

Invisible Girl

“Ceci n’est pas une fille”



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“Ceci n’est pas une fille”

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Theme IV: Gender and Contemporary Media Chapter 29

“A Blog of Their Own”

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This chapter analyses both the theoretical and empirical research regarding the role of blogs, personal web pages, as venues which provide teenage girls with the tools to construct representations of self and express their identity. As Virginia Woolf stressed in her 1928 lectures, female authors were non-existent or invisible due to their lack of money and privacy, a “room of one’s own.” In some recent studies, blogs have been understood as an analogy for bedrooms, offering more than real bedrooms can. Thus, using up to date knowledge of the presence and behaviour of girls in cyberspace, we suggest that blogs are perceived by girls as a secure space where they can talk to other girls while sharing a sense of invisibility and therefore freedom from social and parental constraints. Focusing on identity, on answering the question of “who am I?” blogs offer an ideal space for viewing the continuity of self. They allow reflections and self-presentations to be kept long term and to become visible, not only to others, but most importantly to the individual.

(...) give her a room of her own and five hundred a year, let her speak her mind and leave out half that she now puts in, and she will write a better book one of these days.
She will be a poet, I said (...)
Virginia Woolf

Introduction

In this chapter we would like to shed more light on the girlhood of today especially in regards to blogging and bloggers in Euro and North American societies. By reviewing the related literature we try to address some important questions, such as: What do girls blog about? Why do they blog? Is it to free themselves from social or parental constraints? Can blogs be a powerful tool to make girls visible, speak their minds, and become the poets and novelists of their own lives?

The questions we pose were inspired by a reflection on whether girls today may find in blogs a space of “their own” as Virginia Woolf meant. We suggest that there are invisible girls hidden in the online world who are being overlooked by the relevant experts and considered uninteresting, yet they are the creators and re-creators of a new sense of femininity.

It has been a long time since Virginia Woolf gave her series of lectures at Newnham and Girton, two women’s colleges at Cambridge University in October 1928. At that time females were in many ways invisible, hidden behind their men in the steam from the kitchen or the laundry. Learning to cook, knit and raise children and being fully committed to these activities with little free time. In her lectures Virginia Woolf pointed out two main issues regarding women and writing in her time. Firstly, the presentation of women in the literature of the time portrayed women in the role of lover, mother, and housekeeper, it was mostly written by men. The second, and more relevant to this chapter, were the barriers preventing women from becoming authors and expressing themselves as individuals. This was likely exasperated by the lack of control women possessed over the direction of their own lives. To become someone who touches others with words one must, at least in part, be a conscious writer of one’s own life. However, you probably first need a strong desire to *be* before you can write yourself into being.

At the time Virginia Woolf presented her powerful and accurate opinions on “women and fiction” any women attempting to express their real thoughts and feelings would have found it very difficult, having no room of her own, privacy, time, or money. This is what Virginia Woolf meant when she said “give her a room of her own and five hundred a year” and she will be a poet, she will be able to write something more than just a light novel about love and relationships.

In today’s developed countries most girls have their own room, privacy, and free time. The evolution of femininity has been turbulent (Mazzarella, 2005) as has the development of research on this topic. During the twentieth century, most academic clinical research on youth and development was undertaken using male subjects (Mazzarella, 2005). Carol Gilligan and Angela McRobbie were pioneers in turning attention to the feminine experience of development and listening more to girl’s experiences and lives. However, as most classical studies on human identity and development were carried out by males, studying males, blind spots in regards to female development likely still remain.

It has been two decades since the “new space” of the World Wide Web entered our everyday reality; we propose that it has also brought a new sense of shared and reflected femininity, especially to young girls.

