blog is made into a girl's bedroom, which can be interpreted as a form of ornament through orthography. In addition, the only way of playing with colours on the blog is to do it using the 'hide text' function. The use of 'invisible text' indicates that Helen has chosen to format the text in such a way that white text is written on a white background. When this is done, the phrase 'invisible text' becomes visible to the reader and the reader knows to mark the space after the phrase. Then, the text will be made visible.[12] The bloggers use whatever mean available to them for making the blog into their public bedroom. They make it into a room that looks like their own room. This is also evident when reading Janet's blog, where she at the beginning did not use this type of orthography and typography, but very soon picked it up from other bloggers on *Ungdomar.se*. In this context, agency refer to taking up space at a specific social location and making the space one's own.

The blog post by Helen also illustrates the Foucauldian way of understanding power. At the end of the post, Helen expresses the fact that her goal is to control her body. The blog post can be interpreted as a confession. While done in the public, the act of blogging may still be analysed as agency even though there is also a strong need to moderate one's tone or language because of the norms within a particular group or culture, e.g. the eating disordered blogging culture. In a way, I could even argue that they are perceived as being eating disordered precisely because they blog about it in public. Thus, eating disordered blogging is in this case performative, as it is strongly connected to *performing* an eating disordered identity. This also includes specific anticipations about blogging practices, since in order to pass for an eating disordered girl in written text, a blogger is expected to address certain topics, feelings and words. Performativity also includes repetition. In other words, the act of performing an eating disordered identity must be done consistently and repeatedly. Therefore, power not only stems from the moderators of *Ungdomar.se*, i.e. the society as a whole, but also from other blogging girls, as norms in relation to blogging and eating disorders among girls also play a part. Blogging is dependent on form, content and social context. The blog posts studied in this article are similar with respect to themes, language use and wording, which means that I have not found any comments that question the blogger.

In the blog post by Helen, her boyfriend is mentioned throughout. If agency entails playing discourses against each other, then interpreting the blog as a girl's public bedroom involves an attempt to offset a hegemonic masculinity in relation to public space. Therefore, agency is a form of resistance, since the girl bloggers constitute power relations in ways that diverge from the politics of the online community. This does not only apply to the eating disordered girl bloggers on *Ungdomar.se*, but also to girl bloggers more generally in relation to printed media. In Swedish printed media, girls as bloggers are defined, commented upon and controlled through hegemonic discourses (Palmgren 2014, 101). This contributes to creating and maintaining a normative perception of girlhood, but it also contributes to gendering blogs as girly. The gendering includes not

only the themes of the blog, but also the bloggers' imagined interests and technical skills, or lack thereof, as male and female categories are separated and perceived as complementary. In addition, subversive girlhood and dominant blogging girls are devalued or experienced as threatening or problematic, something which also contributes to maintaining the sense of a normative girlhood (Palmgren 2014, 112–122). One reason for this is that a blog can be understood as public, which historically has been understood as a masculine sphere, and girl bloggers are therefore perceived as threatening because they seem to be claiming a masculine space. This is one way of highlighting the ambivalence about a blog being both a private and public space, and also as a feminine yet masculine space. While there is a right to express different ideas on a blog, since it is after all for private thoughts, it is also public and thus there is the possibility of being excluded from a group if one does not follow the norms set by a particular group of bloggers.

The blog as an attic and a closet

> I use the blog as an anonymous place where I can write whatever I feel. I just have to get rid of everything in my head, why the hell should it be so difficult. I should become immune and dumb and oblivious and stupid for real, live in this fake world. That is what I should [do], but now I am stuck in this swamp, walk around in the shit, cannot get up, just sink deeper […]

The citation from Monica's blog can be discussed in relation to two metaphors connected to spatiality: an attic and a closet. The attic metaphor refers to literature scholars Gilbert and Gubar's (1978) notion of *the Madwoman in the attic,* which they discuss in fictional writing. According to them, a woman's text has to hide female rage and madness and present an angel-like version of the woman to suit the needs of a patriarchal world. With respect to the blog posts and bloggers, I cannot claim that the rage is hidden. Rather, the blog is a space where rage is permitted, and to some extent even desired, by the girl

or the blog reader. In other words, it is what is expected. The attic can be described as half-finished and undecorated, which is illustrated quite well in the example from Monica's blog. The blog becomes an attic for girl bloggers who want to express that they are mad and angry, while girls traditionally are expected to be happy, silent and content. The attic becomes a storage room and a place to keep certain thoughts out of the way so that the girls can continue to operate in what Monica refers to as a 'fake world'.

