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**Reading Fashion Blogs: An interpretative study about young women engaged in blog reading consumption activity**

**Master Thesis**

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<b>Keywords:</b>	Consumer meanings, fashion-blogs, blog reading, identity, status
<b>Thesis purpose:</b>	The aim of the study is to explore the consumer perspective of blog reading; seeking for an extended and more complete understanding of the individual meanings and the role young female blog readers attribute the blog reading activity. We want to gain an initial understanding of blog reading as a consumption activity per se
<b>Methodology:</b>	We have taken a social constructionist ontological position, suitable to form an understanding of consumer perceptions. We use an inductive approach, letting the data speak for itself and have chosen an interpretivist view drawing on hermeneutic-phenomenology, interacting with informants who have lived the experience being studied
<b>Theoretical perspective:</b>	Social media, blogs and other literature covering the interaction between young consumers and internet from mainly a socio-cultural perspective , identity-creation theory, status theory, consumption theory
<b>Empirical data:</b>	Empirical data gathered through a triangulation method; diary posts, followed by observation and a semi-structured interview
<b>Conclusion:</b>	We have gained initial understanding of the meanings and roles young females attribute the blog reading; reaching the conclusion that the underlying role of the activity is to help young readers to explore and create their identity by relating to others using the various identities displayed on blogs, and by so contributed to consumer research, with a new perspective on blog reading as a consumption activity per se

# Index

1. INTRODUCTION .....	3
1. 2 BACKGROUND .....	4
1. 2. 1 The Blog Phenomena.....	4
1.2. 2 Previous research .....	6
1. 2. 3 Young consumers .....	10
1.3 Purpose.....	11
2. METHOD .....	12
2. 1 Overarching research perspective .....	12
2. 2 Research strategy based on the data required to fulfill our purpose.....	13
2. 3 Research method .....	14
2. 4 Informant selection criteria.....	16
2. 5 Methods for data collection .....	17
2. 6 Collection of data .....	23
2. 7 Analysis method .....	27
2. 8 Methodological reflections and Trustworthiness .....	29
2. 9 Research ethics.....	31
3. ANALYSIS .....	33
3. 1 The informants' profiles .....	33
3.2 The emerging themes.....	38
3. 2. 1 Addictive vs. Relaxing, entertainments and joy, satisfaction.....	38
3. 2. 2 The shining blogger vs. The grey reader .....	43
3. 3. 3 Being unique vs. The urge to fit in.....	46
3. 3. 4 Reality vs. Dream world.....	51
4. DISCUSSION .....	57
5. CONCLUSION .....	60
6. FURTHER RESEARCH .....	62
REFERENCES .....	63
APPENDICES.....	71
1. Diary Template .....	71
2. Interview topics .....	71

# 1. INTRODUCTION

It all started with a green dress... the feeling of wanting something so bad because you happen to see it on someone else. It suddenly becomes an obsession, and all you can see is green in all the stores. This someone else is not your neighbor any more, or someone you meet walking the dog, or sit beside at a restaurant. It is not either one of your friends, or cousins, or anyone you have actually met but “she” has it, she looks great in it, and I have to have it...or not? And who is “She”? Well, call her Kenza, Angelica, Sofie, Elin, Tyra, Caroline, just to mention a few of the possible names that can be recalled by all young women in the ages of 15 to at least 35! These are some of the most read fashion bloggers in the Swedish blogosphere and they are today considered influential businesswomen working as fashion editors, designers, or making a living from their own blogs. But where does this success come from? How can some of these blogs have up to 1,000,000 visits a week? And how come something worn by or posted in one of these blogs was impossible to find in stores 5 minutes after the post?

These are just some of the questions in our minds when we chose a subject to write about for our master thesis. A common interest in fashion, and shopping and fascination for the world of blogs, as well as sharing some of the blogs we follow, allowed us to soon point out our subject of study. The challenge was then to narrow our focus and find a research area that would allow us to explore this phenomenon much deeper.

Much media attention has been given to the power bloggers have in today’s society. Debate TV programs have invited some of these bloggers to answer to accusations about influencing young girls’ eating disorders and other habits despised by society. The fact that these bloggers have grown so much, continuously increasing in popularity, has drawn the attention away from the fact that they all started blogging as a hobby, as many other young girls who just had something to say or show. However, there are many who actually see the benefits in this trend and have used the increased popularity of the fashion bloggers to their advantage. Several examples of this include fashion retailer H&M’s launching of a whole collection in collaboration with Elin Kling’s (model / fashion editor /blogger)as well as Nelly.com’ (on-line fashion retailer) collaboration with Angelika Blick ( one of Sweden’s most followed bloggers). These are just some examples of how the fashion industry seems to be “hooked” on blogs. Product placing, sponsoring, gift giving, and free samples and clothes sent to the bloggers with the hopes that these will increase sales, using blogs as a strong marketing tools is clearly one of the trends in the market today.

The belief that blogs have the power to influence commerce and consumption was certainly something that woke our curiosity. Is this that all there is to it? Are we really that easy to understand? Does this behavior correspond to a generation we don’t know much about? Isn’t there much more behind the blogs’ success than just making our list of desires larger and stronger? And finally do blogs really result in the increased consumption of these young women reading them.

We are aware that we no longer belong to the generation that is largely influenced by blogs. Due to the fact that we are both in our 30's our view on blogs could differ from the view younger. But still we believed that the thought that blogs influence and increase the consumption of these young women was not enough for us. Is there all it is to it? Are blogs the mere replacement of the now obsolete advertising campaigns? We wanted to believe there was more to it. A phenomena that has become so recognized and both practiced and followed by millions of people around the world had to have more to it. What are the forces behind the consumers that have made the blog writers become the new influential powers in fashion? What is that makes these young girls so eager to follow several blogs at a time, discuss them, dress like them, act like them, to the extent that we could find 100's Kenzas walking around our city on a sunny afternoon. These were the many observations, thoughts and questions running through our minds that woke the interest to research in the specific area of fashion blogs.

## **1. 2 Background**

In the following chapter blog reading and the influence over its readers' consumption is of concern.

The chapter begins with a description of the phenomena of blogs in general and fashion blogs in particular. Further, this chapter reviews previous research published in the field and suggests where further research should be added. We will suggest and argue for that further research within this field should benefit from widening the consumption concept to embody socio-cultural, symbolic and experiential aspects of consumption. Throughout the chapter we will put forward arguments for acknowledging blog reading as a versatile activity that is performed in multiple ways and embody various kinds of consumer meanings.

Widening the consumption concept would lead to less blunt measuring instruments which would help getting a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena where the individual consumer's world-view and sense-making as well as the ability to discover links between previous research findings are not compromised.

### **1. 2. 1 The Blog Phenomena**

Internet has rapidly become an integrated part of our mundane life, according to Findahl (2011), 86% of the Swedish population use Internet and 69% use internet daily. However in the age span 16-24 years old, the everyday use of Internet is as high as 91% (Findahl, 2011). Along with the rapid growth of Internet usage the social media, such as Facebook and blogs, has also spread immensely (Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels, 2009). 79% of Swedish girls within the age span 16-24 read blogs and 36% read daily and 30% write their own blog (Findahl, 2011). According to Findahl (2011), "blogging" is finding its way down through the ages and 9 out of 10 girls between 12 to 15 years old now read blogs. The life of today's young adults has undeniably become integrated with social media and many young girls today live their lives partly through their own and others' blogs.

Blogs in its current format first appeared in 1999 and has since become an everyday phenomenon in today's society (Frankel, 2005).

The word blog derives from the English word weblog which according to Walker in Bhatt (2005: 28): "..., is a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first. "

In the beginning, most blogs derived from personal homepages and mostly took the form of a personal diary (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright, 2004; Ojala, 2005). Blogs have developed from existing as only short posts and links to become more elaborated and longer, resembling personal online journals, sometimes within a niche topic, and often incorporating both pictures and video (Ojala, 2005; Nationalencyklopedin, 2012).

Due to technological advancement and the increased range of web services, such as blog platforms like Blogger and Wordpress, it has become easy to create and maintain a blog even without knowledge in programming. Blogs can be updated as long as an internet connection exists; from either a smartphone or a laptop. (Nationalencyklopedin, 2012)

Reading and writing blogs can now be done whenever desired; "on the move", while waiting for the bus, or when hitting the stores.

The blog writer decides the content and when and where to post it (Bhatt, 2005), hence the blogs are written from a subjective view which normally mirrors the blog writer's thoughts, opinions and values (Greczanik, 2007). According to Palfrey and Gasser (2008) the blogs of today still resemble, and in many times, even replace/substitute the traditional diary since they reveal personal information, which is the main characteristic of the diary.

The blog can be updated several times a day, weekly, or whenever the blog writer finds time (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright, 2004). The average blog holds personal views and observations on recent news and events and contains links to related articles and websites as well as photos and video clips. The readers hold the possibility to comment on all the posts made. (Nationalencyklopedin, 2012)

To classify a blog a blog is normally done by the "self tagging" system. The blog holders themselves tag their blogs with different labels according to content such as "lifestyle", "fashion", "shopping" etc. (Dodes, 2006) However, no external control is done to control that the blog content really conforms with the label. Many blogs are "crossovers", covering more than one subject or using multiple labels, hence, for the purpose of this study we do not put any restrictions on what specific blogs our informants shall read; as long as our informants consider the blogs they read as fashion blogs and follow them for the fashion content in them.

The blogs are becoming more and more acknowledged and due to its many users it is now nothing less than a societal phenomenon (Frankel, 2005). The blog media has already been recognized and explored by many large companies such as H&M and Gap among others, as well as established marketing and PR firms. Another area where blogs particularly have gained reputation and power is within the fashion world. With growing audiences, part of the fashion establishment is convinced that bloggers do hold an influential power over their followers; a power strong enough to alter sales and emotions about brands, trends and specific garments. Fashion bloggers all over the world now enjoy first row invitations to the international fashion weeks' top shows and are being referenced as sources of inspiration for well-known fashion designers such as Proenza Schouler and Marc Jacobs. (Dodes, 2006)

A sign of this recognition for blogs was noted by Swedish fashion magazine *Bon*, which 2006 nominated fashion bloggers collectively as the most influential “media person” within the fashion category, stating that fashion bloggers had now become more influential than the traditional fashion magazines for advising consumers on what to spend their money on (Svärdkrona, 2007). Evidently, the blogs have gained ground, not only within the lives of young girls but made its mark on a societal level as well.

## 1.2. 2 Previous research

The last decade an increased interest in social media, both as research topic and consumer activity have been seen. However blogging and blog reader have only been in research focus for approximately the last five years. As a consumer activity blog reading and writing has accelerated during the last ten years (Findahl, 2011). As a research topic blogs and blogging has focused on such diverse issues such as lifestyle discourses communicated by fashion blogs (Liakos & Collinder, 2011; Levin, Shademanpour & Sijaric, 2009), blogs as a tool for consumer decision making (Andersson, Blomkvist & Holmberg, 2007), blogs as a marketing channel and other marketing purposes (Jóhannesdóttir & Landin, 2009; Barsk & Lindberg, 2009; Thomas Jane Boyd, Peters Cara Okleshen and Tolson Holly, 2007; Frankel, 2005; Trammel & Keshelashivil, 2005; Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009), blogs effects on the self-esteem and identity building of young women (Bengtsson & Damm, 2011; Andersson, 2007), gender aspects on blog reading (Lu & Lee, 2010; Huffaker & Calvert, 2006), blog credibility and trustworthiness (Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Banning, & Trammell, 2006; Ahlstedt & Ljung, 2007; Miura & Yamashita, 2007; Choeng & Morrison, 2008; Ojala, 2005), the blogs role in e-tailing (Park, & Sullivan, 2009; Rowley, 2009; McCormick & Livett, 2012) and blogs as a source for fashion information and inspiration (Johnson & Kaye, 2004).

As seen, blogging and blog reading have already received attention in preceding studies on consumer behavior and retailing. But even if blogging and blog-reading are acknowledged as a cultural phenomenon in which consumers increasingly invest their time, previous research in the field has not attempted to reach a more extensive understanding of the phenomenon per se.

Previous research could be categorized by its applied perspective. We have found three types of perspective scales applied in prior studies; macro vs. micro perspective; management perspective vs. customer perspective; and blog writer vs. blog reader perspective.

Research applying a larger perspective on blogs and the blog-readers have explored lifestyle discourses expressed in fashion blogs (Liakos & Collinder, 2011; Levin, Shademanpour & Sijaric, 2009), or blogs as a tool for fashion forecasting (Rickman & Cosenza, 2007) but mainly are concerned with marketing through blogs (Jóhannesdóttir & Landin, 2009; Barsk & Lindberg, 2009; Frankel, 2005; Thomas Jane Boyd, Peters Cara Okleshen and Tolson Holly, 2007; Park, & Sullivan, 2009; Rowley, 2009; McCormick & Livett, 2012; Trammel och Keshelashivil, 2005; Palmer och Koenig-Lewis, 2009). These studies all hold a more general perspective on the blog readers and are not concerned with the individual consumer's view. We argue that this static view on the blog reading activity and its practitioners is insufficient since the fact that blog reading can be done in a variety of ways and settings and that the blog readers relate to the activity in different individual ways.

All individuals hold different world-views and therefore perceive their situation differently and make their own interpretations and sense-making out of it (Bäckström, 2006). Since blog reading is a multifaceted activity, performed in diverse ways and embodies a wide range of consumer meanings the individual aspects must be taken into consideration. Hence we argue that an individual-based consumer perspective is needed as a complement to the already explored general perspective.

The most commonly held perspective in previous research is the management's perspective. Blogs are explored as marketing channels and in other marketing purposes (Jóhannesdóttir & Landin, 2009; Barsk & Lindberg, 2009; Thomas Jane Boyd, Peters Cara Okleshen and Tolson Holly, 2007; Frankel, 2005) or as tools for enhancing e-commerce (Park, & Sullivan, 2009; Rowley, 2009; McCormick & Livett, 2012). Another explored area of where the blog can be used is the fashion industry; as a tool for forecasting trends (Rickman & Cosenza, 2007; Johnson & Kaye, 2004), or by exploring how to take advantage of the blogs' influence over its readers and its readers faith in the bloggers' opinions about certain products through "pitching", product placement or brand ambassadors etc. (Ahlstedt & Ljung, 2007; Kristiansson, Lundgren & Petersson, 2009; Andersson, 2010; Choeng & Morrison, 2008; Trammel & Keshelashivil, 2005; Palmer och Koenig-Lewis, 2009) and what attributes that makes blogs possess this power over its readers (Boija & Wilbertsson, 2011).

All these studies hold the management perspective and thereby focus on how blogs can be exploited in different purposes and how to take advantage of their influence and power over its readers, by bloggers, companies and marketing and PR firms. We argue that these studies describe the visible *effects* and *symptoms* of the blog and blog writer's influence, what can be done with it rather than how that influence is expressed or experienced by the blog consumers. We aim for another type of insights, namely a broader, meaning oriented understanding about the consumers and believe that applying a consumer perspective is a way to reach those insights.

The third type of perspective that we have detected is connected with the above perspectives; whether the research covers only the reader's perspective or include the blog writer's (Liakos & Collinder, 2011; Bengtsson & Damm, 2011) or other's perspectives (Berry, 2011; Jóhannesdóttir & Landin, 2009; Ahlstedt & Ljung, 2007; ) on the blog reading activity. We understand the aim of using several perspectives; to gain a more "objective" understanding of the phenomenon. However since the aim of these studies is to explore how and why the *readers* are affected by blogs we believe it is wisely to keep to the reader's perspective on the phenomenon. If taking in other's understanding and perspectives on the blog reading activity such as blog writers and marketers, the findings will be clouded by these. The understanding of the phenomenon will not be entirely grounded in the reader's own understanding and sense-making of the phenomenon. We do not judge the need for bringing in different perspectives on one single phenomenon, that could enrich the study and the researcher's understanding, however if setting out to explore and seek a deeper understanding of the blog reader's perspective the result from taken in additional perspectives will be misleading.

We argue that previous research, gone through above, misses out on important aspects while not looking on the blog reading activity through the eyes of the individuals performing it. Just searching within ourselves we realize that everyone has its own procedures when reading blogs in terms of motivation, usage and situation. We therefore hold the intuitive idea that since the situation and motivation for usage differ the meanings and roles attributed would also vary from reader to reader.

We believe that additional research with a clear consumer perspective considering the many individual ways consumers may relate to the blog reading activity and the various ways and settings to engage in the blog reading activity will help to illumine the diverse forms of consumption behavior and consumer meanings the activity of blog-reading may embody. By applying a consumer perspective the inherent dynamics and individual variations in this activity may be acknowledged and taken into account.

Another way of classifying previous studies in the field is through what role the researchers give the blogs and how consumption as concept is perceived. Blogs and blog reading have mainly been viewed as stimuli to a researched response. Much of previous research about blogs write and discuss their scope in terms of decision-making process and purchase behavior. Concepts that are strongly connected to a traditional view on consumption which builds on the response-black box-stimuli model, (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) where the areas of judgment and choice directly influence the purchasing decisions (Simonson et al. 2001) and mainly focus on the tangible benefits and utilitarian functions of the acquired goods (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

This view on consumption can be expressed by studies about how consumers use blogs as a tool in their *consumption decision making process* (Andersson, Blomkvist & Holmberg, 2007) or what blog attributes that *trigger purchase* (Boija, Wilbertsson, 2011).

