BOY YOU THINSPIRE ME
– The website and forum Boys With ED (Eating Disorders)

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ABSTRACT

Boy you thinspire me: The website and forum Boys With ED (Eating Disorders)

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The aim of this study has been to highlight the website and forum Boys With ED (Eating Disorders), to give us a deeper understanding of the structure, content and member activity as it is seen at the forum, and to show how these aspects interplay with each other. The report is divided into two parts. Part one is about Internet theory and practice. By having had a closer look at how the forum is structurally built up, with regard to the services, guidelines and functions, information is given regarding how the platform itself might affect the member activity held there. The question whether participation at the forum might enhance extreme views among its members has been answered, as well as how the members choose to integrate media material from other resources. Different general traits of Internet use has been related to the forum Boys With ED, as well as theory regarding focus on information or focus on virtual togetherness within a virtual sphere. Part two is about body image theory, masculinity theory and identity theory, since the members of Boys With ED post content related to these issues at the forum. The study of Boys With ED has been conducted by using a combination of virtual ethnography and thematic analysis. The platform's functions and the content of it have been studied. Through the reading of the discussion threads during one month's time, themes have been extracted. The findings show that Boys With ED has many of the possible functions and services an Internet community can have, but it is clear that the participating members' activity is more about discussions with likeminded than using the platform's different functions or integrating media material. The forum can in many ways be considered as a Pro-Ana forum, and members are at risk of getting more extreme views while participating at the forum. At the same time, the members display concerns regarding other members' health, and some of them write they wish other members to recover from their eating disorder. The members display different traits of Internet use, and post plenty of information regarding eating disorder related issues, as well as comments probably posted in order to support and/or motivate each other. They also display occupation with body image issues, and seem to connect their identities tightly to their bodies. In addition, their wish for a thin body can be said to go against the concept of hegemonic masculinity.
For everyone who cares

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Moa Ranung
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The website and forum Boys With ED (Eating Disorders)

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INTRODUCTION

Internet, eating disorders and Pro-AAna

Eating disorders is a problem we face today, both on an individual and a societal level. There is a range of different eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa.¹ These disorders have a large impact upon the health of the individual, both physically and mentally. A considerable amount of research has been conducted regarding this issue. Knowledge about eating disorders per se is crucial, but so is also knowledge about the web spheres where eating disorders are forefronted and/or discussed. Pro-Ana (Pro-Anorexia) websites and communities play a special part here, since they contain information on how to initiate or maintain an eating disorder, and not necessarily information on how to recover from an eating disorder. Therefore, these sites also give rise to ethical issues, and cannot be said to always be in the members’ best interest.

Sometimes, Pro-Ana is called a movement, but there is no clear and final definition of this movement. The definition of the concept Pro-Ana, which I have found to be the best, is as follows: “Pro-ana refers to individuals with an eating disorder who focus on having an eating disorder as a lifestyle choice as opposed to a psychiatric disorder (Lyons, Mehl & Pennebaker, 2006, cited in Juarascio, Shoaib & Timko, 2010:393).” In addition, a good definition of the Pro-Ana movement is that it has ”(...) a radical and largely socially-unacceptable approach to the management of anorexia, and has suffered a powerful media backlash, being characterised as encouraging 'normal' and 'healthy' girls and women to adopt anorexia as a glorified diet (Dias, 2003, Doward & Reilly, 2003, cited in Fox, Ward & O'Rourke, 2005:945).” Fox, Ward & O'Rourke (2005:945) write that the Pro-Ana movement ”(...) challenges and rejects medical, social and feminist models that regard anorexia

¹ Supplement. A more thorough description and definition of anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and eating disorders not otherwise specified can be found in Text 1 in the supplement section at the end of this report.
nervosa as a condition to be 'cured'.” To summarize it, Pro-Ana can be seen as a movement lifting up its belongers' wish to be accepted for the lifestyle they have chosen, and which does not view an eating disorder as something that has to be recovered from. In my understanding, this 'lifestyle' of having an eating disorder is somewhat seen as something to embrace rather than to reject.

Online communities can be defined "(...) through their features as associations of participants who share a common language, world, values, and interests, obey a commonly defined organizational structure, and communicate and cooperate ubiquitously connected by electronic media and possibly represented by avatars (Stanojevska-Slabeva & Schmid, 2001, cited in Stanojevska-Slabeva, 2002:72).” Boys With ED, which is the online sphere highlighted in this report, can in many ways be considered an online community, where these elements are found. In a previous study, the researchers found out that 'thinspiration' was one of the most notable features of a studied Pro-Ana online community (Fox, Ward & O'Rourke, 2005:960). 'Thinspiration' is a word often used within the Pro-Ana movement, and is a combination of the two words 'thin' and 'inspiration'. 'Thinspiration' points mainly to content showing thin people, in order to give the users of a Pro-Ana community something to be inspired of. This can be connected to the title of this report, 'Boy you thinspire me'.

There are websites and communities on the Internet, which call themselves Pro-Ana. Sometimes the concept Pro-Mia is used instead of, or in addition to, the concept Pro-Ana. Pro-Mia stands for 'Pro-Bulimia'. In this report, Pro-Ana is the concept being used. Pro-Ana has been chosen to be an umbrella term for other terms standing for the notion that people having a particular eating disorder should be allowed to live the life chosen.

**My focus of interest**

During the time I have been studying media and communication science and behavioral science, I have always been interested in how the offline world, and its cultural and social phenomena, is constructed within the online world. I find it rewarding to study how people come together online to create their own online culture, and Pro-Ana websites is a phenomenon I find particularly interesting. These websites awaken questions regarding what happens when a health problem is brought into a virtual social sphere on the Internet. Suddenly, the social and individual problem of having an eating disorder is discussed and foregrounded online, mainly by people who claim they already have an eating disorder. I have been wondering: What happens then?

What also came to my mind one day was that all the studies I have found telling about Pro-Ana
websites, only tell about Pro-Ana websites mainly directed to girls or which mainly have girls as members. Research regarding websites directed to boys having an eating disorder is lacking. When I searched for Pro-Ana websites directed to boys, I only found the platform Boys With ED except for a few individuals' own Pro-Ana blogs. The language barrier might have put restriction on my findings, since I do not know whether there are Pro-Ana websites written on other languages than English. Nevertheless, Boys With ED was the only platform I found not only giving information regarding eating disorders among men or only having a recovery approach, but also having Pro-Ana elements in it. During the spring term of 2012, I have therefore studied the website and forum Boys With ED.

Boys With ED

During this research study, I had a first look at a website called Boys With ED (Boys With Eating Disorders), which is a website directed to boys having an eating disorder, and an in-depth look at the oldest forum connected to it. At the first page of the website and forum, the website and forum are called 'BOYSWITHED', but at other places within this online context, 'Boys With ED' is used. In this research report, the website and forum will be called Boys With ED for better readability.

The Weebly website

Through an Internet platform called Weebly (Weebly, 2012), which is a website hoster providing website building opportunities, it is possible to create a website or blog for free. When you do a first search of Boys With ED on the Internet, you find a Weebly website (Boys With ED, 2012:a) created by a person who calls himself Aqua2Day (Aqua Today). This person is also the creator of the two discussion forums connected to the website. At this first stage, there is no possibility to log in or to write your own thoughts anywhere (except for the guestbook).

The website is probably setting the tone for the discussion forums connected to it, which is why it is important to study. Under this paragraph, a list of what the website consists of is included. The words seen in bold typefaces stands for what the tabs are called on the website. The information seen next to the bold typefaces consists of my explanations of what can be found under each tab on the website. The content of the Weebly website Boys With ED (Boys With ED, 2012:a) is:

Home: Here you find general information about the webpage and a mission statement.

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2 Supplement. For a screenshot of the first page of the website, see Picture 1 in the supplement section at the end of this report.
Tips&Tricks: Information about how to increase your metabolism.
Thinspiration: Pictures of very thin boys.
Chat: A chat room.
Together: Information about the 'Pro Ana Unity', meaning the 'unity' of people having anorexia nervosa (or other eating disorders).
Good reads: Here you find a long list of books related to eating disorders, sections from the 'Pro Ana Bible' (a text telling about anorexia and bulimia) and a blog written by the person behind the website.
Music: Here you can listen to music in some way related to eating disorders.
Movies: Here you find a list of movies related to eating disorders. Movie clips from YouTube are inserted here.
Forum: Here you find a newer discussion forum, and a link to the old discussion forum.
Guestbook: A guestbook.

As can be seen in the screenshot taken of the Boys With ED Weebly website, the original site was banned (Boys With ED, 2012:i): "It's been a long while that Boys With ED has been down, unfortunately the original site got banned. But we're back, and stronger than ever!” There is no information regarding who banned the original site, or how this was done and on what grounds. What this points to is though that the original site probably was seen as a site showing unsuitable content, which seems not to be uncommon when it comes to Pro-Ana websites.

Boys With ED is a virtual space where the members are said to be allowed to 'be who they are': “We do not promote eating disorders, this is a place for people who have an eating disorder and like to be accepted for who they are (Boys With ED, 2012:a).” It should also be noted that the creator behind Boys With ED does consider the website as neither Pro-Ana nor anti: “We do not like to label this website as a Pro-Ana website, but we are certainly not anti. We accept everyone's choice (Boys With ED, 2012:a).” In other words, the members at Boys With ED are both free to discuss for example food restriction behavior, or ask for advice on how to recover from their eating disorder. Because of the high acceptance on the site and forum, Boys With ED is a particularly interesting web sphere to study. The members of the forum are fairly free to bring up whatever they want in this online context, which allows for this report to show aspects of what boys having eating disorders bring up online when not being particularly restricted in their expressions. Cavanagh (2007:87) writes about online interaction as semi-anonymous. The "(...) lack of an imagined dialogical other tends to remove the restraints on self-expression which operate in face-to-face environments (Cavanagh, 2007:88).” The semi-anonymous character of the forum might make the members of Boys With ED feel free to express themselves without feeling limited or judged. Boys With ED is also of particular interest since boys from all over the world, who know the English language, can gather there to discuss with other boys facing similar problems.
The old discussion forum

When you click on the tab 'Forum' at the Weebly website Boys With ED, you find a link to two discussion forums. One is the 'old forum' and one is the 'new forum'. Aqua2Day (Boys With ED, 2012:a) writes: “I've heard some people complain about the old forum, so I thought I'd start from scratch and make a simple new one. Maybe this will make people start talking again.” Since the new forum only has 13 posts on the 29th of March 2012, only the old forum (where the discussions are more active) will be studied. From this point, when the 'Boys With ED forum' is mentioned or discussed, the old forum is the forum being referred to.

The forum Boys With ED is created through the platform Forumotion (Forumotion, 2012), which is a forum host where you can create your own online forum for free. The day for the opening of the forum Boys With ED could not be found, but the date of the oldest posting gives us a hint. On the 16th of August 2007, the oldest found posting was written. The forum Boys With ED has several headlines under which the discussion threads are connected. The discussion themes and their descriptions are, as can be seen at Boys With ED (Boys With ED, 2012:b):

Welcome to BWE. READ THIS FIRST. Come here for rules, news, and site updates.

The forum: Go here to ask questions, make suggestions, and introduce yourself to other members on the site!

Introductions: This is a place to introduce yourself, ask questions and get welcomed by everyone!

Questions and suggestions

General stuff: Discuss either non-ED-related content or stuff that doesn't fit anywhere else.

Good reads: Do you know any, Articles? Books? Essays? Lyrics? Related to Eating Disorders? If so then post them here!

Art and self-expression: Share any of your artwork, poetry, stories, essays, lyrics and so on, right here!

Eating disorders (general): Open board for topics unrelated to any specific eating disorder.

Anorexia nervosa: Restricted to topics specifically targeting Anorexia.

Bulimia nervosa: Restricted to topics specifically targeting Bulimia.

C.O.E./B.E.D.: Restricted to topics targeting the Compulsive Overeating & Binge-Eating behaviors.

ED-NOS: A sub-section for all behavior related to the Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified.

Other ED behavior: A place to discuss various disordered behaviors which may not fit in the above categories. Common disorders include purging disorder, chewing & spitting, athletica nervosa, orthorexia, and so on.

Treatment and recovery: A place to discuss various recovery topics, attempts, treatment options, and personal experiences.

Diets/nutrition: Come here to discuss the latest diet trends, exercises, pills, and nutritional habits.

Recipes: Share any recipes that you have.

Thinspiration: Share your favorite pictures, videos, and links.

Emotional support: Because we all know ED's can ruin you.

Relationships: Come here to discuss issues related to family, romantic interests, friends, and so on.

Daily journal: Tell us how you are feeling right now and what you are going through.

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3 Supplements. In the supplement section at the end of this report, a screenshot of the first page of the old discussion forum can be seen in Picture 2, and a screenshot of one of the discussion threads within this forum can be seen in Picture 3.
Boys or men?

It is important to note that not all members of Boys With ED can be considered being boys, but rather young men or men. This conclusion is drawn from the personal age numbers given by many members in their member profiles, where many of the members claim to be between the age of 18 and 25. The members' age numbers have though not been finally confirmed. In this report, the word 'boys' will be used instead of 'men' when writing about the members, but the word 'boys' can in some cases be referring to men.

Filling a gap

This report will fill some of the existing gap concerning knowledge about websites and forums directed to boys having eating disorders. Firstly, the report is relevant for the academic field of media and communication science or behavioral science, since it shows the way online media is used by people to highlight and/or discuss eating disorder related issues. Secondly, it can be of interest to professionals working with people having eating disorders, since it can give them greater understanding of how people presumably having eating disorders gather around these issues on the Internet. Thirdly, it will fill a part of the gap concerning what a website and forum directed to boys having eating disorders can look like and what members at a forum of this kind choose to express. This can be of interest to all people interested in knowing more about this topic.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The aim of this study is to highlight the website and forum Boys With ED. The study will give us a deeper understanding of the structure, content and member activity as it is seen at the forum, and show how these aspects interplay with each other.

In the first part of the report, the structure of the forum, with regard to the services, guidelines and functions, will be studied and connected to theories regarding online community platforms. A platform is built up in a certain way, which is why the users of the platform have the possibility to do certain things whilst not others. As a consequence, the structure of the platform and forum Boys With ED itself might affect the member activity seen there. This will be studied, as well as whether participation at the forum might enhance extreme views among its members, since Internet users presumably facing similar problems come together in this online sphere. At Boys With ED, members also have the possibility to bring in and post media material from other sources at the forum. By studying this closer, the question of media integration will be highlighted. Additionally,
members of the forum can choose to produce and receive information within this virtual sphere, as well as to virtually discuss things with each other. When studying what can be seen at the forum, the findings will be connected to theory regarding Internet usage, as well as theory regarding online information and virtual togetherness. In the second part of the report, the content posted by the members will be studied and connected to body image theory and masculinity theory, since Boys With ED is a platform rising questions regarding these issues. In addition, the content posted by the members will be connected to identity theory, since Boys With ED gives its members possibilities to display their own identities in different ways.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Part One: The Internet

1. In what way is the forum Boys With ED structurally built up, with regard to services, guidelines and functions, and what effect might it have upon the members’ activities?
2. Is the forum an example showing the fostering of extreme views?
3. In what way can media integration be seen at the forum?
4. In what way do the users of the forum display different traits of Internet use?
5. In what way do the users of the forum display focus on information or virtual togetherness?

Part Two: Body image, masculinity and identity

1. How is the issue of body image seen at the forum, and how can it be connected to masculinity norms?
2. What kind of identity formations can be seen at the forum?

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Before having a closer look at previous research regarding males with eating disorders, it should be noted that the previous research presented tells about men, rather than boys. Finding research telling about eating disorders among men in general is easier than finding research regarding boys having eating disorders. At the same time, it is easier to find research telling about eating disorders among women or teenagers in general than about men in general. Because of the lack of previous research telling about boys (rather than teenagers in general) having eating disorders, and because many of the members of the forum Boys With ED can be assumed to be young men rather than boys, the
following section will tell about men having these conditions. Additionally, previous research regarding the web sphere Boys With ED or other perhaps existing Pro-Ana websites for boys is lacking, which is why the following section will tell about Pro-Ana websites in general.

The previous research being presented in this section highlights and problematizes eating disorders and body image issues among men, and points at some key issues that can be of high relevance when studying Boys With ED. In addition, it partly tells about what distinguishes men having eating disorders from women having eating disorders. It is not clear whether boys share the exact same clinical picture as grown up men, but since boys belong to the male sex, research regarding males having eating disorders is still of relevance. Because the study at hand is about the online context Boys With ED, and not eating disorders per se, the previous research section should be seen as a background to the study. The key theoretical concepts have though been carefully chosen to fit this study, which is more about online participation than eating disorders and their clinical picture.

Worth noticing is that the theoretical context in this report is based upon material written in America or Europe. The consequence of this is that the sources used might show a cultural bias, and only tell about the different aspects as they look in the West.

**Eating disorders**

*Feminized diagnostic criteria*

Boys With ED is a website for boys having eating disorders, which is why a description of eating disorders is needed in order to understand the content of the website. Most research focusing upon eating disorders has been done with female participants, which is why the diagnostic criteria for anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are based on experiences with women (Smolak, 2005:468). Drummond (2009:198) notes that historically, “(...) eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia nervosa have been identified as feminised conditions.” Andersen (1990:133) writes about how focus has been on women having eating disorders rather than men. According to the author, an accurate identification of anorexia nervosa (AN) and bulimia nervosa (BN) in males has not been made since these conditions are not as often occurring among men as among women, and since there are theoretical biases in some diagnostic methods that exclude these conditions in males. For example, men having eating disorders do not have the amenorrhea (absence of menstrual period, author's note) required by some criteria.
The fact that the diagnostic criteria for eating disorders are based on women shows that eating disorders are, or at least have been, clearly gendered disorders, with more females having these conditions. But the gender bias might be changing now. The existence of the website Boys With ED shows us clearly that there are boys claiming to have these disorders, and as this report will show, newer research brings up that men are perhaps becoming increasingly aware of their own bodies and therefore more prone to develop eating disorders.

In the Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, DSM-IV-TR, diagnostic manuals concerning eating disorders can be found. In the book MINI-D IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2002), which is a shorter version of DSM-IV-TR, the diagnostic criteria for the eating disorders anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and eating disorders not otherwise specified, are described. Worth noticing is that the eating disorder orthorexia nervosa is not found in the book MINI-D IV, but since this eating disorder is sometimes mentioned at Boys With ED, a short description of this disorder will now be included. A person who develops orthorexia has initially wanted to "(…) improve his/her health, treat a disease or lose weight (Zamora, Bonaechea, Sánchez & Rial, 2005:66).” A person having orthorexia has an obsession for biologically pure food, meaning that this person restricts his or her diet so that he or she only eats food without for example artificial substances, and worries in excess about the materials used during the producing of the food (ibid., 2005:66).

Clinical picture based on sex

According to Crisp and Burns (1990:92), men and women with anorexia nervosa are similar regarding both premorbid characteristics and illness features. Both men and women having eating disorders have been seen to be preoccupied with body weight and the fear of gaining weight. In their study of patients having eating disorders, Woodside, Garner, Rockert and Garfinkel (1990:112) could not find any significant differences between males and females with anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. However, the authors note that while the men tended to have either a clear-cut eating disorder syndrome such as anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa, or that their disordered eating behavior can be considered secondary to another psychiatric illness they have, women more often had atypical or mixed eating disorders. Also, the men had often been overweight, while the women more often had the perception of being overweight. If men and women having eating disorders share the same clinical picture, this would mean that the findings

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4 Supplement. The diagnostic criteria for these eating disorders are presented in Text 1 in the supplement section at the end of this report.
collected from the study of Boys With ED perhaps reveal gender issues that have nothing to do with the clinical picture itself, but rather a cultural and societal picture.

Men having eating disorders

Prevalence

Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia nervosa are clearly gendered psychiatric disorders (Smolak, 2005:464). Grogan (1999:173) writes about the prevalence of eating disorders among men: “Very few men are classified anorexic or bulimic. Most researchers estimate that between 5 and 10 per cent of people classified as having eating disorders’ are men (...)” Fichter and Krenn (2003:371) summarize findings from previous research on eating disorders: “In conclusion, the percentage of male cases in eating disorders appears to be smallest in AN (8%), somewhat higher in BN (roughly 15%) and possibly around 20% for BED (Binge eating disorders, author's note).” Eating disorders Not Otherwise Specified is a vaguely defined category, which is why we do not know whether there are gender differences within this category (Smolak, 2005:464). Crisp and Burns (1990:78) write about one suggested reason for why more women than men develop eating disorders. According to the authors, young females often become preoccupied with the "fatness" that comes with puberty, and with the biological and social significance of this "fatness". In contrast, young males are less concerned with this "fatness" and more concerned about lean body mass and its connection to masculinity issues.

We should though keep in mind that not all men seek help for their conditions. Drummond (2009:200) writes that particular groups of men do not access health services as frequently as they should in order to remain healthy. Fichter and Krenn (2003:371) also bring up methodological shortcomings when it comes to the attempts being made trying to answer how many men develop eating disorders. The authors write that male samples are often too small to be representative "(...) due to low prevalence rates and a higher threshold to report disordered eating (Fichter & Krenn, 2003:371)." Some authorities are though stating that anorexia nervosa is getting more common among men, according to Crisp and Burns (1990:77).

