A PUBLIC VIEW OF PRIVATE WRITING: PERSONAL WEBLOGS AND
ADOLESCENT GIRLS

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2005

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the public and private nature of personal weblogs written by adolescent girls. During a four-month observation period, the participants continue to post material to their weblogs and the posts during that time are available for examination and analysis. There is also an email interview and an end-of-study questionnaire that lend an inside view to the process.

The reflection, collaboration, and mentoring that these blogs enable act as a feminist space as well as a personal one uniquely qualified for investigating identity. At the same time, the intersection of writing, introspection, and digital tools also lends the possibility of answering another feminist goal, that is expressed in AAUW's *Tech Savvy* of bringing more girls to the sciences and to make them more comfortable in digital spaces. I propose that identity development and the need for a space that is both public and private may be behind the steady increase proportionately and numerically of adolescent girls in the LiveJournal user base. From April 2004 to April 2005 the increase has been steady, with the female user base rising from 65.2% to 67.3%, the majority of those being between the ages of 15 and 21 as per the statistics on April 30, 2005. This indicates that a need is being filled and provides an important part of the rationale for my study. It is significant also because by sheer numbers, adolescent girls in personal weblogs are making the definition of what acceptable public discourse is more diffuse and inclusive.

To my mother, who never believed I was a C student, to my father, who didn't live to see the end of this project, but never failed to believe it could be done, and especially to my son and daughter, whose struggles and eventual successes with traditional schooling will always inspire me to graciously look aslant for another way to succeed when the road ahead looks impassable.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to thank my committee, Drs. Kristine Blair, Deborah Alvarez, Bruce Edwards, and Radhika Gajjala for their advice, assistance, and expert knowledge during this dissertation writing process. Without their encouragement, what insight these pages possess would have been far less evident. I would especially like to thank Dr. Kristine Blair, who has been my editor, my mentor, and my best example of what it means to be an academic and a feminist.

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The Focus: Weblogs and Adolescent Girls

The idea for this study began for me when I noticed that my daughter and many of her friends were spending time outside of school doing what they usually disliked doing in school--writing. The difference was that writing on the web using a personal weblog wasn't assigned work and lent itself to more personal expression. Jill Walker in the forthcoming 2005 *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* defines a weblog in the following way:

> A weblog, or *blog, is a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first (see temporal ordering). Typically, weblogs are published by individuals and their style is personal and informal. Weblogs first appeared in the mid-1990s, becoming popular as simple and free publishing tools became available towards the turn of the century. Since anybody with a net connection can publish their own weblog, there is great variety in the quality, content, and ambition of weblogs, and a weblog may have anywhere from a handful to tens of thousands of daily readers.

Although content varies widely, from the densely linked K-blogs (knowledge blogs) such as www.instapundit.com to topic or issue-centered blogs such as kairosnews.org or even the questionably true yet compelling underworld drama of www.aflightrisk.com, the weblog medium finds room for them all. My daughter and her friends began by using blogger.com with its easy to use templates and simple posting method. Type it out and push the orange "Blog this!" button and suddenly, you, too, are a web author. One thing

Blogger lacked at that time was any possibility for interactivity: no comments feature, no communities, no cute emoticon sets (jumping kittens, Goth girls, suns) to show mood—all features of LiveJournal.com, another popular and free web publishing service. Another interactive feature of LiveJournal is the friends list, a self-selected list of links to other people they know on LiveJournal, and the friend-of–a-friend list, the same concept once removed; shown in Figure 1 on the User Page, both encourage users to read and comment on each other's journals.

Figure 1: The User Page and Friends List

An important sub feature of the friends list is that it is the only way to gain access to a private journal, making it a virtual version of the key to a paper diary. In the above example of a User Page, a page that lists blogger friends and interests, Elitegurl shows her Photoshop prowess with a self-created banner of teen-movie star Lindsay Lohan. Each link in the interests, friends, and friends of lists leads to other pages—the friends and FOAF links lead to other member's user pages and the interest links lead to lists of other LiveJournal members who have also listed that interest. With so much interactivity

potential, like many other teens, my daughter and her friends opted for increase

sociability and customization and moved on to LiveJournal.

