



Norwegian Girls in Mainstream Blogging

Performed Blogging Selves, Experienced Digital Competences, Gendered Discourses

Karolina Dmitrow-Devold
Doctoral dissertation
Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)

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Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences

© Karolina Dmitrow-Devold

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Frontpage illustration: Part of the artwork "Skiløper" by Gitte Dæhlin (1956 - 2012) from 1993. The artwork is to be seen on the 1st floor of the main building at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences - Lillehammer.

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Summary

During recent years, blogging has become established as an important part of Norwegian girls' digital media culture. Girls who blog are often trivialized in the Norwegian public sphere; the activity itself is frequently the subject of heated debate but we seldom hear about the experiences tied to the blogging of these girls. This dissertation acknowledges, documents, and theorizes girls' experiences of participation in mainstream blogging in Norway that is competitive, body-focused, and commercialized.

This work emphasizes girls' perspectives in order to address some of the gaps in the literature that often fails to shed light on girls' experiences of identity performances online and their meaning making of digital competences. Combining qualitative in-depth interviewing, ethnographic analyses of blogs, and critical discourse analysis of Norwegian press coverage in a longitudinal design, I investigate how girls perform blogging selves over time, which digital competences they find meaningful for participation in mainstream blogging, and how they are positioned in the press commentary via the identity label of "pink blogger". Drawing on a combination of theoretical frameworks and methods, I strive for a holistic investigation of girls' experiences that takes into consideration both the realities of everyday interactions with the mainstream blogging community and the audience, and of the wider cultural contexts and gendered discourses that frame, regulate, and discipline these everyday interactions.

According to my findings, girls in mainstream blogging are trivialized in the press commentary as superficial, body-obsessed, and commercial pink bloggers. In contrast to these homogenizing and fixed implications of the pink blogger label, I argue that girls perform identity in blogs in various ways, picking up strategies of performing the blogging self according to goals that often change, and identifying with these performances to varying degrees. Similarly, the meanings the girls tie to digital competences are varied, both aligning and contrasting with what is documented as beneficial in the literature. While girls are undoubtedly agents in performing identity and developing digital competences, the identity performances and development of digital competences are also clearly framed by the norm of competitiveness, body focus, and commercialization of the mainstream blogging community as well as by the wider cultural contexts and gendered discourses beyond this community, including the pink blogger label and the normative ideal of the gender equal, socially engaged Nordic Girl.

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List of Papers

Paper 1 (published)

Dmitrow-Devold, K. (2013). “Superficial! Body Obsessed! Commercial!” Norwegian press representations of girl bloggers. *Girlhood Studies*, 6(2), 65-82.

Paper 2 (published)

Dmitrow-Devold, K. (2017). Performing the self in the mainstream. Norwegian girls in blogging. *Nordicom Review*, 38(1), 1-14.

Paper 3 (published)

Dmitrow-Devold, K. (2017). What matters to the girls? Norwegian girls’ experiences of digital competences in mainstream blogging. *Young*, 25(2), 1-18.

Part 1: Introduction

1.1 Focus on Teenage Girls' Experiences in Mainstream Blogging

During recent years, blogging has consolidated itself as an important part of girls' media culture in Norway (Fuglerud, 2013). While debates about young female bloggers are widely engaged and the bloggers are often trivialized in the Norwegian public sphere, academic scholarship on the experiences of Norwegian girls who blog is very scarce. Focusing on the girls' stories of participation in the mainstream blogging community, this dissertation aims to acknowledge, document, and theorize their experiences of participation.

This work focuses on teenage girls' digital media production, identity performances in online-based settings, and informal learning through participation in out-of-school digital practices, thus carving out a space in the intersection of media studies, digital literacy studies, and socio-cultural studies about girls and girlhood. Departing from girls' experiences of participation in mainstream blogging, I investigate the relationships between identity and digital literacy by scrutinizing how girls use blogging as a medium to perform identity and how they are positioned in the public discourse via the identity label (Moje & Luke, 2009) of pink blogger based on their participation in the practice of blogging. I also look at how this identity label makes them see themselves. The ideologies carried by the definitions of literacy that are "embedded in institutions, broader cultural dimensions, and power" (Ito et al., 2010, 24) frame what counts as useful competences. Acknowledging this, I investigate digital competences from the point of view of what the girls formulate as meaningful for their participation in mainstream blogging, rather than from the normative or pre-established notions of competences.

This dissertation focuses on girls' experiences of participation in *mainstream* blogging. I define mainstream blogging in Norway as encompassing both the blogg.no community, which is the largest, and the blog genre viewed as most typical for young female bloggers—personal blogs including life updates and so-called outfit photos¹. I focus on blogging, first, because this digital practice has hardly been subject to academic scrutiny in Norway in spite of its significant role in Norwegian girls' digital media culture. Second, it is important to investigate girls' participation in the mainstream blogging com-

¹ Outfit photos present the blogger in various outfits, often with the information about where they were bought.

munity because this online-based space illustrates some of the wider trends in youth's digital media culture in Norway. Investigating mainstream blogging can shed some light on the experiences and processes related to Norwegian girls' participation in contemporary digital media culture.

1.2 Mainstream Blogging as Part of Norwegian Girls' Digital Media Culture

When I started the project, 42% of girls aged 9-16 blogged in Norway, against 11% of boys (Norwegian Media Authority, 2012). Emilie Nereng (whose blogging name is Voe) was the first teenage girl who made it as a celebrity blogger, after having climbed to number one position on the *blogg.no* community's top list at the age of 14. Like Voe, some Norwegian girls who authored personal blogs started to acquire massive audiences and became recognizable not only in the blogging community but also in the public sphere, thanks to coverage in the traditional mass media. This kind of visibility of girls was new. What was also new was that personal blogs that tended earlier to have small audiences and anonymous authors, were now recognizable and some of them were visited by tens of thousands of readers a day (Fuglerud, 2013).

Voe became number one on the *blogg.no* top list not long after this community had introduced this ranking that listed the most visited blogs. In 2010, the top list also displayed the number of visits, which made the list even more valuable because it made visible and confirmed the position of the most read bloggers. In turn, the status gained by being listed high in the ranking could bring social and financial benefits (Fuglerud, 2013). Girls and young women who gained top positions on the blog rankings became micro-celebrities (Senft, 2008, 2013) for their blog audiences, and at times entered the public space as celebrities of popular culture, covered by the mass-media, and appearing in TV shows. Top female bloggers even had a version of an online celebrity gossip magazine in the form of a blog, authored by some of the readers, entitled *toppsladring*² (top gossip). At the same time, the girls who blogged in the mainstream blogging community were being called pink bloggers and associated with the values perceived as superficial the criticism of which is "socially acceptable" (Fuglerud, 2015, 15, my translation).

Big audiences also attracted commercial actors interested in using the blogs as channels for advertising. Over time, the blog lists on *blogg.no* multiplied (bloggers were ranged according to age, gender, and place of residence) and became the core around which the blogging community was structured. This structure reinforced the aspect of competitiveness among the bloggers. Some of the most popular blogs authored by young women have been professionalized and commercialized. Blogging has

² <http://toppsladring.blogspot.no/>

become their full-time occupation; it generates income from advertising and cooperation with sponsoring companies. This professionalization of personal blogs had an important effect in that maintaining large audiences had become crucial for professional bloggers since this secured their income. Another effect was that the top blogs reminded less and less of home-made documentations of teenage life in their evocation of more and more fashion magazines, with the bloggers looking like models posing for photo-shoots. When we compare the self-presentations of top female bloggers in 2011 (when I started this project) with those in 2016 (as I was completing it), the difference is striking. It is like comparing a teenage girl's diary³ with an advertisement-packed glossy magazine. Importantly, the vast majority of the blogs authored by Norwegian girls and young women never make it big as do the top bloggers, or gain audiences that would allow for drawing any material benefits from their blogging.

As I analyze the girls' experiences of participation departing from their everyday blogging practices contextualized by the ongoing interactions with the blogging community and audiences, I situate these analyses within the femininity norms and a larger cultural and technological context that I have identified as being particularly significant frames of girls' participation in mainstream blogging. Today, girls' performances online are contextualized by the postfeminist media culture in which the body is central to identity and the consumption of fashion and beauty products are framed as empowering to individual girls. The postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2007) is also characterized by the sexualization of culture and a focus on self-surveillance and discipline. I view mainstream blogging as illustrative of the postfeminist media culture's preoccupation with "lifestyle, celebrity and body work" (Attwood, 2011, 207). Moreover, I position the mainstream blogging community as illustrative of three trends typical of contemporary youthful digital media practices: 1) the competing for positive feedback within a judgment culture (Hirdman, 2007) since girls' online-based identity performances are continually being evaluated by the audience and commented on; 2) the celebrity culture (boyd, 2008) since, as internet personalities, top female bloggers become celebrities of popular culture recognizable by the general public; and 3) the increasing commercialization of teen and children's digital practices (Schor, 2004) since some bloggers receive material benefits from blogging. I conceptualize the pink blogger label used to denote female bloggers in mainstream blogging in Norway as a materialization of a gendered discourse exemplary of the dismissal of feminized media genres.

1.3 Research Questions

The overarching research question of this dissertation is:

³ Whereas I use the term diary to illustrate the amateur character of the most popular blogs in the past, I do not conceptualize these personal blogs as online diaries, as some scholars (see for example, Rettberg, 2008) have done.

How do Norwegian girls experience participating as bloggers in a mainstream blogging community?

The main research question is operationalized with the following sub-questions:

1. *How do the girls perform selves in blogs over time? (Paper 2)*
2. *Which digital competences do the girls experience as meaningful, and how do their digital practices change over time? (Paper 3)*

While the girls' experiences of performing the self and of meaningful competences addressed in the above sub-questions are of key interest to this work, an additional sub-question was added in the preliminary phase of the project.

How are the girls who blog in the mainstream blogging community positioned in the public discourse via the identity label of pink blogger and how do they reflect upon this label? (Papers 1 and 2)

In the preliminary phase of the project, I identified the label of pink blogger as dominant in the Norwegian discourse about teenage female blogging and as a label that was negotiated by girls in mainstream blogging because of its negative connotations. By including this additional sub-question I aimed to gain an understanding of the dominant and gendered social positioning of girls in mainstream blogging that contextualizes their everyday blogging practices investigated in the subsequent phases of the project. The three sub-questions are addressed in the respective papers of this dissertation as indicated in section 5.2.

1.4 Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

This work aims to shed light on girls' everyday experiences of participation in mainstream blogging and on how this participation is framed by the wider technological and socio-cultural contexts as well as by the gendered discourses and femininity norms. The eclectic theoretical approach aims to facilitate a holistic investigation of girls' digital practices, which would overcome the limitations of particular theoretical frameworks. Thus, in the analyses of girls' participation in mainstream blogging, I combine the micro-context oriented concepts of the blogging self (Lomborg, 2012) and the performed self (Goffman, 1959) and of experienced digital competences (Bjarnadóttir, 2004; Bjørgen & Nygren, 2010), with the concepts that facilitate uncovering larger cultural contexts and gender ideologies that frame the girls' participation such as identity as position (Moje & Luke, 2009), and online- and offline-based contexts as dynamically co-constructed and interpolated (Leander & McKim, 2003).

While this dissertation draws on the ethnographic approach that focuses on how "media and technology are meaningful to people in their everyday lives" (Ito et al.,

2008, 7) by investigating the girls' everyday experiences of participation in mainstream blogging, I do not position this work as an ethnography per se. Apart from applying ethnographic methods of in-depth interviewing and ethnographic content analysis (Alt-heide, 1996) of blogs, I also analyze critically the press commentary about teenage girls and young women who blog in order to identify the gendered discourses iterated in the pink blogger identity label. This aims at identifying how the participants are being positioned in the Norwegian public sphere based on their participation in mainstream blogging. This dissertation emphasizes the girls' stories of participation in the pursuit of gaining a better understanding of their experiences and perspectives connected to a feminized, competitive, and commercialized media space.

1.5 Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation is structured into five parts. In Part One, I provide a short background of Norwegian girls' participation in mainstream blogging, I present my research questions, and I provide a short summary of the theoretical and methodological approaches used in this work.

In Part Two, I situate my investigation in the existing research landscape, I identify some gaps in relevant literature, and justify my research questions. Part Three presents the theoretical frameworks and concepts used in this dissertation. In Part Four, I provide the rationale for my methods and give an account of the process of the collection and analyses of data. I also discuss some methodological weaknesses of this work. In Part Five, I provide short summaries of the Papers that form the basis of this dissertation, I present and discuss my main findings, and I specify this work's theoretical and methodological contributions. The full Papers follow Part Five.

Part 2: Situating the Project in the Research Landscape

2.1 Girls, Identity and Informal Learning in Online-based Settings

In this chapter, I situate this dissertation's focus on girls, identity, and digital competence development in online-based settings within the existing research landscape, identify some of the gaps in this landscape, and explicate how this dissertation aims to contribute to bridging these gaps. The selection of the work reviewed below includes publications that I have identified as the most informative reference points for my investigations. Given its cross-disciplinary grounding, this dissertation is in conversation with the literature covering a variety of research strands, including identity-and-literacy studies, (digital) media studies, New Literacy Studies, media literacy studies, and cultural studies of girls and girlhood. Consequently, this overview draws on a variety of theoretical frameworks and methodologies.

I start by providing a brief account of the literature search procedure in section 2.2. Section 2.3 presents an overview of the research landscape. This section is structured according to this dissertation's three crucial moments: focus on identity (section 2.3.1), focus on informal learning (section 2.3.2), and focus on the intertwinement of identity, literacy, and learning (section 2.3.3). Section 2.4 identifies some gaps in existing research, justifies the research questions by using evidence from the literature review, and explicates how addressing these research questions contributes to bridging the identified gaps in knowledge.

Although there are some studies of mainstream blogging in Norway on the Bachelor and Master level that address the issues relevant to the blogging community investigated here, like advertising and commercialization (Slagnes & Skramstad, 2015) or top bloggers' influence on young female readers' self- and body-image (Løvold, 2015; Ruth, 2014; Skogen, 2015), they have been excluded from this review as representing research work that has not been subject to the quality check process of peer review. Still, this interest in mainstream blogging among female students in Norway reflects this phenomenon's important place in girls' and young women's popular media culture.

2.2 Literature Search Procedure

At the first stage, my goal was to do a wide literature search according to the main focal points of the project: girls' blogging practices and other digital media practices; identity in online-based settings; and informal learning through participation in digital practices. I searched through multiple online research databases using general key words (in Norwegian and English) in various combinations including: girls; blog; identity; self-presentation; online; internet; social media; digital literacy; digital competence; media literacy; women; young people; teens; informal learning; and digital practices. I also searched through relevant research journals using the same key words for present and past issues. Databases and journals searched included: Bibsys (Oria); Google Scholar; Jstor; *Norsk Medietidsskrift*; *Young*; *New Media and Society*; *Convergence*; *Feminist Media Studies*; *Girlhood Studies*; *Learning, Media and Technology*; *Nordicom Review*; *Nordic Journal of Gender Research*; *Nordic Journal of Digital Literacy*; youth media use reports from EU Kids Online programs; and the Norwegian Media Authority reports. This first-stage, broad search resulted in a large literature base covering a wide range of theoretical and empirical work applying various methodologies. This was useful in providing a rough overview of theorization and empirical investigation of the concepts and topics in the project. This first search allowed me to find literature that covered multiple online-based media practices like blogging, gaming, chatting, and social networking sites; studies focused on girls/young women and those including girls and boys; studies about identity performances and self-presentation online; and studies of informal, peer-based learning in out-of-school practices and studies on digital media practices in the institutionalized context of school or extra-curricular activities.

The subsequent stage aimed at narrowing down the literature base and excluding the irrelevant work. I established the inclusion and exclusion criteria guided by the project's research questions and the main theoretical concepts. I included theoretical work applying concepts of identity and informal learning other than the ones applied in this project in order to get an overview of these different theoretical conceptualizations. In contrast, I excluded the empirical studies that included laboratory experiments because I found them irrelevant in that they focused on the interactions and behaviors elicited in experimental settings, rather than on naturally-occurring interactions.

The inclusion criteria were:

- national context: both Nordic and international studies
- study participants: girls, comparative studies of girls and boys
- age of study participants: from adolescents to young women in their 20s
- methodology: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies
- methods used: various

- type of online-based practice: blogging, social networking sites, studies including multiple practices
- context of participation: out of school, peer-based

The exclusion criteria were:

- study participants: only boys, participants older than in their 20s
- context of participation: in-school and adult-guided practices
- methods used: experimental studies
- type of publication: Bachelor and Master theses

I read through the article abstracts, scanned through the book chapters and looked through the books' tables of content and narrowed down the range of publications according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. In order to find additional literature, I searched the references of the selected publications. This was efficient, allowing for a more targeted search within the selected literature; this enriched the literature database.

As I progressed with the project during the later analytical work and that of writing the Papers, supplementary literature searches were done. While the database was extensive and covered a large body of relevant literature, it needed updating with more recent publications and supplementing with the scholarship pertaining to the concepts that I identified as relevant during the analyses as well as to the more specific research sub-questions formulated in the Papers. For Paper 1, I used additional key words: gendered discourses; hegemonic discourses and representation in the combination with the previous key words (girls; online; social media; and blog). At this early stage of the research process I also identified the concept of postfeminism and postfeminist media culture as crucial for investigating girls' participation in mainstream blogging and this lead to including the cultural studies' scholarship on girls and young women. In this respect, the work of Angela McRobbie (2000, 2009), Rosalind Gill (2007), and the recent anthologies of empirical studies about girls in the postfeminist media culture were included as especially relevant, including Gill and Scharf (2011) and Coffey, Budgeon, and Cahill (2016). For Paper 2, supplementary search words and terms were femininity; celebrity; commercialization; commodification; competitive; and performance of self. Again, I targeted the search according to the concepts and topics identified as particularly relevant for the article based on the analyzed data and research sub-questions. For Paper 3, the supplementary literature search aimed at finding recent empirical studies and studies in which literacy was linked to femininity, so I used key words like digital/media literacy; digital competence; and literacy in combination with girls and femininity.

2.3 Identity, Literacy, and Informal Learning in Girls' Online-based Practices

2.3.1. Focus on Identity

Ample research documents that identity performances in online-based spaces are selective, relational, and situated in the interactions with the context and the audience of the community as well as framed by the structure of the used online application (Lomborg, 2012; Marwick, 2014; Rettberg, 2014). Indeed, literature about girls' and young women's self-presentation online mirrors this variety (Sveningsson Elm, 2007), ranging from identity performances emphasizing the body and sexiness (see for example Hirdman, 2007; Kelly, Pomerantz, & Currie, 2006; Knudsen, 2007; Willem, Araüna, Crescenzi, & Tortajada, 2012) to those resisting the postfeminist ideals of femininity, media sexualization, and body hatred (Mikel Brown, 2011; Retallack, Ringrose, & Lawrence, 2016).

It is also broadly documented that people tend to construct identities in online-based settings according to the same categories that can be found offline such as gender or race, rather than constructing alternative identities (Nakamura, 2002; Robinson, 2007). Studies about young people's identity construction and self-presentation in online-based settings confirm this tendency. For instance, based on their quantitative analysis of teenage blogs, Huffaker and Calvert (2005) suggest that teenagers construct identity in blogs as an extension of the offline-world, using their real names and revealing their sexual orientations. In turn, some scholars suggest that online-based spaces are less constraining compared to offline-based spaces, thus allowing girls' experimentation and transgression of the traditional gender roles or normative femininity, by means of, say, sexualized or raunchy self-presentations (Daneback, 2006; Hirdman, 2007; Kelly et al., 2006; Knudsen, 2007; Willem et al., 2012). Importantly, others have argued that online-based spaces do not actually allow for free experimentation because girls need to balance between positioning themselves as sexually attractive to men and also as displaying respectability (Dobson 2012, 2014; Sveningsson Elm, 2009).

Studies of competitive spaces (Abidin & Thompson, 2012; Gram & Richardt, 2006; Hirdman, 2007; Knudsen, 2007; Lövheim, 2011a, 2011b, 2013) provide useful insights on girls' and young women's performances in the online-based communities framed, in a similar manner as the mainstream blogging community in Norway, by judgment (Hirdman, 2007) and celebrity culture (boyd, 2008), and by commercialization. In their investigation of girls' profiles on a Danish teen portal, Gram and Richardt (2006) document that positive comments from peers are the most powerful motivators for girls to post sexualized photos because they bring popularity in this competitive setting. Hirdman (2007) emphasizes the continuous judging of and responding to the girls' self-presentations by the audience as intrinsic to

participation in contemporary media spaces within what she calls judgement culture.

Lövheim's (2011a, 2011b, 2013) investigations of professional top bloggers document young women's participation in competitive and commercial blogging communities in Sweden that are similar to the community investigated in this work. She documents that maintaining large loyal audiences secures top positions on blog rankings, micro-celebrity (see also Senft, 2008, 2013) status, and financial income for the bloggers. When investigating the bloggers' performances of self, Lövheim (2011a) focuses mainly on how top bloggers negotiate tensions between "the conventions of personal content, frequent updates and an intimate relation to readers and the professional and commercial aspects of their blogging" (12), which emerge in connection to the blogs being income sources. This involves, among other issues, handling the tensions between the readers' expectations of gaining insight into the bloggers' private lives and the bloggers' wishes to protect their privacy considering that failing to give the audience what it wants may lead to losing readers. Lövheim identifies, among other factors, that the top bloggers use two strategies in order to integrate different aspects of their blogging; they perform as ordinary girls like their readers and as the readers' friends. Abidin and Thompson (2012), who observed a similar tendency among top professional bloggers in Singapore, make an explicit link between the professional female bloggers' identity performances and the laws of the market. They suggest that the ultimate aim of the apparently intimate relationships between the bloggers and their readers is "to encourage readers to spend more and buy deeper into the notion of an ideal femininity, purchasable through material goods" (475).

Other scholars (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Keller, 2015) use the notion of self-branding that involves branding the self as a product, arguing that self-branding, together with circulated visibility and achieving celebrity is normalized for girls in the postfeminist media culture in their being incorporated into consumer culture. According to Banet-Weiser (2012), the online-based spaces, in particular, animate the strategies of self-branding because of the technological capacities of the Internet and the creative possibilities for the active user. For Keller (2015), a successful female blogger is "an entrepreneur of the individual postfeminist self who mobilizes self-branding as a technique to gain public attention, reputation and even profit" (277), an incarnation of what Harris (2004) might think of as a girl entrepreneur. What is more, self-branding involves not only the presentation of self but also having the self judged and assessed. Self-branding, like branding other products, works only "if you enable people to rank your product, which in this case is yourself" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, 87). This connects back to the crucial role of the audience in performing identity online within the judgment culture described by Hirdman (2007) as intrinsic to contemporary media spaces. These investigations provide useful references for the dissertation, as they shed light on some of the processes involved in the commercialization of personal blogging.

2.3.2. Focus on Informal Learning

Previous research in media and digital literacy studies documents that participation in leisure time digital practices can contribute to the development of competences by children and youth. Numerous studies document the beneficial effects of blogging, digital storytelling, social networking, gaming and the like, both for the sake of mastering the use and production of participatory media (see, for example, Gee, 2006; Ito et al., 2010) and, in the wider sense, for improving the ability to navigate the global, mediatized interaction and the mutual dependence of the twenty-first century (Drotner, 2008), and reinforcing young people's agency (Hull & Kenney, 2008). All the same, there are relatively few studies of young people's perspectives on the participation in digital practices that have articulated the theoretical and normative representations of what digital competences could be (Bjørgen, 2014). In particular, self-presentation (boyd, 2008; Stern, 2008; Weber & Mitchell, 2008), communication (Drotner, 2008; Hull & Kenney, 2008; Korten & Svoen, 2006; Svoen, 2012) and technical competence (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Perkel, 2008; Ito et al., 2010) have been documented as areas of digital literacy developed during participation in leisure time digital practices.

Among the investigations focused on girls' media production that take into account the girls' perspectives are the Norwegian studies by Korten and Svoen (2006) and Svoen (2012). Korten and Svoen (2006) combine the analyses of films and homepages authored by teenage girls with semi-structured interviewing in order to investigate what they call creative media literacy. The participants are allowed rather a lot of leeway to reflect on their blogging and film-making practices. However, the authors conduct the interviews and analyze the data with their point of departure being their own assumptions about "which factors are important in developing creative media literacy" (*ibid*, 310, my translation), by using the three dimensions of technical and aesthetic self-expression, communication, and reflexivity in one's own media production. While the study provides useful insight into developing media literacy according to the pre-established dimensions, little room is provided for the participants' reflections on what they view as important in media literacy development.

Svoen's (2012) investigation of a blog authored by a teenage girl provides an interesting analysis of how the blogging practice contributes to developing communication skills, producing media content that appeals to the audience, and promoting one's own blog. This study is directly relevant to my project because this is a case study of a girl who is the pioneer and the established trend-setter of mainstream blogging in Norway. Although this study is a valuable contribution to the field of media literacy studies since it identifies specific media skills developed through blogging, it neither situates the analysis nor discusses the findings in relation to the competitiveness, commercialization, and femininity norms of the mainstream blogging community. Thus we do not learn

much about what triggers the development of particular media skills in relation to the context of the investigated blogging practice.

A case study of two adolescent girls' participation in the online-based practices of constructing personal webpages and participating in an electronic mailing list (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003) nicely illustrates how the girls developed literacy skills according to their own needs within their contexts of participation. The study documents, among other points, that participating in online-based communities triggers the development of technical skills beyond basic word processing in order to program one's own website or negotiate the attachments and links to the mailing list. Moreover, the authors document how the girls use the online-based spaces to express their gender identities. For instance, the relationship with an online boyfriend helped one of the girls to position herself "as a heterosexual female to those who viewed her webpage, an aspect of identity that appeared to be very important to her" (379). The authors use a great deal of data gathered during a period of 18 months, including field notes from interviews with the girls (and also when they were using the computer), field notes from interviews with the girls' teachers and from home visits, as well as copies of websites and artefacts. This makes this investigation of the girls' participation in online-based communities longitudinal and it considers the multiple contexts of this participation. While this study is not very recent and focuses on the online-based practices that provide different technological frames for girls' participation, it applies an approach that is similar to mine in that the girls' participation, competence development, and identity constructions are investigated from the starting point of what they themselves put forward as important for their participation online.

2.3.3. Focus on the Intertwinement of Identity, Digital Literacy and Learning

Some media scholars make the link between identity and learning in that they document that children and teenagers learn about self-presentation and identity by participating in informal media practices. Even though their work draws on social theories of (gender) identity, rather than those of literacy practices and learning as situated, the fact that they make the link between identity and learning makes them relevant for the body of literature focusing on literacy, identity, and learning.

Stern (2008) argues that the digital practice of authoring personal websites offers diverse experiences of informal learning, particularly in terms of self-presentation: "[t]he requirement for active and deliberate self-presentation mandates that youth authors evaluate how their self-as-presented matches the self they envision to be at their own core. Identity development and self-learning thus operate in tandem, and personal sites archive but also propel this process forward" (Stern, 2008, 114).

Similarly, boyd (2008), who investigated young people's participation in MySpace, views digital practices as sites for learning through impression management, which she considers as crucial for developing a social identity in that young people learn how to perform identity in ways that elicit reactions that would situate them in the social world they see according to their own expectations. Sveningsson Elm (2009), focusing on what Butler (1990) might call their performances of femininity rather than on learning, has analyzed personal websites authored by Swedish girls. However, she concludes that "to do gender and work out a female gender identity to a great extent consists of learning how to balance [such] conflicting ideals against each other" (258). In similar manner, Kelly et al. (2006), who investigated Canadian girls' participation in chat rooms, instant messaging, and role-playing games, argue that the girls learn about issues of femininity by participating and interacting with their peers within those digital practices.

The scholarship drawing on New Literacy Studies explicitly focuses on the *intertwining* of literacy, identity, and learning. The ethnographies of young people's out-of-school digital practices of Ito et al. (2010, 2013) are among the most influential of work that provide insight about how identity and literacy learning interplay when teenagers participate in a range of digital practices. Apart from this seminal work, less extensive studies are useful reference points for this dissertation (see, for example, Lange, 2014), including those that focus particularly on girls. Davies (2008) draws on the notion that literacy is a social practice and makes a link between identity and what she calls literacy skills in her investigation of selling and buying practices on eBay. She argues that the literacy skills necessary to successfully participate as a seller on eBay include the ability to display identity that would reinforce the seller's authenticity and reliability. One of the cases described in this work is of a young woman who calls herself *libermarie* and who builds her fashion-interested identity by linking her eBay selling account to her blog and *flickr photostream* where she self-presents as a fashionista by posting self-portrait photos in which she is wearing the garments she wants to sell on eBay. While Davies views this self-presentation focused on appearance and love of fashion as supportive of building an authentic eBay seller identity, she does not discuss this in terms of potential commodification of the body or communication for gaining material benefit, as Abidin and Thompson (2012) do, but, rather, positions this ability as a literacy skill.

2.4 Identifying Knowledge Gaps and Justifying Research Questions

Literature on girls' and young women's identity performances online abounds but most of it takes as its point of departure the artefacts published online rather than the perspectives of their authors. As outlined in section 2.3.1, these studies of online artefacts brilliantly analyze girls' textual and visual identity performances in relation to normative femininity and/or to the postfeminist media culture within which these

performances are situated. However, we seldom find out about the girls' experiences of performing identity online, their reflections, goals, and dilemmas since these studies are based on the scholars' impressions and analyses of the blogs, social media profiles, and other artefacts produced by girls. Moreover, while there are some studies that provide useful insights on identity performances in competitive, feminized, and commercialized spaces similar to the mainstream blogging community investigated here, they focus on professional top bloggers—women in their 20s with massive audiences who blog for a living. Thus, they do not address the experiences of teenage girls, with smaller audiences, for whom blogging is a leisure time practice. Further, girls' identity performances online have seldom been investigated longitudinally (see, however, Davis, 2010; Gram & Richardt, 2006) so there is little scholarship on how girls perform identity in online-based spaces over time.

Similarly, while the ethnographies of young people's participation in digital practices provide valuable, in-depth documentation of the everyday realities of this participation and contextualize the development of digital literacy in these everyday contexts, there are still relatively few. Many digital literacy scholars still apply their own notions of what counts as digital literacy and what is important or desirable in developing digital literacy. Thus, the investigations are often grounded in normative, pre-established notions rather than in the notions of competences formulated by the participants. Moreover, few studies apply a gender perspective so we seldom learn about how the development of digital literacy is contextualized by the gendered aspects of participation in online-based practices.

In response to these knowledge gaps, this dissertation investigates teenage girls' participation in a competitive and commercialized space of mainstream blogging over time with its point of departure being the girls' experiences of participation. Beginning with teenage girls' experiences and perspectives, I investigate how they perform identity in blogs and how they talk about these performances over time. Digital competence development is also examined from the perspective of what the participants formulate as meaningful for their participation online, rather than from normative or pre-established notions of competences. This results from my approach to identity performances and the development of digital competences as contextualized by the interactions, rules, and norms of the mainstream blogging community, including norms relating to femininity. Moreover, in the attempt to transgress "the limits of the local" (Brandt & Clinton, 2002), the analyses of girls' experiences of participation in mainstream blogging presented in this dissertation are also carried out in relation to the wider cultural context of postfeminist media culture and the gendered discourses about pink bloggers.

Part 3: Theoretical Approach

3.1 Situating the Project within the Tradition of Identity-and-Literacy Studies

While this dissertation draws on various theoretical concepts across disciplines, I find it useful to present the overall theoretical approach by situating this work within the tradition of identity-and-literacy studies (Moje & Luke, 2009). This is fruitful for clarifying my theorization of identity, literacy, and learning because identity-and-literacy studies approaches and theorizes identity, literacy practices, and literacy learning as being intertwined.

Resulting from the social turn in literacy theory and research (Gee, 1994), literacy-and-identity studies resists the view of literacy as cognitive processes enacted independently from people's motivations, interests, and social practices (Street, 1984). Instead, it examines literacy practices as social practices that are "tools or media for constructing, narrating, mediating, enacting, performing, enlisting or performing identities" (Moje & Luke, 2009, 416). Importantly, literacy practices may also influence the way a person is recognized as being and the way she sees herself; people can be assigned "identity labels" (Moje & Luke, 2009, 416) based on their literacy practices that can be used to stereotype, marginalize, or privilege. The social practice paradigm is well-established, commonly acknowledged, and widely used. There is broad agreement that literacy practices "only make sense when studied in the context of social and cultural (and we can add historical, political, and economic) practices of which they are but a part" (Gee, 2000, 180).