The expression *the angel of the house* has been used by Woolf (1942) to describe how women are expected to be charming and conciliatory and to tell lies if they are to succeed. Some of the blogging girls on *Ungdomar.se* have provided links to another blog they have outside of the online community. When this has been the case, I have briefly visited this blog as well. I have found that those particular blogs fit better the role of the angelic blogger house. Such blogs are open windows to classmates, friends, family and acquaintances. While the blogger on the blog at Ungdomar.se often uses a nickname and only rarely posts pictures, she will use her real name and also publish photographs where she can be recognised on blog posts outside of the online community. This is where a 'correct and real girl' is constructed at the same time as the other, real, enraged and mad girl is unlocking a door to the attic on the blog at *Ungdomar.se*.[13]

The attic can also be understood as a safe haven, as a space where the blogger does not have to pretend to be someone she does not feel she is or wants to be, or as a space where she can be truthful. This relates the attic metaphor to the notion of the angel of the house. As in the blog post by Monica, the blog as an honest space is expressed in a blog post written by Sofia:

> Did not end up working out as much as planned because of muscle fever from yesterday. It is important that the body gets a chance to rest once in a while. I ended up jogging to some encouraging music though. Lovely.
>
> I was stopped by dad when I was heading out.
>
> Dad: You know that you are not allowed to work out, right?

Oh my god, dad! I am not thaaat underweight anymore! I do not weigh [Invisible text:] forty-two [kilos] anymore. I have gained eight kilograms. I should be allowed to work out again, right?

I did not tell him that. Instead I hissed: I am allowed [to], all right!

Neither mum nor dad knows that I am actually out running. They think that I am going out for a slow walk. But it does not hurt, right? Sometimes one has to modify the truth a bit. If I feel good after running, then I run. Anything is better than just lying in bed in depression's firm grip.

In the blog post, it appears as if Sofia's parents know about her eating disorder, but there are other things that she keeps as a secret. Due to this fact, the blog is transformed into a safe haven where Sofia keeps her secrets at the same time as they are no longer secrets on the blog. Another reason for understanding the blog as a closet and safe haven is the practice of using orthographic and typographic means to communicate. The studied blogs are part of *Ungdomar.se*, but in some ways they are invisible since they hide words that are perceived as dangerous.

If the blog as an attic is closely linked to the notion of angelic blogging, then the closet metaphor is more ambiguous in and of itself. Whereas the attic metaphor refer to structures and norms associated with madness and expressing one's feelings, the closet refers mainly to a defining structure of oppression (Sedgwick Kosofsky 1990). As a metaphor, the closet is paradoxical. It both hides and is a place for which to come out. Blogging could be said to allow the blogging girls an un-regulated and un-censored outlet for whatever they wish to say, and it might allow them to be visible at the same time. But since these bloggers have chosen to blog in an online community with regulations, restrictions and moderators, this is not necessarily the case. Thus, the blog becomes a closet for un-desirable identifications. Let me discuss this idea more through an example from Nilla's blog posts on self-harm:

Most often I do it because of a'ngst or because I want to punish myself. Sometimes I also want to punish myself for having angst. I can be crying and cu'tting myself, and do not stop cu'tting before I stop crying, which is stupid. It is difficult to explain. Or then it is because I have hurt someone else, for example mum. I may have promised her not to c'ut myself, but then she understands that I am doing it and she is disappointed. Instead, I would like her to be angry. But then I get a bad conscience and need to punish myself. I know that this is not logical, I should not c'ut myself because of a bad conscience for cu'tting myself. But that is just how it is. […] Well, I can as well admit that I sometimes cu't myself when I am bored. I can be extremely restless and then it happens that I take a razo'r blade… very low, yuck, I am too ashamed because of this. Or I am ashamed because of all the things I do, and everything I am about… but yeah, whatever.

