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# A New Kind of Body Project: Blogging and the American Teen Girl

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A NEW KIND OF BODY PROJECT:  
BLOGGING AND THE AMERICAN TEEN GIRL

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

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\*\*\*\*\*

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2014

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## ABSTRACT

Through a framework of Joan Jacobs Brumberg's 1997 work, *The Body Project*, this paper seeks to provide insight into how the American teenage girl's body project has adapted and changed through the use of online blogging. Brumberg found that over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, girls changed their focus from an inner body project to an outer one. The paper uses a sample of 40 blogs, read in the month of April, 2014, and is divided up into four blog types: diary, pro-ana, style, and whole-self. By reading a girl's online thoughts, readers will gain valuable insights into what is important to the girl and society as a whole. Here, through a phenomenological grounded theory analysis, we find that blogging is a new way to conduct a body project, and may allow girls to connect in ways they have never been able to before. Thus, the blog is an innovative way for girls to support themselves in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

Keywords: body project, blogging, teen girl, gender studies

To girl bloggers everywhere

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Vita.....	v
Chapters:	
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Why Blog?.....	8
3. Blogging as a diary.....	18
4. Promoting friend Ana.....	25
5. Finding style online.....	34
6. Nurturing the whole self.....	46
7. Conclusion.....	51
References.....	56

## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
4.1 Thinspo.....	37
5.1 OOTD.....	50

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Joan Jacobs Brumberg, in her 1997 work titled *The body project: An intimate history of American girls*, found that over the 20th century, American teen girls slowly turned from “good works” to “good looks” (Brumberg, 1997, p. xx). They did this through what Brumberg called a body project: a personal quest to become the ideal teenage girl. She found that “girls today make the body into an all-consuming project in ways that young women of the past did not” (Brumberg, 1997, p. xvii), basing her work in a critical examination of what these girls wrote in their diaries as a primary source, and concluding her analysis at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

When Brumberg concluded her research at the close of the century, the Internet was still a mewling infant, hardly a factor in America's daily life. Since then, the World Wide Web has seen an explosion, so much so that this rapid growth has even begun to slow somewhat, due to saturation, especially in first world countries (Malik, 2010; Meeker, 2014). Brumberg's work concerned the American girl's diary, and how it provided evidence for what she called their personal body project. Since Brumberg's research came to a close, American girls have found a new way to conduct this body project—namely, the blog. The term “blog” is a shortened form of Weblog (Hsu & Lin,

2007). The Merriam-Webster Dictionary lists the first usage of the term to have been in 1997—the year, remarkably enough, when Brumberg’s work was published. Merriam-Webster defines the blog as a web site where authors write about “personal opinions, activities, and experiences” (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, “Blog,” n. d.). The Pew Research Center found that between 2006 and 2010, the incidence of blogging in young adults and teens ages 12 to 17 has actually decreased since 2006, as these users move into adulthood. However, 93% of all members of this age group still go online regularly, often to microblog or use social media (Lenhart *et al*, 2010, p. 2-4). Social networking sites appeared the same year as blogging did, and are online spaces that “help strangers connect” (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 210). The blog, then, is a form of online journaling which is very relevant to the age group being studied here.

Though social networking is eclipsing blogging for teens, the study of blogging in teen girls is still very much a relevant pursuit as we consider how these teens from a few years ago have grown up with their online journaling. Mazzarella (2007) posited that while research has been done on websites for girls, less has been done on websites by girls (p. 260). Thus, this topic is a critical one to discuss and may offer insight on the modern, up-to-date model of the female body project.

A teen girl’s body project is not the only use of a blog, though. In general, blogs have been shown to increase "social integration, reliable alliance, and friendship satisfaction" (Baker & Moore, 2008, p. 747), and studies have shown that blogs are seen as largely credible by their readers (Johnson and Kaye, 2004; Banning and Sweetser, 2007; Sweetser *et al.*, 2008, as cited in Burroughs and Burroughs, 2011). Further, a great

number of Americans spend time in both reading and producing them, and the teen-age and young adult category, in general, is most apt to be participating in online interactions (Lenhart & Fox, 2006, p. 2). Teen boys also practice blogging, as the blogosphere is split fairly evenly among the sexes (Lenhart & Fox, 2006, p. 3). However, teen girl blogs seem to have become almost a cliché, as many girls alluded to their blog as being “yet another” teen girl’s blog in the sample.

Physical body projects, spelled out in ink and paper, have the same basic goals as online diaries. While the blogosphere has continued the trend of physical rather than mental improvement, the practice of blogging has allowed girls to carry on their own body project in ways that are more interactive, more peer-intrusive, and more extensive. Girls of this day and age, like the ones of the late 20th century, place a great deal of emphasis on thinness, clothing, and relationships. Now, however, the body project takes on a new element—the affirmation of the public eye. This affects the modern body project in a variety of ways, some of which hearken back to earlier periods of American societal values.

Brumberg's (1997) book focused largely on the biological aspects of a girl's growth, zeroing in on such details as puberty and sexual activity. While these topics will be touched on in the present work, many of them will be glossed over, due to the fact that the evidence was simply not found in the sample. It seems likely that the girls were unwilling to share such intimate details as these online, and may have reserved them for physical diaries, if they keep them. The only way to ascertain this for sure would be to ask the girls themselves, which would violate the guidelines put forth in the methods

section. However, some mention of these otherwise taboo topics was certainly made, often with euphemisms or false names if it involved other people.

While certain, more private, topics may have been scrupulously left out, other aspects discussed by Brumberg are certainly parts of teen girls' blogging concerns today. These topics, such as friendship, ethics, abilities and talents, slimming, religion, fashion, self-improvement, and a myriad others, are of great importance in mapping where the teen girl blog fits in with the traditional diary body project. This current model is a useful method of developing the teen girl inside and out through peer mentoring and collaboration, as will be shown hereafter. Indeed, it may even be said that the online body project is, in part, a return to the enthusiastic Victorian girl's intention of being the ideal young lady. This paper, through qualitative research analysis and historical context, will examine a sample of blogs in a way that illuminates the current mode of conducting a body project in the digital age.

## **Method**

This study intends to function as a metonymy, taking the words of a selected few, in order to try to understand the attitudes of the whole. Brumberg (1997) wrote that “because diaries reveal so much about the heart of being a girl, I use them whenever possible to provide entry into the hidden history of female adolescents’ experience” (p. xxvii). In a similar way, blogs can serve as windows into the thoughts and feelings of adolescent teen girls, and could be game-changers in the world of teen body image. Since the internet is such a readily accessible source of data, it would be reprehensible not to

make use of the opportunity to study teen girl body projects through blogs. Accordingly, blogs are used as primary sources in this study.

I used a modified snowball technique to choose a data set of 40 girl blogs, first Googling keywords such as “teen girl blogs” and “blogs written by teens.” This resulted in a small list, as few girls named their blogs something so obvious, preferring more descriptive and unique names. This fact constitutes a potential bias. After perusing those first ones, however, I was able to find more by scanning the list of blogs followed by that girl, to which I would save the url and ascertain if they, too, were written by teen girls. In turn, the new bloggers would provide more options to explore. In this way, a chain of links to more blogs materialized that provided the data for my research. I made little effort to control the type of blogs when gathering data, but used snowball sampling freely to gain as representative a piece of the blogosphere as I could. I used opportunity sampling by not setting a limit on the quantity of blogs when I began, but when time began to run short I capped the sample at 40 urls.

In choosing blogs, I included only blogs written by girls in the United States, between the ages of 12 and 20—the ones, by definition, “American teenage girls.” Any blog posts from people of a different gender, age or location were discarded. While searching, I often stumbled upon blogs written by girls in Great Britain and other English speaking countries around the world. Every effort was made to determine that the girl did indeed live in the continental United States, mostly through attending to verbal cues such as non-American spellings and grammatical conventions. Similarly, traditional blog platforms were used, as opposed to microblogging platforms such as Facebook or

Twitter. These would unearth a fascinating area for research, but traditional blogs parallel Brumberg's work more readily. Some work has been done in the subject of teens' online habits, but this region is, as of yet, still relatively unexplored. Thus, this topic in general is important to the furtherance of gender studies in academia.

As per university and IRB guidelines, none of the girls were ever contacted or informed that their publications were being used. I simply examined them as part of the public domain, so no human subjects were tested for this project. Only blogs that are maintained by one teen writer each were included. While collaborative blogs are very much a common practice, the solo online diary fits the parameters of this work better. I examined a total of 40 blogs in the month of April, 2014, reading for 7 hours each week and making notes on what I saw.