The statistics bear this out as an international trend: as of May 11, 2005, 67.3%

of LiveJournalers are women with the peak ages being 15 to 22. LiveJournal updates

their statistics daily and as this dissertation progressed, the proportions leaned more

and more towards the adolescent female, beginning at 65.2% in April 2004. Most

research to date and popular press accounts of blogging and bloggers tend to highlight

journalistic K-blogs, also called filter blogs, because they act as an information filter with

their heavy use of links to other articles and sites, and press interviews with this view of

"a typical blogger" are overwhelmingly male. This goes against the statistical presences

of a vast number of
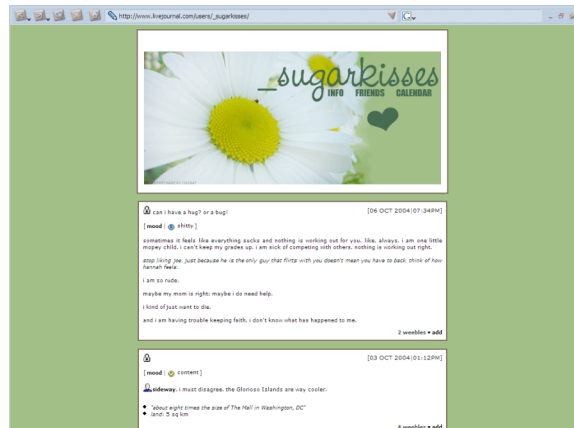
Figure 2: A Typical Blog Based on the Numbers

adolescent girls who blog; the 67.3% quoted is 4,401,972 of a blogging base of

7,064,519 blogs, with 2,037,939 classified as gender unspecified. Susan Herring, Inna

Kouper, Lois Ann Scheidt, and Elijah L. Wright in "Women and Children Last: The

Discursive Construction of Weblogs" claim this about the disparity in perception:

We argue that by privileging filter blogs and thereby implicitly evaluating

the activities of adult males as more interesting, important and/or

newsworthy than those of other blog authors, public discourses about

weblogs marginalize the activities of women and teen bloggers, thereby

indirectly reproducing societal sexism and ageism, and misrepresenting

the fundamental nature of the weblog phenomenon. We conclude by

advocating a broader characterization of weblogs that takes into account

the activities of a majority of blog authors, and more research on weblogs

produced by women and teens.

In centering my research on personal weblogs use by adolescent girls, it is my intent to

complicate what has heretofore been a straightforward discourse about who blogs and

what counts. Personal weblogs, blogs centering on everyday life and ramblings much

like the 19th century commonplace books of our forbearers, despite popular accounts

centering elsewhere, are a significant proportion of web writing, and thus well worth

investigating. The female dominance in that form is significant also in that it contradicts

some widely-held pop-culture beliefs about women, technology, capability, and fear.

Considering the historical affinity between women and diaries and the newer

digital remediation of that form, adolescent girls should find personal weblogs to be a

comfortable rather than a threatening space. Outside of the popular press, others agree

that the negative view of women in digital spaces is an oversimplification of a complex

and varied realm and a monolithic stereotyping of women into a single entity. Pamela

Takayoshi in "Complicated Women: Examining Methodologies for Understanding the

Uses of Technology" also calls for a more complex look at gender and technology

issues, one that moves beyond classroom tales or lore and avoids dichotomizing technology as either good or bad. She writes, "Indeed, rather than swinging back and forth between understanding technologies as either positive or negative for women users, we might work toward a balanced perspective that recognizes technology's ability to be both at the same time" (10). One example of research like this is Takayoshi's own "No Boys Allowed: The World Wide Web as a Clubhouse for Girls," co-written with Emily Huot and Meaghan Huot, her stepdaughters. The article gives many examples of girl-run sites and the empowerment that the process of building and maintaining a web site leads to. This research and Takayoshi's latest work on adolescent girls and Instant Messenger (presented at the Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s) conference at Ohio State University October 2003) shows girls who are very at home on the web, seeing it as neutral space rather than idealizing or demonizing it. Personal weblogs should prove to be an equally accepting space.