These prevalence findings show once again that eating disorders are gendered disorders. It might be that men having eating disorders find it particularly difficult to seek help for their conditions, since eating disorders have been considered being feminized conditions. On the other hand, seeking help for any condition might be difficult for people in general, and many individuals having eating
disorders might not be interested in seeking help. If eating disorders are becoming more common among men, this might say something about today's culture and how we look at men today. In this report, focus lies on a virtual space. This report is not about offline life or the effects of offline culture. Nevertheless, to know something about prevalence findings is still of importance since it gives us hints about whether the boys at Boys With ED can be said to belong to a minority group. And if the prevalence of eating disorders among men is increasing, the importance of this study is increasing as well.

*Why these men?*

Kearney-Cooke and Steichen-Asch (1990:68) write that a man having an eating disorder "(...) lives in a culture which emphasizes thinness and fitness, and exaggerates the importance of body image as a result.” There are several theories to be found concerning why some men develop eating disorders, and some of these theories will now be lifted. No analysis will though be conducted regarding reasons for why the boys at Boys With ED have developed eating disorders.

According to Mickalide (1990:36), men having professions where weight restriction is necessary, such as wrestlers, swimmers, models, dancers and flight attendants, are at greater risk of developing eating disorders. It is not clear though whether males with a distorted body image seek these occupations or whether these occupations lead to a preoccupation with body image. Athletic pursuit is also considered a risk factor for men when it comes to the risk of developing disordered eating habits (Fichter & Krenn, 2003:376).

Kearney-Cooke and Steichen-Asch (1990:55) write about their research study, where they gathered 112 male college students with an average age of 20.3 years. One result from this study was that the males having eating disorders described the “lean, toned, thin” body shape as their ideal, while the men not having eating disorders strove for the V-shaped body shape. The men having eating disorders also reported that they were teased more about their bodies when being children. The research results (ibid., 1990:65) also show that the men having eating disorders have dependent personalities to a larger extent than the men not having eating disorders. Having a dependent personality means that you would have a marked need for social approval and willingness to adapt your behavior to please others. Kearney-Cooke and Steichen-Asch (1990:63) write:

> From birth, most boys learn that being a man entails a certain set of attitudes and behaviors, including independence, competitiveness, toughness, aggressiveness, and courage. (…) Through their peers and through the media, young men are confronted daily with a definition of manhood which is distorted,
dysfunctional, and potentially destructive. The popular ideal overemphasizes physical strength, force, and athletic skills. Yet where else can adolescent boys turn to understand their emerging manhood?

Women’s roles in society have changed dramatically, for example because of women’s participation in professional life, which in turn has the effect that men have to reformulate their identities (Kearney-Cooke & Steichen-Asch, 1990:63). Also, it has become more difficult for men to turn to women in order to understand their own masculinity, since women are constantly reassessing their own roles. Kearney-Cooke and Steichen-Asch (1990:67) write that boys who later develop eating disorders “(...) do not conform to the cultural expectations for masculinity; they tend to be more dependent, passive, and nonathletic, traits which may lead to feelings of isolation and disparagement of body.”

There is an ongoing debate regarding whether homosexuality and eating disorders are connected (Mickalide, 1990:37). Herzog, Bradburn and Newman (1990:40) write that more eating-disordered men exhibit a homosexual orientation than their female counterparts. But, on the other hand, it might as well be the case that homosexual men are more prone to seek help for their eating disorder than heterosexual men (Herzog, Bradburn & Newman, 1990:45). Herzog, Bradburn and Newman (1990:47) conducted a study where they let 43 homosexual men and 32 heterosexual men, between the age of 18 and 35 and from a non-clinical sample, report their current and ideal weight, as well as their body satisfaction. The results showed that the homosexual men weighted less than the heterosexual men on average, and more often expressed the desire for an underweight ideal weight. Also, the higher dissatisfaction among the homosexual men on average regarding their own bodies might put them into higher risk of developing eating disorders (Herzog, Bradburn & Newman, 1990:48). According to Herzog, Bradburn and Newman (1990:48), this “(...) supports the notion that “gay” male culture places greater value on men being slender than does “straight” culture.”

Culture, media and the body

A new kind of equality

In 1999, when Bordo wrote her book The Male Body – A New Look at Men in Public and Private, she saw that the male beauty culture was expanding. Bordo (1999:70) is of the view that we compare our own bodies with cultural images, and that there can be a gap between our own selves and the cultural images around us. If we find that our bodies do not look like the bodies of the cultural images, dissatisfaction with our own bodies can come as a result. In her book, Bordo (1999:179) explains the triumph of consumerism, and that “(...) what's really happened is that
women have been the beneficiaries of what might be described as a triumph of pure consumerism – and with it, a burgeoning male fitness and beauty culture – over homophobia and the taboos against male vanity, male “femininity”, and erotic display of the male body that have gone along with it.” Bordo (1999:221) states that physicians note that more and more men start to have body-image dysfunction, eating disorders and exercise compulsions.

As Bordo notes, the beauty industry includes men in its cradle because of consumer culture. Images of men – images aiming to sell products – are there for us to view. Noting this, we might as well expect men to become increasingly aware of their bodies and, as a consequence, wanting to exercise more control over their bodies. It is though difficult to prove a correlation between the exposure of male bodies within the consumer culture and the development of body dissatisfaction among men. This is one flaw of Bordo's theory. Also, men have historically been aware of their looks, so this is nothing new in itself.

One particularly interesting section in Bordo's (1999:179) work is when she writes that the male beauty culture opens up for male “femininity”. Perhaps the pressure upon men is starting to go both ways: Men should either be feminine or masculine, as long as they are fit and beautiful to the consumer eye. Either way round, the male body is put out there to the gaze of others. In this report, the aim is not to prove that what is posted on Boys With ED increases the body dissatisfaction among the users, or that the boys at the forum have developed their eating disorders because of consumer culture. But Bordo's theory lays the groundwork for the study of Boys With ED, since this website and forum is all about texts and images that relate to body image issues. At the forum, the members can for example compare their own bodies with cultural images, and in this way experience a gap between their own bodies and the cultural images at hand.

**Media and young people**

Most of the members at Boys With ED state they are adolescents or young adults, and it is important to recognize that media can have effect upon this group with regard to body image concerns. Hogan and Strasburger (2008:523) note that teenagers today “(...) face a growing discrepancy between their bodies and mediated role models.” The authors continue by writing about media effects: “Media images and messages offer powerful cues about how we need to look, what we need to eat, and what we must buy. Whether on the television, movie screen, or the front page of teen-focused magazines or People, we see graphically which bodies are beautiful, which shapes are “hot”, and who is successful or not (...) (ibid., 2008:525).” Hogan and Strasburger's work shows
that media messages offer clues about looks, but it does not explain online media activities related to eating disorders. This will now be examined.

**Pro-Ana**

*Pro-Ana or recovery*

In a study of 170 anorexia-related websites, one finding was that "(...) the mean rate of visitors to the pro-ana sites was 34 998, while the mean rate of visitors to the recovery sites was 27 878 (Chesley, Alberts, Klein & Kreipe, 2003, cited in Riley, Rodham & Gavin, 2009:348)." In order to define whether Boys With ED is a Pro-Ana site or a recovery site, the work of Riley, Rodham and Gavin (2009) will be used. The authors write that recovery sites have been set up with the intention of helping people who wish to recover from their eating disorder, while Pro-Ana sites have been set up with the intention of helping people who wish to engage in practices associated with eating disorders (Riley, Rodham & Gavin, 2009:349). At some Pro-Ana sites, members are carefully excluded if they do not participate to the fullest in the eating disorder related behaviors (Brotsky & Giles, 2007, cited in Riley, Rodham & Gavin, 2009:350). Riley, Rodham and Gavin (2009:349) explain what recovery sites usually look like:

Recovery sites focus on people who wish to recover from, are in the process of recovering or have recovered from, an eating disorder. A growing number of these sites are composed of closed forums moderated by healthcare professionals, others are peer-facilitated. Highly frequented ‘non-professional’ recovery forums maintain their integrity through rigorous peer moderation and rules. These sites typically place a ban on numbers (e.g. descriptions of a person’s weight), anything that encourages eating disorders, and links to negative or ‘triggering’ websites (Riley, Rodham & Gavin, 2009:349).

In contrast, Pro-Ana websites...:

(...) tend to share key elements that include homepage warning notices about site content such as ‘thinspiration’ photos of extremely thin models. In addition, terminology such as ‘ana’ and ‘mia’ (which stand for anorexia and bulimia) is commonly employed. (…) Tips and tricks both for weight loss and for hiding ‘ana’ (and/or ‘mia’) behaviour from family and friends as well as counters to measure one’s body-mass index or calorie intake are shared (Riley, Rodham & Gavin, 2009:350).

Riley, Rodham and Gavin's work will make it clear whether Boys With ED is mainly about helping people to recover or to remain in the same state of illness. With this being said, an open mind is crucial while studying Boys With ED. If the website and forum turns out to Pro-Ana in general,
then it will still be recognized if there are elements that may not be considered Pro-Ana.

*Pro-Ana and the Internet*

At the Internet, Pro-Ana communities can be found. Fox, Ward and O'Rourke (2005:945) write that the Pro-Ana movement has been facilitated by Internet technology, and that you can find it at websites and in semi-underground chat rooms on the Internet. Through Internet, the Pro-Ana movement has found a space where to communicate beyond geographical constraints, and where it can be free from "(...) the prejudices of a society that sees it as a pernicious and dangerous movement (Fox, Ward & O'Rourke, 2005:966)."

Fox, Ward and O'Rourke (2005:955) explain how the users re-create the values of the movement at a studied Pro-Ana community called Anagrrl. The users of the community were seen to manifest the Pro-Ana identity through framing their bodies by using a combination of text and photographs. Users of Anagrrl who had posted pictures of themselves could receive "(...) much comment from other users, who would compliment the pictures, noting that the subject was exceptionally thin and beautiful, and a source of 'thinspiration' \(\text{thin} + \text{inspiration}, \text{author's note}\) (ibid., 2005:955)." Fox, Ward and O'Rourke (2005:960) found out that 'thinspiration' was one of the most notable features of the studied community. At Anagrrl, 'thinspiration' was seen for example in the form of photographs of thin celebrities, which were posted to provide encouragement for the users to sustain low weights (ibid., 2005:960). The users of Anagrrl who chose not to post their photographs often constructed their online identities in other ways, for example by creating a 'signature' which was showing the users' body measurements and goal weight. In addition, not only pictures showing very thin people were seen at the community. Photographs showing people seen as fat and undesirable by the members, got comments stating that the photographs are disturbing (ibid., 2005:955).

*Pro-Ana talk*

Riley, Rodham and Gavin (2009:348) had, in their study, a closer look at "(...) the role of 'body talk' (text-based communication about bodies and bodily experiences) in the management, negotiation and development of eating disorder related identities." They found that on a Pro-Ana discussion forum, certain health and appearance concerns were markers of success, and that eating disorder related identities were (re)produced. The authors (2009:349) write that when people bring the body into virtual spaces, dominant cultural values around the slender body type is often reproduced, and that the potential freedom from the constraints associated with physical bodies might not occur.
Riley, Rodham and Gavin (2009:353) write that at the studied Pro-Ana sites, posters described their own bodies in order to make their bodies 'visible' in these online contexts. In this way, the posters could demonstrate they had a right to belong to the site. Descriptions of the body on a Pro-Ana site allowed the posters to share an image of them as having low body weight and to define themselves in terms of their current and ideal body. To eat was framed as a central issue, and bodily experiences that stem from the eating disorders, such as the growth of body hair or stretch marks were discussed (ibid., 2009:355-356). Problematic body experiences were celebrated and seen as measures of success (ibid., 2009:356). This can be compared with the activity held at a recovery site, where the posters described a move away from behaviors and thoughts associated with their eating disorder, and where other members supported this move.

Motivation for participation

Fox, Ward and O'Rourke (2005:945) write a strong explanation of why people would like to be a part of the Pro-Ana movement: "In a disturbed life, the ‘anti-recovery’ stance of the pro-ana movement offers its participants a safe and positive place to share experience and gain further insight into their condition, away from the judgment, gaze and scrutiny of parents, boyfriends, husbands and the medical profession.” The movement contributes to a sense-of-self to its members (Fox, Ward & O'Rourke, 2005:954). When Lipczynska (2007, cited in Riley, Rodham & Gavin, 2009:350) communicated with members of Pro-Ana sites, it became clear that some members viewed their eating disorder as a disease, while other members viewed it as a lifestyle choice.

In their study, Fox, Ward and O'Rourke (2005:955) found out that the pro-Ana ethos was partly about staying safe while maintaining the eating disorder. The Pro-Ana movement is explained by the authors as being of contradictory nature, because of the movement's attitudes “(...) to the anorectic condition as both a damaging behavior and as a condition to be maintained (ibid., 2005:954).” This is further explained:

(...) the pro-ana movement takes its analysis to the logical conclusion: if anorexia is a response to social and emotional difficulties, and one that enables individuals to cope, then it makes no sense to ‘cure’ this coping mechanism. Instead what is advocated by pro-ana is damage limitation and a survival strategy to reduce the risks associated with extremely low body weight. (...) In other words, the movement is there to support its members through life problems, helping them manage anorexia safely, without removing the crutch that it provides them. (Fox, Ward & O'Rourke, 2005:963).
The Pro-Ana rituals, that at first appear as dangerous, become normalized and legitimated through the sharing of information and risk management within the movement (Fox, Ward & O'Rourke, 2005:967).

It is though important to note that participation in Pro-Ana communities might not only be for the worse. Rodgers, Skowron and Chabrol (2011:9) have studied motivations for becoming a member of a Pro-Ana online community. The authors state that these communities can provide social support, and that the potential benefits should not be neglected (ibid., 2011:9). They found out, by contacting members of a Pro-Ana community and asking them to participate in the study by answering some questions, that the reason the members joined the community was because they had a wish to lose weight or to get support in order to maintain their motivation for weight loss, and/or because they wanted social support or a sense of belonging (ibid., 2011:10). The majority of the members who were in contact with the researchers described emotional benefits that come from being understood and having a sense of belonging. The participants "(...) clearly identified online community as serving a double purpose: firstly, the pursuit of weight loss and thinness but, secondly, providing a sense of identity (ibid., 2001:11)." In this study, every single participant reported high levels of eating disorder symptoms (ibid., 2011:11). This would imply that most of the members of the community were there because they had an eating disorder. The researchers also found out that there were practically no healthy messages being exchanged. It should though be noted that the members who were in contact with the researchers were all females and had a mean age of 17.4 years (ibid., 2011:10). Also, Rodgers, Skowron and Chabrol (2011:10) note that the members answering the questions knew they were in contact with a researcher, which in turn might have had effect on the answers.

When Juarascio, Shoaib and Timko (2010:393) analyzed Pro-Ana groups on two social networking sites (Facebook and MySpace), they found out that social support and eating disorder specific content were the two main themes: "Networking sites may appeal to those with eating disorders for other reasons as well. Many individuals with an eating disorder also suffer from depression or social anxiety, making it difficult to form offline social networks." In other words, not only eating disorders per se have to be the reason for a person to join a Pro-Ana group online.

These previous studies are included because they give us an understanding of what Pro-Ana communities can look like. They also give us a deeper understanding of what users might gain from participating within these communities. In this report, no final answer will be given to what the
members gain from being at Boys With ED. Nevertheless, from looking at what the members post within the forum, valuable clues will be revealed regarding possible reasons for why these boys choose to be at a forum of this kind.

KEY KONCEPTS AND THEORIES

The Internet

Technology, power and collective symbols

Stanojevska-Slabeva (2002:71) writes about how online communities have two elements, community members and a platform. The platform itself provides an online space where people can meet and interact with each other (ibid., 2002:71). The services provided at the platform delimit the possible interactions among the users of the platform, and have an impact on community building (ibid., 2002:73). In other words, users of a community do not have the possibility to do what they want at the community, since the platform services set limits to the activities.

In the book Sociology in the Age of the Internet, Cavanagh (2007) explores different ways in which a community can be built up and display power issues or collective symbols. Firstly, Cavanagh (2007:113) points out that there are online spheres where community leaders can delete other users' work. Hence, "(...) the technologies themselves allow power to become invested in an individual or clique far more than they allow distributed power (ibid., 2007:114)." Secondly, Cavanagh points out that some online spheres have reputation systems. In these online communities, you gain reputation points for behaving in a certain way online. According to Cavanagh (2007:118), reputation systems "(...) can be understood as a form of social capital in so far as accumulated reputation acts as a source of power both within and between communities.” Thirdly, Cavanagh (2007:116) explains that there are collective symbols to be seen in a community, such as FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions, author's note), group-specific terminology and common symbolic resources. Cavanagh (2007:117) is though stating that these symbols "(...) create solidarity only when they are used for a more cohesive purpose than mere tribal identification, which is what appears to be being invoked in the case of online community.”

It is important to look at the constraints and the possibilities seen at the forum Boys With ED, since these certainly must have effect on the members' activity there. There are people at Boys With ED who have put up rules of what is allowed to do and not do within the forum. In addition, there is a
single creator behind the main page (a page to which the discussion forum is linked), who at the website has given his opinion of what Boys With ED is all about. In order to understand the activity at a community, we must not forget the platform itself. But we must also recognize that the community is also allowing for interaction that cannot be controlled, for example when people use the virtual chat or choose to interact with each other beyond the community's boundaries.

**MRM (Media Reference Model)**

Lechner and Schmid (2000:3) write about the Media Reference Model, which distinguishes four views when dealing with community-oriented design: The community view, the process view, the service view and the infra-structure view. Stanoevska-Slabeva (2002) has written a useful article where these four views are explained. Stanoevska-Slabeva (2002:74) explains the first view, the *community view*, as follows: “The community view refers to the delimiting and identity-shaping features of a community and to static elements of its organizational structure that can be built into the platform in order to provide as much community-specific support as possible.” The features of the community view are, according to Stanoevska-Slabeva (2002:75), the following:

1. **Roles in the community.** “Each role in the community is an abstraction of a class of community participants (e.g., moderator, contributor, visitor) and is described in terms of rights and obligations as well as required capabilities as a prerequisite for role performance. When the rules of “legal actions” for a role are implemented on a platform, the platform can support their enforcement.”

2. **Valid rules for communication.** At a community, members are usually not free to communicate in any way they want. There are rules to follow with regard to communication.

3. **A description of community participants.** In different ways, the participants of the community might be described. “In existing communities, tools for participants or use management (e.g. yellow pages, participant databases) are typically used to describe features of community members and to manage links to their contributions to the community.”

4. **The common language,** which can be seen “(...) as a delimiting feature of the community and foundation for common meaning. The common language can be built into the platform in the form of an ontology, taxonomy, or vocabulary. For example, in a health community an explanatory list of possible treatments for diseases provides a simple model of the domain of discourse and fosters mutual understanding.”
Stanoevska-Slabeva (2002:75-77) explains the other three views, out of the four, as well. “In the implementation view (referring to the process view, author’s note), the dynamic aspects of the community’s organizational structure (i.e., community processes) are identified and defined. (…) Examples of community processes include the registration process, the process of participation in discussions and events, and the process of gaming in virtual worlds (ibid., 2002:75-76).” The transaction view (referring to the service view, author’s note) points at different communication services, which Stanoevska-Slabeva (2002:76-77) lines up:

1. **Knowledge services**, which “(...) enable management and use of the knowledge (i.e., content) available through the platform.” Knowledge created by community members is “(...) usually made available by content- and knowledge-management modules (e.g. search engines, information catalogs, classification tools, document-management tools) that enable the establishment of a common memory and a shared history”. Knowledge about the community “(...) is created through information provided by the participants, and by user-tracking and data-mining tools. Knowledge about community participants is used by personalization tools to provide personalized services to users.”

2. **Intention services**, which “(...) support participants in articulating their intentions and needs, which is the first step toward mutual coordination and cooperation as well as negotiation of tasks necessary for achieving a common goal. Examples of intentions are requests for communication with other community members, requests for help or for discussion of specific topics. In addition, intention services enable announcements of specific community events and activities.”

3. **Negotiation and contracting services**, which “(...) support the negotiation of tasks or obligations that may be recorded as contracts. The tools required in this phase offer support for collecting different opinions, managing the negotiation process, engaging in negotiations of different kinds (e.g. auctions, bargaining, calendar matching), and on-line voting, as well as on-line surveys and analysis. If the negotiation is successful, this phase will end with a “contract” - a set of binding obligations among community members.”

4. **Settlement services**, which “(...) enable participants to perform activities as part of their obligations and roles in the community. Some examples of this are “(...) communication activities, the preparation and performance of agreed-upon special events in discussion communities, and participation in surveys, online votes, and
brainstorming. The actions in this phase are performed according to the defined community rules.”

Finally, the *infra-structure* view is about how the requirements for a community-supporting platform are matched by available software such as chats and videoconferencing (Stanoevska-Slabeva, 2002:77).