Other studies have a purpose, which is in line with the traditional view on consumption such as analyzing the influence blogs and other online presentation of fashion garments influence on the consumers' behavior and decision-making process, but then find evidence for other, cultural, aspects of consumption such as hedonic effects (McGormick & Livett, 2012). Others aspire to tell something more about the role of consumption in the blog readers' lives but do not entirely succeed in that aspiration and fall back on viewing blog reading as an means to an end and consumption as buying behavior and only mention cultural and expressional aspects such as status or identification superficially, without connecting to the empirical material nor the theories applied to explain the collected data (Kristiansson, Lundgren & Petersson, 2009; Ghazaleh, 2010; Ahlstedt & Ljung, 2007). It is also evident that consumption in the end was primarily used as a synonym for buying, clearly observed when reading the conclusions; where the researcher finds that blog readers feel affected by the blogs and many times buy what was recommended (Ghazaleh, 2010). Or that as long as the blog writer is considered trustworthy the reader will buy or change attitude towards a certain recommended product, even if the lifestyle discourse, here expressed, as ideal, are merely mentioned in the passing (Kristiansson, Lundgren & Petersson, 2009). Or when aiming to find out if fashion bloggers do hold a power over their readers' consumption, engage in an experiment together with an online clothing store to see how the *sales* are altered by product mentioning's on different fashion blogs (Ahlstedt & Ljung, 2007), we also see how consumption in the end meant purchase.

These studies all show evidence on how blogs previously have been mainly studied; as a means to the end (Holt, 1995), where consumption is treated as a response to blog reading. That is, the visible effects and symptoms of blog reading and how these can be used by external parties such as companies. This per se, indicates a perception of consumption based on the stimuli-black box-response model initially argued to belong to a traditional view on consumption based on rational judgment with a focus on the utilitarian functions of the purchase (Hoolbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

However, we are interested in blogs as an end in itself. As argued above, we are seeking a more meaning oriented understanding of the blog reading activity as a consumption phenomenon in itself. According Holt (1995), consuming consists of both actions in which the consumers are directly engaged in consumption objects as well as in interaction with others wherein the consumption objects functions as central resources. Since previous research has focused on blog reading as the means to consumption we argue that we fulfill a need when exploring this activity as an end in itself, applying a consumer perspective.

The traditional view on consumption is in the seek for consumer meanings a blunt and excluding measure device and using it as a lens when researching this area will jeopardize a deeper and more extensive understanding of the complexity of consumption (Bäckström, 2006; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). This perspective does not capture the cultural aspects of consumption nor the meanings and sense-making of the consumer engaged in a consumption activity (Bäckström, 2006), in which we are interested in.

In order to more extensively understand the blog reading activity, a wider cultural approach to consumption is required, incorporating cultural, hedonic, symbolic and experiential aspects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

To study blog reading as a consumption activity and by so, not exclude the possibility that it is an activity that can be consumed by different consumers in various ways and settings, would allow us to see blog reading as a complex and multifaceted activity. This way of studying other consumption activities has successfully been applied of others, e.g. in discover new insights of recreational shopping (Thompson et al., 1994; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Holt, 1995, 1997, 1998; Thompson, 1997, in Bäckström, 2006).

Blog reading has not yet been studied as a consumption activity as such, thus thorough descriptions of the meanings the consumers ascribe to the blog reading activity and how the activity is performed have rarely been touched upon in previous research. We argue that if we do not understand the meanings that underlie the consumers' practice of blog reading; it may be difficult to comprehend the complexity in this type of consumption activity e.g. the role and meaning of this consumption practice in the lives of the practitioners.

Previous research have covered areas such as blog reading as a means to consumption, its role in decision making and blogs as successful marketing tools, with this research we focus on the role and meanings blog reading possesses in the lives of its practitioners. In order to better understand the role blog reading possesses in the everyday lives of the consumers and in which ways they experience it, the meanings attributed to the blog reading activity by the consumers must be given more attention. Consumers use symbols, experiences and meanings to understand the world (Bäckström, 2006). Meanings of any consumption activity are argued to be unstable and reliant on the consumers' constructed interpretations whilst performing a specific activity (McCracken, 1986; Thompson et al., 1994; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Holt, 1997; Thompson and Haytko, 1997 in Bäckström, 2006). Hence any human phenomenon should be studied whilst it is subjectively experienced (Mick & Buhl, 1992), since the meanings are argued to stem/derive from the interaction between the individual, the objects and the context (Bäckström, 2006). Therefore we will seek to extend the understanding and meaning that blog readers ascribe the blog reading activity. This will be done by exploring the individual ways and contexts where our informants perform the blog reading activity, a focus we argue are not fully explored in previous research.

### 1. 2. 3 Young consumers

Some previous research has also chosen to study blogs focusing mainly on the different aspects that affect different age segments of female consumers. Some have focused on the younger female segment and some, like us, have chosen to study the segment of young adult females. The reason for this is society's broad acknowledgement of the existing fashion interest found in women of all ages; starting at a very early stage of development and following them throughout all stages of in their identity building process. Fashion blogs have become a powerful and exceptional tool to express this interest whether done through the creation of blogs or by following them, specially targeted to women in the ages 13-24. The great extent of fashion blogs existing today and the availability of these in an age where social media steers the lives of many young has resulted in statistics showing overwhelming figures of the consumption of blogs in this segment of young women.

As mentioned above, the majority of studies on the subject have focused on the younger consumer segments and mainly girls. Blogs are a social media and according to Park et al. (2010) social media affects and influences its recipients. Furthermore, according to Findahls (2011) report on Swedish Internet consumption, different age and gender groups engage in different activities online. Young girls under 24 are the most active bloggers and blog readers (Rickman & Cosenza, 2007; Findahl, 2011). As well as being the largest group of social media users, Brannon (2005) states that young women under 24 years old, are also the most interested in fashion and the ones involved in setting and spreading new trends.

This is supported by other researchers like Browne and Kaldenberg (1997), Auty and Elliott (1998), and Goldsmith et al. (1996), who have pointed out that women are more fashion innovative as a result of higher involvement. This is seen practically in the amount of fashion magazines and clothes retailers targeted specifically to women (O'Cass 2004). O'Cass (2004) concludes from this that fashion has a more feminine image and has therefore a more central position in women's lives, than in men's. According to Liu and Lee (2010) female blog readers are more interested in the content of blogs while male readers are more interested in system quality and social exchange. Female readers have more of an emotional interest in what they read than men (Liu and Lee, 2010). Consequently, different research has proven that the female gender is more impressionable and easier affected, as well as more interested in "fitting in" socially than the male gender. Young women influence each other mostly in their choice of trends and apparel (Sirgy, 1982). Blog readers usually identify themselves and share the same interests with the blog writers they follow which makes the blogs credible and reliable (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009). Since both bloggers and their readers are mainly young women with the same interests in fashion it is reasonable to believe that they influence each other and that the bloggers are viewed as reliable and trustworthy by the readers, hence a source for inspiration.

O'Cass (2000) together with Auty and Elliott (1998), Fairhurst et al. (1989) further add that age is an important dimension in fashion and that it appears that younger consumers give more importance to their appearance than older ones, implying that younger people will be more involved in fashion. Pacentini and Mailer highlight the importance of considering young consumers' values and how they influence behavior. They believe that clothing can be seen as a social tool in their lives (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004). This further explains the high involvement of young consumers in fashion on social media channels.

Since young girls under the age of 24 are not only the most active blog writers and readers but also the most interested in fashion information and said to be easily affectable to each other's opinions, this group seems optimal for investigating how fashion blogs affect/influence their readers.

For the purpose of our research we have chosen to narrow our respondents to the ages 18-24 years. Some of the studies we found have focused on the even younger group of consumers. Nedanovska (2010) studied the relationship of blogs and identity building in young women 13-16. Bengtsson and Damm (2011) studied self-esteem focusing on bloggers and blog readers in the ages of 16-18. Boija, Tove och Wilbertsson, (2011) although studying a larger segment under the age of 25 chose to include ages 15-18 as well, all in all covering the ages of 15-25, a segment which we believe is too broad to share the same set of values, economy or situation in life.

Some of the main reasons for our exclusion of the younger ages 13-17 include access issues as well as ethical. We are aware that the younger group of consumers could have provided with a clearer pattern of behavior probably due to the young stages in identity seeking process. However due to our aim to find different nuances and meanings in these young women's behavior, it was important for us that our informants were comfortable and had the ability to express their thoughts more than just their actions, which could have been difficult for the younger women. Due to the need of parental permission to participate in a study of this nature, under the age of 18, we chose to avoid any possible misunderstandings or time consuming processes that could have resulted from this.

All the strong arguments put forward by Findahl, Sirgy, O'Cass, among others, as well as the fact that these young consumers do not know a world without Internet and Internet access devices, they belong to the largest group of social media consumers, and, unlike those between 13-17, have higher independent economic means from jobs or student loans for example, have led our choice to study the demographic group of women between 18-24 years of age.

### **1.3 Purpose**

The aim of the study is to explore the consumer perspective of blog reading; seeking for an extended and more complete understanding of the individual meanings and the role young female blog readers attribute the blog reading activity. We want to gain an initial understanding of blog reading as a consumption activity per se, and add to previous research that have mainly viewed blog reading as a stimulus to consumption; blog reading as a means to other ends; that is, the visible effects and symptoms of reading blogs and how that can be exploited by third parties such as companies and marketing firms among others.

Young women are argued to be easily affected by blogs and fashion information and are also one of the demographic groups that spend most time reading blogs. Therefore we found the topic and purpose of this study to be highly relevant.

The overall research question is: what role and what meanings do female blog readers in the age 20 to 24 attribute to the blog reading activity.

## 2. METHOD

In this chapter we will explain how we performed our research. The chapter starts with an explanation and arguments for how we as researchers and humans view the world, knowledge and theory. We believe it is a crucial starting point since our view will affect the methodological choices we have made throughout the entire study. We will continue with a discussion about the data needed and the methods we have chosen for collecting that data as well as account for how it was actually collected. The chapter ends with a discussion about research ethics, methodological reflections as well as providing arguments for the research's trustworthiness.

### 2.1 Overarching research perspective

As researchers, we consider reality to be subjective social constructs since we believe that individuals view, understand and perceive his or her surrounding world in different ways. Hence no objective "true" reality exists since every individual has its own meaning of it. Reality can rather be explained as the social construct resulting from diverse individual and group viewpoints, created through interactions in a contextual manner (Moisander *et al.* 2009)

This study is concerned with irradiating the subjective individual views and perceptions of our informants. These perceptions together will provide us with insights and a better understanding of the consumers' meanings of the social phenomenon that is blogs and blog reading. It is a prerequisite for reaching our research aim and to explore the consumer perspective of the blog phenomena seen from our informants' world-view.

Therefore we undertake a social constructionist ontological posture which according to Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2008) is specifically suitable to form an understanding of consumer perceptions. Within social constructionism the expression of the personal, and therefore subjective, meaning are regarded as self-interpretations of common/all-embracing cultural standpoints, which are adapted and adjusted to the unique life context of the individual (Thompson *et al.* 1994). In other words, each individual categorizes and classifies reality with the intention of making sense of their own worlds and to gain, maintain and convey knowledge to others in social situations (Moisander *et al.* 2009).

Therefore, in this study we will place the weight on language and the conversations between individuals as means for creating their own interpretations of reality, their meanings (Thompson *et al.* 1994). These subjective meanings will help us in getting richer descriptions hence we will recognize these as knowledge (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Goulding, 2005). However, since the reality is subjective and multiple according to social constructionism and according to our perspective, the findings from this research can only be seen as one out of many co-existing truths.

## 2. 2 Research strategy based on the data required to fulfill our purpose

Easterby-Smith et al (2008) state that before determining the specific methods for data gathering the research aims must be settled and formulated. Our aim is to contribute to the understanding of what meanings the individual consumers ascribe to the blog reading activity, applying a consumer perspective. We seek to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the blog reading phenomena by exploring the meanings our informants ascribe to the blog reading activity. Consumer meanings are argued to be influenced by the consumers' individual history and world-view. These meanings come into being through interaction between the individual, the objects and the specific context. The consequence of this reasoning is that human phenomena, such as blog reading, should be studied while they are being subjectively experienced. (Mick & Buhl, 1992)

This implies using qualitative techniques such as observation or diary, to capture the consumer meanings as they are experienced, that is, while our informants are engaged in the unique settings of the phenomena of blog reading. Furthermore we want to understand this phenomena as our informants understand and make sense of it, we therefore need data that allows the informants to convey their own individual and subjective views captured in the specific context we are researching. This type of data can by difficulty be collected with quantitative methods such as experiments, data modeling or surveys but rather through in-depth interviews or observation belonging to qualitative research (Sherry, 1991 in Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Methods where words, language and conversations are emphasized thus becoming the preferred and chosen form of data (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The qualitative research has been accused of being difficult to replicate and challenging to generalize due to its subjectivity (Bryman & Bell, 2007). However, the last twenty years, leading scientific journals have increasingly published papers based on qualitative research which witness about a changed and more positive attitude where qualitative methods no longer are regarded as being too speculative (Goulding, 2005), subjective or vague.

Our research aims to explore the sociocultural and symbolic aspects of consumption where the need for rich contextual data, that captures the view and opinions of the informants, is crucial to fulfill our research purpose thus qualitative methods for data collection are required. Hence, despite the critique sometimes raised against qualitative research we argue that the data we need, only can be obtained through qualitative methods.

After formulating a broad research question we discussed our view on theory, theory generation and how to relate to it in our research. Since we further seek to explore the cultural aspects of consumption of a social phenomenon using a perspective, the consumer perspective, which has not been much used before, we believe that the inductive approach where the data should be let to speak for itself and where the theory will be built upon the themes appearing within our primary data, and rather be created than tested, is the most suitable way to deal with the subject (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2008, Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Since we want to capture the meaning of the phenomena from our informants' perspective we do not want to impose ready-made categories or theories but rather try to see what emerges from the data collected from our informants. We believe that an inductive approach will aid us in revealing new dimensions of the subject and help us secure vivid and comprehensive accounts based on the informants' personal experience.

However, even if choosing an inductive approach, some preconceptions and pre-knowledge about the general subject inevitably exist. Easterby-Smith *et al.*, (2008) explain that research is often conducted within the researcher's area of interest and one normally does not become interested in something without having some level of pre-knowledge within that subject. It is therefore advisable, even when conducting inductive research, to become familiar with previous research within the broader field of research before generating own theory (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008). As discussed in the introduction chapter, we have a personal interest in the subject spurred from personal experience of the blogs' influence over taste and purchase decisions as well as a wider understanding of consumption practices gained from our master studies within marketing. These pre-conceptions made us problematize and wonder about our own experiences, which have become this study's point of departure. Since blogs and blogging have recently become highlighted within both press and magazines, we took for granted that it had been emphasized within research as well. Since we want to contribute to research and not accidentally repeat existing studies, we found it wise to make ourselves familiar with previous research within the general area, to search for discrepancies and gaps where we could contribute. This pre-knowledge has been accounted for in the background chapter that is previous studies and pertaining literature within consumption as well as our personal experiences of the blog's impact initially touched upon. This is done to make the reader aware of our basis of interpretation of the collected data.

Preconceptions and prejudices form part of the interpretation; this means that the knowledge the interpreter possess becomes the background, the basis, for his or her interpretation of a phenomenon (Sohlberg, 2001). As already mentioned, our point of departure is the pre-conceptions as well as prejudices we already have when entering the research process. Pre-conception is the comprehension we have about a phenomenon which we have gained through education and experience (Holme & Solvang, 1997). The prejudices we have entering this research is socially grounded subjective constructs about the phenomenon we are set to explore; the blogs and its readers. It is not possible to completely uninvolve oneself from these subjective frames of reference, which means that, as for all researchers, we will be inevitably influenced by these. (Holme & Solvang, 1997) Hence, we argue that our view as researchers will constitute of a subjective attitude. However, we will strive for an open acceptance for information and external views of the phenomenon, and not be led by subjective opinions when collecting and interpreting the data (Goulding, 2005). The main parts of the empirical material will therefore be included for the reader to make his or her own interpretation and to allow for a critical review of our interpretation and results.

## 2.3 Research method

When forming our research method we found it quite difficult to "label" what we have done and how it was done. We know what we want to accomplish and how we have gone about to achieve it but when trying to match it with a certain school of thoughts we felt that many had similar parts and that none completely described what we was doing. In line with both grounded theory and phenomenology we have an interpretivist approach where we seek to explore the real-life situations of our informants which entail a great level of interaction between the informant, and us, the researchers (Bryman & Bell, 2008). Since we seek to gain a comprehensive understanding of the consumers' experiences and meanings related to the specific context (Bäckström, 2006), we have strived to keep and nourish the informants' perspectives in the collection of data as well as in the analysis of it.

However we feel more inclined with the hermeneutical-phenomenology approach since we believe that above requires collecting data from those who have lived the experience (Goulding, 2005). Our informants were chosen due to their first hand experiences of blog-reading and we are concerned with providing a rich description; highlighting details and seemingly trivial aspects of their experiences which could otherwise been taken for granted or overlooked and not be seen as something that create understanding and meaning.

According to Spiegelberg, (1982, in Goulding, 2005) "... the goal is to enlarge and deepen understanding of the range of immediate experiences." We seek to extend our understanding of the blog phenomenon, looking at the specific context where the blog activity takes place in hopes to "... uncover the essential invariant features of that experience." (Jopling, 1996, in Goulding, 2005). As already discussed we believe that "reality" is a subjective social construct hence our source of data becomes the experiences, views and meanings of our informants who have all lived the experience of blog reading, the subject we are studying. Hence, we sampled our informants purposively after their interest and engagement in blog reading and used the interview as our main collection method (Goulding, 2005)

However, in order to make the most of our interviews we decided to add observation and diary writing as well. The reasons for this was many; it was an effective way to seek for themes to further explore during the interviews, it was also a way of trying to capture the context bound thoughts and emotions to try to get closer to the consumer meanings attached to the activity.

Due to the similarities with grounded theory and ethnography we initially felt confused. However, grounded theory builds on two time-consuming and challenging elements; the data saturation rule and the constant comparison technique. The data saturation rule says that the researcher should keep collecting data until no more information that can contribute to theory development is found (Goulding, 2005). All the collected data should then be compared to seek for contradictory cases (Goulding, 2005). These processes make it difficult to anticipate the period of research time and since our time frame is limited to eight weeks we decided to not engage in grounded theory as a method. The involvement and participation of ethnography in its truest sense would be difficult to achieve due to our time limits. Another cornerstone of ethnography is the combination of the insider and outsider perspectives which requires that the researcher becomes part of what he or she is studying and have an extended direct contact with the group or individuals under study, preferably in their natural settings (Goulding 2005). We aim to seek a deeper understanding of our informants' perspective however we do not have the time or means to follow them as closely as required in ethnographic studies. Hence we *aim* to understand the perspective of our informants but through their own narratives of the lived experience.