My study looks at a small group of adolescent girls who write in personal weblogs in two friends clusters on LiveJournal. Although the friends and FOAF (friend of a friend) chains includes boys as well, the majority are girls and the writing and subject material is typical of the interests and focuses of adolescent girls from fourteen-years-old to about twenty. The primary research method will be case studies of four particular bloggers utilizing textual analysis of blog entries with an overview of the group as a whole. In addition, there will be individual interviews using email for the case study bloggers as well as a questionnaire for all the girls. Chapter Two, Project Overview and Methodology, will go into this in far greater detail, but for now, the overarching question

for the study focuses on how keeping a personal weblog leads to a remediated self, one refashioned and repurposed through this new digital media.

Project Rationale: An Interaction between Three Problems

Women and Writing: Some Theory and a Problem

The female authorial dominance in adolescent blogland contradicts the traditional view of woman writer angst given by Sondra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who write in *The Madwoman in the Attic* that Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence," his patrilineal reasoning for the creative spark, is substituted by the female writer with an "anxiety of authorship," one "built from complex and often only barely conscious fears of that authority which seems to the female artist to be by definition inappropriate to her sex" (48-49). Rather than a quaint look back at the early days of the second wave of feminism, many believe this work describes a syndrome affecting even the current generation of women who write. More recently, Margaret Finders in *Just Girls: Hidden Literacies and Life in Junior High* describes a similar malaise, focusing on literacies bubbling beneath the classroom surface such as note-passing. For these girls, authorship involves distant authorities, not them. Personal writing, such as those sometimes lengthy notes, is not viewed the same way.

Cinthia Gannett's findings in *Gender and the Journal: Diaries and Academic Discourse* on gender differences in journal writing connect to this perceived and most personal lack of significance. Gannett details the term *journal* versus the pejorative nature of the term *diary* and how those textual differences connect to gender. She cites a "legacy of several more public and academic journal types that men can explicitly or implicitly draw on" as opposed to a "popular culture tradition of journal/diary keeping that

sustains women's discourse networks," adding that "women have been socialized to

see their diary keeping as less important, as belonging only to the private sphere and to

the realm of emotion rather than that of the intellect" (149). As mentioned before, this

predisposition to consider personal writing as less significant extends into cyberspace,

where the term *girlblog* or *chickblog* is sometimes used derogatorily to define the

personal weblog, usually by bloggers who claim that journalism-style K-blogs with their

completely different goals are intrinsically superior because of the number of other blogs

linked and the amount of information contained. Torill Mortensen in "Personal

Publication and Public Attention" explores the differences between weblogs and paper

diaries without the value judgments attached:

> What makes weblogs a genre different from the autobiography, the diary,
>
> the researcher's journal or any other pre-Internet writing? We recognize
>
> the weblog through the connections between text fragments, within one
>
> blog, but also to other texts available online. This means both existing
>
> connections and potential connections: those made by the writer and
>
> those made by the reader, as the reader again becomes writer and links to
>
> the weblog from his or her own piece of work - frequently a weblog. While
>
> weblogs have many non-digital predecessors, blogs cannot live outside of
>
> the computer.

The diary connection that Mortensen makes is important, but this is a key passage

mainly because of how it describes the differences rather than the obvious similarities.

First and foremost, personal writing on sites such as LiveJournal acts as a continuation

of historically female-gendered diaries, a continuation and expansion of form much in

the way Jay David Bolter describes the remediation process in *Remediation: Understanding New Media.* The remediation, most fundamentally expressed by the links that Mortensen describes, explains partly why personal weblogs shape writing (and the writers) differently than paper diaries or journals. Looking once again at personal weblogs vs. K-blogs, the links potentially have a different goal than information gathering. Girls tend to link to each other's blogs as acts of friendship and to point out links in their posts because they are "cool," and coolness doesn't necessarily translate as informative. The purpose is closer to community-building than information gathering or trading. As far as the print/broadcast media dear-diary-bashing is concerned, few adolescent girls are aiming for political punditry with their personal weblog space. Personal writing is their aim, and those readers who are uninterested simply go elsewhere.