The Media Reference Model shows how a community can be built up in a clear way. By including this model, the different elements of the platform and forum Boys With ED can be described thoroughly. These descriptions can then be used in order to understand how the community services might, or might not, show the path for certain member activities within this platform.

*Extreme views*

Not only can an online community display power issues and collective symbols, or show the path for certain online activities, it can also enhance extreme views. Cavanagh (2007:124) notes that extrapolating group effects, having effect on both opinion and self-construction, can occur online. At the Internet, individuals having similar interests are linked together, which can give rise to greater extremity. In addition, behavior that would be moderated in the offline world can appear more generalized in the online world and therefore more legitimate. The question of individuals having similar beliefs is explained further:

Where the potential exists to link up those who are widely geographically distributed, it appears that there is little incentive to join up with those of differing opinions and, as a result, personal choices in lifestyle or particular opinion and belief come to be amplified into identities, which then go on to act as a structure for a more diffuse range of interactions and choices (Cavanagh, 2007:124).

Since Boys With ED is a forum found on the Internet, extreme views or polarization effects might be seen there. Finding out an answer to this will give us a better understanding of what the members of Boys With ED come in contact with at this forum.

*Media integration*

As Slevin (2000:38) notes, various types of media are integrated on the Internet. Many browsers on the Internet are multifunctional, allowing the users to transmit files, to chat, to send e-mails and more. Slevin (2000:37-38) writes about how Internet can be used both to receive information and to
make it available to others, for example through hyperlinks: “Using hyperlinks embedded in hypertext, users acting as producers of information link up files containing text, sound and graphics to create so-called webpages. (...) The sources of information linked in this way can be located on any computer that is also part of the web.”

Since Boys With ED is an Internet community, media integration is something that can be seen there. By looking at the members' use of hyperlinks, and the integration of various types of media, it will become clearer how the members use Internet technology to communicate with others or to display their own selves. But, as already shown, an Internet forum does not allow any kind of activity. The media integration can be put into restraint, since the producer behind the community sets limits to what is possible to do within the community.

Four traits of Internet use

Slevin (2000:175-179) points out four ways in which people use the Internet, in order not to be overwhelmed by its complexity. According to Slevin (2000:174), these four traits "(...) are related to the contexts within which individuals act as producers of information, the contexts involved in the transmission of information, and lastly the contexts within which individuals act as recipients of information”. Here follows a more thorough description of the four traits:

Trait 1: The use of Internet technology to negotiate experience.

According to Slevin (2000:175), Internet makes it possible for its users to negotiate mediated experience. At the Internet, people can make information and other symbolic content available to other users, and as a consequence re-embed this content as part of the project of the self. Slevin (2000:175) writes that this negotiation must be understood within 'socially structured contexts', since it does not happen outside these contexts. In addition, people are selective in their Internet use because some information or interaction is relevant for the project of the self, while some is not (ibid., 2000:175). Slevin believes that more than with any other medium, people using the Internet negotiate their mediated experiences with regard to the project of the self.

On the Internet, we can find standardized influences such as “(...) the standard questions answered in a list of frequently asked questions, the standardized interaction made possible by dialogue boxes on a webpage, or even a particular version of events encoded on a webpage (Slevin, 2000:176).” But there are also influences on the Internet opening up the possibilities for the users, meaning that
the Internet gives the users possibilities to control, shape and personalize these mediated experiences themselves. Also, with help from Internet, people can find proximate others with who they share some interest, or learn things that make them communicate more competently with people in real life situations (ibid., 2000:176). These influences on the Internet can also make people aware of its limitations, since people may not always find the information they look for, or since they may not find the material relevant for their priorities.

Trait 2: The use of Internet technology to reappropriate knowledge and skills.

To reappropriate knowledge and skills, while using the Internet, often involves transforming knowledge and skills no longer appropriate within late modernity (Slevin, 2000:177). This knowledge and these skills have earlier been "(...) passed on to external agencies or particular expert systems (ibid., 2000:177)." Individuals can today reappropriate control by using Internet and hence bypass gatekeepers that earlier could limit the access to information or channels of communication. People can today frame their own experiences at Internet, regardless of how the mass media portray people. And the more knowledge you have regarding Internet technology and how you can make use of it, the more you are free to portray yourself in the way you wish.

Trait 3: The use of Internet technology to forge commitment and mutuality.

"In order to enrich and transform processes of self-formation, individuals must actively draw on intranets and the internet to establish new patterns of commitment and routine (Slevin, 2000:178)." This kind of routine and commitment can for example be found in people's list of bookmarks or files showing information regarding regular e-mail contacts (ibid., 2000:178). The Internet also offers a way to form new alliances, and according to Slevin, this process is selective among people since they orient themselves selectively according to their own interests and priorities. In addition, the Internet also allows people to shift their alliances when there are changes in their life projects.

Trait 4: The use of Internet technology to track risk and uncertainty and transcend conflict.

The Internet makes it possible for people to get in contact with contexts or experiences they would not have gotten in contact with otherwise. According to Slevin (2000:179), there are four ways in which Internet makes it possible for people to deal with conflicting dispositions:

Firstly, it can be used by individuals to monitor the development and nature of conflicts and assess
their safety. As such, it may allow them to manage their fears and responses more consciously. Secondly, Internet technology allows individuals to cope with cultural differences through dialogue. Thirdly, more communication may, in potential at least, lead to a greater mutual understanding and therefore to cosmopolitanism as an attitude of mind. Fourthly, the Internet may confront individuals with experiences normally being excluded from the regularities of their day-to-day lives. They may find some of these experiences shocking or disconcerting, but it is not impossible for them to manage their use of it in such a way as to filter these out.

Slevin's four traits point at different ways of using the Internet. These traits will in this research report be connected to Boys With ED and the activity held there. Once again, the analysis will only be based upon what the content posted at Boys With ED reveals. Also, these four traits of Internet use might not be applicable on all users at Boys With ED or at all times.

**Focus on information or virtual togetherness**

Participation within the virtual world can look different with regard to sociability. In the book *Internet Society – The Internet in the Everyday Life*, Bakardjieva (2005:169-180) highlights various forms of approaching the Internet among Internet users. One group of people belongs to the *infosumption* category. These users upheld a rationalistic ideal of information production and exchange, and do not find human contact or intimacy as "(...) legitimate motives for using the Internet (Bakardjieva, 2005:170).” Another group of people belong to the category of *instrumental interaction*. These people interact with other people in order to gain information, not in order to get to know people. They might enter virtual social spheres in order to get experiences illuminated, to have a problem solved or perhaps a question answered. A third group of people are *exploring ideas* in virtual public spheres. These people are interested in the information gained from the discussions held on the Internet, as well as socializing with other users as discussion partners/ interpreters/ knowers. Some of these people wish to "(...) build alliances with like-minded people and to enjoy intellectually stimulating encounters (Bakardjieva, 2005:173).”

The already mentioned types of Internet use all stem from the rationalistic model, according to Bakardjieva (2005:173), although they show various degrees of interpersonal interaction. But at one point, Bakardjieva saw a qualitative break with the rationalistic model. Bakardjieva then saw models of Internet communication where sociability is of central value. One of these ways of communicating is by *chatting*. Some people are particularly interested in talking in the virtual sphere and to make friendships. These people might find out that they share the same interests as
the other people in the chat room, despite the physical distance between them. Bakardjieva (2005:175-176) writes about her experiences from a chat room, where she saw that the users had a shared desire to overcome the privateness of their existence, and that they wanted to tell others about their most personal experiences and troubles. What consequences the participation in the chat room could have for the users is further explained:

The merry superficiality of the chat room was only the first level of contact where, through the expression of one's personality in public, interpersonal affinities were sought and negotiated. The deeper effects of this activity were realizing themselves at the level of the private conversations breaking off from the party and even further, into participants' actions in the offline world (Bakardjieva, 2005:175-176).

To be in the virtual world can also be a way to connect or make a commitment (Bakardjieva, 2005:176). One of Bakardjieva's (2005:177) respondents was a good example of this, since her motivation to become an Internet user was to find information and help through an Internet support group. This respondent discovered that thousands of other people were going through the same experience as she was, and that nobody in their offline lives could understand what they were going through. When this respondent wrote something about a negative experience to the people in the Internet support group, the others gave her supportive responses: "What distinguished Ellen's experience from other, more detached, forms of learning like those described by previous respondents was the fact that the people she was interacting with online had come to constitute a collective entity with its own distinctive culture. Her virtual group had a relatively stable membership communicating on a daily basis and feeling responsible for each other's well-being (ibid., 2005:178)." There was a sense of common identity. According to Bakardjieva, a particular situation, such as a rare disease among the members, was required in order for this extreme kind of online community to come to life.

Bakardjieva (2005:180) summarizes the difference between the two models explained above:

The qualitative distinction between the two models lies in the absence or presence of users' involvement with one another. The degree of immediacy and depth of this involvement may vary in the different versions of the community model. It may or may not meet a normative standard of 'genuine community', but in all the expressions of this model, users produce something of value to others – content, space, relationship and/or culture.

By explaining the different forms of 'virtual togetherness', Bakardjieva (2005:180) is hoping to undermine the dichotomy between private space and public space. Her respondents' narratives
revealed a negotiation of the boundaries between their own private world and the public online space. According to Bakardjieva (2005:185), people combine privacy and publicness in different proportions when they do social actions.

The members of Boys With ED might go to the forum to gain or share information, to find a 'virtual togetherness', or both. This might be revealed in the discussion threads, since some boys might ask for information regarding their disorder while others might post their wish to meet people who can support and understand them. This will be analyzed later in this report.

**Body image**

*Body image*

Western culture has increasingly valued physical appearance and in particular slenderness in the last 20 years. Unrealistic targets of thinness and excessive weight loss have led to eating disorders, the idea of obligatory exercise and other mental health problems. The concept of dissatisfaction with one's body image is driven home by images of ultra-thin models appearing in newspapers, magazines and television (Kindes, 2006:vii).

Eating disorders such as bulimia nervosa and anorexia nervosa seem to be connected to a disordered body image (Hogan & Strasburger, 2008:524). Before looking closer at the concept of body image, we much first acknowledge that men and women have different body shapes. The distribution of weight is different among women compared to men: "Women's normal bodies carry a higher percentage of fat than do men's bodies. The fat is not only located where girls would like it to be, that is, in their breasts but also in the hips, abdomen, and thighs – all of the places that popular culture suggests should be lean." (Smolak, 2005:472).

According to Smolak (2005:463), *being looked at* has always been a part of the feminine role. As a consequence, women are aware that other people look at and judge them. Smolak (2005:463) states that today's eating problems have their roots in a history where attractiveness in general has been of importance, and where a certain body shape has defined a woman's success. On the other hand, Smolak (2005:480) brings up the notion that the pressure on boys "(...) might eventually equal those of girls”. According to Morrison, Morrison and McCann (2006:28), men report progressively more dissatisfaction with their bodies.
Men's body image

According to Grogan (1999:58), the study of body image has been devoted mainly to women's bodies up until recently. The male body is today occurring more often in popular culture, which is why an increasing amount of research is devoted to it. Grogan (1999:58) writes about the most desired body shape among men:

There is a general consensus that most men aspire to a muscular mesomorphic shape characterised by average build with well-developed muscles on chest, arms and shoulders, and slim waist and hips, rather than the ectomorphic (thin) or endomorphic (fat) build. (…) It seems likely that the muscular shape is the masculine ideal because it is intimately tied to Western cultural notions of maleness as representing power, strength and aggression.

Orbach (1993) as cited in Grogan (1999:173) claims that the "(...) usual explanation of the lower incidence of male anorexics is that social pressure on men works against extreme thinness (the mesomorphic body type is the most valued for men) so that men getting thin are likely to face negative social responses, whereas women may face encouragement and praise in the early stages of anorexia, as being effective dieters". In other words, social reinforcement may be one reason for why men develop eating disorders more seldom than women. At the same time, the increased objectification of the male body may have increased men's focus on their bodies as objects to signal their psychological distress (Orbach, 1993, cited in Grogan, 1999:174).

Orbach's thoughts are especially interesting when looking at the community Boys With ED. Here, males might as well get positive responses when getting thinner, which might encourage them to continue their strive for thinness. On the other hand, it is difficult to know whether the members at Boys With ED were thin already when they entered the forum, which would imply that they might have faced encouragement in other contexts. It is also difficult to prove whether positive responses of this kind at an online community would encourage people to get thinner.

Body image and masculinity

In the book Men, Masculinities and Health: Critical Perspectives, Drummond (2009) writes about how we can understand masculinities within the context of men, body image and eating disorders. He states that the cultural evolution has gotten men, especially young men, to feel the pressure to look in a certain way (ibid., 2009:198). According to him, issues associated with masculinities must be understood when working with men having eating disorders (Drummond, 2009:199).
Physical activity plays a “(...) unique role in the social construction of masculinity among many men (Drummond, 2009:200).” Drummond (2009:201-204) compares the construction of masculinity among endurance sporters with the construction of masculinity among bodybuilders. He writes about the difference between doing and being. An endurance sporter is aware that his body is capable of performing or doing physical feats of endurance that most men are incapable of (ibid., 2009:202). This can be put in contrast to men who are bodybuilders. Among bodybuilders, the masculinity is instead constructed through the occupation of space and being hyper muscular.

Through interviews with 200 males, Drummond (2009:206-211) found three key themes these men came back to when thinking about body image:

1. The muscular male. Muscularity was by the respondents seen as equating to strength, and since strength is seen as something that signifies masculinity, muscularity is seen as an indicator of masculinity. 'Being' muscular is therefore something the men find important. The males also found it important to be able to 'do' masculine acts using strength.

2. Fat consciousness. Fat was by the respondents seen as visually abhorrent on a contemporary archetypal male physique. The archetypal male body is seen as a body that “(...) displays a high degree of athleticism and hence has little visible signs of fatness (Drummond, 2009:212).” To develop and maintain fatness was, according to the men, seen to display a lack of control, which was not considered a masculine trait. According to Drummond, males in general are becoming increasingly concerned with body fat as a consequence of an increasing awareness of body aesthetics. The young men in Drummond's study claimed that the more fat there is on a body, the less you can see the muscles beneath the fat. One of the eating-disordered males in the study brought up his fear of fat: “Like, it's fat. All the time. You know, you look in the mirror and you think, 'Oh, yuck'. It's either that or occasionally you might put on a little bit of weight and everyone will notice and that's when it really hits and you think, 'I've gotta lose weight, gotta lose weight'. That's what your mind is constantly telling you. Telling you to lose more weight. Break open some more stomach suppressants, whatever. Go on every diet there is. And do more exercise (Drummond, 2009:209).”

3. Fitting the societal image. The majority of the males in the study identified that media “(...) play a significant role in the construction of the archetypal male physique (Drummond, 2009:210).” The males “(...) argued that media images have a far greater negative impact upon a male's sense of masculine identity than providing positive physiques to aspire to (Drummond, 2009:210).” Many of the men in the study expressed similar thoughts regarding that through media, such as magazines or advertisements, you see male bodies
that set the standard for other men. As a consequence, some of the men in the study feel frustrated for not having the same physique as the men in the media images.

According to Drummond (2009:212), the young men find it more important to be muscular, while the ageing men find it more important to have a 'doing' functional body. Drummond (2009:212) writes that young men are the most critical of their bodies in terms of comparison with the archetypal male physique, and that they wish to establish their masculine identity through muscularity.

The members at Boys With ED probably display a fear of fat. But, on the other hand, they might work against the muscular body image, or they might want to be skinny and muscular simultaneously. They might also want to fit a social image, but perhaps not the archetypal male body. We cannot be certain that the boys will discuss what societal image they want to follow, or discuss that they do not want to follow the societal images. But what is interesting is that they probably want to go against the archetypal male physique. In other words, these boys probably strive for what they believe is beautiful, although it might not be what the Western society in general states is beautiful for males.

Connell (2005:45) is of the view that mass culture generally assumes there is a 'true masculinity', and that true masculinity is usually thought of as something which is inherent in a male body or which express something about a male body. But according to Connell (2005:47), the 'natural' masculinity is almost entirely fictional, and something that humans have created. This leads us to the concept of hegemony: "The notion of hegemony provides a way of talking about overarching ideologies at the level of everyday, taken-for-granted ideas and practice performed 'with consent', 'without coercion' (Hearn, 2004:389)." Connell (2005:76) explains the concept of hegemonic masculinity: "Hegemonic masculinity' is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable." Connell (2005:77) continues by writing that at any given time, one form of masculinity is culturally exalted at the expense of other masculinities. Through the cultural dynamic called hegemony, one group claims and sustains a leading position in the social life. The bearers of the hegemonic masculinity must, according to Connell, not always be the most powerful people, but might as well be film actors or film characters.

Reeser (2010:2-3) believes the concept of masculinity is a fabrication of a given historical or cultural context, and that it is always being contested. Reeser (2010:14) agrees with Connell
regarding that there are dominant models of masculinity in society, but wants to focus on that a man is never simply in any one position in any relation. Instead, men shift between various relations of masculinity. Images, discourse and different practices within society depict male bodies and have an effect upon how we think a male body should be (ibid., 2010:93). Reeser (2010:91-92) writes that the male body is connected to culture and discourse; it is actually “(...) one of the main avenues through which culture attempts to construct masculinity. (...) The male body, too, can be approached as dialogic: the meaning given to a body differs according to the relation between that body and the perceiver of that body.” In conclusion, there is an ongoing dialogue between a person's own body and other bodies (Reeser, 2010:100): “If the dialogue between me and my body defines an element of my masculinity, so does the dialogue between my body and other bodies. That dialogue can be created by two discrete bodies – my imagined body and another one that I perceive.”

The reason the concept of masculinity is under the concept of body image in this report is that issues regarding masculinity – as in a masculine body – are what can most clearly be connected to Boys With ED, rather than other kinds of masculinity expressions. Drummond's theory of body image connected to masculinity is applicable on this study in a more direct fashion, while Connell's theory is of a more general kind that will be connected to the material in a more indirect way. The boys at Boys With ED are perhaps working against a hegemonic masculinity, for example by not wishing to have an archetypal masculine body, but it is hard to tell whether they strive for or oppose the hegemonic masculinity in other ways.

**Identity**

*What is identity?*

Williams (1995:8) makes a difference between the identity you recognize as your own and the identity others believe you have. Buckingham (2008:1) explores the term further by stating that our own identity is something unique to each of us, and something we assume to be quite consistent over time, at the same time as it implies a relationship with a broader collective or social group. Our national identity, cultural identity or gender identity is partly a matter of what we share with other people:

> Here, identity is about identification with others whom we assume are similar to us (if not exactly the same), at least in some significant ways. (...) On one level, I am the product of my unique personal biography. Yet who I am (or who I think I am) varies according to who I am with, the social situations in
which I find myself, and the motivations I may have at the time, although I am by no means entirely free to choose how I am defined (Buckingham, 2008:1).

Riccini (2003:114) writes that our identities are connected to our bodies, the body that we are and that we become. The body is one of the foundations on which identity is built: "From earliest childhood, the development of bodily identity represents the plot upon which to construct the self as persona, with the multiple identities and roles we then assume over time (Riccini, 2003:114).”

The reason 'identity' is brought in as a concept is because the boys at Boys With ED probably tightly connect their identities to their bodies. At Boys With ED, the boys might display their own identities and renegotiate their identities when receiving comments from others. It will not be possible to say anything about whether their identities change over time while they are members at the community, but it will be possible to study what the boys choose to display, regarding themselves, to others. The reason the concept of social identity is not in focus is that this study is more about the togetherness and the social support the members at Boys With ED perhaps display, than about a possible social identity. It is also important to be careful not to use the concept social identity in this case, since it would imply that people meeting around eating disorder issues have a social identity in common, while it might be that they only have their disorder in common.

\*Internet and identity\*

Today, under conditions of reflexive modernization, individuals are faced with having to use communication technologies such as the internet in their attempts to refashion the project of the self and attempt to steer it through an increasingly uncertain world of baffling complexity (Slevin, 2000:157).

Weber and Mitchell (2008:27) write about how new technologies and identity processes are connected. Digital productions can tell stories about individuals and their identities. A digital production can leave a digital trail, for example in the form of a photograph showing ”where I was then”, ”who I would like to be”, and so forth. Weber and Mitchell write that both digital productions and identity processes are in flux, incorporating new and old images. The authors note that young people often take up and consume popular images, and have these images become a part of their own media productions (Weber & Mitchell, 2008:27). These media productions might also have their audiences, which is why young media producers revisit their own web productions in order to see how other people have responded to the content of the productions. There is a reflexivity to this process, a conscious looking, not only at their production (reflecting themselves), but at how others are looking at their productions. Weber and Mitchell (2008:41) explain this
Firstly, their own media production (both through its processes and its outcomes) forces young people to look at themselves, sometimes through new eyes, providing feedback for further modification of their self-representations. Secondly, the source materials and modes of young people’s media production are often evident or transparent; the choices and processes that they use reveal and identify them in ways that they themselves might not even realize. Thirdly, through built-in response mechanisms or simply through audience response, media production invites other people’s feedback and readings, sparking a dialectic that is inherent to mediating and reshaping how we see ourselves and how we think others see us.