The introduction of new technologies has commonly been connected to the masculine world. From its beginnings until the late 90’s the Internet was no exception, as van Zoonen (2002) summarised, it is because the main actors and an overwhelmingly majority of the developers were men. The creation of the Internet itself came from a so-called military-industrial complex. Computer mediated communication has been shown to take on many masculine modes (Kendall, 2002). Boys have generally been expected to be more experienced with computers and have better attitudes towards its usage (Gackebach & von Stackelberg, 2007). At the start of new millennium the number of female users began to grow significantly as did the patterns of Internet usage. The technical and expert aspects of Internet use diminished and the Internet became a social and communication tool. It thus took on strong feminine attributes. Although no major differences exist in the numbers of boys and girls using the Internet frequently in Europe (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig & Ólafsson, 2011) a perception of gendered Internet use still occurs, for example boys are often depicted as more interested in gaming. Researches have often focused on studying shooting games or role-playing games where male dominance is significant. Subsequently, the favourite topics were aggression or gaming addiction. Although girls also often play computer and online games (Livingstone et al., 2011, ESA, 2011) their favourite genres are puzzle, board,

and card games and these have been rather neglected by researchers.

It is not only their gender that makes online girls particularly invisible to the common adult observer but also their age. As an example, Technorati.com, an influential server and blog search engine which is focused on depicting the blogosphere world-wide, includes only those blogs maintained by people over 18 years of age with most bloggers being between 25 and 44. This gives the impression that youth blogging is not serious or worth attention. As has been shown, youth are prevalent bloggers, and among youth it is females who predominantly blog (Subrahmanyam, Garcia, Harsono & Lipana, 2009; Mazur & Kozarian, 2010; Blinka, Subrahmanyam, Smahel & Seganti, 2012 in press) while according to technorati.com it is males among adult bloggers. In this way girl bloggers may really be invisible.

Before we try to investigate the transition of girlhood and the features of spaces specifically for girls, it should be mentioned that this chapter focuses on the Euro-American context. In the past, even within this area, there have been significant cultural differences especially in terms of gender roles. In regards to space, today’s world is very different from that of the past and of Virginia Woolf’s time. The term “space” is somewhat hard to grasp, as it has lost its traditional physical and cultural borders. Although cultural contexts still have strong influences on socialisation and the lives of individuals, media, digital media, and the Internet in particular influence society on a global level. As stated by Bjarnason, Gudmundsson and Olafsson (2011), the Internet tends to vaporise cultural trends. Young people in both Europe and North America share similar immersion in the use of this technology. The Internet has become an integrated part of youths’ lives, with the majority of them going online regularly and the borders blurring between offline and online lives (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). Similarly, most of the young people in Europe go online privately in their own room or they have a mobile Internet device of their own (Livingstone et al., 2011). Finally, globalised Internet applications are attractive for most young people regardless of their geographical location. As an example, Facebook, which was originally American, has become a dominant social networking site among European young people (Livingstone, Ólafsson & Staksrud, 2011).

New technologies, in this case represented by the Web 2.0, allow youth a lot of customisable personal space. This can be seen as true space of their own. One of the most known and popular tools for creating such a space is the blog. These are especially popular among adolescent girls (Subrahmanyam, 2007). This can partially be perceived as a continuation of keeping a diary. Though, blogs are not just virtual diaries and the virtual environment has its own qualities different from those of the offline world (Bjarnason, Gudmundsson & Ólafsson, 2011).

Before we provide deeper insight into the very specific world of wired female youth, we need to take a brief look at what blogs are and what blogging means for contemporary youth generally.

Blogging through adolescence

Blogs, an abbreviation of web-logs, can be defined as frequently updated personal web pages which allow their owners to publish their thoughts, links, videos, photos etc. The links are organised in reverse chronological order, with the newest entries displayed at the top of the page (Schmidt, 2007). Despite the fact that blogs can be compared to traditional personal journals resembling a standard diary, blogs are a more diverse genre. Blogs may include personal reflections in the form of text, thoughts, essays, audio-visual materials, and hyperlinks all of personal or external origin. Although an effort was made to categorise blogs, placing them into groups such as personal diaries, K-logs (knowledge blogs), and filters; f. e. Herring et al., 2004, in reality it is difficult to recognise any clear-cut distinctions. While at the same time, all online tools including blogs are quickly developing in both structure and content. Creating a precise technical definition has been further complicated as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and Twitter have entered the virtual arena (Bjarnason et al., 2011) bringing with them a phenomenon called “micro-blogging”, brief continuous status updates.