This focus on friendship and community building may be the secret to the personal weblog's success on the web and an answer to the patrilineal anxiety of authorship dilemma. In addition to the solitary benefits of writing on a daily basis, in weblog publishing sites such as LiveJournal, additional support and reinforcement is available through "communities," clusters of blogs and bloggers joined by interest. For example, my daughter belongs to many communities, a typical one being the haircuts community where they upload digital photos of their latest haircut for feedback or just commiserate about bad hair days. On a superficial level, this may seem just that—superficial. Looking at it more deeply, participation in interest communities like this has several benefits.

The first benefit would be an increased familiarity with writing in computer-mediated environments and with the burgeoning online culture itself. The American Association of University Women's Educational Foundation's 2000 study, *Tech-Savvy: Educating Girls in the New Computer Age* takes a look at the issue of gender equity with a two-fold approach that intends "to get more girls into the 'pipeline' to computer-related careers" and encourage "ways that the computer culture itself could be positively transformed through the integration of girls' and women's insights" (3). A positive transformation "through the integration of girls' and women's insights" (3) sounds very much like what weblog communities aim for, and also sounds like something squarely in the realm of writing theory. Christine Tulley and Kristine Blair talk about mentoring within the frame of the writing classroom in "Ewriting Space as Safe, Gender-Fair Havens: Aligning Political and Pedagogical Possibilities." They advocate that computer-mediated writing teachers "establish 'friendship groups' or a buddy system as a support network, and recruit technology mentors for students" (57). Within this ideal feminist pedagogy then, a cooperative learning community would be built. The weblog communities potentially take this one step further by being self-directed.

The second benefit is mastering digital media. For example, knowing how to take digital photos, turn them into suitable web files, and upload them to the web are skills that go much further than sharing an awesome haircut with friends. They are skills transferable to other needs and an important part of computer literacy. Returning to the AAUW commission's findings, the report shows a less than an ideal relationship with technology in many classrooms, which is the place where one would expect learning about technology to naturally happen. Some teachers in the report describe their

relationship with technology as what the AAUW calls the "productivity model," where there are "few changes in what is taught (the curriculum) and how it is taught (pedagogy)" (18):

> They are trying to mesh computer technology into traditional lesson plans, subject areas, classroom protocols, and instructional formats (lectures). For example, some teachers imagine computer technology as a more efficient way to deliver lectures and textbook material in a whole class instruction format. (18)

In this model, technological equity is defined as parity in skills and a computer is seen as a souped-up typewriter. However, as the AAUW study points out, "most girls and women already have demonstrated a familiarity with these specific tools and functions" (18). Worse, being skilled in PowerPoint, word processing, email, Internet research, and database software such as Excel is not a ticket to high or even moderate-paying jobs. Word-processing and data processing jobs in the service, clerical, and retail industries receive low pay and unfortunately remain typically held by women (18). The productivity model within the classroom holds no real gain for women in either skills or status. Compared to this paradigm, the needs-based learning in action process inspired by continued writing in a personal weblog can lead to learning more flexible technologies, ones that girls can use in daily life such as digital photography, as well as some that could have crossover benefits for the workplace, such as Macromedia Flash or HTML.

Finally, communities such as this one that center on shared interests are a way to declare, "This is who I am." Investigation and assimilation of identity is a vital part of the leap from adolescence to adulthood. Web writing that focuses on identity can be the

most important writing-to-learn an adolescent can do. The caveat about the unexamined life is being vigorously answered by literally millions of personal webloggers.

Like her predecessors with pen and ink, today's virtual diarist should find it a comforting space, and the addition of digital tools such as communities and comments should also make it a most inclusive and accepting space for adolescent girls to develop an identity as writers.