Weber and Mitchell (2008:41-42) state that the body and the identity formation are closely tied to each other. The body is something that gives a sense of permanence and stability to the flux of identity processes. Although the body changes in appearance, it remains at the heart of identity (ibid., 2008:41-42). When young people post pictures of themselves, often deliberately posed, they are examining and modifying their bodies as well as putting their bodies out there.

In this report, the different ways in which the members at Boys With ED are displaying their identities will be examined. Through the posting of texts and images, the members might display their own identities, and through the comments posted by other boys at the forum, a reflexivity process might come to life. It will not be possible to say anything about how an eventual reflexivity process do occur in the members' minds, but it will be possible to say something about what the written reactions to a posted material are, and what these might tell us. The goal is though not to say anything about the members' identity processes, since the member postings are not followed during a period long enough.

**Similarity identification and wishful identification**

Von Feilitzen's and Linné's (1974) concepts similarity identification and wishful identification is applicable at the study of Boys With ED. **Similarity identification** means that a person recognizes him-/herself in a media person (or is similar to this person), while **wishful identification** means that a person wishes to be like the media person (von Feilitzen & Linné, 1974, cited in von Feilitzen, Filipson, Rydin & Schyller, 1989:173). Firstly, the boys at Boys With ED might put up pictures on celebrities they want to look like, and comments on how they would like their body to look, and therefore reveal their own wishful identification. Secondly, these boys might reveal through their comments that they wish their bodies to look like other members' bodies. Thirdly, the boys might display similarity identification, since they might write comments about the similarity between their
own body and another person's body.

**METHOD**

In this report, the results that will stem from the study of the platform itself will be of a more descriptive nature, since the study of the platform is mostly about looking at functions and services. In contrast, the results that will stem from the study of the content the members have put at the forum will be interpreted more deeply, since this content will reveal more about the culture of the online context in question.

Worth remembering is that the findings concerning the studied content will stem from content posted by members who are (or have been) interested in being a part of this particular forum. Therefore, online content perhaps posted by boys having or not having eating disorders, who are not interested in being at this forum, is not a part of this study (since these boys logically have not posted anything at Boys With ED). In addition, there might be boys out there who have not found this forum yet, but who might want to be a part of the forum. One limitation of this study is therefore that it only highlights material posted by (at some point) active members of one selected forum. The reason this report only tells about one forum is that I have found no other discussion forum for boys having eating disorders not only being about recovery issues.

**Virtual ethnography**

In this report, virtual ethnography will be used as a method to map out the website and forum Boys With ED. The functions and services of the platform will be studied, before conducting the thematic analysis of the member discussions. Christine Hine has written many interesting texts concerning virtual ethnography. In the book chapter *Virtual Ethnography: Modes, Varieties, Affordances*, Hine (2008:257) explains the subject further:

> Virtual ethnography transfers the ethnographic tradition of the researcher as an embodied research instrument to the social spaces of the Internet. (…) Early applications of ethnography to online settings focused on demonstrating just how rich and socially patterned Internet-based interactions could be. This form of ethnography was influential in establishing the idea of online community, a new kind of social formation enabled through Internet interactions and existing independent of physical space.

According to Hine (2008:259), the key ethnographic principle is the same in virtual ethnography as in traditional ethnography. This principle is about the researcher gaining understanding of a context,
through participation and a progressive collection of data. Hine (2008:259) writes that virtual ethnography often includes online surveys and interviews: “The use of ethnography in the online context tends to imply (…) a participant observation approach where online surveys and interviews, and systematic analysis of message content, are supplemented by the ethnographer's embodied learning through being a part of the situation.”

Because of the limited amount of time, the study of Boys With ED will not consist of online surveys or interviews, only analysis of the posted content and analysis of the platform itself. The understanding I will get as a researcher is therefore limited to these two blocks. No answer will be given to how it is to be an actively participating member at the forum, only to what the forum consists of. This also puts some limits to what conclusions can be drawn from the material, since the members' own voices will only be heard in the form of their posted content. What they are posting, and my interpretation of these postings, cannot tell the whole story. At the same time, the focus of this report lies on the posted material rather than the forum's individual members.

Virtual ethnography also raises the question of interpretation and assumptions. Hine (2008:261-262) writes that ethnography is about making strange things familiar by a researcher through his or her interpretation of these things, while it also is about making the familiar seem strange by questioning our daily practices. Where an ethnographer finds his or her standpoint at the spectrum between full participant and full observer has consequences for ”(…) the ease with which the ethnography is able to fulfill its goals in these two directions.” Hine (2008:261-262) continues:

A full participant might find it easy to describe a culture in its own terms but tend to share its assumptions, whilst a full observer might find a culture bizarre in its practices and experience difficulties in taking it seriously as a coherent domain of cultural practice. Any position on the spectrum places an onus on the ethnographer to do careful work on their assumptions (Hine, 2008:261-262).

Being a researcher, you always begin your study having a certain set of assumptions or a certain set of understandings, which can blur the clear view of what is actually found during the study. In the method of interpretation called hermeneutics, the pre-understanding of the researcher is of highest importance. In hermeneutics, it is assumed that we never look at the world in an unbiased manner (Gilje & Grimen, 2004:183). When we for example do a close reading of a text we do not understand, the text is not understandable to us because we bring our own background understanding to the interpretation process (Gilje & Grimen, 2004:183). An interpreter understands a text according to the language and terms he or she knows, according to the beliefs he or she has about the world, and according to his or her previous experiences (Gilje & Grimen, 2004:184-186).
While studying Boys With ED, it is important for me trying not to assume too much or read things according to these assumptions, although it is impossible to fully step out of my pre-understandings. Since this report tells about my interpretation of a certain online context and online content, it will always somewhat be based on the language and terms I know, the beliefs I have about the world, and my own previous experiences. In summary, me being the person I am will do that the interpretation will be different from anyone else's. For this reason, the result and discussion section contains conclusions that cannot be generalized, since another person might highlight other aspects of the material or draw different conclusions. This does not mean that the findings are less important or interesting, this is only the nature of qualitative analysis. The findings from this study will still be showing something that is real and seen in the chosen online context, although the interpretations drawn from these findings could be of a different kind if drawn by another person. This report will show a certain set of interpretations of the material chosen, and hopefully open up the minds of the readers so that the theme of this report is better understood and reflected upon in the future.

It might be more difficult to maintain an “objective” stance after a while of studying Boys With ED, since I perhaps get used to the material and no longer notice some parts of the material that could be of particular interest. Moreover, what initially strikes me to be a community where its members conduct activities that can be dangerous for their health and triggering for their eating disorder, might after a while of passive participation seem more 'normal'. During this study, I strive for getting a better understanding of the material by getting closer to it and trying to understand it from the members' point of view, but also by taking a step back and look at the material from a more ”objective” point of view. By doing this, it will be easier to take a closer look at the material without getting lost in it. Within hermeneutics, a similar process is called the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle points to that during the interpretation process, the different parts of the material are understood in relation to the whole material, and the whole material is understood in relation to its different parts (Gilje & Grim, 2004:191). The interpretation of the different parts is based on the interpretation of the whole material, and vice versa. In this way, the understanding of a material is continuously deepened. Through shifting focus between the different parts of the material and the material as a whole, I will prevent myself from only seeing the different parts without seeing the connection between them, or from only seeing the material as a whole and forgetting about important parts that might put the material as a whole in a different light.

The question of 'lurking' is also important to reflect upon. “It has been suggested that the Internet
provides an ideal opportunity for covert ethnography, since it is possible to lurk in many online environments without being visibly present to informants (Hine, 2008:262).” Hine (2008:262) continues by writing more about this approach:

Such an approach risks losing the benefits of trying out emergent knowledge in practice that the 'participant' part of participant observation affords. Lurking is, however, a useful part of the virtual ethnographer's repertoire when it mirrors the practices of ordinary members of a group, and where it allows for a period of cultural familiarisation in order to facilitate a relatively smooth entry into active participation.

As Hine writes, some of the benefits of ethnography are lost when the researcher decides to be a lurker. While studying Boys With ED, no interaction with the members will be conducted. This in turn puts some limits to the results. The 'participant' part of the ethnography is not the focus of this research report, which will result in lack of knowledge regarding the question of how it is to be an active member of the community. This choice is made firstly because of the limited amount of time there is to do this study. In order to get a thorough understanding of how it is to be a part of Boys With ED, a considerable amount of time is needed. It probably takes some time to get into the online environment, meaning that it probably takes time to create a professional relationship with the other members in order to understand what comes out of being an active participant of the forum. Also, telling the members of Boys With ED that you are present might have effect upon the interaction held at the community. Members might put a strangle on their communication, and behave differently when knowing their online activity is being observed. As Hine (2008:263) writes, the “(...) presence developed by the ethnographer has to be acceptable to those who inhabit the field setting. The ethnographer also needs to attain a level of confidence that what they have observed in the setting is in some sense authentic, in that it represents more than a mere show put on for their benefit.”

Secondly, the choice of being a lurker is made since this study is only about the platform Boys With ED itself and the material posted within this online context. In other words, since this study is about the Internet platform and the mediated communication seen there, there is at this point no need to study the way the members themselves perceive the activity held there, or what this activity means to them. The focus of this research report lies on what the members choose to post within an online context of this kind, and what this might tell us. In the future, it might though be interesting to go deeper into this field of study and interact with the boys in order to get a deeper understanding of the community from a user perspective.
Hine (2008:263) also notes that a lurker stands at risk of missing some of the communicative practices of an online context: “The lurker risks assuming, without any experiential basis for doing so, that the public bulletin board is all that there is for all members. Trying out what it is like to be a participating member can be a route into a complex set of communicative practices which deploy multiple media in flexible and creative fashion.” This study will not tell everything about how the members of Boys With ED interact with each other, especially since no active participation will be conducted by me as a researcher. Since this study is about the platform Boys With ED and the activity held there visible to the eye, this is what will be in focus. Hine (2008:263) writes that virtual ethnography can “(...) benefit from a step back from total technical competence in order to see the steps which precede effective entry and to bring into focus the taken-for-granted qualities of the setting.” By not taking the setting for granted, my conducted research will show how the platform Boys With ED and its services show the path for the member activity conducted there.

It is also important to note that it is impossible to know whether what the members of Boys With ED write is true, that they are who they write they are, or that they do have an eating disorder. If some members are looking for virtual togetherness, they might write certain things in order to become a part of this togetherness, things they would not have written if they were not longing for belonging. Or, if some members are looking for virtual togetherness, they might choose not to write certain things in order not to be excluded from the togetherness. Also, had I as a researcher told the members about my presence, they might have become truer with who they are, since they would know their postings were objects of study. Or they might have become less true with who they are, because of the same reason. This research report will largely be based upon postings, images and texts that the members of the forum upload. Whether the postings are 'true' or not is of second value, since the main interest here is to find out what the members actually choose to bring up in this online context. A member of Boys With ED might be, or not be, someone else in real life compared to who he says he is at the community, but this does not eliminate the interesting findings that will come out of studying what can actually be seen in this virtual space.

**Thematic analysis**

If the themes that stem from a material are set beforehand, or following a certain set of theories, it is called deductive analysis, while if the themes are extracted from the material, it is called inductive thematic analysis (Langemar, 2005). After having had a brief look at the content of Boys With ED in the beginning of this study, it became clear that the theoretical concepts to be used are: Internet theory, body image (and masculinity) theory, and identity theory. This conclusion was made with
help from inductive thematic analysis, where a first sketch over the occurring themes was drawn. A risk that was taken while deciding these theoretical concepts is that some other theoretical concepts might have put an even brighter light upon the material in question. One limitation of this study is therefore that I might have missed out on some usable theoretical concepts. On the other hand, choices have to be made, and there is no possibility to fully grasp a material at hand. In addition, the limited amount of concepts put a valuable framework to the study, and keeps it from being too unfocused.

Now that the theoretical concepts have been chosen, thematic analysis will be used in order to look at the material one more time, this time in more detail. With help from thematic analysis, the content posted at the forum will once again be studied. The themes that appear, and which in addition will be connected to the research questions and theories, will be examined further. This thematic analysis of Boys With ED will be deductive in the sense that the found themes will be connected to the theoretical concepts chosen.

The discussion threads at the forum Boys With ED will be read, one by one, during three full time work weeks in total, beginning with the oldest thread. The reading of the discussion threads will start on the 1st of March and stop at the 1st of April 2012. By reading the headline of each discussion thread, the first post written by the author of the post, and the posted replies, themes will be extracted from the material.

According to Hayes (2000, cited in Langemar, 2005:51), a thematic analysis begins with the researcher going through the material, writing down key words that are relevant for the research questions. After this, the researcher puts the key words under preliminary themes, meaning that he or she puts the key words under different umbrella terms. The following moment is when the researcher reads the material once more, and puts different parts of the material under the different themes. At the end, the researcher decides what themes are to be highlighted, and makes short summaries of the material connected to these themes. This will now be highlighted by a fictive example: If the content of one discussion thread in the forum Boys With ED tells about a low calorie recipe, and another discussion thread tells about a certain fruit a member has tasted, these contents will be put under the same theme, namely 'food'. What could happen when doing a thematic analysis is that some particular posts do not become properly reflected upon, but since only the extracted themes are in focus, not every post has to be reflected upon in the first place. The posts that are posted after the 1st of April 2012 will not be read, so it could be of interest to look at these in a future study to see if the discussions held at the forum change over time.
Validity and generalization

A research study's validity points to the credibility of the study, meaning first and foremost how relevant the data and the analysis are in relation to the research questions or the problem at hand (Østbye, Knapskog, Helland & Larsen, 2003:40). In other words, validity points to whether you have been measuring what you have the aim to measure. The validity of the study is connected to how well the theoretical concepts are captured during the collection and analysis of the data. In general, qualitative analysis has its strength in giving the researcher the opportunity to come closer to the core of the theoretical terms (Østbye, Knapskog, Helland & Larsen, 2003:41). During the process of this study, the key theoretical concepts were chosen after having had a first look at the material. At the same time, I remained open for the fact that new findings might show up, during the deductive analysis, which would not fit under the concepts chosen. It became clear though that no such important or big findings were there to be seen in the material, since the key theoretical concepts were broad enough to include the key findings. During the analysis of the material, the key theoretical concepts were always in my mind. I have let the material speak for the theoretical concepts, as well as the other way round, in a dialectical process.

Generalization can point to the possibility to connect the research conclusions to another group of individuals, or other phenomena than the studied phenomenon (Østbye, Knapskog, Helland & Larsen, 2003:42). It is important to note once again that since I only study one online forum for boys having eating disorders, the findings cannot be generalized to other online contexts. Generalization can also point to the possibility to have the hermeneutic understanding of the different parts to equal the understanding of the whole (Østbye, Knapskog, Helland & Larsen, 2003:42). During this study, efforts have been made to continuously go back and forth between the parts and the whole, in order to understand the material. Worth noticing is though that, as written earlier, I as a single researcher will always understand the text in some way differently from other persons. Hence, the understanding is always in some way personal. As a final comment, not all members at Boys With ED have necessarily been posting material, which means that the conclusions drawn in this study draw upon the material posted by a limited amount of members.

Ethical considerations

Hine (2008:265) brings up that there have been some challenges to the human subjects model, which is a model saying that subjects shall be informed about them being a part of a research
project, so that they can decide whether they want to participate or not. Hine (2008:265) continues: “These objections tend, however, to focus on research which is essentially passive, involving collection by the researcher of a pre-existing corpus of data.” The study of Boys With ED is of the passive kind, and the choice has been made not to inform the members of the forum that research is being conducted. But since the discussion forum is a closed forum, meaning that only members of the site can enter the forum, ethical issues must certainly be thought about.

In the document Ethical decision-making and Internet research – Recommendations from the Aoir ethics working committee, from the year of 2002 and found at the Association of Internet Researchers' website, information regarding ethical guidelines for Internet research is found. Firstly, it is written that "(...) the greater the acknowledged publicity of the venue, the less obligation there may be to protect individual privacy, confidentiality, right to informed consent, etc. (Aoir, 2002:5).” Secondly, it is written that "(...) the greater the vulnerability of the author/subject – the greater the obligation of the researcher to protect the author/subject (Aoir, 2002:5).” For example, researchers have to show a certain ethical awareness when the study subjects are minors between the age of 12 and 18 and/or children. Thirdly, it is written that from a utilitarian standpoint, "(...) research can only be justified – especially if it risks harms to individuals – if the likely benefits arguably outweigh the real and possible costs (including potential harm) (Aoir, 2002:8).”

The Weebly website Boys With ED can be considered public, since everyone with access to a computer having an Internet connection can visit this website by typing in the web address. Therefore, some written material found at this site (as it is seen at the site) is included in this report, as well as a screenshot showing the first page of this site. This has been included in order for the reader to have a better understanding of the study object. Since the creator behind the website might be a minor, the online diary and other more personal information is not revealed in this report.

In terms of the discussion forum, the ethical considerations are tightened. Since participation at the forum Boys With ED requires registration, although this registration is easy to go through, the content of the discussion forum has to be handled with much greater care. During this study, members of Boys With ED will not know that the material posted at the forum is being studied, and there will be no interaction between me being a researcher and the members. The virtual sphere of the forum cannot be considered public, and some of the members might as well be minors, or in some cases, children. In order to save the members from unethical exposure, their nicknames and other personal information will not be revealed. In addition, the result section will only show general themes found in the discussion threads instead of individual statements. In this way,
valuable information can be given regarding a forum where boys meet to discuss eating disorders and other issues, while at the same time, the persons being active at this forum are protected from individual exposure.

**MATERIAL**

**Boys With ED revisited**

The discussion forum

On the Boys with ED discussion forum (Boys With ED:b, 2012) there are 28045 messages and 1126 registered users on the 6th of January 2012, at 14.26. On the 2nd of April 2012, there are 28371 messages and 1144 registered users. The amount of members at Boys With ED seems in other words to be increasing. Whether this means that the new members are boys having eating disorders, or whether the individuals behind the new nicknames are new at the forum or just being old members changing their nickname, are questions not being answered in this report. Nevertheless, the fact that the amount of members is increasing might be a sign of a growing need among boys having eating disorders to have a place where they can discuss these issues with likeminded people.

In order to understand how the rules of the forum, and the services provided, might affect the members' activity within the forum, it is important to have a closer look at what certain elements the forum consists of. A description of the registration process is of interest. When being a new user of a forum, the registration process might give you a view of what is allowed within the forum and what is not, and also what the online culture is supposed to look like within the forum.

When you first register at the forum Boys With ED, you have to agree to the forum's terms of service (Boys With ED, 2012:c). If you choose to agree to these terms, you are free to choose your own username. At the same time, you must write your e-mail address and create your own password. After doing this, you get an account activation link in the inbox of your personal e-mail account. Whether you choose to register or not, you are always free to read the 'Welcome to BWE' section, where you can read about the rules and guidelines of the forum (Boys With ED, 2012:d).

You are though not allowed to post anything or read the members' postings without being a registered member of the forum. By reading the rules and guidelines, new members of the forum

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5 Supplement. The terms of service of the forum can be seen in Text 2 in the supplement section of this report.

6 Supplement. The rules and guidelines of the forum can be seen in Text 3 in the supplement section of this report.
might get an understanding of how they are supposed to behave within this forum. All of them might not follow these rules and guidelines, or read about them, but at least these rules and guidelines are there to be followed.

When having become a registered member of the discussion forum, you are also free to write information about yourself in your profile. In the personalized profile, you can tell about yourself in relation to these themes: Gender/ Birthday/ Location/ Job and hobbies/ Humor. You can also choose to write your contact information in the contact field that holds these headlines: Website/ ICQ Number/ AIM Address/ MSN Messenger/ Yahoo Messenger/ Skype. In this personalized profile, you are also free to upload an avatar which might show a picture of the real you or any other kind of picture. This avatar will further on be seen under your username when you for example post something in the discussion threads. Besides the personalized profile, you are also free to make use of a pre-made introduction sheet to introduce yourself (Boys With ED, 2012:e). Both the personalized profile and the pre-made introduction sheet can be seen as services allowing for the members to show their identities online. Under the section 'Welcome New Members!' at the forum, the pre-made introduction sheet is found.7

*Girls at the forum*

There are some individuals claiming to be girls at the forum Boys With ED as well. As can be seen in the rules and guidelines (Boys With ED, 2012:d), girls are also welcome at the forum. The girls' activity and postings are not in focus in this study, since the girls' postings are too few to make any general statements from, and since the focus of this study is the online activities of boys presumably having eating disorders. It could be that some of the members state that they are boys while being girls in real life, but this will not be examined. In this study, what is being found out regarding the members will be “trusted”, in the sense that the conclusions will be drawn from what is actually posted, whether it being true or not. This is a study of what happens in a virtual sphere, which is why the content of this virtual sphere is what is of interest, regardless of what the members are or do offline.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

In this part of the report, the research questions will have their answer. The result and discussion

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7 *Supplement.* The pre-made introduction sheet can be seen in Text 4 in the supplement section of this report.
section is divided into two parts, in accordance with the two parts the research questions were divided into. Before having a closer look at the findings, it is worth noticing that the content posted at the forum Boys With ED is in many ways 'westernized'. It is in several ways related to different aspects of the Western culture. The food discussed, the celebrities discussed, the music discussed, etcetera, mostly belong to the Western culture. In other words, the findings show a cultural bias. This can probably partly be connected to the fact that the language of the forum is English.