In the blog post, Nilla writes about a phenomenon that is considered taboo and that can also be considered an undesirable identification. She lets the blog reader know that her mother knows that she cuts herself, but she also expresses the fact that this is a practice that her mother does not want her to do. In the blog post, it is also obvious that it is an un-desired practice for Nilla as well. Instead of talking about it with friends and family, she writes about it in a blog. But still, by writing about committing self-harm in the blog, the practice is made public. The closet metaphor can therefore be interpreted as performative since it is made manifest through the subject's act of speech, which is exemplified here by Nilla. Since she writes as she does in the blog, the blog also manifests itself as a space where Nilla comes out as someone who commits self-harm. The notion of *coming out* assumes that self-knowledge and self-identification takes the form of public expression. If Nilla would not blog about self-harm, she would not publicly be identified as the other, since self-harm is not the norm in society. The paradox of hiding at the same time as coming out allows the blogging girls to explore practices outside of normative understandings and representations of girlhood, which also helps them construct the blog as a space for reconstructing girl positions. Girlhood, or more particularly, self-harmed and eating disordered girlhood, is reconstructed in the hidden spaces of these blogs.

Traditionally, a girl's room has been interpreted as a place where a girl can escape the surveillance and disciplining of adults, but also as a place that enables adults' assaults on girls (Widegren 2010, 178). In the case of the bloggers, who are members of the online community *Ungdomar.se*, this is however not the case. The assault, in this case, comes in the form of the moderators having the option of erasing blog posts whenever they choose and without prior notice. Consequently, the blog can be interpreted as a closet, since a closet refers to a defining structure for oppression. An example where a blog being erased is mentioned can be found in Helen's blog post, where she writes:

> I get so tired when the moderators erase posts. But I am still cheerful and no one can stop me from [doing] this.

In the blog post, Helen implies that she will continue blogging and living the way she does even if the moderators would erase some of her posts. The very existence of the closet reflects the girls' relations to power, as the possibility of their blogs being erased demonstrates. However, the closet metaphor also implies that the blog can be interpreted as a place where the blogger can feel at peace and conceal undesirable or secret identifications, but also feel closed in. The power to erase and the mere existence of rules for an online community suggest that eating disordered girls are referred to as non-normative. The norm for *Ungdomar.se* could be said to be compulsory un-eating disordered girlhood. An externalised danger, which in this case is exhibited by eating disordered girls, is expressed by the moderators through rule number ten. Therefore, it is paradoxical that the girl bloggers choose to write about eating disorders at *Ungdomar.se*, since this expressed girlhood in practice can be understood as resistance and protest. Furthermore, this particular online community is the only one I know of in Sweden that has an explicit rule against writing about eating disorders. The resistance can be interpreted as agency. The eating disordered girl's blogging thus becomes a subversive spatial practice.

If the blogs can be understood as closets or attics, *Ungdomar.se* as a whole could be referred to as the panopticon. For Foucault (1977, 83), the panopticon provides the image of the disciplinary society's aspirations, as it consists of a twelve-sided polygon with a central tower through which a superintendent could observe the behaviour of institutionalised inmates. Since the possibility that posts can be erased without warning is ever present in the form of the rule, the threat of constant observation could lead to a process of internalisation and reduce the need for discipline. But as the girls transform the blog into a closet by their use of tactics and rebellious spelling of words, they manage to undermine the idea of the panopticon.

The blog as a laboratory and a factory

The fourth and fifth metaphors, which can be used to describe the spatiality of the blog, are that of a laboratory and a factory. In early internet research, it was common among scholars to refer to the internet as an environment with unlimited potential for identity management, and the expression *identity laboratory* was often used.[14] The expression implies that people can play any social role they like and transform themselves however they like while being online. Even if I choose to use the metaphor of a laboratory, I will discuss how it relates to limitations, norms and diagnostics when exploring such identifications as girl and eating disordered, which follow a more nuanced perspective in more recent internet research on constructing gender identities online.[15] One could argue that the blogger can, in this laboratory or factory, either together with others or alone construct and re-construct girlhood and eating disorders, play with words and identifications, and expand the norms related to traditional girlhood or medically diagnosed eating disorders, but this cannot be done without restrictions. I will first discuss the identification as a eating disordered girl more closely, and later the identification as a girl.