However, strengthened by following quote from Laverly (2003: 16) "A methodology is not a correct method to follow, but a creative approach to understanding, using whatever approaches are responsive to particular questions and subject matter.", we have used our common sense and tried to see what would be the most beneficial in our research instead of feeling obliged to strictly follow one school of thought.

## 2. 4 Informant selection criteria

Within qualitative research the aim with the selection of informants is to find and gain access to individuals that want to talk about and share their experience with the researcher (Laverty, 2003). To gain access to the right informants who can provide the researcher with rich data becomes more relevant than the ability to generalize or to seek external validity (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Krueger (1994) amongst other researchers argue that the informant should preferably be prior unknown to the interviewer; the informant should then display their feeling, views and opinions more openly since he or she will never expect to see the interviewer again. Hence our method for choosing participants was based on indirect social ties. We contacted all our friends and acquaintances and asked if they knew any one fitting with our selection criterion of age, gender, interests and willing to share their thoughts and experiences with us. They in turn, asked their friends. In addition we randomly approached young women in central Malmö on a sunny Thursday afternoon and asked a number of short questions. Those who fitted into our selection criterion were asked to join our research. Two girls were found this way and three through indirect social ties. Blogging and blog reading are not always well approved of, and admitting a high involvement in this activity could for many be embarrassing. Since the topic could be considered delicate we believed it could be wisely to not hold any previous relation with the participants (Holt & Üstüner, 2010).

It was quite difficult and time-consuming to find participants that fully matched our criterions. When we have found five we decided to start to collect data to see if the data we could gather from these would be rich enough or if we would need to find additional participants. We soon realized that the data gathered from these informants was rich enough to keep the sample size to five informants. This is in line with McCracken (1988) who states that “less is more” in terms of interviewees; and that eight or less respondents can provide sufficient data to analyze.

As touched upon above we based our selection on age, gender, interests and willingness to share their feelings and experiences with us. The most important was to select informants “...who have lived [the] experience that is the focus of the study” (Laverty, 2003: 18). We wanted to find informants with first-hand experience (Thompson *et al.* 1989) in devoted blog reading. All our five informants share a deep interest in fashion blogs and all are devoted blog-readers. The other crucial criterion were the age and gender of our informants. According to Findahl (2011) young girls between 12- 15 years old are the most active blog readers followed by young women between 16-24. Since underage informants call for extra precautions in terms of ethical and parental permission issues, as well as existing restrictions for those under 18 in other social media, we chose to focus on girls between 18-24. In order to gain as rich and unique descriptions as possible our informants differed in some aspects; they were in the same age range but not in the exact same age, they had different main occupations and some were habitant in smaller villages and other in bigger cities. Even if they all share a deep interest in blogs some with a higher degree of involvement than others. We believe that these degrees of variety will give us unique descriptions and further enrich our data. Bryman & Bell (2007) warn that can be difficult to interpret the data through the participants’ eyes if being much different from the researcher. Even if our informants are much younger than us we still have common features in terms of location, gender and to some degree interests which we hope helped us in understand our informants’ perspectives.

Additionally, Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2008), argue that in order to get relevant and rich information it is important that the informants find the research they participate in to be relevant, valuable or beneficial. On the bright side, the majority of us find it beneficial and valuable when an unknown take interest in what is important in our lives hence the researcher's commitment and honest interest are likely to flatter the informants which most likely lead to better results than an impersonal and "objective" posture would. (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2008)

Since we have met these girls personally we believe that we have been able to express our gratitude for their involvement and the importance for their honesty. We have shown our interest in them and their interest and tried to make them feel appreciated and admired for something they believe is important, in this case their style and knowledge about fashion. This is something they do not share with many in their lives and they were all positive to share it with us. Since we both show a great interest in what they are doing we believe we allow them to feel natural and relaxed when showing and writing about their experiences of reading blogs. Most important of all is that we take them seriously by listening to what they say and motivating by showing interest in every expression and action we observe.

### Our informants' profiles

Name	Age	Residence	Main occupation
Elin G	20	Höör	sales staff in clothes store
Elin H	22	Kristianstad	hair dresser/personal assistant
Hanna	23	Kristianstad	student
Maria	24	Malmö	sales staff in clothes store
Ylva	19	Malmö	student

## 2.5 Methods for data collection

Some of the different qualitative methods of data collection suggested by the literature include interviews, focus groups, observation, video recordings, text analysis, and literature reviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011). When choosing which methods of data collection could be most appropriate for the purpose of our research we had to exclude those methods which we believed could affect the outcome of the findings by influencing our informants to an extent as to produce unreliable data.

Qualitative data gathering through focus groups was rapidly excluded due to several reasons. As believed by Bryman & Bell the strength in focus groups relies on the power these have when the interest on meanings, constructed jointly by a group of people, is strong. This was however, for the purpose of our thesis, seen as a restriction and counter producing. The subjectivity of our informants answers was consider essential to the total outcome of this research in order to achieve the highest degree of nuances possible in in an already limited sample size. Focus groups are said to restrict the respondents' answers due to group pressure (Easterby- Smith et al., 2008).

This could result in participants not answering open-heartedly, honestly, and keeping certain aspects, which they do not feel comfortable sharing with a large amount of people, to themselves. More importantly we believe the group would influence each other in their answers, restricting individual feelings and emotions to crystallize, resulting in a loss of valuable information of subjective opinions and answers. Furthermore, in order to be a moderator for a focus group requires certain skills as both initiator and facilitator of the discussion (Easterby-Smith 2008). The complexity of the situation would have required more experience with this kind of method, as well as data recordings of this nature, something that neither one of us had.

Due to the recent interest in blogs in the consumer research studies the information found on this activity is quite limited. Existing literature found on studies of a similar nature were used as background information, which lead the course of our study. This limited amount of literature in the topic we chose to research, excluded the possibility to base our data collection on existing literature. Moreover the focus of our research has been to explore the subjectivity and individual experiences of a young group of women in which the context and individuality of the experience provided us with our valuable data. We would not be able to analyze this kind of data without having the whole context and experiencing the collection process ourselves.

Video recordings are also recommended by Easterby-Smith arguing that in some situations words alone are not able to communicate a complex combination of actions and emotions (Secrist et al., 2002, in Easterby-Smith, 2008). However, we chose not to carry out video recordings since we believe that the thoughts in the mind are difficult to record on film. We did make voice recordings of the interviews and the process of observation since we considered that voice tone and words alone could reflect the emotions we were looking for. The camera could have made some of these young women uncomfortable or unsure of the way they could be judged by their appearance, something we did not intend to do. Field notes of these observations recorded facial expressions, as well as the body language that could be interpreted as valuable to our data analysis.

Initially, we had considered gathering shopping receipts as part of our data collection, in order to observe the response from the blogs reflected in their shopping habits. Since we promptly chose to somewhat disregard the purchasing behavior of our young consumers, we replaced this step by including this area of discussion in our interviews and allowing the informants' answers to enlighten us on the relevance that the purchasing behavior might have to their lives.

Amongst the ethnographic approaches we chose to exclude was shadowing. We interviewed our informants in their homes in the most natural situation as possible, given the circumstances. They were encouraged to use the preferred way of blogging, which varied, from use of their laptop, ipad, and iPhone. But we did not observe them over a long period of time, moving into their homes for a day or two and following them around to observe all the situations in which the observed phenomena would be carried out. We did not feel comfortable intruding in the lives and privacy of these young women who we were not so acquainted to, for a longer period of time. This kind of ethnographic studies are not recommended either when the time limit is short (Goulding, 2005), as is the case for our thesis study. Instead we chose to rely on their answers about the feelings and situations in which they felt compelled to open their Internet devices and start reading their blogs.

Amongst the different possible qualitative methods of data collection there are we chose those, which we found could accurately describe the blogging phenomenon from a subjective point of view.

We have chosen to collect data using the technique and advantages of triangulation. Triangulation according to the literature (Bryman & Bell, 2011) was initially exclusively associated to quantitative research. However today it is largely accepted within qualitative research strategies in order to develop thorough understandings of complex social phenomena by allowing corroborating observations our clear up misunderstandings, as well as areas of convergence can be more easily identified if they emerge simultaneously from the different methods of data collection (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Although the interview is our main method of data collection, we have chosen to include the methods of diary entries and observations to gain more valid and reliable data. Additionally, we have identified these three different methods as possible to perform, given our limitations of time and resources, as well as the most suitable for the purpose of our research. We have several reasons for this assessment. Firstly, it is crucial for us to capture our informants' understanding of the phenomenon, to understand it from their world-view and to make their voice heard. These three methods have given us multiple angles into the informants' own understanding and meaning making of blogs and its effects on them.

The second reason for choosing these three methods is to narrow down the scope and to fine-tune our research focus. As explained above, we use an inductive approach where we allow the data to speak for itself and we have applied it to a broad subject, which could result in a very scattered and broad subject. To avoid that we, step by step, peel off extraneous thoughts and ideas with the help from what emerges in our collected data. With this approach we can keep our research focus narrow without losing interesting perspectives coming into view from our data and informants. We have started with letting the informants keep a diary for a short period of time. Then the emerging themes within that data have been those we have focused on while observing our informants. During the observations some themes from the diaries have been confirmed while other themes have emerged. These themes have then been the focus during the interviews. We argue that this procedure has helped us focus our research without losing interesting insights or forcing the data into predetermined categories.

### **Diary**

According to Easterby-Smith *et al* (2008), there are many advantages of using the diary technique; it is a useful tool to collect data from the perspective of the informant since the data from a diary study is written mainly within the frame of reference of the diary writer. Since we are eager to gain insights into the informants' understanding and meaning making of the phenomenon we believe that the diary method will suit the purpose of our study.

Another benefit with the diary method is that it is possible to compare several informants' perspectives simultaneously (Easterby-Smith *et al*, 2008). Being able to concurrently contrast and compare our informants' views helped us not only save time but to quickly grasp an understanding of how the informants understand and experience the phenomenon. This helped us get an early focus around the emerging themes.

Since we are beginners in the field of observation we found it beneficial to divide the data collection on different methods, putting off some of the pressure to perform a great observation or interview, allowing for some executional mistakes without jeopardizing the collection of rich and useful data.

According to Bryman & Bell (2011) the diary as a method of data collection is often supplemented by a personal interview in which the researcher asks questions based on the remarks found interesting when reading these diaries. This form of diary is often called the *interview diary*, according to Zimmerman and Wieder (1977), and is used to record activity in words rather than the amount of time spent doing the activity. As we intend to do?

According to Bowey & Thorpe's experiences using the diary method on the workers of an English coal mine (1986 in Easterby-Smith *et al*, 2008), most participants were flattered when an outsider took interest in their lives and thoughts and the majority welcomed the chance to express and share their own opinions and feelings about their situation and life to someone who was interested in it. Many of our informants expressed a delight over our interest in what, they considered, was their biggest interest; the blogs. And we got the impression that they were happy to get the opportunity to talk with someone about it since their own friends and families did not always share the same interest. This is in accordance to Bowey & Thorpe's experiences (1986 in Easterby-Smith *et al*, 2008). To have informants that understand the purpose of the study and that are happy to be part of it helps secure honest and rich answers, which helps the researchers collect rich and relevant data (Easterby-Smith *et al*, 2008).

The most important practicalities to address when conducting a diary-based study is to provide the diarist with some structure to help him or her to focus the writing (Bowey & Thorpe, 1986 in Easterby-Smith *et al*, 2008). We provided a couple of starting questions but also encouraged the informants to write down all thoughts they had. We wanted to provide structure without steering them too much. We believe this structure was necessary in order for them to understand what to pay attention to and what to include in their diary. They expressed, in earlier conversations, that they were not really aware of what they were doing all the time, since it is something they have been doing for a period of time and in some cases as a routine.

It is also advisable to give the diarist continued encouragement while writing. We had continuous contact through email and phone calls where we, in a positive tone, tried to encourage them to keep up the writing. We had no significant problems with getting the diaries written, however the informants only kept a diary for three occasions each and we believe problems could easily have arisen if they had to write for a longer period of time. We further believe that the maintained interest and dedication to the task was due to their own profound interest in the subject as well, as suggested by Bowey & Thorpe (1986, in Easterby-Smith *et al*, 2008) the knowing of an upcoming interview based upon the diaries.

### **Observation**

Although we have chosen to use the concept of observation to describe the nature of this method, we admit that our overt presence and interrogation can be viewed merely as an interview-like discussion, a preceding stage to the semi- structured interview. However, we believe this moment to be of great value to our research.

Firstly, it intends to offer our participant the most natural setting possible to resemble the customary blogging situation. Secondly, it allows the informants to express themselves in the observed context, and the observers to capture emotions and thoughts in the right context and get familiar with the remarks found in the diary texts. In this case, we do not intend to follow any given structure, but rather allow the activity of our informants to lead our questions and allow us to draw parallels with the previous information found in the diaries. Thus, our observations are subjective to every informant rather than structured observations in which the informants are all observed during the same amount of time using the same rules (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

With this in mind we have chosen to adapt a participant observant role rather than a non-participant. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) this is a good method when seeking to observe the behavior of members in a certain setting and to extract the meanings they ascribe to their environment and behavior. The participant observer then chooses how much they want to be involved in the process (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Contrary to the non-participant observation in which the observer seeks to record as much activity as possible without getting involved at all (Bryman & Bell, 2011), we consider this almost impossible in our case since we want to understand the thoughts going on in our informants' minds. Since we have also asked our informants to talk us through what they are doing we take the role of listeners as well as we choose to participate by asking questions along the way.

Although we do not have a clear observation schedule (Bryman & Bell, 2011) applied to all our observations, we have recognized some of the main elements which we will pay special attention. These include: the length or duration of a visit in the different blogs, trying to understand the reasons behind this duration, be it long or short, as well as how far back the readers are willing to go in every single blog visit, and why. If there is a predetermined order in which the young informants review the blogs and what are the reasons behind this. The situation in which the activity of reading blogs is most presumed to happen. How deep their involvement is in the different blogs and what are the characteristics leading to this. The areas that attract their attention the most (clothes, photos, outfits, looks, hairstyles, accessories, trips, parties) and the reactions brought by this interest.

The observation session duration will be determined by the informant, and will conclude when they choose to shut down their devices or continue working with something else. We will then proceed to the interview. As well as it allowed us to get familiar with their values, tastes, preferences, choices, as well as their skills when scrolling up and down, in and out of the blogs.

### **Semi structured interview**

The aim of an interview is to make the informant convey an experience, knowledge, opinion or value within the area of investigation (Jacobsen, 1993), or as expressed by Burgess (1982:107 in Easterby-Smith *et al*, 2008:144) “(the interview) is... the opportunity for the researcher to probe deeply to uncover new clues, open up new dimensions of a problem and to secure vivid, accurate inclusive accounts that are based on personal experience”.

It is, with other words an attempt to not only collect information but also to achieve an understanding from the informant's perspective that captures the informant's interpretation and meaning of the phenomenon in relation to his or her world-view; information that capture their viewpoint as well as the reason *why* they have this point of view (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008).

Since our research aim is to explore the effects of blog reading from the consumer perspective, we want to explore our informants' experiences and gain deeper insights into how they view the phenomenon and why. In line with our inductive approach we want to open up new dimensions of an already researched field hence the deep interview seems to be an accurate choice for fulfilling our purpose.

However, a deep interview can still have different amounts of structure; the question the research has to answer is how much structure will be necessary to make the interview give the data you need (Jones, 1985 in Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008). Since we are not the most experienced interviewers but still want the interview to give us rich and relevant data we believe that the semi-structured interview is the best choice for us. A too loose structure could end with poor data, which could be difficult to interpret (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008). Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2008) argue that a clear outset about the areas of interest are more likely to give the researcher relevant data and suggest the use of a topic guide. Instead of using pre-made questions, the researcher can use themes that they want to be touched upon during the interview. This allows for a more open dialogue where follow-up questions can lead to a better understanding of the informant's viewpoint which in turn can lead to an easier interpretation of the answers (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999). Our topic guide emerged from the diaries and background information, helping us to focus the interviews on topics found to be of relevance for both us as well as our informants.

Even if using a topic guide the researcher still has the opportunity to identify and make use of non-verbal expressions such as inflection of voice, facial expression, body language, and clothes (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008; Jacobsen, 1993). These are important unconscious clues, which could give new insights or assist in developing follow-up questions, especially if the interviewer is not that experienced with the interview as technique (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008; Jacobsen, 1993). We found these additional clues helpful; we are not experienced interviewers and we explore a subject where these nuances could help us better understand our informants' answers.

Further, a deep semi-structured interview is advisable to use when it is crucial to understand the subjective constructs that the informants use as a base for his or her beliefs and opinions about a certain situation and where the aim of the researcher is to gain insights and understanding of the respondent's world-view (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008). This is in line with our research aim, where we want to explore the consumer perspective of the blogs' influence. In order to understand that, we need to understand how our informants experience and use blogs and what meaning they make out of it. Especially when dealing with subjects that can be perceived as delicate; many of our informants said that it could be a bit embarrassing to admit to friends and family how much time and emotions they put into the blogs hence a comfortable and relaxed dialogue is preferable to an "interrogation"-like interview session.

## 2. 6 Collection of data

A triangulation of data collection methods was used during the course of our research in order to build upon each other and gather as much rich information as possible.

### **Diary**

We initialized the data collection process by asking our respondents to carry out a diary and include three days describing their blogging experience for one particular situation. At this stage the communication with our informants was conducted by email messages including attachments of documents with the same instructions for all as recommended by Corti (1993). Most of them were then contacted by phone to clarify the instructions and answer any questions. However, a personal meeting was conducted, before initializing this stage, with one of the informants who requested more information about the procedure and our expected; a meeting that we later realized should have had with all our informants. This had most probably resulted in richer data in this early stage.