**Part One: The Internet**

As Stanoevska-Slabeva (2002:73) notes, platform services have an impact upon the community building of an online community. This was indeed the case of Boys With ED as well, which will now be shown. After having registered myself as a member of the forum, and after having spent time trying out the functions and services of the forum, answers were found to how the platform itself might have effect upon the member activity there. To summarize it, this section will answer the following research question:

In what way is the forum Boys With ED structurally *built up*, with regard to layout, guidelines and functions, and what effect might it have upon the members' activities?

*Technology, power and collective symbols at Boys With ED*

As Cavanagh (2007:113) notes, the community leaders of an online community hold certain power, since they can decide what material is allowed and what is not. The members of Boys With ED are probably aware that if they would write something inappropriate, the moderators of the forum can delete it. Yes, the forum Boys With ED does have moderators, and it is fully clear which members are, since the word 'moderator' is seen right next to these members' nicknames. Sometimes, when a member of the forum writes something a moderator of the forum finds very inappropriate, this moderator writes that the member is banned from the forum. This written note about a member being excluded is seen in the form of a posting, in the same discussion thread where the inappropriate posting was posted in the first place. Sometimes the inappropriate posting is erased, sometimes not. It happens at times that a member writes something going against the rules of the forum, but something not inappropriate enough to have him banned from the forum. In these cases, other members often write in the same discussion thread that the member in question has crossed a line.
Having been excluded from the forum, it might not be that difficult to start a new account, but the fact that some members get banned might keep some members from posting things they believe the moderators would not accept. Members who have been members of the forum for a while, and therefore are recognized by the other members and perhaps have gained some kind of reputation, perhaps do not want to lose the possibility to continue to be at the forum under their chosen nickname. The work and effort they might have put into their membership at Boys With ED could be something they would find was lost if they got banned from the forum. To be a part of an online community might lead the members to not want to disappoint the other members by posting something that could be unpopular among the other members.

Surprisingly enough, no postings were seen to be solely negative about the forum. The forum can be said to consist of plenty of unsuitable content, for example in the form of thinspiration. Perhaps people who would believe this forum to be unacceptable in many ways have not come across this online context yet. Had such people found the forum, they might have posted very negative comments about the forum. If you are not aiming at becoming a respected member yourself, you probably feel less need to be accepted by the other members, which can lead you to express yourself more freely. At the same time, the moderators at Boys With ED might have executed their job flawlessly by deleting any previously posted content not being welcome.

It can be noted that next to each member's nickname, the word 'reputation' is seen. Cavanagh (2007:118) brings up that in some online communities, there are reputation systems where the gaining of reputation points can be understood as a form of social capital. At the forum Boys With ED, every new member starts at a reputation of zero points. A member's reputation points can be seen either at the member's own profile page or in the member's postings. If you, being a member, appreciate another member's posting, you can choose to click on a plus sign (+) seen within the other member's posting. If you choose this, it will have the consequence that the author of the post will gain a reputation point and therefore get a higher reputation score. If you come to dislike another member's posting, and choose to click at the minus sign (-) next to the plus sign, the author of the posting will lose a reputation point.

The reputation system at Boys With ED might further increase the members' will to write things they believe other members will appreciate. The reputation system might also create a certain culture of posting. If the members see that certain types of posts are more appreciated than others, they perhaps become more prone to create posts of a similar type. As a result, the subjects being discussed within the posts maybe become increasingly similar. This could for instance mean that
the issue of eating disorders is discussed in an increasingly homogeneous manner, which might have the result that the boys become more prone to either maintain their disorder or to express a wish to recover. It could also mean that the boys become more prone to show support to other members in a certain way, instead of trying out different ways of supporting. On the other hand, the members do perhaps not put so much thought into their own or other members’ postings with regard to the reputation system. What is posted at the forum could as well be things that have been going through the boys' minds regardless of what other members have posted. And far from every member has a reputation score of other than zero, which would either imply that many members do not create their own postings in the first place, or that the members in general are not particularly interested in giving or withdrawing reputation points from others.

In conclusion, the power of reputation points seems not to be a key issue at Boys With ED. Perhaps this has to do with what is written at the Weebly website (Boys With ED, 2012:a), namely: “We do not like to label this website as a Pro-Ana website, but we are certainly not anti. We accept everyone's choice.” With such an open-minded statement to follow, the members might not want to be judgmental when it comes to the other members' postings. Boys With ED is a forum where sensitive issues are lifted up. The members seem to in many ways have a troubled life, from what they are writing, and they are probably in some way aware of their own and other members' state of mind. By not putting too much focus on the other members' reputation score, the members are perhaps showing each other that the forum is about acceptance rather than evaluation.

Cavanagh (2007:116-117) explains that there are collective symbols in an online community, and that these symbols may create solidarity if used “(...) for a more cohesive purpose rather than mere tribal identification.” These symbols can at an online community be seen in the form of FAQs and group-specific terminology (Cavanagh, 2007:116). At Boys With ED, group-specific terminology is seen, both at the platform and in the discussions held, as well as common symbolic resources. Members of Boys With ED write about Ana (anorexia) and Mia (bulimia), about wannarexics (people who want to develop an eating disorder, author's note), about Ortho (orthorexia, author's note) and so forth, which points at a group-specific terminology. The members also share common symbolic resources. They gather around pictures, videos and other material highlighting eating disorder related issues; material often telling about what people having eating disorders struggle with and wish for.

The group-specific terminology at Boys With ED, along with the thinspiration material and other material that can be said to encourage eating disorders, points towards Riley, Rodham and Gavin's
work. The authors write that it is typical of Pro-Ana websites to contain thinspiration material and a language where words such as Ana and Mia are used (Riley, Rodham & Gavin, 2009:350). In line with this, Boys With ED cannot be considered a recovery forum, but rather a Pro-Ana forum, although it has some elements being similar to elements found at recovery forums. In relation to Cavanagh's (2007) writing, it is not possible to make a final statement regarding whether the collective symbols seen at Boys With ED enhance solidarity among the members, or whether these only provide a possibility for mere tribal identification. The majority of the members can be assumed to have an eating disorder, which leads the eating disorder to be the potentially single biggest factor they have in common. Because the members perhaps have a certain health condition in common rather than a collective identity, the solidarity might not be enhanced. On the other hand, members that supposedly want to be a part of the Pro-Ana movement can perhaps be more prone to make use of the collective symbols, or letting themselves be effected by these symbols, in order to increase their feeling of being a part of this movement or in order to have other members to join their mission. This is though not proved, and there can be other reasons for the members to make use of the collective symbols, for example in order to make themselves understood or purely to find togetherness in the situation they presumably share with the others.

**MRM (Media Reference Model) in relation to Boys With ED**

In this section, the Media Reference Model, developed by Lechner and Schmid (2000), will be put in relation to the forum Boys With ED. Stanoevska-Slabeva's (2002) explanation of the Media Reference Model has laid the groundwork for this study. Firstly, the *community view* will be connected to the forum:

*Roles in the community.* The members of Boys With ED have different roles. Some of them are 'only' members, while some of them are both members and moderators. As already shown, the moderators have more power in the forum when it comes to deciding what is allowed and not within the forum. As already noted, most of the members have the roles of members and not of moderators, and therefore they are perhaps more careful with what they post within the forum.

*Valid rules for communication.* As already noted in the material section of this report, there are rules defined by the community in the 'Rules & Guidelines' section. The rules are, in summary: The forum is not a forum for 'wannarexic' behavior/ It is not a forum for tips, trick and encouragement/ It is a place where people of all ages, races, religious backgrounds and sexual orientations are welcome/ It is not a place for foul language/ The pictures posted should not contain full-frontal
nudity and should not break any laws/ The community is a welcoming one and female members are welcome (Boys With ED, 2012:d). The rules set up perhaps put some restriction on what the members choose to write at the forum. Knowing that certain postings are not allowed to be put at the forum, some members might choose not to put them there. On the other hand, these rules might not always be followed, which for example can be seen when certain members write they have a wish to develop an eating disorder, and therefore show 'wannarexic' behavior.

It is difficult to know why some members choose to break the community's rules. One reason could be that some members do not have the will or patience to read the rules. Within the online culture of today, people probably seldom have the patience to read all the information handed to them. Another reason could be that some members feel it is so important for them to write what they are writing, to make themselves heard in order to get a response, that they take the risk of getting banned from the forum. As noted earlier, when a member breaks the rules, other members often step forward and make this clear to this member. At least some members seem to be taking the rules very seriously. This is perhaps enhanced by the fact that the forum highlights serious matters. Sensitive issues are elaborated on within the virtual discussions, and some members might find it important for everyone to follow the rules in order to have everyone feel respected.

A description of community participants. Interestingly enough, there is no room for the members' own presentation of themselves in their own profiles. This certainly puts some limits to the members' identity formation in their profiles. The only way the members can create their own personal information at the profile page is by filling in the 'signature' box. The signature box is an empty box, where the members can write texts or insert links. The material put into the signature box can then be seen in the members' postings, under the texts they have written for discussion. At their own profile pages, the members can also choose to fill in the contact field, which contains the following factors: Website/ ICQ number/ AIM address/ MSN Messenger/ Yahoo Messenger/ Skype. Under each avatar, clearly seen in the discussion threads as soon as a member posts something there, some specific information about this member is seen. The information seen is: How many posts this members has written/ How many reputation points the member has/ At what date the member joined the community/ What age the member has/ What geographical location the member has.

The different ways in which the members of Boys With ED are (or can be) presented, can perhaps have effect upon the member activity of the forum. If certain information about a member is seen, this might make other members more prone to comment upon that information or modify the
comments they send to that member according to the information. The limited possibility for the members to give information about themselves in their profiles can possibly be, or not be, a conscious choice made by the creator of the forum. Since Boys With ED is a forum where sensitive issues are in focus, a conscious choice might have been made by the creator not to give the members the feeling they have to come up with who they are. At the same time, the forum builder Forumotion perhaps puts limits to what is possible to provide the users with as a forum creator. Despite all this, there are services at the forum giving the members plenty of opportunity to further present themselves if they so wish. At the forum, one of the headlines is called "Introductions" (Boys With ED, 2012:b). Under this headline, the members are free to introduce themselves in any way they wish. Many members do this by including a certain fill-in-sheet in this introductory part of the forum. In the 'Welcome New Members' section (Boys With ED:e, 2012), the members find this pre-made fill-in-sheet with questions to answer regarding themselves. This is a clear example of how a forum service can affect member activity.

The common language. The common language as a foundation for common meaning can easily be seen when looking at the 'Welcome New Members!' section (Boys With ED, 2012:e). There, members can click on links leading them to web pages with self-tests. At these web pages, they can self-test themselves in order to see if they have an eating disorder and, if so, of what kind. In the 'Welcome New Members!' section, there are also links to web pages where different eating disorders are explained and defined. By visiting these links, the members of Boys With ED can get the same understanding of what an eating disorder actually is, and what the different terms used at the forum mean, before starting to get active within the community. By getting an understanding of the different terms and the disorders per se, some members might become more prone of using the terms, while other members might choose not to participate at the forum when realizing that they are not having an eating disorder themselves. Since Boys With ED is expressively not a forum for 'wannarexic behavior' (Boys With ED:g, 2012), the definitions of what it means to have an eating disorder are perhaps also put there in order to exclude people not truly having an eating disorder. In general, there are many spaces within the forum where members try to reach a common understanding regarding eating disorder related issues. By discussing different eating disorders and the terms circulating around these health conditions, a common understanding seems more or less to be reached.

The implementation view, meaning the second view in the Media Reference Model, can be applied on Boys With ED when looking at the registration process and the process of participating in

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8 Supplement. The pre-made introduction sheet is seen in the supplement section at the end of this report.
The registration process. When registering at Boys With ED (Boys With ED, 2012), a potentially new member is supposed to read through certain rules of the forum, and has to click in the box “I agree to these terms”, in order to continue the registration process. This required step might be a way for the person behind the rules of the forum to make sure that new members follow the rules. As noted earlier, some members might not follow these terms although having approved to them, while other members might adjust their online behavior to these terms of use. By having potentially new members going through this registration process, the forum producer is perhaps making sure that mostly people who highly want to become members of the forum will proceed. The registration process can also be a way to keep the content posted at the forum more hidden from the outside world, since the content might be considered sensitive material.

The participation process. To participate in the discussions held at the forum is very easy. As a member, you only have to fill in a writing box at the very bottom of the webpage, once you are in a chosen discussion thread, to create your own comment. The ease in which this can be done might make the users more prone to answer other members' postings. A member can also create his own discussion thread by clicking on the button "new topic” found under each of the forum's topic headlines. There is perhaps also other ways in which the members choose to participate at the forum, apart from participating in the discussions or by posting content, but since this study was conducted by passive observation instead of active participation, this has not been examined. The process of gaming in a virtual world cannot be seen at Boys With ED, since the community does not offer any games.

If you, being a member, are particularly interested in certain topics already highlighted on the forum, you can choose to 'watch' these topics, or make them your 'favorites’. By doing this, you can always go back to your profile and find these topics again without having to search for them. As a consequence, the members might choose to follow certain topics more frequently than others, and therefore perhaps participate to a greater extent in the discussions concerning the chosen topics. This is interesting, because if one member chooses to for example focus upon the topic of eating restriction, then this person might miss out on some of the information there is regarding recovery issues. In this way, the member himself might get a less nuanced point of view regarding his eating disorder.

We will now have a closer look at the different elements of the transaction view, in relation to Boys
With ED:

**Knowledge services.** There are not many knowledge services to be found at Boys With ED, if you do not count the fact that members can write about their knowledge in the discussion threads, or that they can read about the forum in the FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section or 'Welcome to BWE' section. Besides this, there is a search field (search query) where you (being a member) can search for certain posts or topics, or do an advanced search where you search for certain keywords or material posted at a certain time or by a specific author. The fact that members can search for topics being of particular interest to them might make them even more focused on these topics. On the other hand, by searching for certain topics, members might find information new to them which they did not know would interest them, and choose to discuss this information with other members.

**Intention services.** If you, being a member, click on another member's nickname, you are able to send your own PM (Private Message) to that person. If you wish to come in contact with more than one member at one time at the forum, your only options are to log into the chat, to create a posting in a discussion thread, or to create a new discussion thread. In the 'preferences' section in your own profile, you can choose in what ways the other members are allowed to contact you, whether it be through MSN Messenger, through Boys With ED, or in some other way. It is therefore possible to contact other members outside the context of Boys With ED. By writing to each other at for example MSN Messenger, or through the PM function, the members might dare to tell each other about personal issues they do not dare to write about in the discussion threads. The different possible ways of contacting other members give the members more social opportunities, and more options regarding where and to whom the communication is made. Consequently, the members perhaps find certain other members they wish to discuss more with, and create togetherness outside the togetherness seen at the forum. Whether some members perhaps choose to contact each other in other virtual contexts, or perhaps even meet in real life, is a question left unanswered.

**Negotiation and contracting services.** In the discussion forum, one of the titles is 'Questions and suggestions'. Here the members are free to write what they want regarding how they would like to change the forum. This might give the member a sense of power, since it seems as if the moderators are actually interested in knowing what the members are looking for in the forum. Interestingly enough, there is only one post in the 'Questions and suggestions' section. There are a few more suggestions seen under the 'Forum' headline in the discussion forum. It might be that at least some suggestions posted have had their result in the form of a transformed community, but this has not been studied. Therefore, it is not clear whether the suggestions have lead to any changes at the
forum. If the community has been transformed in some way over time, the activity held there could also have been changing as a consequence. A suggestion posted by a member could possibly have effect on the platform itself, since the creator and the moderators of the forum might change the platform according to the suggestion, which then possibly has effect on further member activity held there. At the same time, suggestions are only suggestions and do not say much about what the creator of the forum and the moderators will choose to change.

Settlement services. The members are, as already shown, free to write their own posts and create their own discussion threads. On top of this, they can also create their own polls connected to a discussion thread. The polls at Boys With ED are mostly about weight issues, or in other ways eating disorder related. The polls are of particular interest, because the members are able to view the results of every poll. Since the members can see how other members have voted, they might start to compare themselves with the other members in different ways. This might in turn have effect on the way the members choose to interact with other members in the future, or how they participate at the forum later on.

Regarding the infra-structure view, the platform Boys With ED is not matched by many other available software. The chat room is already a part of the forum. Besides this, the members can find information about how to find each other in other ways, such as through MSN Messenger. Sometimes the members bring in YouTube clips or material from other platforms, but other platforms are still not an organic part of the platform Boys With ED. Boys With ED seems to be more about the togetherness among the members than the platform itself. The layout is not as developed as are the efforts made regarding the fact that all members should feel welcome, or the efforts made regarding the notion that the forum is only for people having eating disorders. Posting comments in the discussion threads seems to be the far most widely used function at Boys With ED. The lack of available software might keep the members focused on having discussions with each other in the discussion threads. It might also be that discussing is what the members are most interested in doing, regardless of other possible functions or services. Also, since the person behind Boys With ED claims to be a boy or a young man, perhaps not having an education in website creation, and since the forum is created for free in a forum builder, no more services than which are seen can be expected.

Extreme views at Boys With ED

Cavanagh (2007:124) writes that community membership on the Internet can enhance extreme
views. At the Internet, people from all over the world can gather around certain issues. Since people coming together at a certain community often share the same interests to begin with, this might lead them into more polarized thinking. The research question to be answered in this section of the report is:

Is the forum an example of Internet's fostering of *extreme views*?

Cavanagh (2007:124) writes that personal choices in lifestyle, or particular opinions and beliefs, can be amplified into identities among individuals who have similar interests or beliefs, and who meet each other on the Internet. The result can then be greater polarization and extremity. Boys With ED can be considered an extreme community in many ways, since several members for instance express themselves being there in order to gain 'strength' not to eat. This might of course be very harmful to their health. And within this community, the members can find some kind of togetherness around the issue of eating disorders, which might make them more extreme in their illness behavior. This is nothing this report can prove, but according to what some of the boys write, they get 'help' from this forum when it comes to maintaining their low intake of food. If a member for example writes he ate loads of food the same morning and that he feels like a failure, other members usually write that tomorrow is another day, and that he will be stronger and able to avoid loads of food the next day.

It is though notable that if a member writes about his wish to recover, the other members always wish him well. This goes in line with what is written on the Weebly website (Boys With ED, 2012:a), where it is said that Boys With ED is neither Pro-Ana nor anti. If a member wants to remain in the same state of illness, that is fine, and if a member wants to recover from the illness that is just as fine. At some Pro-Ana sites, members are carefully excluded if they do not participate to the fullest in the eating disorder related behaviors (Brotsky & Giles, 2007, cited in Riley, Rodham & Gavin, 2009:350). This seems not to be the case at Boys With ED. It should though be noted that after having studied the forum, it is clear that focus lies upon maintaining the eating disorder rather than getting well. Most of the discussion threads are about issues that can be related to maintenance behavior rather than recovery behavior.

Fox, Ward and O'Rourke (2005:954) write that the Pro-Ana movement is of contradictory nature, since the anorectic condition is seen as “(...) both a damaging behavior and as a condition to be maintained.” The Pro-Ana ethos is partly about staying safe while maintaining the eating disorder you suffer from (Fox, Ward & O'Rourke, 2005:955). At Boys With ED, contradictions of this kind
can be seen. According to what the members of the forum have written, is clear that many members see eating disorders as both harmful and dangerous and as something to maintain. The love/hate relationship is obvious. In the rules and guidelines of the forum (Boys With ED, 2012:d), it is written that at this forum, an eating disorder is considered a very serious thing, and that the members must be careful not to encourage each other's starvation, since this can cause death in the end. At the same time, this is not considered the same as wishing someone well on a fast (Boys With ED, 2012:d). To wish another member well in his illness behavior is, in other words, not considered being the same as encouraging this behavior. This line is though difficult to draw, and we cannot be certain whether the members' comments, where they wish each other good luck in their illness behavior, actually have bad consequences for their health.

Sometimes, when a new member enters the forum and writes that he wants to develop an eating disorder in order to get thinner, other members of the forum write that an eating disorder is nothing to wish for. And if a member expressively asks for diet tips, he can get the answer that the forum is not a diet forum. Members sometimes write about how their lives have become a hell after they developed their eating disorder, and under the headline at Boys With ED (2012:b) called 'Emotional support', it is written: “Because we all know ED's can ruin you”. At the same time, some members discuss how thin they can become before it is getting too dangerous for their health and bodies, and some members write that their eating disorder give them a good feeling of power and control. Hence, eating disorders are once again seen both as harmful and as something to maintain.

There are moments when the members discuss whether they should help each other in maintaining this kind of illness behavior, and it is clear that the members find it difficult to decide where to draw the line. On the one hand, members write that they accept everyone's choice and that they want to help the other members in achieving whatever they want to achieve, whether it be about recovering or remaining in the same state of illness. On the other hand, members write that they do not wish the other members harm, or that they do not want other members to do something that is dangerous for them. The discussions held at Boys With ED indicate that the members often stand between two positions and try to find a middle path, meaning that the members show concern for the other members' wellbeing, while at the same time believing that the other members should have the right to make their own life choices.