In one blog post, Janet writes:

I feel like I shouldn't be here,
>   I'm too f.at to play eating disordered.
>   This is exactly how I feel.
>   I don't want to admit that I feel bad after every small bite of something, because it simply feels like 'yeah right, so how did you get fat?' […]

In the blog post, Janet expresses the fact that she feels she is too fat to be called eating disordered, or as she states 'play eating disordered'. Eating disordered is something that is done, it is performative. The verb 'play' may refer to an attempt to pass as something that Janet does not feel that she is. Or else she feels that she is not doing it in the right way. This highlights how there are norms connected to how an eating disorder should be done and what kinds of expressions the disorder should take to pass as a normal eating disorder. If Janet would feel that she is able to pass and play the part in a successful manner, then the blog could be interpreted as a laboratory. However, successful repetition is necessary in order to pass oneself off as being normal. Since Janet can be interpreted as feeling she has failed to consistently do this, the blog can be interpreted as a factory, one where consistence is very much anticipated and expected.

The experimental or performative aspects of blogging are not just present in the way a person constructs her or his identity. The example from Janet's blog also illustrates how a hierarchy exists in connection with eating disorders. According to the blog post, one cannot have an eating disorder if one is not thin enough. But passing oneself off as having a specific eating disorder is also associated with making a diagnosis, and therefore it is closely interconnected with the medical world. Blogging about having or not having an eating disorder is a recurring theme in Janet's blog. In another post, she writes:

> I feel sick when I see all the empty candy wrappers. I wasn't going to, but then I had one, then two, and now I don't even know how many.
>   A failed anorectic is exactly what I am.
>   I even have it on paper. The paper arrived today.
>   **Diagnosis: atypical anorexia nervosa.**
>   Black on white.

> Failed anorexic.
>   Other content of the letter: Janet [name changed] has, during a short time period of time, gone from 62 kg to 42 kg. Fingers and toes are often blue and the blood circulation is not good.
>   I don't know if I should laugh or cry.

In the blog post, Janet reads atypical as failed, which illustrates both how such a diagnosis carries with it an interpretative prerogative and also how she finds it important to be anorexic in the right way, to fulfil every criteria. Apparently, Janet's goal has been to pass herself off and identify as an anorexic, but she has now failed. Janet relies on the diagnosis. However, since it is not a matter of direct control and governing from the doctor, who has written the letter that now serves more as a question of confirmation (or lack thereof), the blogging girl does not experience the diagnosis as a means of exerting power. This is highlighted by the way in which there is a lack of resistance from the blogger, while there is, for example, more resistance against the moderators of the online community.

With respect to the blog as a laboratory for constructing girlhood and gender, the limitations and restrictions lie in heteronormativity and the division of gender into two categories. In a blog post by Maria, she writes that: 'boys do not like girls with bodies with nothing to grab', with the addition that the blog reader should accept herself as she is and that others will then do the same. One interpretation of this idea is that the opposite gender has the power to judge and that a heterosexual desire is expected and desired. The dichotomised gender divide between boys and girls restricts the laboratory metaphor, even if a simplified category of girl is seldom mentioned or highlighted in the blogs.

The simplified categories of boy and girl are exemplified especially in lists that circulate in the blogosphere. The themes of these lists are most often about the body, femininity or masculinity, and favourites of different kinds. The purpose of these lists is to tick the box for every phenomenon that applies to the person. One example of these lists can be found in Nilla's blog. First, there is a list where the blogger is asked to tick a box

for twenty-two phenomena, experiences and acts in relation to specific objects, drinks, people, TV series and feelings. This first part of the list has the heading 'my feminine side', which indicates that these twenty-two examples all have feminine connotations. Some examples include 'has joined a friend to the store as someone giving advice on taste', 'talked about feelings', 'thought about names for my children', 'felt like having a cup of tea' and 'hugged a guy'. The blogger receives one point for every box that applies; Nilla received thirteen points. After this first list, Nilla attached a similar list of twenty-two examples under the heading 'my masculine side'. To give just a few examples, this list consists of 'eaten a bloody steak', 'been responsible for the barbeque during a barbeque party', 'felt hungry after eating a whole pizza', 'used your hands for the purpose of hurting another person' and 'discussed breasts'. Nilla receive fourteen points on this list. The list can be analysed and understood in many different ways.