Journal Writing in Context: A Problematic Genre

Given the clear connection between personal weblogs and paper journals or diaries, a consideration of personal weblogs needs to consider its "roots" and how that history shaped the medium. Journals in paper form have long been the writer's friend inside and outside the classroom. Historically, journals have been a part of published literature as well. Margo Culley's 1985 anthology *One Day at a Time* gives excerpts from nineteenth century American journals and diaries, including one by Mary McLane that was a best seller in 1901. This journal was a surprising success for its time, considering its Adrienne Rich-like declarative introspection on touchy subjects. Since the author was fifteen years old at publication, its success could be used as evidence of both the compelling nature of such normally private writing in the literary sphere, and of the consistency of subject material through the years in private writing.

Cinthia Gannett in 1994's *Gender and the Journal* would agree with this view of the journal, and finds that this appealing blend of the personal and the transcendental is more typical of female journal writers than of males. Gannett exemplifies mainstream awareness of these differences with contrasting cartoons, the first from *The Boston*

Globe, and the second from *The New Yorker*, which typify the stereotypes. In the first an adolescent girl taunts her parents with, "I suppose it's only fair to warn you: I've been keeping a journal the whole time!" (103). Visions of a Christina Crawford-like *Mommy Dearest* text may rest behind the parents' discomfort. The neatly dressed *New Yorker* man, on the other hand, writes, "Dear Diary: None of your damn business!" (104). The range from the completely personal to the almost contentless impersonal summarizes the stereotyped view of diary as dangerous disclosure and journal as terse facts. A more precise definition of the journal's purpose, as described by Gannett, is "an invitation to serve as the record book of the mind's life--the hard disk for the soft human memory" (26). The difference between cultural characterization and actual function is contextualized historically and painstakingly analyzed in Gannett's groundbreaking book. She broaches the subject with this analysis:

> In order to understand why the use of journals inspires such extreme and contradictory responses from students, teachers, parents, and school boards, we need to consider the complex public and private, as well as the academic and nonacademic lives that journals and diaries have led. In particular, we need to consider the tension that has developed around the term *journal*, which in composition and education parlance has become the preferred term, the generic name, and the term *diary*, which is denotatively similar, but which has come to be associated with connotations such as overly personal, confessional, trivial, and, as I will argue, feminine. (21)

The balance between the personal and the academic then, Gannett later writes, is the core of the controversy (34). Looking inward, reflection, introspection, no matter what the label, personal writing tends to be linked to the idea of the feminine and undervalued for it.

In addition to these gender-based perceptions of text, socially inspired yet deep-rooted gender-based differences in how males and females approach journal writing need to be addressed. Gannett makes a case for clear and pervasive gender differences in journal writing (182-190). In her research, male students saw journals as a place to record daily activity, a travel journal that describes college experience, or as a commonplace book that collects quotes and wisdom necessary for a developing writer (166). They saw what they viewed as diaries as a much less valuable, even trivial space. Most were not aware of the historically rich tradition of male journal writing exemplified by Pepys, Boswell, and Jonson (187), which share features of both diaries and journals as defined by Gannett. The female students were far more comfortable with the journaling tradition and many drew from their own experience with personal diaries, a tradition Gannett calls "interpersonally focused" and "a means of self-construction" (168). This traditional use of reflective writing by women combined with the empowering act of publishing on the web gives the personal weblog great potential as a place where adolescent girls can claim their identity as writers and creative, empowered individuals whose work has significance. At the same time, this usefulness remains undervalued by some, tainted by the historically feminine identity of the form.