At first, the literacy tradition focused on reading and writing practices: literacy originally meant the ability to read and write. With time, as the new media came into the picture, the literacy tradition extended in order to address other media practices characterized as social practices. However, for historical reasons the term "literacy" remained in use, often extended to "media literacy" or "digital literacy". In this dissertation, I use the term "literacy" with its extended meaning, acquired over time as a designation of a social media practice. In order to denote more specifically that the type of literacy practice I am investigating is a social practice, I sometimes use the term "social practice" and, so as to be even more specific about this social practice's digital context, I use the term "digital practice".

In line with Ito et al. (2010), this work acknowledges “the limits of the local” (Brandt & Clinton, 2002) of approaching literacy as social practice, which, if taken too far in the reactive direction, bring the risk of “exaggerating the power of local contexts to set or reveal the forms and meanings that literacy takes” (338). Recognizing literacy practices as socio-cultural ones implies that identity and literacy practices are interconnected in that people’s identities mediate and are mediated by the texts they read, write, and talk about (Ito et al., 2008; McCarthy & Moje, 2002; Moje & Luke, 2009). This conceptualization of literacy practices defies the view of learning literacy as practicing skills or transferring knowledge from one head to another. Rather, learning “involves people in participation, interaction, relationships, and contexts, all of which have implications for how people make sense of themselves and others, identify, and are identified” (Moje & Luke, 2009, 416). Similar to New Literacy Studies, identity-and-literacy studies views literacy as framed by ideologies carried by the definitions of literacy that are embedded in institutions, cultural dimensions, and power structures (Ito et al., 2010).

Sharing this approach, this dissertation investigates the practice of mainstream blogging in relation to ideologies, discourses, and gender structures that frame the blogging girls’ everyday participation in this practice. Moreover, this work acknowledges that the ideologies embedded in institutions, cultural dimensions, and power define what counts as useful learning. While the adults might view some digital practices as having little value, the girls and boys who participate in these practices tend to experience them in quite different ways (Ito et al., 2010). Exploring girls’ experiences of developing digital competences through participation in mainstream blogging seems especially interesting given that this practice is generally discarded as trivial or even detrimental. By emphasizing the girls’ experiences of participation in mainstream blogging, this work explores which digital competences the girls find meaningful for their everyday digital practices and it identifies how the girls negotiate the ideologies that frame these practices.

This dissertation conceptualizes blogging as a digital practice. I investigate this as a practice

- in which girls perform social identities;
- in which girls develop digital competences through participation; and
- that positions girls in particular ways via the identity label pink blogger.

This work strives for a holistic investigation of girls’ experiences in mainstream blogging that takes into consideration both the realities of the girls’ everyday interactions with the mainstream blogging community and their audiences, and of the wider discourses and structures that frame, regulate, constrain, and discipline these everyday interactions. Hence, this work explores the practice of blogging in relation both to the micro-contexts of the blogger-audience interactions and in relation to the macro-contexts that I identified as crucial for framing girls’ blogging practices—youthful digital media

culture and postfeminist ideals of femininity.

Moje and Luke (2009) rightly argue that identity-and-literacy studies can be very different since there are many different ways of conceptualizing identity and literacy; the way we conceptualize identity influences our view on literacy and the other way around. Whereas identity-and-literacy studies commonly see identity as social, fluid, and recognized, Moje and Luke argue that many concepts have these assumptions as starting points but, at the same time, propose different takes on how we think about literacy. Literacy practices are tools for performing particular identities and they position young people in particular ways (McCarthy & Moje, 2002). This work explores the intertwinement of identity and literacy using two of the metaphors of identity proposed by Moje and Luke (2009)—identity as self and identity as position. I investigate how the girls use the literacy practice of blogging to perform identity as self. Here, I draw on the concept of the [blogging] self (Lomborg, 2012; Goffman, 1959), which exemplifies Moje and Luke's (2009) metaphor of identity as self. I also investigate how the girls are positioned by the identity label of pink blogger and how they negotiate this positioning when they tell their stories of participation in mainstream blogging. Here, I conceptualize the pink blogger label as a position that the girls are called upon to take, according to the metaphor of identity as position. The concepts of identity used in this work are further discussed in section 3.2.1.

The theoretical background of this work is cross-disciplinary. It draws on the concepts that all rest on the ontological presumptions that emphasize social interaction, process, and context. These include symbolic interactionist concepts of identity as relational and situated in ongoing interactions with the audience (Goffman, 1959; Lomborg, 2012); the poststructuralist and relational conceptualizations of gender as discursively performed (Butler, 1990) and situated in social interactions (Fenstermaker & West, 2002; West & Fenstermaker, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987); and the socio-cultural approach to digital competence development as part of social practices situated within certain contexts (Bjørgen & Nygren, 2010; Lave & Wenger, 1991). The digital practice of blogging is a socio-cultural practice situated in everyday blogging activities occurring through interaction with the mainstream blogging community and the audience. However, this practice is also framed by the larger socio-cultural and technological contexts of youthful digital media practices and of postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2007) as well as by the gendered discourses and structures that are disciplining and constraining.

3.2 Theorizing Identity

As outlined in the previous section, this dissertation investigates identity using the two metaphors of identity as self and identity as position. In this section, I explicate the theoretical concepts of identity used in my work.

3.2.1. Identity as Blogging Self and as Position

In order to investigate how the girls perform identity as self, I use the concept of performing the blogging self, drawing on two symbolic interactionist concepts—Lomborg's blogging self (2012) and Goffman's performed self (1959). Both of them presume that, as Lomborg (2012) puts it, in social interaction "in any specific setting, some elements of our identity are highlighted, while others are toned down" (416). Importantly, the blogging selves performed by girls are viewed as "relational and collaborative accomplishments" subject to negotiation between the blogger and her readers and "framed by the blog as a communicative genre" (415). This means that the blogging selves are situated in the interactions with the audience and performed in response to the audience. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor implies performing multiple selves in different social interactions depending on the context and the audience of a given social interaction. When they are performing selves, people draw on the experiences they have gathered by interacting with others in different kinds of social situations in order to fabricate impressions that they expect to be suitable for the context and the audience of a particular social interaction.

The concept of identity as situated in social relations is crucial in symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934); performing different selves in different social interactions has been called multiple self-ing (Robinson, 2007). Goffman (1959) uses the term performance to refer to all activity of an individual in front of a particular set of observers—an audience that is always attributing meaning to the performance. Through this performance, the individual gives meaning to herself, to others, and to their situation. In Goffman's approach, people's presentational behavior is a process of negotiation as they "offer definitions of themselves in various interaction contexts which the audience either accepts or challenges" (Tseelon, 1992, 115). I combine the concept of self as performed in front of an audience (Goffman, 1959) with the concept of the blogging self coined by Lomborg (2012) for context of the practice of blogging. I apply the term "performing the blogging self" to designate the character that the girls perform in their interactions with the blog audiences. Situated in the interactions with the audience and with the blogging community, the blogging self is presumed to be changeable rather than fixed or stable.

While Goffman's concept of performing the self has often been used in investigating online-based interactions (see for example Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Marwick & boyd, 2011), some of the applications of the Goffmanian (1959) dramaturgical metaphor to online-based settings have been misguided (Lange, 2014). I agree with Lange in her critique of equating Goffman's onstage with online-based settings and offstage with offline-based settings. Following Lange, I do not consider online-based performances of self as masks or cynical self-presentations since those who create online content often experience their online-based performances as real and not fully controllable. When performing the self in online-based setting, one gi-

ves off signals in the same manner as one does in offline-based spaces and is thus not able to fully control the impressions he or she delivers. The audience can interpret performances of self in various ways including against the performer's intention.

While Goffman's theory of the presentation of self has been a useful analytical tool to investigate how the girls perform their blogging selves and how they reflect on these performances, his concept of gender display (1976) was not used in this work. Instead, this dissertation draws on poststructuralist (Butler, 1990) and relational approaches to gender (Fenstermaker & West, 2002; West & Fenstermaker, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987). These conceptualizations stand in stark contrast to categorical, essentialist thinking about gender that views masculinity and femininity as natural opposites with the definition of gender resting on the dichotomous classification of bodies (Connell, 2012). Poststructuralist gender theory has focused on cultural processes and on the way in which gender meanings arise in discourse that is understood as language along with all other symbolic systems. This means that gender identities are shifting and fluid; they are subject positions in discourse open to change, rather than expressions of inner truth. However, this fluidity of gender identities does not mean that gender is an illusion because powerful institutions like the family, schools, states, and churches that follow logics laid down in discourse, discipline individuals accordingly (Connell, 2012).

Whereas poststructuralism views gender structures as cultural *points of reference* for daily life, the relational thinking about gender recognizes gender structures as emotional and material *constraints* "embedded in person-to-person relationships (e.g. parent/child), and in law, economics, violence, the built environment and technology" (Connell, 2012, 1677). Relational theorists are concerned with the everyday social practices such as femininity and masculinity or homosexual and heterosexual sexuality in which gender is enacted but they view these everyday practices as occurring within the large-scale patterns across institutions and sites. Gender is an integral part of individual identity and societal structures; it informs societal hierarchies and power systems. Accountability (West & Zimmerman, 1987) is one of key concepts in the relational theory. Individuals are categorized as men and women in interactional work, and they are held accountable for their performances of femininity and masculinity. If they do not comply with normative gender behavior, they risk being assessed as not normal.

This dissertation draws on a combination of poststructuralist and relational thinking about gender. This allows for examining girls' blogging practices as being both discursively performative of gender identities that draw on the multiple, fluid femininities emphasized by poststructuralism, and as everyday social practices constrained by gender structure in terms of which the girls are held accountable for their performances of femininity. The girls' blogging practices are creative but not random in that they perform different femininities according to the interactions with the audience

within the mainstream blogging environment and their goals. However, these performances are also constrained by gender structures normalizing how a girl can be, and they are held accountable for their performances of femininity. Different femininities are valued differently and normative femininity requires striking a balance between physical attractiveness and respectability (Ambjörnsson, 2004; Skeggs, 1997).

Apart from investigating identity as self, this dissertation also explores identity as position in reference to the social positioning of girls who blog in the mainstream blogging community. Participation in digital practices affects the way a girl is recognized as being and the way she sees herself. People are socially positioned through everyday discourses, spatial arrangements, text, film and other media (Moje & Luke, 2009). Identities are produced “in the ways people are cast in or called to particular positions in interactions, time, and spaces and how they take up or resist these positions” (ibid: 430). Identity labels assigned to people based on the practices they participate in can be used to stereotype, marginalize, or privilege them (Moje & Luke, 2009).

I conceptualize the pink blogger label as an example of such an identity label, one that positions teenage girls in mainstream blogging in certain ways. Paper 1 investigates the ways in which girls participating in the mainstream blogging practice are positioned in the Norwegian press commentary via this identity label. In Paper 2, I look at whether the girls take up or resist the position of a pink blogger. In order to examine if the pink blogger identity label has an impact on how the girls see themselves, I investigate how they make meaning of this label in relation to their own blogging practices.

3.2.2. Online- and Offline-based Contexts Intertwined in Performing Identity

This work draws on the conceptualization of the Internet as a cultural product that needs to be investigated in the cultural context (Hine, 2000). I view technology as integrated with and into everyday life, where practices take place on the intersection of the offline- and online-based settings (Sade-Beck, 2004) and where people make meaning of their experiences across online- and offline-based settings (Leander & McKim, 2003). In line with Leander and McKim (2003), I view online- and offline-based practices and spaces as “co-constituted, hybridized, and embedded within one another” (223).

Early postmodern Internet-Mediated Communication research relied to a great extent on the dichotomy of the virtual (online) space and the real (offline) space. This implied that the online persona is distinctive and parallel to the offline, biological person (Stone, 1995). This early research exemplified by scholars like Stone (1995) and Turkle (1995) relied on the disembodiment hypothesis (Marwick, 2014), according to which Internet users are free to choose the gender and/or sexuality of their online personas and

can thus create alternative identities. This approach was grounded in the assumption that because Internet-based communication, which was mostly textual in those times as in role-playing games, bulletin boards, or chat rooms, is deprived of corporeal cues like appearance or voice so users can and do freely experiment with identity online.

The disembodiment hypothesis has been undermined. Media researchers of the second and third wave of Internet research agree that the identities people have online align with their offline categories like gender, race, and class and that power relations are often sustained the same way as they are offline, even if the users understand that other users engage in online identity play (Kendall, 1998). The online and the offline are no longer constructed as opposite binaries but viewed, rather, as two settings intertwined in everyday practices. This conceptualization of online and offline settings as intertwined also bears implications for the theorization of identity. While the earlier postmodernist approach separated offline identity from online identity as distinct, distinguishing between a “real” (offline) and “virtual” (online) identity, the status quo in contemporary media scholarship is that identity is performed across the online- and the offline-based settings in an ongoing process of identification (Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic, 2004). In this work I strive to avoid relying on the online/offline dichotomy even though I recognize that online-based interactions do manifestly diverge from offline-based ones since the former are characterized by the lack of physical contact in the sense of face-to-face interactions as well as by the persistence of content published online, which may be retrieved, copied, and used without the knowledge of the producer or in ways that she does not accept. As mentioned above, I view online- and offline-based spaces as dynamically co-constructed and interpolated. In order to account for the mutual dependency and overlapping of these different contexts in performing identity, my work strongly relies on the integration of online (blogs) and offline (press commentary and interviews) data sources as outlined in section 4.1.2.

3.3 Digital Competences as Experienced and Non-normative

This dissertation draws on the socio-cultural approach to learning and digital competence development that emphasizes the social and cultural context and young people's perspectives (Bjarnadóttir, 2004; Bjørgen & Nygren, 2010; Ito et al., 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nygren, 2015). I take a socio-cultural approach to learning; situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and community of practice (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) are key concepts. This implies an emphasis on the socio-cultural situatedness of learning, the belief that digital competences are developed through interactive participation in digital literacy practices that are viewed, in turn, as social and cultural practices situated within certain contexts (Bjørgen & Nygren, 2010). My approach is thus in line with the New Literacy Studies' ethnographic approach to learning as being

situated in everyday social practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The theory of situated learning promotes the view of learning in practice as “a matter of joining a community of practice, rather than the application of skills and principles, which operate independently of social context” (Nygren, 2008, 6). According to Wenger (1998), “The concept of practice connotes doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. In this sense, practice is always social practice” (47). Participation is thus another key concept of this work’s approach since competence development “takes place through *participation* in and across different *practices* within and across socio-cultural and material *contexts*” (Research Centre for Child and Youth Competence Development, 2010, 26, emphasis in original). This view on competence is contradictory to the concept of competence rooted in behaviorism referred to by Bukowski, Bergevin, Sabongui, and Serbin (1998) that views competence as “frequencies of behavior or as behaviors that occur in response to environmental circumstances” (94). The socio-cultural approach relies on the concept of communities of practice formulated by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) who describe a community of practice as “a community that is established, maintained and developed over time through the participants’ specific ways of coordinating activities in a particular form of collective *practice*” (Research Centre for Child and Youth Competence Development, 2010, 12, emphasis in original). Competence development includes the processes and mechanisms that enable individuals to participate fully in social practices as well as to reach specific goals and master specific tasks related to participation in these practices (Nygren, 2008).

In this dissertation, I have strengthened the focus on girls’ perspectives by introducing the concept of experienced competences (Bjarnadóttir, 2004), which facilitates investigating how the girls experience digital competences, rather than how these competences “appear to, or would be evaluated by others” (Bjarnadóttir, 2004, 301). Being aligned to the view of learning as situated (Lave & Wenger, 1991), Bjarnadóttir (2004) argues that “individual experiences of one’s own competence are always connected to social and cultural situations and to special functions, expectations and roles” (301) and this does not always agree with how this appears to others. In addition, and in connection with this emphasis on the girls’ experiences of digital competences, I have also strived to identify the competences they bring up as meaningful, instead of drawing on normative or generational definitions of digital competences mostly found in the literature. Here, Bjørgen and Nygren’s (2010) non-normative take on digital competences has been especially useful because it relies on a non-normative understanding of competence development (see, too, Nygren, 2008; Nygren, 2015) and actualizes the theorization of competences in the digital context. The key assumption of this approach is that digital competences are developed in different ways in different social practices according to the goals pursued in different contexts. This take on digital competence development

emphasizes two things. The girls who blog are subjects in their competence development, and the competences that the girls experience as meaningful for their blogging practices do not necessarily comply with the normative ideas of digital competences articulated by researchers, institutions, and policy makers. The non-normative approach to digital competence development includes identifying the meanings of competences that represent values and ideologies that might not be compliant with general social values, rules, or norms but that are still experienced as meaningful by some people in some contexts (Nygren, 2015). This non-normative approach to digital competence development has been particularly fruitful for my work because it has allowed me to identify the meanings of competences that were not only experienced as beneficial but also as problematic or challenging for the girls. The use of a non-normative approach to competences distinguishes this work from previous research on informal learning in online-based literacy practices.

As mentioned earlier, the girls who blog are viewed as “*subjects* in their own competence development according to how they respond to and influence the contextual arrangements” (Bjørgen & Nygren, 2010, 117, emphasis in original). Still, their blogging practices are at the same time framed by “the opportunities, demands, and power-structures” (Nygren, 2015, 185) embedded in these practices and their socio-cultural context. This view is consistent with the approach found in the sociology of childhood that focuses on young peoples’ agency but also acknowledges how this agency is limited by the structures of family, community, commerce, and the like (Sefton-Green, 2004). Also according to the media ecology metaphor of Ito et al. (2013), the actor and context are viewed as interdependent and co-constitutive. Young people are embedded in an “ecological-cultural context and everyday routines organized by the interrelated contexts of peer relations, family and school” (40).

This dissertation recognizes the intertwinement of identity and digital competence development in the sense that girls can become more able to perform their blogging selves in a way that would better respond to their audiences and fulfill the girls’ changing goals and needs. Becoming more able to perform a blogging self desired by the blogger can be viewed as learning a more effective self-presentation (see also Stern, 2008).

3.4 Participation in Mainstream Blogging Framed by Micro- and Macro-contexts

As outlined in the introduction, this work combines the ethnographic focus on the girls’ everyday blogging practices with an emphasis on larger cultural contexts and gender ideologies that frame these practices. I analyze how girls’ participation is framed both by the structure of and interactions within the mainstream blogging community that I call the micro-context of their participation. Also, I investigate how the girls’ par-

ticipation in mainstream blogging is framed by their experiences of femininity norms and gendered discourses beyond the blogging community and I call this the macro-context of the girls' participation. More specifically, I analyze the girls' participation in the mainstream blogging community as situated within the wider cultural context of post-feminist media culture (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009), judgement culture (Hirdman, 2007) and celebrity culture (boyd, 2008), as well as framed by the gendered identity label of pink blogger.

Symbolic interactionist concepts of identity have been criticized for neglecting the macro level of social interpretation and for not sufficiently taking into account the influence of social forces and institutions, with their underlying power relations, on individual interactions. Moje and Luke (2009) suggest that the studies relying on the theories of identity as self, risk producing the model of the subject "as an independent meaning marker/agent" (424) somehow separated from institutional structures and power relations. Acknowledging these limitations of the symbolic interactionist theoretical framework, this dissertation attempts to situate the girls' identity performances in blogs not only within the micro-context of their interactions with the audiences and other bloggers in the mainstream blogging environment but also beyond this micro-context. Whereas the concept of performing the blogging self is a concept allowing for grasping the situatedness of girls' identity performances in the interactions with the blogging community and the audiences, their stories of participation are also analyzed in relation to the larger cultural contexts of this practice mentioned above. I analyze the girls' performances of selves in relation to the realities of the postfeminist sensibility relying on femininity as a bodily quality and characterized by the focus on self-surveillance and discipline, the sexualization of culture, as well as by consumerism. Moreover, these analyses are also made in relation to the normative femininity requiring the balancing of physical attractiveness with respectability and the Nordic Girlhood normative ideal of a strong, independent girl who can and should do whatever she wants (Formark & Bränström Öhman, 2013). In a similar manner, I analyze the development of digital competences in relation to the rules and norms of the mainstream blogging community that are illustrative of wider cultural and technological contexts; the ongoing feedback from the judging audiences; the narrow femininity norm promoted by top female bloggers; and the commercialization of personal blogging. Moreover, I examine the gendered connotations of the identity label of pink blogger in order to illustrate how girls who blog in the mainstream are positioned within relations of power and I investigate how they position themselves in relation to this label.

Part 4: Methodology

4.1 Methods Grounded in Research Questions and Theoretical Assumptions

The methods, data sources, and design used in the project reflect the research questions and the theoretical underpinnings of this work. In sections 4.1.1. and 4.1.2., I provide the rationale for the methodology applied in this work according to these research questions and theoretical underpinnings.

4.1.1. Focus on Interaction, Process, and Girls' Perspectives

This work's theoretical underpinnings emphasize social interaction, process, and context. As I have already explained, I draw on symbolic interactionist concepts of identity as relational and situated in ongoing interactions with the audience; on the poststructuralist and relational conceptualizations of gender as discursively performed and situated in social interactions; and on the socio-cultural approach to digital competence development as part of social practices situated within certain contexts. Hence, in order to capture the processual dynamics of girls' experiences of participation, identity performances, and digital competence development over time, I apply a longitudinal design. Moreover, this work's goal to acknowledge, document, and theorize girls' experiences of participation in mainstream blogging together with its theoretical underpinnings dictate my emphasis on girls' perspectives. Combining interviewing with blog-analyses allows for investigating not only how the participants perform their blogging selves but also how they experience and talk about these performances over time. This also allows for exploring the non-normative meanings and goals that the participants attach to digital competencies in relation to the changing contexts of their blogging practices. The methodological implications of the non-normative approach to digital competence development understood as being functional, situated in particular practices and contextual is that it "should be examined from the perspective of the participating subjects" (Nygren, 2015, 189).

Davis (2010) rightly argues that "content analyses require researchers to draw inferences about the motivation and intent behind youths' online productions" (153). The researchers' own experiences may not align with the experiences of the young content producers and this must be taken into account. Interviewing allows for identifying participants' experiences and attitudes that are inaccessible through blog content

analysis (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2011). Moreover, as emphasized by boyd (2006), it is not enough to analyze the content of a blog since blogging is an interactive process and only an investigation of the processes involved in this practice can fully render the phenomena at play in the blogger-audience exchange. Only by moving away from a content-focused approach can we see blogs in terms of culture and practice. In my work, interviewing has not only been complementary to blog content analyses but has had a guiding function in the analysis of the blogs.

The focus on girls' perspectives is present in the various stages of the project such as in formulating the research questions; in the theorization of identity and digital competence development; and in the inductive analysis. The analyses begin with the girls' stories of participation and rely on my using the notions that could be developed from my interpretation of how the participants formulated themselves in the interviews, rather than from pre-constructed ideas.

4.1.2. Online- and Offline-based Contexts as Intertwined

While some researchers (e.g. Hammersley, 2006; Travers, 2009) privilege face-to-face interactions with participants, claiming that online-based methods like, say, internet ethnography usually result in a thinner level of description, others (e.g. Christians & Chen, 2004; Hine, 2000; Williams & Robson, 2004) claim that applying online-based research methods is the most relevant for investigating Internet-mediated practices. Finally, there are those who support integrating online and offline data sources (e.g Kendall, 1999; Sade-Beck, 2004; Wilson, 2006), or at least acknowledging "the possible effects of the off-line contexts on participant understandings of their on-line experiences" (Kendall, 1999, 62).

In this dissertation, I approach online- and offline-based practices and spaces as co-constructed and embedded with one another. For me, following Leander and McKim (2003), people make meaning of their experiences across online- and offline-based spaces. The recognition of this complex relationship between online- and offline-based contexts has methodological implications (Orgad, 2009) because research on online-based practices and interactions cannot ignore the offline-based social and cultural contexts. The integration of online- and offline-based methods and data sources can help understand the relationships between the contexts and interactions. Integrating online and offline data collection methods is key to achieving rich ethnographic material when we are investigating online-based practices because "there are reciprocal relations and links that exist between the culture of the Internet and between the wider processes taking place in the society" (Sade-Beck, 2004, 50). Hence, this work relies strongly on the integration of online (blogs) and offline (press commentary and interviews) data sources. In an attempt to account for the mutual dependency and overlapping of these

different contexts, I use the blogs and the blogg.no community, as well as the press articles and the interviews, as complementary rather than as separate data sets.

Grasping the meaning people give to their online participation requires observing what they do online as well as what they say about what they do (Kendall, 1999). By combining analyses of blog content and interviews with the girls who author them, I investigate their online-based practices and performances on the one hand and the meanings they attach to participation in mainstream blogging in relation to their online- and offline-based experiences on the other.

This dissertation, as I have already mentioned, aligns with the approach to the Internet as a cultural product that needs to be investigated in the cultural context (Hine, 2000). Combining three data sources (press commentary, interviews, and blogs) serves another important purpose, one that is dictated by the aim to identify both the micro- and macro-contexts of girls' participation in mainstream blogging. While the ethnographic analyses of the blogs identify and examine the micro-context of the mainstream blogging community and the everyday realities of girls' participation within this micro-context, the critical analysis of the press commentary examines the gendered discourses that frame their participation. Drawing on Fairclough's (2003) argument on the cumulative power of media discourses, I view the hegemonic mass media discourses on pink bloggers as part of the macro-context of girls' participation that is representative of the wider social positioning of girls in mainstream blogging. In turn, the phenomenological analysis of the girls' stories of participation elicited during the interviews allows for identifying and investigating the meanings that the participants make of their experiences tied both to the everyday experiences of participation within the micro-context of the mainstream blogging community and to the wider cultural contexts of this participation.

4.2 Data and Samples

The following sections provide an account of the samples used in the project. In section 4.2.1, I present crucial information about the sample of participants and blogs. Section 4.2.2. focuses on the sample of press articles for the critical discourse analysis.

4.2.1. Participant and Blog Samples

Following Lincoln and Guba (1985) I used purposive sampling to select a strategic sample of information-rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 2002). The purpose was to contribute to the theoretical development of the performing identity as self in online-based settings and to the theory of digital competence development. I selected a strategic sample conducive to understanding and developing concepts

that would provide explanations of the investigated phenomena, rather than a representationally generalizable description of teenage female bloggers in Norway. The size of the strategic sample was determined on the basis of theoretical saturation. The sample included 12 participants of the mainstream blogging community.

I chose to focus on personal blogging rather than on alternative or niche digital media practices because personal blogging has become an integral part of Norwegian girls' digital media culture. A lot of teenage girls were blogging when I started the project and some teenage female bloggers had very extensive audiences that gave them visibility in the Norwegian public space on a scale that had been previously unmatched. On the basis of my preliminary research into the Norwegian blogosphere and the existing literature, I established the sampling criteria that would allow for recruiting participants who were most typical of young blog users in Norway, and who used the blog genre viewed as the most typical for Norwegian female bloggers.

I was looking for girls aged 15 to 17 since most bloggers were girls in this approximate age group (Norwegian Media Authority, 2012) when I began collecting data. I was looking for girls who authored personal blogs including life accounts and outfit-of-the-day photos since these two elements were viewed as most typical for young female bloggers in this country. I recruited participants who used the blogg.no blogging community because this is the largest in Norway. I was looking for active bloggers and assumed that frequent updates would indicate considerable engagement, and thus recruited girls who updated their blogs at least ten times per month. Because I wanted to analyze blog content at different points in time, including the archives, I searched for girls who had blogged for at least six months prior to recruitment.

When I was searching for participants, I worked backwards from the blogs. Using the blogg.no website, I searched for blogs that fitted the above-mentioned selection criteria, checked the author's age (usually listed in the "About me" section of the blog) and approached, by email, the authors of blogs that fitted the criteria. At that point, each region of Norway had its top list of the most read bloggers. When I was searching for blogs, I used the national and regional rankings on blogg.no and the "comment search" method. I clicked on names/nicknames of female bloggers who commented on blogs and thus accessed their blogs. The authors of selected blogs were contacted by email (see Appendix 1⁴). In this first contact email, I introduced the project and asked if I could look at what they had published in the blog. Those persons who agreed were contacted again after some time and requested to participate in the interviews (Appendix 2). Originally, the first contact email was considerably longer and

⁴ The first contact email was originally in Norwegian. The emails sent to potential participants were close to the one in Appendix 1 but not always identical. This was because I was testing which emails worked best to recruit participants.

included a request for both observing the blog and meeting for the interviews. Because of a rather low response rate, I later chose to approach potential participants initially solely with a request to look at their blogs (Appendix 1) and ask about full participation in the second email (Appendix 2). This resulted in a higher response rate.

I contacted 31 girls in total. Of these, 15 did not respond to my request to participate in the project and 3 expressed interest in participating in the project but did not take part in it in the end. Although 1 person participated in interview 1 she became unavailable when I contacted her about interview 2. She was excluded from the sample and the data collected up to that point (interview 1 and samples from her blog) were deleted. The other girls who participated in interview 1 continued to participate thus allowing for the longitudinal collection of data (including interview 2). Of the 19 girls who were requested to participate in the project but did not participate, 3 were well-established top bloggers with very large audiences. This means that, as I specify in the next paragraph, none of the established top bloggers participated in the project. As far as I was able to conclude on the basis of the blogs authored by the remaining girls who did not reply to my request for participation, they formed a varied group.

Audience sizes in the selected sample ranged from 20 to 5000 unique readers per day⁵. These were unstable, changing on a daily basis. Whereas some of the girls in the study said in the interviews that they have at times reached relatively big audiences (up to 20 000 readers), this was short-term and their average audiences over time were considerably smaller than those of top bloggers. In the case of blogs set up on blogg.no, every town and region in Norway has its own ranking, as I have already mentioned. That means that in the case of small towns, the chance of being listed as one of top bloggers for this particular town is quite big. The rankings are so numerous that even the bloggers who have very small audiences or are inactive may appear on the rankings. However, this is very different from the top bloggers who occupy top positions on the national ranking and have massive audiences of up to 70 000 readers per day over months and years. Since none of the participants of my project had such extensive audiences and none of them had such extensive audiences over time, I do not define them as top bloggers even though some girls were listed in the blog rankings. However, 1 participant was listed high enough to receive a salary from the blog portal over a period extending to months and 3 participants had the experience of being covered by a newspaper in connection with their blogging practices.

Of my participants, 10 attended upper secondary school and 2 were in the last grade of lower secondary school upon recruitment. The girls came from towns of different

⁵ The audience sizes change daily. They should be treated as rough estimates. Average audience sizes for each participant are listed in Table 1. The average audience sizes were given by the participants and/or were taken from blogg.no where the audience sizes for the blogs listed high on the blog rankings were provided.

sizes, mostly in the Oppland, Hedmark, Akershus, and Oslo regions. I recruited 8 girls with an ethnic Norwegian background and 4 participants with a non-ethnic Norwegian background in order to see if these elements were in any way meaningful for their experiences of participation in mainstream blogging.

My selection criteria narrowed down the participants to active bloggers who update regularly. This can be viewed as a weakness since non-active bloggers, or bloggers with very small audiences were not represented in the sample. However, thanks to the longitudinal design, I was able to interview the participants and analyze their blogs in their non-active phases, when they posted very seldom, had few readers, took breaks, and, in some cases, after they quit blogging. The longitudinal design proved very useful because I could track how the goals and experiences of participants changed over time, and how the blogs reflected these changes.