On the one hand, the list can be understood as advocating a binary view of gender, one which is then transferred to the virtual sphere, despite the fact that early internet research argued that such a sphere was free of constraints regarding gender, race, social class, and so forth. Nonetheless, femininity and girlhood, and masculinity and boyhood, are performed through the list and in relation to the other gender. On the other hand, the list can also be understood as problematizing femininity and masculinity as binary categories. It also illustrates how gender identification can be experienced as a narrow room. Even if the list dichotomises femininity and masculinity, the blogger ticks boxes from both sides, thus in a way subverting certain aspects of gender identification. For this reason, gender is not biologized on the list. Following Sundén (2015), who developed an understanding of gender as fundamentally technological and, as such, always broken, it would be impossible for Nilla, or for anyone else, to do gender, or pass as feminine, in a perfectly successful way. According to Sundén (2015), gender as technological is a fragile and unstable bit of machinery prone to breakages and breakdowns. This means that continuous maintenance, upgrades and reboots might move gender in the direction of being an illusion.

The blog post by Nilla, in which the list was published, does not consist of anything other than the words 'HAHA :P', with the heading 'I am bored :P'. When Nilla completed the list, the male side received one more point than the female side, which may be one of the reasons why Nilla ended the list with laughter. There is a glitch, however. Sundén (2015), in her study on (trans)gender, social media presence and public transition of Isabella Bunny Bennett, refers to it as a struggle with binaries, such as the gender binary.

'HAHA' can be interpreted as a way for Nilla to indicate that she regards it as funny that she received one more point in the male column. She recaptures her female identity through laughter. Another interpretation could be that the laughter is directed at the list and how it ascribes different phenomena as either/or. Accordingly, filling in the list can be perceived as a subversive act, one which challenges the gender binary. In other words, gender is performed in an unexpected way and serves as a subversive act. Hence, gender as binary category is impossible. The laughter therefore indicates that Nilla is well aware of her act and chooses to make the act visible through her laughter so that the act will not lose power or agency. The examples in the list can be considered as a space for making something visible and as a space that enables a normative gaze and helps users construct specific ways of doing gender in a normative or non-normative manner. This normative gaze exists within a system of knowledge and power relations, where specific people are viewed and judged by others. The blog can therefore be both a laboratory for subversion and also a laboratory, a space, for highlighting limitations and norms.

Conclusion

In this article, I have analysed how girls who blog about eating disorders construct the blog as their own space, while still operating within the restrictions set by moderators of *Ungdomar.se*, an

online community. The material that the article has stemmed from is eight blogs written by girls during the time period 2007–2011. All of them are, on different levels, blogging about eating disorders, whereas one of them is doing so in combination with writing about self-harm. The blog as a space is deconstructed through five metaphors: a (bed)room of one's own, an attic, a closet, a factory and a laboratory. The article views space as socially constructed, and therefore connected to culture and time. The particular culture that functions as a backdrop for this empirically oriented article is the culture of eating disorders.

Generally, blogs have been viewed as spaces in which people can be themselves, free of constraints and able to say what they think and feel about everyone around them (Reed, 2005). In this article, I have problematized this view by discussing blogs as spaces in relation to power structures and social relations. The context of the blogs studied in this article is important since the eating disordered bloggers are governed by the rules set by the site *Ungdomar.se*. As I have shown, the blogging girls still manage to operate within given frameworks and create a space for action regardless of this regulation by using, for example, orthographical and typographical practices. However, social relations governed by blog readers, other bloggers, friends, boyfriends and families are very much present, even if the bloggers themselves are unaware of it. Furthermore, the identity, in this case that of eating disordered girlhood, of those present in a particular space, and thus the identity of the space being produced, is also constructed by the gaze of the others present on the site rather than by the performers. In this way, girls may construct a room of their own,

as earlier girlhood studies suggest, but when the space consists of blogs the girls are not separate from the critical gaze of the public.