Blogs are a very easy tool to start using as they require no special IT skills (Schmitt, Dyanim & Matthias, 2008) and are free to use. However, blog portals are owned and controlled by corporations and driven by economical interests. In spite of this, adolescent blogging may be approached as a new adolescent public sphere or form of crowd communication standing apart from economic interests

and mainstream consumption and stemming from the real adolescent society (Bjarnason et al., 2011). This adolescent public sphere is, in a sense, universal across the European and American contexts.

In a direct comparison of the English language U.S. blogosphere and the Czech language Czech blogosphere some structural similarities and culturally influenced differences were found (Blinka et al., 2012 – in press). In both countries young people were similarly likely to be interested in maintaining their own blog and reading other’s blogs. About one fifth of young people maintain their own blog at least weekly and about one third regularly read other’s blogs (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). In both blogospheres (Blinka et al., 2012- in press) girls make up 90% of the bloggers, with those around age 15 dominating youth blogging. In both blogospheres, quizzes and asking for feedback occurred with similarly frequency, as did blog content focused on, teen problem behaviour, the public scene (typically celebrities) and metablogging (blog entries about issues connected to blogging itself). But significant differences were also found. The U.S. youth blogosphere more frequently consists of narration, reflections of family, peer relationships, romances, or school and afterschool activities. In contrast, the Czech youth blogosphere typically had more frequent use of visuals, photos, videos, pictures. The authors use culture to explain the differences. Youths in the USA are more used to writing essays and reflections in schools than Czech youth and this may be the reason why Czech girls use visuals more often to express themselves. About two thirds of Czech, and one third of American, youth disclosed personal and contact information on their blogs. This indicates that the bloggers have rather interwoven online and offline personas, and it also demonstrates the stronger privacy concerns in the USA. Thus, in both blogospheres the answer to “who is blogging” is the same, mostly young girls around the age of 15. Nevertheless, “how blogging is approached” may differ depending on the specifics of each country such as its educational system.

However, as pointed out by Recabarren, Nussbaum and Leiva (2008) it may be problematic to identify people from one country as part of one culture. Especially as regards the Internet, it is important to study the behaviour, motives, and needs etc. of subcultures, as large proportions of young people

travel and stay abroad and the language barrier may be receding.

Blogs as identity negotiation tools

As stated above, adolescents appear to be the group most engaged in blogging. Blogs can be perceived by youth bloggers as a reflection of their interests and values (Stern, 2007). Keeping a blog often provides relief from emotional tension, which is, according to Nardi (2004) one of the main reasons for engaging in this activity. Many authors suggest that keeping a blog can be a contributing factor in developing a sense of *self*: Most blogs represent the personal experiences of their authors, and the ability to write about these may facilitate a better understanding of oneself and it may also alleviate problems or conflicts (Miura & Yamashita, 2007). This is very important when speaking about developmental tasks in adolescence, i.e. exploration and reaching one’s identity (Kroeger, 2000). According to Erikson (1968) the feeling of self-consistency and its continuity over time is necessary for identity creation, especially in adolescence. Even if we act differently in different contexts, the sense of *self* mostly does not change over time and thus we may know that we are still ourselves. For adolescents, whose identities are emerging (or moratorium, Kroeger, 2000) a narrative blog kept over a period of time can help them to see such stable characteristics within themselves (Schmitt et al., 2008). Youth can check their older posts to search for what they were thinking or feeling at a particular time. By archiving a personal narrative, youth are given a chance to answer some essential questions of this period of life, e.g. *Who am I?* Of course this is not intentional but rather an intuitive process.