While all the participants in the sample authored personal blogs including life accounts and outfit photos, the participants were selected, following Ritchie and Lewis (2003), in a way that would make the sample comprehensive of all known constituencies and thus account for diversity within the sample in order to secure its reliability. This meant that the sample included participants with small and large audiences, those with and without experience of commercial cooperation in blogging, those with and without experience of being listed in high positions in the blog rankings, and those with and without experience of being covered by the mass media. It also included participants from various ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, the sample blogs represented diversity in terms of the types of self-portrait photos and textual content published, and in the proportion of text to photos. One could quite easily label some of the blogs in the sample as lifestyle blogs or as fashion or feminist blogs, at least during particular phases of their existence. However, I chose not to label them in any way, and particularly not as pink blogs since all these labels carry with them certain connotations. Rather, I chose to use the more inclusive and neutral label of the personal blog representing the blog genre focused on by the blog author (in contrast to filter blogs) and selected those personal blogs that included the elements (life accounts and outfit photos) commonly associated in Norway with girl and women authors. The table below provides an overview of project participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Place of residence	Ethnicity	Readers per day (average)	Commercial cooperation	Mass media coverage
Sara	16	Town in Oppland	Ethnic Norwegian	2000	Yes, regularly	Interviewed by a local newspaper
Nora	17	Town in Oppland	Ethnic Norwegian	200-300	Yes, a few times	None

Pseudonym	Age	Place of residence	Ethnicity	Readers per day (average)	Commercial cooperation	Mass media coverage
Sofie	16	Small town in Møre og Romsdal	Non-ethnic Norwegian	5000	Yes, salary from blogg.no	None
Nadira	17	Small town in Akershus	Non-ethnic Norwegian	Up to 200	No	None
Janne	17	Town in Oslo	Ethnic Norwegian	2000	Yes, a few times	Covered by national newspapers
Ella	17	Town in Akershus	Ethnic Norwegian	Up to 1700	Yes, regularly	Covered by national newspapers
Lisa	17	Small town in Oppland	Non-ethnic Norwegian	200-300	Yes, regularly	None
Deena	15	Town in Akershus	Non-ethnic Norwegian	20-70	No	None
Pia	16	Town in Hedmark	Ethnic Norwegian	Up to 200	No	None
Emma	16	Town in Oppland	Ethnic Norwegian	200-2000	No	None
Karoline	17	Town in Hedmark	Ethnic Norwegian	50-60	No	None
Maria	15	Small town in Oppland	Ethnic Norwegian	40-500	No	None

Table 1: Recruited participants⁶ (all indicators upon recruitment)

The participants were recruited in the following batches.

1. Nora, Sara, Sofie, Nadira (February 2012 to March 2012)
2. Janne, Ella (May 2013 to July 2013)
3. Lisa, Deena, Pia, Emma (December 2013 to March 2014)
4. Karoline, Maria (May 2014 to June 2014)

As shown in Table 2 (see section 4.3), the periods of the collection of blog- and interview data did not overlap for all participants. This is more widely discussed in section 4.3.6.

⁶ The names of the participants are pseudonyms. See section 4.7 for more information about this anonymization.

4.2.2. Sample of Press Articles

I selected the sample of press articles for the discourse analysis from the three most read Norwegian newspapers *Aftenposten*, *Verdens Gang*, and *Dagbladet*. I excluded newspapers with lower readership rates and local newspapers. When I was selecting the sample, I used search engines on the newspapers' homepages that provide access to present and past issues, both on paper and online. The words for my search were variations of the Norwegian word *rosablogger* (pink blogger). I chose to limit my search to this particular term instead of pursuing more neutral terms like teenage blogger or personal blogger or female blogger because I was looking for gendered representations connected to pink blogging that I had identified as commonly used for girls in the mainstream blogging community. I have included all articles found through this search in the sample. The sample included 22 press articles published from January 2009 to April 2011 (see Appendix 3). I searched for the press coverage starting from 2009 because this was the year when the term "pink blogger" was coined.

4.3 Collection of Interview- and Blog- Data

In line with this work's conceptualization of identity, digital practices, and the development of digital competence as being intertwined, I used the same data sources (interviews and blog samples) to investigate the participants' experiences of participation in mainstream blogging, their performances of their blogging selves, their perspectives on the ways in which they are positioned in the public discourse, and their experiences of digital competency. The interviews were conducted between February 2012 and December 2014. The period for the collection of blog data from the participants' blogs was between August 2011 and December 2014. Table 2 provides an overview of the process of collection and preliminary analysis of blog- and interview data for each participant. The fact that the periods for collection of blog- and interview data did not overlap for all participants could be seen both as a weakness and a strength. This is discussed in section 4.3.6. The table below provides an overview of the phases in the process of collection, and preliminary analyses of interview- and blog-data. This stage of the collection and management of data is summarized in section 4.4.3.

Participant	Interview 1 & preliminary analysis of interview transcript	Blog sample Month 1: Collection and preliminary analysis	Blog sample Month 2: Collection and preliminary analysis	Blog sample Month 3: Collection and preliminary analysis	Interview 2 & preliminary analysis of interview transcript
Nora	02.02.2012	Aug. 2011	Feb. 2012	July 2012	04.06.2013
Sara	03.02.2012	Aug. 2011	Feb. 2012	May 2013	13.06.2013
Sofie	29.02.2012	Aug. 2011	Feb. 2012	Apr. 2013	02.05.2013

Participant	Interview 1 & preliminary analysis of interview transcript	Blog sample Month 1: Collection and preliminary analysis	Blog sample Month 2: Collection and preliminary analysis	Blog sample Month 3: Collection and preliminary analysis	Interview 2 & preliminary analysis of interview transcript
Nadira	20.03.2012	Aug. 2011	Mar. 2012	May 2013	20.06.2013
Janne	25.05.2013	Nov. 2012	May 2013	Sept./Oct. 2013	11.03.2014
Ella	02.07.2013	Dec. 2012	July 2014	Jan. 2014	06.03.2014
Lisa	02.12.2013	June 2013	Dec. 2013	Apr. 2014	02.06.2014
Deena	18.12.2013	June 2013	Dec. 2013	Apr. 2014	06.06.2014
Pia	31.01.2014	July 2013	Jan. 2014	Apr. 2014	31.05.2014
Emma	27.03.2014	Sept. 2013	Mar. 2014	Aug. 2014	02.09.2014
Karoline	30.05.2014	Dec. 2013	May 2014	Oct. 2014	24.10.2014
Maria	03.06.2014	Jan. 2014	June 2014	Dec. 2014	05.12.2014

Table 2: Overview of the phases during the collection and preliminary analyses of data

As demonstrated in Table 2, the design of the data collection process allowed for contextualizing the interview-data in relation to the blog-data and vice versa. This data collection design allowed for integrating the online- and offline-based data sources and supported gaining a preliminary understanding of the relationships between the online- and the offline-based contexts and interactions. The following sections provide a more thorough account of the process of data collection and the rationale for the methodological choices made during this process.

4.3.1. Face-to-face Semi-structured Interviews

Face-to-face interviewing allowed for my meeting the participants in person and I found this important on two levels. First, this was beneficial for establishing rapport. Although I think that it is possible to establish good rapport with participants by interacting with them online only, I found meeting the participants in person, and doing so on two different occasions, to have been important and informative. I could observe how the participants performed their selves in their blogs and how they did so during our meetings. These online-based and the offline-based observations complemented each other very usefully. The observations I made during the interviews were recorded in the form of memos in Nvivo files that I used for storing and managing the raw data (see section 4.4.3). Second, since I found it very important to ensure that the girls were well-informed and comfortable about their participation in the project, I presumed that meeting them in person would facilitate their bringing up any issues or questions

they wanted to address. Organizing the interview-meetings and making them happen was undoubtedly demanding given the re-scheduling, the cancellations, having to send reminders repeatedly, and finding the right interviewing venue that would allow some privacy but would not be too noisy. Online interviewing would probably have been easier on the organizational level. Still, I think that making face-to-face interviews happen was well worth the effort for the reasons mentioned above. One participant could be interviewed only by phone and not face-to-face. This was not my standard procedure but I went ahead with the interview in order to secure her participation in the study.

Drawing on a social constructionist framework (Miller & Glassner, 2004), I viewed interview respondents as not simply individuals with their own unique experiences but rather as members of a culture. In line with Richardson (1990), I presumed that “participation in a culture includes participation in the narratives of that culture, a general understanding of the stock of meanings and their relationships to each other” (127). Following Rapley (2004), I approached interview talk as revealing two interconnected phenomena. First, interview talk reveals the identity work of the interviewee and of me as the interviewer and this makes the data a reflection of the social encounter between us as two people. Second, although interview-talk is locally and collaboratively produced, it also reveals the wider cultural arena in which the talk is situated and thus “speaks to and emerges from the contemporary ways of understanding, experiencing and talking about that specific interview topic” (Rapley, 2004, cited in Silverman, 2006, 137). This approach was further implemented during the analysis since I investigated both what the participants said and how they said it (see Silverman, 2006), thus approaching the interview talk as both data and discourse.

For me, the interviews were aimed at eliciting what I called the “stories of participation” that, on the one hand, would allow for identifying the everyday realities (among others, blogging routines, goals tied to blogging, attitude towards the audience, norms and rules of the blogg.no community, attitude to top bloggers, and so on) of participation in mainstream blogging and the participants’ reflections connected to this everyday participation, and their dynamics over time. On the other hand, however, I viewed the stories of participation as cultural stories (Silverman, 2006), which allow for detecting how the participants use culturally available resources to construct their stories as situated in the larger cultural norms and gendered discourses that frame participation in mainstream blogging. The girls’ stories of participation were a point of departure for investigating their performances of their blogging selves and their negotiations of the social positioning of mainstream female bloggers, as well as of the digital competences they experienced as meaningful.

It was important to give the participants the space to bring up what they themselves thought was important or relevant, so I used mostly open-ended questions (for

instance, Can you tell me about...? What are your thoughts on...? What is your attitude to...?). I also wanted to structure the interviews according to the focal points of my investigation so I used an interview guide to elicit stories of participation that would be fit for comparative analysis. I used semi-structured interviews based on interview guides to keep the interviewing focused around the selected topical areas but also to permit considerable flexibility. Using semi-structured interviewing allowed for the eliciting of individual stories of participation and for flexibility in providing space for the girls to take up and elaborate on topics relevant to them. It also allowed me to focus on specific points that would be useful for comparing the participants' stories.

The interview guides were tested during the first batch of data collection and preliminary analysis (for the first four participants) and slightly modified on the basis of these preliminary findings in order to sharpen the focus of the interviews (see also section 4.3.6). The interview guides were used consistently but flexibly: not all interviews included the same questions. I used the following interview guides.

Interview 1 guide

1. The blog: reasons for setting up, goals, routines, define your blog
2. Self-presentation in the blog: photos, topics
3. Attitude to/experiences tied to readers and their response (comments, likes, statistics)
4. Blogg.no environment (experiences of participation; attitude to top bloggers; competition?; commercialization?)
5. Expanding the audience: desirable? Why/why not?
6. Experiences as blog reader (consumed blogs, reasons for consumption)
7. What have you learned through blogging/what has blogging given you? (general questions)
8. Pink blogger: definition, identification with the term? (wait until term is used by the participant)

Interview 2 guide

1. The blog today (changes? If quit blogging, why? If continued, why?)
2. Attitude to blogging/goals today (changes?)
3. Compare the blog today and when you started
4. Reflections around blog and off-blog
5. Digital competences: specific (self-presentation, communication, technical)
6. Digital competences: follow up on other competences mentioned by the participant

7. Excerpts from the blog/interview 1: follow up
8. Sum up your blog experience

In the following two sections, I give an account of how I used these interview guides as points of departure during the interviews focusing on the two central themes of performances of self, and digital competences.

4.3.2. Interviewing about Performances of Self

During the interviews, I asked the participants about their experiences, dilemmas, and goals tied to the performances of the self in the blog. For instance when they were talking about the norms and rules of participation in mainstream blogging, I encouraged them to reflect on these norms and rules in order to elicit their perspectives, goals, and attitudes in relation to these norms and rules. I was interested in how they define their blogs, where they placed themselves in the blogging world, and in how they positioned their performances of selves in blogs over time. I also asked about their blog consumption and their attitudes to top bloggers in order to find out which bloggers they were inspired by and in what ways.

I was interested in how the participants described the mainstream blogging community and the top bloggers so as to find out about their perspectives but also to be able to compare their stories to the discourses on mainstream blogging, its participants and trend-setters (top bloggers) that I identified in the analysis of the press commentary on pink bloggers discussed in Paper 1. I wanted to find out how the participants positioned themselves in relation to the pink blogger label that I had earlier identified as an iteration of a gendered discourse that frames participation in mainstream blogging. Importantly, I waited until the participants mentioned the term pink blogging instead of using the term first myself because I wanted to see how relevant this label was in their stories of participation and I presumed that they would bring this up if it was relevant. This proved to be the case during the interviews; all but one of the participants brought up the term during interview 1 without my elicitation. After the term was brought up, the participants were asked about how they defined a pink blogger and how they positioned themselves in relation to the label. The participant who did not bring up the term herself was asked “Have you heard about the term pink blogger”?

Interview 2 focused largely on eliciting reflections about the dynamics of the participants’ experiences of participation and the resulting performances of selves over time. However, this served another important purpose, that of member validation as expounded by Ritchie and Lewis (2003), which I account for in section 4.5. Interviewing the participants on two occasions, analysing their blogs between the interviews and encouraging them to reflect on their past and present per-

formances of identity in blogs formed a critical part of the longitudinal analysis.

4.3.3. Interviewing about Digital Competences

Taking the stories of participation as my point of departure also facilitated identifying which competences mattered to the participants and why. During interview 1, I followed up on any statements connected to competences by asking complementary questions. I also asked general questions like “What has blogging given you?” or “What have you learned by blogging?” to allow for their bringing up anything they viewed as relevant. During interview 2, I asked the participants to compare their blogs in the past with how they were now, as well as to compare their past and present blogging experiences in order to elicit what they had learned during the time they had blogged, and what the process was. I also asked specifically about the three competence areas⁷ of self-presentation, communication, and technical competence documented as significant in the literature in order to see what meanings the participants tied to these notions. For instance, I asked, “During the time that you have blogged, have you learned anything about communication?” This combination of questions served important purposes. It allowed for an investigation of digital competences connected to everyday blogging routines based on the participants’ blogging-related experiences and on what they brought up as meaningful for their participation in mainstream blogging. It also helped to elicit responses about the three competence areas identified as crucial in previous research (self-presentation, communication, technical competence) and helped me to compare them. Interview 2 also served the purpose of reviewing my interpretations of the digital competence indicators I had found in the blog content. This proved to be very important since some of my interpretations were wrong. For instance, when I was comparing blog samples collected for one participant, I noticed that the blog improved in terms of the technical quality of the design. I made a note during the analysis that this might be an indicator of developing technical competence by the participant. But when I talked to her about this during interview 2, it turned out that she had had the design done by someone else. So, the improved technical quality of the blog design was not an indicator of the blogger’s developing technical competence, by for instance, learning HTML coding.

4.3.4. Ethnicity and Class in Interviewing

Whereas eliciting the participants’ views on the gendered aspects of participation in mainstream blogging was strongly focused on during the interviewing, less attention was directed towards the dimensions of ethnicity and class. Still, the sample was selected

⁷ For more information about the competence areas see Paper 3, in the section headed Studies of Informal Learning in Peer-based Digital Practices.

strategically in a way that accounted for the diversity in the ethnic backgrounds of the participants and the interviews opened up possibilities for the participants to bring up the themes and issues they experienced as important in their experience of participation. I also followed up on the statements and the blog content that had to do with the participants' ethnic background. For instance, one participant said she had many readers with the same Asian background as herself and another participant posted a self-portrait photo in which she was wearing an outfit witnessing her immigrant background. However, insofar as ethnicity was addressed, no significant findings were produced.

In terms of class, I presumed that the differences in their economic status would not influence the participants' access to computers or to the medium of blogging. This presumption was based on Norwegian statistics that document the extremely good access to computer hardware and Internet technologies that Norwegian teens have. Almost 100 percent of Norwegian teens had access to the Internet when I started the project⁸ (Statistics Norway, 2011, 2012), and 82 percent of Norwegians aged 15 to 16 had access to a computer in their own room (Norwegian Media Authority, 2012). Setting up and maintaining a blog on the blogg.no portal, which is the focus of this dissertation, is free of charge. Consequently, I did not ask about the participants' economic status during the interviews. This presumption had to be somewhat revised since it turned out that the participants with lower economic status had access to technical equipment of lower quality and this influenced, to some extent, the technical quality of their blogs. However, this was not straightforward since some of these participants had free access to expensive equipment and software at school and they used this for blogging without having to invest their own money. While I acknowledge the importance of the dimensions of class and ethnicity, these were not the focal points of this dissertation. (See the research questions in section 1.3.).

4.3.5. Archiving Blog Posts and Comments

The blog samples for each participant were collected during 3 months in the following order.

Month 1: posts and comments posted in the blog during the month half a year prior to interview 1.

Month 2: posts and comments posted in the blog during the month when interview 1 took place.

⁸ In 2011, 98 percent of Norwegian teens in the age group 13 to 15, and 97 percent in the age group 16 to 19 had access to the Internet. In 2012, 99 percent of Norwegian teens in the age group 13 to 15, and 98 percent in the age group 16 to 19 had access to the Internet. The access percentage for both groups in 2015 reached 100 percent.
(Statistics Norway, accessed from <http://medienorge.uib.no/statistikk/medium/ikt/347>).

Month 3: posts and comments posted in the blog during the month when interview 2 took place⁹.

Each post, together with comments, was archived as a PDF file and saved under the title of the given post. The PDF files were introduced to NVivo and stored in the “Internals” section in three folders, each folder containing posts and comments from one month. The PDF files contained all the original content of the posts (text, photos, and comments) but not videos. In order to make the videos accessible for analysis, I saved them in the “Externals” folder in the form of active links to the videos published in the blog, which I was able to access during the analysis. Introducing data coming from blog samples to NVivo allowed for storing and managing extensive data including voluminous textual, graphic, and video material. Importantly, using NVivo allowed for documenting the analyses of the blog samples and provided easy access to the coded data during subsequent stages of analysis.

4.3.6. Data Collection in Batches

Data collection did not overlap for all participants but covered the same time span (see Table 2) of about one year for each participant apart from the four participants recruited in the first batch. Collecting data in batches was dictated by practical reasons; I wanted to contact the participants while they were interested in participating in the project. As a result, data was collected at various points in time depending on when the participants were recruited. This can be seen as a weakness but I suggest that securing data collection from all participants during the same period of time was not essential since the stories of participation elicited during the interviews reached beyond the period of data collection. In fact, I suggest that I managed to use this to my advantage in two ways. First, because data collection was intertwined with analysis, I was able to use the data that I collected and analyzed in one batch to refine data collection in the subsequent batch. This involved, for instance, sharpening the focus of the interview questions based on the themes the participants brought up during the interviews. Second, because the participants were not interviewed during the same period, their stories of participation, sometimes somewhat overlapping in time, at other times coming one after another, covered a longer period of time than the one year of data collection for individual participants. This allowed for the observation and investigation of the changes in the mainstream blogging community on the basis of the interview data over a longer time—during 2012 to 2014 and, indirectly, through my observations of blogg.no prior to the interviews, from 2011.

⁹ Some participants quit blogging or took a break from blogging during the period between interview 1 and interview 2. Consequently, the blog samples for Month 3 were collected from the last month when the blog was updated preceding interview 2 (for details, see Table 2).

Moreover, the four participants recruited in the first batch were interviewed with an interval of approximately one year between interviews while for the remaining eight participants the interval between interviews 1 and 2 was approximately six months. This may be considered as a weakness of the study but the reason why the intervals between interview 1 and interview 2 were longer for the first four participants than for the remaining eight was that the design of the project was changed in its early stage. Originally, I was planning to interview the participants once and secure the longitudinal design of the study by collecting blog samples from different periods of time. After having interviewed the four participants from the first batch, I decided to introduce interview 2 to the study in order to strengthen its longitudinal aspect and to secure member validation. The break between interview 1 and interview 2 for the first four participants was longer compared to the remaining 8 participants also because of my parental leave which took place during the realization of the project. While this modification undoubtedly influenced data collection, I suggest that the data collected from the first four participants was comparable to the data collected from the remaining eight. The stories of participation elicited during the interviews reached back beyond the time frame between interviews 1 and 2 and this made them suited to comparison.

4.4 Data Analyses

In the following sections, I provide a summary of the crucial phases of the analyses carried out during the research process. I start by giving an account of the critical discourse analysis of the press commentary (section 4.4.1). Sections 4.4.2—4.4.6 summarize the analyses of the interview- and blog data.

4.4.1. Critical Discourse Analysis of Press Articles

The aim of the discursive analysis of press articles was to identify the hegemonic discourses of the pink blogger label. This analysis was much narrower in scope and volume of material, compared to the analysis of the data coming from interviews and blog samples.

I printed out the articles selected through the newspaper search and marked each of them with a symbol, for example A1 for article 1 published in *Aftenposten*. Following Moss and Shank (2002) I began by close reading, and, following Forman and Damschroder (2008), by memoing the articles in their paper versions. This first stage served to identify the topic of each article and the context in which search words were used as well as to record my first hunches and thoughts about the data. I made notes on the margins of the article print-outs. Subsequently, I introduced the PDF files with the articles to an NVivo file. Once the electronic versions of the articles marked with symbols were introduced to NVivo, I set off with the coding procedure. I relied entirely

on open coding to ensure what Lincoln and Guba (1985) see as a naturalistic and exploratory enquiry. I read the articles repeatedly and inductively coded chunks of text, for instance under codes “pink bloggers as stupid” or “pink blogging as feminine”. During this process, I kept coming back to the paper versions of the articles to consult my initial comments and to prevent my losing track of the way pink bloggers were framed within respective articles. After re-reading all the coded excerpts, I grouped them into the following categories: pink blogging as trivial; pink blogging as commercial; pink blogging as detrimental; pink bloggers as popular and/or role-models; pink bloggers as exhibitionists; and pink bloggers as positive. These preliminary categories were modified in the course of the analysis since some of them were imprecise and some overlapped with others.

At this point, I carried out a more in-depth discourse analysis of the preliminarily categorized excerpts. I focused mainly on the rhetorical mode of discourse samples including types of argumentation and narrative; thematic structure of texts; and word meaning and wording in identifying value-laden words and expressions. I looked at how pink blogging is framed on the textual level of individual press articles and, intertextually across all selected articles, by considering, for example, how it is framed by the title or the wider context. This analysis revolved also around the hegemonic, gendered discourses about pink blogging as recounted in Paper 1.

4.4.2. Analyses of Interviews and Blogs: Performing the Blogging Self and Experienced Competences

Analyzing the interviews and blog content samples was a complex, multi-step process that is summarized in the following sections. As much as the space constraints allow for only a selective and rather concise summary, I report the crucial steps and moments of this extensive analytical process. I have structured the summary according to what Ritchie and Lewis (2003) formulate as the crucial analytical stages: managing the raw data; developing descriptive accounts; and creating explanatory accounts.

4.4.3. Data Management: Labeling and Synthesizing Raw Interview and Blog Data

The goal at this stage was to manage the raw data. This involved the labeling and synthesizing of the verbatim material while retaining the original terms and concepts used by the participants. I immersed myself in what Patton (2002) calls the “details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes and interrelationships” (41). During this stage, I used NVivo software to store and code the data collected from interviews and blogs. I created an NVivo file for each participant into which I uploaded verbatim material collected at subsequent stages of data collection: the interview 1 tran-

script; blog samples (month 1, month 2, month 3); and the interview 2 transcript. This stage involved a two-step coding of the data for each participant.

First, I did the preliminary coding, also called indexing by Ritchie and Lewis (2003). Preliminary coding was carried out at each stage of data collection before I embarked on the next. Here, data collection and analyses intertwined: salient themes and concepts identified at each stage fed into the collection and the coding of data at the subsequent stage. Preliminary coding involved labeling chunks of the verbatim material to identify the themes and concepts to which they relate. I used quite a lot of in vivo codes to stay close to the language and concepts used by the participants. See, in Figure 1, for instance, the code “blogging is an ego boost” in the preliminary coding of the transcript of interview 1 for one of the participants.

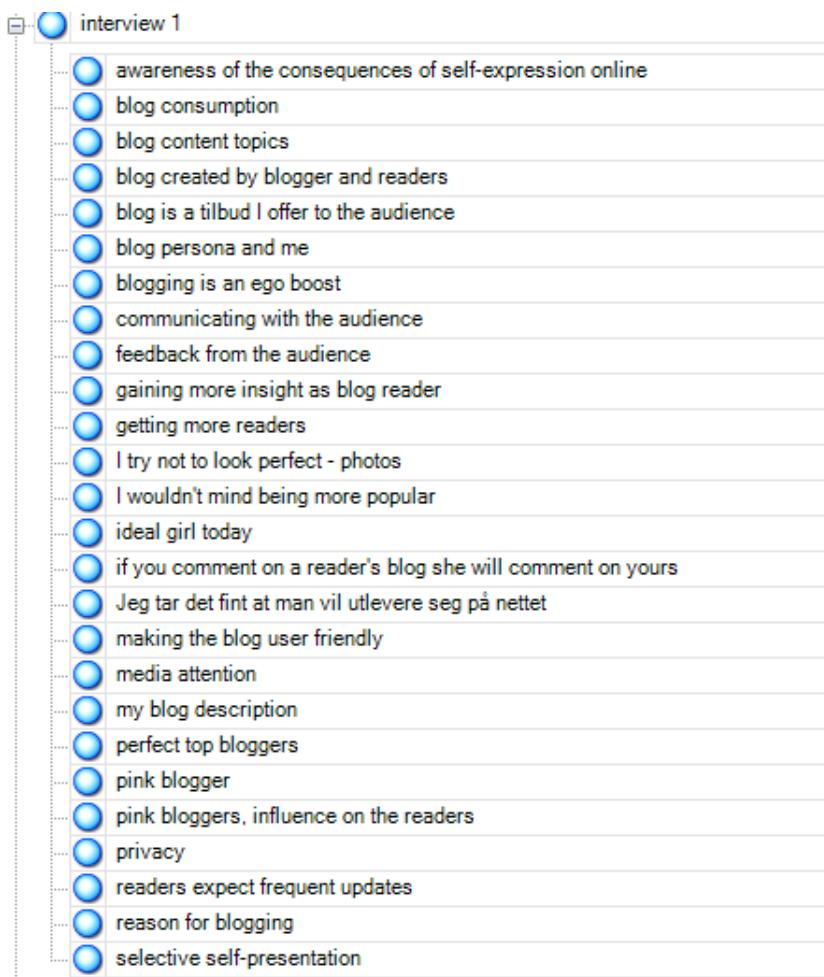


Figure 1: Example of preliminary coding of interview 1 in Nvivo

The themes and concepts identified in interview 1 fed into the analysis of the blog samples. Blog content analyses were inductive since I was labeling chunks of text and visual material (photos and videos) as I went along with the coding, rather than according to any codes established beforehand. At the same time, the coding was guided by my analysis of interview 1 in that I was trying to locate the indicators of competences and identity performances that the participants mentioned during this first interview. Originally, I had planned to code all the data coming from blog samples, but I modified this because some blog samples were extremely voluminous, including up to 60 to 70 posts per month. While I archived and reviewed all the posts published during the selected months, I analyzed in-depth only the posts and comments published during the first ten days of each month since I concluded on the basis of the first analyses that such samples would provide a satisfactory level of what Patton (2002) regards as information richness. I also reviewed the remaining posts, of which I coded only those that I identified as salient for the analysis. The ethnographic analyses of blog content were “strongly oriented to qualitative data analysis, which involves description, attention to nuances, and openness to emerging insights” (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, 26) but they also included a degree of counting in order to gain an overview of which topics and photos/videos were the most common as well as tracking the potential changes in these proportions. I categorized the posts into four categories: life accounts; fashion/beauty related posts; opinion posts; and sponsored posts.

As I went along with the coding, I actively used NVivo functions called externals, memos, and annotations. As I have already pointed out, since the blog posts were stored as PDF files in NVivo, I could not access the videos that were posted or the content that was linked to them from these PDF files. Therefore, I stored this material in the “externals” folder and accessed them from there. As I was proceeding with the coding, I recorded early thoughts and hunches about the data by creating annotations. The annotations in NVivo are notes attached to chunks of the interview transcript or blog content. They appear on the screen every time the annotated content is accessed, as in the example below:

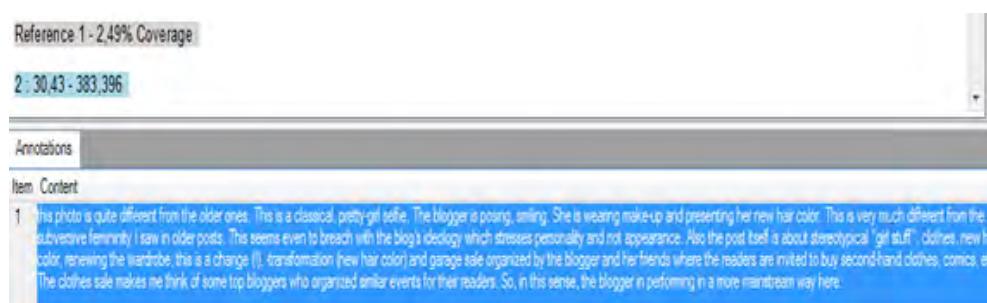


Figure 2: Example of an annotation created for a photo from a blog sample

The annotations served to record the associations I identified between and among the chunks of data coming from various stages and sources of data collection and this was the first step in identifying the patterns in the coded material. I used annotations as what Birks, Chapman, and Francis (2008) call coding memos, which serve to “enable a deep and detailed exploration of processes involved in coding and categorization of data” (72). The annotations proved to be extremely helpful during the refined coding when I reduced and ordered the data according to the themes and concepts I identified as salient.

I used memos in NVivo in a function similar to that of a research journal; I entered reflections and brainstorming ideas all through the analytical process. Some memos were my observations and reflections connected to the interviewing situations, ethical issues, my role as a researcher, my presumptions that were challenged during the interactions with the participants, or other impressions from these interactions. I also used memos to note down the questions I wanted to ask during interview 2 if I found any theme the participants brought up during interview 1 or any element of blog content I identified as salient during the coding of the blog samples.

After having collected and preliminarily coded all data for individual participants, I carried out the second step, the refined coding. At this stage, I synthesized the data that had been preliminarily coded and located it within a framework developed on the basis of the recurrent themes in the material and the focal points of the investigation formulated in the research sub-questions (see section 1.3). Ritchie and Lewis (2003) call this stage charting. This involved merging, dividing, deleting, and adding codes to order the data according to the recurring themes and concepts. These were ordered according to my research questions and the stages of data collection: digital competences interview 1, blog, and interview 2; performing identity interview 1, blog, interview 2; and the pink blogger label. Below is an example of the refined coding of all the data for one of the participants (Figure 3).

As in case of the preliminary coding, when I was assigning meaning to chunks of data by coding them under different labels (see Figure 1), this step in the management of verbatim material also involved interpretation because I was bringing together similar material and summarizing the original text. Moreover, in this step, the data was ordered in a way that facilitates grasping the processual nature of the investigated phenomena over time thanks to bringing together portions of data collected during subsequent stages (interview 1, blog content, interview 2) and to introducing codes called “change” or “change over time”, where I registered data that reflected the changes identified in the blog data and in interview 2 during which the participants reflected on their past and present experiences of participation in blogging.

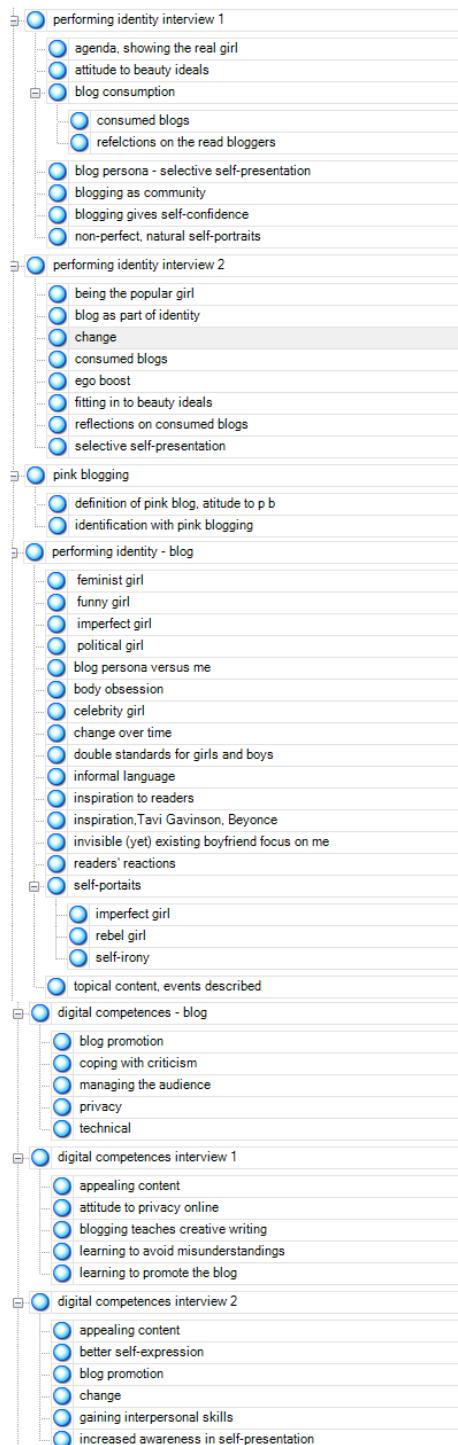


Figure 3: Refined coding of data collected from one of the participants

The last step in data management was the creation of what I called “participant summaries”. I reviewed the NVivo files for each participant in order to identify key moments in their stories of participation so as to be able to create participant summaries according to the sharpened categories and dimensions that I detected as crucial for exploring the investigated phenomena. In the process, I actively used annotations that included the notes on the first associations that I identified in the data. For instance, I identified that frequent updating was associated with extending or maintaining the audience.