In accordance to Corti (1993) certain elements should be provided by the researchers or persons preparing the diary. Our informants were given a template to follow We informed the young informants that this template was to be used as a guide in their writing, and if there was anything else that came to mind, they should write it down freely. The more they were willing to share the better for the purpose of our research. Although Corti (1993) recommends providing a model of a completed section of the diary, we chose not to do so to allow our informants' individual thoughts to come forward. We did not want to influence their answers by providing possible answers. They were encouraged to paste pictures if they felt eager to express something with it and in that case to describe what they meant by using these pictures. They were then recommended to keep all the opened pages to be able to give account of the different sites they were in and why. They were asked to paste the links to these pages and give a short description of what lead to the opening of the mentioned pages. We then asked them to send each completed diary post separately through e-mail attachments. We wanted to make sure that the first day was thoroughly completed and that they had understood what they were being asked to do. In some cases we were obliged to remind them about certain elements which we felt they had missed in the instructions. This to make sure that the next post would be completed in a more detailed manner. Some of the questions included in the diary template were more of a factual nature, as time, date, place and the blogs they had read. The other questions involved the feelings around the whole experience. We were interested in finding out what lead them to start their blog reading sessions, how they felt for the different blogs, what they were most interested in in a certain page and what made them move on to another page (for whole diary template see appendix I.)

The diary posts gave us a good insight into the interests of these young women and the blogs they usually read. Most importantly, it gave us an understanding of the emotions and feelings involved in the blog reading experience and the way in which they themselves address their own behavior. It is appropriate to mention the varying depth and detail of the different posts, not only amongst the different informants, but amongst the three different required posts as well. Amongst the individual diary posts, there was a clear distinction in detail in the first day compared to the other days.

Bryman & Bell (2011) mention some of the disadvantages with diaries including the process of attrition, in which the informant has had enough of writing a diary. In this case the task was not so arduous, but the repeating nature of the posts could have made the informants less thorough over time about the documentation of their behavior (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However we consider the data outcome from the diaries gave us a good basis to build upon to construct our observation strategy and identify what to look after once we had the chance to witness a blog reading session with our informants.

One of the repeating subjects and themes that surfaced during this first stage was the young informants' admiration for the bloggers they followed. A clear interest in their lives and not only in what they were wearing. They also expressed the qualities they found in the different blogs which made them want to follow them in their everyday lives. Inspiration was constantly mentioned as they wrote about what they got out of reading blogs and their interest in the bloggers' different styles which also showed clear signs of identification. Their wants and desires of the beautiful clothes and accessories, seen in the different blogs and worn by the bloggers.

By applying a triangulation of data collection methods we built upon the completed diaries in order to conduct our observation as well as our interview. All the information found in the diaries was double crossed by observing certain interesting aspects found in the diary posts as well as asking questions related to the remarks found in these. We familiarized ourselves with the informant by reading the collected diary posts and making a short visit to the mentioned blogs. Due to our initial interest in the subject of blogs and the world of fashion in some cases we found the blogs extremely appealing and found ourselves following a few of these during a longer period of time. This, of course allowed us to place ourselves in our informants shoes and understand the different emotions that can arise from following different blogs, as well as understanding that what is appealing to us differs from what is appealing for the younger generation, which we chose to study.

### **Observation**

Once the diary entries were collected we booked separate meetings with our informants. We were careful to inform them that they would be observed first and later interviewed, and booked a sufficiently long meeting for both moments. We chose to perform both these methods of data collection on the same day with each informant, due to distance issues, several of our informants live in other cities than Malmö, and the shortage of time. Since we considered it important to carry out our observations in the most natural way possible, in order to get to know our informants better and to observe the environment in which the activity is being done, we asked if we could visit them in their homes or where they often performed the activity of reading blogs. This was not a problem and all our informants agreed that their homes were the most convenient and accurate place to do so.

Although the amount of time was a restriction and we could have chosen to divide ourselves to save time, we believed that we should both participate in all the observations and interviews in order to get the broadest picture of each informant and be able to analyze the data from two perspectives.

Once we arrived we were kindly greeted, since they felt they already knew us due to all the previous messages sent back and forth. The mood was very relaxed and once we had explained how we would go through with the observation and the interview they appeared to feel comfortable with the situation.

We chose to sit in the living room at some of the homes or by the dining table according to their preference and which device they chose to surf through the blogs. We sat on both sides of our informant with the purpose of enabling us to follow her activity with the blogs.

Complying with the purpose of existential-phenomenological observations and interviews which imply staying as close to the actual experience as possible (Lavery 2003) our observation was designed to allow the informant to carry out the activity while being observed and interviewed.

We feel that there is a fine line between our observation and the following interview, since we openly asked questions while observing the blog reading activity. These questions were later taken up again during the interview in order to get a deeper understanding of the thoughts of our informants. We conducted an *unstructured observation* in which no particular observation schedule was used. In agreement with Bryman and Bell (2011) the aim of our observation was to record as much information possible about the behavior of our participants when carrying out the process of reading blogs. Our role, due to the internal nature of this process was to ask questions around the activity we observed taking the role of *observant-as-participant*, as mentioned by Bryman & Bell (2011), in which the role of the researcher is mainly an interviewer. We complemented the observation by asking questions regarding the different activity observed and asked our informants to talk us through the process, mentioning the names of the blogs, what they were looking at and what caught their attention. We asked for the permission to make voice recordings of the observations as well since we expected our informants to make spontaneous comments and believed this would give us much valuable data.

According to Easterby-Smith et al (2008) the informants can be influenced by the observer effect, in this case leading the informant to act differently due to her knowledge of being observed. However, we tried to make the process feel as natural and familiar as possible by showing interest in what they were doing. As advised by Thompson et al. (1989) we intentionally appeared to be less knowledgeable in this subject to allow the informants to act as the experts when describing their own experience. The observation was designed to allow the informants to talk freely about everything that came to their minds while reading the blogs. The aim was to provide the right context in which they were able to describe their experiences as they happened instead of intending to extract this information through a number of questions only. Follow-up questions were then based upon the informants own words and phrases, as Thomson et al. (1989) recommends, since we were continuously trying to identify data on potential themes that could surface from the activity. Although the observation resembled a conversation to an extent, we had to constantly remind them about speaking out their feelings, since it did not feel very natural for them to do so.

### **Interviews**

Once our informants were “done” and expressed that they did not feel the need to continue reading any more blogs, we proceeded with the interviews.

According to Lantz (2007) it is essential for researchers to establish a sense of safety and trust with the interviewee in this situation. To further contribute to this atmosphere we opened the interview with general questions about our informants to make them comfortable with the situation and avoid unnecessary stress. Following McCracken’s (1988) recommendations, we continuously expressed the confidentiality of their identity and assured their answers would only be used for the purposes of this research paper. We have later contacted our informants and asked permission to use their first names, age and occupation.

They have all granted this permission.

Following the initial descriptive questions we continued our interview with a series of open questions, which allowed the informants to talk freely about their individual experiences when reading blogs. Our approach to conduct a semi structured interview was indeed conditioned by the results from the observations. We believed that the observations and conversations that came about would influence the execution of the interview.

We therefore designed the interview through several predetermined questions in an interview guide to lead us through the topics that emerged initially from the diaries and authenticated by the observations, giving us a more general frame of reference but offering space for follow-up questions as well, as suggested by Bryman & Bell (2011). In some cases we used the informants earlier answers and reformulated our questions to remind them of something they had said or done in earlier stages. Overall the questions were formulated to adjust to the level of conversation held by these young women, to try to use their own words and expressions and make them feel more familiar when talking to us. The hermeneutic school of thought suggests that data is a result of the relationship between the informant and the interviewer and in order to obtain valuable data, a trusting and familiar relationship should be established (Laverly, 2003).

We felt a certain freedom to include new questions if the situation called for it in hopes of obtaining alternative viewpoints, a practice found normally in semi structured interviews, as recognized by Bryman & Bell (2011). We are also aware that this kind of research is often influenced by the researcher's preconceptions or previous knowledge, and regardless of the efforts made to keep an unbiased view, these are hard to escape. We realized as well that every successive interview improved our interviewing skills keeping the conversation more centered around the actual questions and not so much about our own personal opinions about things.

We admit that all our questions were not completely expressed according to the recommendations found in the phenomenological interview method. This was undoubtedly due to our amateur interview skills and eagerness to keep the flow of the respondents' thoughts.

Although Thompson et al. (1989) advise against using "Why" questions, we often found ourselves so deeply involved in the conversation that this question was inevitable. The outcome of these answers was not always very enlightening since the informants were not always aware of the reasons for their behavior. As Thompson et al (1989) suggest, this kind of questions leads the analysis towards a theoretical abstraction, something which we will be careful to keep in mind when analyzing the data. However our questions did provide context for our informants to unreservedly describe their experiences thoroughly. (Thompson et al., 1989) The eagerness of some of these young women to talk about their experiences with blogs and their detailed description of the process and feelings involved provided us with an extensive and very rich amount of data, essential for the inductive nature of our study. The nature of the questions allowed them to use their own words in which we recognized certain slang related to the blogging activity and common to all our informants.

Following Bryman & Bell's (2011) recommendations we chose to record the interviews and later transcribe them. These transcripts will serve as proof for the methods chosen and structure of both our observations and interviews and will enable us to go through the data in a more structured way. The topics recognized in the diaries and then discussed in the interview were emotions, the social aspect of blogs, identity and hedonistic values.

## 2.7 Analysis method

In accordance with Golding's description of phenomenology as a method of analysis we considered it most appropriate in order to find a more profound understanding of the informants' inner experiences and relations. This part-to-whole model, presented by Thompson (1997 in Goulding, 2005), requires intensive reflection as an intertwined part of the process, but keeping the personal experiences as expressed by the informants as the fundamental basis and crucial part of the analysis method (Goulding, 2005). In order to not lose the voice and personal experiences of our informants we have tried to keep the exact wording as expressed by these, in the text appearing as quotes. In order to keep the voices as intact as possible through our intensive reflection we endeavored to keep the data's richness all the way through the analysis.

Following Colazzis (1978, in Goulding, 2005) suggestion we began by transcribing the many hours of observation and interview material. Continuing the arduous labor of transcription, we proceeded by reading the transcripts including the diaries, observations, and interviews, following the same sequence as the different methods of data collection took place. This was done, in order to get a complete picture of the content. We read the texts several times to really capture the entire contents. We then began to extract significant statements (quotes) by identifying keywords, which we realized after having read the transcripts multiple times, were relevant to the blog reading phenomena as the subject of our research. Examples of these key words and phrases were words equivalent to "set oneself apart", e.g. "unique" and "distinctive". Other key words we found interesting for explaining the meaning and role blog reading possess in the lives of our informants were "must" as in "must read", "must keep myself updated" etc.

We then took all the interesting quotes and sentences that we extracted and tried to look at what they meant, trying to identify patterns and differences in the behaviors of our informants according to what they expressed. However, the extracted expressions and sentences were all the time treated with respect to its certain context hence we rather kept a longer extract of the transcripts than risking losing the context where the key phrase was expressed. We then started to cluster these patterns into themes in which we considered the different quotations belonged to.

These themes included uniqueness, fitting in, inspiration, conciseness of the reality behind the blogs, recognition, admiration etc., around 20 different themes which we felt were covered in some extent or other by the answers of our informants. We did not go back with these interpretations to our informants, as recommended by Colazzi (1978) but we were very careful that we had really understood what they meant, and sometimes we called or e- mailed our informants to make sure that we had not misunderstood anything that they had said.

We then tried to find the links between these themes, which decided the structure in which they were presented, by giving a rich description of them in relation to the phenomenon of the blog reading activity. The description was complemented with quotes to clearly illustrate the sources of our interpretations. We were careful to use a lot of quotes to give the reader a rich description of the phenomenon under study and to let our informants' own voices be heard, in accordance with the consumer perspective of our research. These themes ended up being eight in total. We then started to look at these themes in order to see if we could find something in common, a red thread. We soon realized that these eight themes represented four polarized emotions and that the relation between them was complex and intertwined but crucial for the understanding of each theme e.g. being unique in comparison to wanting to fit in. It was like two sides of the same coin. When we could see this relationship in-between the themes we reached the conclusion that this was how they should be presented and discussed in the analysis chapter.

Finally, we began to further reduce these themes, which described the main behaviors being observed, to then proceed to explain what this behavior means as a whole, in order to connect them to the purpose of the study, in order to explain the meaning and role of the blog reading activity in our informants' lives (see above for our purpose).

This process of recontextualisation proposed by Morse (1994, in Goulding, 2005) in which the process of rewriting can trigger new thoughts and insights was proven valuable in our process of data analysis by allowing us to think more abstractly, starting from a particular point of view and moving upwards toward an more universal understanding of the phenomena in research. We searched for the red thread, the underlying mechanisms behind these four polarized themes. We ended up with the impression that they all covered a mechanism of relating and positioning oneself in relation to others. We thought of what that could mean and be an expression for and we realized that the constant relating and positioning where a way to mark where the self of our informants began or ended and where the self of the blogger started. We started to search in literature in order to understand this and soon realized that it had to do with the creating and negotiating of the identity. But that did not seem to cover it all, we then searched further and found theories within the field of status research which seemed to explain the positioning part of relating to others. We now started to look at the themes from this angle and searched for literature and theories explaining what we had found.

The seventh and final step involving the researcher could return to the participants to conduct further interviews or elicit their opinions on the analysis in order to cross check interpretation; we haven't been able to follow out due to time limits, but also because we have been so carefully throughout the process to really understand what our informants say.

## 2. 8 Methodological reflections and Trustworthiness

Due to the nature of qualitative studies which often involve the observation and study of small samples of people or particular case studies, assessing the quality of research can be challenging when using the means of reliability and credibility, commonly used in the valuation of quantitative studies and carried out with the help of statistical measures. Since qualitative studies focus on an in depth view of a phenomena rather than the extension of it, some writers including Guba and Lincoln 1985, 1994) suggest that the quality of qualitative studies should be examined using different means than those used for quantitative research. Trustworthiness and authenticity are proposed as alternative criteria for this process. Trustworthiness of qualitative research is further examined in terms of four criteria: credibility and transferability, dependability and conformability (Guba and Lincoln 1985, 1994) in Bryman & Bell, 2011)

### **Credibility**

The credibility of the study is reached by ensuring that the research is carried out according to good practice and suggesting that the respondents have given a good view of the particular social world or phenomena being studied (Guba & Lincoln 1985 in BB). This can be achieved using the techniques of respondent validation or triangulation. In our thesis, triangulation, the process of using more than one method in order to verify the findings when gathering data about a social phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2011) has been chosen to improve our understanding of the behavior of our young informants as they enjoy the experience of reading blogs. These methods included diary entry collection, observation, and a semi structured interview. All of these methods have implied different ways of expression by our informants contributing to a rich and nuanced description of the phenomena.

Most importantly we believe that these methods have complemented each other due to the similar context in which they were conducted. The informants were asked to complete the diaries during individual blog reading sessions. Correspondingly the observation was also conducted in a similar context, followed immediately by the interview. Although we acknowledge the limitations and strengths of these methods, we believe that the different methods have contributed to our complete understanding of the phenomena as experienced by our informants. For example, we believe that the diaries gave our informants the possibility to express into words the actions, which they probably never had thought about before. By using their own words we were able to identify the elements important to our informants matching the subjective point of view we were seeking in our research. Although given a template to follow when writing their diaries the data included was reached with a low degree of influence from us as researchers.

The observation was also a method that allowed the respondent to put into word the process they went through when reading blogs, but our possibility to ask questions along the way opened a whole new dimension of thoughts and contributed to added depth of the data. We are, however, aware that our presence could have had an effect on them and that our questions might have steered some of the activity witnessed by us. Nevertheless, we still judged their movement along the blogs not to deviate significantly from the reality of their customary blog reading sessions. The possible deviations can be justified as to have descriptive purposes. However, something that has additionally come to mind after reading the many transcripts produced during our research is how our booked meeting to observe our informants as they review their blogs could have conditioned their behavior.

If we had offered less information on the purpose of our research and allowed them to go on with their daily routines, taking a more non-participant observant role, we could have observed another dimension of the blog reading experience, namely the spontaneous urge to check out their blogs when doing something else, and in what circumstances this can appear.

The in-depth semi structured interview, as main method of data collection, served the purpose to provide further insights to the informants' behavior and experiences not totally examined during the observation allowing the informant to give more elaborate answers

### **Transferability**

Transferability, equivalent to the external validity of quantitative research, aims to describe the degree of which the findings of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred into other fields of research. Due to the small samples and particular cases studied often in qualitative research, in order to allow for transferability the researcher is encouraged to give, what the literature expresses as, a thick description of the investigated phenomena. Since the strength of qualitative research tends to be the contextual uniqueness from which the findings emerge the description of this phenomenon should be as thorough as possible allowing others to judge the transferability of the findings, when researching in different fields or even in the same field or context at another time. (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) This issue has not been regarded as extremely necessary for us since the purpose of our research has not been to generalize but to explore the blog reading phenomena and the meaning given to this activity as experienced by our individual informants. As proposed by McCracken (1988. P.17):

“The purpose of the qualitative interview is not to discover how many, and what kinds of, people share a certain characteristic. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world”.