Writing on the Web vs. Writing in the Classroom: An Audience Problem

Although I use a Drupal CMS (content management system) in the writing classroom for student community blogs and find this use valuable, I chose to observe adolescent girls' blogs in the wild, outside a classroom context. The decision hinged on the problem of audience. In "Is this for a grade? A personal look at journals," Ava Chandler gives a dual perspective to the problem of audience in classroom journals. As a Language Arts teacher, Chandler replaces "a plethora of lock step activities" such as "quizzes, class exercises, chapter questions, writing assignments" with journals, making "writing to make meaning" as the goal (45). She also ran the gamut of incentives for that writing, including gold stars, bonus points, stickers, or even assignment credit for missed work. Counting pages, grading content, checks or pluses—it all came down to a grade as motivator. Chandler concludes, "I was sure I was doing a good job" (45). However, in her own journal writing as a returning student in graduate school, another perspective arose:

> My weekly journal pieces of five to ten pages about three to five authors or
> articles, were collected religiously. All journal pieces were graded with a
> rating or evaluation mark; however, one instructor did not evaluate my
> journal pieces. They were returned with varying responses. In the journal
> for one class, I saw an incomprehensible rating mark on the last page--no
> comment, no explanation. (45-46)

Later, when covering research on teacher responses in a writing pedagogy class, she finds herself identifying with the students in the research; like the students, she too finds "'journaling for a grade' dehumanizing" (46).

Margaret J. Finders in *Just Girls: Hidden Literacies and Life in Junior High* also makes conclusions about what she calls "the myths of student-centered pedagogy," which mostly connect with ignoring social contexts when teaching writing (118). First, "the myth of a safe haven" where "classroom walls are perceived as somehow capable of holding out other dimensions of students' lives is analyzed. Finders finds this ideal "both impossible and undesirable" (118). This concept of "safe haven" excludes the world outside the classroom, a different concept than that of the "safe haven" within feminist pedagogy that allows outside contexts to be safely included in the classroom. The myths of comfort, inclusion, and free choice receive similar treatment by Finders. She finds the junior high students in her study, if anything, "far too comfortable with their work and with their perspectives. Little change was noted over the course of a year" (119). Inclusion is viewed as "holding out conflicting dimensions of student's lives" (120) forming a shared community where tasks such as exchanging papers and responding would benefit all. The reality of junior high life shows that Dottie, one of Finder's case studies, did "not always follow these directives and chose to write a response to herself in a different color ink" when "her response did not bring her into the classroom community and marked her as an outsider" (120). Finally, there is what Finders calls "the greatest myth of all," free choice, or "the assumption that students' choices can be choices free from sociopolitical tangles" and their consequences (120).

Note that despite the vigorous criticism, Finders does not call student-centered pedagogy itself a myth, but highlights some practitioner beliefs that do not always line up with classroom reality, especially as documented in her ethnographic study. Applying these pedagogical problems to the subject of journal writing explains the distance and

disconnection some, if not most, students feel with classroom journals. Anything so

thoroughly situated within the system of extrinsic rewards that typifies some classrooms

fails to connect personally. At the same time, personal writing, the stuff of *ethos* and

pathos, is the heart of journal writing at its best and the element that makes it unique.

This not uncommon failure to connect with the personal in the classroom is the reason

self-directed journaling, which finds its motivation outside classroom demands, has

superior results for writers wishing to improve their craft.

In other research, Marian Collins and Scott Baird (1991) consider gender

differences in classroom writing when they state that their "experience shows that

gender mixing produces better writing," thus explaining their reason for exclusive use of

mixed pairs in their study. This would indicate that an all-female study, despite my

feminist reasoning for a female-only focus, would produce inferior writing. However, this

preference also ties into Gannett's claim about the historical devaluing of personal

writing as expressed by the term *diary*. Anne Ruggles Gere, a scholar who has thought

much about personal writing in historical contexts, gives in "Revealing Silence:

Rethinking Personal Writing" some thought to how journals in classrooms intensify this

inherent instability of purpose between personal reflection and privileged, more

academic genres. Defining personal writing as "prose that gives significant attention to

the writer's experiences and feelings" (204), she gives a possible reason why journalers

in the classroom may feel silenced. She states that although "personal writing

introduces a leveling force into the classroom--after all, everyone has a life to narrate" in

some classroom it also "accords higher prestige to certain narratives" (207). In a

parenthetical aside, Baird and Collins express a similar devaluing of the personal when

they write that "students who write to members of the same gender tend to avoid in-depth discussion. Instead they write superficially about constantly changing subjects" (3). This description may say more about which kind of writing they privilege in the classroom than the intrinsic worth of the female to female texts.