The process of creating participant summaries was time-consuming and demanded the repetitive extraction of data that came across as essentially relevant for the participants’ experiences of identity performances and digital competences and that summarized how they were reflected in the blogs. The participant summaries included the following categories: reason to start blogging; positioning of the blog within the community; goals tied to blogging over time; attitude to the rules and norms of the mainstream blogging community and to its trend-setters over time; perspectives on self-presentation in the blog and beyond; summary of visual and textual self-presentations in the blog sample over time (photos/videos, topical content, number of posts per type); participant’s accounts of response from the audience; summary of the received response identified in the blog; participant’s definition of and identification with the pink blogger term; competences brought up during the interviews as meaningful; reasons why particular competences mattered; meanings attached to competences; and indicators of digital competences identified in the blog samples over time. The summaries were structured according to the themes and concepts listed above to make them manageable during comparative analyses but also included additional themes and moments brought up by the individual participants or detected during the analyses, which I identified as salient for their stories of participation. The participant summaries also included: name (pseudonym) and age of participant; place of residence; audience size; and her ethnic background. They were about ten pages long. The summaries included active links to the chunks of material coded in NVivo and this made it possible to access the original data for consultation in subsequent analytical stages.

The stage of data management was crucial for further analytical stages (creating descriptive and explanatory accounts) since this allowed for familiarization with the voluminous data and for synthesizing the data in a way that would be workable for further analysis. An important goal in approaching and synthesizing the data was to identify the recurrent themes that the participants brought up as important in their everyday experiences of participation in mainstream blogging, how these were reflected in the blogs, and how their experiences and perspectives evolved over time. I recorded the individual stories of participation for each participant, which were unique, varying in terms of goals attached to blogging, responses from the audience, and ways of self-presenting in

the blog. It was crucial to identify the rules and norms of participation in mainstream blogging since this was dictated by the theoretical underpinnings of the analysis—emphasizing the contextual and relational situatedness of identity performances and digital competence development. I continually recorded the participants' reflections about the everyday realities, norms, and rules of participation in the mainstream blogging community in the memos of NVivo files for individual participants and gathered them into a single Word document. This allowed for identifying the recurring themes concerning the realities of participation in the mainstream blogging community across all the participants. These realities included: competitiveness; high degree of relevance of blog rankings; commercialization of blogging (for instance, sponsorship cooperation); focus on the body and consumerism; pressure to update the blog frequently in order to maintain audience; the perfect femininity norm promoted by the top bloggers; and the give-and-take rule of delivering the content desired by the audience in exchange for their reading the blog. (I termed this the “appeal prerogative.”)

Identifying the stories of participation was possible only through immersion in the raw data, coding the data in a way that retains the concepts and language of the participants, and the subsequent synthesis of the verbatim material. The process of managing the raw data was time-consuming, at times tedious but necessary in order to synthesize the data in a way that would give a workable basis for the subsequent stage of comparative analyzes. Importantly, the data management stage has been documented in the NVivo files, and, subsequently, in the participant summaries, and this made them easily accessible during the subsequent analytical stages. The NVivo files included the record of how the data was coded, recoded, annotated, and memoed and were consulted repeatedly during the analytical process.

4.4.4. Creating Descriptive and Explanatory Accounts

The stage of creating descriptive accounts involved “detection, categorisation and classification of the substantive content and dimensions of phenomena” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, 261) in the process of carrying out comparative analyzes across all the participants. Whereas data management summarized in section 4.4.3 aimed at labeling and synthesizing the verbatim material while retaining the original terms and concepts used by the participants, at this stage I introduced into the analysis the theoretical concepts of performing the blogging self and experienced digital competences. The outcome was developing a typology of the strategies in performing the blogging self and a classification of the experienced digital competences. This descriptive and typological work formed the basis for the final analytical step—creating explanatory accounts. This involved developing “local explanations” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, 255) in accordance with the chosen theoretical frameworks and evaluating the evidence from the study in

terms of its wider application. I summarize the analyses carried out in these stages in the following sections.

4.4.5. Performing the Blogging Self: Comparative Analysis

During the analysis, I used the constant comparison method (Silverman, 2006), moving between different participants in order to check if the hypotheses emerging for one participant yielded for others. When I was analyzing the participant summaries comparatively, I identified an important pattern in that the participants' performances of blogging selves tended to change over time. While these changes varied in degree and scope across the sample, the changeability was always there, whether in terms of changes in the topical content, the visual self-presentation, the blog design, or the frequency of updates. When I was reviewing the interview data, I was looking for how the participants were describing and positioning their own performances of blogging selves and how this changed over time. As a result, I identified that the different ways of performing the blogging self were actually manifestations of the different responses to the norms and rules of the mainstream blogging community expressed by the participants during the interviews. In other words, the attitude towards the norms of the mainstream community came across as a crucial dimension in developing a typology of performances of blogging selves. Establishing the other dimensions of the typology was a complex process involving testing the fit of different dimensions across the sample. In my using as the point of departure the participants' views and perspectives captured in their stories of participation over time, I found that they identified with their blogging selves over time to varying degrees. I detected an association between the degree to which the participants adjusted to the norms of the mainstream blogging community and the degree to which they identified with the performances of their blogging selves. Hence, I established the degree of identification with the blogging self as the second dimension of the typology. The process led to establishing three strategies of performing the blogging self, which were different responses to the norms and values of the mainstream blogging community: the *adjustment* strategy, where the performances of the blogging self were adjusted to these norms; the *fit-in-and-be-myself* strategy where they partly complied with these norms but also diverged from them in some ways; and the *contestation* strategy, where these norms were contested.

In turn, these different responses to the norms of the mainstream blogging community resulted in different performances in the blogs, which could be placed on a continuum of performing the self according to the femininity norms of the community, or against these norms. Such classification reflected the analyzed data well but also avoided the categorization of the participants as different *kinds* of bloggers which would have resulted in labeling the girls in particular ways. Instead, the typology documented that the parti-

cipants were subjects who pick up various strategies of performing the blogging self over time, while also acknowledging the wider cultural contexts and gendered discourses that influenced these performances. The three strategies can be placed on a continuum with respect to 1) the degree to which the participants' performances of selves fitted in with the mainstream blog community, and 2) the degree of identification with the blogging self. The higher the degree of fitting in with the mainstream blog community, the lower the identification with the blogging self. The table below presents the use of strategies over time for all the participants:

Pseudonym	Use of strategies over time
Sara	Adjustment, changed blogging platform, quit blogging
Nora	Adjustment, quit blogging
Ella	Adjustment, took a break off school to blog full time
Sofie	Fit-in-and-be-myself, adjustment, changed blogging platform, quit blogging
Lisa	Fit-in-and-be-myself, took a break from blogging
Deena	Fit-in-and-be-myself, took a break from blogging
Pia	Fit-in-and-be-myself, quit blogging
Emma	Fit-in-and-be-myself, adjustment, continued blogging
Karoline	Fit-in-and-be-myself, adjustment, continued blogging
Maria	Fit-in-and-be-myself, started new blog, contestation, continued blogging
Nadira	Contestation, fit-in-and-be-myself, took a break from blogging
Janne	Contestation, quit blogging

Table 3: Use of strategies of performing the blogging self over time

The strategies are refined, analytical products that I derived from the empirical material. Rather than relating the stories of participation of all participants, Paper 2 presents the typology of the strategies with their essential characteristics and illustrative examples from the data. Importantly, the article also presents the dynamics of performing the blogging self across time and contexts focusing on several participants. While this reduces the thickness of the presented description, this way of presenting data corresponds to the goal of the investigation. Still, as summarized in sections above, the presented findings are formulated on the basis of multi-step analyzes that resulted from in-depth, detailed investigation of extensive raw data. Rather than providing evidence for representational generalization, Paper 2 contributes to the theorization of performing identity as self in online-based settings and to the provision of some insights on the experiences of, and processes involved in, participating in mainstream blogging as part of the contemporary girl's digital media culture in Norway.

4.4.6. Experienced Digital Competences: Comparative Analysis

When I was comparatively analyzing digital competences, my goal was to identify which competences the participants experienced as meaningful for their blogging practices and why. This was dictated by the non-normative and functional approach to digital competences that I was drawing on. During the data management stage summarized in section 4.4.3, I used annotations in NVivo to record the associations between the competences mentioned by the participants and specific norms and rules of the community (including femininity norms). These reflected the meanings attached to competences by individual participants and were included in the participant summaries that I used at this stage. For instance, some participants framed guarding privacy as important in connection to their experiences of the blog readers being overly inquisitive about the details of their private lives.

When I was analyzing the participants' summaries comparatively, I repeatedly read them and listed, in a single Word document, the competences that had been brought up as meaningful during the interviews. I recorded which participants mentioned specific competences by writing the participant symbols I had used during the analytical process next to the competences on the list (b 1 for blogger 1, b 2 for blogger 2, etc.). In the process of data management summarized in section 4.4.3, I identified in the data that the meanings that the participants attach to competences were multiple so it was important to consider this multiplicity during the process of classifying the competences. I repeatedly consulted and compared the participant summaries in order to identify the meanings that the participants attached to specific competences. For instance, producing content that would be appealing to the audience mattered to all the participants (at least during some periods of their blogging activity) but they defined appealing content in various ways. Some participants defined this as carefully staged self-portraits evoking fashion shoot photos and they experienced the ability to produce high quality, flattering outfit-photos as meaningful. Others framed opinion posts as appealing content and brought up the ability to do research for these posts and to argue for their standpoints as being meaningful.

At the same time, it was important to show how the competences mattered to the participants in relation to the norms of participation in mainstream blogging, as well as to the participants' blogging-related goals. The process of establishing the classification involved constant comparison (see Silverman, 2006) across the sample of the meanings attached to the competences, and of the associations the participants were making between their goals and the developed competences, as well as between the norms of the blogging community and the developed competences. In the end, I classified the participants' replies into five competences according to the main functional areas I detected during the analyses. These were: regulating online self-disclosu-

re (concerning the area of guarding privacy); producing appealing online content in an appealing form (concerning the area of adjusting the blog content to the audience's expectations); managing the audience and dealing with comments (concerning the area of responding to the feedback from the audience); written self-expression online (concerning the area of formulating thoughts and opinions in the online setting); and technical competence (concerning the area of producing content of high technical quality). Departing from the stories of participation allowed for identifying some of the digital competences the girls experienced as meaningful within the mainstream blogging community but also beyond in other online-based practices.

The classification of the competences is presented in Paper 3. The competences are interdependent and partly overlapping and the development of some competences supports the development of others. The analysis of the competences in the article is based on all collected data. However, in analyzing particular competences throughout the text, I provide citations from various participants that best illustrate these. I provide relatively few long citations from the blogs and the interviews acknowledging that overuse of cited passages "can make a research account tedious to read, voluminous in length and can easily distract from the clarity of the main commentary" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, 290). Instead, I incorporate the words and phrases used by the participants and enclose them in inverted commas in order to present the analyzes in a condensed way and also in order to include the participants' original phrasing that illustrates their stories of participation.

4.5 Reliability and Validity

I acknowledge the debate among qualitative researchers about the extent to which the concepts of reliability and validity that originate in quantitative research are useful in the context of qualitative scholarship. I share the standpoint expressed by Ritchie and Lewis (2003), who argue that reliability and validity should not be seen as alien concepts in qualitative research: "reliability meaning 'sustainable' and validity meaning 'well grounded' will have relevance for qualitative research since they help to define the strength of the data" (270).

While I agree with the position presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985) that the exact replication in qualitative research is unrealistic because of the complexity of the investigated phenomena and the impact of context, I am also committed to the view that it is essential to ensure that qualitative research is reliable by, first, carrying out internal checks on the quality of the data and its interpretation, and, second, by providing a thorough documentation of the research procedures that would confirm that claims are supported by adequate evidence. As accounted for in the previous sections of this chapter, I have attempted to address the first requirement (internal checks of quality) by

selecting a sample comprehensive of all known constituencies, by allowing all the participants sufficient opportunities to portray their experiences, by carrying out the analyzes systematically and comprehensively by means of multiple assessments of typologies and classifications, and by providing evidence of my interpretations. I have attempted to provide comprehensive information about the research process in order to document as many details of the procedures that have led to particular conclusions as space permits.

In terms of validity, following Ritchie and Lewis (2003), I used both internal and external validation for the collected qualitative data. For internal validation, I applied the constant comparison method advocated by Silverman (2006) during the stages of developing descriptive and explanatory accounts. This involved deriving hypotheses from one part of the data and testing them on another by constant comparison across different sites, times, and individuals. For external validation, I used triangulation of sources, which involved comparing data from different methods (interviewing, blog content analyzes, discourse analysis of press articles), theory triangulation (I approached data from different theoretical perspectives), as well as member validation that involved taking the evidence back to the participants to validate my interpretation of the data they generated.

4.6 Theoretical and Inferential Generalization

The particular strength of qualitative research studies in terms of their contribution to social theories is that they explore issues “in depth and from the perspectives of different participants, with concepts, meanings and explanations developed inductively from the data” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, 267). I suggest that this investigation contributes to developing the theory of performing self in online-based settings as well as to the theorization of digital competences and digital competence development. The evidence from this study has been assessed by comparison with the established theories on performing identity in online-based settings and on digital competence development. As I report in sections 5.2.2 and 5.2.3, the evidence from this work partly supports these theories but also provides new insights that develop and refine them by providing empirical evidence of newly detected variations in behaviors and circumstances identified in the course of the research process, thus providing some insight into the underlying processes that constitute contextual frames, and the explanation of individual behaviors. At the same time, I share Seale’s (1999) position that theory is a mutable collection of principles and hypotheses rather than something fixed and unchangeable, and I acknowledge that the inference from this study rests as a hypothesis until proved or disproved by further evidence.

Moreover, I suggest that the evidence from this work can, to some degree, be inferred to contexts beyond the sampled one by means of inferential generalization (Ritchie &

Lewis, 2003) or what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call transferability. While the latter argue that there will always be factors that make a specific setting unique, one can evaluate whether the evidence from this setting can be transferred to a setting that is similar while taking these factors into account. This study documents the experiences, processes, and views that I position as illustrative of some wider trends in contemporary youthful media practices that have been identified in previous scholarship as typical of teen digital media culture nowadays. Mainstream blogging is specific in terms of the structure of the community built around blog rankings, the easily-consumable norm of perfect femininity and the social positioning via the pink blogger label, and this undoubtedly makes the girls' stories of participation documented in this work context-specific. However, as documented in this work, these experiences, processes, and views are also illustrative of some of the wider trends in participation in digital media culture pertaining to young people generally, like judgement culture (Hirdman, 2007), celebrity culture (boyd, 2008), and commercialization (Schor, 2004), as well as concerning girls particularly. These include, as I have pointed out earlier, negotiating normative femininity in online-based self-presentation that requires striking a balance between attractiveness and respectability as well as negotiating the postfeminist perfectibility and the rigid ideal of the body that is neither too fat nor too thin. Thus, the evidence from this work seems to be to some extent transferrable to settings that are similar to the one investigated here in terms of competing for positive feedback from the judging audiences, and the significance of celebrity culture in which visibility provided by large audiences can give celebrity status. Also included here is commercialization—girls not only consume but also produce commercial content and can gain material benefits by doing so, and their focus is often on the perfect female body, hardly escapable in the popular media culture of today. However, the inferential generalization must rest as a hypothesis until proved or disproved by further evidence.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

Participation in the project was confidential. The participants were given pseudonyms and the visuals published in the blogs were neither included in publications nor during project presentations. I had known beforehand that I would publish in English and that I would be able to include the citations from the blogs in the publications without identifying the quoted blogs online. Names and URLs of the investigated blogs were neither disclosed in the publications nor in any of the other ways in which I have disseminated my findings.

Excluding photos and other visuals meant losing highly illustrative material but this granted the participants anonymity that I found important because of their young age and, in some cases, considerable visibility. Moreover, I did not want to make the participants recognizable because of the trivializing discourses on mainstream blogging. The

decision to grant the participants anonymity resulted from my ethical position: when I was embarking on data collection I did not know what the girls would think about this matter. I did not want to put the participants in the vulnerable position of being scrutinized in research publications alongside their photos and full names. Of course, I could have asked the participants if they would choose to be anonymous participants or not. To some, my standpoint might seem protectionist, implying that teenage girls are unable to make decisions on their own. This is not the case. Rather, I acknowledge that being a participant of a research project is unknown territory for teenagers, and they may not be aware of the possible consequences of relinquishing anonymity when participating in such a research project. My decision was reinforced during my conversations with the participants. Their attitudes to what they publish online and to what they view as public and private content often changed over time, sometimes resulting in their deleting old blog posts because they no longer identified with them. If not rendered anonymous, the girls could have been uncomfortable with immortalizing, as it were, their past blog posts in a research publication.

Each participant received the project information sheet and the consent form before interview 1 (see Appendix 4). Before each interview, I asked the participants if they had any questions about participation in the project. I emphasized that they were free not to answer the questions if they did not wish to do so. I restated what was stated in the consent form about their participation being voluntary and emphasized that they could withdraw from the project at any point. I encouraged the participants to talk to their parents about their participation in the project and made clear that I was available for them to contact me.

The interviews were recorded and stored both in the form of audio recordings and transcripts. The participants were informed as to how long the material will be stored and by whom it will be accessed in compliance with the obligation to inform study participants specified in the “Guidelines for research ethics in the social sciences, law and the humanities” (NESH, 2006). According to these guidelines, the project was registered at and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) as involving the gathering and processing of personal data. The consent of parents was obtained for those of the participants who were fifteen-years-old in compliance with children’s right to protection (NESH, 2006).

Part 5: Presentation and Discussion of Findings

5.1 Summary of Papers

In this section, I provide short summaries of the three papers that form the core of this dissertation. I summarize and discuss my key findings in the subsequent sections.

5.1.1. Paper 1: “Superficial! Body Obsessed! Commercial!” Norwegian press representations of girl bloggers

In this Paper, I investigate how teenage girls and young women are socially positioned in the Norwegian public discourse via the identity label of pink blogger based on their participation in mainstream blogging. I identify the gendered, hegemonic discourses (Fairclough, 2010) of this label on the basis of the Norwegian press commentary, and critically analyze the implications of calling girls and young women “pink bloggers”. I position this identity label as an iteration of a gendered discourse that is part of a broader cultural context of Norwegian girls’ participation in mainstream blogging.

5.1.2. Paper 2: Performing the self in the mainstream: Norwegian girls in blogging

Paper 2 is based on the longitudinal analyses of in-depth interviews with Norwegian teenage girls who blog in the mainstream blogging community, and of their blogs. This paper investigates the girls’ participation in the practice of mainstream blogging as a site of performing identity as self (Moje & Luke, 2009). I focus on how the girls perform their blogging selves and how they reflect on these performances over time. I examine the girls’ performances of their blogging selves in relation to the online-based interactions and settings but also in relation to the larger cultural context and gendered discourses that frame the girls’ experiences and interactions. The pink blogger label reappears here as an important element of the larger gendered discourse in relation to which the girls position themselves when they perform identity in blogs and when they talk about these performances.

5.1.3. Paper 3: What matters to the girls? Norwegian girls' experiences of digital competences in mainstream blogging

Paper 3 focuses on the girls' experiences of digital competences and is based on the analyses of the same data-set as in Paper 2. Departing from the girls' stories of participation in mainstream blogging, I identify the digital competences that the girls find meaningful for their blogging practices and I show the ways in which the online-based context and interactions work together in framing what girls experience as useful learning over time. Moreover, I discuss these digital competences in relation to the normative definitions of what counts as such. I argue that the digital competences experienced as meaningful by the girls in this investigation both comply and clash with the normative conceptualizations of digital competences documented in the literature.

5.2 Summary and Discussion of Key Findings

In the following sections, I summarize and discuss the key findings of this work. The first three sections are organized according to the three research sub-questions of the dissertation. Section 5.2.1 pertains to the first research sub-question addressed in Paper 1 and Paper 2: How are the girls who blog in the mainstream blogging community positioned in the public discourse via the identity label of pink blogger and how do they reflect upon this label? In section 5.2.2, I present and discuss the key findings concerning the second research sub-question addressed in Paper 2: How do the girls perform selves in blogs over time? Section 5.2.3 provides a summary and discussion of the findings related to the third research sub-question addressed in Paper 3: Which digital competences do the girls experience as meaningful and how do their digital practices change over time? I further discuss my key findings in the two final sections focusing on the issue of agency and situatedness in performing identity and developing digital competences (section 5.2.4) and on the issue of experiences of participation in a competitive, commercialized and body-focused space (section 5.2.5).

5.2.1. Gendered Discourses: The Pink Blogger Label

Based on the critical discourse analysis of the Norwegian press coverage mentioned in section 5.1.1, I identified the hegemonic discourses conveyed by the pink blogger identity label, which is well established and commonly used in the Norwegian public sphere. Pink bloggers are discursively construed as visible but insignificant, as irresponsible role models, and as savvy but vulnerable. This label positions mainstream female bloggers as being homogenously trivial and superficial. They are discursively construed as being exhibitionistic in bringing what have been called their “secret conversations” to the public sphere. This is also being associated with making oneself vulnerable to bullying. The earlier press articles in the sample tend to associate pink bloggers with teenage girls and

pink blogs with the girls' online diaries. This is close to the original meaning of the pink blogger term dating back to 2009, that defined a pink blogger as "a relatively young girl who uses her blog to tell the world what she is wearing, what her favorite cosmetics are and how boring school is, nothing else" (<http://thomasmoen.com/rosabloggere>). The girls who blogged were positioned as being too trivial to be worthy of visibility and attention in the public sphere. Another significant element of the hegemonic discourses identified in the press commentary is that the most popular bloggers are framed as being unsuitable role models for the members of their young massive audiences because they promote unrealistic body-ideals and the product consumption of expensive clothes and accessories. Moreover, especially in the most recent press articles in the sample, the bloggers are being positioned as commercialized and they are criticized for not marking the product placement in their blogs but are also framed as vulnerable girls who risk being cheated by the companies that want them to advertise their products.

The pink blogger label clearly subscribes to the tendency to disparage feminized media genres documented in media studies (Bell, 2007; Gray, 1992). For Marwick (2014), the mere fact that personal blogs authored by women are called online diaries degrades these blogs as being less important in comparison to political and filter blogs authored by men. She argues that any online practice that breaks out of the male Internet norm is positioned as being of lesser value¹⁰. While the pink blogger label originally emphasized the alleged triviality and superficiality of teenage girls' blogs, at present this label conveys additional connotations of the commercialization of blogging, the promotion of unrealistic body ideals, and consumerism. At the same time, the changing connotations of the pink blogger label do, in some respects, mirror the gradual shift towards professionalization and commercialization of mainstream blogging in Norway and the problematic sides of these aspects, as the girls brought up during the interviews.

As I document in Paper 2, the participants clearly negotiated the pink blogger identity label as homogenizing and trivializing. They refused to be put into what they called "one box" and to thus be positioned as a "separate species" as bloggers. On the one hand, the implication of the pink blogger term that the style- and clothes-related content is superficial and trivial was rejected. However, on the other, the participants also framed such content as "superficial" themselves at times and clearly tried to justify focusing on such content if they emphasized this in their blogs. Still, none of the participants seemed to claim back and own the term pink blogger in the spirit of third-wave feminism as "a recognition of femininity as a constructive force to be used against patriarchy 'from within'" (Sundén & Sveningsson Elm, 2007, 8). Most participants actively distanced themselves from the pink blogger label. This was the case with both the subversive per-

¹⁰ In contrast, Rettberg (2008) has pointed to the connection between women writing diaries and calling personal blogs online diaries.

formances of self in the *contestation* strategy, and when the blogging self was performed in a way that aimed at adjusting to the norms of the mainstream blogging community. Even if some of the girls said they would not mind being called a pink blogger, or identified as pink bloggers to some extent, or at some point, this tended to change over time, and was accompanied by discomfort with the negative connotations of this label.

Whereas the participants tended to reject the trivializing discourses about pink bloggers, they tended to frame top bloggers as promoting singular, narrow, and unrealistic beauty ideals and this partly overlapped with the discursive construal of top bloggers in the Norwegian press presented in Paper 1. Still, the participants' reflections about top bloggers come across as rather nuanced. On the one hand, they viewed top female bloggers as promoting consumerism and what they called the unrealistically "perfect" self-presentations and this aligned with the discourses on the most popular pink bloggers in the press commentary. The participants described the blogging community as becoming increasingly competitive and commercialized over time and the top bloggers as becoming increasingly "provocative" in posing in sexualized ways, blogging about beauty treatments, plastic surgery, or getting tattoos. They also talked about having a hard time comparing themselves to these seemingly perfect top bloggers. On the other hand, I identified voices that presented the body-focused self-presentations of top bloggers in ways that indicated a degree of understanding towards the top bloggers as being subject, and succumbing, to the body-image obsession in contemporary culture. This did not however alleviate the struggles with their own body-hatred that the participants positioned as being reinforced by the "perfect" self-presentations of some of the top bloggers. Even if the participants said they knew that the photos in some blogs were manipulated, partly thanks to their own blogging practices that made them aware of the selectivity in one's own self-presentations, they still compared themselves to the unrealistic images of perfect bodies. Bordo (2003) documented that we tend to compare ourselves with the manipulated advert models even though we are aware that these images of the female body are exactly that—manipulated. Still, my findings indicate that the models in fashion magazines and Hollywood celebrities seem to be perceived somewhat differently from how top bloggers are. One of the participants said,

[W]hen you watch Hanna Montana, she's a celebrity and lives in the USA, of course I can't be like her. I just have to try to be as good as I can. And then you see (the name of a popular blogger), oh she's my age, she lives in Norway ... She has exactly the same premises as I, why can't I be like her?

Hollywood celebrities are positioned here as very distant in that they have their image created by a team of personal trainers and beauty experts so it is not realistic to even try to be like them. In contrast, top bloggers are framed as rather close, living in the same country, being the same age, having the same premises and thus possible to catch up

with. In her study of Swedish top bloggers, Lövheim (2011a) documents that top bloggers strategically perform as ordinary girls to create a sense of sameness or closeness with their readers. This feeling of being like the top blogger is echoed in the words of one of my participants and this feeling seems to reinforce the disappointment with her own life and/or appearance. Apart from this effect of comparing oneself with the top bloggers, I suggest that this is also a good illustration of how celebrity culture manifests itself in mainstream blogging: it implies a presumption, or even an expectation that anyone can become a top blogger if only one tries hard enough, looks the right way, and has enough readers.

5.2.2. *Performed Blogging Selves*

In contrast to the homogenizing and fixed implications of the pink blogger label, this investigation documents that the girls who blog in mainstream blogging perform in various ways and that these performances tend to change over time (see Table 3). What comes across as striking in my findings is that the girls' identity performances changed over time, to a lesser or greater extent, depending on their changing goals, the feedback from the audience, and the importance they attached to their blogging practices over time. The participants tied various, often changing goals to their participation in blogging and picked up strategies of performing the blogging self accordingly. While some scholars (see for example Stern, 2004) have argued that girls are more free to experiment with femininity in online-based settings than offline, I suggest that the performances of self I identified in my material are complex balancing acts—girls are disciplined according to the normative ideals of the perfect, technology-enabled body (Jackson, 2016) and the ideals of Nordic Girlhood.

All the participants performed blogging selves in relation to the norms of self-presentation of the mainstream blogging community but they responded to these norms in different ways. The attitude towards these norms is the first crucial dimension in my typology. Three strategies in performing the blogging self mirror the different ways in which the participants responded to these norms. The *adjustment* strategy aims at complying with the norms. The blogging self is performed through short life accounts and style-related topics, excluding opinionated, negative, or private content and through constructing a positive image of oneself through text and flattering photos. The *fit-in-and-be-myself* strategy involves a degree of adjusting to the norms but also presenting potentially deviating aspects of self. This resulted in combining posts about life accounts and style with opinionated or emotional content, and in the attempts to present both the positive and negative aspects of life. The *contestation* strategy aimed at subverting the norms of the blogging community. In this strategy, the blogging self was performed through publishing a lot of opinionated and emotional content and presenting one's

own life and body in realistic or subversive ways. The second crucial dimension in the typology of strategies was the degree of identification with one's blogging self.

The three strategies can be placed on a continuum with respect to 1) the degree to which the participants' performances of selves fitted in with the mainstream blog community, and 2) the degree of identification with one's blogging self. In the case of the *adjustment* strategy, the girls distanced themselves from their polished blogging selves as being not representative of their complex personalities. The *fit-in-and-be-myself* strategy involved a middle degree of identification with one's blogging self. The self was performed to fit in with the community's norms but also in a way that would prevent being labeled a superficial pink blogger. The degree of identification with one's blogging self was highest in the *contestation* strategy, where the blogging selves were performed in ways that went against the perfect and easily consumable (Marwick & boyd 2011) femininity norm. The higher the degree of fitting in with the mainstream blog community, the lower the identification with one's blogging self.

While previous studies about girls' online-based self-presentation emphasize the importance of striking a balance between sexual availability and respectable femininity, in this work looks and smartness came across as crucial. The participants who used the *adjustment* and the *fit-in-and-be-myself* strategies negotiated the discourses about bloggers being, as some of the participants said, "superficial" and "body-focused" or even "stupid" in many ways. They did this by distancing themselves from their blogging selves and positioning these as only fractions of what they saw as their "real" selves, by saying that they engage socially or politically in other settings beyond blogging, and by saying that they do not really care if somebody calls them pink bloggers because the fact that they blog about style does not make them shallow or stupid. Putting such emphasis on the quality of being smart and/or occupied with what is viewed as serious matters might be triggered by the trivializing discourses about bloggers in Norway that position them as lacking this quality. Still, the focus on looks and brains might also be indications of the requirements to be both pretty and smart as contemporary Norwegian girls (Nielsen, 2014).

Mainstream blogging seems to bring together the old and the new phenomena tied to girls' participation in digital practices. On the one hand, participating in mainstream blogging is very much about the wish to belong to and be accepted by the peer group, as has been documented (boyd, 2008; Chittenden, 2010; Stern, 2008). On the other, some new premises frame girls' participation in mainstream blogging. The blogging community is competitive. The polished and body-focused identity performances can bring large audiences that in turn secure material benefits, and being continually judged online is being normalized. The girls are clearly trying to navigate the various expectations and negotiate the various disciplining discourses that frame their participation in

blogging. They negotiate the norms of perfectibility (McRobbie, 2000) of their blogging community but also the ideal of the gender equal, “socially engaged” Nordic Girl who is expected to be beyond the “superficial” preoccupation with the body, fashion, and beauty products.

Upon the completion of my data collection for this dissertation, only four out of the twelve participants were still blogging. Some of those who quit justified this by no longer identifying with the increasingly commercialized and body-focused community. Some felt misjudged in being labeled as pink bloggers. Others felt that blogging took too much time away from friends and/or school. Most participants who continued blogging adjusted to the premises of the mainstream blogging community by pursuing the goals connected to staging a polished self, competitiveness, and commercialization in the *adjustment* strategy. One participant who continued blogging rejected these premises by promoting an agenda that dismisses them in the *contestation* strategy. None of the participants used the *fit-in-and-be-myself* strategy upon my completion of data collection, even though this was the most often used strategy upon recruitment. This might indicate that the tensions in the *fit-in-and-be-myself* strategy resulting from the attempt to reconcile contrasting performances of self are too difficult to tackle in the long run. It seems that it was easier for the girls to “ride the blogging wave”, as expressed by one of the participants, by adjusting to the premises of mainstream blogging, to rebel against these premises by using the *contestation* strategy, or to quit blogging altogether.