When analysis took place during sampling, I made note of repeated ideas and recorded my observations as I read. After sampling, and a phenomenological approach to grounded theory, I then coded the content of each blog for repeated ideas. Use of a phenomenological approach "refers to the totality of lived experiences" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 235), where the words of the girl-blogger stand in for data and the analysis represents her experiences. Grounded theory analysis allows researchers to carefully examine data and empirically generate theories based upon the research (Strauss, 1987). In keeping with this tradition, repeated ideas were deemed most important to the girls and thus most important to this discussion, though many more inferences are doubtless hidden in the data set. This approach is the best way to analyze this form of data because the goal is, like Brumberg's, to gather information about teen girls in general through reading the

words of a smaller population. The assumption was made that girls would try to display their very best selves, or only what they believed would make them more appealing to others. In keeping with the goal of using modern bloggers as mirrors for Brumberg's greater work, this analysis merely seeks to shed light on a medium that expands on the traditional body project found in journaling. Thus, comparing blogs to diaries allows us to understand teen girls' lived experiences in 21<sup>st</sup> century context.

Coding results were used in two ways: firstly, as a way to determine genres for the blogs according to their subject matter, and secondly, to analyze the content in each genre for comparison to each other and to Brumberg's diaries. The resulting list revealed four genres: diary, pro-ana, style, and whole-self. The diary type fit most closely within Brumberg's framework, and spoke most closely to the inner body project of the early 1900s. The pro-ana blogs and style blogs reaffirmed Brumberg's assertion that, over time, girls have turned from a quest for good thoughts to good looks (which will be discussed in more detail later). Finally, whole-self blogs combine the tension between inner and outer in a harmonious recapitulation of the whole. These claims about the genre grew inductively from repeated ideas within each genre, and I will explicate them later. This paper will show how blogging is a marriage of two ideas taken from Brumberg's (1997) work: outer maintenance of body and inner development of character. Now, we delve into the wilderness of the young female's self-esteem through the lens of her online diary, but first, a word about blogging in general.

## CHAPTER 2

### WHY BLOG?

The first and foremost question this paper seeks to answer is, *why*? Why do teen girls blog? The solution to this may seem obvious on first inspection. Girls blog to share their feelings. Girls blog to have a creative outlet. But under the surface, why do teen girls actually blog? The answer is a complicated one. Many girls are unable to answer it even for themselves, though most will try. Nearly every “About” section in the blogs studied will allude to that particular blog’s purpose and their own reason for writing.

One succinct example asked, “Why in the world am I doing this? Why am I being a weirdo that let's [sic] people see my innermost thoughts on the internet? Why?” She quickly answered her own question: “It's a teenage girl's diary but online” (deeplyconfusinghighlyamusing). This is the most clear and obvious reason for blogging. It is not the only one, however. Nardi *et al* (2004), in a qualitative study of 23 bloggers in California, discovered a few main reasons why people blog: to document their lives, as commentary on current issues, for catharsis, as a community forum, and as a "muse" with which to share their feelings (p. 44). This chapter will discuss both the benefits and harmful effects of blogging, as well as how blogging has two aspects: interpersonal and intrapersonal. These dual uses bring the blog to the forefront as an effective girl body project.

## **To blog...**

Apart from the obvious reasons, there are many less discernable benefits and harmful effects of blogging, most of which have to do with the community aspect of the blogosphere. Firstly, the internet functions as a great equalizer, which Jenkins (2006) mentioned in regards to the educational aspect of online interaction. Jenkins (2006) quoted a Harry Potter fan-fictionist, who wrote that the “absence of face-to-face equalizes everyone a little bit, so it gives the younger members a chance to talk with adults without perhaps some of the intimidation they might normally feel in talking to adults” (Jenkins, p. 187). Due to this democratizing effect of the web, anyone, anywhere may become a writer by beginning online (Jenkins, 2006). A few girls stated this openly by mentioning that they started their blog partially or completely so they could get better at writing (earthtocase, writingismykryptonite, aninfinitydynamic).

A common practice for the girls was writing fiction on their blog, some of which took the form of serials or poetry, as well as the more typical short story. Jenkins (2006) also discussed how writing fiction with some truths helps fan-fiction writers online work through real-life issues, noting that “children use stories to escape from or reaffirm aspects of their real lives” (Jenkins, p. 182). As teen girls write fiction about topics near and dear to their hearts, they are better able to accept and understand their own circumstances. One girl wrote, “I had a really inspiring weekend, and I couldn’t help but want write about it. I feel as though I don’t blog as much as I should, but when I do, I have such purpose and I really feel that to be important” (thesecretlifeofanactualteenager,

April 14, 2014). As the girls write their stories, and frequently even some fictional ones, they manage difficulties in their daily lives in a way that is more positive.

While most girls seem to seek for a unique reason to blog, the vast majority is there for the same purpose: self-discovery through peer support, and overall, pursuit of their own personal body projects. Girls take pride in their blogs and in sharing them with others. They feel accomplished when they reach a significant number of posts and make new years' resolutions about blogging more (bigcitydreamer, pinkstoryofme). Bloggers help each other through tough times—through parent divorces, deaths of close family and friends, breakups, and illness—in short, every teenage heartache that girls aid each other with in person transfers (more or less neatly) to the virtual world. Again and again we see girls feel indebted and obliged to their readers in a mysterious, intangible bond which even they find difficult to put into words. Even the most benign of systems can easily go awry, however.

### **...or not to blog**

While the benefits seem self-evident, there are negative aspects to the blog universe, as well. Of internet use in general there are many risks, and one *EU Kids Online* study suggested that there are “‘significant gender differences’ in online risk and opportunity ... girls appear to be ‘more likely to be upset by offensive, violent and pornographic material, to chat online with strangers, to receive unwanted sexual comments and to be asked for personal information, though they are wary of providing it to strangers’” (Livingstone and Haddon 2009, p. 16, as cited in Ringrose & Barajas,

2011). This study refers mostly to social media sites; however, the concept is the same—the internet is not always a safe haven.

One reason the internet is potentially dangerous is the way that girls share their personal information online, putting them at risk to potential antagonists. Blinka and Smahel (2009) studied adolescent bloggers in the Czech Republic and found that the majority of them provided their personal information honestly (p. 735). This proved true in my 40-blog sample. I could readily ascertain where most of the girls lived; I knew their first and last names and their approximate age. Bikini pictures were not common, but neither were they unheard of (thesummertimegames). It is fortunate that the bounds of my project prevented me from contacting them in any way, or that I had no other sinister, more nefarious purposes for reading their blog. Other readers, however, may be less trustworthy.

Although most topics transfer neatly to the blogosphere, the procedure is occasionally messy. Since the overall consensus in the sample seems to be that the internet is a relatively safe place, one where anything may be shared with little fear of retribution, there can be turbulence when too much information is shared. This turbulence comes in the form of negative feedback in the comments or otherwise. One girl wrote that she was grateful for her kind followers, since she had been reading articles about blogs whose commenters were not so kind (abeautifulheart07). Another girl dealt with negative comments through this stern reprimand:

“Dear Anons who like to send me crappy comments,

I really don't care what anyone thinks of me because everyone has a right to their

own opinion. If you really hated me that much then, then say it to my face, not my blog, because thats [sic] pathetic. Everyone gets hate and no one appreciates it so lay off or come talk to me in person :)

xoxo” (theuglygeekling, May 11, 2012)

This thinly-veiled sarcasm shows suppressed hurt at what should be a positive, collaborative experience but has gone sadly wrong. In this case, the blogger seems to be speaking to people she knows in person, as well, inviting them to come and reiterate their feelings face-to-face. Indeed, she seemed to be acting as a self-appointed gatekeeper for the blogosphere, defending herself and others from the outward foe of negativity.

Like theuglygeekling, others seemed united in their need to make the blogosphere a safe place for writing. Knockedaskew wrote that she frequently wrote posts but then failed to publish them, concerned with what her readers would think. She then resolved that, "from now on, I'm posting *everything* that I write on here. I'm not holding back anymore because I really want to know if other people have the same views as me" (knockedaskew, August 18, 2011, emphasis in original). Through her insistence on openness, she is fostering a universally free space to write whatever she thinks and feels, in spite of criticism. Privacy is still an issue when it comes to people other than the girls themselves, however, as a few girls were careful to use nicknames when referring to their friends or family members.

A few deal with the privacy issue by simply writing under an alias or pseudonym. Secretsofateenager wrote that "I'm using a pen name and am anonymous but everything I write on here is and will be the truth and not made up. I feel that if I keep my real identity

unknown then I can honestly tell my secrets and not have to worry about ruining my reputation” (thesecretsofateenager, February 2, 2013). My research contained only a few bloggers who used a pen name, however. Most shared their full identities with their readers. The internet, it seems, is a separate place from that of the face-to-face world, and this is one of its biggest appeals, but also one of the greatest risks that girl bloggers face. Tuhsang expressed this fear of the risks when she said, “I want to say more but I'm scared someone I know is reading this” (February 21, 2014). The blogosphere, though it is an inherently public arena, is designed, paradoxically, to be mostly anonymous. Its anonymity makes it safe, and yet, dangerous. The reason for this risk is found in the inherently public nature of a blog—that is, blogging takes an intrapersonal experience and makes it interpersonal.