The transferability of the findings could be possible if assuming a similar context in a culture similar to the one studied. In our case a study carried out in Norway or Denmark could show a similar outcome. In less developed countries however, the findings from this kind research could be completely contrasting. Our study has been aimed towards the experiences regarding fashion blogs. The findings of this research, if applied to another category of blogs and studying a different segment of consumers, could also show clear signs of transferability by displaying comparable meanings and experiences. In order to give the reader a thick description and allow their own judgment of the transferability of the findings we have provided detailed descriptions of our informants as well as their experiences and the context in which they are revealed.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is also included as an element of trustworthiness. This requires that all records of the research process be kept in order to be able to assess the procedures carried out as well as the correct handling of data. As for our thesis, all data acquired like interview recordings, transcripts, diary posts and observation field notes, to mention those that apply to our research have been made available upon request due to the extensive length of the transcripts following the observations and interviews with our informants. All our methods of data collection have been thoroughly accounted for as well as quotes and descriptions taken from the interviews included in the presentation of the empirical material.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability as described by Guba & Lincoln (1985) relates to trustworthiness in the sense that it requires the researchers to show awareness of their personal values, preconceptions, and biases and how they might have influenced the research process. It is important for the researchers to show that they have acted in good faith and not allowed their individual theoretical inclinations to guide the findings of the research but allowed the data to speak for itself. However complete objectivity is today considered as an impossible position to hold (Guba & Lincoln 1985). Some preconceptions and knowledge about the subject have been essential for constructing and designing the research. However the findings of this research have surfaced through the thorough analysis of the data provided by our informants and not by any previous values or beliefs. We have aimed to give a descriptive picture of the way in which our informants perceive their lives and experiences in relation to the blog reading activity.

### **Authenticity**

Authenticity has also been suggested by Guba & Lincoln (1985) as an important criterion to take into consideration to assess the wider impact of the research. According to the literature the fairness of the research is reached if it is considered to represent different viewpoints among members of the social settings. We believe that our research and choice of informants in different ages shows a varied set of personalities, including different social settings, cities and occupation which contributes to a broad view of opinions and a good picture of the social setting of blog reading. Additionally we believe in the educative authenticity of this research subject to the ability of the members of this social setting, and those who question or appreciate it, to assimilate the perspectives presented in our findings.

## **2. 9 Research ethics**

In research it is important to reflect about and consider the ethical aspects of conducting a study (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008). Examples of these aspects may be to take into consideration the wellbeing of the informants; respecting their integrity and not harm them in any way. Another area where ethics is required is to clearly show the distinction between the contribution of others and your own (Jacobsen, 1993) and to reflect about the use of the study's results (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008). These ethical aspects have been respected throughout the work.

### **To inform the participants**

Dalen (2008) states that participating persons shall be informed about what they are participating in and in which the purpose their participation is relevant to the study. They shall also be informed about the aim of the study as well as how the data shall be analyzed and presented. We have informed our informants about the nature of the study, the context of it as well as its purpose and how the analyzed data will be presented. All our informants approved to this.

### **Confidentiality**

In this study we aim to understand a certain phenomenon from our informants' perspective. In our pursuit of this we needed access to our informants' private thoughts and views on this phenomenon. Thus it is important to offer our informant's confidentiality if wanted and to handle the collected data as to protect and defend our informants (Dalen, 2008).

We asked our informants if we could use their first names and age and provide basic information about their main occupation which they all approved of. In all the collected material, only their first name and age are displayed.

**The further use of material and results**

Easterby-Smith et al (2008) and Dalen (2008) state that it is crucial to consider the use of the collected material and the results of the study. We have no intentions to use the material or the results in any other way than to complete this study.

### 3. ANALYSIS

The themes with central aspects to the blog readers' experience that have been found in the empirical data are here presented (Goulding, 2005) (the process explained in detail in the Analysis method chapter). Eight themes, which all are intertwined with another of the themes in a polarized relationship. Hence the themes will be presented below four headings, expressing the mentioned polarization. We will give the reader rich descriptions in the form of quotes, so that the reader can get a sense of our informants and also to be able to make a critical judgment of our analysis. Since an inductive approach is applied, we seek connections to theory in our interpretation of the data (Goulding, 2005). The chapter starts with a description of each one of our informants and their view on blogs and blog reading. This is provided to deepen the reader's understanding of them as individuals. But before presenting the themes, or "units" another matter will be discussed.

We can ascertain that the girls find it important with the inspiration they gain from the blog reading activity; when it comes to purchase, style, food, interior design, etc. However if probing into this we are back in a perspective already explored in previous research; that is, blog reading as a means to other ends. As argued throughout the study, we aim to explore the blog reading as a consumption activity per se. Hence we only establish that blogs and blog reading are a source of inspiration to consumption.

#### 3.1 The informants' profiles

##### **Elin G. - "fashion is inside of me"**

Elin is a warm, fun, upbeat small-town, twenty year old working as sales staff in a clothing store. She describes herself as social, happy and spontaneous. She says that she has clothes on her mind twenty-four-seven and wears fashion on the inside; she maybe look like the ordinary girl next door but her heart beats for styles, trends and ?? She believes her interest in fashion and clothes is the driving force behind her blog devotion. She sees blog reading as both a support in her career as well a never-ending source of inspiration. When asked to describe her main reason for reading blogs she says:

*"To become inspired, because when you do not know what to wear, you go in and search [on the blogs], even though you can never wear the exact same things, you get reminded of what you have in your closet. As such the outfit [posted on a blog] that I showed you; a gray scarf, that hangs in my closet and that I only days ago wondered why I had not yet given it away, and a beige cardigan, such have I in multitude, and a plain beige top, where is it? I must have because my entire wardrobe is kind of beige and white and black"* (Elin G)

*"Due to the inspirational photos, the blogs then give me a sort of recycling of my closet. I get inspired to reuse what I already have with just adding a few minor things, making the outfit to my own, instead of buying everything you see."* (Elin G)

Elin reads "her" blogs daily:

*"Sometimes I read the blogs until late at night, before getting to sleep, and then in the morning I wake up at nine and start reading again"* (Elin G)

She cannot recall how she first got in contact with blogs; she believes it was through recommendations by friends or by reading about it in some fashion magazine.

She does recall that it coincided with her seventeenth birthday when she got a pink laptop. The very same laptop was quickly filled with new interesting blogs that she neatly categorized and she soon established a certain procedure for in which order to read the 50 “regular” blogs – Elin was hooked!

Her favorite blogs are Hanna MW, Anni Honey and f-l-o-r-e-a-l-e which all have “an incredible feel for styling and fashion” and they are always there to support her in times of occasional outfit crisis:

*“Pleas girls, all of you help me out now!”* (Elin G)

### **Maria- “I need to know it first”**

Maria, a “too cool for school” looking 24 year old native of Stockholm that due to fashion and design studies emigrated to Malmö. Here, she works in a trendy clothing store while in her spare time designing her own collection as well as taking on occasional styling assignments. Her heart tells her she has a future in fashion but under what forms are still undecided.

Maria describes herself as “fashion nerd”, an updated fashionista with extensive knowledge about designers. She started reading blogs about five years ago when she accidentally came across

The Coolhunter and Stockholm Streetstyle. She still does not know the direct reason to why she is so devoted to fashion blogs but maybe it is partly due to the arousal and satisfaction the blog reading grants her with; a feeling that reminds her of the adrenaline kick of playing an elite soccer game. And when observing Maria in “blog action” this state of flow becomes evident; she becomes completely absorbed by the blogs forgetting both time and space which is the reason why she prefers to take her time, reading them in peaceful and quite environments.

It is crucial for Maria to feel “updated”; to not only know what others are talking about but be the first with the first and wearing a certain designer before it hits the blogs, is the ultimate proof of being on top of the trends.

*“ [while looking at catwalk pictures] these I turn to in order to get a sense of what is trendy in terms of colors and cuts next autumn, and the street style blogs I turn to in order to get what is happening right now. The catwalk pictures are of much greater interest for me.”* (Maria)

When we asked why she replied:

*“Yes, I want to be first...”* (Maria)

She sometimes tests her sense and knowledge of fashion by looking at the photos and guessing the brands and designers behind the garments, she then reads the text in order to see if she was right; and of course Maria mostly is.

She believes that she would be the same person as today even without access to blogs, however she acknowledge that she would not be as knowledgeable about trends as today which would probably had cost her career opportunities she presently enjoys due to her knowledge about upcoming trends.

Blog reading has become a “must”; a strong routine which gives her satisfaction and a sense of calm after having performed it. Blogs means inspiration to her daily outfit as well as being the most important tool for staying on top at work.

### **Elin H.- “I can’t stick out”**

Elin is a small town, 22 year-old girl, who has a hairdresser education but works as a personal assistant for the moment being. She describes herself as fun, social and honest. She admits to being too social sometimes, as well as talkative and all in all a happy person. Right now she acknowledges to be quite boring due to her new job and the long hours of work she has right now, which vary from 9 to 15 hours, then coming home only in time to sleep and get up the next day, which she considers leaves her no time for any fun. She describes her style having a preference for black, white and grey, baggy pants, loose-fitting t-shirts, hoodies, leggings and converse sneakers.

The first blog she ever came in contact was BlondinBella.se, one of Sweden’s first big blogs written by the young Isabella Löwengrip who initially provoked the whole country with her controversial observations of society and inappropriate behavior. Elin admits she found her more fun back then.

*“ It was Blondin Bella’s blog I heard about first from a friend, everyone got annoyed by her, so this is a couple of years ago, maybe four, and I read her blog everyday until around a year ago, because she is really boring, she has become more mature, but it’s like if she were 60 years old.”(Elin H)*

When asked which blog really got her attention and got her “hooked” she tells us that Kissie, another rather controversial blog written by a young girl who has also received much attention due to her outrageous comments and behavior , and provocative debates with other bloggers.

*”It was Kissies blog, just because she's very provocative, everyone was irritated by her because she retouched all their photos to make herself smaller, hair bigger, she still does that sometimes, but now after all her surgeries , I still think it's a lot of fun to read her blog.”(Elin H)*

The two mentioned blogs belong more to the category of xxx blogs. However throughout the our meetings with Elin, the blogs that she mentioned the most, being obviously her favorite ones, was Keela.se, and Stylesbykate.se and Angelicablick.se three very different fashion blogs which she finds appealing for different reasons. Keela has beautiful hair and expresses herself in a style that is very appealing to Elin although she does not dare to assimilate it all the way. Kate dresses in a different style but shares her hairdresser background giving tips about hairstyles and colors as well as clothes. She follows Angelica Blick’s blog since she deeply admires her beauty and hairstyle.

Although her admiration for these young women is strong, she does not dare to really dress like any of them. She is very conscious of the fact that she lives in a small town (Kristianstad) and that it is not appropriate to stick out too much. She longs to move to a larger city where it is more acceptable to express your individual tastes and style.

*"...in this town ... you can not stick out too much, it does not work .... [further down in the same paragraph] ... The watches, however, colorful watches, that I could wear, because a watch feels more discreet than earrings ... [a little further down in the same paragraph] ... people start talking, you should not think that you are more than what they think you are, so no, there has been much talk about those who opened this deal now, a lot of gossip and people are so jealous in this town"*(Elin H)

She has a strong connection to the blogs she follows and likes to keep updated at all times, which she does through her iPhone in which she has bookmarked all the blogs she follows, and can read them whenever she has some spare time on the bus to work or in the mornings while eating breakfast.

She compared the activity of reading blogs with sharing an evening drinking wine with her friends. And when asked, she expressed that she used blogs mostly for inspiration

*"Inspiration by the clothes and the fun of reading about others' lives, plain entertainment."*(Elin H)

### **Ylva- "I'm there and then"**

Ylva is a, soon graduating, 19 year old high school senior who lives in Malmö together with her parents and three siblings. She describes herself as a normal girl, with some self-confidence issues, which she is gradually getting over, but in general fairly, pleased with live. She is a smart, determined young woman with a high degree of integrity.

She admits that she follows her blogs since they are entertaining, they have nice pictures, and for seeking inspiration in her life. She believes there are no different reasons for her interest in the different blogs. She says that blogs rather than having a negative effect on her, support her in her life:

*"...they support me mostly. For me, a girl who shows great self-confidence give me support, a girl who instead is like me ... I had not read my own blog!"*(Ylva)

She has her own blog which she has written for several years now and which started as a way for her to express her feelings and thought about her relationship at he time. Today she uses the blog as a way to keep her friend updated with her daily activities, as well as a way to handle her emotions, especially when angry at someone in particular. But she confesses that she would not read her own blog, which she considers to be something she does for her own sake, not so much to inspire others.

To her, blogs are something she uses when she needs a break.

*"... I take a shower. If I'm doing something and I need a break or clear my thoughts, then I either take a shower or read blogs."*(Ylva)

When it comes to clothing she believes she has a very different style compared to her friends. She is also rather impulsive and does not like to previously decide what to wear the next morning or when going out.

*” ...I'm very impulsive when it comes to clothes. If I start at school, when I know I'm going to a party in the evening, and start thinking in school on what to wear, it's the dumbest thing I can do. Because if I have planned before what to wear, I will change clothes 15 times. But if I come home, step into the shower, fix my hair, put makeup on and then "hmm, what should I wear? - It works well! "And then I'm finished. I am really there and then, when it comes to clothes.”(Ylva)*

However, she sadly admits that she has not bought any new clothes for a while due to her upcoming ball and graduation and all the costs of the dresses she will be needing

When it comes to what she gets out of blogs, her answer is inspiration and is very careful to let us know that her style is very individual and that she does not like to wear what everybody else is wearing.

The inspiration she is seeking is in photography and the poses and self-portraying of the bloggers she follows, who like Ylva happen to be models. Her self-esteem issues are once again evident since she wants to dare to look like the bloggers but doesn't understand how they can make it look so easy. Whenever she is not feeling comfortable to pose, she will ask her boyfriend ”to settle for an stretched out tongue! ”

### **Hanna- “quality before quantity”**

Hanna is a smart, determined, well-organized and straightforward twenty three year old, living in a small town in the heart of Skåne. She describes herself as strong-minded, humble and a little bit stubborn.

She puts quality before quantity in almost all aspects of her life; clothes, blogs and friends, and do not willingly trade it against the budget choice:

*“ If she wears something interesting, I will look for it and if I find the budget version I may consider it but... I am quite picky when it comes to clothes, I do prefer quality to quantity, and I rather spend my money on something I will really use.” (Hanna)*

In times when the wallet does not permit any larger excesses she uses her determination in her pursuit of quality:

*“I don't want to end up in Lyxfällan [Swedish TV show about people who are in deep financial distress due to compulsive shopping]. No, I cut down on partying or eating out if I find something I really want.” (Hanna)*

She first came in contact with fashion blogs four years ago through magazines. Her favorite blog is written by Angelica Blick:

*“she has an distinctive character, but still, a normal small town girl with a normal life; she used to work at Carlings [a budget fashion retailer]” (Hanna)*

Angelica Blick is her favorite due to her ability

*“to make the mundane look glamorous” and “she makes budget garments look like something luxurious.”*

Hanna makes use of every little moment to browse through a couple of blogs on her smartphone. She is particularly drawn to what happens “behind the blog”: the life, work and benefits and perks of being a successful blog writer that appeal to her:

*“it is also the life behind, her working assignments, the guest collection she did for nelly [nelly.com, an online clothing store], what she gets by having a blog, so it is much about what happens behind e.g. ‘I wonder what she has done today?’ that question brings me to her blog.”*

*“since the readers increased she has been invited to events and get the opportunity of for nelly.com and other assignments, for instance working in Hong Kong and such.” (Hanna)*

She keeps up in societal debates about blogs influence on young girls’ self-esteem and about power structures within the fashion establishment and she displays an awareness of that the perks of being a fashion blogger do not come without strings:

*“They get so much! So much perks, but you are never free of demands to deliver either. You must deliver to 100% and that is not how it is in anyone else’s life.” (Hanna)*

## 3.2 The emerging themes

Here the eight themes in four polarized relations are presented and analyzed. In the following chapter of discussion, the underlying mechanisms of these themes presented here will be discussed.

### 3.2.1 Addictive vs. Relaxing, entertainments and joy, satisfaction

One of the strong emerging themes we observed after an extensive reading and analysis of data is the addictive nature of the blog reading activity. We found that in many occasions our informants enter their blogs<sup>1</sup> daily, in order to see what is happening in the lives of the bloggers and of course what they are wearing at all times, following up the next day due to the diary-like form of the blogs. This behavior of continuous reading can be seen from Godden’s (1999) perspective in which the blogs belong to a sector in the young girls’ lifestyles, the part in which the individual follows a fairly consistent set of practices which in fact determines the kind of lifestyle they have, explaining the need of these young girls to repeat the activity on and on again. The blog reading activity becomes thus a part of these young women’s lives, part of their habits and routines.

The following quote illustrate the different ways in which some of our informants incorporate blogs in their lives as part of their lifestyle and routines:

*“ I just felt like reading my blogs, it has become a routine in my so called everyday-life, a habit. I had no special reason [to go into the blog] it’s just a routine when I turn on my computer. Just like when I go into Facebook. ” (Maria)*

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this analysis we will refer to the blogs the informants have chosen to follow and read as *their blogs*, not to be confused with the blogs the informants write, which is not the focus of our research.

[When asked what would happen if she didn't have time to read her blogs for a few days]

*"That would never happen, I don't know, I guess that wouldn't be fun, but it has never happened, yet... but I guess that if my phone would die, or something, that would be frustrating, I would be able to get along, but I would go through the posts I've missed as soon as I got home"*(Hanna)

[When we asked Ylva about her blog routines]

*"I see it like my parents read the newspaper...information, entertainment. Ja, I would like to compare it to when my parents read the newspaper... like news, control of the situation. I really don't feel anything special about it, I have been reading blogs for such a long time now so they are a part of my life."*(Ylva)

This routine seems to have become so strong that they have designed methods to make them more easily available in their lives. In order to make sure they have a good overview of all their blogs some of these girls use the technology available to organize the blogs in tags on their iPad or bookmarked on their computers and iPhones. This, to make sure that they have not missed any blog and in some cases to keep a certain predetermined sequence, certainly important in the structure of their lives. The following quotes illustrate the recurring behavior.