Looking a little deeper at how "better writing" is defined by Collins and Baird, it is possible that the judgment word, "better," indicates an unstated preference on their part for a certain type of linear discourse. Later in the study, they mention that the university involved is strongly committed to a writing pedagogy centered on "enthymemic structures," where a classic syllogism such as "All Men are Mortal. Socrates was a Man. Therefore, Socrates is Mortal" converts to the blended "Socrates (A) was mortal (B) because Socrates (A) was a man (B)" (17). This learning environment could predispose the researchers to prefer the classical "taproot" over a more free-ranging "rhizome" structure, to use Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's famous metaphor, which may be more typical of female to female writing. It is true that linear argument has a historically strong place in academic writing, but care must be taken to avoid defining "good writing" as enthymeme-based arguments alone. Sometimes a more circular approach succeeds where a straight path fails to persuade. Personal weblogs meander, they depend more on linking to other sites and consensus reached through a chain of comments than a straight-ahead, linear argument. Focusing on personal, day-to-day interests serves a different, inner-directed purpose, one different from outer-directed argument privileged in a classroom setting, but no less important; it is definitely not inferior for the painstaking long-term work of identity-formation. The privileging of personal writing

outside the classroom in this pilot study is justified, especially when looking at girls wishing to identify themselves as writers.

At the same time, many writers begin weblogs outside the classroom with much enthusiasm only to stop after only a few entries. However, ones that persist exist, and may be motivated by the desire to be identified as a writer or a scholar; the friends cluster in this study has members with archives stretching back as far as three years—a difficult situation to reproduce in the classroom given the academic semester timetable and lack of teacher continuity over such an extended amount of time.

Identity, Hypertext, and Landscape

Besides the focus on the personal weblog genre, this study also investigates web-writing and identity formation—specifically that of a writerly identity by adolescent girls and how the remediation of the genre from paper diary to digital, communal space is paralleled by a remaking, a remediation of self through the digital medium. One way to view identity-formation as it relates to reading and writing is to connect it with a geography of links and the people the links lead to. Instead of separate writers in separate garrets flourishing their pens, personal weblogs in communities such as LiveJournal create a linked landscape of joined writers who add to and sometimes even change the direction of the multiple texts.

The idea of a connection between rhetoric and landscape is not particularly new. Johndan Johnson-Eilola in *Nostalgic Angels: Rearticulating Hypertext Writing* points out that "although recent theory certainly makes more complex the causal relations between words and worlds, the perceived connection between language and landscape, information and space, is not a new one" (104). He recalls that in classical rhetoric a

topic is the place to which one goes to locate something to say on a subject, the *loci* are

an arsenal, and the "*ars memoria* of ancient oral rhetoricians included the metaphorical

set of rooms in which the speaker had 'placed' portions of an oration" (104). Michael

Joyce in *Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics* expresses a similar view about current

rhetorics when he writes that "our thoughts do experience compression and in the

process assume a geography in which the global is indeed mapped upon the local, in

which ideas literally are part of a physical landscape that we can apprehend

proprioceptively, i.e., inwardly and spatially" (159-160).

  Text and the specific three-dimensional space of hypertextual constructs also

lends itself to Gaston Bachelard's concept of a space inhabited by readers. In *The*

Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places, Bachelard

explores the intimate places of the imagination. He uses the term image rather than

memory because "the reader of poems is asked to consider an image not as an object

and even less as the substitute for an object, but to seize its specific reality" (xix). He

thus uses the common images of a house, a chest of drawers, nests, shells, corners,

small and large, outside and inside, and roundness to structure his book-length analysis

of how humans imagine:

> By the swiftness of its actions, the imagination separates us from the past
>
> as well as from reality; it faces the future. To the *function of reality*, wise in
>
> experience of the past, as it is defined by traditional psychology, should be
>
> added *a function of unreality*, which is equally positive…Any weakness in
>
> the function of unreality, will hamper the productive psyche. If we cannot
>
> imagine, we cannot foresee.