Some members seem to be more prone to wish other members good luck in their goal of getting thinner, while others seem to be more prone to take a careful stance and tell other members to be careful in what they are doing. After having conducted the study of Boys With ED, it seems that
most of the members belong to the first category. It also seems that both the members taking the more careful stance, and the members who are more active in wishing other members good luck in their maintenance behavior, continue to take the same stance over time. Perhaps the members of Boys With ED come to this forum with a certain set of values, and stick to these values. This could perhaps imply that being a member of Boys With ED does not have the consequence that you shift your point of view over time. This is though not proven in this report, and would need further studying.

**Media integration on Boys With ED**

As Slevin (2008:37-38) notes, various types of media are integrated on the Internet, and users can for instance be active by using hyperlinks which link to different files, or chat and send e-mails to each other. At the forum Boys With ED, different aspects of media integration can be seen. In this section of the report, the following research question will be answered:

In what way can *media integration* be seen at the forum?

Being a member of the forum, you can choose to present yourself through an avatar or a signature (Boys With ED, 2012:b). The avatar is a picture you choose yourself, while the signature can be something you choose to write, link to, or in other ways insert. The avatar and signature can then be seen under each post you write in the forum. By inserting pictures or texts under their own nicknames, the members show one type of media integration. The avatars or the signatures at Boys With ED are most often connected to eating disorders in a direct or indirect way. In the avatars, what looks like the members' own thin bodies are often on display.

Some of the members have put a 'diaet-ticker' in their signature boxes. The 'diaet-ticker' is a graphical measurement bar which shows what BMI (Body Mass Index) the member has at this very moment, and what BMI the member is aiming for. The 'diaet-ticker' is a measurement function found at a certain dieting website. The name of this dieting website can be seen in connection to the 'diaet-tickers' at Boys With ED. Having the 'diaet-ticker' is not something that is a “natural” part of the forum Boys With ED, meaning something that is suggested for you to use when you become a member of the forum. The 'diaet-ticker' is something the members probably have incorporated into the forum themselves. Apart from the 'diaet-tickers', the signatures often consist of written text in some way connected to eating disorders, or a certain view of life or motto. Since some members post 'diaet-tickers' at the forum, this might have effect on the other members. Seeing another
member's 'diaet-ticker' showing a lower goal BMI than the goal BMI you have yourself, might have you to change your own goal BMI to something lower. What could perhaps be a way for the members to show themselves and the other members what they are aiming at, in order to become more motivated, might as well work as a trigger for other members. This is though not proven.

In the forum threads, the members put in hyperlinks to different material. It is most often the case that the hyperlinks lead to something that can be said to be connected to the subject of eating disorders. Sometimes the material is put into a discussion thread so that it is viewable for the eye immediately, meaning that the viewer does not have to click anywhere in order to have a view of the material. Sometimes, the links have to be clicked on in order to see the material in question. In the forum threads, pictures of what looks like pictures of the members' own bodies are seen, or pictures of other people such as celebrities, models, overweight people or very thin people. Members' own artistic work or written work can sometimes be seen directly within the forum threads, and sometimes the members post links which lead to web pages showing their artistic work or their written work. Links to YouTube videos are also put into the forum, and these videos often show movies and video material connected to eating disorders. YouTube (YouTube, 2012) is a website where people are free to upload video material for others to see. In addition, it happens that links to research reports or articles are put into the forum, and sometimes the same information regarding eating disorders is pasted into the forum.

In summary, the members of Boys With ED mostly put material into the forum in some way connected to eating disorders. This is not surprising, but still of interest. It seems that most of the members of the forum are occupied by their eating disorder, and therefore choose to use the media integration functions by bringing in material related to eating disorder. The forum does make it possible to integrate media material not connected to eating disorders within the forum, but this is usually not something members do. Under the 'General stuff' headline of the forum (Boys With ED, 2012:b), members are explicitly free to post material not related to eating disorders. But usually the posts are related to eating disorders anyway. It might be that the members of Boys With ED are also members of other social forums on the Internet, where they can discuss non eating disorder related content, which is why they choose to discuss eating disorder related content at Boys With ED. Also, Boys With ED is a forum where the layout of the forum encourages the members to discuss their eating disorders rather than other issues. The headlines, the rules and guidelines, the pictures: Everything points the members in the direction of posting eating disorder related content.

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9 Supplement. Pictures showing male models can be seen under Picture 4 in the supplement section of this report.
After having looked for media integration at Boys With ED, it is clear that the media integration aspect of the forum is not the main aspect, although it cannot be neglected. The members are more active when it comes to writing posts in the discussion threads than integrating media material from other virtual contexts. Firstly, perhaps the platform itself put restraints on the members’ integration activities, since the only way the members can integrate media material is for example by putting links or pictures into their signatures or into the discussion threads. Secondly, the members perhaps feel that the most important thing for them is to be able to discuss their eating disorder and life situation with likeminded, rather than to integrate media material in some way speaking for itself. To discuss their own thoughts with others might be more interesting to the members, since this has a more personal touch to it than showing a video clip. Thirdly, if the members are looking for a virtual togetherness, which will be discussed thoroughly later on in this report, then the sharing of personal experiences and asking questions is perhaps of larger interest than to integrate pre-made media material.

Four traits of Internet use at Boys With ED

Slevin (2000:175-179) writes about four traits of Internet use, which will now be connected to the activity held at Boys With ED. Slevin's theory about the four traits is usable for sketching out in what way a member of Boys With ED might use the forum. The theory is of a more general kind, without examples to make it more precise, which is why it is used to explain Boys With ED from an overall usage perspective. The themes extracted from the material posted at the forum will be more thoroughly explained and discussed in a later section of this report. The research question to answer in this report section is:

In what way do the users of the forum display different traits of Internet use?

The use of Internet technology to negotiate experience. As Slevin (2000:175) notes, Internet can be used to make information available to others and to receive information that one can use in the project of the self. According to Slevin, people are selective in their Internet use, since some parts of the Internet is understood as relevant to one's project of the self, and some is not.

The members of Boys With ED can perhaps be seen as actively having searched for a place where likeminded boys are gathered, firstly because it is not a big forum with regard to the amount of members, and secondly because membership requires registration. Since Boys With ED is neither a clear-cut Pro-Ana forum nor a recovery forum, the members have perhaps also been looking for a
place where to discuss eating disorder issues in a quite unrestricted way. In summary, the members can in this way be said to have been selective in their Internet use. It might also be that the members are selective in what they read at the forum and use the forum for. Some members might for example only visit discussion threads that tell about recovery issues, while others might visit threads telling about food restriction. Some members might even have been looking for a Pro-Ana forum for boys, without finding anything else than Boys With ED. As written earlier, I could not find any other online community for boys having eating disorders. More or less all boys having an eating disorder, who searched for a community highlighting their situation, might have come together at Boys With ED. The members of Boys With ED did not have a range of communities to choose from, so they could not be selective in that sense. To conclude, the members might all be different regarding what they were hoping to find when they became members of Boys With ED, and they might not always agree with each other regarding what kind of culture and focus the forum should have.

At Boys With ED, the members post and receive content which most often tell about eating disorders in some way, whether it be links to other Internet pages, YouTube videos or pictures. By looking at material other members have posted, members perhaps make use of this information in their self-projects. By reacting to what other members are posting, and by reacting to the way other members react to what you have posted, you as a member start to negotiate the mediated experience. On the Internet, people can control and shape the content of the mediated experiences (Slevin, 2000:176). On Boys With ED, the members can, within certain limits, choose what to write in the discussion threads, and what to read in the forum. They can also choose how open they want to be with who they are.

On the Internet, people can “(...) find proximate others with who they share some interest (Slevin, 2000:176).” Accordingly, the members of Boys With ED have found other boys at the community who have somewhat the same kind of struggles and longings. On the other hand, Slevin (2000:176) notes that not all people find what they look for at the Internet. At Boys With ED, you are for example not allowed to ask for diet tips, since the forum is a forum for people having eating disorders rather than a forum for people who are there in order to lose weight. In other words, some members who become members at Boys With ED might soon leave the forum when realizing the aim of the forum.

*The use of Internet technology to reappropriate knowledge and skills.* On the Internet, you can bypass gatekeepers that earlier could limit the access to certain information (Slevin, 2000:177).
Online, people can frame their own experiences regardless of how the mass media portray people.

At Boys With ED, members can share information or knowledge with each other in a quite unrestricted way. Some of the material posted at Boys With ED might have gotten banned immediately if it was posted in another context, such as a newspaper. Some of the content at Boys With ED, such as pictures of extremely thin bodies or extreme food restriction advice, would probably be stopped at an early point by gatekeepers had it been in another context. A media content can be read differently in different online contexts. If the picture of an extremely thin celebrity were to be put in an online newspaper, most people would probably write that they feel bad for him or her, but when a picture of this kind is posted at Boys With ED, the members often write that the celebrity has succeeded and looks great. The content is read differently through different eyes. Another example is nutrition facts. For some people, nutrition facts are helpful when you want to lose weight, and can lead to a healthier lifestyle. At the same time, nutrition information can be harmful when posted at a site as Boys With ED, since the members there do not seem to need a weight loss. On Boys With ED, members can frame their experiences in almost any way they like, as long as they do not go against the rules of the forum. They can for example frame their own experiences of losing weight as something good, and many of them do, while the same experiences held by these boys would not be glamorized in another context.

As can be seen in the screenshot taken of the Weebly website, the original site was banned (Boys With ED, 2012:i). Apparently, a website of this kind can be closed down. Interestingly enough, the new site is still reachable for its members. It could be interesting to study, at a later point, who has the right to close down these sites, and why Boys With ED is still provided. Has Boys With ED not been found yet by the ones who can ban it, or is it not seen as inappropriate enough?

The use of Internet technology to forge commitment and mutuality. Slevin (2000:178) writes that individuals “(...) draw on intranets and the internet to establish new patterns of commitment and routine”, and that they for example do this by making bookmarks or making files with e-mail contacts in them.

At Boys With ED, members contact each other and discuss shared experiences. Some of the members show up at the forum at a regular pace, and show a proper commitment to the forum. Slevin (2000:178) writes that Internet allows for people to create alliances with other who have the same priorities and interests. This can truly be said about Boys With ED, since the members presumably have come together because they all have eating disorder issues as their first priority,
and since the issue of eating disorders is the foundation of the forum and the focus of the discussions. According to Slevin (2000:178), Internet also allows for people to shift their alliances when there are changes in their life projects. Shifts of alliances could for example be if someone leaves a regular diet forum to become a member of Boys With ED, or if someone leaves Boys With ED in order to make it easier to recover from their eating disorder. Sometimes, members of Boys With ED write that they will not be as active at the forum anymore, since they are aiming at recovering from their eating disorder. By writing this, these members are stating that Boys With ED is a forum that does not suit their upcoming life projects anymore. Being at a recovery center does for instance probably not allow for Internet activities of this kind. Indirectly, these members might also possibly be stating that Boys With ED is a forum you should not visit if you want to recover, which is what I believe. Someone who wishes to recover should probably not be at a forum where eating disorders are the main focus, and where maintenance behavior is discussed.

The use of Internet technology to track risk and uncertainty and transcend conflict. According to Slevin (2000:179), the Internet allows for people to get a greater mutual understanding of certain issues, and to be confronted with experiences they would not otherwise be confronted with in their daily lives. In addition, this technology allows for people to cope with cultural differences through dialogue.

This fourth trait of Internet use is not as easy to connect to Boys With ED as the other traits. The forum seems not to be so much about tracking risks and transcending conflicts, but rather to share and discuss experiences related to eating disorders. Many members of Boys With ED write expressively that they have an eating disorder. If this is true, this might do that when they read about other members' experiences, they already have an understanding of these kind of experiences. It can though be stated that at Boys With ED, the members can perhaps reach a mutual understanding of their situation through dialogue. Also, they might be confronted with, and able to discuss, issues they would not be able to discuss in their offline lives. By receiving information about how other boys having an eating disorder experience things, the members get second hand knowledge regarding the possible consequences of eating disorders, which in turn might make them more prone to act in a certain way offline. The members in this virtual sphere can in this way track the different risks of having an eating disorder. In addition, members perhaps not having an eating disorder might also get information they would not have gotten in their offline lives, and this information might either have them inspired to develop an eating disorder or actually have them becoming less motivated to develop one.
Since everyone knowing the English language is able to discuss with other members at Boys With ED, cultural differences are perhaps also in some way smoothened out. Although the members are from different countries, they presumably share somewhat the same health condition, and can therefore have discussions beyond the cultural differences.

Focus on information or virtual togetherness at Boys With ED

According to Bakardjieva (2005:169-180), Internet users can have various ways of approaching the Internet. Some people use the Internet in order to produce, gain or exchange information, or to explore ideas. Other people look for the virtual togetherness, and in the online communication held by these users, sociability is of central value. In this section, themes that were seen while exploring the discussions (held at the forum Boys With ED) will be connected to Bakardjieva's theory. The question to be answered in this report section is as follows:

In what way do the users of the forum display focus on information or virtual togetherness?

At Boys With ED, both the first and the second Internet approach can be seen, meaning that members are sometimes more focused on the information part, and sometimes on the togetherness part. It is important to note that every member does not have to have the same approach over time or in each discussion.

The first Internet approach will now be highlighted in relation the forum Boys With ED. At the forum, the members display activities that can be said to belong to the information category. The members give each other plenty of eating disorder related information. Often, the members of the forum ask questions which other members give answers to. Here follows a list of the main themes the members ask about, give information about and/or discuss:

1. **Information about how to maintain your eating disorder.** This is seen when the members discuss how to get the bodies they wish to have, how to increase the body metabolism, how to manage hunger, how to use drugs/nicotine/medicines in order to lose weight, purging behavior, how to hide an eating disorder from other people, or how to have people who know about your condition to think about something else.

2. **Information about the upsides and things you gain from having an eating disorder.** This is seen when the members discuss how they feel empowered and being in control when losing their weight or achieving their goals.
3. Information about the downsides and risks of having an eating disorder. This is seen when the members discuss how difficult it can be to have an eating disorder, how you can get increasingly lonely, that bodily functions can worsen, and which risks there are having an eating disorder regarding health issues in general.

4. Information about recovery issues. This is seen when members discuss how it is/was to be in treatment, how you can recover from an eating disorder, what it takes to get a place at a recovery facility, and what benefits you get from recovering from an eating disorder.

5. Information about food. This is seen when the members give information about low calorie recipes, how to handle your cravings for food, how much food you should eat in order to lose the biggest amount of weight, how you can keep yourself from buying food, how you know when your stomach is “empty”, and how you can eat and then spit in order to fool yourself that you have been eating.

6. Information about the members' day. As expected, the content of this material is mostly about the members' diet plans, what they have been eating during the day, the amount of calories they have been taking in, their current body weight statistics, and the exercise they have done during the day. The members often write about themselves being angry at themselves for not being able to restrict their food intake, or happy because they were able to.

7. Information about 'stats'. The members give information about and/or discuss their current weight numbers, their goal weight, and other people's weight. Information is also given regarding how much calories the members have eaten or how much they aim at eating. Numbers are often shared, regarding the body or food intake in general.

8. Information about different eating disorders. The members give information about and/or discuss how you can tell you have a certain eating disorder, and how it is to have a certain eating disorder.

9. Information about non eating disorder related issues. This information tells about different things, such as the members’ identities apart from their eating disorders, written text or other art expressions, and the question of love. When the members discuss their love lives, homosexual relationships are most often in focus.

As can be seen, almost every part of the information given is in some way connected to eating disorders. The thought that people having eating disorders are more or less obsessed with their condition, their body and food, is easy to connect to the forum Boys With ED. At the same time, the forum is expressively a place where to find other boys having eating disorders, and the members do therefore perhaps focus on information regarding eating disorders rather than other kinds of
information. Had the content they were producing in another online context been studied, it might not have been telling about eating disorders.

Bakardjieva (2005:170) writes that one group of people belong to the *infosumption* category, and that these users do not find human contact or intimacy as "(...) legitimate motives for using the Internet." It is possible that some members of Boys With ED belong to this category, although it is impossible to prove at this point. Perhaps there are members having this view and therefore not being active at the forum, apart from gaining and producing information. Some of the members who for example do not participate in the discussions might belong to this category. Some Internet users belong, according to Bakardjieva (2005:170), to the category of *instrumental interaction*, and these people interact with other people in order to gain information rather than to get to know people. They might enter virtual social spheres in order to have a question answered or a problem solved. At Boys With ED, it is very common for members to post questions regarding eating disorder related issues. Some of these questions are questions they would probably not receive answers to in other online contexts, since some of these questions for example are related to eating disorder maintenance. Had the boys been asking the same questions about eating disorder maintenance in their offline lives, they would perhaps not receive answers, at least not from the people who know about their presumed health condition. Also, the members have perhaps in Boys With ED found a place where they actually want to ask these types of questions. Asking these questions in other contexts might have consequences, for example if they then are sent to a rehabilitation center. In other words, the members do perhaps want to hide their health condition and thoughts from people outside the context of Boys With ED. From what I have seen, members of Boys With ED receive answers to their questions up to a certain limit from the other members. If a member for example is posting questions about eating disorder maintenance, he receives answers up to the point when other members post their concern that giving him more information might be very harmful to the member in question. Hence, the members are somewhat careful regarding what questions they choose to answer. A third group of Internet users are *exploring ideas* in virtual public spheres (Bakardjieva, 2005:173). These people are interested in the information gained from the discussions held on the Internet, as well as socializing with other users as discussion partners/interpreters/knowers. At Boys With ED, discussions are frequently held and the members often display a wish to interpret different aspects with help from others, according to the themes noted above. If the members are not clear about a certain issue, they often bring in other members into the interpretation of this issue. It is though not clear whether the members perhaps post information in order to have other members to understand their situation, or whether they wish to receive information in order to better understand other members' situation. It is time to move on to the
concept of virtual togetherness.

Bakardjieva (2005:173) writes about models of Internet communication where sociability is of central value. By chatting or connecting to a support group, or by sharing a sense of common identity, Internet users can socialize with other people online (Bakardjieva, 2005:176-178). At Boys With ED, there is a chat function, but since this has not been studied, further information regarding this will not be revealed. There is though content seen at the forum pointing to a communication where sociability is of central value. This content can be seen to point at the members' wish to find or uphold a virtual togetherness with the other members. Boys With ED might be a place for its members to find a certain kind of support not found in the outside world, and this might in some way be beneficial for their mental health. On the other hand, being at a community where more or less no one tells them to stop doing what they are doing, the members might continue their presumed high-risk behavior. The different parts of the virtual togetherness seen at Boys With ED are as follows:

*Boys who understand/ Boys who feel happy or sad for you.* Some members write that it feels nice to be a part of Boys With ED, since the community is full of other boys who will understand their situation. Some members write they hope to find support at the community. If a member writes about his “drawback”, or his bad day, other members write that he should look forward, or that they have been in a similar place and that the person is not alone in experiencing these issues. If a member writes he feels sad about having to go to a rehabilitation center, where they will have him gaining weight, other members usually answer that he can always lose weight later, and/or that they feel sorry for him. It is clear that when a member writes about him being happy or him being sad, other members show their support by congratulating him or writing that they feel sorry for him, respectively. Some boys at the forum write they appreciate being there, since other forums have mostly girls as members. The virtual togetherness is perhaps heightened because the members are aware they belong to the same sex, and therefore perhaps believe they can understand each other better.

*Making friends in the online world/ Being lonely in the offline world.* The members at Boys With ED sometimes write that they can PM each other (send private messages to each other, author’s note) about eating disorder issues, or make friends. When a new member enters the forum and writes an introduction of himself in the forum, other members tell this person welcome. Sometimes a member writes in a discussion thread to another member that this other member is welcome to contact him for further support, for example through MSN Messenger. Finding friends within the
offline world might perhaps be difficult for some of the members of Boys With ED, since people in the offline world perhaps are not as accepting when it comes to eating disorder related behavior. Having a social life while having an eating disorder is discussed a lot within the forum Boys With ED. The fact that an eating disorder can make you lonely is lifted up. Boys at the forum agree with each other that it is difficult to meet people in real life, since real life people for example often want to meet over a dish. Being at birthdays or holidays is seen as a problem among many members, since you are often supposed to eat something at these occasions. The members also express that they find it hard in general to keep up the pace in their offline lives when not eating, since it is hard to study or work without the energy you get from food. The boys at the forum also agree with each other that it is problematic to live with your family if you are a minor, since family members always keep an eye on you or try to feed you. The members share these family experiences with each other, and gather around the notion that families can be very annoying. For members of Boys With ED, the community can perhaps be a place where they do not feel the need to hide what they are doing or thinking for their virtual friends, for better or for worse.