I suggest that this investigation contributes to the theorization on performing identity in online-based settings in two ways. First, I have provided empirical findings that support some of the existing theories pertaining to performing identity in online-based settings. I have documented the intertwinement of the online- and offline-based contexts and interactions in framing the girls’ performances of blogging selves, as suggested by Thurlow et al. (2004). Following Rettberg (2014), I have demonstrated that these performances of self are selective. I have shown that the performances of the blogging self are relational and situated in the interactions with the context and the audience of the mainstream blogging community. I stress, however, that I do not argue that the context of blogg.no prescribes to my participants certain actions that could be argued as originating in a technologically determinist standpoint (Marwick, 2014). Rather, following Marwick (2014), I view the participants’ performances of self as a sum of their reflexive and strategic actions, the technological affordances of their online-based community, and of how this community reinforces the participants’ cultural behaviours.

Second, the evidence from this study provides new insights into the theorization of performing identity in online-based settings. By applying a longitudinal design, I have empirically documented the dynamics of performing the blogging self *over time* thus providing insight on the processual nature and the changeability of identity performanc-

es so scarcely documented in the literature. By beginning with girls' perspectives and experiences of participation in the practice of blogging, I have detected and empirically documented that one can identify with one's own performances in the online-based setting to varying degrees, and have thus provided new insight into the theorization of performing identity online. Moreover, I have identified not only that people take performances of self originating in the offline-based contexts to the online-based contexts, as has been suggested previously (see for example Davis, 2010; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005), but also that they can keep to their online-based characters during offline-based interactions in order to perform in compliance with the anticipated expectations of the readers that are based on the participants' online-based performances. This extends Lomborg's (2012) concept of the blogging self to the offline-based settings and indicates that the blogger can perform on stage (Goffman, 1959) also in the offline-based settings. This then undermines equating Goffman's notion of on-stage with online and offstage with offline (see also Lange, 2014). Moreover, while at times the participants reinforced the emphasis on the aspects of their blogging selves they identified as most appealing to the audience, as documented elsewhere by Lomborg (2012), at other times the participants switched between strategies in connection with their changing goals in spite of having received positive response from the audience. In other words, at times the aspects of the blogging self other than those appealing to the audience are emphasized if this is dictated by a new goal. This indicates the significance of goals the participants tie to blogging in their decisions about how they wish to self-present. Moreover, some participants continue to perform blogging selves even though they identify with these performances to only a small degree in order to achieve particular goals, to gain status among peers at school, for instance, or to extend their audience.

Moreover, Paper 2 provides some insights into the experiences of and processes involved in participating in mainstream blogging as part of Norwegian girls' digital media culture that have been scarcely investigated. While the mainstream blogging community is unique and differs from other new media spaces used by girls, it exemplifies some of the more general trends in youth's participation in digital media practices that include competing for positive feedback from the judging audiences, celebrity culture, commercialization, and the postfeminist focus on the body. Thus, this investigation contributes to documenting girls' experiences of participation in contemporary digital media practices in the Nordic context. I elaborate on this more widely in section 5.2.5.

5.2.3. Experienced Digital Competences

Based on the analyzed data, I have classified what the participants brought up as meaningful for participation in the mainstream blogging community into five competences: regulating online self-disclosure; producing appealing online content in an

appealing form; managing the audience and dealing with comments; written self-expression online; and technical competence. These competences are connected to the norms of participation in the mainstream blogging community and to the technological affordances of blogging.

The participants frame the mainstream blogging community as competitive, hence competence in producing appealing content in an appealing form is brought up as meaningful. The participants frame the readers as being curious about their private lives. The competence in regulating self-disclosure allows for establishing and guarding privacy. The frequent updating of blogs is framed as necessary in order to extend and/or maintain one's audience. Negative comments are normalized as an unavoidable element of the blogging practice. Thus, the competence in managing the audience and dealing with comments is framed as meaningful. Communicating with readers via blog posts is described as different from offline-based communication in that the former implies a bigger risk of being misinterpreted. Hence, the competence in written self-expression matters to avoid misunderstandings.

Importantly, the meanings attached to the competences depend on the goals tied to the blogging practice and on the participants' responses to the femininity norms of the mainstream blogging community. The participants described the mainstream blogging community as being increasingly commercialized. They positioned top female bloggers as trend-setters in the community and associated them with polished representations of one's life and body, including retouched photos and accounts of having undergone plastic surgery. These polished expressions of femininity are associated with achieving success in mainstream blogging because they secure large audiences and material benefits. While some girls view the increasing commercialization as problematic, others embrace it. In turn, the polished representations of the body and life in the top blogs are positioned as the perfect femininity norm that the participants compare themselves with. Some participants actively subverted this norm, others tried, to various degrees, to adjust to it.

Some of the meanings ascribed to the digital competences in my findings comply with what is viewed as beneficial competences for girls and/or young people such as protecting privacy, presenting one's own views in an appealing and understandable way, eliciting dialogue with the readers, dealing with critical comments, presenting counter-arguments, advancing the development of technical competences, and using the competences developed through leisure-time participation at school. However, other meanings ascribed to the digital competences go against the normative views of what is beneficial. The competence in managing the audience and responding to comments is associated with using intimate communication for the sake of acquiring a large, loyal audience. The use of intimate communication with the readers for the sake of popularity and financial gains may be interpreted as instrumentalization of intimate communication

(Lövheim, 2013). The competence in producing appealing content supported by the technical competence is associated with learning how to work on the body in order to stage and edit self-portrait photos so as to have them be more flattering. This is problematic because, as the girls expressed during the interviews, they are tired of the unrelenting focus on the body and often feel that they are unable to produce the flawless self-image to which they aspire. The competence in written self-expression is associated with improving one's cooperation with sponsoring companies, which reinforces the commercialization of blogging.

The evidence from the study contributes to developing the theorization of digital competences and digital competence development in two ways. First, the focus on girls' perspectives enables the identification of concrete experienced competences (Bjarnadóttir, 2004) and a range of complex, even contradictory meanings they attributed to these competences, depending on their blogging-related goals and the norms of their community of practice. Taking as my point of departure the participants' stories of participation, rather than only the artefacts they produced, I provide evidence that gives some insight into how the context and the participants' goals frame what they view as useful learning, and which digital competences they develop over time. Thus, the evidence from this investigation is a contribution to the further development of the theorization of digital competences as non-normative and functional (Bjørgen & Nygren, 2010; Nygren, 2015) in that it challenges the normative and generational conceptualizations of digital competences in the literature. Second, by applying the gender perspective to this investigation, I document that the femininity norms of the mainstream blogging community frame the participants' experiences as to which competences they view as meaningful for their participation in the blogging practice.

5.2.4. Girls as "Subjects" and as "Objects": Agency and Situatedness in Performing Identity and Developing Digital Competences

Earlier, I emphasized the girls' agency in performing identity and developing digital competences: they perform blogging selves strategically and reflexively and they develop competences according to changing goals. However, I have also demonstrated how their participation in mainstream blogging is framed both by the micro-context of the on-line-based interactions with the blogging community and the audience, as well as by the larger cultural contexts and gendered discourses, both within the blogging community and beyond.

Compared with traditional mass media, social media allows for considerable agency. Instead of being depicted textually and visually by newspaper and magazine journalists, the girls who blog make their own decisions about how they want to self-present. They take reflexive actions if they decide to modify these self-presentations by, for instance,

switching to a different strategy in performing the blogging self. In a similar manner, they are subjects in their competence development since they identify what competences are meaningful for achieving goals tied to participation in the blogging community, and they take action to develop necessary competences, often through trial and error.

Performing identity and digital competence development intertwine in that developing competences may support performing the blogging self according to one's own needs and goals. The girls experience as meaningful those competences that help them achieve their changing goals. Depending on the strategy of performing the blogging self, they experience various competences as meaningful and ascribe various meanings to digital competences. For example, in the case of the competence in producing appealing content in an appealing form, appealing content is defined by these girls as "social dilemmas" in the *contestation* strategy and as "girl stuff" in the *adjustment* strategy and thus triggers different kinds of development, as described in Paper 3. However, this intertwinement is far from clean-cut. First, this is because the girls tend to switch between the strategies of performing the self, and these changes trigger the development of various digital competences over time. Second, the competences experienced as meaningful sometimes overlap across the used strategies of performing the self. For instance, the competence in written self-expression online was brought up as important in the case of the *adjustment* strategy and also the *contestation* strategy, which differ considerably in terms of the performances of self (see Paper 2). In fact, this competence is framed as beneficial for improving performance in school by the participants who use the *adjustment* and *fit-in-and-be-myself* strategies.

While being reflective and strategic subjects in performing identity, the girls are also the objects of the gaze and judgement of their blog audiences and also of the general public beyond the blogging community. Being looked at and commented on is inscribed in the judgement culture of contemporary social media, where we perform towards and for the audience, whether on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or in a blog. This can be beneficial if the response is positive, and destructive, especially of self-confidence, if negative. According to my findings, the responses from the audience tend to be variable but the significance of these responses for the girls also varies over time. While all the participants at one point aim to enlarge their audience or be listed on a blogging ranking, this tends to change over time. There are periods when satisfying the audience is slightly or not at all important and sometimes the girls even go against the audience's wishes, prioritizing, rather, their own goals and needs.

The participants came across as reflexive of their own performances of their blogging selves as active subjects who decided about their own participation in the practice of blogging. The girls applied technological and cultural filters (see Rettberg, 2014) in order to hide some aspects of self and emphasize others according to the anticipated

responses of their audiences. This does not, of course, erase the numerous dilemmas tied to how they want and choose to perform their blogging selves. Nonetheless, the girls clearly regulate their own participation, whether this means switching to a strategy that makes the blogging self more representative of their complex personality, or deciding on a highly selective performance of an easily consumable self in order to climb the blogging rankings, or quitting blogging entirely. In the end, it is the girls who decide if and on what terms they want to participate in the blogging practice.

At the same time, the blogging selves are relational and situated in the interactions with the blogging community and the audience. The blog content is constantly negotiated between the blogger and her audience and this makes identity performances in the blogs to some extent collaborative. The feedback from the audience, the competitiveness, as well as the judgement - and celebrity-culture of the mainstream blogging community frame the girls' performances of their blogging selves. The girls' stories of participation clearly demonstrate that their blogging selves are always unavoidably selective and that the audiences judge them based on these selective self-presentations. The girls are held accountable for their performances of their blogging selves and this frames their participation in the blogging practice. They are disciplined by the refracted (fe) male gaze (Abidin & Thompson, 2012) of their peer audiences and by the pink blogger label iterated in the public discourse that trivializes them.

5.2.5. Experiences of Participation in a Competitive, Commercialized, and Body-focused Space

As I already explained, while the mainstream blogging community is unique and, to an extent, blogging differs from other digital media spaces used by girls, it exemplifies some of the more general trends in contemporary girls' digital media culture such as the focus on the body (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009), competitiveness within judgement culture (Hirdman, 2007), commercialization (Schor, 2004), and celebrity culture (boyd, 2008). In this sense, my work provides some insights into the processes and girls' experiences in contemporary digital media culture in the Nordic context, which has been, as mentioned already, scarcely documented.

The girls whom I interviewed frame the trend setters in the mainstream blogging community (top female bloggers) as promoting the technology-enabled body and consumerist lifestyles. I find such identity performances illustrative of the postfeminist sensibility typical of contemporary media culture. I have documented that the girls negotiate these norms of perfectibility promoted by the top bloggers and that they are judged by their readers according to these norms as well as according to the respectability norm.

Trying to be appealing to the audience is inherent in the practice of blogging, as

documented by Lomborg (2012) and Rettberg (2008). The blogger-audience relation is built on interactivity; this is the intrinsic, key characteristic of the blogging practice (boyd, 2006). The blogs are produced to be consumed and responded to by others. The participants frame positive response from the audience as the biggest motivation to blog. Positive comments and stable readership statistics are uplifting, indicating that the blogger, as a participant put it, “did something right”, and this makes them feel good about themselves. Positive response is framed as an indicator that one fits into the peer group, a manifestation of one’s performances of self being validated by peers. My finding here is in line with previous studies (boyd, 2008; Chittenden, 2010; Stern, 2008). Still, in mainstream blogging, girls compete with each other for audiences and positions on the blog rankings. The top lists structure the blogg.no community in a way that frames the bloggers as competitors. All the participants aim, at least at one point, at being listed, although this changes depending on their goals and/or whether they are in their active or passive phase of blogging. In this competitive setting, positive response from the audience can make you a “winner” of the competition and give you status, just as the likes on Facebook or a large number of followers on Instagram or YouTube do. Competing for positive response implies being compared by the readers with other girls who blog and being judged based on these comparisons. In this sense, mainstream blogging is illustrative of the judgement culture that frames contemporary youthful social media practices.

Mainstream blogging is also contextualized by celebrity culture. Some top female bloggers gain not only micro-celebrity status in the blogging community but also mainstream popularity with traditional mass-media coverage and participation in TV shows. However, I suggest that celebrity culture also manifests itself in another way in the mainstream blogging community: even the participants with relatively small audiences experience fan behavior; they receive fan mail from readers, are recognized by some readers on the streets, or are commonly asked to pose with a reader for a selfie. The relation to the audience is often described as hierarchical in its celebrity and fan setup. This is a point quite different from those made in earlier research that documents that young people are on social media mostly in order to socialize with peers they know from offline contacts (see, for example, Ito et al., 2010).

While validation among peers comes across as the biggest advantage of blogging, some participants frame receiving sponsored products or money as incentives to extend and maintain their blogging audiences. The participants associate having big audiences with material benefits such as sponsored gifts or income from advertising. Achieving material benefits from blogging seems to be normalized by the participants unless it is abused, for instance by a blogger not clearly marking the sponsored posts. While only some of the participants are actively seeking commercial cooperation, participation in

the mainstream blogging community is clearly framed by this norm.

While the mainstream blogging community is commercialized in the sense that it is heavily populated by irremovable advertisements that are continually consumed by the girls who blog, as has been documented (Schor, 2004), the girls who blog are not only consumers but also producers of content, including commercial content. In mainstream blogging, girls who have large enough audiences can start cooperation with commercial actors and receive material benefits in exchange for advertising products or services in their blogs. However, receiving material benefits is not typically the driving force of the participants' blogging practices: they blog in their spare time rather than to earn a living and they frame blogging as a hobby. Thus, in contrast to professional top bloggers, I argue that the girls in my study are not engaging in strategic self-branding (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Keller, 2015) in order to gain material benefits. Still, the girls position the acquisition of material benefits from blogging as a sign of success in their community and this undoubtedly influences their participation. As documented in Paper 2 and Paper 3, the commercialization norm frames their performances of their blogging selves and their meaning-making of digital competences.

5.3 Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

This dissertation makes three theoretical contributions. First, its eclectic theoretical approach aims to facilitate a more holistic investigation of girls' digital practices that could overcome the limitations of particular theoretical frameworks. In the analyses of girls' participation in mainstream blogging, I combine the micro-context oriented concepts of performing the blogging self and the experienced digital competences (Bjarnadóttir, 2004; Bjørgen & Nygren, 2010), with the concepts that facilitate uncovering larger cultural contexts and gender ideologies that frame the girls' participation including the notion of identity as position (Moje & Luke, 2009), and online- and offline-based contexts as being intertwined in performing identity (Thurlow et al., 2004).

Second, this work nuances the dichotomy present in the literature about identity performances in online-based settings, according to which identity is performed online either through the adoption of a fictitious persona or through a self-presentation coherent with, though selective of, the offline identity. This nuance is achieved by shifting the empirical focus from the *dichotomy* between online and offline identity to the *intertwinement* of online- and offline-based settings in ongoing identity performances. Based on my analysis, I suggest that one can identify with one's own performances of one's blogging self to varying degrees. Moreover, I argue that a blogging self can be performed towards blog audience both online and also in blog-related interactions that occur offline. This undermines the simplistic application of Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor (1959) in studies of online-based practices in which the online is equated with

front stage and the offline with backstage, and implements an approach to identity as performed *across* online- and offline-based settings.

Third, this dissertation challenges the normative and generational conceptualizations of digital competences dominant in academic discussions about young people's informal learning. Since I draw on the socio-cultural approach to digital competence development widely used by literacy scholars, the theoretical concepts of experienced and non-normative digital competences have been particularly pertinent to shaping this work's approach because they grant the power to define what competences are and how they are meaningful for digital practices for the girls, rather than for the scholars. This emphasis on the girls' experiences has also facilitated examining the girls' meaning making of digital competences in relation to the gendered aspects of their practices that have seldom been taken into consideration in previous research.

Apart from the theoretical interventions outlined above, this work makes two methodological contributions. First, in my striving to emphasize the girls' perspectives on participation in mainstream blogging, the ethnographic analyses of blogs have been combined with in-depth interviews with the girls who author them. This has enabled situating the girls' identity performances and competence development observed in blogs within the girls' stories of participation elicited during the interviews. Through doing this, I have gained an understanding of these identity performances and digital competences through the meanings the girls assigned to them. Such intertwining of data collection and analysis secured the presence of the participants in the process of analysis, which is valuable because the stories the girls told during the interviews contextualized the content found in their blogs (see also Duguay, 2016). Whereas media and literacy scholars have often advocated for focusing on youthful perspectives, many studies still depart solely from the artifacts the girls produce or from the scholars' own notions of what counts as digital competences without examining the girls' experiences. Consequently, while these studies provide valuable documentation and interpretations of the girls' online-based practices, we seldom learn about the goals and dilemmas that drive the girls in their practices.

Second, both the girls' blogs and their experiences of participation in mainstream blogging have been investigated over time in the scope of a longitudinal design, which is rare in the literature. The girls were interviewed twice over a longer period of time and their blogs were analyzed in the periods preceding and following the interviews. This reflects this dissertation's longitudinal focus as well as my understanding of identity and competence development as processual and situated in ongoing social interactions.

5.4 Conclusion

This dissertation is the first in-depth, longitudinal investigation of Norwegian girls' participation in mainstream blogging, a practice that has become a significant part of girls' digital media culture in Norway. In taking as the point of departure teenage girls' stories of participation, this work acknowledges, documents, and theorizes girls' experiences of participation in mainstream blogging over time focusing on three key moments.

First, I posit that the identity label of pink blogger positions girls who blog as homogenously superficial, framing them as popular but insignificant, as trendsetting but irresponsible, as savvy but vulnerable. I argue that this identity label is actively negotiated by the girls and that it frames their participation in blogging. Second, I suggest that contrary to the fixed and trivializing implications of the pink blogger label, girls perform their blogging selves in various ways. They are reflexive subjects in their identity performances and tend to pick up strategies of performing the blogging self depending on their blogging-related goals that often change over time. At the same time, the girls' performances of identity come across as complex balancing acts framed by the judging audiences, the commercialization of blogging, and the celebrity culture all of which lead to girls being disciplined according to the normative ideals of the perfect, technology-enabled body (Abidin & Thompson, 2012; Jackson, 2016; Rysst, 2010) and the ideals of Nordic Girlhood (Formark & Bränström Öhman, 2013; Nielsen, 2014). Finally, I identify some of the digital competences that the girls experience as meaningful for their blogging practices. The participants attribute a range of meanings to digital competences, depending on their blogging-related goals and attitudes to the rules and norms of participation in mainstream blogging, including the polished, easily consumable (Marwick & boyd, 2011) femininity norm. While most of these meanings align with what is being framed as beneficial for young people in the literature, others do not since they are tied to sustaining the unrelenting body focus and to the commercialization of girls' digital practices.

While this dissertation does not provide a generalizable description of Norwegian girls' participation in blogging, it identifies some of the perspectives, processes, and dilemmas at work in a competitive, body-focused, and commercialized online-based space thus providing some insights into contemporary girls' participation in digital media culture in the Nordic context. Importantly, this work is a contribution to the theorization of performing identity as self in online-based settings and of the development of digital competences, in that it provides empirical findings that support, as well as further develop, some of the existing theories.

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“Superficial! Body Obsessed! Commercial!”

Norwegian Press Representations of Girl Bloggers

Karolina Dmitrow-Devold



ABSTRACT

Teenage female personal bloggers in Norway occupy the top positions in national blog rankings. This takes girl-bloggers to a place where they have rarely, if ever, been before: a place with massive audiences and media attention that can bring about celebrity status or financial benefits. Operating within a genre of personal blogging that combines accounts of everyday life and topics related to fashion and beauty, they are commonly referred to as pink bloggers. This gendered term is widely used in the media and this article argues that it contributes to a reinforcement of a negative image of teenage female personal bloggers, who are dismissed as trivial, commercial and irresponsible. This article analyzes prevailing discursive representations of the so-called pink bloggers in the mainstream press coverage: popular but insignificant, trendsetting but irresponsible, savvy but vulnerable. The implications of these representations are discussed as well.

KEYWORDS

gendered discourses, personal blog, print media, teenage girls



Introduction

Teenage blogging continues to be an important element of the participatory media landscape in Norway. A total of 36 percent of 15- to 16-year-olds are reported to have blogged in 2012 (Norwegian Media Authority 2012). In a manner consistent with previous research (see Herring et al. 2004; Van Doorn et al. 2007) and figures from Sweden (Lövheim 2011a), female bloggers in Norway significantly outnumber male bloggers.¹ While Norwegian teenagers operate within a range of blog types, both with respect to form and content, personal blogs in which the major topics revolve around everyday life and fashion or beauty are very visible because they reach the top positions on blog rankings and attract considerable media attention. These

are commonly referred to as *rosablogger* [pink blogs] and are mostly authored by teenage girls and young women.

Top teenage female bloggers in Norway attract the interest of the media and obtain celebrity status that makes them more or less publicly recognizable. Some gain financial profits from their blogging. However, unlike some of their Swedish counterparts in their twenties (Lövheim 2011a), they rarely abandon their concurrent lifestyles in order to blog as a full-time job. At the same time, the media attention and commercial benefits gained through blogging undoubtedly influence their everyday reality in respect of both blogging activity and offline routines. Female personal blogging continues to be heatedly debated in the mainstream media, and pink blogging is an ever-recurring leitmotif.

Focusing on press articles published in the most popular daily newspapers in Norway, this article attempts to identify the central discursive representations of what has become known as pink blogging. Who are pink bloggers? In what ways are they depicted? What aspects of pink blogging does the press coverage emphasize? Moreover, I shall also discuss the implications of these discursive representations.

Girl-blogging Gone Big

Audience size, accessibility to the public and the degree of bloggers' anonymity regulate the level of personal disclosure in blogs. Much research on female personal websites and blogs have focused on their intimate, diary-like character, where the audiences are small and often mirror already existent offline relations. One recurring theme is that the writing style and content of personal blogs stem from practices associated with paper diaries. Hence, female personal blogs are often referred to as online journals or diaries, which have roots in traditionally feminine diary-writing and provide a safe online space where girls can share their intimate feelings and experiences (see Bortree 2005; Cadle 2005; Bell 2007; Stern 2007). Reid-Walsh and Mitchell (2004) regard girls' websites as private spaces that exist in a public domain and compare them to their bedrooms, where they express themselves creatively and store their private virtual artifacts, rather like in a museum. Hodkinson and Lincoln (2008) also apply the bedroom analogy to girl blogs hosted on LiveJournal, where the friends-only facility grants the bloggers a high degree of ownership and control over their personal online space.

The very nature of the blogs investigated in these studies dictated the emphasis of the previous research on the “private and diary-like” (Bell 2007: 97)² character of girl blogging. They tended to have relatively small audiences. Some were open to the public, while others regulated access by a password, used anonymity to protect privacy or regulated accessibility through codes understandable exclusively to selected readers. While previous studies might have found girl-blogging intimate and diary-like, the blogs examined here introduce new dimensions that bring girl-blogging out of the bedroom.

First, massive audiences have superseded the limited and mostly small circles of readers. At peak times, the most popular teenage female bloggers have had up to 70,000 unique readers per day (Gonsholt Ighanian 2011), by far outdistancing other bloggers in terms of audience size. Second, public visibility maintained by mainstream media has replaced anonymity. Top teenage bloggers appear on national TV and are covered by newspapers. Third, massive audiences have introduced a commercial aspect to personal blogging. Norwegian top female bloggers now gain financial profits from their blogging.

The Pink Blogging Label

Young female bloggers began to receive media attention in Norway in the late 2000s, when the biggest Norwegian blog portal, *blogg.no*, enjoyed fast growth in the number of hosted blogs. Media debates about teenage female blogging intensified when girl bloggers reached the top positions in the Norwegian blog rankings.³ These rankings became points of reference in terms of popularity measured in audience size.

The term *rosablogging* [pink blogging] seems to have come into extensive use around 2009. Although it is difficult to ascertain its exact origin, there are indicators that it was coined, or at least popularized, by the founder of one of the Norwegian blog platforms, then picked up by the media and eventually reified in everyday discourse. In 2009, according to <http://thomasmoen.com/rosabloggere>, a pink blogger denoted “a relatively young girl who uses her blog to tell the world what she is wearing, what her favorite cosmetics are and how boring school is, nothing else” (n.p.). This definition points to the blog topics (everyday teenage life, outfits, make-up) as well as the gender and young age of the bloggers (girls attending school). Although the author explicates that the term is not meant to convey negative connotations, it does ironically imply that female teenage bloggers have

nothing else to say to the world apart from their thoughts on clothes and the cosmetics they fancy. This in turn, frames pink blogging as a gendered, female-only, and unserious practice.

The selection of the color in the term pink blogging conforms with the pink for girls and blue for boys dichotomy omnipresent in the marketing of products ranging from clothing to magazines. Computer games have also been characterized as “blue and pink ghettos” (Jenkins 1998:294), owing to their gender-stereotypical design. According to Ambjörnsson (2011), pink is a gender marker both for children and adults that maintains stereotypical representations of gender and sexuality. She identifies its connotations of low status, gayness, or a childish phase before female adulthood. Koller (2008) likewise demonstrates its associations with naivety, stupidity and clichés of feminine gentleness and politeness. However, both researchers point to the subversive uses of pink that undermine the very structures it maintains: pink is reclaimed as a symbol of the queer feminist struggle (Ambjörnsson 2011) and of postfeminist femininity (Koller 2008). The postfeminist, neoliberal “fun fearless female” (Koller 2008: 416) is equipped with pink outfits, pink electronic gadgets, the purchasing power granted by economic independence and the freedom to enjoy her sexuality. And while this postfeminist rhetoric promoted in contemporary media and popular culture can be appealing, since it promises freedom and independence, McRobbie (2009) suggests that it contributes to the “undoing of feminism” owing to its “aggressive individualism, … hedonistic female phallicism in the field of sexuality, and … obsession with consumer culture” (5).

While currently pink blogging is associated mainly with the blogger’s sex (female) and its focus on lifestyle, outfits and make-up, the term is used quite inconsistently. The epithets found in the title of this article (Bjellås Gilje 2011) cover only some of the elements that have been defined as typical for pink blogging: (young) female blogger; outfits; make up; hair; shoes; innumerable self-portrait photos; blond girl; bimbo; sexually provocative; showing skin; representing oneself and one’s life as perfect; top blog; and male blogger focusing on lifestyle and fashion. I have also come across conceptualizations of blogging in general, and pink blogging in particular, as being feminine, and thus negotiated by straight male bloggers. One male blogger writes: “I blog but I’m not gay,” while another stresses: “This is not a blog—this is a homepage.” This feminizing effect of blogging seems to reinforce Gray’s findings on the watching of soap operas as a feminizing activity (Gray 1992), which is rejected by men (although this conflicts with Hobson’s study (2004) in which the young men she interviewed watched

or even identified soap operas as a favored genre). Consequently, I view pink blogging as a gendered label rather than a designation of the blogging genre.

Data and Method

My purposive sample includes 22 press articles published from 2009 to 2011⁴ in the three daily newspapers with the highest readership rates in Norway. *Verdens Gang* and *Dagbladet* can be categorized as tabloids, while *Aftenposten* is a high-profile newspaper. The extracts originate from various press text sub-genres, including editorials, commentaries and reportage. Hence, with regard to interdiscursivity, the discourse sample is homogeneous in respect of discourse type, because it includes contemporary mass-media texts produced collectively by editorial teams and distributed massively, but at the same time it is heterogeneous because it includes sub-genres that are governed by various formal and topical rules.

When selecting the sample, I used search engines on the newspapers' homepages that provide access to present and past issues, both in paper and online. The words for my search were variations of the Norwegian word *rosablogger* [pink blogger]. I chose to limit my search to this particular term instead of pursuing more neutral terms like teenage blogger or personal blogger or female blogger because I was looking for gendered representations connected to pink blogging, which is a well-established term in Norway. I have included all articles found through this search in the sample.

I draw upon Faircloughian critical discourse analysis (CDA), in which language is viewed as "an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life ..." (Fairclough 2003:2) and thus needs to be considered in social research. As Fairclough and Wodak (2010) propose, I view discourse as constitutive of and constituted by society and culture. I use the term "representation" interchangeably with "construal" as in construction in discourse "achieved by and as evidenced in the words used" (Sunderland 2004:170), rather than construction beyond the words spoken and written as in social constructionism. This investigation attempts to "denaturalize" (Fairclough 2010:30) ideologies about the nature of teenage female blogging by adapting a critical approach in the discursive analysis of newspaper articles, which present certain taken-for-granted naturalizations.

My analysis is inspired by Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model, which is comprised of the analysis of text and "micro" aspects of discourse practice, the analysis of discourse practice at a "macro" (231) level (that is,

text production and interpretation) and the analysis of the social practice of which the discourse is a part. I focus mainly on cohesion or rhetorical mode of discourse samples, types of argumentation and narrative, thematic structure of texts, word meaning—with the key words pink blogging and pink blogger—and wording (identifying value-laden words and expressions). I look at how pink blogging is framed on the textual level of individual press articles and, intertextually, across all selected articles, by considering, for example, how it is framed by the title or the wider context. The social-practice dimension of CDA evolves in my analysis around the hegemonic, gendered discourses about pink blogging scrutinized in this article. Owing to space constraints the present article does not include the complete textual analysis. I have attempted to compensate for this omission by providing selected illustrative examples of the overarching discursive representations found in my material.

Discursive Representations of Pink Blogging in the Norwegian Press

Visible but Insignificant

The representations of pink blogging from the material seem to emphasize triviality and superficiality. As Wang-Naveen (2010) states:

Girls and women take the floor on the so-called pink blogs. However, this does not mean their words are meaningful and important.... They tend to be about familiar and uncomplicated things, celebrated by other bloggers who support the same values (*Aftenposten*, 15 July).

The first sentence of the quotation frames bloggers as being visible in their self-expression. The expression “take the floor” stresses their agency. However, this positive implication is immediately nullified because the blogs are described as lacking any meaningful content, and being comprised almost exclusively of posts about clothes, make-up and beauty tips. Mundane activities like having a coffee in town or getting a manicure are reported and celebrated by other bloggers.

Pink bloggers are undoubtedly represented as enjoying their popularity and massive readerships. According to a reader’s comment in *Aftenposten*, they have “more readers than many big online newspapers” (Ørvik 2011). This implies that they have a voice. However, the seemingly positive statement quoted above is merely a backdrop for the article’s story line that por-

trays them as inexperienced, young bloggers, who are used by commercial entities for the sake of advertising. Even when pink bloggers are written of as trendsetters, they are trivialized. A *Verdens Gang* article by Unanue-Zahl (2009) about video blogging presents female bloggers as pioneers of this blogging form. Its sexualized headline however completely ignores this by reducing video blogging to female body parts: “Victoria (22) video-blogs about her breasts” (11 September).

The articles in the sample stress the bloggers’ young age repeatedly. Omdahl (2010) calls them “pink blogging teenagers” (*Dagbladet*, 23 February). In her review of blogs in *Aftenposten*, Hofsødegård (2010) uses the term “pink age” (6 August). Another author in *Dagbladet* states they are “teenage celebrities” (Kongsli Lundervold 2010). The last term’s intertextuality with low-quality celebrity culture implies that the bloggers are visible but in a tabloid, flavor-of-the-month way. This comparison dismisses the power of their public voice. The effect is intensified by pejorative expressions. Wang-Naveen (2010) considers pink blogging “trivial” (*Aftenposten* 15 July). A sex blogger quoted by Nordseth and Pettersen (2010) in *Dagbladet* straightforwardly ridicules pink bloggers by calling them “orange-tanned idiots with bad hair extensions and leisure-time problems” (30 December).