While searching for *who we are* we are also very likely to search for some kind of *meaning*. During the stormy time of adolescence, it is easy to get lost in one’s own soul and grasp for some assurance, *this is me, I know who I am, there is meaning underlying my life*. Past experiences are often just fragmented pieces of the *old me*, until we give them meaning. The blog is a unique tool for reconstructing past experiences, and for grasping such meaning. McAdams (2006) describes adolescence as the developmental stage of reconstructing the past to make a coherent story. The blog provides a place where this can easily be done. Past events, which were perceived as a

fragmented pile of incidents can be given their own meaning, and causal relationships emerge. These past events are key factors in explaining how a person understands aspects of their own personality, or the person they would like to be (McAdams, 2006). With regard to what we do now and the kind of person we think we are, we are constantly choosing events and experiences from our past lives that we credit with causing our existing position in life, and shaping who we currently are. This “picking” of specific experiences is related to the basic human need to perceive one’s own identity and the path to its creation as coherent, something that possess a very causal meaning (McAdams, 2006).

For girls, identity can be created and re-created very simply. Anyone who has ever visited a teenage girl’s blog has probably seen the little surveys, such as: “Which colour are you?” “Which character from the Twilight saga do you dream of?” (Subrahmanyam, et al., 2009; Blinka et al., 2012 – in press). These little things, no matter how trivial they may seem, also help to answer the identity question (Bortree, 2005).

The final contributing factor, and perhaps the most important in identity development through blogging, is reader feedback. Peer relationships are of great importance in youth identity development. Adolescents need to slowly separate themselves from the strong parental ties to more individual and peer group ties. Online peer groups are often presented as helping strongly with youth emancipation. Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) note that the online world strongly enhances peer group relations at the expense of family relations. This may cause some parental anxiety, however, it provides youth with many benefits which would have been unimaginable a few years ago. Probably the most important benefits relate to identity development through narratives, feedback, and interaction. Keeping the Cooley’s *looking glass self theory* in mind we can clearly see why, for most bloggers, audience is very important (Viégas, 2005). Moreover, as in Scheidt (2006), adolescents often have feelings of being permanently watched by an (imaginary) audience. This in effect pushes them to act or to present idealised parts of themselves, e.g. to post personal fables for the assumed readers. The audience has a great impact on the blogger; to some extent, their audience will determine what they blog about, and will offer feedback when needed. Howev-

er, this feedback can easily be regulated if unwanted comments occur. It provides a more emotionally secure space for interaction about important and self-related topics. It is common practice for bloggers to write their posts in such a way that only certain people can understand them; these people are the *selected audience*, and are often known from real life. To make content “invisible” to others bloggers often use specific language, omit parts of a story, or write in code (Gumbrecht, 2004). This is very common when youth blog about intimate and personal things that they only wish to reveal to those who they think can understand and give valuable feedback. According to Van Dijck (2004), self-verification is very important for bloggers. Blogging is perhaps primarily about synchronising one’s experience with others, about testing one’s evaluations against the outside world. Blogging, besides being an act of self-disclosure, is also a ritual of exchange. Bloggers expect to be signalled and perhaps to be responded to (van Dijck, 2004). In line with Pasquier’s (2008) argument, blogs are seen to play an important role in facilitating youth in the symbolic and practical establishment of social identity in a period of life which is complex, insecure, and uncertain. Pasquier (2008) argues that in a contemporary context where the expression of self is continually scrutinised by reference groups exchanges and discussions on the Internet may be a sort of emotional safety valve. They provide a place where interactions which may have been constrained during the day can develop more fluidly, often with the same interlocutors. Pasquier says: ‘Electronic sociability sheds light on the dead ends or difficulties of teenagers social lives’ (2008: 457). Thus, blogs in general offer many possibilities for answering the developmental tasks of adolescence; but what about youth female bloggers? How exactly are they different, and what do they reveal?