Wishing each other good luck/ Keeping each other motivated. The members do wish each other good luck, whether it be about recovering or reaching goals related to eating disorder maintenance. The members can for example congratulate a member when he is successful in reaching his weight goals, as well as when he is successful in his recovery. As already noted, the boys at the forum sometimes keep an online journal where they write about their weight loss or their calorie intake. Sometimes boys at the forum write that keeping an online journal will hopefully keep them motivated, since both they and other members can then see how they are doing in achieving their goals. This can be compared to when a smoker tells people he will now quit smoking, or if a non-exerciser tells people he will now start exercising, in order to get a social pressure upon him to keep the promise he made to himself. In a similar way, the boys at Boys With ED sometimes seem to use the social forum as a way of forming a virtual social pressure. This social pressure is supposed to keep them motivated in for example losing weight. When knowing, or at least hoping, that other members are following their progress, some of the members write that this will keep them motivated. Some members do have a discussion regarding whether it would be motivating if they would insult each other. In other words, if they would tell each other they are fat, this might perhaps keep them motivated losing weight. The members have though different opinions regarding whether they believe this would help them staying motivated. By the ways already presented, the virtual sphere of Boys With ED and the material posted there is used by its members in order to stick to a certain behavior. Boys With ED seems often to be used in this way by its members, meaning that the forum works as a means for continuing the shaping of the body.
Getting well. Sometimes members write that they wish to recover from their eating disorder, or that something good can come out of rehabilitation. It happens that a member comes back to the forum after having been in rehabilitation, in order to tell the other members that life is better when you are healthy and that he wishes the other members the same happiness. It is clear that there are members who care for the other members, since they come back to the forum to tell other members about a brighter side of life.

To be in the virtual world can be a way to connect or to make a commitment (Bakardjieva, 2005:176). One of Bakardjieva's (2005:178) respondent's told her that she had found an Internet support group where the ”(...) people she was interacting with online had come to constitute a collective entity with its own distinctive culture.” In addition, the ”(...) virtual group had a relatively stable membership communicating on a daily basis and feeling responsible for each other's well-being (Bakardjieva, 2005:178).” According to Bakardjieva, a particular situation, such as a rare disease among the members, was required in order for this extreme kind of online community to come to life. At Boys With ED, the members presumably have eating disorders in common. It is difficult to say whether Boys With ED has a distinctive culture, but from what can be seen, the members support each other in their life choices, life choices seldom healthy, at the same time as they show a certain responsibility for each other's well being by stating that the other members should take care of themselves. In summary, from what I have studied, I believe that many of the members became members in order to find other boys who understand their situation and who can support them in their strivings and problems, or in order to see that they themselves are not the only boy facing this kind of situation. The membership at Boys With ED seems also to be quite stable over time, which might do that the members have the courage to open up more to the other members than would otherwise be the case. This possibly has the consequence that the virtual togetherness is increased, since the members come closer to each other in this way.

By explaining the concept of 'virtual togetherness', Bakardjieva (2005:180) is hoping to undermine the dichotomy between private space and public space. Her respondents' narratives revealed a negotiation of the boundaries between their own private world and the public online space. At Boys With ED, the members share their private lives in different proportions, and negotiate the boundaries between their own private world and the online space by bringing in their life situation into the forum and discussing it with the other members, as well as by avoiding to bring in other aspects of their lives which could not be interpreted by me as a researcher.
Part Two: Body image, masculinity and identity

Eating disorders among males, and therefore the boys at Boys With ED, can be connected to body image and masculinity issues. The first research question to be answered in part two is:

How is the issue of body image seen at the forum, and how can it be connected to masculinity norms?

Body image and thinspiration at Boys With ED

Eating disorders seem to be connected to a disordered body image (Hogan & Strasburger, 2008:524), which is why the issue of body image has to be acknowledged when studying the forum Boys With ED. Kindes (2006:vii) writes that people's dissatisfaction with their own bodies is enhanced by media images showing ultra thin-models, and Smolak (2005:480) writes that the pressure on boys to look in a certain way "(...) might eventually equal those of girls.” At Boys With ED, boys who seem to be struggling with how they view their own bodies meet each other and show they have an inner pressure to look in a certain way. Perhaps has this inner pressure come as a result of an increased outer pressure, meaning that men are becoming increasingly looked at while different "perfect” male bodies are more often than ever figurating in different media material.

Orbach (1993) as cited in Grogan (1999:173) writes that the usual explanation of the lower prevalence of eating disorders among men is that women face more encouragement when losing weight, while men more often face negative social responses when losing weight. It is clear that many members of Boys With ED wish to have a thin body. This is at least what they write. If being a member of the forum, and having a particular body image where you believe you look fat, the strive for getting thinner might become reinforced. At Boys With ED, the members do for example encourage each other in their weight loss by congratulating each other in their success. Although these boys might face negative social responses in the offline world, when getting thinner, they might at the same time find positive social responses at Boys With ED for the same reason.

At Boys With ED, pictures of different kinds are integrated. Members posting pictures of their own bodies often write they wish to receive comments on how they look. There is also written text to be found regarding body image issues. Some of the members write, in connection to pictures of their bodies, that they look fat. This they write even before the other members have had the chance to write any comments. This shows once again that people having eating disorders often have a distorted body image, and consider themselves being fat, while others can tell they are not. The
other members' comments on these pictures are always positive. The other members often write that the member in question does not look fat, or that he looks good the way he is and that there is no need to get thinner. Often they write that the member looks good or hot, that they envy his looks, or that the pictures 'thinspired' them and will keep them away from food during that day. Some members put up pictures showing their body as it looked before their eating disorder, as well as pictures showing the body they have today, in order to show the progress. The other members then write that they admire the result accomplished by the person who has been losing weight.

Hence, a member posting pictures of his own body at Boys With ED might get encouraged to continue losing weight. Or he might become more satisfied with the body he has, and try to maintain the thinness of his body. When a member receives positive feedback from the other members at Boys With ED, this might enhance the thought that being thin is being beautiful. The first suggestion is what I believe to be the most probable consequence, since people having eating disorders always seem to strive for a body shape different from the body shape they have at the moment. It is also notable that some of the members of Boys With ED write that they do not dare to put up a picture of their own body, since they are ashamed of it and believe it is terribly fat. Once again, clues pointing to the importance of body image among the members are seen. It is difficult to know whether the members' own body images are modified or maintained as a result of the participation at Boys With ED, but the way the members interact with each other might have some effect upon the individuals' self images. Worth taking into account is also that sometimes the members show a high awareness of their own body image, and write they know it is distorted but that they cannot help it. In other words, members at Boys With ED might be aware of their distorted body image, but have not found the strength to change it.

Reeser (2010:93) writes that for example images within society have effect upon what we think a male body should look like. As already noted, media material supposed to be 'thinspirational' is also integrated into the forum Boys With ED, although this material often shows pictures of thin males whose looks goes against the general western view of what a male body should look like. Some of the thinspiration material is no longer available on the Boys With ED, meaning that the links provided did not work anymore when clicking on them. Despite this, the majority of the thinspiration material is viewable. The members upload pictures of videos of celebrities or models, or other people they wish to look like. As Bordo (1999:70) notes, there is a gap between our own selves and the cultural images around us. The members of Boys With ED experience this gap between their own bodies and the bodies in these cultural images. When the members post thinspiration material, they write they wish to look like the people in this media material. In this
sense, the members are implicitly expressing the gap Bordo writes about.

Sometimes the members post media material showing people being overweight. This is called 'reverse thinspo', which means that these pictures work as reversed thinspiration. The material is supposed to have people feel fear of what they might look like if they start gaining fat, and therefore have them feel more motivated to remain thin. By looking at visual material of people being overweight, the members of Boys With ED might use the material to get motivated to continue getting thinner. The members write they would not want to look that fat and that they become more motivated to never gain weight. The images showing overweight people are not images that usually can be seen in the magazines or advertisements, but they are still cultural artefacts standing for a gap between the members' thin bodies and the bodies in the pictures.

Sometimes, before and after pictures of celebrities are put in the thinspiration section. This is the same as pictures of celebrities before losing weight and after losing weight. There are divergent opinions to be seen regarding whether the members find that a certain celebrity looks better in the before or the after picture. This is interesting, because this means that the members seem to be harder on themselves when it comes to the look of their own bodies, than when it comes to the look of different celebrities' bodies or other members' bodies. Regarding their own bodies, the members all seem to believe they would look better if they were thinner. Sometimes the members discuss that a celebrity has gained weight, and that they are disappointed at this celebrity. This could perhaps be reflecting the hardness in which they treat themselves and their own bodies, meaning that it reflects the disappointment they would experience if they gained weight themselves. Or it might reflect that the members find it sad that they can no longer use this celebrity as thinspiration while trying to achieve their own weight goals.

All members do not always find all the pictures of celebrities or models thinspirational. Sometimes when a member posts a picture of a celebrity and writes that he finds the person in the picture thinspirational, other members write that they do not agree. Hence, the members are not always agreeing with each other regarding whom they would want to look like. Not seldom, members state that the people in the photographs have too muscular bodies. A blurry line is drawn when it comes to how thin the members think a body can be and still look attractive. The members seem to draw different lines regarding this issue, meaning that the members have different ideal body shapes.

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10 Supplement. ‘Before’ and ‘after’ pictures showing a celebrity can be seen under Picture 5 in the supplement section of this report.
Sometimes, members post what is called 'food porn'. Food porn can be images or videos showing large amounts of food, or unhealthy food such as cookies, hamburgers, ice cream, pizza and so forth. By viewing food porn, some members state that they can keep themselves from eating, since they can 'eat with their eyes' (author's expression) instead. Other members write they get disgusted by watching the food porn, which therefore keeps them from eating. In whatever way the members choose to use the food porn, some of them seem to view it in order to be able to lose weight and come closer to the body shape they wish to have.

*Masculinity norms in relation to Boys With ED*

Drummond (2009:200) writes that physical activity plays a "(...) unique role in the social construction of masculinity among many men.” Doing physical feats of endurance or being muscular is seen as masculine traits (Drummond, 2009:201-204). The boys at Boys With ED discuss exercise with each other, in order to find out the best way to exercise in order to get the figure they strive for. Hence, it seems as if exercise is discussed by the members as a way to get thin, rather than as a way to get a 'masculine' body. In Drummond's (2009:206-211) study, the men reported it being important to be muscular, since muscularity is seen as an indicator of masculinity. At Boys With ED, there is some difference between the boys regarding whether they want to be muscular or not. Some boys write they would rather not have many muscles visible, while some boys write they want toned muscles while at the same time having a slim body. To look very muscular or like a bodybuilder is in other words out of question. What is interesting is that the boys at Boys With ED bring up muscles as an issue, while at the same time not wishing to have too big muscles. The muscle issue might be discussed more often on this site than at sites directed to girls having eating disorders, since muscles are connected to the concept of masculinity.

In Drummond's study, the men reported being fat as something visually abhorrent. At Boys With ED, body fat is seen as something terrible and something to get rid of. In the discussions held at the forum, the boys write they wish to lose fat in different ways, or that they look or feel fat. Fat is discussed more often than muscles, which goes in line with the finding that these members seems to be more interested in loosing fat than in building muscles.

Fitting the societal image is the third key theme the men in Drummond's study brought up when thinking about body image. The media was thought of as having a negative impact upon a male's sense of masculine identity, and for having them frustrated for not having the same looks as the men in the magazines or advertisements. At Boys With ED, the members discuss how they would like to
look, and material showing male models or male celebrities are often integrated in the discussions. The members do not seem to explicitly or frequently discuss what negative impact media might have upon their body image, although the media might have a negative impact. Perhaps some of the members are so involved in the strive for their ideal body that they are not interested in critically examining the media content in general, while perhaps some of them keep thoughts of this kind to themselves. As a conclusion, the media influence might work in two steps: Firstly since the media content, to begin with, was put out in another context than Boys With ED in order for people (and these boys) to see, secondly since the boys share this content with each other at the forum Boys With ED.

Connell (2005:45) writes that our mass culture assumes there is a 'true masculinity' and that this is connected to men's' bodies. But according to Connell (2005:47), the 'natural' masculinity is almost entirely fictional. The hegemonic masculinity is a masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations (Connell, 2005:76). If the concept of hegemonic masculinity can be said to be related to Drummond's findings regarding body image and masculinity, we might say that the 'masculine' body type the men in Drummond's study tell about can be said to be a part of the hegemonic masculinity. Hearn (2004:389) writes that the concept of hegemony tells about taken-for-granted ideas and practices. We might say that in the Western society of today, the mesomorphic body type is the body type that men wish to have, and only a few voices might be telling differently.

Reeser (2010:100) writes that the dialogue between my body and me defines an element of my masculinity. In relation to this, it is possible to view Boys With ED as a place where its members have an opportunity to find a virtual dialogue between their own bodies, the other members' bodies and the celebrity or model bodies, in order to define their own masculinity and body image. If a muscular body is connected to masculinity in our Western society, and therefore a part of the hegemonic masculinity, we might say that the boys at Boys With ED are somewhat going against this hegemonic masculinity. Some of the members indeed wish to have visible muscles, but none of them express a wish to have big, pumped up muscles. Some of the boys actually do not wish to have visible muscles at all. Whether this is a conscious choice by the boys in order to go against the hegemonic masculinity, or whether this only is a consequence of the mental processes that occur when you are suffering from an eating disorder, is a question yet unsolved. Therefore, it is important not to go too far in the conclusion, and instead be aware that the concept of hegemonic masculinity might not be of more or less importance than in any other context.
Requestioning the findings

As have already been touched upon, the previous research in this report is based upon American and European research, so the body image theory and masculinity theory can in many ways be assumed to be culturally biased. The Western media content might be different from media content in other parts of the world, and what is considered being the 'perfect male body' or a 'masculine body' might be different as well. In addition, the hegemonic masculinity is possibly differing across the globe. As a consequence, the body image the boys at Boys With ED express and the comments they make regarding what is a perfect body, is in this report understood within the cultural context where I myself and many of them are situated. Whether eating disorders are as common in other cultural contexts, or whether people from other cultural contexts having eating disorders would discuss these issues in a similar way online, is not to be answered here.

Identity at Boys With ED

Focus will now be turned to the identity formations within Boys With ED, and the research question following this notion is:

What kind of identity formations can be seen at the forum?

Buckingham (2008:1) writes that a person's identity can be seen as something unique for this person, something that is more or less consistent over time, or as the person's relationship with a social group of some kind. Riccini (2003:114) writes that our identities are connected to our bodies, the body "(...) that we are and that we become.” At Boys With ED, all these different identities are blended together. Firstly, the members come to the forum with an individual identity, something unique for this individual, an identity with a certain mix of personal experiences and characteristics. Secondly, the members have a certain relationship to the whole social group at the community, and can perhaps start to read their own identities in relation to this group. At Boys With ED, members can find other people struggling with similar or different life experiences, and therefore perhaps compare their own identities to the other members' identities and renegotiate their own identities accordingly. Thirdly, since many of the members seem to connect their identities very tightly to their bodies, the members might increase each other's focus on this part of their identity.

Since Boys With ED is an Internet forum, the members are able to present themselves in any way they prefer. In real life, it can be much more difficult to hide the parts of yourself you want to hide, but on the Internet you can choose to hide them. The members can for example choose not to post
anything about themselves, but to only read what other members have written. At the same time, Internet might also be a place where you feel free to be 'more of who you are'. Since Boys With ED seems to be a non-judgmental community, the members perhaps feel free to show more or other parts of themselves than in real life.

Some members of Boys With ED have the urge to prove that they, and other members, have a right to belong to the community. Riley, Rodham and Gavin (2009:353) found out that at Pro-Ana sites, "(...) descriptions of the body made the body 'visible' within an online context and allowed the poster to make an identity claim demonstrating that she had a right to belong to the site.” In the same way, some members of Boys With ED post pictures of what seems to be their own skinny bodies, and write in connection to these pictures that they wish other members to also prove they have a right to belong to the community by posting pictures of themselves. This goes in line with the rules and guidelines of the forum (Boys With ED, 2012:d), where it is said that people who only want diet tips or who are 'wannarexic' are not welcome to the forum. Some members respond by posting pictures of themselves, while others write they are too embarrassed over their bodies to post pictures of their bodies in order to prove their right to be at the site. This example shows that according to some members, only people who have a true struggle with an eating disorder are welcome to the forum. This example shows that if a member's identity claim is not in line with the culture of the forum, he is not welcome according to some members.

According to Weber and Mitchell (2008:27), new technologies and identity processes are connected. Young media producers revisit their own web productions in order to see how other people have responded to their content (ibid., 2008:27). This process shows reflexivity, since these young producers have to "(...) look at themselves, sometimes through new eyes (ibid., 2008:41).” In the same way, the members of Boys With ED post pictures of themselves, art or writings they have done, or share other material that display themselves in different ways. And by receiving comments on this material, the boys might start to see themselves through new eyes. In the postings I have found where members share their own art productions - productions that do not always have to do with eating disorders - I clearly see them expressing other aspects of their identities. The other members often write, in relation to these productions, that the member behind the production is gifted. These encouragements might have the member behind the production to appreciate things about himself that are not connected to his body.

Weber and Mitchell (2008:41-42) state that the body and the identity formation are closely tied to each other. This statement might be even more relevant when looking at the postings made by the
members of Boys With ED. At the forum, most of the information the members give regarding themselves concerns their bodies. It might be that the reason they developed their eating disorder is that they put too much of their identity into their bodies, instead of looking for their own identity at another level of existence. It should though be noted that since the forum is expressively a site for people having an eating disorder, it might be more natural for the members to write about their bodies rather than the other facets of their identities.

With help from technology, young people are examining their bodies and putting them out there (Weber & Mitchell, 2008:41-42). What seems to be pictures showing the members' own bodies are continuously posted within the Boys With ED forum's discussion threads. The pictures look like amateur pictures taken by them in their own homes, and the pictures look very 'real'. You can tell they are not professionally taken in a studio. These pictures can be connected to von Feilitzen's and Linné's (1974, cited in von Feilitzen, Filipson, Rydin & Schyller, 1989) similarity identification and wishful identification theory. Some boys write they have a similar body shape as another boy at the forum, whether it be the bone structure, measurements, weight or other body characteristics. This can be connected to similarity identification, since the boys find similarities between themselves and the other boys. Von Feilitzen and Linné's (1974, cited in von Feilitzen, Filipson, Rydin & Schyller, 1989) theory tells about people recognizing themselves in a media person, but I find this theory applicable also when members of Boys With ED find themselves being similar to other members. Perhaps seeing themselves in other members helps them to renegotiate their body image, for better or for worse. Von Feilitzen and Linné's theory also tells about wishful identification, meaning that a person wishes to be like a media person. This theory can very well be applied on the forum Boys With ED, since the boys post pictures of media persons they would want to look like. What is interesting is that the comments the members write regarding these media person pictures do not tell so much about them wanting to be like this person, but rather them wanting to look like this person. The question of identity is in this way connected to appearance more than other characteristics. The same connection is seen when the members write they wish to look like other members. Once again, the members' body images seem to be tightly connected to their identities.

Some members have chosen to fill in and post their own version of the introduction sheet found in the 'Welcome New Members!' section. Most of the information about the members in these sheets tell about their eating disorder. This is not very surprising, since the pre-made introduction sheet has its focus on eating disorders, and since the biggest factor the members have in common probably is that they all have eating disorders. But, information about the members that not only has to do with

11 Supplement. The pre-made introduction sheet can be found in the supplement section at the end of this report.
eating disorders is also revealed. In these sheets, quite many of the members write that they are homosexual, although there are also some members who in different discussion threads tell they are heterosexual. The fact that many of the members write them being gay, is something that can be connected to the earlier research telling that eating disorders and sexual orientation might be connected among men. Herzog, Bradburn and Newman (1990:48) found that the higher dissatisfaction found among homosexual men - in comparison with heterosexual men - regarding their own bodies might put them into a higher risk of developing eating disorders. It is though important to note that this study does not have the aim to answer this question. Additionally, the fact that many of the members write that they are gay might be because percentually more gay people than heterosexual people are at this online forum compared to other contexts, or that the gay members are more active in writing about their sexuality at the forum.

Sometimes, when the members find out that other members come from the same country, they write that they enjoy having other people from the same country at the forum, or they start writing in the language of that country to the other person. At the forum, recognition of other members' national identity also has its part. A shared national identity among two or more members might have them feel that they can understand each other even better. Simultaneously, members can go beyond their national borders to find a shared identity in the problems they are facing.

**Connecting Part One with Part Two**

Part One and Part Two in this report should not be considered being two fully separate entities. In Part One, it became clear that the platform sets the framework for what the members can do within this virtual context, and presumably for what they choose to do. In Part Two, it became clear that the content posted at the forum reflects body image issues, masculinity issues and identity issues in many ways. Part One can be connected to Part Two in the sense that the platform shows the path for what subjects are to be in focus, what culture the forum is supposed to have, and what the forum should be about. This can be exemplified: The platform allows for the members to integrate other media material and post pictures of themselves, and one of the headlines in the forum is 'Thinspiration' (Boys With ED, 2012:b). These factors might have lead the members to display body image and masculinity issues in the chosen way. The platform also allows for the members to fill in a pre-made introduction sheet, to post their own artwork, or to view other members' national identities, which might have lead the members to display their identities in the ways chosen. In conclusion, the member activity of a platform can never be fully detached from the platform itself, although individual members of course can choose to bring in (almost) what they want within the
already fixed framework.