### **Blogging as interpersonal**

Once a girl decides to hazard the potential risks and write a blog, she is entering into a relational context that is vast, well-populated, and complex. Dialectics theory determines that every relationship will have varied levels of openness or closedness in regards to sharing information (Gudykunst & Mody, 2002; Floyd, 2009; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). In this case, the internet forms the other half of an interesting and different relationship than American teen girls were wont to have in previous eras. Girls now are saddled with the task of navigating how much is appropriate to tell the internet and how much they must keep to themselves. Nardi *et al* (2004) also found that bloggers were highly aware of their audience, "calibrating" their writing to the appropriate level of openness (p. 42-43). Myrelevancy put it thusly, “I think that I have been acquainted with the internet long enough to tell it all about myself. I mean, we're pretty tight now”

(myrelevancy, May 19 2013). How did she and the internet get this "tight"? In this case, it happens in a similar fashion as with a face-to-face relationship: through self-disclosure.

The girls in the 40-blog sample followed these models frequently in their writing. And who makes up this nebulous entity commonly known as "The Internet?" Nearly every blogger in the sample was highly aware of her audience, addressing them as "you guys" and scrupulously greeting them with "hello" and "goodbye" in many cases. Bloggers feel a certain obligation to their readers and feel guilty when they have not posted recently (big city dreamer, pinkstoryofme, earthtocase). They ask for feedback on what they should post (thetrue-thereal). They dangle new posts about significant events over their readers' heads like a wrapped candy from a beloved adult's pocket (aziaanderson, sometimesijustdontgetmyself, myrelevancy, apassionatafortheking). The girls love and cherish their readers like their own dear relatives, because of the bond they have gained through telling their innermost thoughts and, indeed, secrets with them.

In return, the comments made by readers are usually very encouraging and familiar, often offering advice, sympathy, and praise. Blog readers have been found to view comments in blogs as important as the blog content itself (Moor & Efimova, 2004, as cited in Hu *et al*, 2007). In the sample, many were other teen girl bloggers, but others seemed to be adults, commenting familiarly and complimenting the young writers. Chittenden (2010) emphasized the importance of followers, who are different from social media "friends," as well as the importance of having comments on your blog for boosting self-esteem (p. 515-516). The girls, in turn, are gushingly grateful for feedback from their readers, as was littlejamiieg who wrote that she was "apprehensive in starting a blog this past summer...But I have to say, I have been shocked. In only 5 months, I have more

followers and page views than I ever thought was possible...What I am most proud about is that you guys are engaged - *you are sending me opinions, suggestions, and ideas* - and I could not thank you enough for that" (littlejamieg.tumblr.com, December 31 2013, emphasis in original). These commenters and followers turn the private diary into a public blog, and are a key element in forming the modern body project into what it is today.

As more evidence for the benefits of the cooperative nature of blogs, three drama instructors used collaborative blogging to lead a group of teens in creating their own theater production in a series of summer camps. The cast who used more focused, visually present blogging showed greater camaraderie and cohesiveness throughout. In the cast where the blog was largely ignored, disjuncture and detachment were more common. "This engagement with the blog echoed how they worked in the room and interacted with each other," their teachers wrote (Bable, Waxman & Bellomo, 2011, p. 229). In a similar way, using online tools such as blogging is a strong method to help young teens engage with each other in more ways than in face-to-face. They are not alone in this journey, and conduct their body project alongside countless others, helping each other along the way.

### **Blogs as intrapersonal**

On top of the collaborative and peer-oriented nature of blogs, they seem to ultimately serve as an unrestricted place for freedom of expression. One girl greeted her audience with the unmistakable banner, "Welcome to the life of a[n] Alaskan teenage girl... Enjoy the show as she figures life (and herself) out" (sometimesijustdontgetmyself, About). Nearly every girl in the sample expressed, implicitly or explicitly, the feeling for

the need to say how they truly felt, away from parental and peer-based pressure. Blogs were used as a workbook for their own personal feelings, judgments and character. This allowed them to develop the inner side of their body project, like Brumberg's Victorian diarists, who preferred to be good instead of look good. This aspect is particularly relevant to diary blogs, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Whole-self blogs, too, touch on the inner body project, and will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Alongside their own personal body project, the blog also allows them to conduct a "body project," for their online presence—that is, their blog is something to be tended and nurtured. They can gain more followers and increase their online social capital. As adolescents form their own identity, they look at others as models for who to be (Josselson, 1994, as cited in Chittenden, 2010, p. 96), and blogs are an ideal place for this to happen (Huffaker, 2005, as cited in Blinka & Smahel, 2009). One girl wrote that “the Internet builds people up, makes them their own little celebrity” (raucous-smiling). Whether this is a positive influence remains to be seen, but it is clear that girls are influenced by peers on the Internet, which is one more arena in which they will wrestle with finding their own place in the world. The blog's body project could easily be considered interpersonal, because it cannot be conducted without the help of others, but fits better as intrapersonal because it is a personal quest to build one's reputation and important online. In my sample, this was especially important in style blogs and whole-self blogs, which will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

No matter how a girl uses her blog for development, neither the risks nor the benefits of blogging can be denied. This chapter has covered two main aspects of blogging: as social support and as a body project. The succeeding chapters will explore

the positives and negatives of a few different types of blogs from the sample. Though there are a myriad of ways to classify the way girls blog, the sample of 40 revealed four main categories. The first is the most straightforward—the blog as a diary. Next we dive into the murky depths of self-image blogs, followed by the similar, *yet all-too-different* fashion and style blogs. Lastly is the conglomerate of them all, the whole-self blog. But, first things first: blogging as an online, interactive diary.

## CHAPTER 3

### BLOGGING AS A DIARY

Now that the nature and value of blogging have been established, I divide the sample into four basic types. Though all of these fit into the framework of Brumberg's (1997) girl diaries, they do so in different ways. The first is titled simply "diary" because this type of blog is merely the online version of a hardcopy diary. This chapter will compare the online diary to the offline one, as well as discuss both the interpersonal and intrapersonal uses for the diary blog, showing how the diary blog is the most like traditional girl diaries out of the other four types. Additionally, diary blogs (along with whole-self blogs, which will be discussed in Chapter 6) are one of the types most focused on the inner body project, even more so than on the outer.

The most obvious and common use for the blog is as a personal diary, though this definition is altered somewhat from the ink-and-paper variety. Unlike diaries, blogs serve as both "personal and public records that are conducive to personal narratives" (Mazur and Kozarian, 2010, p. 139). Out of the 40 blogs sampled, over half of them have been classified as a diary blog to differentiate them from the others in the sample. While this may easily have been due to the snowballing data collection process, and may not be an indication of the overall percentage of the vast majority on the internet, it is significant and appropriate that there were so many in the sample, given Brumberg's (1997) model for this paper.

Brumberg (1997) uses the teen girl diary merely as a microscope to scrutinize the changing American world in the 20th century, but journaling has also proven useful in more ways than this. Firstly, it is an effective coping mechanism (Ullrich & Lutgendorf, 2002) and has been shown as powerful tool for therapy, particularly among adolescents (Utley & Garza, 2011). Journaling also aids in improving learning and self-reflection (Fritson, 2008; Bouldin *et al*, 2006). More specifically, diaries have been shown as excellent playgrounds for female identity formation (Karagiozis 2007). Brumberg's diarists likely gained myriad benefits from the time they spent with diary in hand, putting down their innermost thoughts on the pages. Our girls received similar benefits.

Though it is beneficial, the teen girl blog is a fairly recent invention, even by the Internet's standards. In the early stages of Weblogging, authorship was primarily male (Siles, 2012). In fact, "the online diary was linked to the 'feminine' realms of domesticity and everyday life," and "male online diarists opted for naming their sites 'journals' to avoid being associated with the feminine notion of 'diary' and at least one female weblog user created an online diary to post content that did not 'fit' in her weblog" (Siles, 2012, p. 788). That is, since a "diary" has a feminine connotation, women desiring a voice in the then male-dominated Internet must downplay their feminine uses of the Web. Times have changed since then, however, and women are now as comfortable—and common—online as men (Kimbrough, 2013; Harcourt, 2000). Both genders use the Web to increase interpersonal relationships and for social support (Shaw & Gant, 2002). There was evidence for this in the sample, as the girls would frequently use labels denoting "yet another teenage girl blog," implying that this phenomenon has become commonplace or even cliché. Common as it may be, our bloggers received therapeutic benefits from their

blogging activities, while also providing us with more windows into the soul of the American teenage girl. Now that we know why the diary blog is so crucial, let us demarcate it from the other blogs in the sample, as well as discuss how it helps the girls complete their own body projects.

### **Qualifying the diary blog**

In this new female blogging world, girls use their blogs just as the young diarists of former times did. Bigcitydreamer wrote in 2013 that she started her blog because she wants to remember moments in her life so she could go back and relive them later. In the very next paragraph she stated that she bought a physical journal, as well, to use alongside her blog and to write the things which are too personal for online. In this way, the blog is merely a public extension of a traditional diary, functioning in a similar manner. The content of diary blogs was primarily textual, which sets them apart from other blogs in the sample. While girls would occasionally post images or videos of things that were important to them, the focus is primarily using text for self-expression. The text itself is less structured than the other forms, too, and covered a variety of topics. Usually these topics tended to follow whatever thoughts and feelings that were relevant to that girl on that day.