Contrast is another rhetorical device that frames the bloggers as insignificant voices. The image of the Norwegian blogosphere that emerges from the articles seems to divide it into pink bloggers and non-pink bloggers, where the former limit their content to what is merely “glossy and commercial,” as stated by Hofsødegård (2010) in *Aftenposten* (6 August 2010), while the latter provide a meaningful alternative. Since the latter group is homogenized, the contrast appears even stronger and overlooks the fact that not all of them are socially engaged. Paraphrasing a Norwegian author of a book about blogging, Henriksen (2010) states:

[T]he blogosphere is divided in two, on the one hand, the so-called pink bloggers, young teenage girls who write about themselves and fashion and hence have high readership figures. On the other hand, [there are] the more socially topical ones (*Aftenposten*, 6 November).

Again, pink bloggers’ visibility is affirmed but trivialized by associations with the light, popular entertainment of girl stuff and it stands in stark contrast with the implied elitism of serious blogging. Later the same article represents pink bloggers as detrimental to the image of the Norwegian blogosphere because they reduce blogging to shoes and lipstick, thus discrediting it in its totality.

Though few, there are unequivocally positive representations of pink bloggers’ voices in my material. The following extract refers to bloggers’

involvement in a campaign against an inhumane abortion law introduced in Nicaragua.

Amnesty also demands that the authorities in Nicaragua guarantee access to free, safe and legal abortion for victims of incest and rape. Several of the so-called pink bloggers, who are often girls in their teens, have become involved in the issue (*Pinheiro Harbo Verdens Gang*, 29 October 2010).

Juxtaposed with Amnesty International, a renowned activist organization, pink bloggers are framed as being equally powerful in their engagement in social issues concerning their peers. Another article by Bjellås Gilje (2011) also undermines the trivializing pink-blogging label:

If not totally color blind, one can see that pink blogs have all sorts of colors and bloggers write about most things: education, clothes, feminism, climate, love, politics, make up, overconsumption, etc. Let us have discussions with the girls who express themselves in public instead of condemning them. The future Gro Harlem Brundtland is a young girl who today makes her way forth through blogging (*Dagbladet*, 7 January).

The allusion to the former (and the first female) prime minister of Norway invokes connotations of power and influence. Pink blogging is framed as a readily accessible public forum that teaches young women self-expression and, as the article implies later on, breaks men's monopoly of public visibility. We shall see, however, that this public visibility is overwhelmingly construed as negative.

Irresponsible Role Models

Pink bloggers in the spotlight of the media are represented as wielding huge influence on their young readers. According to an employee at the Norwegian Consumer Ombudsman quoted by Kongsløk Lundervold (2010), they are undeniably trendsetters:

We see that it is more attractive to use popular bloggers for marketing of various products, so we understand that they have a considerable influence on children and young people. The clothes bloggers wear often land on top of teenagers' birthday wish lists (*Dagbladet*, 30 June).

Associated with product marketing, pink bloggers are construed as influencing young readers' purchasing choices. Hence there then appears the notion of responsibility that popular bloggers bear toward their young, implicitly vulnerable audiences. The above citation comes from an article about a celebrity blogger who blogged enthusiastically about a beauty treatment she had undergone in order to make her lips look fuller. She was

strongly criticized for promoting a beauty treatment that might involve health risks. Furthermore, this was depicted as product promotion launched under the cover of a commercial-free account of the blogger's experiences and judged as detrimental to readers, who, out of the desire to imitate her, expressed their wish to undergo a similar treatment. This is how a blog reader quoted in the same article in *Dagbladet* reacted to the controversial post:

People should be happy the way they are. And you should be ashamed that you let a company buy you to promote this to young girls.

The role-model construal implies that pink bloggers bear an ethical responsibility for what they post, which is emphasized by the patronizing notion of shame that also negatively colors the readers' vulnerability.

The extract above introduces another recurring element—the promotion of unattainable beauty ideals. Pink bloggers are often construed as seemingly perfect. This emphasizes the showing off of physical appearance while entirely neglecting intellectual reflections, genuine emotions or life experiences. Celebrity pink bloggers are accused of presenting themselves as unrealistically perfect and this makes their readers feel bad about themselves, because they are unable to reach this ideal. Consequently, pink blogging is presented as socially detrimental because it pressures young women to live up to unattainable standards of feminine beauty. Here is how an author of a sex blog quoted by Nordseth and Pettersen (2010) expresses her disapproval of pink bloggers:

I was fed up with pink bloggers who make you feel like a pale, fat loser with thin hair. It's better to look up to girls who are not seemingly perfect but still have guts, a sense of humor and self-confidence (*Dagbladet*, 30 December).

The juxtaposition of the physical (complexion, weight, hair) and the seemingly absent intellectual (guts, sense of humor, self-confidence) reduces pink bloggers to body-focused, as opposed to personality-focused, authors. Still, the use of loser suggests that a suitable appearance is necessary for personal success.

Success is central in the following construal connected to excessive self-disclosure for the sake of gaining popularity:

They have made secret girl conversations into something everyone can participate in. This follows a trend, where to be open about yourself is perceived as unquestionably positive. Maybe that is why the most popular bloggers are the ones who pour out their feelings and draw blogging as a phenomenon closer to the traditional diary (*Wang-Naveen Aftenposten*, 15 July 2010).

Equating blogs with secret girl conversations or the traditional diary suggests that they belong in the intimate, domestic sphere rather than in the spot-

light. The author suggests later in the article that pink bloggers are “living their own version of *The Truman Show*,” a reference to Peter Weir’s film in which the main character is devastated to learn that he is a protagonist of a live reality show. Unlike Truman, however, bloggers are positioned as exhibitionists who readily live their lives online, fully aware of being watched and heedlessly providing full accounts of their lives. This suggests that pink bloggers are popular because they satisfy the audience’s voyeuristic needs. Blogs are implicitly associated with a trend typical of reality shows and tabloids—the low-quality genres of popular culture. Terms like “reality bloggers” (Henriksen 2010) used elsewhere in *Aftenposten* emphasize the bloggers’ alleged exhibitionistic tendencies. So, while they are framed as successful, their success is devalued as part of the tabloid celebrity culture. The allegedly exaggerated exposure of intimacy online is also often associated with bullying as Skotheim (2011) makes clear in *Aftenposten*:

Publishing your diary online with full name and photos is surely no joke. “Intimate blogging” can bring celebrity status and spotlight but it is dark in the blogger’s backyard. … Another successful blogger … decided to give up. The 15-year-old is tired of bullying and harassment (4 January).

Again, blogs are framed here as accounts of intimate life, thus crossing acceptable borders of self-disclosure online. The bloggers are construed as seeking fame and bullying is the implicit price to pay. Because they build their brand and gain popularity by overexposing their private lives and relinquishing their anonymity, they are predictably exposed to bullying and negative attention from the readers. The successful blogger’s quitting in January 2011 mentioned in the extract above triggered media discussion about online bullying. Other popular teenage bloggers expressed their understanding of her decision, since they, too, had had similar experiences of negative attention. While this particular case seems to have been framed as a cautionary tale for other “intimate bloggers,” the story’s protagonist herself began blogging again after a three-month break.

Savvy but Vulnerable

Because of their huge popularity, top female blogs have become sites of advertising practices that include placing advertisements, links to product sites or providing bloggers with free products and sponsorship in exchange for word-of-mouth advertising on the blog. Here, pink bloggers are framed in two contrasting ways: as victims of calculating companies and as savvy commercial agents.

The first construal stresses both the vulnerability and ignorance of young female bloggers and the unscrupulousness of the companies that take advantage of these inexperienced girls. For Ørvik (2011):

Recently, there has been a lot of press coverage on the so-called pink bloggers who, sponsored with various products, write about them on their blogs as if they had bought them for their own money. Many bloggers are young girls who have no idea about marketing rules. They do not know how to behave in relation to potential sponsors and risk being cheated (*Aftenposten*, 23 March).

On the one hand, blogging involves sponsoring and is subject to marketing rules, which implies its professionalization and evokes business activity. On the other, the bloggers are disempowered because of their lack of experience and their young age. They “have no idea” about commercial cooperation and are thus exposed to risks on the part of companies’ greed for profit. Similar presumptions appear in the context of tax regulations, as Gonsholt Ighanian (2011) insists in *Verdens Gang*:

Tax authorities increase their pursuit of bloggers who do not pay for themselves. Pink bloggers are being closely investigated as well. [As tax auditor Magdalena Wood says], “No one can expect a 13- or 14-year-old to be familiar with rules for taxation and expenses. The parents must therefore pay attention to what their child is doing in front of the computer screen” (27 April).

The use of the noun *pursuit* at the beginning of the quotation almost frames the bloggers as suspects. At the same time, they are represented as being negligent regarding tax regulations as a result of ignorance rather than calculated strategy. Being young and having professional skills are thus construed as contradictory. The reference to parents as competent adults who should step in and protect their children further strengthens this view.

The opposing construal of pink bloggers as savvy commercial agents builds on quite different assumptions. The article by Dybfest Dahl, Bøe and Husby (2011) depicts a Swedish top blogger as an “entrepreneur” and an “owner of four companies” (*Verdens Gang*, 4 January) and this associates blogging with successful commercial activity, managerial skills and prestige. Similarly, a co-founder of the biggest blog portal in Norway quoted by Irgens Ertzsås (2011) in *Verdens Gang* frames a Norwegian teenage top blogger as being resourceful and strategic in building her blog brand:

Julia has worked with her blog determinedly for over two years. Such hard work, good writing and her understanding of the blogging medium are probably the main reasons that she has come so far today (19 January).

These are the only examples in my material that construe blogging as work that demands long-term commitment, writing skills and advanced knowl-

edge of the blogging medium. Otherwise, this construal remains conspicuously absent. Female personal bloggers are represented as merely commercial and their skills and efforts invested in developing high quality blogs tend to be ignored.

Powerless Empowerment? Concluding Discussion

The tensions in the ways in which so-called pink bloggers are construed in the sample illustrate the fluidity of discursive aspects of power relations. The bloggers are positioned as being both empowered and powerless. On the one hand, they have massive audiences and thus a public voice, are successful commercial agents and role models. On the other, they waste their public visibility on trivialities, are tabloid celebrities manipulated by companies, and are easy victims of online bullying. This rather simplified depiction of teenage female personal bloggers seems to create two extreme subject positions of irresponsible and commercial, on the one hand, and easily influenced and naïve, on the other. Furthermore, even though pink bloggers are construed as commercial agents who are capable of building up their brand and earning profits, this portrayal is devalued by the emphasis on ambiguous practices relating to sponsorship and tax regulations. Similarly, their success is trivialized as low-culture entertainment and their influence as role models is censured. These representations appear to maintain certain taken-for-granted naturalizations that will be discussed below.

The press coverage I investigated represents pink bloggers in a gendered way, in that it implies that their online production is silly and insignificant. Previous research in media and cultural studies indicates that media genres addressed to girls or women, or both, are often based on gender stereotypes. McRobbie (1991) found that magazines targeted at boys take account of their diverse interests and professional ambitions, while those addressed to girls cater only to age groups, as though all girls were interested in “romance, make-up, physical fitness, cooking and fashion” (Cassell and Jenkins 1998: 26). Similarly, pink software and games seem to replicate gender differences in traditional toys and games because they are based on characters like Barbie, and activities like babysitting (Kafai 1998). Other studies indicate the disparaging of genres viewed as female. Gray’s (1992) classical study of household TV cultures demonstrates how both men and women judge female-preferred genres in more negative terms. Despite the fact that the working-class women emphasized the dichotomous and hierarchical relation between female TV and film

genres (for example, romance and soap opera) and male genres (for example, action, science-fiction and horror) while the educated women tended to have tastes similar to their partners', both informant groups devalued the female genres. Similarly, girl blogs have been dismissed as having value to neither academia (Herring et al. 2004) nor society because of "their association with personal writing and the paper diary" (Bell 2007: 108). Is pink blogging devalued because of its associations with a female genre? Are pink blogs all about today's outfit and girl stuff? And if these elements dominate, are they worthless? In her analysis of today's outfit photos, elements typical of Swedish blogs authored by young women and men, Palmgren (2010) has demonstrated how these photos allow for staging different versions of identity and for receiving comments on gender performances from blog readers. Lövheim (2011b), who has examined the most popular Swedish female blogs, calls them ethical spaces, in which women can discuss important topics on their own premises. Do press representations of pink bloggers imply that young women's online presence is too trivial to belong to the public sphere?

Although the notions of private and public spheres are blurred in the case of blogs and are constantly changing in contemporary society,⁵ young female bloggers are undoubtedly visible to the general public. Rettberg (2008) suggests that despite the fact that new communication technologies are omnipresent nowadays, we can still observe "moral distress displayed by people accustomed to a print culture with mass media when they are faced with participatory media such as YouTube, the Wikipedia or blogs" (2). In this respect, accounts of everyday life published online by teenage girls run against traditional notions of the public sphere, in which the only ones worthy of participating are the elite. Moreover, teenage female personal bloggers seem to overturn the traditional notions of gender and the inviolable opposition of girls usually associated with the space inside the home and boys with the space outside, which is similar to Reid-Walsh and Mitchell's (2004) observations in their study of websites authored by girls.

Discursive construals of the most popular and thus visible bloggers seem to include elements of the postfeminist, neoliberal "fun fearless female" (Koller 2008: 416) symbolic: consumerism, glamorous femininity enhanced by self-maintenance work, expensive clothing and bold sexuality. Top bloggers become objects of moralization and critique because they fail as role models and are commercially oriented. Are top teenage female bloggers part of the mainstream celebrity culture that promotes unattainably perfect models of femininity? Are they micro-celebrities (Senft 2008), famous only in the eyes of limited blog audiences? When does one stop being a regular girl

and become a role model? The postfeminist media context focused on “lifestyle, celebrity and body work” (Attwood 2011:207) certainly frames girls’ visual performances online in that they are pressed to negotiate “normative forms of gendered and sexualized visual self-representation” (Ringrose 2011:101). Are bloggers’ online self-representations a way to manage the compulsory “disciplinary technology of sexy” (Gill 2008 cited in Ringrose 2011:100) maintained by the media and popular culture? And what about the commercialization of blogging? While I do not imply that bloggers are deprived of agency in their relations with commercial partners, I suggest that we should do well not to ignore the role of the profit-oriented marketing apparatus plays in maintaining young female (and male) bloggers’ interest in earning profits through blogging.

In contrast to the top bloggers positioned in my material as having the power to influence their young readers (who are often bloggers labeled as pink as well), the latter are construed as uncritical and naïve in their consumption of blogs. Such a representation appears to frame blog followers as “uncritical media victims” (Jackson and Vares 2011: 135). Earlier studies indicate the presence of teenage girls’ agency in media consumption. Hobson (2004) has found that teenage girls who watch soap operas and reality TV display an advanced understanding of these shows as versions of reality or fiction and are not unduly influenced by what they see. Jackson and Vares (2011) point to girls’ strategies in their negotiations of hyper-sexualized femininities promoted by celebrities, which allow them to enjoy the consumption of this celebrity culture without compromising their good-girl femininity. Ringrose (2011) also suggests the significant role of teen girls’ agency and experimentation (and not only regulation) in their navigation of online sexualization. Can this reflexivity in media consumption be translated into blog audiences? Lövheim (2011a) has found that Swedish female top bloggers perform as ordinary girls and blog followers’ friends. Are top bloggers perceived as more real than conventional celebrities where reality is always juxtaposed against image? Are blogs thus consumed less critically? How do young women make meaning of what they encounter in blogs?

Girl-blogging described in my material receives considerable media attention and is subject to commercialization. This brings about new theoretical and empirical questions, some of which I have raised above. While commodification in the media and commercialization undoubtedly have problematic aspects, I propose that the overwhelmingly negative representations of pink bloggers are simplistic and one-sided. The language used in press articles conveys specific representations of these bloggers that seem to maintain taken-

for-granted naturalizations: young women do not belong to the public sphere, personal bloggers are exhibitionists, successful bloggers are merely commercial, and blog followers are passive and uncritical. In order to grasp the complexity of teenage female personal blogging, we need to investigate young women's perspectives and experiences with blogging as well as the socio-cultural context they find themselves in. An examination of their negotiations of the pink-blogging label seems like a good place to start.

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Karolina Dmitrow-Devold is a doctoral fellow at the Research Centre for Child and Youth Competence Development at the Lillehammer University College, Norway. Her PhD project focuses on digital literacy and gender representations in the context of teenage female personal blogging in Norway. Her academic interests include teenage blogging, girlhood studies, new media, and digital literacy.

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Notes

1. In the age group of 9- to 16-year olds, 42 percent of girls reported having written a blog compared with 11 percent of boys (Norwegian Media Authority 2012).
2. By calling blogs private, Bell (2007) seems to refer to both their intimate topical area and small audiences. However, Lüders (2007) problematizes the privacy of blogs and proposes that it is critical to acknowledge that online spaces can be both public and private, because "intimate and private expressions and actions can be protected within private spaces online as well as offline" (123).
3. Using various blog portals the blogglisten.no ranking covers registered blogs. The blogg.no ranking includes only blogs hosted by blogg.no. Both are updated daily online.
4. One article published in 2009, nine in 2010 and twelve in 2011.
5. Lövheim (2011b) proposes that new media technologies redefine the notion of private and public spheres by providing new public arenas for discussion on cultural values and social norms (unlike the traditional media) in which people are active media producers and not merely media consumers.

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Performing the Self in the Mainstream

Norwegian girls in blogging

Karolina Dmitrow-Devold

Abstract

Blogging has become an integral part of girls' media culture in Norway. This article investigates how teenage girls in the mainstream blogging community perform selves in their blogs over time. While studies of girls' self-presentations online abound, most draw solely on analyses of online artefacts and lack a temporal perspective. To address these gaps, this investigation has employed a longitudinal design combining in-depth interviews with ethnographic content analyses of blogs, and has analysed girls' online-based performances of self as integral to their offline experiences framed by the wider cultural context and gendered discourses. This approach is fruitful because it acknowledges girls' changing experiences across time and contexts, thus making possible a contribution to the theorization of identity as performed across the online and the offline settings and interactions in an ongoing process.

Keywords: girl culture, identity, online/offline

Introduction

Blogging has become an integral part of Norwegian girls' media culture (Fuglerud 2013), despite its rather limited diffusion among the Norwegian population as a whole. 53 per cent of Norwegian girls aged 15-16 visit, author or comment on blogs (Norwegian Media Authority 2016) and some blogs authored by young women have massive audiences. Top bloggers are celebrities, framed as role models for girls. Rysst & Roos (2014) have observed that top blogs are a source of the body-image pressure experienced by Norwegian girls. Research on blogging is thus important in order to gain some insight into girls' experiences of participation in the current mainstream media culture.

This article brings the literature on self-presentation online into conversation with the literature on girls' and young women's femininity and sexuality online by addressing the following research question:

How do girls who blog in the mainstream blogging community in Norway perform blogging selves over time?

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This investigation is longitudinal and emphasizes girls' perspectives on participation in mainstream blogging, which allows insight to *their* experiences of performing blogging selves *over time* rarely addressed in the literature. The goal is to acknowledge, document and theorize girls' experiences and changing perspectives.

I define mainstream blogging in Norway as encompassing both the blogg.no community, which is the largest, and the blogging genre viewed as most typical for young female bloggers (Fuglerud 2013): personal blogs including life updates and so-called outfit photos.¹ This investigation does not cover other blogging communities and genres, such as fitness or fashion blogs.

Nordic girlhood

Nordic countries rank favourably in international gender-equality statistics. This relates to "several decades of women's movement activism and welfare state intervention, targeting women's participation in the public sphere of employment and politics and change in the traditional, gendered division of domestic work" (Sümer et al. 2014). Like their Anglo-American peers, Norwegian girls are subject to body-image pressure (Jávo 2012, cited in Rysst & Roos 2014), eating disorders, and body-hatred resulting from the increasing focus on the body characteristic of neoliberal postfeminist sensibility (Rysst 2010). Nordic Girlhood is unique because it leans on discourses that emphasize "innate likeness of girls and boys" and gender integration and frame gender differences as resulting from socialization (Formark & Bränström Öhman 2013: 4). This produces a normative ideal of a strong, independent girl who can and should do whatever she wants and downplays the potential hindrances due to structural dimensions of gender (*ibid.*). Norwegian girls today, especially from the middle class,² must be "perfect at everything: look great, have a slim and toned body, an exciting social life, and be very good at school" (Nielsen 2014: 87, my translation). Being feminine and clever are no longer assumed to be contradictory, something Nielsen (2014) views as both liberating and challenging.

Mainstream blogging as part of girls' media culture

Though I document Norwegian girls' performances of selves in the online-based mainstream blogging community, I have striven to analyse these performances as integral to their offline experiences framed by the wider cultural context and gendered discourses. I view mainstream blogging as illustrative of the postfeminist sensibility (Gill 2007) in that femininity norms promoted by top female bloggers focus on consumerism, the technology-enabled body (Jackson 2016), and hetero-normative sexuality that seems to originate in what Abidin & Thompson (2012) call "refracted (fe)male gaze", whereby women "monitor and discipline each others' bodies on the basis of presumed heterosexual masculine desires" (468). This article does *not* investigate top blogs,³ but I have earlier identified (Dmitrow-Devold forthcoming) that top bloggers are trendsetters of femininity norms in mainstream blogging and thus frame the self-presentations of the girls in this study.

I position mainstream blogging as illustrative of three recent trends in youths' digital media culture: the competition for positive responses within the judgement culture

(Hirdman 2007), because girls continually perform selves online and the audience judges these performances; celebrity culture (boyd 2008), because high-ranking female bloggers become celebrities; and increasing commercialization of children's and teen's media culture (Schor 2004), because some bloggers receive products or money from advertising.

Moreover, I conceptualize the term "pink blogger" as an identity label (Moje & Luke 2009), which represents a gendered discourse that positions girls' participation in mainstream blogging in mostly negative ways. On the basis of my critical discourse analysis of Norwegian press articles (Dmitrow-Devold 2013), I argue that this label reflects the disparagement of feminized media genres that media studies (Gray 1992, Herring et al. 2004) have documented: it positions mainstream female bloggers as homogenously superficial. "Pink bloggers" originally denoted teenage girls who blog about personal life and style. They were positioned as unworthy of public attention and wasting their voices on trivialities. Historically, women's public visibility in Norway has been largely connected to the second-wave feminist movements that initiated and pushed forward the fight for social gender equality. In this light, an engagement in the public sphere based on the accounts of teenage life and style seems misguided and incompatible with the normative ideal of Nordic Girlhood (Formark & Bränström Öhman 2013). At present, the "pink blogger" label is mostly associated with top female bloggers in their twenties who blog for a living and conveys additional connotations of the commodification of personal communication and of promoting unrealistic body ideals. The changing connotations mirror the gradual shift in mainstream blogging towards professionalization and commercialization, including the problematic aspects.

Studies of self and femininity online

People tend to portray themselves online according to the same categories that exist offline, such as gender or race (e.g., Nakamura 2002, Robinson 2007), rather than constructing alternative identities unconstrained by one's life or body (e.g., Turkle 1995). Still, we can filter ourselves online (Rettberg 2014), either literally, by using photo filters or Photoshop, or culturally, by hiding aspects of self which diverge from community norms and from what we want to show the anticipated audience. The performance of self also depends on the degree of anonymity in a particular online setting, its purpose and structure (Marwick 2014), and its norms of behaviour – hence a variety of girls' self-presentations documented previously (Svenningsson Elm 2007).

Today, girls' performances online are contextualized by postfeminist popular culture, which frames bold hetero-normative sexuality and the focus on the technology-enabled body (Jackson 2016) as individual empowerment (McRobbie 2009, Gill 2007). Stern (2004) proposes that online spaces enable adolescents to experiment with self-presentation styles more freely than offline spaces, where social constraints are stronger. Some scholars (Kelly et al. 2006, Daneback 2006, Willem et al. 2012) point to showing more skin, adopting traditionally masculine sexual scripts or playing with conventional codes of gender display as instances of such experimentation. Still, normative femininity requires girls to balance physical attractiveness with respectability (Ambjörnsson 2004). While young women transgress the traditional gender roles by, say, posting sexualized photos and acting raunchily online, they tend to balance these transgressions by emphasizing self-worth and autonomy (Dobson 2012).

Some studies of Nordic girls' self-presentations online show similar balancing acts. Sveningsson Elm (2009) finds that the girls who posted revealing photos in the Swedish online community also emphasized their involvement in romantic relationships, which she interprets as the balancing between "the undesired polarities of the attractive but too available 'whore', on the one hand, and the unattractive, unwomanly woman, on the other" (97). Such dilemmas are also present on websites that explicitly encourage publishing sexualized photos, like the site *deiligt.no* (Helseth 2010), where girls (and boys) post photos of their bodies and compete for the audience's highest score for "hotness". Studies of these kinds of websites in Norway and Sweden (Knudsen 2007, Hirdman 2007) show that the girls' photos are sexualized, often evoking soft-pornographic aesthetics. Helseth (2010) rightly argues that competing for the audiences' scores by exposing one's body is not an expression of girls' free play with sexuality because they risk, much more than boys, being labelled as slutty or desperate if they fail to exhibit sexual availability to men in just the right way. An investigation of girls' profiles on a Danish teen portal demonstrates that positive comments from peers are the biggest motivators for girls to post sexualized photos, because they bring popularity in this competitive setting (Gram & Richardt 2006).

These sites engage with celebrity- (boyd 2008) and judgment culture (Hirdman 2007) that originate in docu-soaps and reality-TV, where the participants compete with each other for the audience's highest score. Lövheim's (2011) investigation of top blogs authored by Swedish women also highlights a competitive online community, where bloggers use various techniques to enlarge their audiences, which lead to high positions on blog rankings and therewith popularity and material benefits. The blogging community investigated here is also competitive and engages with celebrity culture in that it frames girls as competitors for the highest positions in the blog rankings and the most popular bloggers gain celebrity status within and outside of this community. However, while Lövheim (2011) focuses on top bloggers in their twenties who blog for a living, I have focused on teenage girls who blog in their spare time and have smaller audiences.

While numerous studies focus specifically on girls' self-presentations online (e.g., Sveningsson Elm 2009, Dobson 2012), most of them draw solely on the analyses of the online artefacts the girls produce and mostly lack a temporal perspective (see, however, Gram & Richardt 2006, Davis 2010). Consequently, we seldom learn about the girls' experiences of self-presentation or how they self-present over time.

Theoretical framework – the blogging self as relational and situated

This study employs the concept of performing the blogging self, drawing on Lomborg's blogging self (2012) and Goffman's performed self (1959). These symbolic interactionist concepts presume that in any social interaction "some elements of our identity are highlighted, while others are toned down" (Lomborg 2012: 416). A blogging self is not fixed but is relational, situated in the interactions with the context – the blogging community – and the audience. The girls perform this character (Goffman 1959) for their audiences. While the concept of the blogging self allows for investigating girls' performances of self situated in everyday interactions with the blogging community and the audience, I conceptualize these performances as an integral part of the girls' offline experiences framed by the wider cultural context and gendered discourses, including

the “pink blogger” label. Identity is performed in an ongoing process across the online and the offline settings (Thurlow et al. 2004).

I draw on poststructuralist (Butler 1990) and relational (West & Zimmerman 1987, West & Fenstermaker 1995, Fenstermaker & West 2002) approaches to gender, rather than on Goffmanian (1976) gender display. I view girls’ blogging selves as both discursively performative, drawing on the multiple, fluid femininities emphasized by poststructuralism, and as situated in everyday social interactions constrained by gender structures that hold girls accountable for their performances of femininity. I also presume that different femininities are valued differently, with normative femininity requiring the balancing of physical attractiveness and respectability (Ambjörnsson 2004).

Method: Investigating blogging self across time and contexts

This study is a part of a larger project that combines ethnographic methods with discursive analyses of media commentary about mainstream female bloggers, rather than an ethnography *per se*. The methods reflect the focus on girls’ perspectives and the theorization of the blogging self as situated and framed by both the online-based and the offline-based experiences and contexts. In line with this study’s theoretical view of the online and offline settings as intertwined in the ongoing process of performing the self, I collected data from both online (participants’ blogs) and offline sources (press articles, interviews with participants). The analyses of these different sources of data fed into each other.

The longitudinal design tracked the girls’ performances of selves and their experiences over time. The data-collection stages were: 1) interview one; 2) archiving blog posts and readers’ comments; 3) interview two carried out six months after interview one⁴. It is important to note that the data collection and the analyses intertwined. I analysed the data collected at each stage before embarking on the next. The stories I heard during the interviews contextualized the content I found in the blogs and *vice versa*: the interviews made it possible for me to ask about the performances of self I had identified in the blogs. This presence of the participants (see also Duguay 2016) supported my investigating their experiences. Interviewing the participants twice, analysing their blogs between the interviews and encouraging them to reflect on their past and present performances formed a critical part of the longitudinal analyses.

To capture how the girls not only performed blogging selves but also how they experienced and justified these performances, I combined interviews with ethnographic content analyses (Altheide 1996) of their blogs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face⁵ during 2012–2014, audio recorded, and transcribed. Using mostly open-ended questions, I elicited the girls’ stories of participation in mainstream blogging over time. Departing from these stories, I asked about experiences, dilemmas, and goals tied to the performances of self. Drawing on my earlier analyses of Norwegian press articles (Dmitrow-Devold 2013), I also analysed how the participants positioned themselves in relation to the “pink blogger” label, an iteration of a gendered discourse that frames participation in mainstream blogging. Drawing on the social constructionist framework, I investigated both what the participants said and how they said it (Silverman 2006): I viewed them not simply as individuals with their unique experiences but rather as members of a culture who “use culturally available resources in order to con-

struct their stories” (134). I applied ethnographic content analysis (Altheide 1996) for the investigation of the performances of self in the blog samples focusing on the topics, photos and videos, and the readers’ comments.

The purpose of this investigation is to contribute to the theoretical development of the performing identity as self (Moje & Luke 2009) in online-based settings, rather than to provide a generalizable description of teenage female bloggers in Norway. Purposive sampling (Lincoln & Guba 1985) was used to select a strategic sample conducive for understanding and developing concepts that would provide explanations of the investigated phenomena. The size of the strategic sample was determined on the basis of theoretical saturation. The sample included 12 participants of the *mainstream* blogging community, as defined above: girls aged 15-17 whose blogs were part of the blogg.no community and included life accounts as well as outfit photos. For the sake of securing the longitudinal collection of blog samples,⁶ I only included participants who had blogged at least six months prior to recruitment. The participants had various audience sizes.⁷

Results: Three strategies of performing the blogging self

The analyses led me to identifying three strategies of performing the blogging self. I called these *strategies* because the girls emphasized and filtered out aspects of the blogging self according to changing goals. At the same time, the judging audiences (Hirdman 2007), the competitiveness, and the norms of polished femininity promoted by celebrity bloggers framed their performances. The strategies mirror the different ways the participants tried to respond to these norms: adjusting to the norms in the *adjustment* strategy; both adjusting to the norms and presenting potentially deviating aspects of self in the *fit-in-and-be-myself* strategy; and contesting these norms in the *contestation* strategy.

These strategies are refined, analytical products derived from the empirical material. Some girls reflected them to varying degrees. Some used different strategies over time. Instead of relating the stories of all participants, I present the essential characteristics of each strategy and provide illustrative examples. Subsequently, I present the dynamics of performances of blogging self across time and contexts focusing on several participants. While this format reduces the thickness of the presented analyses, it makes for a clear understanding of the concepts that provide explanations of the investigated phenomena.

Adjustment strategy

The typical elements of this strategy comprise: focusing on style-related topics in favour of opinionated, negative or private content; constructing a positive image of oneself; distancing oneself from one’s blogging self. The below quotation illustrates this strategy:

[T]o blog about superficial things is quite external to me in a way. The blog is not me; it’s just a small part of what I am interested in. I’m more likely to get through to readers with something that a lot of them can relate to – clothes and shoes and such – rather than just writing about me and my life. Sara, interview.