*"I like to sit with my iPad and I have different tags and when I go into one of them I find all-together 20 blogs, so I start with Kenza, I like that, to always start in the same sequence."*(Elin G)

[When asked what decides the sequence she follows when reading her blogs, she answered:]

*"...my obsessions, my need for routine..."* (Elin G)

[she later describes the sequence in which she reads her blogs]

*"Next is always My...Melissa, My, and then Victoria, they always come after each other."* (Elin G)

When asked why in that sequence:

*"All of them blogged on Modette.se. Melissa and My started blogging there and I followed them from Devote.se and then there, I found Victoria when I was reading My and Lisa"* (Ylva)

Interestingly, we have observed how this addictive behavior seems to be even stronger in some cases. We learnt that some of our informants not only go in on a daily basis, but sometimes even several times a day. Although they are aware that many of the blogs will not be updated until then, they will go in and see in case the blogger has happened to add something new.

*"It is usually when I wake up, I read over the latest updates, later when I'm on the bus back and forth from work, since it's still 20 minutes by bus, there I read them more thoroughly and then if I find a post which I find more interesting then I read it when I come home and have had dinner..."* (Elin H)

When we asked if she felt it was a routine or just to pass time, she answered:

*“It’s clearly a routine, every single morning...and before I go to bed”* (Elin H)

We asked her how she felt if she didn’t have time for them:

*“ Oh I don’t know [laughing] I would feel panic! What if they have written something I have to know about, or a really fun update...”* (Elin H)

*” Today I read my blogs mostly because I “should”. It is the thing I do when I have nothing else to do. As on Day 2 when I read [when I was sick] I think I was in 5 times. That’s not enough time for them to update much but I still do it since I want them so badly to have come up with something new. It scares me sometimes that I’m faster than the bloggers themselves! Don’t I have anything else to do? I feel stressed sometimes that I actually have other things to do, but then I feel like I have taken a break and enjoyed some time here with the blogs, not it will take a few hours until I can go into them again.”* (Elin G.)

Every time they go in, they do this with the anticipation and even the expectation of finding updated posts with new content for them to review, admire, get inspiration from, etc. This constant expectation is connected to a constant need of updates. The feeling of anxiety that builds up during the hours or, in a few cases, days in which they have not read the blog, resemble a lot the symptoms of addiction, in this case addiction for more information about the bloggers lives, clothes, styles, photos, all kinds of different elements appealing to the reader.

The following quote by Elin H. describes this feeling of frustration:

*“ I get so annoyed at them, But Kate for example, she was in a period in which she didn’t feel like blogging, so she didn’t update her blog like in two weeks, but then she started again”* (Elin H)

When asked how she felt everyday:

*“ I felt like, yes, now maybe she has updated, but no! And then one day when I had not been in and then the next day, I went in, and I saw that she had updated the day before... that shows you have to go in everyday.”* (Elin H)

How did you feel about it:

*“It was good since he had made a post about hair, she had new hair extensions and had colored them, s that was good... I forgave her [laughter]”* (Elin H)

*”... I like the feeling of being up to date. If I’m not up to date then I feel... out of place, or out of balance. At least I do [smile]”* (Maria)

*“Its hard for me to describe the feeling today. It’s so natural to me now, a habit that does not feel special, just necessary, just like a drug. It’s a must!”*(Maria)

Trying to understand the reason for this we can apply Tapscott’s (1998) argument that the Internet is the only available means to find and access such an extent of different identities.

Being able to explore such an array of personalities and individuals can be significant in the own identity formation process (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). This could be the reason for young people to find the Internet so interesting, and the blogs, as a tool to get closer to these identities, even more appealing, as a means towards identifying their individual inner self (Tapscott 1998).

The way we interpret this is that the blog reader is in constant need of confirmation or corroboration in this delicate process of identity seeking. Once they have established a "relationship" with their bloggers, due to the continuity of their reading, they will rely on a constant flow of corroboration not to get lost in the sea of choices and impressions available in today's society. The stronger the "relationship" with the blogger, i.e. self-recognition, the higher the anxiety to be updated. Tapscott (1998) recognizes that the absence of updates creating a certain irritation and longing can be interpreted as emptiness, as losing a part of one self, leading this anxiety to grow in the desire to fill that emptiness. Like shown in Elin's, previously mentioned, case when one of her favorite bloggers had not updated for several days. Once she posted a "good" post, according to Elin, matching their common interest in hair styling, everything was in order again.

In the cases in which our informants have followed the bloggers for many years, establishing a strong relationship with them, they tend to be disturbed by any changes that do not match the image they based their relationship on, like is the case for Elin G. and Elin H.

*"It's almost scary since I notice... [observing a blog in which the blogger has changed style] It's like, what's happened? You notice their different stages... here she has a beautiful blouse from Zara, but the other day she had converse shoes with a heel, ripped stockings, and hair extensions with ping dip die on the ends, which I will never try."* (ElinG)

*"Yes, maybe that's why I think she's so boring, actually. She has not had a boyfriend during all the time I have followed her blog, she was more fun before. That's how it is when you get a boyfriend you behave more properly. But she doesn't have to post about her boyfriend all the time.. I guess that's why I think she's boring actually."* (Elin H)

This does not necessarily mean that they stop following them but it does certainly make them question what it is about them they keep finding appealing. The emotional aspects of this will be discussed further on when approaching the themes of reality vs. fantasy.

From a more functional point of view Tapscott (1998) describes how experts find that people, especially young people are attached to their computers due to the fact that it is their own will steering their actions, and if they wish to leave it takes them only a second to do so. The fact that the blog reader is anonymous is also a strong factor. The ability to do this in your own privacy without any restrictions for it or anybody knowing what you are looking at are strong arguments for this recurring behavior (Livingstone, 2009) Ylva puts this very clear, when asked why she reads all the updates she has missed, she answers: "because I can!"

What we then find intriguing is the fact that many of these young women said to read blogs to relax, enjoy a moment of time for themselves, taking a break, all situations associated to the seeking of an uplifting experience, somewhat contrary to the anxiety their addictive behavior seems to lead to.

When we reminded Hanna about writing in her diary that she wrote that she slavishly followed some of the blogs, that they felt like musts, but at the same time they were mere relaxation. She explained her use of words by saying:

*“Relaxation is when one has control over the situation, it’s like, ok, now I know.”* (Hanna)

Hanna’s explanation of her own words, found in her diary in the initial stages of this research, supposes that the longing our informants feel to take a break, relax, and enjoy a moment by reading their blogs is a symptom of having earlier read the blogs and gained a certain satisfaction, and relaxation coming from being updated with the latest content. In other words, as we were into earlier, getting their daily dose of association or recognition. This interpretation is supported by Simmel’s (1957) identification of two mutually-limiting divergent forces: the inclination towards distinction or towards association. He believes that distinction from others gives the freedom to move from example to example, while association, or identification with others, gives peace of mind. This peace of mind, or freedom, are feelings described by some of our informants when asked about the drive to start reading the blogs.

Elin G described for us what the blog reading experience did for her:

*“For me it like when someone else sits down and meditates, or does yoga, or something like that. Or reads a book, or eats chocolate , it’s a moment I get for myself... or what I like to do the most to relax. Everyone likes different things. For me it’s reading my blogs.”*

(Elin G)

*“ Many times when I’ve had a lot to do and I am on my way home, I can think about all the posts I have to go through and that’s every-day- luxury for me”* (Elin G)

Hanna confesses that blogs can replace a night out with her friends:

*“ I’m also a person that doesn’t need to go out with my friends and do stuff. I can just sit at home alone, and read my blogs! I like to sit down in my couch and make it nice and cozy and look at blogs... it’s not like I chose the blogs over my friends, it’s not that, but I like to be alone, entertain myself with blogs, it’s fun!”* (Hanna)

Clearly enough we have understood that the initially contradictory feeling that could arise from the anxiety caused by a feeling of addiction, of “having to” read the blogs was closely connected to the desire of reaching a feeling of wellbeing, many times associated with the affirmation of identity our informants are seeking constantly, which in this case is achieved by reading the blogs. The fact that our informants follow these blogs as a routine in their daily lives is a clearly proof of the constant development and importance blogs have grown to have in their lives.

### 3. 2. 2 The shining blogger vs. The grey reader

When trying to cluster the impressions emerged from the collected data we saw an evident theme of comparing oneself with the blog writer; their lifestyle, clothes, style, job, all seemed to work to the advantage of the blog writer and our informants had a tendency to put themselves in an inferior position.

*“for instance as yesterday when I was going out, everything was nicely put in the wardrobe and I tore up maybe ten different tops, three couple of shorts, and then I thought of how Keela would have worn it since she always makes it work so good, and I am not particularly good at putting together [outfits] and think for myself what would work. So that is a situation in which I think of what she would have done.”*(Elin H)

*” it’s funny now when I for the first time have to reflect about how I feel [about blogs]. I feel updated. I understand that it sounds like a cliché but that’s how it is. I want to stay à jour. Difficult to explain. One can compare it to ‘the popular girls in the class’, you know the girls you wanted to hang with when you were in 6th and 7th grade but that you wasn’t as cool and pretty as. You can compare that story with the blogs I follow today, if you think that blogs are real persons. I want to hang with the blogs/humans because I think they are cool and interesting.”* (Maria)

*”[about Mimmi] The clothes she is wearing, I would really have liked to put them on myself but I know I do not fit in that type of clothes, but she looks so incredibly pretty, and it is fun that she dares to stick out in this town.”* (Elin H)

The majority of the followed blog writers were looked upon in awe and following quotes witness about the high thoughts the blog readers have about the blog writers. Elin says the following about the fashion blogger Angelica Blick:

*“I like that you can hardly see the outfit but even so it becomes sooo pretty, must be the person in matter that makes it!”* ( Elin G)

*“I mainly sit and contemplate over how wonderfully beautiful this girl is and how she can be so gorgeous in everything she puts on. Jealous.”* (Elin G)

But that is not the only blog writer that Elin looks up to in awe. She has various “favorites” as seen below:

*“Pretty pictures of wonderfully beautiful Valeria Sokolova, eye candy in forms of pictures.”* (Elin G)

Elin H also admires various bloggers:

*“[about Mimmi] She is a very pretty girl actually. She usually writes about how she exercises and where she exercises. She also sews much on her own and it is fun to see because she shows photos and the clothes she makes are super pretty:”* (Elin H)

*“[about Keela] The blog I am entering now, which will also be the last for today, is really fun, the girl is always so pretty! From top ‘til toe, I just love her hair!”*(Elin H)

Despite of the blog writers' attributed position as role models it seems like their different way of looking, acting and being led to pressure and evoke feelings of inferiority within the blog readers. They have to be someone. Our data tells us that the blog writers have a tendency to give the blog reader too much to live up to, especially when taken into concern that each informant had these high thoughts about many different blogs and blog writers.

According to Immanuel Kant the reasoning, the common sense, is what gives humans the possibility to compare alternatives and individual choices that one faces in life e.g. which qualities and characteristic one wants to possess (Bauman, 1999). Bauman (2002) draws upon this line of reasoning when arguing that the important is not how the identity shall be gained but rather what identity the individual wants to possess.

To know what traits one wish to have may sound easy, however taking in all the possible identities presented online in general and on blogs in particular one quickly realizes that it is not such an easy task to distinguish and choose between the traits and identity.

These endless amounts of possible identities have resulted in strict societal norms of what traits are seen as acceptable and unacceptable. These expectations on the individuals are challenging and may be complicated to live up to.

As seen in the quotes, the informants experience that they are bound to a certain inferiority in relation to the blog writers, how much they try, they feel that they will not live up to the position of the blog writers. When Ylva was asked what she gained from reading blogs she answers:

*"Well, what do you gain from reading blogs? Self doubt!" (Ylva)*

We asked her why:

*"because they looks so damn hot all the time!" (Ylva)*

We asked how she, a model in making, could feel inferior in that way and she explained she did not have the self-confidence to see herself as "hot" or sexy. She was amazed and surprised that her boyfriend thought she was sexy and pretty at all times:

*"He apparently thinks I'm pretty all the time and I said 'are you stupid or what!?! Sexy? Nooo!' And then the hair! I had slept in that hairdo and he says 'please look sexy' [he was taking photos of her]. Maybe when I have had the time to put makeup on, shower, do my hair and put on lenses, then maybe." (Ylva)*

*"well, like, I don't mean maybe like that, but it makes me wonder why it is so easy for them to look pretty? If you do this or that you will look pretty, but I wonder... I have tried! But it feels so strange, I wonder why it seems so easy for them?" (Ylva)*

*"I can't understand where they find all these pictures, like in this, f-l-o-r-e-a-l-e [blog], I wish I had found so many pictures but I can't, so instead have I found a place that does it for me, then I don't need to, [about f-l-o-r-e-a-l-e]" (Elin G)*

Some of the informants believe that they will never be viewed as equals in the eyes of the blog writers, whom are perceived as "out of reach" and in possession of unattainable abilities.

*“The feelings that emerge are happiness and jealousy. Happiness because you see how beautiful these girls have styled their clothes and how oneself could have looked like. Jealousy because I cannot afford all of the clothes I want so I will never be able to style it as good as they do” (Elin H)*

Maria says that she sometimes get struck by inferiority complex when looking at the blogs when we asked what feelings that sense of inferiority felt like she answered:

*“ I look up to them in a way, I respect them... But I have seen Elin Kling on a fashion show... but it is still like they are much bigger than me, I will never hang out with them” (Maria)*

For Maria this sense of inferiority even keeps her from leaving comments on the blogs:

*“It doesn’t matter. I feel that I have nothing to give them, they are much better than me on these things [putting together outfits]” (Maria)*

It looks like Maria does not believe it will pay off to leave comments, she feels she has nothing to offer the bloggers, she is not “enough”. Her quote can be interpreted from Willett & Buckingham’s (2006) argument that girls seek confirmation and support by finding individuals with the same way of thinking as them and if they do not get that confirmation they look for someone else that will respond to them. Hence if not getting response on their blog comments they choose to not comment at all, they fall under the blogger’s shadow.

These quotes all display a view on the own inferior and fixed situation that reminds us about the resigned portrait (our translation of “det uppgivna porträttet” described by Ulvert-Sneistrup in Status, 2012) discussed by Ulvert-Sneistrup, (2012).

According to Ulvert-Sneistrup (2012) status can be viewed as four different portraits depending on the applied theoretical perspective. These portraits can be compared and put in relation to each other depending on two dimensions; if regarding that the society is organized by strong or weak social structures and if the aspiration of status is viewed as something morally wrong and should be discouraged or if it is viewed as something universal and inevitable. The resigned portrait holds the view that the society is organized by strong social structures and that aspiration to achieve status is universal and inevitable. If having this view on status the quest for higher status is seen as a difficult and troublesome affair; the individual is relevantly fixed to the class he or she comes from and often lacks the cultural and economic means to fit in. He or she will always risk revealing his/her background with minor mistakes and will probably not succeed in his quest. (Ulvert-Sneistrup, 2012)

And it is here where the “resigned part” observed in the above quotes, comes into play. The perceived inferiority Maria, Elin G and Elin H feel locked to in relation to the blog writers and no matter how hard they try they will just never be on equal terms with them, or as expressed by Maria; she will never be friends and “hang out” with them.

If wanting to imitate someone else’s social status by copying the consumption style you will be put up for a challenge (Ulvert-Sneistrup, 2012). Bourdieu (1984 in Ulvert-Sneistrup, 2012) argues that habitus, social style including behavior, use of language, interaction codes, dressing and body movements, is too complex to simply copy. Habitus is even so complex that you need to be born into it to fully master, which would then increase the risk to reveal your true background and belonging status.

Even if the rest of the society does not consider the blog writers as “high class” or as “socialites”, our informants do express a feeling of inferiority in relation to them, which we argue is what is required in order for these thoughts on status to be relevant in this situation. These three young women feel it is almost hopeless since nothing they do will grant them the same status as the blog writers’ possess. They see someone, or someones, they admire and would like to, if not be, so at least be more alike but something is stopping them in their attempts to approach these and the level they hold. For instance Maria tried to write her own blog but soon realized that *her* life just was not as interesting as the bloggers’ she herself is following:

*“And before I blogged myself. But it is tiresome, you have to have people that help you, work on a communication office. I believe I just don’t have as interesting life as they have [other bloggers].”* (Maria)

Ylva and Elin G, as seen in the quote above, sense that it is something more to it, since they wonder how the bloggers are able to be as effortless and make everything looks so pretty and chic:

*“well, like, I don’t mean maybe like that, but it makes me wonder why it is so easy for them to look pretty? If you do this or that you will look pretty, but I wonder... I have tried! But it feels so strange, I wonder why it seems so easy for them?”* (Ylva)

And we argue that this could be the so difficult-to-copy habitus showing its face. Even if Ylva does all the things she is *supposed* to do in order to look pretty; put lenses on, nice clothes and makeup, she still can’t get it completely right, something is missing, that feel of ease, that you only master when really belonging to that level.

We argue that the inferior feeling that sometimes arises in the comparison with the blog writers can be connected to the societal pressure of choosing the accepted traits and identity among the myriad of identities displayed online and in blogs. This societal pressure of “living up to the standards” may impose a resigned feeling of failure when it turns out that it is not as easy as to imitate the styles and procedures. The blog readers sense it is still something lacking, they feel that they still are not in the same league as the admired blog writers and they develop a sense of inferiority in relation to these.

### **3. 3. 3 Being unique vs. The urge to fit in**

The most consistently recurring theme in our data was the use of blog reading as a tool for positioning themselves and relate to themselves or others in some way or another. We believe it has to do with mainly two things; the exposure of diverse traits, looks and identities and the visual aspect of blog “reading”. Blog reading mainly consists of screening through a huge amount of pictures and photos, and this visualization we believe makes it easier to use as a positioning tool, since humans easier take in visual information. Tapscott (1998) views internet as a toolbox for young persons to find themselves. The blogs can be argued to be some of the tools within that box. Through the display of such diverse identities young people can easily relate to what traits they want to possess and which they do not want to have, which would help young persons to find the individual and independent persons within themselves (Tapscott, 1998).

Under this heading we will account for all aspects that have come into light in terms of positioning oneself in relation to others. We do not have one quote regarding being unique that does not also touch upon the opposite; the positioning, always in relation to others. Centrally, there also exists a tension between being unique and the urge to fit in.