Though fiction writing occurs, to a lesser degree, in the other blog types in the sample, it is the most common in diary blogs. This fiction writing usually takes the form of short stories, serial fiction, and even poetry composed by that girl for her blog. Offmychestblogdotcom2 openly admitted that writing stories are for “trying to work through [her] own feelings without revealing them outright” (April 6, 2014). Through

both real-life and fictional (or partly fictional) stories, these girls provide records of their personal growth. This chapter will discuss how the diary blog aids a teen girl in fulfilling her own personal body project, both by herself and with others.

### **The camaraderie is in the comments**

The inherently public nature of the internet transforms a private diary into an online blog. Unlike private diaries, blogs are meant to be set in a public space. They are accessible worldwide, by anyone with a computer and an Internet browser. While this can be problematic, as we have seen, it is also highly useful, and girls have begun using this resource for online girl talk in cases where their face-to-face interactions fall short. An example of this can be found in the blog of *deeplyconfusinghighlyamusing*, who mentioned how the blogger at “My Dating Perscription [sic]” had helped her through her parents’ divorce (February 19, 2014). Apparently their initial connection came through their blogs, and being mentioned was noteworthy enough to make an appearance in an unrelated post. In other words, being mentioned on another’s blog is highly desirable, and connections can be made through commenting on other blogs. Girls also frequently invited their readers to email them directly for more interaction, and even included contact information for social media sites so that readers could follow them on platforms other than their blogging site.

The blogger at *offmychestblogdotcom2* demonstrates this many times in her discussion of encounters with the opposite gender. She expresses a disinclination to Tweet her feelings (ie, share it on the social media platform known as Twitter) but

instead prefers to share it with the readers of her blog (June 18, 2013). Later, she expresses her gratitude:

“Alright, for those of you who follow my blog- thank you. I know my posts haven’t been amazing lately since they’re usually about my life problems instead of actual world issues/ events but I’m a teenage girl and you’ll have that. I love this blog, it’s a place for me to be completely myself and get feedback from people who don’t have personal ties to my life. It’s amazing when people like my posts and it blows my mind when I receive comments... I love you guys and I love WordPress.” (July 3, 2013)

This excerpt shows the intense feelings of support that the blogosphere may offer its inhabitants. Blogging becomes a way for teen girls to get friendship and support that they may not be able to get elsewhere.

### **Internal improvement**

At the same time, blogging is a way to explore one's inner thoughts, just as with a diary. As girls relate their stories, they and others tease out their behavior and feelings. Gonewiththesummer related, as part of her summer bucket list, her intention to sneak into an R-rated movie before the legal age of 17. She and a friend began to make the attempt, but decided at the last minute to see a different film. After relating the story on her blog, she concluded the post by commenting, “Hmm... doing the responsible thing. Does this mean I’m growing up?” (June 16 2012). In this way, blogs serve as a way to debrief from life’s experiences and usefully contextualize them. Zebraunicornassis referred to these posts as “learn a lesson” posts, implying that there was some sort of moral counsel to be

gained from them. Some of these posts took the form of rhetorical questions, followed by an explication of that topic.

Though the girls did not always find a final answer to their discussion, the purpose of these posts was to share their feelings, thereby defining them for themselves and others (offmychestblogdotcom2; gonewiththesummer; aziaanderson). A good example can be found in thetrue-thereal who expressed her desire for acceptance from others by asking her readers: “Is that what people think of me? Do I try too hard? I hope not. I hope people like me. I really do” (February 3, 2014). In this way, girls used their personal reflections to probe into their feelings and understand themselves better, whether or not an “answer” could be reached.

While reflective pieces are helpful in understanding one’s thoughts, some simply serve the purpose of getting unwanted feelings off of the girl’s chest. Another of the most common uses for a diary blog is what is usually called a ‘rant.’ A ranting post is designed to have an outlet for frustrations and negative opinions. The topic of these ranges widely, but the purpose is the same—to vent frustrations to an always willing ‘ear.’ Myrelevancy posted “Ten Pet Peeves” on her blog (May 23, 2013) in an itemized list.

Offmychestblogdotcom2 thanked her readers for the chance to vent to them whenever she felt the need (September 13, 2013). The blog, available 24/7, serves as an always-constant companion to girls who may have few other places to share otherwise unwanted sentiments.

Though girls certainly continue to follow the late-90s trend of focusing on their outward appearance, rather than their inward abilities, the blogs in the diary sample are

evidence that girls still maintain their inner body projects almost exclusively in diary blogs. Each of these intrapersonal uses of the blog, while they have been classed here as intrapersonal, technically still may be read and commented on by anyone with a computer and internet access. Since blogs are genetically unrestricted zones, any “private” use for a blog will be also public. They still give the benefits of a private, hard-copy diary, and arguably these benefits are enhanced by their public nature through collaboration.

Though a different format, these posts hearken back to the Victorian girls in Brumberg’s (1997) book, who sought to improve themselves through moral means rather than physical. As girls read and give feedback on others’ body projects, and receive their own feedback in return, they are slowly finding improvement within themselves in a way that is meaningful, even if they do not acknowledge it themselves. This will be discussed in greater detail in the whole-self blog chapter. The next two forms of blogs, by contrast, place their emphasis almost entirely on the outward body project. While diary blogs are the most plentiful form of blogging in the sample, let us now turn our attention to a much rarer and far more personal use for blogs—slimming.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROMOTING FRIEND ANA

There are many uses for a blog, and one of them, surprisingly enough, is to champion the cause of eating disorders. Brumberg (1997) wrote at length about the increase in eating disorders over the course of the 20th century and how they stem from a changing cultural emphasis in America (p. 122). The disorder which is most relevant to this discussion is “anorexia nervosa,” a condition which “leads patients to place central importance on their shape and weight as their self-esteem is deeply entwined with their body esteem” (Bulik *et al*, 2009). Brumberg (2000) wrote again at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that anorexia is a uniquely Western invention, traveling around the globe with American media. Perhaps not coincidentally, the instance of eating disorders increased between the years 1999 and 2006 (Zhao & Encinosa, 2009). This growth and expansion occurred for a number of reasons, a few of which will be discussed in this chapter. The primary focus, however, is to examine how eating disorders fit in with a teen girl's online body project.

#### **A changing ideal**

Brumberg (1997) chronicles the growing emphasis on the female body over the 20th century. Girls in the Victorian era had little to do with slimming, since a “robust” figure was considered healthy and fashionable. Over time, with changes in fashion and modesty standards, more skin could be exposed and therefore had to be maintained. At

the same time, advertisements began glorifying the female body and setting up a model of the ideal woman for young girls to imitate. Even small aspects of daily life, such as the prevalence of mirrors, played a role in a girl's need to have the perfect figure. Girls began going to great lengths to achieve what they called a "sylph-like" form (Brumberg, 1997, p. 101).

Thus, over the course of that eventful century, women changed from external controls on their shapes (such as corsets and girdles) to internal controls (such as diet and exercise). The standards of the ideal size changed over the century, as well, as girls in the 1920s and 30s occasionally turned to dieting, girls in the 40s and 50s fell into habitual dieting, and girls in the latter portion of the century added exercise and toning to their regimens. All of this was in order to keep up with the progressively more exacting standards, which, by the 1990s, the sexually liberated girl must carefully follow, now including more body parts to scrutinize and perfect (Brumberg, 1997, p. 119—124).

20<sup>th</sup> century girls received pressure from advertisements, magazines, and others, but the Internet provides an anonymous forum where girls see idealized versions of others, leaving the door even wider for comparison and dissatisfaction with one's own size (Riley *et al*, 2009). Time has given girls more exposure to more forms of media, and eating disorders have increased along with media. As girls use their blogs for the purpose of slimming, they place themselves squarely in the later decades of the 20th century, when being tiny was paramount. This pursuit for petite has only deepened with the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, as eating disorders are just as prevalent and even more so. If slimming was difficult in the late 1990s, American girls now have a new resource: the pro-ana blog.

## Saying hello to Ana

Near the end of data collection, as I delved deeper and deeper into the blogosphere, I discovered something entirely new to me: a self-conscious damsel in the ethereal specter known to her friends as "Ana." She also goes by the formal name of "anorexia." "Pro-ana" is the online pseudonym for supporters of the disorder anorexia nervosa, and in these blogs, the disorder is personified by a girl named Ana (Curry & Ray, 2010; Riley *et al*, 2009). Due to the snowballing effect and the time constraints of data collection, only a few teen girl blogs touching on the serious topic of slimming occurred in the sample, but each were deeply memorable. Studies estimate that the total number present on the web exceeds the 500 mark (Chesley *et al*, 2003, as cited in Juarasicio *et al*, 2010), though most are divided on this point (Brotsky & Giles, 2007). Many pro-eating disorder sites have even been taken down, due to their potentially destructive content (Haas *et al*, 2010; Lewis & Arbuthnott, 2012). Other such sites still exist, however, as is evident from their presence in the sample.