Both the blogs and the identities of the girls can be perceived of as spaces for negotiation and framing. Moreover, I use different metaphors to show how the intersections between space, girlhood and eating disorders are constructed. The nexus of these intersections affects how space is perceived and how the specific blogs can be represented. Rather than discussing the blogs as a space free from constraints, or treating the blogs as one single metaphor, I have chosen to problematize the blog as a space. Thus, I do not argue that the metaphors I have chosen to discuss more closely are the only possible ones. The blog as a space can be understood as both private and public, as individual and collective, as restricted by limitations and free of them, and as a space for resistance and adaption. For example, I argue that the blog can be interpreted as an attic because it is private, as a space for resistance on both an individual and collective level. However, by discussing the blogs as a (bed)room, I have chosen to interpret them in a collective manner, as both private and public. These binaries are quite blurry in fact. At the same time, since the blog is a space for a girl blogger to identify herself as eating disordered, so as to free herself, it is a space where she can hide and also feel that she is locked up. The metaphors are interconnected through the identifications of the girl bloggers, while at the same time the different metaphors open up new possibilities for alternative identifications. Identifying oneself as eating disordered affects how the blog is used, but the blog also affects how eating disorders are illustrated.

NOTES

1 Previous research on the public and private in online spaces consist of, for example, studies by Donath and boyd (2004) and Papacharissi (2009).

2 During this time, the word blog (in Swedish blogg) was, however, not used in Sweden; instead, the term online diary was frequently used.

3 For an overall review of theoretical and empirical research on blogs as girls spaces, see Černá, Blinka & Romana Seganti (2012

4 This article builds on parts of a chapter from my doctoral dissertation. In this article, I focus more closely on nuancing the discussion regarding the different possibilities for blogs as spaces and relate the empirical study to agency as a theoretical concept.

5 The names of the bloggers have been changed, and the blog posts and comments have been translated from Swedish into English by the author of the article.

6 In December of 2012, the moderators of the community announced that changes would be made to the community and that the blogs and blog function would no longer be included in the new version of Ungdomar.se. At the beginning of April 2013, the changes were implemented and the blogs that are discussed in this article cannot be found or read anymore. The community was described in 2012 as Sweden's largest information site regarding health and well-being, with 50 000 questions being posted for experts and 100 000 unique visitors each week. The members of the community were between 15

and 24 years of age, and 59% of the members were women.

7 http://www.ungdomar.se/about_us.php [5.4.2012.]

8 In communication by e-mail (8.11.2010).

9 More specifically, Woolf's description of a hypothetical case where William Shakespeare has a sister who writes texts of the same caliber as William, but despite this, is not able to achieve the same success.

10 Fakatsa is a Hebrew acronym for young female derogatory language directed at 'loud' and extreme feminine performances and their associated practices—following fashion fads, narcissistic obsession with appearance, excessive consumerism (Vaisman 2011).

11 On some of the blog posts, words such as never, angst and fat has been written several times in a row without a blank space. This can be interpreted as adding emphasis to the word.

12 For a more detailed discussion of this, see Palmgren (2014, 71–83).

13 Because of ethical questions about anonymity, and because I have only asked for consent to cite blogs on *Ungdomar.se,* I am not doing a closer comparison of the two very different blogs.

14 See, for example, Turkle (1995) and Wallace (1999).

15 For example, Wajcman (2004, 7) argues that technology is both a source and a consequence of gender relations. Another example is van Doorn's (2011, 535) study of how lived social relations, as well as embodied gender and sexuality, extend into digital space.

SOURCES

Research material

Eight blogs published during the years 2007–2011 on *Ungdomar.se*. Prints have been archived by the author.

E-mail correspondence with Erik Nahlén, 8.11.2010. Archived by the author.

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KEYWORDS