The posts typically include short updates on the day and carefully staged outfit photos. The photos are numerous and dominate the posts but they neither expose bodies in sexualized poses nor document undergone beauty treatments and/or plastic surgery,

which the participants associate with top bloggers. Rather than transgressing the norm of respectability (Ambjörnsson 2004), they carefully avoid posting “provocative” photos. For instance, while bikinis appear in the “new in” section, displayed on a table, they are rarely presented on the person.

In this strategy, the girls say they look “more perfect” than “in reality”. Whereas choosing the most flattering online profile photos has been documented as common (Kapidzic & Herring 2014), here the selection is very restrictive. Lisa said she only feels comfortable looking “dolled up” in the blog and the photos confirm this: she always has full, immaculate make-up. Ella takes up to 100 photos for one post, only to choose a few which she subsequently edits to enhance them. Another element is emphasizing positive aspects of personality and projecting a positive attitude to life, because this is “more fun for the readers”. By filtering out (Rettberg 2014) critical worldview and negative emotions that could “offend” someone, the girls construct blogging selves that are easy to consume, which is typical for micro-celebrities (Marwick & boyd 2011): people who become popular online. Indeed, in my sample, switching to this strategy tended to give an increase in audience size. This indicates that the polished and positive performances of self can lead to large audiences.

The girls frame their polished blogging selves as responses to both the overwhelming focus in society on the perfect body, where “you have to be thin but also have muscles... be pretty, have long hair, nice clothes and bags” and the judging audience’s reactions, where “a normal person gets comments that she is super fat or super skinny”. “Society has gone crazy”, said Lisa. In this strategy the girls respond to this “craziness” by trying to adjust their blogging selves to the premises laid out by the blogging community’s trendsetters and the postfeminist culture, where looking good, wearing the right clothes, and having a slim, toned body are essential.

Though audiences often compliment these “perfect” self-presentations – “I’m totally jealous of your hair, it’s soooo great!”; “You are dead gorgeous!:)” – the girls seemingly never manage to be “perfect” enough. Sara received critical comments for wearing “too short” dresses, Lisa for posting about parties with alcohol, and Nora for being “too thin”. The readers seemed to discipline the bloggers according to the refracted (fe)male gaze (Abidin & Thompson 2012), denouncing the show of too much skin as a signal of intolerable sexual availability or the failure to comply with the rigid ideal of the body that is neither too fat nor too thin (Rysst 2010).

Interestingly, the girls who used the *adjustment* strategy typically distanced themselves from their blogging selves during the interviews: “the blog is not me”; the blog and the off-blog settings are “two different worlds”. As specified in Sara’s quote opening this section, the self-presentation focused on fashion and beauty is justified by its appeal to female audiences and an expression of only one of her interests. Hiding personal or negative emotions is in turn framed as protecting privacy and not making oneself vulnerable. As Ella put it: “The most private I get (in the blog) is about my dog”. At the same time, the girls realize that they can be judged as “superficial”, “stupid” or “pink bloggers” because of their selective and polished performances. Distancing oneself from one’s blogging self seems to be a way to deal with the unease of being perceived as a “superficial” girl – an image that clashes with the demands of being the modern girl who is supposed to have it all: good looks with brains and an interesting social life (Nielsen 2014).

Karolina Dmitrow-Devold

Fit-in-and-be-myself strategy

The typical elements of the *fit-in-and-be-myself* strategy are: combining life accounts and style with opinionated or emotional content; attempts to present both the positive and negative aspects of one's life; a moderate degree of identification with the blogging self. Karoline distances herself from the "pink-blogger" label right at the start of our first interview:

I would say that I have an ordinary blog. This is not a pink blog. Because I don't present everything as pink and perfect but I try to balance the types of posts I publish... I make sure not to publish posts that are too personal, but I also make sure that I look normal. That I also have bad days and not a perfect life like in the pink blogs. Karoline, interview.

Karoline wants to make sure she does not look "perfect" like "pink bloggers". This is typical for the *fit-in-and-be-myself* strategy. On the one hand, there is the attempt to perform a blogging self that complies with the community norms that dictate staging a positive, fashionable and polished blogging self. On the other hand, there is the desire to stay "normal" and not perceived as "fake" or "superficial".

Posting about own views and sharing personal or difficult experiences is one way this struggle for "looking normal" is mirrored in the blogs. While Sofie posted many outfit photos and inspirational collages depicting magazine-cover-looking girls, she also used her blog to "get things off her chest", writing about bullying or eating disorders. She also shared her own difficult experiences with individual readers through email correspondences, something she framed as supportive for them. Pia published some posts out of keeping with a positive façade: how she "hates everything about her body" or struggles with an injury. However, publishing posts about "social dilemmas" is viewed as challenging because this demands a readiness to stand up for one's convictions, including offline, perhaps in front of schoolmates who might confront the blogger about her views. While avoiding controversy is even stronger in the *adjustment* strategy, where all opinionated content is excluded, here publishing such content is desirable, though often accompanied with the fear of being criticized. Posting about negative life experiences is framed as challenging because this means disclosure and vulnerability.

Also the photos are less staged and polished, evoking more documentations of everyday life than fashion shoots. Karoline frames looking as good as possible in the photos as something "everybody wants", but associates this with being a "pink blogger", someone she "tries hard" not to be. This illustrates the challenge this strategy entails: striking a balance where one fits in to the community's norms of perfectibility (McRobbie 2000 cited in Jackson 2016) but also remains "normal" enough to avoid being labelled as a superficial "pink blogger". Because this strategy involves a higher degree of identification with one's blogging self, the pressure is greater than in case of the *adjustment* strategy.

Contestation strategy

This strategy undermines the normative expressions of femininity in mainstream blogging. Elements typical for this strategy are: publishing a lot of opinionated and emotional content; presenting own life and body in realistic or subversive ways; and a high degree of identification with one's blogging self. Marie's blog post illustrates the *contestation* strategy:

I am not after fame and popularity based on what I look like. I am not really after popularity, so that everyone in Norway knows who I am, but I want to get through to people. ... I want people to understand what the world is like, that not everyone is doing fine. I want to put this into focus because my friends and I have gone through different things! Marie, blog post.

Marie refuses to use her looks to gain popularity but wants to articulate teenagers' experiences. Janne's agenda is to create an alternative to the "manipulated and perfect images of what girls look, behave, and live like" constructed in the most popular blogs. In this strategy, socially engaged topics are framed as most appealing. Opinion posts abound and cover topics like beauty tyranny, peer pressure, depression, bullying, feminism, politics, suicide or relationships. This is different compared with the *fit-in-and-be-myself* strategy, where expressing opinions is desirable but only partially realized due to the fear of critical comments. The posts are usually quite long and sometimes elicit discussions between the commenting readers, which seldom occurs in the other strategies. These comments tend to relate to the content of the blog rather than the blogger' appearance. Much interaction also takes place through private correspondences, where the blogging self is performed off the blog.

This strategy presents the body in realistic or subversively non-normative ways. Janne performed an ironic, "imperfect" blogging self by posting almost exclusively unflattering photos of herself with messy hair, exposed spots, and unfashionable clothes that caricature the outfit photos. Her blogging self emphasizes her flaws in order to rebel against polished mainstream self-presentations, unlike the other strategies that minimize flaws. Nadira published several outfit photos: her agenda was to inspire "those who may not feel that their body fits in". She described herself as "not the catwalk type", not fitting in to the current ideal of a slim, toned body. By continuing to publish outfit photos in spite of the judging audience's disciplining comments about her weight or unshaved armpits, she contested the narrow ideals of femininity that privilege slimness.

The experienced identification with one's blogging self is distinct in the *contestation* strategy compared with the others. Janne even said that the blog "was her identity" for some time.

Blogging Selves across Time and Contexts

While most girls at the beginning of their participation in the study followed the *fit-in-and-be-myself* strategy, none of them did so towards the end: they either quit blogging or switched to another strategy.

Karoline and Emma switched to the *adjustment* strategy. Over time, their blogs included outfit photos more frequently, and fewer opinion posts. During our second interview, Karoline gladly said she now had a bigger audience and received sponsored products. Emma deleted the blog's sub-page related to her engagement in a political party because she was "no longer so active in the party" and "politics was not really interesting to the readers" in contrast to "girl stuff". Over time, their blogging selves emphasized style more than "social dilemmas" because of the audience's positive responses. This supports Lomborg's (2012) findings that the blogger-readers interaction "has a conservative effect on the blog content", leading to a stabilization of topics over time (427) and thus reinforcing the emphasis on a few selected aspects of the blogging self that are most appealing to the audience.

Moreover, Emma made a link between audience-appealing content and sponsorship. In order to maintain sponsorship cooperation, where the blogger receives products in exchange for advertising them in her blog, she needs to maintain a certain audience size specified by the sponsoring company. In this case, maintaining commercial cooperation seems to be an incentive for adjusting the blogging self to the audience's preferences. Only some of the participants actively looked for sponsorship. Still, most of them, regardless of strategy, framed sponsorship cooperation as desirable as long as bloggers are "honest" about the advertised products. This seems to indicate an increasing normalization of the commercialization of personal blogs.

Marie switched from the *fit-in-and-be-myself* strategy to the *contestation* strategy. When I interviewed her the first time, she said she was "a bit like a pink blogger". Her initial goal was to "get the kind of attention Andrea Badendyck and Emilie Nereng have". These popular bloggers had the right looks, the right clothes, many readers, and material benefits, which symbolized status among Marie's schoolmates. By emphasizing looks and outfits in her blogging self, she wanted to prove she was "as good as" them, gaining status on their terms by becoming a popular blogger. This documents that the offline interactions with her schoolmates influenced Marie's blogging self. In retrospect, however, she framed this self-presentation as "not her". During the second interview, she no longer identified herself as a "pink blogger".

Janne quit blogging although she strongly identified with her blogging self performed in the *contestation* strategy. As she told me during our second interview, she began to wear make-up and was no longer comfortable with publishing ugly photos of herself. She felt pressured to live up to – or as she said, "live down to" – her flawed, self-ironic blogging self. She was afraid to "lose face", say, by publishing photos of her wearing make-up: a pretty, made-up blogging self seemed incompatible with her agenda. This does not mean that she considered being pretty and opinionated as mutually exclusive. Rather, she felt that acting prettily clashed with her subversive blogging self, which was selective and performed for the sake of the blogging context.

Interestingly, Janne seemed to perform her blogging self offline when giving interviews to the media or meeting with one of her readers in person. "I didn't know how cool she thinks I am", she said, recalling her nervousness before meeting a reader, as if she wanted to be the person the reader knew from the blog. Ella, who used the *adjustment* strategy, also seemed to perform her blogging self in offline settings, like attending the blog awards ceremony or being interviewed about fashion tips in one of Norway's biggest newspapers. Referring to this interview, she said: "maybe not me, but (the name of her blog persona) certainly has a voice" that people want to listen to. This appears to indicate that the girls also kept in character in offline settings during interactions that revolved around their blogging activities.

Concluding discussion

On the basis of the empirical analyses of the interviews with teenage girls and their blogs, I have identified that the girls performed blogging selves reflexively and strategically but they were held accountable according to the gendered norms and discourses manifested both within the online-based blogging community and beyond – in the offline settings. The blogging selves changed over time and the girls identified with them to different degrees.

On the one hand, the online-based interactions with the girls who read the blogs shape the blogging selves. This judging audience (Hirdman 2007) evaluates the bloggers according to the norms of the postfeminist perfectibility (McRobbie 2000) and of respectability (Ambjörnsson 2004). On the other hand, the offline-based interactions with their schoolmates and the trivializing label of “pink blogger” also frame the girls’ performances. Public engagement based on life accounts and the stereotypically feminine area of style seems incompatible with the normative ideal of a gender-equal Nordic Girl granted with endless possibilities (Formark & Bränström Öhman 2013). Whereas some have argued that girls are freer to experiment with femininity in online settings compared with the offline settings, this investigation concludes that the girls’ performances of self are complex balancing acts disciplined according to the normative ideals of the postfeminist body and the ideals of Nordic Girlhood.

Still, while most previous studies emphasize the importance of striking a balance between sexually available and respectable femininity, in this investigation the dimensions of the looks and the brains came across as essential. The dimension of the looks relates, of course, to sexuality: the girls wanted to display attractive bodies that match the current ideals of feminine beauty. Still, those who enhanced their photos talked about the right body shape (slim but toned) and fashionable outfits and avoided posting photos that could be viewed as sexualized. Or, maybe they did not want to say they wanted to look sexy when talking to me? After all, research interviews were also social interactions, where we performed particular selves to create the desired impressions (Goffman 1959). I have not registered using fashion and style in the spirit of third-wave feminism as “a recognition of femininity as a constructive force to be used against patriarchy ‘from within’” (Sundén & Sveningsson Elm 2007: 8). Instead, in the *adjustment* strategy, the girls distanced themselves from blogging selves that emphasized the looks and style because they clashed with their self-perception as being smart and opinionated off the blog, even though they felt they were being misjudged. The *fit-in-and-be-myself* strategy involved the attempts to combine “girl stuff” with “social dilemmas” the girls felt they “should” blog about in just the right proportions. In turn, the *contestation* strategy that emphasized the brains was accompanied by the feeling of acting “unwomanly” (Sveningsson Elm 2009) owing to the incompliance with the normative body ideals.

It is possible that the looks and the brains dimensions were important because of the social positioning of mainstream female bloggers in Norway as superficial “pink bloggers”. The girls might have responded to this label by insisting that they were not superficial, but have opinions and are “interested in what’s going on in the world”. However, the looks and the brains dimensions might also be indications of requirements towards contemporary Norwegian girls formulated by Nielsen (2014): *both* pretty and smart. The girls experienced self-presentations dominating in mainstream blogging as polished and body-focused, but they responded to them differently: trying either to comply with or to subvert them. The more polished, easily consumable (Marwick & boyd 2011) and body-focused blogging selves they performed, the less they identified with them.

Finally, whereas earlier studies propose that young people tend to create identity online consistent with identity offline (Huffaker & Calvert 2005, Davis 2010), my results also indicate a reversal. Some participants seemed to perform their blogging selves not only in the online settings, but also offline, during face-to-face interactions with their readers and people who got to know them as bloggers. This expands Lomborg’s (2012)

concept of the blogging self in that this self can be accomplished not only online but also offline. In broader terms, this finding contributes to the theorization of performing identity as self by documenting not only that people take performances of self originating in the offline-based contexts to the online-based contexts, but also that they can keep in their online-based characters during offline-based interactions.

Notes

1. These photos present the blogger in various outfits and sometimes include information about the place of purchase (Palmgren 2010).
2. I acknowledge the class dimensions in Nielsen's (2014) analysis but I do not address them in this article.
3. I define top female bloggers as those listed at top positions of the Norwegian blogging rankings over a longer time, with stable audiences counting up to tens of thousands of readers per day.
4. The first four participants were interviewed for the second time about one year after interview 1.
5. One participant was interviewed by the phone.
6. The analyses included the first ten blog posts with accompanying comments published in three selected months: six months prior to interview 1, the month of interview 1, and the month of interview 2. The collection of blog samples did not coincide for all participants but covered a similar time span of about 12 months.
7. Approximate audience sizes ranged from 20 to 5000 unique readers per day. These are unstable, changing on a daily basis.

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KAROLINA DMITROW-DEVOLD, PhD candidate, Research Centre for Child and Youth Competence Development, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences,
karolina.dmitrow-devold@inn.no

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What Matters to the Girls? Norwegian Girls' Experiences of Digital Competences in Mainstream Blogging

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Karolina Dmitrow-Devold¹

Abstract

This article seeks to identify the digital competences experienced as meaningful by teenage girls, who blog within the mainstream blog community in Norway. Previous work has mostly had its basis in the artefacts produced by girls rather than in their stories of participation, and has discussed digital competences in abstract or normative terms. This study focuses on girls' perspectives, identifies concrete digital competences they experienced as meaningful, and a range of complex, even contradictory meanings they attributed to the competences, depending on their blogging-related goals and the femininity norms of their community of practice. The study documents how the girls' digital practices changed over time. While some of these modifications align with what is considered beneficial, others can be viewed as problematic or gendered.

Keywords

Digital technology, gender, Internet, media, teenagers, leisure

Introduction

Research has documented that participation in leisure-time digital practices can contribute to developing children's and young people's competences (e.g., see Ito et al., 2010; Korten and Svoen, 2006), which facilitate the navigation of the global, mediatized interaction of the twenty-first century (Drotner, 2008) and reinforce young people's agency (Hull and Kenney, 2008). Some researchers have recommended the application of the insights from leisure-time digital practices to institutionalized education (e.g., Drotner, 2008; Gee, 2006). Discussion of digital competences, however, is often abstract, and few studies of youth's perspectives on the participation in digital practices have articulated the theoretical and normative

¹ Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway.

Corresponding author:

Karolina Dmitrow-Devold, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway.
E-mail: karolina.dmitrow-devold@inn.no

representations of what digital competences could be (Bjørgen, 2014). Moreover, the studies including or focusing on girls seldom have a gender perspective (but see Chandler-Olcott and Mahar, 2003; Kelly et al., 2006), implying that digital practices are gender-neutral.

This article addresses these gaps in two ways. First, I approach digital competences as socioculturally situated (Bjørgen and Nygren, 2010; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Nygren, 2015) and ‘experienced’ (Bjarnadóttir, 2004). Here, I depart from the perspectives of teenage girls who blog in order to identify specific blogging-related competences that *they* experience as meaningful. Second, I introduce a gender perspective by investigating these experiences in relation to the femininity norms of the mainstream blogging community they blog within in order to understand the meanings they attach to competences in relation to these femininity norms. Blogging in Norway is statistically more common among girls (Norwegian Media Authority, 2012, 2016). The public discourse mostly frames mainstream female blogging negatively (Dmitrow-Devold, 2013), as trivial, exhibitionistic, unhealthy due to the promotion of unattainable ideals of beauty or problematic because of commercialization.

It is thus interesting to explore girls’ perspectives on the competences they find meaningful in this practice, and how these experienced competences are related to the femininity norms of the mainstream blogging community. Specifically, I address the following two-part research question: Which digital competences do girls who blog within the mainstream blogging community experience as meaningful, and how do their digital practices change over time?

Drawing on in-depth interviews with 12 teenage girls who blog and on ethnographic analyses of their blogs (Altheide, 1996), I identify some of the digital competences they experience as meaningful. I demonstrate that their digital practices change in various ways over time. I argue that while some of these modifications reflect what earlier research frames as beneficial, we may view others as problematic or gendered. The investigation is longitudinal, which allows for documenting the development of competences over time, which is uncommon in previous research in the field.

Studies of Informal Learning in Peer-based Digital Practices

Recent studies of digital competences draw on a range of methodological approaches and document various practices (Bjørgen, 2014; Coiro et al., 2008; Warschauer and Ware, 2008). The research reviewed here reflects a subset of this field: I focus on informal learning in peer-based settings, thus excluding studies relating to institutionalized learning. I have also excluded studies of girls’ online participation that do not explicitly address learning, digital competences or literacy.

Previous studies mostly focus on the benefits of online communities for out-of-school literacy development and practice (Guzzetti, 2008). Numerous ethnographic studies have investigated youthful digital practices, drawing on the approach to literacy and learning as social and cultural practices (e.g., Drotner, 2008; Ito et al., 2010). These studies have their basis in Lave and Wenger’s (1991) approach to learning as a process situated within the communities of practice, where the participants learn by regularly interacting with each other within a community of practice

(Wenger et al., 2002): a group that shares an interest or a passion. These concepts of literacy and learning as situated sociocultural practices have shifted the focus from individual cognition and knowledge acquisition to the intertwinement of learning and identity (Moje and Luke, 2009) situated in social practices. The ethnographic approach aims at understanding how media and technology are meaningful to young people in the context of their everyday lives (Ito et al., 2010).

Some studies have documented learning about self-presentation. Stern (2008) argues that personal websites and blogs force young people to decide how to present themselves so that they create identities that match both their own self-image and what they want others to see. Through this process, they learn effective self-presentation and navigating an image-driven culture, which Stern views as increasingly important in the media-dominated world. Similarly, in her study of young people's engagement on MySpace, Boyd (2008) argues that young people learn through impression management while participating in social network sites because they continuously evaluate 'where they want to be situated in the social world they see' (137) and try to perform in ways that will elicit the reactions they desire.

Kelly et al. (2006: 22) have investigated girls' online learning about issues of femininity and discussed its implications for girls' empowerment. They show that when online, some girls pushed the boundaries of acceptable femininity by engaging in 'individual acts of gender rebellion', for instance, by taking initiative in heterosexual relationships or confronting boys about their disrespect for girls. However, they failed to challenge the 'emphasized femininity' oriented to accommodate men's desires and 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1987) on a collective level because they were unable to place their experiences within feminist discourses. Media production greatly contributes to the construction of identities because it facilitates reflexivity: A person not only looks at herself and modifies self-presentation accordingly but also reacts to the audiences' comments (Weber and Mitchell, 2008). Thus, communication with the audience and the other participants in the community of practice facilitates and intertwines with self-presentation.

Communication is another crucial dimension of media literacy developed through participating in leisure-time digital practices (e.g., Korten and Svoen, 2006; Svoen, 2012). Korten and Svoen (2006) demonstrate that engaging in what they call 'creative media practices' of making films and personal websites develops competences in three areas: (i) communication: the ability to make mediated content that others communicate with, (ii) technical and aesthetic self-expression and (iii) reflexivity of one's media expression. Svoen (2012) investigates the communicative competence in the later textual analysis of a blog authored by one the most popular teenage bloggers in Norway. By analyzing the blog videos, posts and comments, Svoen identifies elements of communicative competence such as the abilities to produce content appealing to the target audience, to elicit dialogue with the readers and to promote the blog in order to maintain and extend the audience. Studies of digital practices other than blogging, including chatting and digital storytelling, show that these practices can contribute to improving knowledge about special forms of etiquette (Drotner, 2008) or sensitivity towards the audience (Hull and Kenney, 2008).

Moreover, most of the studies reviewed in this section demonstrate that participation in leisure-time digital practices improves technical competence. This technical competence interconnects with, facilitates and supports the competences in the areas of self-presentation and communication. Some of the empirically identified

examples of technical literacy include among others creating MySpace pages with the strategic copying and pasting of blocks of code (Perkel, 2008), producing a game (Ito et al., 2010) or making videos and coding in HTML (Svoen, 2012).

Digital Competences as Non-normative and Situated

In order to address the research question, I take a sociocultural approach to learning, where situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and community of practice (Wenger et al., 2002) are key concepts. Specifically, I view technology and digital competences as part of the social practices situated within certain contexts (Bjørgen and Nygren, 2010), where learning occurs through interactive participation in digital practices. This conceptualization of digital competences relies on a non-normative understanding of competences (Nygren, 2008, 2015), which assumes that digital competences are developed in different ways within different social practices according to the goals pursued in different contexts (Bjørgen and Nygren, 2010). Drawing on the ethnographic approach (Ito et al., 2010), the aim is to understand how digital competences are meaningful to girls in everyday blogging. Giving primacy to the girls' perspectives, I draw on the concept of 'experienced competences' (Bjarnadóttir, 2004), which facilitates investigating how the *girls* experience digital competences, rather than how these competences 'appear to, or would be evaluated by others' (Bjarnadóttir, 2004: 301).

I apply a gender perspective to my investigations in order to understand the meanings the participants attach to digital competences in relation to femininity norms of the mainstream blogging community they blog within. I have earlier shown (Dmitrow-Devold, 2013) that top female bloggers in Norway are framed in the press as incarnations of postfeminist ideals of femininity (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). In this article, I identify the norms of femininity the girls say are dominant in mainstream blogging, and analyze the competences they develop in relation to these norms. In my theoretical approach to gender, I draw on the perspectives where gender is something people do (West and Zimmerman, 1987) or perform (Butler, 1993). Different femininities are valued differently and normative femininity involves balancing physical attractiveness with respectability (Ambjörnsson, 2004).

Investigating Experienced Competences Over Time

As shown below, the methods I used reflect both the research question and my theoretical approach. I used two sources of data collection: (i) semi-structured individual in-depth interviews with 12 bloggers on two occasions and (ii) 3 months' posts and comments in the participants' blogs.¹ Combining in-depth interviewing with the ethnographic analyses of blog content (Altheide, 1996) in a longitudinal design served a double purpose. First, this allowed for exploring the non-normative meanings and goals (Nygren, 2015) that the participants attached to 'experienced' competences (Bjarnadóttir, 2004) in relation to the changing contexts of their blogging practices. Second, this allowed for identifying the indicators of these competences in the blogs: thus, analyzing digital competence development in the context of the participants' everyday blogging routines over time (Bjørgen and Nygren, 2010; Ito et al., 2010).

The longitudinal design tracked the processual dynamics of these experiences and modifications in the blogs over time in accordance with the research question.

I presumed that the competences the girls mentioned during the interviews mattered to them in this particular blogging community and connected to their blogging goals. I wanted to elicit their stories of participation in the mainstream blogging community in order to understand why competences mattered. During the interviews, I used many open-ended questions that aimed to elicit the stories of participation in the mainstream blogging community (blogging routines, relation with the audience, received comments, etc.) and followed up on any statements connected to competences. Second, I asked the participants to compare their past and present blogging experiences in order to elicit what they have learned and what the process was. Third, I asked specifically about the three competence areas: self-presentation, communication and technical competence. This combination of questions served important purposes. It allowed for an investigation of digital competences connected to everyday blogging routines based on the participants' blogging-related experiences. It also facilitated the focus on the three competence areas of self-presentation, communication and technical competence—crucial areas of digital competence identified in previous research.

Because I was interested in the girls' experiences of digital competences in *mainstream* blogging, I recruited participants who matched what I defined as typical for mainstream blogging in Norway. On the basis of my preliminary research of the Norwegian blogosphere and the existing literature, I established the following sampling criteria: (i) gender and age: girls aged 15–17,² since most bloggers were girls in this approximate age group when I began collecting data (Norwegian Media Authority, 2012); (ii) the blog genre: all the blogs include life accounts and outfit-of-the-day photos³ (Palmgren, 2010), since these two elements are viewed as most typical for young female bloggers in Norway (Fuglerud, 2013); (iii) blogging community: blogs set up on blogg.no, because this is the largest in Norway. Another criterion was regular updates (at least 10 times per month) because I was looking for active bloggers and assumed that frequent updates would indicate considerable engagement. Length of participation in the blogging practice: at least 6 months prior to recruitment, as the analysis of blog content was to include samples from the blog archives in order to track the indications of digital competences over time.

Finally, I selected girls who had various ethnic backgrounds (eight girls were ethnic Norwegian and four were non-ethnic Norwegian) and whose blogs had various audience sizes in order to see if these elements were in any way meaningful for their experiences of digital competences. The former did not appear to have any significant influence. Audience sizes ranged from 50 to 5,000 unique readers per day.⁴ The most popular female blogger on blogg.no has about 70,000 readers.⁵ Upon recruitment, ten participants attended upper secondary school and two were in the last grade of lower secondary school. The girls came from towns of different sizes, mostly in the Akershus, Oslo and Oppland regions.

All participants had free access to the Internet but they disposed of different technological devices and software depending on their economic situation. These ranged from PC computers and free software downloaded from the Internet to Mac portable devices and expensive, high-quality cameras. Two participants had access to expensive editing software free of charge at school. I determined the size of this

strategic sample on the basis of theoretical saturation. Purposive sampling (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) is viewed as most successful when data are reviewed and analyzed in conjunction with data collection (Becker, 1998), which I did in this study.

Analyzing participants' blogs between the interviews allowed me to go back and forth from one data source to the other, in order to identify what competences the participants experienced as meaningful and how their blogs mirrored the development of these competences. At times, I followed up a statement from an interview in order to find indications of competences in the blog. At other times, something I found in the blog made me ask about it during the interview. This presence of the participants in the process of analysis was valuable, as the stories they told during the interviews contextualized the content I found in blogs (see also Duguay, 2016).

Some of the competences that the girls talked about were difficult to track in the blogs because they pertained to abstract notions of knowledge or awareness. Furthermore, their stories went back to when they began blogging, while I was able to track the modifications in the blogs only within the samples I collected. Still, combining interviews and blogs analyses allowed for a fuller understanding of the experienced competences. If I had only investigated the blogs by decoding the posts and comments according to my standards of evaluation, as has often been the case previously (e.g., Stern, 2008), I would have not gotten to know the girls' stories of participation. On the other hand, if I had only interviewed the participants, I would be unable to compare what they *say* they do in the blogs with what they *do* there.

I analyzed the interview transcripts inductively, using the notions of competences that could be developed from my interpretation of how the participants formulated themselves in the interviews, rather than any pre-constructed notions of competences. Drawing on the social constructionist framework, I investigated both the content of the interviews and 'the rhetorical force of what interviewees say' (Silverman, 2006: 134). This implies viewing the participants not simply as individuals with their unique experiences but rather as members of a variety of cultures who use culturally available resources when constructing their stories. I looked at how the girls constructed their stories of participation in the mainstream blogging community. I focused on what they framed as important for their blogging practices, how this related to the norms of their community and how their digital practices changed over time.

The interviews were face-to-face and audio recorded, conducted during 2012–14. Data collection did not coincide for all participants. The purpose of this study was to contribute to developing the theory of digital competence development. I wanted to understand and develop concepts that would provide explanations of the investigated phenomena, rather than providing a generalizable description of teenage female bloggers in Norway.

Four participants recruited in the first batch were interviewed with an interval of approximately 1 year, while for the remaining eight participants the interval between interviews was 6 months. While this modification can be considered as a weakness of the study, the stories of participation elicited during the interviews reached back beyond the time frame between interviews 1 and 2 and this made them possible to compare. One of the participants could only be interviewed by phone rather than

face-to-face. Although this was not the standard procedure, I went ahead with the interview in order to secure her participation in the study.

Participation in the study was confidential. I changed the girls' names and did not include visuals in any publication. Excluding photos and visuals meant losing highly illustrative material, but granted the participants anonymity, which was important due to their young age and, in some cases, considerable visibility. I translated the blog quotations used in the publications into English to prevent tracking them online. All participants and the parents of the participants under the age of 16 signed informed consent forms approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

Girls' Experiences of Participation in the Mainstream Blogging Community

In this section, I outline major characteristics of the mainstream blogging community and the main blogging-related goals according to how the participants expressed them during the interviews.

The participants experienced the *blogg.no* community as competitive owing to a large number of young female bloggers and the similarity of the blogs, which make it difficult to be 'discovered', especially if the blog is not ranked. The significant role of the rankings of blogs with the largest audiences and their daily updating, around which the community is organized, reinforces this competitiveness. Each participant had at some point wanted to be listed on the rankings or to extend her audience. Those who were listed, tended to track their positions, compare them with other blogs and attempt to climb higher. The girls experienced high readership statistics along with positive comments in the blog as positive. In turn, they framed such positive indications as the biggest advantage and motivation for blogging. They provide visibility, validation (see also Chittenden, 2010) and status in the peer group. At the same time, the participants described their readers as demanding: expecting frequent updates, overly curious or even 'looking for flaws'. The girls viewed negative comments as undeserved and unpleasant but unavoidable. The lack of comments was sometimes experienced as a sign that something is wrong, for instance with the outfit.

They framed top female bloggers as the community's trendsetters associating them with design and photos of high-technical quality, as well as 'girl stuff' like cosmetics, outfit photos and expensive lifestyle replete with dining out and exotic travels. Top bloggers were described as looking 'as perfect as Hollywood celebrities', with 'long hair' and 'loads of expensive clothes'. Some participants framed them as increasingly provocative, like showing skin or undergoing plastic surgery, and using 'manipulated' (Photoshopped) photos. While only some girls aimed at imitating such polished self-presentations and others actively subverted them, all of them associated these expressions of femininity with achieving success in mainstream blogging because they secured large audiences. Top bloggers were mostly viewed as 'celebrities' who receive sponsored products.

Most of the girls framed the mainstream blogging community as becoming increasingly commercialized. Although only one of them explicitly said that earning money on the blog was her goal, most viewed sponsorship cooperation as desirable. However, only some of the girls actively looked for sponsorships.

Which Digital Competences were Experienced as Meaningful?