What do these sites look like? Lipczynska (2007) characterized the pro-ana website as "pink, pretty and walks a fine line between supporting and enabling behaviours" (p. 545) and was not far off the mark. In a study of teens in Belgium, Custers and Van den Bulk (2009) found that girls were more likely to have been on a pro-eating disorder website than boys (p. 218). These websites promote eating disorders as a "lifestyle" as opposed to a destructive mental disorder (Custers and Van den Bulk, 2009; Haas *et al*, 2010; Lewis & Arbuthnott, 2012), and studies have suggested that they frequently worsen the symptoms (Harper *et al*, 2008; Lewis & Arbuthnott, 2012; Baker Moore, 2008).

The format of a pro-ana blog is not as important as the content, however. Knapton (2013) found that the pro-eating disorder attitude is "not an isolated system of beliefs; rather, they are extensions of Western societies' conceptualisations of female beauty" ( p. 467). There are also pro-bulimia blogs (known as pro-mia), but none occurred in my sample, due to the modified snowball method of data collection. Knapton (2013) further likened pro-ana and pro-mia blogs to both a skill and a religion, as girls develop and enact habits and beliefs matching their disorder and others within their group.

### **Ana's features**

The posts on these blogs were designed to aid other girls in this quest to be the ideal American girl, who is now thinner than she ever was, even at the end of the 1900s. On these blogs, anorexia was not framed as a terrible disorder but a noble quest to be as thin as possible. Each blog contained a prominent display of the girl's measurements. This section usually contained the girls' age, height, "high weight," "low weight," and current weight. There are some eating-disorder blogs which acknowledge eating disorders as a medical condition (Strife & Rickard, 2011), but none of them occurred in the sample. The ones in this sample were merely a space for forming connections through anorexia nervosa and sharing information on their personal body project.

While some girls acknowledged the difficulties of suffering from an eating disorder, most believed that what they were doing was merely a pursuit of the ideal female body. Girls frequently referred to the pro-ana community with epithets such as "secret world," (illshrinksmile2) as they found solidarity in their online universe. This idea of anonymity is somewhat ironic, given that I found them without looking, merely

by trolling the internet at random. The tone of most posts swung frequently between desperation and a hyper-motivation, as girls frequently deplored their frustrations with their pursuit of thinness before reaffirming their capacity to be thin. Each blog contained various low-calorie and calorie free recipes, exercise tips, and a daily log of that girl's food intake and workout regimen. Each varied as to format, but the general goal was the same.

While diary blogs were primarily composed of text, the emphasis on images here is significant. While much of a pro-ana blog is text-based, there are images too, and they are significant. If a picture is worth a thousand words, the images in pro-ana blogs speak volumes about what is important to the pro-ana blogger. One of the most intriguing aspects of the pro-ana blog is the posting of what the girls call "thinspo." This term is short for "thinspiration" (Lewis & Arbuthnott, 2012; Burke, 2012) Thinspiration is an image of an



Figure 1: Thinspo from <http://illshrinksmile2.blogspot.com>, posted October 11, 2011

extremely thin, idealized female in order to inspire blog viewers to become as thin as the girl in the image. This girl, who Burke (2012) dubs “the waif,” is generally pictured recumbent in an alluring pose, usually wearing revealing clothing.

A form of thinspo in the sample was “fantasy thinspo,” which displayed girls in various fanciful poses, often wearing mystical or vintage costumes and occasionally posed seductively with a member of the opposite gender. The girls in these photos are almost always pale, scantily clothed or nearly nude, posed in graceful, submissive attitudes, and of course, always thoroughly thin. Some of the girls also posted “reverse thinspo,” which were images of very large women, to remind them how not to be. Significantly absent from each pro-ana blog was any image of the blogger herself, which was not uncommon in other blog forms. Instead, most pro-ana blogs included at least one instance of thinspo.

The purpose of thinspo is to help the viewers of the blog, who may be feeling more or less motivated to achieve the ideal level of thinness, to become more motivated by viewing the ideal they want to be. One blogger made the following observation about thinspo:

"I feel like EVERYBODY does real girl thinspos recently. But you know what? Runway models are pros at staying perfect and thin! I think they're just amazing photos, and super inspiring. The thing is that these girls are "real" too. If they can do it, we should all be able to too! Did you hear that? YOU can do this, girlfriend!" (illshrinksmile2, January 11, 2012, emphasis in original)

These “real girl” thinspos are photos of ordinary girls, as opposed to celebrities or runway models. The writer expresses the preference for runway model thinspiration, asserting that each girl in America is capable of the same level of thinness. She is enthusiastic and encouraging, reassuring the reader that she, too, is capable of achieving her thinness goals. Note the use of "perfect" and "thin" in the same sentence. Pro-anas are on a hunt for perfection through the shaping of their bodies.

All of these elements combined make for a heart-wrenching blog post to the outside reader. Girls who write these blogs are using their blogs for an extreme kind of body project, a body project that is often unhealthy and potentially lethal. These girls express a body-dissatisfaction which is insatiable. Now that we understand the pro-ana blog, let us turn to its implications in the lives of teen girls.

### **Support through ana**

While these blogs certainly have potential for harm, as they may aid other girls in more effective methods of starvation, they ultimately serve the same purpose as their sisters: a collaborative and exploratory space for personal growth. One girl mentioned her need to “record what I'm going through even if no one hears it. I need to read what other pro ana bloggers are saying. It will remind me everyday[sic] to stay strong, and most importantly to remind myself that I am not alone" (illshrinknsmile2, Sept 27 2011). Her meaning behind "stay strong" is ambiguous, though it presumably means that she must stay strong in her relentless desire to be thinner. The key here, however, is that she is gaining social support through her blog.

"Fulloffair" writes that when she first began to diet, she was miserable and desperately needed help from other "anas" as she termed them: "That's why this blog exists. Think of this place as one where you won't be judged, where everyone feels the way you do! A safe haven. That's what I'm here to accomplish" (fulloffair, About). This "safe haven" she describes what most girls find in the internet: an escape from their real-life relationships and camaraderie with others like them, whether for good or for ill.

Indeed, the pro-ana blog places greater emphasis on sociality than other blogs in the sample, as the goal is primarily for connecting with others experiencing an eating disorder. While there is certainly room for self-reflection in the pro-ana blog, and one may use a pro-ana blog to keep a personal record, social support is ultimately the reason for blogging. Pro-ana blogs represent a quest for an ever-thinning ideal, thereby rendering it less and less attainable. These girls are turning to others who feel the same way to gain support in a pursuit that is so difficult it is probably impossible. Because pro-ana blogs often exacerbate the symptoms of eating disorders, they can be regarded as a reflection of the later-20<sup>th</sup> century ideal lined out in Brumberg's girl diaries. The blog has taken anorexia, which would have been a fairly private disorder in a diary context, and made it a public, collaborative experience, through online sharing. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, therefore, the diary becomes the blog, and the eating disorder becomes something to perform together in public.

The fact that many pro-eating disorder blogs have been removed from the web (Haas *et al*, 2010; Lewis & Arbutnott, 2012) speaks to their controversial nature. As effective as they may be at social support, this is a social support that is subversive, painful, and dangerous. While removing these blogs is a violation of the girls' free

speech, it is important to be familiar with these blogs and the girls who write them, in an effort to try and get them the medical care and face-to-face support that they need.

Perhaps the girls are turning to the online world because the offline world has failed them in this regard; however, these blogs should be taken as pleas for help, despite their confident outer shells.

We have seen how, through modern media, girls are pressured to extreme grooming of their outer shells through inner controls. Brumberg (1997) wrote extensively on the impact of marketing and advertising on the female American mind, which will be discussed more in the next chapter. It suffices to say, however, that the girls' extreme desire to be thin reflects the modern American emphasis on thinness. In conjunction with pro-ana blogs, there is another type of blog that deals with the idealization of a girl's outward appearance, which will be covered in the next chapter. This type is the style blog, and seeks to improve a girl's clothing and sense of fashion. The fashion and eating disorder blog categories belong next to each other in this work because of the way exposure to fashion is linked with eating disorders in academia (Tiggeman *et al*, 2005; Beaudoin & Lachance, 2006). Let us turn, then, to a blog type that links the ordinary teenage girl to her dreams as a fashion expert—the style blog.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDING STYLE ONLINE

Like the pro-ana blog, the style blog is another type of blog that focuses on maintaining the outward appearance as a body project. And, like the pro-ana blog, an important part of its function is the use of images, but to an even greater extent. These blogs would not exist without photography, and tended to be more visually thoughtful—that is, emphasis was placed more on the beauty of the site than in the other types. This chapter will explore how the fashion blog is not only a personal body project, but also an aid to others' body projects, and a reflection on cultural values among young American females. After a brief overview of the role of fashion and media in girls' lives over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I will explain how the fashion blog figures in a girl's life today.

Most of the girls in Brumberg's (1997) earliest diaries would have made their clothes at home with their mothers. American middle class women in the early 1900s tended to make all of their clothes, rather than buying them ready-made (Gordon, 2004). Further, Gordon (2004) writes about the need for effective women to be able to dress themselves gracefully by sewing their own clothing. Over time, there was a shift from this home-centered, localized fashion industry to the contemporary consumerist fashion scene. In previous centuries, clothing styles have varied by location, but in more recent times clothing changes by decade instead (Laver, 1963, as cited in Mazur, 1986).