Girl bloggers

When surfing through adolescent blogs the first question that comes to mind is, is blogging a typically “girlish” discipline? The second question should then be why are adolescent girls so keen on blogging? The simple answer would be that diaries are more traditionally kept by females (Burt, 1994; Subrahmanyam et al., 2009). Keeping a blog thus can be seen to resemble keeping a diary to the extent that boys would

rather do something more “masculine” like playing online games. This may be true, however, there may also be other reasons, such as the shattered gender role system: Who is a woman and who is a man? How should they look and express their individualities? This places a large burden on (western) girls. We are not assuming that men do not undergo a similar transition; instead, what we suggest is that the feminine role has changed vastly over the past few decades, perhaps more so than the masculine. Thus, femininity requires greater investigation and identity switching. The internet is a place where this can be relatively easily addressed. The fact that blogs are mostly kept by younger adolescent girls (Subrahmanyam et al., 2009) who probably have the greatest need to experiment with different identities as there is no “template” to follow, supports this idea of the difficulties inherent in today’s multifaceted femininity.

It should be mentioned here that the media have a tendency to present the internet as a dangerous place for youth, especially for girls (Mazzarella, 2005). The media’s position and presentation of this issue could be viewed as creating a vicious cycle. This view of the dangers is not only related to the risks of data misuse, meeting strangers, and sexual harassment etc. but also because there is a risk of being involved in dangerous communities, of exposure to today’s overly sexualised image of girls, getting inappropriate information, and being objectified and exploited (Toffoletti, 2008). Contrarily, it is the media who spread this over sexualised image of the modern girl, who is slim, fit and perfect.

Recently, the debate over girls being at risk flared up with the growth in popularity of “Gossip girl”, an American teen drama television series based on a series of novels of the same name written by Cecily von Ziegesar. The series is especially popular among adolescent girls. The main character/narrator is an omnipresent (but unseen) blogger called “Gossip girl”. The series is centred on privileged youth, living in Manhattan’s Upper East Side. The story is full of controversial topics revolving around, beauty and fashion (both presented only in the form of total perfection), sex, luxury shopping, drugs, and wrecked family relationships. What most critics probably consider to be the most disturbing thing is the portrayal of “girl beauty” and sexualisation. The character gos-

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sip girl is disturbing; a blogger whose identity is never revealed but who reveals every spicy detail about the lives of the main characters. It is made clear that the blogger is one of the main characters, the same age, and in the same social context. As Tofolletti (2008: 75) says:

Part of the moral panic generated by novels like Gossip Girl is a product of concern over what happens when girls are immersed in an integral reality, positioned as both observer and observed, consumer and consumed, and the potential shifts in traditional adult-child power relations that may ensue when girls 'know too much'.

There is an invisible girl in the show, who knows everything, and who attempts, and succeeds, to manipulate the lives of others. She uses her blog as a powerful tool to change and reveal things in the lives of others, without their parents' knowledge. This invisible girl is an embodiment of the consumption-centred society, and in spite of being disturbing in many ways, we can consider her existence as leisure time micro-world. However, the show emphasises how popular girls' blogs are nowadays, and the extent to which they can influence everyday lives, even if the topics are rather “superficial”. However, blogs are not isolated monads, especially those of adolescent girls. An interconnected blogging emerges as girls are connected through the same topics, areas, interests or previous friendships. Online communities are then created giving girls another shared world of possibilities. Blogs and blog communities possess a social potential able to transcend any specific topic and are separated from the marketing of “youth culture” (Bjarnason et al., 2011). This social aspect appears to be the cornerstone of the new sense of femininity and visibility that is so amazingly different from that in the times of Virginia Woolf.

Blogs: Girl's bedrooms or open spaces?

Do we know how girls perceive their own blog, as they write their thoughts, post pictures, create, or just copy and paste, manifesting their identity? Do they consider it a space or a place, or just something “not very real”, like a non-existent diary made of zeros and ones? Is the virtual world really able to provide both public and private awareness?