*“...I don’t wear a clean cut blazer or a suit like everybody else does, I do it in a cooler way!”*  
(Maria)

Since an ongoing theme in Maria's interview was the urge to distinguish herself from others: we asked if it was important to set oneself apart from others. She answered:

*“For me? Yes it is!”*(Maria)

When asked if she had ever imitated a whole outfit, Elin G answered:

*“I might have done that, but I don’t remember it. I can’t see myself combining everything the same way as another person. I can’t buy a whole outfit where I have the same top, same pants, same shoes, and yes, maybe Kenza wears converse to everything, so it’s something one maybe does, but I have almost become allergic to converse lately. So no, I have not done it completely, maybe just one thing.”* (Elin G)

The subject of relating to others through consumption is not a new thought. Veblen (in Ulvert-Sneistrup, 2012) argues that the most important instinct, besides survival, is emulation which is the eternal process where humans with lower status imitate the ones with a higher status in an attempt to gain higher social status. According to Veblen (in Ulvert-Sneistrup, 2012) this is what drives change in the society. Simmel (McCracken, 1988) argues that it exist two polarized forces; the wish to unite with some people and the wish to distinguish oneself from others. Accordingly, the “unification” or association to others would supposedly bring peace in mind and the separation would lead to freedom in moving from example to example (Ulvert-Sneistrup, 2012). In a social context these two polarized forces translates to social conformation (adjustment) and differentiation where fashion satisfy both these needs through imitation and differentiation (Ulvert-Sneistrup, 2012).

*“... I bought that one because I thought it was gorgeous and then I started seeing it in several pictures”* (Elin G)

When asked how that felt, she answered:

*“Then I was proud, since I had it first... but then the other way around, when I borrowed a blouse from my friend which I then have in my Facebook picture, and the Kissie had it, and I was like, No!... It had been better if someone else had it instead.”* (Elin G)

When asked who she would have preferred to see it on, she answered:

*“For me, Hanna med W, but that’s because she doesn’t have such a large blog and she has her followers she lives on.”* (Elin G)

*“ No, it was more that Blondinbella made track suits and stuff like that and she has more that strict style with shirt and stuff, her clothes I wouldn’t have wanted to wear just because it was Blondinbella”* (Elin K)

These quotes illustrate these two opposite forces. Her blouse was later worn by Kissie, which she clearly did not like, Kissie being someone she did not want to be associated with. However if the blouse would have been worn by Hanna m W she would have been happy since she is someone Elin wants to be identified with.

The importance of being unique was a concurrent theme in many of our informants' narratives even if it was mainly discussed by Elin, Maria and Elin H.

*"I like doing things in my way, to make the outfits 'mine'. A couple of months ago you were supposed to wear statement necklaces, and then it was statement bracelets instead, and now it is rings you should wear but that did not work for me, but you have to try. And now I have maybe two wristbands instead of those four big bracelets shown in the pictures"* (Elin G)

*"That I can do, for instance some things that all bloggers have I certainly don't want to have because everyone else have hem. And if someone gets tired of them I can still use mine... Or I mean, if it is something all bloggers have, I don't want to have it but when they stop using it and if I still like it, then I gladly buy it. But then they have to have stopped wearing it, it can't be shown on the blogs anymore! I don't want the stamp 'she bought it just because Kenza has it', no that I don't want!"* (Ylva)

Even if some of our informants have expressed a resigned feeling of inferiority (discussed more in detail under the heading The shining blog writer vs. The grey blog reader), we also get the impression that our informants all see possibilities to become who they want to be through the use of others' displayed identities on the blogs, as a source for inspiration to how to define themselves. This perspective is supported by Tapscott (1998) who, as mentioned earlier, argue that due to the plethora of different identities and traits displayed online, the blogs are considered as tools for identity creation by their readers. The blogs give the readers the opportunity to practice in constructing their own individual roles and identities, which will have a positive effect in the readers' assertion of the own personality (Tapscott, 1998). The variety of traits and identities on display, ready to be picked liked if being a tapas menu is illustrated in following quote:

*"They are so different but yet so alike, it is still the trends... And that is what they are wearing and that's when I become one of them who has colored pants just because they have colored pants, I want a pair of Jeffrey Campbell shoes because they have Jeffrey Campbell shoes, I have leather jacket, they have leather jacket. It becomes that all are alike but in their own way to make it personal. And then I can put genres on them, not in words but visually and there I feel that I pick a little bit from all, all the time. I see a little bit of Jeffrey Campbell shoes, Indian handbags, a lots of rings, something I liked there, and here, and I realize that the way I dress is a little bit of what Kissie stands for, and Kenza"* (Elin H)

Even if acknowledging that bits and pieces of ideas and inspiration of who to be is taken from the blogs, our informants often express a wish to be distinct, not like everyone else, and how to express that through your own personal style, which relates well to the theory of reflexivity. Reflexivity is used to describe when something refers back to itself via something outside of itself. Ziehe, a (1993) sociologist youth researcher argues that by looking at oneself in relation to the outside world, the individual creates his or her identity and relates to the society's demands. In a reflective behavior, the individual look at him- or herself and compares that with others.

In accordance to Tapscott, Ziehe (1993) argues that the Internet have given humans more possibilities to look at oneself reflexively; especially the social medias, such as blogs, have increased the information channels that tells what is appropriate and what is not. The identity and personality are no longer bound to your background; it is up to each individual to create the identity which makes the identity not as given as previously. In this modern world, where you have the ability to create your own self have increased the amount of individual choices which in turn, leads to greater possibilities e.g. to make social class-climbing easier. (Ziehe, 1993) It is now the *choice* of identity that is the important issue for the individual (Bauman, 1999). So, even if our informants do acknowledge they get inspired to certain styles, activities and behaviors it seems important to point out that they still want to have their own style and self. This is supported by Godden's (1999) who argues that the individual may be influenced by the blog writers' opinions, and be open to explore them, but in the end the choice is made by each individual themselves.

According to this perspective the individual has a wider range of choices to choose from and to relate oneself to, but the final choice is still made by the individual. And it is exactly that our blog writers say they do, they try on, sometime a little bit of Kenza, another time they try something from Blondinbella but in the end they feel that the choice is theirs, and that choice is often to be unique in relation to the blog writers, other blog readers and their friends, as illustrated in the previous quotes.

A reason for the informants' ultimate choice of being their own self, can be related to what Tapscott (1998) says about the new media, that it forces young people to critically review what is true or not in what they read or see since it is easy to portray yourself falsely online. This learning process shows that everything expressed in the blogs are not true and this may lead to a growing confidence in the individual's ability to make decision.

Even if the choice is to be unique, some of the girls feel it is not that simple. Elin H feels a strong fear and peer pressure from her social world to conform to the established norms of how to dress and act and who to be. She fears that if being "too special" she will risk becoming the victim of trash talk behind the back.

*"[about Keela] her jewelry, she does her own jewelry using pearls, earrings and necklaces, I believe she does. And then, the glasses, really cool but I would never...well, in this town... you can't be too different, it doesn't work.. [further down in the same line of reasoning] ...the watches on the other hand, colorful watches is something that I could wear because a watch feels more discreet than the earrings"* (Elin H)

This is clear evidence of Swedish "Jante Law" (Jantelagen); societal values of Swedish culture that has its roots in jealousy and "small-town mentality" and dictates that you should not set yourself apart or believe that you are better than anyone else (Nationalencyclopedia, 2011). It seems that Elin H. suffers from moral restrictions. Moral restrictions are one out of many tricks that are used to hinder the (miss)use of social class symbols by persons from the wrong class (Goffman, 1951 in Ulvert-Sneistrup, 2012). Moral restrictions can be detected in phrases like "one should know his place". And that is what Elin does; she does not challenge her social surroundings by wearing colorful leggings or t-shirts in her mundane life even if she feels a bit more freedom of being who she wants to be when visiting music festivals or when she lived in a bigger city like Malmö.

When asked if she would have dared to dress differently in Malmö, since she had lived in Malmö previously. She answered:

*“There I would be able to dress in a more colorful way...I spoke with my friend about it yesterday. Because it’s completely different in Malmö, people don’t talk about others there, if there’s anything to say they’ll do it to your face, and people stick out in Malmö. It seems like no one has the same fashion style in Malmö at all, so in Malmö absolutely!”* (Elin H)

Even so, she and some of the other girls speak admiring about those who do challenge the established norms and do dare to distinguish themselves from others.

*“the clothes she is wearing, I would have liked to use them too but I know I don’t fit in that style. But she is so damn good looking, and it is fun that she dares to distinguish herself in this town, no one, all look the same in this town, and then she comes walking with leather jacket, heels, black sunglasses, a hairdo and some nice cool jacket, it is actually fun to see [about Mimmi, a blogger]”* (Elin H)

*”[about My, a blogger] She is a gorgeous girl, one of the most beautiful persons I know, but sometimes she looks a bit goofy. But I like that she dares, she’s not afraid to show exactly who she is. For instance she has placed a tattoo in a very unusual place... That’s not where you place a tattoo! [My has placed a diamond shaped tattoo on the middle of her chest] But I think it is fun. It’s so damn cool that she goes all in, and then she has another one on the left wrist, a “Lilla My”, I would never do it but it is cool [Lilla My is one of the figures in Tove Jansson’s children books]”* (Ylva)

Maybe this admiration for the bloggers who have the courage to be themselves can be explained by the fact that these bloggers have made the most out of the personal choice of identity referred to above and have the courage to not let jealousy of others affect their choice. And since this is what the girls themselves strive for, the daring blog writers become someone to look up to, feel strengthened and supported by in their own quest for individuality.

That line of reasoning leads to another theme that was discovered; some of the girls, who have loudly claimed their individuality later, admitted that they had one blogger they fully identified themselves with and that they could easily switch life or wardrobe with. Willett and Buckingham (2006) offer a valid explanation to that contradiction; blog reading is a way to find role models since the reader can see how a certain behavior or style is perceived by others, through comments and how successful the blogger is outside the blog. In accordance to Godden’s (1999) they point out that visible role models affect the choice and creation of lifestyle and identity. Finding someone in a similar situation or with similar life, dreams or aspirations is important for young people’s identity creation (Willett & Buckingham, 2006).

Especially Ylva felt a connection with her favorite blogger Melissa, since they were in the same age, both had dreams of becoming models and similar taste in fashion:

*“... Melissa is almost just like me, so I follow her because of the clothes, and Victoria which I couldn’t open earlier, her clothes I don’t look at that much, she has strange clothes.”* (Ylva)

*“ I think I started earlier, the reason I started following her was that I recognized myself a lot in her, she dreams of becoming a model.”* (Ylva)

*“I like outfit pictures, then I can see how she brings out the clothes, and she works as a model too, and I have done some model jobs, so sometimes I go to her blog to find inspiration on how to pose.” (Ylva)*

Melissa confirms Ylva in her choice of lifestyle, dreams and personal style. She also helps her when in self-doubt, she can then turn to Melissa to see how she has handled similar situations, sometimes communicated through the blog and sometimes imagined by Ylva. Ylva seems genuinely happy about having found someone that also wants to become a model and live the same life with high school and model castings like herself. It becomes a confirmation that she is not the only one having to deal with the insecurity and self-doubt of trying to become a model. Ylva have found someone that understands her and to share this with, since none of her friends aspire the same dream.

Our informants find support for their identity creation and self-development when reading blogs. Some blogs they use as role models, someone to feel support from, others they pick bits and pieces from and yet others they use as an example of whom not to be. These girls are clearly negotiating and re-negotiating their identity by positioning themselves by relating to the blogs they read. The blogs obviously provide the informants with different lifestyle, identities and roles. Even if they feel that the ultimate choice is theirs and the choice is to be themselves, to be unique.

### **3. 3. 4 Reality vs. Dream world**

Interestingly, when reading through the data thoroughly something that comes to mind was the paradox that appeared to exist in the thoughts and expressions of our young informants. In some of their answers we got the feeling that finding a common trait with the bloggers was a key element for them in the categorizing of their blogs. In a way it seems important for them to see the bloggers as “normal” people, to recognize themselves in them. From the data gathered we could see that they are all aware that the women behind the blogs are young students as themselves, of the same age as they are, have the same interests they have, or even the same background, or profession.

*“ I also wanted to work with fashion, I took the textile and clothing orientation in high school, so my goal was to work in fashion. I would have liked to create a clothes collection as well, and that’s what I find fun in Angelica’s blog.” (Hanna)*

*“.....the reason I started to follow her was that I recognize myself a lot in her, she dreams of becoming a model, ...and then her photo interest, we have a very similar style, I used to take a lot of pictures, yes, we have the same values when it comes to photographing.” (Ylva)*

*“ I follow Styles by Kate since she is also a hairdresser and she posts stuff about both hair and fashion.” (Elin H)*

Very important in some cases was the fact that the blogger looked like a normal person, not like the model-like women seen everywhere else in the media. This was very well illustrated by Elin's insightful comment:

*“Mimmi updates a lot about working out and about fashion as well and she is very beautiful, and she has a normal body too, I mean she is not the really thin girl, she can post pictures of herself in bikini and there will be some flesh all around, it’s like a good normal body, not like those thin girls posted on Philips blog.” (Elin H)*

According to Ziehe (1993) one of the features of the modern world is that people examine themselves, how they behave and should behave, in relation to what others believe. This is described with the term of reflexivity. In the case of Elin she appreciates the fact that the blogger, whom she admires, looks normal which probably allows her to see herself with more approving eyes. She chooses from the different channels which message to focus on, in this case the bloggers normal body vs. the thin girls from the other blog. The new world gives young people the opportunity to reflexively see themselves through many different perspectives. The array of media channels existing today sends out all kinds of different messages on what is suitable behavior and plays a central role in the identity seeking process of these young women (Ziehe, 1993) .

Some of our informants chose to follow blogs that were written by people they actually knew or had met, or were acquaintances to their acquaintances, or merely lived in the same city as they did.

Regardless of the actual degree of acquaintance, and although they believed that they had read their blog no matter that, they confessed that the familiarity made it somewhat more exciting. The fact that they could write about something going on in their city, or about someone they knew, or about styles and trends accessible on a more local level, made these blogs more appealing for some of our informants.

*“ It’s much more fun to read those [the blogs] that actually come from Kristianstad and Malmö, in Malmö I can recognize a lot of the places in the pictures she posts. So of course, that’s much more fun! Stockholm; I’ve only been to once so that feels like, no! And the fact that with my friends’ blogs, well there you know who everybody she writes about is, so it’s much more fun to read if they keep it more local.” (Elin H)*

*“Mostly, I feel curious when I read Billytilly’s blog, she seems to live down in Malmö and that’s quite close to Kristianstad. And since I’ve lived in Malmö before, then I’m very curious about where she hangs out and so on.” (Elin H)*

*“...it’s written by a girl who works at Nova [shopping mall in Lund] and that’s a lot of fun because you get close, it’s a places where I am...” (Elin G)*

*“ Felicia [blogger], she goes to my school as well and Lisa [other blogger] and Felicia went to the same class, now they go different classes a year under me. So they are friends outside school and have been that for a long time I think.” (Ylva)*

*...It’s actually quite fun that she’s from here too and that she has that many visitors now...” (Elin H)*

*“... with her blog [Annika Fager] it’s much more fun because she’s from a place where I am from, and it feels very close because I have friends have friends who know her, so in a way I know who it is. We, don’t know each other, but it’s just fun that she is here and I have seen her and recognize where she takes her pictures.”*

“... she is 23 years old and comes from Lund, which is a bit more real for me [About the same blogger].”(Elin G)

“[When talking about Lisa, the blogger that goes to her school] *It's quite cool because she does not post a 'today's outfit' every day, but I see her every day, so she is like a walking fashion blog... she always looks like she does on her blog, so it's no scam, that's what she looks like.*” (Ylva)

Very obvious was the fact that most of the informants followed some kind of local blogger, in which the identification of environment and people, and closeness involves was an appealing factor making these blogs somewhat more interesting. As Ziehe suggests, another feature of the modern world is that the fact that we are aware of the availability or “doability” of things can motivate us to change, or to do things otherwise not so obvious to us, but it can also make us more anxious due to a certain press to shape us according to an ideal.

The closeness to the blogger makes their lives seem more reachable, more attainable, the fact that she looks good, and lives the life she does can motivate our informants to strive towards a similar lifestyle due to the possibility of it. The paradox then, is the fact that they acknowledge and appreciate the reality or self-recognition of the blog and the blogger, but they are still fascinated with the luxurious, glamorous, perfect life showed by the blogger herself. Some of them seemed to appreciate the more natural pictures, less styled type of pictures, but in general we felt that in one way or another they were not as interested in looking at pictures of the blogger looking like “normal” people, in the morning, with no makeup, in their pyjamas.

“ *I mean, I do like that kind of life, but not the clothes, I don't think it's appealing when she walks around in jogging trousers, when she's outdoors ...it's fun that they're out, but I want to see Rebecca in a dress with big accessories, that's what she usually has, rings and all, that's what I'm used to see Rebecca in, not rubber boots!*” (Hanna)

Our informants get lost in the trips the blogger writes about, the events they get invited to, the fancy clothes they get to wear, and acknowledge the benefits received by being a successful blogger. It is in fact this fantasy world of the bloggers' life that makes it so attractive.

The trouble-less life they seem to have is surrounded by beautiful things, since it is usually the only side of the bloggers' life that actually comes forward. The admiration and desire to, like the bloggers, achieve a lifestyle full of pleasures and benefits were present from the start, as part of the joy of reading blogs and dreaming away.