As the United States developed a centralized and commercialized fashion industry, American families felt the change at home. Previously, mothers and daughters would dress themselves together. Now, girls shop for their clothes alone or with other girls. This shift toward commercialism came along with a visually impactful advertising culture. Stearns (2001), in a history of consumerism in Western culture, cited an ad from the early 1900s that urged girls to become “The Envied Girl” by buying fashionable, ready-made clothing. In a premise similar to Brumberg’s, Stearns (2001) posited that “virtue and vice thus we re-evaluated” (p. 58), as “envy” became a noble rather than immoral sentiment. While this shift was enacted, in part, by marketing and advertising, it marks a greater change in cultural emphasis.

In more modern eras, clothes have been closely associated with self-esteem (Lennon *et al.*, 1999; Frith & Gleeson, 2008), and studies have shown that individuals will choose clothing according to social expectations, in order to remain socially acceptable (Banister & Hogg, 2004; Willet, 2008; Seock & Merritt, 2013). Research further shows a gender difference between males and females, as women and girls are more likely than men to be both fashion-conscious and brand conscious (Beaudoin & Lachance, 2003; Ayman & Kaya, 2014). For girls, putting on clothes is a reflection of their body size, and has been associated with eating disorders, as a girl feels the need to wear certain clothing associated with her size.

This phenomenon is related to media exposure, as girls compare themselves to the ideal female presented in media (Kostanski, 2013). Media forms such as magazines and television certainly play a role on clothing choices for adolescents (Wilson & Macgillivray, 1998; Ju & Johnson, 2010; Badaoui *et al.*, 2012), but the 21<sup>st</sup> century has

yet another form of media, popularly known as the Internet. This chapter will refer to the blogs in the sample dealing with fashion and clothing as “style” blogs, per the name frequently given to the genre by the girls themselves.

### **Assembling the style blog**

In order to understand the workings of a style blog, we need to be familiar with a key term. This is the OOTD, which is an acronym for Outfit of the Day. The method for posting an OOTD seems simple, uniform, and regulated: each girl will post a picture of herself dressed in her fashion choices for that day, then describe each piece in the captions below it or perhaps with a short, explanatory paragraph. Many girls will include the store in which they bought each piece so that other girls may benefit from their sense of style and copy their manner of dress. Though the OOTD is labeled “of the day” it is not necessarily posted daily, but only as often as the girl has time or inclination.

The style blog also includes cosmetic, hair product, and occasionally health and fitness advice, and whatever other tidbits the girls felt to share with their readers. Style blogs also frequently include giveaways, where readers can sign up to be chosen for a random prize of jewelry, clothing, accessories, or another item of the blogger’s choice. The blogger will usually then mail the item to the lucky winner.

A fair number of potential blogs about fashion were excluded from this sample, because they veered into the territory of professional blogging. A blog was deemed “professional” if it seemed to have already brought the girl significantly into the public eye. As a result, the number of style blogs is again very small, making it the least-representative type in the sample. There is still much to be gained by reading them,

however. For these girls, blogging is a way into the business, as young teens are beginning careers in fashion through blogs, which frequently gain a great deal of attention in the fashion industry. A shining example of a girl whose blog could not be used in the sample, but is nevertheless a stellar blogger is Tavi Gevinson, who founded *Rookie* magazine, an online style blog “for teenage girls” (Rookie). These blogs serve as a universal link to any and all parties interested in that girl’s fashion ideas and creativity, and in this way, the blogs almost become a public, online resume.

Tavi’s blog, *The Style Rookie*, presented itself during snowball sampling, but unfortunately had to be dismissed because it was too commercial to fit the criteria of the study. Tavi began *The Style Rookie* in 2008 as an 11-year-old, according to her very own Wikipedia article (Tavi Gevinson a). She also has a bio in IMDB, (Tavi Gevinson b), her own Ted Talk (Tavi Gevinson c), and has been listed in *Forbes*’ twice (Dziemianowicz, 2014). Now 18, she has largely abandoned her blog in favor of managing *Rookie* and pursuing a career as an actress and editor, leaving her online magazine to the capable hands of other teen bloggers (Gevinson). Her choice of the title “rookie” is interesting; she may have been a rookie when she started, but since then, blogging has launched Tavi into a professional career.

*Rookie* is a stellar example, and is by no means alone. These impressive mounting blocks to a prancing industry are not the ones this study is concerned with, however. The “style blogs” of this chapter are ones produced by aspirant fashion experts, rather than as already-established participants in the field. For lack of a better term, these girls might be considered “wanna bes” in the world of fashion. It could be argued that they are merely amateurs, playing with pink plastic fashion blogs, in shallow imitation of professionals.

The opposite seems more likely, though, considering that Tavi began in the same way these girls did—by starting her own blog. This fact raises many questions about the state of the fashion world today, how "ordinary" people may participate, and how this affects the psyche of the American teen girl.

While the professional style blog is an easy shoo-in for many girls, most are less fortunate. What authorizes a girl to make her own fashion blog? The answer, it seems, is a computer, a camera, and the willpower. Other girls look to these bloggers for fashion advice and inspiration, as is evident through their comments, and in turn the bloggers feel sufficiently qualified to give advice to their readers. What makes these girls experts? Is it merely that they are in the rising generation of fashion-wearers, and therefore drive the industry? Surely they do not recognize it in so many words, but something drives them to advise others about their own sense of fashion. Ostensibly, this lifts them out of the realm of layperson and establishes them as fashion mavens in the eyes of others, all the while remaining in their usual pursuits of school, family, friends, and the like. Having characterized the "style blog" and its role in a teen girl's life, let us examine its significance.

### **Computer couture**

Fashion blogs have had a significant impact on the fashion industry. The first fashion blog was created in 2003, appropriately by "a young American woman" (Rocamora, 2012, p. 92). Rocamora (2011), in a study of personal style blogs, wrote about how a style blog is a space for the ongoing story of the self, or an identity forming

space (p. 410). What Rocamora (2011) is describing is essentially a body project, and this becomes evident through the sample.

Rocamora (2012) also emphasized how the invention of the blogosphere increased the “seasons” present in the fashion world. That is, where there used to be only biannual collections, there are now a large number of sub-seasons that a would-be fashionista must keep up with. These new seasons include, but are not limited to, “pre-collection, pre-fall, cruise, resort, high summer, and Christmas collections” (Rocamora, 2012, p. 97). Where the teen girl once had a lengthy time span in which to be completely ‘in,’ now she must remain ‘in’ at all times, all over the world.

The style blog is also a space for identity formation. Chittenden (2010) sums up the function of fashion blogs in a teens’ identity exploration thusly:

“The mediated spaces of the fashion blog enable teens to try out wacky or risqué outfits without compromising any social capital they have garnered in physical encounters, and to gauge the reactions of followers...The opportunity to try out different looks, and to ‘fail’ with minimal consequence, provides teens with opportunities to play with the impression they make and learn to use resources creatively” (Chittenden, 2010, p. 512).

In this way, the two aspects of blogging—interpersonal and intrapersonal—work hand in hand as girls experiment with their fashion abilities. As they share their clothing choices online, the girls are simultaneously advancing their own body projects and aiding the body projects of others. First, let us discuss how a girl sharing her personal style creates a collaborative body project for groups of teen girls through their style blogs.

## Sharing styles online

As with all other blog forms, the fashion blog forms a collaborative space for female development of current style trends. Girls in these blogs advised readers about their clothing, hair products, cosmetics, and more. This is significant because these girls are not trained members of the beauty industry. They are qualified to give advice through their shared experience as teen girls. An example is the blogger at chicvadourbyb, who, apart from regular OOTDs, shares her hair care regimen as well as “ideas, random thoughts and inspiration to share with all you lovelies from around the world” (chicvadourbyb). She signs each post with the valediction, “Much love, Brianna,” giving her blog an elder-sisterly or almost mothering inflection.

Perhaps the shining example in the sample was “A Walk in the Park,” the blog of Carly Maddox. She is “dreaming of New York City,” (carlymaddox) and her blog reflects her desire to join the fashion world in the way that Tavi Gevinson has. Her blog was almost rejected from the sample for its professional appearance, but still included because it became clear that she still maintains her blog as a personal body project, with an emphasis on helping others do the same. She has not, as yet, been recognized significantly by the public eye, at least not out of the realm of fashion bloggers. She is, however, on the *Seventeen Magazine* committee and has ads on her blog (carlymaddox). Despite this, her primary audience remains other teen girls, and this is why her blog was not rejected in sampling. An important aspect of this mutual journey is the way Carly advises her readers on many different topics, such as how to wear floral prints, how to accessorize, how to look their best for a school homecoming dance, how to dress for music festivals, and how to take good photographs for their own blog (carlymaddox).

This emphasis on guiding others is clear, as Carly openly asserts herself as qualified to advise other teen girls in their own fashion journey. While influence on guiding others is perhaps the most important of a style blog, the use of the style blog as each girl's personal body project cannot be overlooked.