During the interviews, I recognized what Drotner (2008) characterizes as typical of informal learning. The participants did not tend to associate their blogging practices with learning. Rather, they viewed the learning outcomes as by-products of their pursuit of blogging-related goals. The competences I identified are interdependent and partly overlapping. The development of some competences supports the development of others. My intention in classifying the answers was to depict competences that the participants experienced as relevant in one way or another. I categorized the answers into five competences: regulating online self-disclosure, producing appealing online content in an appealing form, managing the audience and dealing with comments, written self-expression online and technical competence. In the following sections, I present the competences together with illustrative statements. I also address the second part of my research question by identifying how the girls' digital practices modified over time.

Regulating Online Self-disclosure

The competence of regulating online self-disclosure is well expressed by 16-year-old Sara: 'I have learned where my boundary goes'. At the time of our first interview, she had already blogged for over 3 years and was well aware of where she wanted to draw a line when sharing her life with the readers. However, when she started out, the audience seemed somehow abstract: all she was doing was 'posting stuff' from her bedroom. Her blog quickly gained a large audience and she felt awkward when people recognized her on the streets of her small town. Still, Sara enjoyed this visibility, even though this made her vulnerable because a large unknown audience commented on what she shared about her everyday life. It is the interaction with the blog readers that tends to trigger the development of the competence of regulating self-disclosure. In her study of top female bloggers in Sweden, Lövheim (2011: 10) finds that the blogger's 'decision to protect one's private life is clearly set against the expectation that popularity requires sharing "personal stuff" with readers, and setting boundaries implies the risk of losing this position'. Some of the girls experienced similar pressures from the curious readers. Sofie, aged 16, said:

They want to know everything from what my house looks like inside and my whole family, if I drink and snuff and smoke, what I do at weekends and at parties and the like.

Faced with the expectations to relinquish her privacy, she searched for and established her boundaries of self-disclosure. Developing this competence takes time. For Sara, this was 'something that came with years' and was linked as much with her blogging as with her getting older. My interviewing participants twice allowed me to identify the changing experiences of what is private. Janne, aged 17, who posted about her struggles with depression, said during our first interview that she was comfortable about sharing this condition in the blog. However, in our second interview, she described the posts about suicide and other sombre topics as rather too revealing and 'unpleasant to read'. This later reflection made her disclose much less

on Facebook, as she no longer wanted ‘everybody’ to know about her ‘all the time’. This competence allows not only the protection of privacy but also greater control of self-presentation online, as earlier studies observe (boyd, 2008; Stern, 2008). The girls in my study tended to disclose less in the blogs and displayed greater reflexivity over time.

Producing Appealing Online Content in an Appealing Form

All the girls aimed at extending the audience at some point. They viewed the production of appealing content as important for ascending the community’s hierarchy, where the bloggers with the largest audiences enjoy the highest status. Interestingly, the participants attributed different meanings to this competence depending on what content they viewed as appealing. Ella, aged 17, and some other participants viewed the ‘girl stuff’ typical for top blogs as ‘something all teenage girls are occupied with’ and thus most appealing to their ‘target audience’. The participants wanting to imitate top bloggers’ ‘perfect’ self-presentations associated looking good in the photos with appealing content.

Ella: I got to know myself better. I know what works for me. Taking photos is more effective if you know how your face works.

Researcher: In terms of posing?

Ella: Yes, posing and make-up, especially make-up. There is a huge difference in how I used to do my make up when I started and now.

Ella’s goal was to stage flattering outfit photos according to the ‘perfect’ femininity norm set by the top bloggers, because she viewed publishing such photos as a way to become a successful blogger in the competitive community. Developing the competence of producing appealing content involved learning how to work on the body: make-up, clothes, posing, staging and editing the photos. In effect, getting the body closer to the perfect-looking top bloggers. Moreover, some girls said they became more occupied with their looks and clothes since they began blogging because they needed to assemble new outfits and post them daily. Some girls said this was learning a ‘better style’. However, many of them experienced the pressure to publish flattering photos as frustrating because their photos and clothes were never as ‘perfect’ as those posted by top bloggers. Some girls mentioned that top bloggers continually present new clothes, because they receive them from sponsors, something that witnesses the commercialization of mainstream blogging. They felt that matching these stylish self-presentations would be easier if they also received clothes for free through sponsorship deals.

In contrast, other participants defined appealing content as texts expressing their worldviews. For Marie, aged 15, developing this competence involved learning how to search for facts to support her standpoint and thus making her posts more ‘objective’. Similarly, Janne learned over time how to formulate her opinions in an appealing way, so that the posts are ‘substantial but personal’, ‘not angry’ and ‘something everyone can relate to’. Her goal was to undermine the normative expressions of femininity with a feminist worldview.

Keeping textual content concise was mentioned as an appealing feature. Some participants emphasized the importance of ‘high-quality photos’ because they are attention-grabbers. The blog samples I analyzed had mostly short texts and prominent photos, thus confirming this. This is consistent with findings from a qualitative investigation of Norwegian teenagers’ use of social media (Norwegian Media Authority, 2014): sharing and viewing photos have become more common modes of communication than text.

Managing the Audience and Dealing with Comments

Maintaining readership demands frequent updates of the blog. During the periods when this was their goal, the girls tended to update the blogs at least once a day. The pressure to update frequently was often frustrating because of the girls’ packed schedules. At the same time, it was necessary in order to maintain or extend an audience in a competitive community. Updating the blog regularly and predictably is a way to ‘give something back’ to the readers in return for their following or commenting on the blog, an agreement that is typical for bloggers and their readers (Lomborg, 2012). In their active blogging periods, the girls felt obliged to deliver regular posts to keep this agreement. The competence in managing the audience is well exemplified by 17-year-old Nora, who was a popular blogger in her small town. At one point, she announced on her blog that she would take one day off from blogging each week. She informed the readers in advance in order to prevent disappointment with the lack of updates and promised to blog at least twice a day, like before, on the remaining days of the week. This illustrates how Nora identified the rules of the reciprocal blogger–audience relation and modified her blogging practice in a way that allowed for relieving the pressure for frequent updates without jeopardizing her readership statistics.

Ella’s story exemplifies a different interpretation of the competence in managing the audience. By observing some popular female bloggers, she concluded that developing a personal bond with individual readers encouraged them to comment on the blog. This personal communication involved, for instance, responding to individual readers’ comments in a personal manner and addressing them as ‘sweetie’ or ‘love’. Ella framed this kind of intimate communication as a means of achieving her goal: acquiring a large, loyal audience. Ella was the only participant who took a break from school in order to make a living out of blogging. This goal corresponds to her plans to switch to full-time blogging, which would be her source of income. The use of intimate communication with the readers for the sake of popularity and financial gains could be interpreted as the instrumentalization and commodification of personal communication as Lövheim (2013) indicates in her study of professional bloggers in Sweden.

Another competence tied to communicating with the audience brought up in the interviews was becoming more able to deal with negative comments. Janne had become more able to respond to negative comments in a matter-of-fact, rather than emotional, way. I identified an indication of this competence in her blog. One of the readers wrote that Janne ‘knows nothing about feminism’. Janne addressed this criticism in a calm yet firm tone by presenting counterarguments. She was able to

maintain her composure and avoided emotional fights. However, even if most girls expressed an improved ability to deal with negative comments over time, they still experienced them as troubling and unpleasant. While they framed positive comments as an ‘ego boost’, the negative or lacking comments were a ‘self-confidence killer’. Moreover, the ‘ego boost’ tended to last only as long as the readership statistics were going up or the complimenting comments were coming in but self-doubt returned quickly when a downturn occurred.

Written Self-expression Online

Most of the participants had become more attentive in the production of texts they published in blogs over time. They experienced this as useful for communicating in an understandable and linguistically correct way. This involved gaining an increased awareness that once the text is published, it can be interpreted in different ways, including the ways unanticipated by the author. As Marie put it, it is different to ‘say something in your head’ than to write it in the blog. By publishing texts in her blog and observing her audience’s reactions, she eventually acquired a better understanding of how communication functions online, where body language and facial expressions are absent. Pia, aged 16, also expressed that she had become more reflexive in her production of texts:

In the beginning, I looked at some old posts: I write really badly. There are lots of spelling mistakes because I just wrote. And never read through, right? But now I write and read through a few times to see if this is formulated well enough. So that nobody misunderstands it.

Publishing posts hurriedly sometimes resulted from the pressure for frequent updates coming from the audience.

The girls perceived the long-term experience of having the texts read and commented on as highly instructive. The regular production of open-access content contributed to the development of hands-on competence in written self-expression online. The participants practised how to express themselves in a way that prevents misunderstandings. Janne said that she had often written ironic blog posts and later received comments from the readers who did not understand the ironic tone. This resulted in a modification, which was visible in her blog. At first, she addressed possible misunderstandings in the comment field after discovering misunderstandings in earlier posts. Later, she began to add a postscript to her ironic posts, stating explicitly her ironic tone, thus preventing potential misunderstandings.

Some of the participants, including Lisa, aged 17, explicitly framed blogging as beneficial for their performance at school:

[The blog] helped me with some homework. It’s easy to write...and make a better sentence. Not too long. Be good at using comma and full stop and the like.

Pia said she went from grade 4 to 6⁶ in written Norwegian partly because she practised writing in her blog. Still, she referred to the dominant dismissive discourse on

blogging that labels its practitioners as ‘stupid’. This illustrates a clash in some of the participants’ own meaning making of blogging-related competences on the one hand, and dominant discourses on mainstream blogging, on the other:

[P]eople don’t think so much about it, but I think it’s quite important to say that you can become better in writing at school thanks to the blog. ...So, it’s not like people who blog are stupid.

However, developing the competence in written self-expression was also experienced as advantageous for communicating with commercial actors. Lisa was receiving products such as clothes or cosmetics from companies in exchange for advertising for them in her blog. She perceived her improved ability to communicate with sponsoring companies as meaningful because this competence paved the way for commercial partnership:

[Y]ou can’t just write ‘Yes, I want to cooperate’ but you have to expand on this more and think a bit about how you are going to reply. And this depends a lot on who gets in touch, whether this is about make-up products or clothes.

Interestingly, Lisa also framed blogging as useful for increasing her writing skills at school as we have seen above but here she talks about developing this competence as useful in her communications with commercial actors. While the former exemplifies the benefits of leisure-time digital practices for school noted in the literature, the latter does not, as the commercialization of blogging is usually framed as problematic (Dmitrow-Devold, 2013).

Technical Competence

While the girls said that blogg.no provided easy solutions for setting up and maintaining the blog, most of them found that their technical competence developed over time as a result of their blogging practices. Most girls said that obtaining high-technical quality of blog design, digital photos and videos was their goal and mentioned the most popular blogs as displaying good examples of these. Some participants learned over time to program in HTML, to use the editing software on photos and videos and to use colours for blog design that reflect their personality. Others learned how to edit their photos so that their skin and face looked more flattering and closer to the ‘perfect’ visual self-presentations in top blogs.

The girls used various learning strategies, such as watching online tutorials to learn how to use software or exchanging technical tips with other bloggers. The pursuit of technical excellence also manifests itself in their investments in equipment, such as buying a Mac computer, a camera with special lenses or a tripod, or taking a course in photography. It seems that the blogging practice not only motivated the girls to complete specific technical tasks but also stimulated an interest in technical equipment and software as long as this helped them produce technically good blog content. Still, only some participants could afford buying expensive cameras or portable devices. Consequently, the girls from wealthier families had better access to tools for achieving technical excellence in blogs and thus an advantage over the girls with lower economic status.

Some girls framed technical competence as being beneficial at school. For instance, Sofie said she had a technical advantage over her classmates when beginning her secondary school education in a media-profile class because she had already learned a lot about web design through her blogging practices.

Discussion

So far, I have identified some of the digital competences experienced as meaningful by the girls who blog within a mainstream blogging community that is competitive, commercialized and where polished expressions of perfect femininity are normative. The girls ascribed various meanings to these competences in relation to their blogging-related goals and their digital practices changed in various ways. While some of these modifications align with what is considered beneficial in previous studies, others can be viewed as problematic as they are connected to increased body focus, commercialization and commodification of personal communication.

On the one hand, the girls developed the competence of regulating self-disclosure and became more able to protect their privacy online, where expressions can travel very far, becoming ‘hyperpublic’ (boyd, 2008). Some participants experienced an improvement in presenting their views in an appealing way that elicits dialogue with the readers in the competence of producing appealing content in an appealing form, which is in line with Svoen (2012). Developing the competence of managing the audience allowed for presenting counterarguments to critics, which enhanced the ability to participate in online debates. Most girls experienced developing the competence of written self-expression online as meaningful for gaining a better understanding of how mediated communication works in contrast to face-to-face interactions (see also Korten and Svoen, 2006). Developing the competence in written self-expression online allowed for making oneself heard and understood. Moreover, some participants experienced their blogging practice as advancing development of technical competences, undermining the stereotypical view of girls being less technical than boys (Corneliussen, 2011; Guzzetti, 2008). Some girls framed the blogging-related competences as useful at school, which suggests that insights from leisure-time digital practices can be valuable for the institutionalized education (see also Drotner, 2008; Gee, 2006).

On the other hand, the experienced competences identified in this article also have problematic meanings connected to unrelenting body focus and commercialization. The girls in my study associated displaying ‘perfect’ femininity with success in their blogging community, stating that top female bloggers display perfect bodies shaped by training, plastic surgery or Photoshop, consume the right products (clothes, cosmetics, accessories) and have glamorous lifestyles. This ‘perfect’ femininity evokes the postfeminist sensibility, where the body is central to identity and the consumption of fashion and beauty products is framed as empowering to individual girls (Gill, 2007). The postfeminist body must be just slim enough, worked on in order to achieve its desirable form (Jackson, 2016) and styled with the right clothes and accessories. Those girls in my study who were seeking to engage in or engaged in commercial cooperation did this not only because getting things for free is ‘nice’ but also because this allowed for obtaining the attributes of

the perfect femininity normative in mainstream blogging that they otherwise could not afford. Striving to fit in to these ‘norms of perfectibility’ (McRobbie, 2000, cited in Jackson, 2016) has indeed prompted some of the participants to improve their ‘style’ and the ability to stage and edit their photos. However, this was clearly accompanied by self-doubt as they were tired of the unrelenting body focus and often felt they were unable to produce the flawless self-image they aspired to. This illustrates the postfeminist trap, where empowerment can only be had by making the right choices within the market forces (Retallack et al., 2016) and maintaining the ‘disciplined body’ (Keller, 2015), which is so elusive that it is nearly impossible to obtain (Jackson, 2016).

Furthermore, the girls I interviewed framed the acquisition of material benefits from blogging as a sign of success in their community. In this sense, a successful female blogger is an incarnation of a ‘girl entrepreneur’ (Harris, 2004), who symbolizes the postfeminist, neoliberal values of ‘individualism, self-reliance and innovation’ (Keller, 2015: 276) in that she uses self-branding in order to gain public attention, reputation or profit. Personal bloggers’ self-branding involves some measure of self-disclosure (Keller, 2015) and building a rapport with their readers (Lövheim, 2011), for instance, by means of using intimate communication with the readers mentioned by Ella. This can lead to the instrumentalization and commodification of personal information and communication for the sake of getting popularity and material gain (Lövheim, 2013).

Conclusion

Giving primacy to teenage girls’ experiences of participation in the mainstream blogging community, I have presented some of the digital competences they experienced as meaningful within this community. The focus on girls’ perspectives enabled the identification of concrete ‘experienced’ competences (Bjarnadóttir, 2004) and a range of complex, even contradictory meanings they attributed to these competences, depending on their blogging-related goals and the femininity norms of their community of practice. The girls experienced as meaningful the competences, which allowed them to reach their goals within a competitive, body-focused and commercialized community. So, what mattered to the girls?

Producing appealing content was meaningful because this allowed for extending the audience and thus obtaining visibility and status in the competitive environment. Developing technical competence mattered because good design strengthened the blog’s appeal and edited, flattering photos brought the girls closer to the perfect femininity norm. Improving communication with commercial actors mattered, because this allowed for receiving clothes and accessories, which further completed the stylish look. Regulating online self-disclosure was meaningful because this allowed for protecting privacy from curious readers. Improving written self-expression allowed for expressing own views in an understandable and linguistically correct manner. Finally, managing the audience was meaningful because this supported discussing own opinions and tackling the pressure for frequent updates but also allowed creating a personal bond with the readers to build a loyal audience.

This study contributes to bridging the gap in the literature, where digital competences are often discussed in abstract or normative terms. I suggest that we need more studies, also beyond blogging, that emphasize young practitioners' experiences and have their basis in their stories of participation in digital practices, rather than solely in the artefacts they produce. This allows for a fuller understanding of the norms in the communities they choose to be in, the goals they tie to their participation and the processes involved with developing digital competences.

Notes

1. One month half a year prior to the first interview and two months between the first and the second interview.
2. Age upon recruitment.
3. Outfit photos present the blogger in various outfits, often with the information about where they were purchased.
4. Audience sizes are unstable, changing on a daily basis. The numbers given are approximations.
5. Source blogg.no.
6. 6 is the highest grade in Norway.

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Author's Bio-sketch

Karolina Dmitrow-Devold is a doctoral candidate at the Research Centre for Child and Youth Competence Development at the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway. Her main academic interests are girls' online practices, new media, girl and youth cultures and identity online. She is a member of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), the Norwegian Media Researchers' Association and the Nordic Network of Girlhood Studies (FlickForsk). She was a guest researcher at the Centre for Gender Research at the University of Oslo in spring 2015.

Appendices

Appendix 1

First contact email used during participant recruitment

Hei (navn),

Jeg har funnet bloggen din (bloggnavn) på nett og er veldig interessert i dine erfaringer med blogging.

Jeg heter Karolina Dmitrow-Devold og er doktorgradsstipendiat i et forskningsprosjekt som skal se på hvordan unge kvinner blogger i Norge, hvordan de opplever det å ha en blogg og hva de lærer gjennom blogging. Dette prosjektet jobber jeg med på Høyskolen i Lillehammer.

Siden du blogger, håper jeg at du kan bidra med mye spennende til prosjektet. Så, jeg ville gjerne be deg om tillatelse til å se på det du har blogget om i de siste månedene. Hvis du er enig, vil jeg se på hvilke temaer du skriver om, hvor ofte du oppdaterer bloggen, osv. :)

Studien er anonym. Det betyr at ditt navn, bloggnavn, bilder eller andre opplysningene som kan få deg identifisert ikke vil inkluderes i min doktorgradsavhandling.

Vennligst ta kontakt med meg på mail karolina.dmitrow-devold@hil.no , eller mobil 958 98 785.

Beste hilsener,

Karolina Dmitrow-Devold

Forskningsenter for barns og unges kompetanseutvikling, Høyskolen i Lillehammer (<http://www.hil.no/buk>)

PS. Her er linken til forskningsprofilen min på Høyskolen i Lillehammers sin side:
http://www.hil.no/hil/buk/om_buk_senteret/medlemmer_i_buk_senteret/karolina_dmitrow_devold_stip.

Hi (name)!

I found your blog (blog name) online and I am interested in your experiences with blogging.

My name is Karolina Dmitrow-Devold. I am a PhD candidate who does a project about how girls blog in Norway, how they experience having a blog and what they learn through blogging. I work at the Lillehammer University College.

Since you blog, I hope you can bring an interesting contribution to the project. So, I would like to ask for your permission to look at what you have blogged about during the recent months. If you agree, I will look at what topics you blogged about, how often you updated your blog, and so on ☺

The study is anonymous. This means that your name, the name of your blog and other information on the basis of which you can be identified will not be included in my doctoral dissertation.

Please get in touch with me by email karolina.dmitrow-devold@hil.no, or telephone 958 98 785.

Best wishes,

Karolina Dmitrow-Devold

Research Centre for Child and Youth Competence Development, Lillehammer University College (<http://www.hil.no/buk>)

PS. Here is the link to my research profile on the Lillehammer University College's website: http://www.hil.no/hil/buk/om_buk_senteret/medlemmer_i_buk_senteret/karolina_dmitrow_devold_stip.

Appendix 2

Second email used during participant recruitment

Hei igjen,

Det har vært kjempespennende å se på bloggen din! Som jeg har forventet, er den et verdifullt bidrag til mitt prosjekt.

Jeg har også veldig lyst til å snakke med deg og finne ut mer om dine meninger og opplevelser knyttet til blogging. Uten å høre på det du har å si, virker prosjektet ikke helt komplett.

Derfor lurte jeg på om vi kunne møtes for å snakke om dine erfaringer med blogging? Skulle du velge å delta i prosjektet, ville vi møtes to ganger. Det er du som velger sted og tid. Hvert intervju tar cirka en time.

Gi meg gjerne beskjed om hva du synes om det ☺

Hilsen, Karolina

Hi again!

It was very interesting to look at your blog! As I expected this is a valuable contribution to my project.

I would also like to talk to you and find out more about your opinions and experiences related to blogging. Without this, the project would be incomplete.

So, I was wondering if we could meet and talk about your experiences with blogging? If you agree to participate in the project, we would meet twice. You are the one who chooses the place and time of the interview. Each interview is about one hour long.

Please let me know what you think about this ☺

Best wishes,

Karolina

Appendix 3

Sample of Press Articles for the Critical Discourse Analysis

Anon. (editorial) 2011. “Bloggmobbing [Blog-bullying].” Aftenposten, 6 January

Bjellås Gilje, Karianne. 2011. “Jenta som talte i forsamlingen. [The girl who spoke out.]” Dagbladet, 7 January

Bryn Rambøl, Ingvill. 2011. “‘Så feit og stygg du er’ [‘You are so fat and ugly’].” Aftenposten, 14 January

Dybtest Dahl, Ingvill, Anders Bøe, and Marcus Husby. 2011. “Svensk superblogger: Voe bør blogge igjen. [Swedish super blogger: Voe should blog again]” Verdens Gang, 4 January

Gonsholt Ighanian, Catherine. 2011. “Økt ‘skattejakt’ på bloggere. [‘Tax pursuit’ against bloggers increased.]” Verdens Gang, 27 April

Henriksen, Arve. 2010. “Bryr noen seg om bloggerne” [Does anyone care about the bloggers?] Aftenposten, 6 November

Hofsødegård, Mette. 2010. “Bloggende uttrykksbehov. [Need to express through blogging.]” Aftenposten, 6 August.

Holmlund, Jan Thomas. 2011. “Sinnablogger Linnea Myhre er årets blogger. [Angry blogger Linnea Myhre is blogger of the year]” Dagbladet, 9 February

Holmlund, Jan Thomas. 2011. “- Skjønner at de ikke ville jeg skulle ta tv-jobben. [I understand why they didn’t want me to take the TV job]” Dagbladet, 9 February

Irgens Ertsås, Kirsti. 2011. “Hun er Norges nye blogg-ener. [She is Norway’s new number-one blogger.]” VERDENS GANG, 19 January

Kongsli Lundervold, Linn. 2010. “Hun er dama som harselerer med ’rosabloggerne’. [She’s the lady who makes fun of the ‘pink bloggers’]” Dagbladet, 9 July

Kongsli Lundervold, Linn. 2010. “Skamløst å promotere slike ting’. [It’s shameless to promote such things.]” Dagbladet, 29 June

Nordseth, Pål, and Jonas Pettersen. 2010. “Lurte 100 000 nordmenn med oppdiktet sexblogg. [Fooled 100,000 Norwegians with fictitious sex blog.”] Dagbladet, 30 December

Omdahl, Jan. 2010. “Kan man fortelle Voe hvordan hun skal oppføre seg? [Could someone tell Voe how to behave herself?”] Dagbladet, 23 February

Pinheiro Harbo, Daniel. 2010. “Det er avskyelig at tiåringer blir voldtatt og nektes abort.

[It’s abhorrent that teenagers are raped and denied abortion.”] Verdens Gang, 29 October

Saugestad Hatlen, Trine. 2010. “Linnea er Anne-Kats favoritt. [Linnea is Anne-Kat’s favorite]” VG, 10 November

Skotheim, Liv. 2011. “Fiende uten ansikt. [Enemy without a face.”] Aftenposten, 4 January

Unanue-Zahl, Pål. 2009. “Victoria (22) videoblogger om puppene. [Victoria (22) video-blogs about her breasts.”] Verdens Gang, 11 September

Vangerud, Lise. 2011. “Altfor unge bloggere [Far too young bloggers].” Aftenposten, 12 January

Varsi, Hege. 2011. “- Jeg forstår godt hvorfor ‘Voe’ la opp. [I really understand why Voe quit]” Dagbladet, 19 January

Wang-Naveen, Mala. 2010. “Det trivielles utvikling. [“The development of the trivial.”] Aftenposten, 15 July

Ørvik, Isabell. 2011. “Bloggplakaten. [Blogging manifesto.”] Aftenposten, 23 March

Appendix 4

Informed Consent Form

Forespørsel om å delta i forskningsprosjektet Digitalkompetanseutvikling og kjønnsrepresentasjoner i kontekst av kvinnelige tenåringers blogging i Norge

Takk for at du har sagt deg interessert i å delta i studien min!

I forbindelse med min doktorgrad gjennomfører jeg et prosjekt om blogger som skrives av jenter. Hensikten med prosjektet er å undersøke hvordan blogging bidrar til å utvikle digital kompetanse. Jeg er også interessert i kjønnsrepresentasjoner rundt kvinnelige tenåringers blogging.

Jeg har funnet bloggen (bloggnavn) på nett og er veldig interessert i å få kunnskap om dine erfaringer med blogging.

Sammen med ca. 10 andre jenter som blogger, får du denne forespørselen om deltagelse i dette forskningsprosjektet. Deltagelse i prosjektet innebærer at jeg undersøker det du publiserer på bloggen din og at du deltar i to intervjuer. Hvert intervju vil ta omrent en time. Jeg skal gjøre lydopptak under intervjuer slik at jeg ikke glemmer hva som vi snakket om. Det er du som velger intervjustedet.

Det er helt frivillig å delta i prosjektet og du kan på hvilket som helst tidspunkt trekke deg og kreve personopplysningene som er gitt slettet, uten å måtte begrunne dette nærmere. Det er ingen andre enn mine veiledere og jeg som vil få tilgang til de personidentifisbare opplysningene. Vi er underlagt taushetsplikt og opplysningene vil bli behandlet strengt konfidensielt. Resultatene av studien vil bli publisert uten at den enkelte kan gjenkjennes. Det betyr at ditt navn, blogg navn, bilder eller andre opplysningene som kan få deg identifisert ikke vil inkluderes i doktorgradsavhandlingen.

Doktorgradsprosjektet forventes å være avsluttet sommeren 2015. Etter at prosjektet er avsluttet, vil opplysningene bli anonymisert og lydopptak slettet. Det er imidlertid mulig at det vil bli aktuelt å gjennomføre en oppfølgingsundersøkelse før utgangen av 2015. I så fall vil du motta ny informasjon og ny forespørsel om å delta.

Prosjektet er godkjent av Personvernombudet for forskning.

Dersom du ønsker å delta i undersøkelsen, er det fint om du signerer den vedlagte samtykkeerklæringen og returnerer den til meg. Har du spørsmål i forbindelse med denne henvendelsen, eller ønsker å bli informert om resultatene fra undersøkelsen når de foreligger, kan du gjerne ta kontakt med meg på e-post, telefon eller adressen under.

Med vennlig hilsen

Karolina Dmitrow-Devold

Forskningscenter for Barns og Unges Kompetanseutvikling, Høgskolen i Lillehammer

Postboks 952, 2604 Lillehammer

e-post karolina.dmitrow-devold@hil.no, tlf. 958 98 785

Samtykkeerklæring: Jeg har mottatt informasjon om prosjektet Digitalkompetanseutvikling og kjønnsrepresentasjoner i kontekst av kvinnelige tenåringers blogging i Norge og er villig til å delta i studien.

Deltakerens signatur

Telefonnummer

Foresattes signatur (hvis deltager er under 16 år)

Request to participate in the project Development of digital competences and representations of gender in the context of teenage female blogging in Norway

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in my project!

I am carrying out a doctoral project about blogs authored by girls. The goal of the project is to investigate how blogging contributes to developing digital competences, I am also interested in gender representations around teenage female blogging.

I found your blog (blog name) online and I am very interested to find out about your experiences with blogging.

Together with about 10 other girls, you receive this request for participation in the research project. Participation in the project involves that I will investigate what you publish in your blog and that you will take part in two interviews. Each interview will last about one hour. I will audio record the interviews so that I remember what we talk about. You are the one who chooses the place for the interviews.

Participation in this project is voluntary and you can withdraw from it at any point and demand that your personal information is deleted without having to justify your withdrawal. Nobody except me and my PhD advisors will have access to the information on the basis of which you could be identified. Your personal details will be managed in strict confidentiality. The findings of the study will be published in a way that no individual participants will be identifiable. This means that your name, the name of your blog, your photos or other information that can identify you will not be included in my doctoral dissertation.

I expect to complete my doctoral project in the summer of 2015. After the project is completed, the personal information will be anonymized and the audio recordings will be deleted. However, there might be a follow-up study before the end of 2015. If this will be the case, you will receive new information and a new request for participation.

The project is approved by the Data Protection Official for Research.

If you wish to participate in the project, please sign the included declaration of consent. If you have any questions about this request or wish to be informed about the results of this investigation when they will be available, please contact me by email or telephone, or postal address given below.

Sincerely

Karolina Dmitrow-Devold

Research Centre for Child and Youth Competence Development, Lillehammer University College

Postboks 952, 2604 Lillehammer

e-post karolina.dmitrow-devold@hil.no, tlf. 958 98 785

Declaration of consent: I have received information about the project Digital competence development and gender representations in the context of female teenage blogging in Norway and I wish to participate in the project.

Participant's signature

Telephone number

Legal guardian's signature (if participant is younger than 16 years old)

Appendix 5

Registration at the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD)



Karolina Dmitrow-Devold
Forskningscenter for barns og unges kompetanseutvikling
Høgskolen i Lillehammer
Postboks 952
2604 LILLEHAMMER

Harald Håfagres gate 29
N-5007 Bergen
Norway
Tel: +47-55 58 21 17
Fax: +47-55 58 96 50
nsd@nsd.uib.no
www.nsd.uib.no
Org.nr. 985 321 884

Vår dato: 01.12.2011

Vår ref: 28498 / 3 / AH

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

KVITTERING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 19.10.2011. All nødvendig informasjon om prosjektet forelå i sin helhet 29.11.2011. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

28498 *Digital Competences Development and Discursive Construals of Gender in the Context of Female Teenage Personal Blogging in Norway*
Behandlingsansvarlig *Høgskolen i Lillehammer, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig *Karolina Dmitrow-Devold*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysingene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, eventuelle kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/-helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skalgis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gir via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html. Det skal også ges melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database,
<http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 30.04.2015, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen
Vigdis Kvalheim
Vigdis Namtvedt Kvalheim

Åsne Halskau
Åsne Halskau

Kontaktperson: Åsne Halskau tlf: 55 58 89 26
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Doctoral dissertation submitted for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) at the PhD programme in Child and Youth Competence Development (BUK) Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences

Norwegian Girls in Mainstream Blogging. Performed Blogging Selves, Experienced Digital Competences, Gendered Discourses

This doctoral thesis is the first in-depth, longitudinal investigation that acknowledges, documents, and theorizes Norwegian girls' experiences of participation in mainstream blogging. In taking as the point of departure teenage female bloggers' stories of participation, this work bridges a knowledge gap by investigating girls' own experiences from a feminized, competitive, and commercialized media practice.

Combining qualitative in-depth interviewing and ethnographic analyses of blogs in a longitudinal design, I investigate how girls perform identity in blogs over time and which digital competences they find meaningful for participation in the blogging practice. I also critically analyze Norwegian press coverage to investigate how the blogging girls are positioned in the media commentary via the identity label of pink blogger.

According to my findings, girls in mainstream blogging are trivialized in the press commentary as superficial, body-obsessed, and commercial pink bloggers. In contrast to these homogenizing and fixed implications of the pink blogger label, I argue that girls perform identity in blogs in various ways, picking up strategies of performing identity according to goals that often change over time, and identifying with these performances to varying degrees. The meanings the girls tie to digital competences are varied, both aligning and contrasting with the normative conceptualizations of digital competences. Blogging girls come across as reflexive and strategic subjects in performing identity and developing digital competences. At the same time, their participation in blogging is framed by the interactions with the audience and the norm of competitiveness, perfect femininity, and commercialization that characterizes the mainstream blogging community, as well as by the wider cultural and technological context and gendered discourses beyond this community.

Karolina Dmitrow-Devold
was born in 1979
in Białystok, Poland.



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