“...it feels like you go into small worlds in which you cannot go in otherwise, and in a way one has not been able to do earlier, before blogs, and now you can do it...now it's open and I want to be there.” (Maria)

“ ... and for me it's very easy to get stuck there... sometimes when there's a commercial break on TV, I'll turn on my computer and start reading my blogs and then I forget all about the program I was watching.” (Maria)

“ *It feels like I've been in for 15 minutes though I've been in for a whole hour!*” (Maria)

*“Then there’s this blogger called Rebecca Simonsson and it’s all about glamour there, she is the nightclub manager and runs a blog about her glamour life and her clothes, like today’s outfit, tips to buy, and other stuff....”* (Hanna)

*...it’s not like I have to buy this and that, it’s like when you sit there in the evening, and just want to check it out and enter into another world, just like with Sex and the City [cult TV show about successful fashionistas in Manhattan] and I just wanna sit there and just feel “now I’m there, nothing else around me, but now I’m there.”* (Hanna)

*“It entertains me. You get into another world, and she is a real Hollywood girl too [Rebecca Simonsson]. She has many friends in Hollywood and she usually posts when she is there. It’s like turning on Sex and the City or a glamour-movie and just, relax and enter their world.”* (Hanna)

*“Sometimes I’ve felt...for example, when I see pictures from fashion week, of course I would love to be there... of course I want to be her right now! [Picture of Anna dello Russo, editor in large at Japanese Vogue and style icon]...yes, absolutely! Her job, her apartment, her clothes, to sit front row... It’s a fantasy world, and even if you’re looking at the clothes it’s like you end up in the same scene as they are in.”* (Maria)

But as Ziehe suggests dreaming is not merely something negative. Ziehe suggests that dreaming can lead to commitment and hard work. As Ylva expresses, the life she dreams of is the life she would like to have. This could engage her in a certain commitment with herself to get there, as we believe is the case for many young women that dream away in the lives of the bloggers, realizing the path they should take in order to achieve a certain kind of life.

*“ She keeps her blog, in my opinion...well she has the kind of life that I really want to have, she works as a model, she lives in Stockholm where I am from, she seems to have it so easy, although I know that the blog usually just shows the positive side... but it’s still a life that I could consider living.”* (Ylva)

The admiration and interest in the lives of the bloggers can most evidently be associated with what, for decades now, we have experienced with celebrities. According to the academics Kurzman et al. (2007) celebrity status can be compared to the early concepts of status explored by Weber (1946). The celebrity status is, of course in this case, determined by the bloggers’ followers. The degree of exposure and to what extent they can be considered celebrities by society is clearly due to the amount of followers they have. But to these young girls, a less exposed blogger could be as interesting, depending on the role she plays in the life of the reader, and how much the reader knows about them.

It was interesting to acknowledge the amount of information they know about their bloggers, knowing their previous blogging platforms, who they were acquainted to, why they started writing, who they had worked for before, their background, their coming collections. Then of course we understand that this knowledge comes from following the same bloggers for a long time and all the personal information the bloggers themselves provide for their readers due to the diary-like nature of the blogs. However the interest they have in their lives behind the blog was striking to us.

*“There he is! He’s like everywhere, he is part of the jury for the Elle-prize [fashion magazine, which gives out a yearly prize in the fashion industry] and he is one of Sweden’s powers in fashion together with Sofie Fahrman [editor for fashion and beauty magazine for Aftonbladet newspaper] and fashion editor at Elle.”* (Hanna)

*“ I’m usually in another site as well; Ytlighter.com and there is a girl who blogs there Ellinor Nygård. She was actually an engineer background before she started blogging. She was even the first fashion blogger in Sweden. Then when she actually made it big, so that she could make a living of it, she started a magazine, Modette, but it doesn’t exist anymore, since she now runs the website Modette, which has now been bought by 24 [media company]. And she makes a living from her blog. So now she doesn’t work as an engineer she works at Monki (Swedish fashion retailer) I think in product development, I don’t know exactly but something to do with design.”* (Hanna)

*“She worked for Carlings [fashion retailer] some years ago when nobody knew who she was, but then it’ has just grown. The visitors have found her blog and now it’s more and more, which has led to her being invited to many events and creating collections for Nelly [nelly.com, online fashion store] and other assignments. Sometimes she’s in Hong Kong for nelly and stuff.”* (Hanna)

As suggested by Schickel (1985: In Kurzman et al., 2007) all this information and attention by the fans, in this case the readers can turn celebrities into “intimate strangers”, creating “parasocial” relationships (Giles 2000:128; Horton and Wohl 1956. In Kurzman et al., 2007). We observe a very similar situation between the blogger and its readers in which the eagerness to know more about them and find out things from their past that can get them closer to them can in return make them want to reassemble them even more.

According to a study made of the relationships students have to celebrities by Leets, de Becker, and Giles (1995:114. In Kurzman et al., 2007), people seek information about the lives of celebrities for “vicarious pleasure”. Meaning that people do this to experience pleasure by or reading, listening, or watching other people doing something instead of doing it themselves (Nationalencyclopedia, 2012).

The celebrity status is then given to the blogger according to the attention they get, which concurs with what Kurzman et al. argues on the anxiety we can get when close to a celebrity.

*“When I saw Frida Fahrman [blogger for kanal 5] the first time in Malmö, I really didn’t get it! If she says Hello to me I really don’t know who she is!!! But then she came forward and I was like GOD! Why should she say hello to me, she has no clue who I am! And I felt like I knew her so well. But of course I think she would have says hello back to me.”* (Elin G)

*“I also met Hanna-med-w last summer on holidays and I didn’t know that she would be there, and she didn’t know that I would be there [ironically] and she was so sweet and asked how long we’d been there and I had my boyfriend along and she had a friend that she thought should make a move on me since I was so nice and friendly, and I was more interested in what she thought of me, what do you think? Then I told her that I followed her blog and that I even had a tag on my iPhone for it and she was like, what?”* (Elin G)

However, consistent with the paradox we found that in many occasions although fascinated by this world, the young readers need to bring it all down to earth through the awareness that the celebrity status given to the blogger by their readers is a mere construction and that they are women living lives somewhat similar to many others.

As Tapscott (1998) suggests, the breadth of the Internet forces young people to approach media with critical eyes. This is especially important in the early stages of identity formation due to the huge amount of information blogs spread, not always including trustworthy references or sources. The fact is that we could observe some critical thinking about the reality shown in these blogs. The awareness that buying clothes is actually not cheap and that there must be an explanation to where it all comes from, are just some of the questions that surface in the minds of the young informants when trying to explain a lifestyle which in many cases can be hard to achieve.

*"...one evening when I had my friends over for a pre-party we had some wine and talked and I got into the fact that , have you thought that, the other day, when Kenza had bought, no she never wrote bought, she said, she'd been and picked up, what does that mean? What does she mean with pick up clothes? I mean, you either say bought or nothing at all, because she uses the word 'buy' very rarely. So if she does then you know she has bought, but those days she doesn't write that at all and we believe she has bought, then what is that? "* (Elin G)

*" Actually, I don't think that much, mostly that the clothes are gorgeous and I wonder how much they actually make a month to be able to afford that much shopping."* (Elin H)

The paradox of being attracted to reality as well as wanting fantasy can be resumed then by the continuous process the young readers go through trying to find themselves by a reflexive activity of identification with the blogger. However, the fact that they are disturbed when the blogger becomes too real is due to the wish to achieve this wonderful world the blogger has shown them and which seems to be her lifestyle, creating a celebrity aura around the blogger as well and thus fascinating its followers. The admiration and striving to get closer to the blogger by learning about their lives, and anxiety produced in the presence of them seems to draw parallels with the early principles of status enjoying some of the recognized elements of celebrity status. By dreaming, these young women can then imagine themselves in that world, which in turn can trigger motivation and ambition to achieve it. The critical mind of the reader is then necessary to filter what is true and what is not and the forces affecting this in order to hopefully protect themselves from false life expectations.

## 4. DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter we identified and grouped the different feelings and emotions involved in the activity of reading fashion blogs, performed by our five informants. Our ambition has been to, with open eyes, observe the phenomena and extract as much information possible in order to find the symptoms of the meanings which young women give the reading of fashion blogs, an activity that has continuously been growing and that has become a part of the lives of most young people, especially young women.

Our intention was to study the blog reading as an activity per se, a research angle, which has not been extensively used previously and to let the data speak for itself. Therefore our research should be viewed as an initial intent to explore and seek for interesting themes in the blog reading phenomenon, in order to see “what it is all about” and what role the activity possess in the lives of its practitioners.

Through previous research we know the perspective of others on the blog readers, how they can be influenced and how they are segmented and targeted. However, we chose with our study, to let the data, produced from the voices of our informants and their own interpretations of emotions, lead us through the search for surfacing themes. Our interest was therefore the subjective emotions and meanings coming from our informants.

The themes that surfaced gave us then an interesting set of, what seemed to be paradoxes, in the behavior and emotions of our informants.

By describing these paradoxes and explaining the complex and multidimensional nature of the informants' behavior with the intention of interpreting the meanings behind the behaviors, we identified two main themes that seemed to coexist and appear in different forms along the process of describing the phenomena of blog reading as experienced by the blog readers themselves.

The two overall themes that crystallized through the analysis of data explained the apparent paradoxes as a constant pursuit towards the identity creation of the young blog readers constantly accompanied by the elements of status seeking. These recurring and closely related human processes will be discussed in one heading though they are found linked to each other in different stages of the self-defining of the human being.

Status seeking in the process of identity making

The academics Kurzman et al. (2007) identified Weber's (1946. In Kurzman et al., 2007) analysis of status to fit the aspects of celebrity status, as an alternative way to find some of the modern dimensions by which people today measure and group themselves into different status positions, differing from the historical perspective of status and class. We make a similar parallel using the fashion world, more specifically the fashion blog world to identify similar dimensions as those mentioned by Kurzman et al. (2007). We argue then that status seeking is present in the process of identification by discussing the meaning of status in the context of the phenomena observed and the data obtained in the process.

We will start by arguing how we recognize the aspects of status when it comes to the bloggers and blog readers and how they then affect each other by considering the definition of status as presented by Ulvert-Sneistrup (2012) in which she suggest that “the individual status is the formal or informal, given or performed, objective or subjective perceived position in a hierarchical and social context, guaranteeing privileges and improving chances in life the higher this position is or is perceived to be.” (Tønnesson translation, Ulvert-Sneistrup, 2012:7-8).

Weber’s (1946. In Kurzman et al., 2007) dimensions of status which include the development of status groups, the usurpation or acknowledgement of superiority, the monopolization of niches, and the pursuit of legal privileges, the last two emerging as a result of time, are not always present in today’s different views of the status system (Ulvert-Sneistrup, 2012). However evident or not, these should to be adapted to the early stages in which this type of celebrity idolizing, which is here described as blog reading or following, has existed, in contrast to the long historical background of status brought by economic background or birth. We will identify the dimensions from the point of view of the blog world leaving aside the political and legal aspects, which we believe are not applicable in this case and diverge from the blog-reader focus and perspective, which we have kept along our research.

These elements can be applied to this case in which we consider a new kind of celebrity emerging from the popular phenomena of blogging, namely the status of the blogger. Kurzman et al.(2007) suggest that we must begin with the development of status groups. There is probably no one who will disagree on the evident presence of status in the fashion industry, not only in the way we dress, historically related to the class in society we belong to, but on another level, namely the different levels of power existing in the hierarchy of the fashion world. This power is then consistent with the privileges brought by belonging to the high status groups of the fashion world, extending from magazine editors like Anna Wintour, editor- in- chief of American Vogue and recognized as the most influential woman in the fashion industry, to designers, models, celebrities, retailers, and fashion reviewers, many of whom have become strong voices in the fashion blogosphere.

It is the fashion bloggers’ new role in society to bring fashion closer and on a more personal level to millions of fashion lovers around the world. This allows young women to choose whether the personal interpretations of fashion and style, brought upon by the blogger, suit them or not and take a stand of acceptance and assimilation, or rejection and refusal.

The process of negotiation and re-negotiation with themselves by taking a stand and choosing which traits they wish to have and not to have is made possible due to the extent of choices available today. They can chose who they want to be and not to be a positioning made possible by the blogs they read.

This acceptance or rejection is then turning point to the establishment of status, in accordance to Ulvert-Sneistrup’s (2012) suggested definition in which privileges brought by status are the main motivation for its striving. The associations these girls have to the blogger and the perceived privileges they have are then transported to themselves by choosing to assimilate the styles found in one blog or choosing not to do so, in the pursuit of something else. The quest for information on fashion, styles, how to wear them, or even what will come next season is closely connected to the need for esteem and self-actualization, where this knowledge will allow them to express confidence, creativity, individuality, or belonging an array of the needs found in our informants’ behaviors and emotions expressed.

The fact that, in the end, they are the ones choosing which life styles they admire, picking out different elements from different places can in return can give them that feeling of uniqueness which we found important in our informants' lives. All this, in order to achieve, from their perspective, the appreciation, affirmation and respect of others, seen as the privileges following a certain status of fashion knowledge and awareness. The constant need for this affirmation is then visible in the longing and anxiety that builds up in these young women only to be relieved when the next blog up-date has been posted.

These perceived privileges could be a result of the dream world depicted in the images and texts posted on the blogs. However, the constant need for a reality check up and self-recognition are then closely related to the societal pressure of choosing the accepted traits and identity among the myriad of identities displayed online and in blogs. In simple words what is perceived to be the "right" style, what will it say about me and what privileges will come with that. In some cases when striving to reach this position with no success, the feeling of lacking, not being in the same league as the admired blog writers can develop a sense of inferiority in relation to these. This level of inferiority though completely subjective, plays a critical role in the identity seeking process.

Evidently, blog reading is merely one of the many context in which young people today search for the meaning of who they are, reflected towards others by what they wear, listen to, read, talk about, etc. We have thus observed that the reading of fashion blogs supports this constant search of the young girls' identity creation and self- development by providing them with different tools to relate to others as well as to themselves.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter we will summarize the conclusions arrived to in the previous chapter. The conclusion will be put in relation to the purpose of the study. To recall, the aim of the study is to explore the consumer perspective of blog reading; seeking for an extended and more complete understanding of the individual meanings and the role young female blog readers attribute the blog reading activity. We want to gain an initially understanding of blog reading as an consumption activity per se, and add to previous research that have mainly viewed blog reading as a stimuli to consumption; blog reading as a means to other ends.

We argue that the informants mainly use blogs and blog reading in their attempt to relate to others and to positioning themselves in a constant pursuit towards their identity creation..

Relating to others by distinguish themselves or to look for resemblances with others. To differentiate oneself or to unite with others, in parts or as a whole, is a way to construct, develop and negotiate the own identity.

Positioning oneself in relation to others is an efficient way of defining the personal status of oneself in relation to the perceived status of others. By comparing themselves and as a consequence either seeks to imitate or to differentiate themselves from others helps the young blog reader to unite or to distinguish oneself from others. This helps the blog reader to define the own social status as well of being a tool for achieving the status one wants to possess.

Throughout the analysis many examples of the individual ways these processes are performed by the blog readers have been provided. We find it crucial to point out that none of the informants under study used blog reading and these strategies attached to it in the exact same way. However the identified underlying motives, here presented, was central in all the informants.

In order to connect the previous discussion back to our purpose, we believe that blog reading in the lives of these young women being studied is an important tool for developing a sense of whom they are and what they could become, their identity. Reading e.g. certain blogs and not others is a way to identify with certain traits and identities and to reject others. By being exposed to a diverse plethora of identities, style and traits, makes it easier to develop an own sense of self. By reading and viewing blogs, young women become aware of the range of possible identities available. It is also an opportunity to find out how well one trait or another seems to work out; if the blog writers e.g. receive appreciating comments on a post, are offered interesting working opportunities or invites to coveted events, then that may work as a proof of the value of having a certain trait, style, behavior or identity. It help the blog reader to understand the cause and effects; if dressing in these clothes, behaving in that manner others will approve and maybe even appreciate it, making this style and behavior a possible way to personal success. Or the other way around.

When having find out the traits and its likely effects, and having made a choice of whom to be, the blogs offer an expressed way to find out how to be the person one wants to be; they present what clothes to wear and how to combine them, how to act, what to do and where to eat. However, it is still not an easy route to take; some of the informants experienced a barrier difficult to overcome. The blog readers sometimes felt that despite all their efforts they could not reach the desired level of the blog writer, which triggered a resigned emotion leaving them with a sense of inferiority to others.

Even so, on other occasions they all felt inspired, inspired to continue the challenge of becoming oneself.

We argue that we have fulfilled the aim of this study of exploring the meanings and roles the blog readers ascribe to the blog reading activity. We understand that the blog reading is assigned many different meanings and play many different roles in the blog readers' lives, however the underlying mechanism is that of relating to others, helping the readers to understand who they are, whom others are, and the relation between them. By doing so, pursuing their own sense of self, their identity. And that is why the blog readers experience the blog reading activity as so appealing, pleasurable, amusing and inspiring.

## 6. FURTHER RESEARCH

Since this particular study aimed at being an initial attempt of exploring the consumer perspective of the blog reading activity per se, we realize that the emerging themes here identified are only the beginning. Hence interesting areas of future research would be to further probe into the relationship between status and blog reading or the several aspects of identity and blog reading.

Another interesting area of future research would be to focus on younger girls, in the age range of 9-16. According to Findahl (2011) these young girls read blogs yet extensively than the age group identified in this study. Various researchers further claim that it is in this age the influence of blogs on consumption behavior are at its peak. It would then be interesting to develop our applied consumer perspective and look at what meanings even younger girls attribute to blog reading.

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# APPENDICES

## 1. Diary template

Questions to complete the diary

1. Date

2. Time of day / Situation / Location

3. What made you go into the blogs today / Why did you go into the blogs today? (did you have different reasons for going into different blogs, please write them and what blog they then belong to).

4. Describe how you move through the internet, including blogs, links or other page, and what makes you go from one page to another.

5A. Which blogs did you go into? (keep all "internet-windows open"!)

5B. Which other linked sites were you inside? (keep all "internet-windows" open!)

5C. In connection with (during or shortly afterwards), did you get any impulses to go into any other page that was linked to via a blog? Description:

6A. What / how do you feel during the time you read blogs?

6B. What do you feel afterwards?

7. The time when you stop blogging session?

Thanks for your help! / Mikaela and Jessica

## 2. Interview topics

Interview

- Introduce yourself
- Background to the experience with blogs
- Emotions and experiences while reading blogs
- Socially
- Identity
- Amusement/Hedonistic values