### **Developing a personal style**

The inner, more personal function of the style blog, while it is an important aspect, seems almost to be an afterthought for the girls themselves. Chittenden (2010), however, discusses in detail how female teen bloggers “realize their offline emerging identity” by conceptualizing it online (p. 505). Thus, writing about one's fashion goals, failures, and triumphs builds a linear record of that girl's fashion growth. This gives them a concrete, tangible method of seeing their own progress through the rocky process of establishing their clothing identities. This aspect was often more subtle in the style blog, however. Whereas diary, pro-ana, and whole-self blogs were eager to discuss their own progress in their body projects, fashion bloggers tended to focus on the body projects of others. It could be that this is the case because of the particular style blogs that occurred during snowball sampling, and another, more focused study would be necessary to fully understand the workings of the style blog. A longitudinal close analysis, strictly rooted in style blogs, could fit nicely with Chittenden's (2010) “emerging identity.” In any event, the few blogs classified as style blogs in the sample placed a greater emphasis on advising others than on their personal progress.

These two important aspects of blogging (personal body project and body project for others) are very evident in the style blogs in the sample. Another thing that may be



Figure 1: OOTD, from <http://carlymaddox.blogspot.com> on April 19, 2014

gained from the sample, through visual analysis, is an idea of what is important to girls in this day and age. If a picture is indeed worth a thousand words, the images on style blogs are just as suggestive as eating disorder blogs in the way they speak volumes about the American girl's needs, wants, and desires. Certainly an important ideal is the quest to become a well-dressed, fashion-savvy adult. The implication on many blogs was that readers could not be an effective girl unless they knew what to wear and how to wear it.

This chapter explored a genre of blog that allows teen girls to advise, generate, and actively participate in a vast, flourishing commercial market, one that reigns supreme over many aspects of modern American society. Judging by these examples, clothes are just as important to the American teenage girl as they have always been. They are still a way to be 'the envied girl' in our culture and society. Like pro-ana blogs, style blogs represent the outward body project clearly and emphatically. These two types, sandwiched in the middle of the four, represent the most outward-focused, superficial needs of teen girls. Some blogs still explore the inward beauty so important to the girls of the early 1900s, however. Let us now turn to the final type of blog, which is a cross-breed of them all: the whole-self blog.

## CHAPTER 6

### NOURISHING THE WHOLE SELF

The type of blog which we will here call the whole-self blog defies classification. Like the mythical hydra, this is a blog with many heads, though not nearly so deadly, as it is merely a hybrid of each of the other types. It is more than just a combination, however. In the sample, whole-self blogs were the second-most prevalent, right after straight diary blogs. These blogs have many of the elements of a diary blog, but also contain ingredients from each other type of blog. These blogs are not to be mistaken for ‘miscellaneous.’ On the contrary, these blogs are labeled ‘whole-self’ to describe a blog which is a mixture of all the others, and yet a type all of its own. It could even be argued that this type of blog is the quintessential teenage girl blog.

Brumberg made no distinction of diary genres in her work, merely showing the change in focus over time in regards to the body project. The girls who wrote in the early days of the 1900s, however, sought to improve each aspect of their life, inner and outer. If Brumberg had chosen to sort her diaries into categories, a name along the lines of ‘whole-self’ would have been appropriate, as it encapsulates the way that these girls are cultivating every aspect of their natures, instead of merely focusing on their outward appearance. This chapter will overview the elements found in the whole-self blogs in the sample, as well as discuss how the whole-self blog is the most overtly focused on the collaborative body project out of all the four types. Particular emphasis will be given to

the way that whole-self blogs, even more than all the others, focus on the inward body project of teen girls.

### **Framing the whole-self**

Whole-self blogs seem to be a compilation blog for each of the other types in the sample, complete with health advice, diary entries, artwork, OOTDs, short fiction, giveaways, and more. Giving away small items such as jewelry or clothing was a surprisingly common practice in the blogosphere for even the youngest, particularly in style blogs, which were discussed in Chapter 4. To refer again to the exalting power of the internet, the girls loved to give things away to lucky readers, as another way of connecting with and mentoring their readers. Whole-self blogs represented a grafting in of each of the four types into a new type that serves a function beyond each of the others in the sample.

Perhaps the most effective way to characterize a whole-self blog is to compare it to what it is not: it is not a diary, pro-ana, or style blog. Like a diary blog, there is a great deal of text, but there are more images than in most diary blogs. Unlike a diary blog, there is a marked outward focus—that is, the girls in whole-self blogs were highly aware of their audience and wrote directly to them. While these blogs can hardly be compared to pro-ana blogs, they did, however, contain a certain degree of health and fitness advice, which rarely, if ever, occurred in diary or style blogs in the sample. Whole-self blogs contained OOTDs like a style blog, and often contained some of the flavor of the “put-together” girl that is so necessary to a style blog.

As smilesnomatter put it, whole-self blogs are for sharing the author's "discoveries, experiences, and knowledge," for her readers' own enlightenment (smilesnomatter, About). In some ways, whole-self blogs could be considered simply a more complex style blog, but this would be downplaying the whole-self blog's ability to encapsulate all aspects of the teen author's life. Ultimately, the whole-self blog is more than merely the sum of its parts. An examination of data from the sample shows that the whole-self blog covers both aspects of a body project—inner and outer. First, let us examine the outer aspect in the way a whole-self blog mentors other girls.

### **Online mentoring**

First and foremost, whole-self blogs are designed to offer advice to other teen girls, presumably on the grounds that the author is a teen girl, and this makes her the best to advise other teen girls. The advice on these blogs is varied and extensive. Smilesnomatter offered some of this advice, including the importance of enough sleep in college (April 22, 2014) and "Ten Tips for Studying for Finals" (December 2, 2013). Abeautifulheart07 instructed girls on "8 ways to wear boots, this fall" (December 3, 2013) as well as "How to stay positive in rough times" (March 29, 2014), and "Traveling essentials and tips" (March 8, 2014). One girl gave a very open, instructive post in the form of an advice column letter, explaining sanitary products and advising girls about feminine hygiene (beautybarbie16, July 17, 2012).

These are merely some of the most interesting examples, but in no way are they the only examples of girls taking a mentoring role with their readers. In these cases, girls are standing in as surrogate mothers, teachers, and counselors, who could be relied on to

give advice on these topics in other circumstances. It seems that girls seek the same information from others of their age on topics relevant to their age, through a forum that is age-appropriate. Or at least, there is a market for such information, as girls are willing to publish it.

The most notable example in the sample was an intricate, carefully constructed, nearly-professional website, providing material in a multitude of categories, including writing, art, music, reviews and giveaways, health, fitness and herbal remedies (appassionatafortheking). The site offers advice on a variety of topics in a friendly, upbeat style characteristic of the other whole-self blogs in the sample. The author was liberal with photos of herself and the blog was well-designed in a visually appealing, inviting format.

Another noteworthy blog included photographs from the girl's family vacations, as well as OOTDs, recipes, and advice (abeautifulheart07). These blogs represented ways that girls aid each other in becoming the best girls they can possibly be, both inside and out. Overall, the consensus on these blogs seems to be that through self-improvements and attendance to the rules of how to be an effective girl, you, too, can be as effective as the girl in the blog, who is not there yet, but on her way.

In this vein, Littlejamiieg even went so far as to stipulate that her hot chocolate recipe must be served in a "trendy mug" in order to make it more effective (littlejamiieg, n.d.). This attention to detail was common, as girls evidently wished to achieve perfection as closely as possible. Even in the most cooperative ways, whole-self blogs approached the late Victorian girls of Brumberg's (1997) diaries in their fervor to improve both a

wide variety of aspects of their life. The only significant difference is the way they did this collaboratively, rather than privately.

### **Inward and upward**

While the outward, collaborative body project is the most prominent in whole-self blogs, the inward body project cannot be ignored, and the genre emphasizes the inner body project in several distinctive and important ways. Like the other forms of blogs in the sample, the whole-self blog is a way for girls to monitor their personal progress in their own character. The most diary-like posts were replete with reflective posts about school (smilesnomatter), character studies of themselves (appassionatafortheeking), and short fiction (pinkstoryofme). These posts placed text at the forefront, emphasizing the diary-like quality of their blog, and documented important life events. These functions of the whole-self blog develop the inner body project side of the two-faced coin that is blogging.

Inner reflection is not the primary focus, however. Pinkstoryofme referred to her blog as “*also* a platform for organizing [her] thoughts” (pinkstoryofme, April 5, 2014, emphasis mine). Her use of the word “also” is interesting, for perhaps she was subconsciously recognizing her blog’s focus on connecting with others, allowing the intrapersonal functions of her blog to take a backseat. At the same time, she is underscoring the integral role of self-reflection in the whole-self blog, making sure it gets a seat at the high table of importance. Thus, while whole-self blogs are for other girls, they are for the author, too. Both the ideas of an inner body project and an outer collaboration are met in the whole-self blog.