My final note

Having come to the end of this report, I am hoping the report has made you think further around certain issues. Are men or boys becoming more aware of their own bodies? Do men or boys experience that the pressure upon them to be and look in a certain way is expanding? Today, because of Internet, people having eating disorders can interact with each other in a way never seen before. What are the consequences of this? And lastly, but of highest importance: How can we help each other become more satisfied with who we are?

CONCLUSIONS

Boys With ED is a virtual sphere for boys having eating disorders. The aim of this report has been to highlight the website and forum Boys With ED. It has given us a deeper understanding of the structure, content and member activity as it is seen at the forum, and has shown how these aspects interplay with each other. The report has been divided into two parts. Part One tells about Internet theory and how it can be connected to Boys With ED, while Part Two tells about body image theory, masculinity theory and identity theory, and how these theories can be connected to the virtual sphere in question.

At the Weebly website Boys With ED (Boys With ED, 2012:a) it is said that Boys With ED is not a place for the promotion of eating disorders, but a place for people having an eating disorder who like to be accepted for “(...) who they are.” The creator behind Boys With ED does consider this online context as neither Pro-Ana nor anti (Boys With ED, 2012:a). After having studied this virtual sphere, I have drawn the conclusion that the community is more pro than anti, although there are elements that tell more about recovery than eating disorder maintenance. Cavanagh (2007:87) writes that interaction on the Internet has a semi-anonymous character, with the consequence that the restraints of self-expression that operates in face-to-face environments tend to be loosened up. At Boys With ED, the members might feel they are welcome regardless of whether they want to maintain their eating disorder or recover from it. By having a closer look at the discussion forum connected to the Weebly website, greater knowledge and understanding of the virtual sphere Boys With ED has been gained.
Part One: The Internet

The first research question to be answered was how the platform Boys With ED is structurally built up with regard to the services, guidelines and functions, and how the platform itself might affect the member activity. The members of Boys With ED might put restraint on what they decide to post at the forum, since the forum has moderators who decide what is allowed to post, and since the members might lose reputation points when writing certain things. There is also a certain terminology seen at the forum, where words such as 'Ana', 'Mia' and 'thinspiration' is used, which new members might choose to follow.

When Boys With ED was put in relation to the Media Reference Model (Lechner & Schmid, 2000), it became clear that the platform consists of many of the possible community functions and services. All these factors might steer the member activity in a certain direction. The members might for example be prone to follow the fixed community rules, to describe themselves in their personal profiles or in the pre-made introduction sheet, or decide to leave the forum if they do not fulfill the criteria you have to fulfill in order to be said to have an eating disorder. The members might choose to participate at the forum by posting material in the discussion threads or to only be passive observers of the already posted material. They might also use the search field to find topics of their interest, choose to communicate with other members through PM:s or through other communication platforms such as MSN Messenger. There were some community functions or services that were missing, or not frequently used. There were not many knowledge services to be found, no games to be found and the forum was not matched by many other available software. In the service for negotiation and contracting called 'Questions and suggestions', only one post was written. In summary, the activity held at Boys With ED seems to be more about the togetherness among its members and the discussions rather than the use of many different software or different platform functions, although the platform's presumed effect on the member activity cannot be neglected.

The second question to be answered was whether the forum is an example of the fostering of extreme views. In a way, Boys With ED might be very harmful for the members' health, since several members write they use the forum in order to gain 'strength' not to eat. The forum is full of 'thinspiration' material, and many of the members wish each other well in their weight loss or in the maintenance of their personal state. There are though some parts of the studied forum that goes against extreme viewpoints. In the rules and guidelines of the forum (Boys With ED, 2012:d), it is written that starvation among the members is not to be encouraged. It is clear that many members view eating disorders as a very serious thing. Sometimes, when a new member enters the forum and
writes he wants to develop an eating disorder, other member writes it is nothing to wish for. Many members do also write about the downsides of having an eating disorder. Some members discuss whether they should try to stop each other from doing what looks like self-harm, or whether they should accept and support everyone's personal choices, and it is clear that these members find this question difficult to answer. The extreme views are therefore continuously put in question.

The third question to be answered was in what way media integration can be seen at the forum. At Boys With ED, members can choose to insert their own avatars or signatures, as well as putting in hyperlinks to different material. The media material being integrated in the forum is often pictures of thin people, YouTube (YouTube, 2012) videos in some way connected to eating disorders, or body measurement tables. It is though clear that on Boys With ED, the members are more active when it comes to writing down their thoughts in the discussion threads than integrating media material from other virtual contexts. Sometimes, members' own artwork is on display at the forum. Since the members write positive comments regarding other members' artwork, the member posting the artwork might begin to better appreciate aspects of him not connected to his body.

The fourth question to be answered was in what way the users of the forum display traits of Internet use. According to Slevin (2000:175), Internet can firstly be used in order to negotiate experience, to make information available to others, and to use received information in the project of the self. It can be assumed that the members of Boys With ED have actively been searching for a forum of this kind, since it has a very specific target group. By looking at what other members have posted, the members perhaps begin to make use of this information in their self projects. At the same time, some members might choose to leave the forum when they realize this forum is not relevant for their self projects. Secondly, Internet can be used to reappropriate knowledge and skills and to bypass gatekeepers (ibid., 2000:177). At Boys With ED, members can share information or knowledge with each other in a quite unrestricted way. Some material being posted would probably be banned if posted in another media sphere, such as the thinspiration material. Thirdly, Internet can be used to forge commitment and mutuality, and to create alliances with others sharing the same priorities (ibid., 2000:178). At Boys With ED, members seem to have eating disorder issues as their first priority, and they can choose to create alliances with other members or to leave the same alliances when they change their life priorities. Fourthly, Internet can be used to track risk and uncertainty and transcend conflict, as well as to cope with cultural differences (ibid., 2000:179). This trait is not as relevant for Boys With ED as the other traits. The forum seems not to be so much about tracking risks, but rather to discuss similar experiences. The members might though gain information regarding some consequences of eating disorders - consequences they have not
experienced themselves - that might have effect upon them. Additionally, since the members claim they have an eating disorder, they can through their health condition find a togetherness that goes beyond the cultural differences.

The fifth question to be answered was in what way the users of the forum display a focus on information or virtual togetherness, in relation to Bakardjieva's (2005) theory. At Boys With ED, both parts can be seen. The information part mainly consists of eating disorder related information. Some examples of this are: Information concerning how to maintain your eating disorder/ The upsides and downsides of having an eating disorder/ Recovery issues/ Food issues/ Body measurements and weight statistics. The other part can be seen when the members of Boys With ED indirectly express their wish to find a virtual togetherness at the forum. Firstly, it can be seen when they write they feel happy or sad for each other, or that they understand each other. Secondly, it can be seen when they write about making friends in this online context, since some of them find it difficult to maintain friendships in their offline lives. Thirdly, it can be seen when they wish each other good luck in whatever they aim to do, or when they write motivating comments to other members. Lastly, it can be seen when some members, that earlier left the forum, come back after their recovery to tell the other members that they wish the other members the same kind of life they are now themselves having. In summary, I believe that many of the members became members in order to see that they are not the only boy facing this kind of situation, and in order to find other boys who can understand their situation and support them in their strivings and problems.

Part Two: Body image, masculinity and identity

The first research question to be answered in part two was how the issue of body image can be seen at the forum, and how it can be connected to masculinity norms. Orbach (1993) as cited in Grogan (1999:173) writes that it is assumed that men more often face negative social responses than women when losing weight. At Boys With ED, this might not be the case since the members often congratulate each other in their success of getting closer to their goal weight. Some members post pictures of their own bodies at the forum, sometimes together with a comment that they believe they look fat. The other members respond by writing that the person in the picture looks great and that they envy him. In this way, the members of the forum might come to renegotiate their own body image through the Internet. Some members display a negative view of their own body by writing that they do not have the courage to show their fat bodies online. In addition, some members write them being aware of their body image being distorted. In summary, the members of Boys With ED seem not to be satisfied with their bodies at all, which is typical among people having eating
disorders.

Bordo (1999:70) notes there is a gap between cultural images and our own selves. At Boys With ED, the members post thinspiration material showing bodies they would like their bodies to look like, before and after pictures of people who have lost weight, or reverse thinspiration showing overweight bodies. Through posting this material and writing that it works at thinspiration for them, the members are implicitly expressing the gap Bordo writes about. It is though important to note that the members do not always find the posted material thinspirational, and that not all members share the same opinion of what a ideal body shape looks like.

Drummond (2009:2000) writes that physical activity and the concept of masculinity can be connected. At Boys With ED, exercise is discussed as a way to lose weight rather than to gain muscles. In Drummond's (2009:206-211) study, muscularity was seen as a masculine trait, fat was seen as visually abhorrent, and fitting the societal image was seen as stressful. At Boys With ED, some boys write they wish to have a slim and muscular body, while some boys write they wish to have invisible muscles. They also display a fear of fat. Worth noticing is that the members don't explicitly discuss the negative impact media might have upon their body image, although they incorporate media material into the forum. Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity can be connected to Boys With ED, since the members are in some way going against the hegemonic masculinity when they do not wish to have the most desired body shape among men. It is though not answered whether this is an expression for the boys wanting to go against the hegemonic masculinity, or whether this is a consequence of the mental processes following an eating disorder.

The second question to be answered in part two was what kind of identity formations can be seen at the forum. At Boys With ED, some members choose to display information regarding themselves, while others do not. When members who have posted material showing their identities in some way get response to it from other members, they might start to view themselves through new eyes. At Boys With ED, most of the information given by the members regarding themselves tells about their bodies, so the members seem to have connected their (online) identities tightly to their bodies. When the members' identities are on display, and not connected to the members' bodies, it often tells about them being homosexuals or that they share the same national identity as other members. These are though findings that have not been elaborated further in this report.

When the members compare their own bodies with pictures of other bodies posted at the forum, von Feilitzen's and Linné's (1974, cited in von Feilitzen, Filipson, Rydin & Schyller, 1989) similarity
identification and wishful identification theory is of relevance. Von Feilitzen's and Linné's theory tells about people wanting to be like a media person, and about people who find similarities between their own identity and a media person's identity. At Boys With ED, the members post pictures of media persons they would want to look like. The comments the members write regarding these media persons do not tell much about them wanting to be like this person, but rather them wanting to look like this person. The question of identity is in this way connected to appearance more than other characteristics. The members of Boys With ED sometimes write that they find another member's body to look similar to their own body. In this way, the members do also display similarity identification. Once again, it is clear that the identities and bodies are intertwined at Boys With ED.

Finally, it is important to note that Part One and Part Two in this report should not be considered being two fully separate entities. The member activity of a platform can never be fully detached from the platform itself, although individual members of course can choose to bring in (almost) what they want within the already fixed framework. The body image and masculinity issues, as well as the identity issues, might have been brought up in the chosen way (by the members) because of the way the forum is built up.

For the future

Through Internet, different constructions concerning eating disorders among men are made. During future research, it would be interesting to follow and conduct interviews with members of Boys With ED in order to gain a deeper understanding of the members' own view of the community and what it means to them. This study has in many ways laid the groundwork for a study of that kind. At this moment, there are not many virtual spheres for boys having eating disorders, but if the researchers are correct in assuming that an increasing amount of men are developing eating disorders, more virtual spheres of this kind might show up. If this happens, studies of these virtual spheres would be even more relevant. It would also be interesting to compare a forum directed to boys having eating disorders with a forum directed to girls having eating disorders, in order to more thoroughly highlight gender issues.
SUPPLEMENTS

Text 1

Diagnostic criteria for eating disorders in MINI-D IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2002:195-197). The diagnostic criteria in MINI-D IV have been translated from Swedish by the author of this report:

Anorexia Nervosa (AN)

1. The person refuses to maintain the body weight on the, or over the, lower limit of normal weight for the person's age and height (for example weight decrease that leads to the body weight being constantly less than 85 per cent of the expected weight, or not gaining weight although the body is still growing, which leads to the body weight being less than 85 per cent of the expected weight).
2. The person has an intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat, although he or she is underweight.
3. A distorted body image regarding weight or shape, the self-esteem being overly influenced by body weight or shape, or denial of the low body weight's seriousness.
4. Amenorrhea among menstruating women, i.e. that at least three menstrual periods in a row are absent.

There are two types of anorexia nervosa:
With only self starvation: During the episode of anorexia nervosa, the person has not regularly being binge eating or doing other self-cleansing actions (i.e. self-developed vomiting or addictive use of laxatives, diuretics or enemas).
With binge eating/self-cleansing: During the episode of anorexia nervosa, the person has regularly been binge eating or doing self-cleansing actions (i.e. self-developed vomiting or addictive use of laxatives, diuretics or enemas).

Bulimia Nervosa (BN)

1. Intermittent episodes of binge eating. One episode is characterized by 1) and 2). 1) The person is eating during a limited time (for example during two hours) a considerably larger amount of food than what most people would eat during a corresponding time or circumstance. 2) The person experienced him- or herself to have lost control over his or her eating during this episode (for example a feeling of not being able to stop eating or control what or how much one is eating).
2. Intermittent unsuitable compensatory behavior to not gain weight, for example self-developed vomiting or addictive use of laxatives, enemas, diuretics or other medicines, fasting or excessive exercise.
3. Both the binge eating and the unsuitable compensatory behavior are acted out on average at least two times a week during three months.
4. The self-esteem is being overly influenced by body shape and weight.
5. The disorder does not only occur during episodes of anorexia nervosa.

There are two types of bulimia nervosa:
With self-cleansing: During the episode of bulimia nervosa, the person has regularly done self-developed vomiting or
shown addictive use of laxatives, diuretics or enemas. 

*Without self-cleansing:* During the episode of bulimia nervosa, the person has been using other kinds of unsuitable compensatory behavior such as fasting or excessive exercise, but has not regularly been doing self-developed vomiting or shown addiction to laxatives, diuretics or enemas.

**Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified (ED-NOS)**

This category is used for eating disorders that do not meet the criteria for any of the specific eating disorders, for example the following:

1. For women, all the criteria for anorexia nervosa are met, except for the menstrual period which is regular.
2. All the criteria for anorexia nervosa are met, except for the person's weight which lies within a normal range despite a significant weight loss.
3. All the criteria for bulimia nervosa are met except for the binge eating and the unsuitable compensatory behaviors which occur less than two times a week or during a shorter period of time than three months.
4. A person of normal weight who regularly uses unsuitable compensatory behavior after having eaten only small amounts of food (for example self-developed vomiting after having eaten two small cookies).
5. A person who repeatedly chews and spits out, but who does not swallow, large amounts of food.
6. Binge eating: The person has regular episodes of binge eating, but does not exhibit any of the unsuitable compensatory behavior that usually characterizes bulimia nervosa.
Forum terms of service (Boys With ED:f, 2012).

Forum Terms of service

The moderators of this forum will try hard to edit or remove reprehensible messages as soon as possible. However, it is impossible for them to review all the messages. You thus admit that all the messages posted on this forum express the sight and opinion of their respective authors and not those of the moderators or the Webmaster (except messages posted by them) and consequently, they cannot be held responsible of the discussions.

This forum uses cookies to store information on your computer. These cookies will not contain any personal information; they are only used to improve comfort while browsing. The address e-mail is only used in order to confirm the details of your registration as your password (and also to send you back your password if you forget it).

-Aggressive or slanderous messages, as well as personal insults and critics, the coarseness and vulgarities, and more generally any message contravening the French laws are prohibited.
- Messages who promote - or evoke - illegal practices are prohibited.
- If you post informations which come from another site, look first if the site in question doesn't forbid it. Show the address of the site in question in order to respect the work of their administrators!
- Please post your messages only once. The repetitions are unpleasant and useless!
- Please make an effort on grammar and spelling. SMS-style language (ex: r u sk8ing?) is not advised!

Any message contravening the listing above will be edited or removed without additional notice or justification within deadlines which will depend on the availability of the moderators. Any abuse will involve the cancellation of the registration. Internet is neither an anonymous space, nor a space of no-right! We reserve ourselves the possibility of informing your access provider and/or the legal authorities of any malevolent behavior. An IP address of each poster is recorded in order to help us to make you respect these conditions.

By clicking on " I agree to these terms " below:
- You acknowledge to have fully read these current rules;
- You commit yourself to respect unreservedly these current rules;
- You grant the moderators of this forum the right to delete, move or edit any discussion subject at any moment.
Text 3

Rules and guidelines of the forum (Boys With ED:g, 2012).

1. ’Wanna’-rexie Behavior

This forum is not for people wanting to drop a few pounds to fit into those perfect pair of pants you bought. It's not for people who are looking for a quick fix, and it's not for people who are thinking an eating disorder is all the glitz and glamour the Hollywood media loves making it out to be. You're not a tragic character in your own little story. An eating disorder is a serious mental disease. If you're looking to lose weight, please visit a dieter's forum and leave this one to the people who actually need it.

2. Tips, Tricks, & Encouragement

It's one thing to wish someone well on a fast. It's another thing to encourage the fast. The people on here already suffer from severely negative eating habits and don't need outside stimulants like a person trying to manipulate them into starving, throwing up, or upping their exercise. Be mature and responsible in the way that you speak to someone. If you're unsure of your post content, please PM a member of the staff and ask them to review it. Also, there will be LITTLE tolerance to members either posting threads asking for tips on how to purge food or hide their disorder, or members responding to these threads. Again: Be mature and responsible. Realize that if you participate in these sorts of topics, it is entirely possible for you to cause the death of another member, and that is not what this forum is for.

3. Disrespect & Abuse

Members of all ages, races, religious backgrounds, and sexual orientations reside here. If you have a problem with skin color, culture, religion, or any of the above, keep it to yourself. No one else wants to hear about your personal prejudice views nor should they have to endure it. No insulting or disrespecting other members, and absolutely no rude, slanderous, or condescending behavior. If you get into a dispute with another member, take it to the PM system immediately. (Should the offender start harrassing you via PM, report them to the staff immediately.)

4. Language

The occasional 'fuck' isn't going to give anyone a heart attack. But if your posts become so cluttered with foul language on a daily basis, or if any member finds that your use of swearing is excessive, we have the right to both edit your posts and contact you on behalf of the forum.

5. Graphics

If you're going to post pictures, make sure they contain no full-frontal nudity and violate no known laws (this means underage members should be cautious in the way that they take their own photos). Please get your image hosted by a free site like Photobucket or Imageshack before posting to avoid stealing bandwidth.

6. Team Spirit

We are all part of a nice and welcoming community here that was created specifically yet not exclusively for
males. Female members are always welcome here and should always be accepted just as much as our male members are. Remember that a lot of the people here will confide within us and therefore we should provide support to them and everyone here.
Text 4


**Basics About You:**
- Age:
- Gender:
- Ethnicity:
- Height:
- Location:
- Sexual Orientation:
- Relationship status:
- Current Education Level:
- Astrological Sign:

**About Your ED:**
- What ED do you currently have:
- Are You Diagnosed/Undiagnosed (if yes, when?):
- What EDs/ED issues have you dealt with through your life:
- What age did your ED start:
- What do you think caused/impacted your ED:
- Do you have other Mental Health Diagnosis's/Issues:

**Details About You:**
- What are your Hobbies/Interests:
- What are your favorite TV Shows:
- What are your favorite Movies:
- What are your favorite books:
- Who inspires you:
- What are you passionate about:
- What is your biggest dream:
- If you could have one wish come true, what would it be:
- If you were to win a shopping spree, where would you want it to be to:
- What are 3 things you can't live without:

You may alter or ignore any questions which you so choose. This form is entirely OPTIONAL and created only to help you along! Include as much information as you are comfortable with, but remember: weights and BMI's are only numbers. They tell us NOTHING about you as a person.
Picture 1

The first page of the Weebly website (Boys With ED:i, 2012).

Welcome Back,

It's been a long while that Boys With ED has been down, unfortunately the original site got banned. But we're back, and stronger than ever!

Boys With ED is made for boys who deal with an Eating Disorder. I know it's hard to find a website dedicated to boys, most ED sites are for girls, and even if it's not only for girls, mostly the majority of the members are girls.

A couple of years ago, I created this website, with great success. I was really proud of having 700 members, and it was so good to see that you guys could be exactly who you wanted to be.

Hope you'll enjoy the new site.

Stay strong,

Aqua2Day
The forum (Boys With ED:j, 2012).
A discussion thread within the forum (Boys With ED:k, 2012).

The black boxes on the left side hide the nicknames and avatars of the members. The black boxes on the right side hide the subject of discussion and the members' own written texts.
Picture 4

Thinspiration material showing thin boys (Boys With ED:1, 2012).
The pictures show male models and are taken from Modelmayhem.com. The black boxes hide the member's nickname, avatar and written subject.
Picture 5

*Thinspiration material showing a celebrity* (Boys With ED:m, 2012). 'Before' and 'after' pictures showing celebrity Jenna Jameson.
REFERENCES

Printed sources


**Electronic Sources**


Supplements

Text 2. *Forum terms of service.*


Picture 1. *The first page of the Weebly website.*

Picture 2. *The forum.*

Picture 3. *A discussion thread within the forum.*

Picture 4. *Thinspiration material showing thin boys.*

Picture 5. *Thinspiration material showing a celebrity.*