Sitting in my virtual bedroom

Hodkinson and Lincoln (2008) came up with the concept of online blogs/journals as individual bedrooms. They suggest that like the real teen bedroom online journals have the symbolic and practical properties of individually owned and controlled spaces. Youth can mark their territory and explore and exhibit their identities. During childhood and later during adolescence it is essential to occupy, mark, and claim a place of one's own. This could be a bedroom, but as we pointed out at the beginning of this chapter a young person's bedroom does not really belong to them. It is linked to the family, owned by a family, as is represented by the typical sentence “Clean up that mess in your room”. In contrast, a blog is really a place of one's own and if you do not want to clean up you do not have to. According to these authors blogs can be perceived as personal rather than shared territory (Hodkinson & Lincoln, 2008) this may seem confusing as blogs are mostly made public and almost anyone can read them. Bloggers are well aware that people (e.g. family members) could look over their shoulders or read their files later (March & Fleuriot, 2006).

This perception of blogs as personal spaces may relate to the fact that if you own a blog you can erase anything anytime, you can change everything in a few seconds. This is not possible in any offline aspect related to identity. Perceiving a blog as a room of one's own is a typical feature of blogging; bloggers speak of blogs as if they were their homes and invite others to “come over” (boyd, 2006).

According to Bagder, blogs themselves balance on the edge of private and public and are in fact dichotomous. We are used to surfing the web alone in private and when we read someone's very personal entry it strengthens our feeling of having face-to-face interaction (Badger, 2004).

Girl blog communities: Am I too fat? Am I worthy? Anyone like me here?

Online blog communities are quite specific. They do not develop around a “centre” like other online communities, there does not have to be a shared chat room, web page or server. They are really a kind of a “ring” of blogs (also known as “blogroll”), which are interconnected to create a community. But what are girls looking for in such communities? Generally

speaking, apart from a particular topic or interest, online blog communities can provide girls (and youth in general) with a sense of belonging, social identity, confirmation, and empower the development of social identity (Wellman, Boase & Chen, 2002). According to Ridings and Gefen (2004) the main reasons for engaging in online communities are: searching for information; social support, help, advice, the fact that members are caring, leisure, and searching for friendship, it is easier to find people with similar natures and interests. While these sound like a lot of good opportunities, when we talk about girls and communities we also meet some ambivalent or negative aspects. Some online communities are potentially risky, helping to facilitate risks which are hidden within particular girls' lives. These include for example self-harming communities and pro-ana (pro-anorexia) communities. Both share some common features and have gained a fair amount of researcher attention in the past few years due to their growing popularity and the potential risks involved. They are mirroring not only the body-related issues girls deal with, but also they can serve as a reflection of today's society. A society which is often body-cult driven, yet blind to those invisible things, such as emotions, frustrations and the basic needs of the human soul, girls who self-harm or are looking for someone to share their fears and stories with, trying to escape from solitude and to find advice (Whitlock, Lader & Conterio, 2007).

What we can say with certainty is that these girls are invisible. To a common surfer visiting a webpage they are hidden behind their nicknames and their special language. To their parents they are likely partially invisible through very carefully hiding their behaviour and in so doing hiding a very important part of themselves. Maybe they were invisible as healthy beings and now are crying out for attention. Attention seeking is often mentioned as one of reasons for both self-harm and excessive dieting (Costin, 1997). Amongst online communities, the self-harming community and the pro-ana community are perhaps the most alarming due to their huge popularity and their health and life threatening character.

In contrast to these communities, closely linked to the body and embodiment in adolescence, other similarly focused communities can be found. These may appear shallow, but embrace a huge variety of

identity creation, such as fashion blog communities. Over the past few years these communities have become increasingly popular with specialised websites emerging along with individual blogs, such as Lookbook.nu and many others. Within these blogs and websites both strong visuals of identity switching through dress changing and the gathering of social capital can be observed. However, these are not apparent to the casual observer (Chittenden, 2010). As fashion may seem very superficial and part of an industry that pushes girls towards eating disorders, hating themselves, and self-harming, these communities often possess a strong manifestation of individual taste, artistic skill, and playful slaps to the face of the mainstream fashion industry. The social aspect is more visible within these communities. As Chittenden (2010) notes, "collecting" other bloggers and hosting links to their blogs is a means of making social capital visible and making oneself visible. Furthermore, "Visibility in the teen fashion blogosphere is about visibility in relation to one another and to one's followers through the exchange of gaze and comments provoked by that gaze. Where teens are reserved or have poor social capital in their offline relationships, the mediation of the blog creates a distanced space where they can build confidence by exploring their identity with like-minded others." (Chittenden, 2010:518). Fashion blogs seem to be a great tool to *use* fashion and the media, not *to be used* by them. Of course, the opportunity and the manner of the use of this tool depends on the individual.