As part of this inner body project, a few girls in whole-self blogs posted New Years' resolutions or bucket lists, which clearly stood for inward body projects in their lives. Diary bloggers occasionally did this, as well, so this marks one way that a whole-self blog is similar to a diary blog. Littlejamiieg wrote that her goals, among others, included "just relax," "start journaling," "attempt a vegan diet for at least a week," "run a half-marathon," and "write a cook-book" (littlejamiieg, January 14, 2014). The variety in her list is interesting, as it covers a broad range of the facets of her life. Smilesnomatter's goals included "crochet many hats," and "do more community service," among others (January 14, 2013). In this way, whole-self blogs served as a personal body project for each girl, even as she provided a model for others to do the same.

On top of the usual aspects of self-reflection in the blogging sample, the whole-self blog had one obvious addition that was almost missing in the other types. This is the element of religion. Perhaps a larger sample size would diminish the role of religion in whole-self blogs, but the ones present here revealed a recurrent theme of the importance of religion in these girls' lives. While one diary blog mentioned that she was Jewish (myrelevancy), and another discussed her Christian faith (thesecretsofateenager), most girls seemed reluctant to bring their religious creeds onto the table.

Whole-self blogs, by contrast, were more open about their religious beliefs. Indeed, the very url of [appassionatafortheeking](#) seems to imply that one purpose of the blog is evangelism, and the page's description establishes her Christian beliefs ([appassionatafortheeking](#)). Smilesnomatter once posted "A Student's Prayer for Finals Week" (smilesnomatter, December 10, 2013) on her blog, which took the form of a letter addressed to God and concluding with an Amen. Not every blog in the whole-self section

referenced religion, but a higher percentage did, and those that did were more vocal about it. This speaks to the inner body project of these girls, who, like Brumberg's late Victorians, wished to focus on inner beauty as well as outer.

Smilesnomatter commented on this "inner beauty" by advising her readers on how to obtain it (smilesnomatter, April 20 2013). This is a telling reference to the fact that some girls, at least, still care about maintaining the inner surfaces of their lives, even while they polish the outer ones. While the girls outwardly bent their writing with an eye for helping others, great attention was paid to developing all aspects of a girl's life. Further, these girls seemed eager to make the world a better place through their blogs.

Whole-self blogs are perhaps the best blending of inner improvement and outer accoutrement in the sample. Indeed, in many ways they rival Brumberg's early diaries with the way they more completely aid a teen girl's body project while simultaneously guiding others. If girls in the early 1900s would have made modest clothing at home with their mothers, and turned to reading and charity work to improve their minds, it is not unreasonable to think that girl bloggers would desire similar methods, even if they cannot live out the same experiences in a modern context. They can, however, tick off their online bucket lists and encourage others to develop themselves in healthy and constructive ways.

These quintessential teen blogs, then, provide a model for the teenage body project that is new and improved. This chapter has shown how the final type of blog in the sample is an accurate representation of each of the others, blending them together in a way that is effective, intriguing, and on the whole, positive. Out of all the types, these

were the most meaningful and effective in helping a girl to perform her own body project and in aiding the body projects of others. The concluding chapter will summarize the inferences gleaned from the blogs in the sample, as well as take a position on how these findings fit in with Brumberg's work and the wider context of American culture.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The teenage girl blog is an online text full of possibilities. While most of us have never been an American teen girl, some of us have been American, or a girl, or a teen. It could be even argued that each and every human being is constantly wrapped in a body project of their own, in one aspect or another. This paper has examined 40 blogs written by American teen girls, in an attempt to understand how the blog is used as a body project today. There were four types, two of which spoke mainly to the girls' outer beauty and two of which maintained their inner character. Appropriately, each type did this in both collaborative and reflective ways.

Drawing concrete conclusions about American culture as a whole is not possible from such a small sample, but several major inferences can be made, most of which deal with how blogging affects the teen girl's health and happiness in a changing world. Blogs, arguably, eclipse the traditional diary in an updated, more effective way to develop the teen girl and her psyche. In most cases, I retreat to the wings and allow the words of the teen girls themselves to take center stage in speaking to what is important and relevant to American teen girls today.

Bloggers have clear feelings about how blogging can effectively solve and prevent problems for teen girls. I defer to the blogger at [sorrynotsos](#) who expresses the blogging body project in these terms:

Lets [sic] be real about this whole blog thing...My existence here on earth could very well be nothing to [sic] important...But we all are invisible to someone if you think about it, sometimes the ones you wished noticed you as you passed in the hallway or some of the ones who tried to erase every last, living, breathing, moment in your existence here. Its [sic] the side you take on how you embrace being invisible. (February 17, 2014)

This idea of being "invisible," according to her, seems to be a common problem for teen girls. Blogging allows them an un-regulated, un-censored outlet for whatever they wish to say, and allows them to be very much visible to other teens. For some girls, blogging can make them highly visible, even to others outside the sphere of teen blogging.

Preventing invisibility, through providing voices to the voiceless, could also be a preemptive measure for many difficulties in life. The blogger at zebraunicornasiss may have said it best when she apologized, "Sorry for those who are sick of my 'learn a lesson' posts, but this has been bugging me all day, and I need to get it down...where somebody will see this, and hopefully prevent it from happening to somebody else" (Feb 14, 2012). Studying girls' blogging habits may actually help us prevent harm from happening to someone else; it may help us learn lessons; or it may only uncover more questions than it solves, but ultimately blogs are excellent tools to discover how teen girls enact their personal body projects today. As zebraunicornasiss implies, reading and understanding teen girl blogs gives outside readers an inside view into their thoughts and feelings, and may allow others an avenue to aid them when problems arise. These readers may simply be other girls, but could potentially be parents, teachers, and friends. No matter who reads them, ultimately, as another girl elegantly expressed it, "this space is an

extension of myself” (reflectionsofelizabeth, About). Through understanding a blog, we may, in part, understand the self.

Though some blogs certainly demonstrate the risks of blogging (such as pro-ana blogs or privacy issues with sharing one’s self online), over all the practice is a positive one. As earthtocase wrote, "the concept of blogging deserves an award or at least a round of applause" (earthtocase, January 2, 2014). She wrote this in reference to the way her blog had improved her writing skills, which is certainly an important aspect of blogging, but it goes much deeper than that. Blogging serves a number of essential functions, through collaboration and self-reflection with feedback, which were not available before the internet was invented.

Perhaps the blogger who best encapsulated both the interpersonal and intrapersonal experience of the blog was raucous-smiling, who eloquently wrote:

“The Internet builds people up, makes them their own little celebrity. This blog in particular allows me to become self-indulgent, selfish. So is this goodbye? I’ll probably crawl back here when things get too rough and I need a little ego boost. But like two good friends, there comes a time when we must part in order to reunite with renewed appreciation of one another. I’m looking at two or three months[?] vacation from here, a reappearance around the first week of June. During that time, I’ll see the world, open my mind to new things, make myself a better person. And when I return, we’ll do a slow-mo[tion] run-and-hug scene, and you’ll say with teary eyes, "My, my, you've grown!" (raucous-smiling, March 24, 2014)

Contrary to her intentions, she was unable to leave. She returned almost immediately (raucous-smiling, March 25, 2014), to a blogosphere that did, indeed, welcome her with open arms. This dependence on her blog speaks to the integral role that a blog can play in some girls' lives. Whenever life as a teenage girl gets tough, the internet will be there, as a therapeutic, interactive body project.

The implications for this century and beyond are difficult to predict, especially as the blog recedes and social media platforms advance. Even more illuminating would be a study about micro-blogging and social media in terms of Brumberg's (1997) work, could an efficient measure for the qualitative data be found. In the meantime, however, the new body project of these 40 teen girls may serve as a way to understand the female teen psyche a little better.

In the early 1900s, American girls were taught to deemphasize outer beauty in favor of the inner. Over time, due to changes in societal values, girls became less focused on inner beauty in favor of the outer. Brumberg (1997) deplored the decline of organizations for teen girls in America, as well as their turning away from the support of their mothers and older women in their communities, saying that these institutions functioned as a safety net in times of strife. She seemed disappointed in the different ways girls were evolving from their belief in their inner selves and focusing only on their outer selves. While the negative consequences are certainly substantial, it is impossible to turn back the clock, which Brumberg acknowledged in her conclusion. As Brumberg believed, it is necessary to find a balance between the old and the new in advocating teen girls in America today.

Perhaps one way that girls are adapting in this brave new world without safety nets is through collaboration with other girls online. My sample showed almost a graded scale from the superficial to the interior, proving that girls are still thinking about all aspects of their lives. Girls may have been led to write only the most positive aspects about themselves online, but this is of small significance if portraying their best selves leads to the inspiration and aid of others.

Brumberg (1997), in her conclusion, called for girl advocacy, positing that “it is time for us to talk—squarely and fairly—about the ways in which American girlhood has changed and what girls must have to ensure a safe and creative future” (p. 214). Perhaps teen girl blogs are making the same plea. While it may be time for the nebulous group called “us” to merely talk, girls are using action instead of words. This action is working to create the “safe and creative future” for themselves, and one way they are doing this is through their blogs. This practice shows the resourcefulness and resilience of American teen girls, who will doubtless continue to adapt long into the future.

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