The main reason why girl blog communities are worth exploring and discussing is that the majority of research on them is focused on their negative aspects and potentially risky communities (such as self-harming and eating disorders). Although there are exceptions to this, the greatest attention is still given to adult bloggers, and if focused on females, then adult female bloggers (as is shown on the case of Technorati.com) who do not even note why adolescent girl bloggers should be less important or interesting. Thus, there are a huge number of invisible girls. While this invisibility is in some regards deliberate and liberating, not seeing these girls could mean ignorance of one of today's important social phenomena.

Who sees me?

As shown by the reviewed literature, new technologies, represented by the Internet, have allowed young girls far greater customisable personal space. These spaces can be self-created, with the owner controlling who, if anyone is invited to share them. Sonia Livingstone (2002) speaks about the decline of street culture, claiming that youth no longer spend the majority of their free time outside their homes now being media rich. Young girls having mastered digital technologies now also have media rich bedrooms. This has developed into a bedroom culture, where it is preferable for parents to keep their children “in the protected environment” of the home. Girls of today are thus equipped with a very powerful tool, a room or a place of their own which can be private and then easily made public. They have the opportunity to stay invisible if they wish and to become very visible when needed. One minute they can sit in their virtual bedroom in safety and enjoy a quiet moment, the next they can create a huge online open space within a community of their own choice. If it seems too social they can block comments with the same efficiency as locking a door. They can keep their blog as just a journal. There are many more girl blog communities online than those mentioned above. Girls seem to use and profit from online communities much more than boys. These communities can serve as a very powerful tool to speak out about feelings and thoughts in a disinhibited way, in ways which would not be acceptable in the offline social world. Becoming a girl and understanding what that means is a big task, especially in these times of shattered gender roles as it is difficult to define the “real me”.

Invisibility regarding blogs is very relative. As was shown, blogs can enhance identity development and serve as an efficient tool to reflect oneself in times of uncertainty. Blogs can help to answer the questions *Who am I? Where am I heading?* If a girl is alone on her blog, a self-reflective tool, the answer to the question *Who sees me?* would be... “Me”. Previously invisible girls can become visible to *themselves* through their blogs.

Maybe this is one of the reasons for the popularity among girls of online communities. Females use the social aspects of blogging to a far greater extent than males (Dolgin & Minova, 1997) and through this self-

disclosure and sharing they can gain the knowledge to become prolific constructors of the multi-faceted female identity of today. Girls and youth in general do not seem to be used by media but rather to use them, re-creating their own spaces in ways that the people who designed particular tools could never have anticipated. This could also be interpreted alongside the co-construction model of Patricia Greenfield (Greenfield & Yan, 2006). This explains how the youth of today participate and co-construct rather than just watch, consume and use. This creates a complex virtual universe with its own social norms (Greenfield & Yan, 2006) which is invisible to, and not set by, corporations and financial interests. The power of sharing everything regarding youth femininity is what brings a breath of fresh air into something which was valid not only in the times of Virginia Woolf, but also a few decades ago when mastering technology was still attributed to men. Girls were able to find a technological tool to create and dominate their own space and to invisibly socialise beyond parental constraints, and perhaps, at least to some extent, behind economic and corporate interests.

The most important thing is probably not for once invisible girls to grow into poets or belletrists or to change the course of the world, but to be able to find themselves through their blogs, mirroring each other, observing the stories of their lives, and enjoying the precious presence of those who understand and reassure them that their stories are as good and promising as everybody else’s.

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