But to touch more simply upon the problems of the poetic

imagination, it is impossible to receive the psychic benefit of poetry unless

these two functions of the human psyche--the function of the real and the

function of the unreal--are made to co-operate. (xxxiv-xxxv)

Using Bachelard's imagery, a personal weblog is organized like a chest of drawers;

each post is a drawer ready to open, potentially with comments making the scarves,

socks, and buttons inside. The fact that this space is really composed of the endless

digital strand of 1010010001 binary synapses make no difference. The imagination

appends the unreal and gives it substance.

In a similar vein, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in *Remediation:*

Understanding New Media write of "remediation as the inseparability of reality and

mediation" (58). They cite Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass in *The Media Equation* and

how their research "conclusively demonstrated that people relate to media in the same

way in which they relate to other people or places" (58). Bolter and Grusin expand this

idea into real-time observation:

When a tourist is taking a photograph or making a video, for example, we

treat the line of sight between the camera and the object as if it were a

real obstruction; we walk around it, bend under it, or wait until it is gone.

We make these gestures not only out of politeness, but also to

acknowledge the reality of the act of mediation that we are witnessing.

…Mediations are real not only because the objects produced (photos,

videos, CD-ROMS, etc.) circulate in the real world, but also because the

act of mediation itself functions as a hybrid and is treated much like a

physical object. (59)

Bolter and Grusin conclude that "just as there is nothing prior to the act of mediation,

there is also a sense in which all mediation remediates the real. Mediation is the

remediation of reality because media themselves are real and because the experience

of media is the subject of remediation" (59). Mediation then, or the process and result of

constructing new media, depends on the reader/viewer's complicity in its reality. At the

same time, if "all mediation mediates the real," (59) the connection between the

fashioning of images, text, and hyperlinks to the re-fashioning of self becomes clearer.

Constructing a new rhetorical self through personal writing in a weblog, like Cixous's

escritoire, leads to a keener sense of identity—both actual (real) and future, imagined

(unreal) self.

On the other hand, personal writing in weblogs is no panacea. Of 4,818,837

weblogs on LiveJournal, 2,876,634 are inactive, many with only one or two entries. This

could demonstrate a rejection of the reality of digital space and the voices (their own

and that of other people and their writings) housed within. Jean Baudrillard in "The

Precession of Simulacra," an essay from his book, *Simulacra and Simulation,* notes the

effects of rejection of reality in what he calls the simulation:

When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning.

There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality--a plethora of

truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity. Escalation of the true, of

lived experience, resurrection of the figurative where the object and

substance have disappeared. Panic-stricken production of the real and of

the referential, parallel to and greater than the panic of material

production: this is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us--

a strategy of the neoreal and the hyperreal that everywhere is the double

of a strategy of deterrence. (6-7)

In order to define hypertextual space as a place to house one's self then, the writer, or

blogger in the case of this study, must accept the reality of the space. The links on the

friends list must be seen as something as prosaic as phone numbers or doorbells. In

other words, when viewing blogging as a remediation of paper journal writing, the

writers most likely to create an identity within the remediated aspects of the environment

will be the ones who see the personal weblog as something real rather than as a

remake of a past technology. The current generation of adolescent girls may not

remember a time without Instant Messenger or the World Wide Web. For them, the

personal weblog is simply another mode of expression rather than a new and potentially

too-complex-to-use technology. For them, it's like picking up a pencil—technology so

familiar that it's transparent. Using that technology then is an innate part of their identity

and a natural venue for identity construction.

In addition to the identity-building aspects, there are writing process connections

as well. Carolyn Handa in "Teaching with the World Wide Web: Transforming Theory,

Pedagogy, and Practice" details how complex textual landscapes using hypertext can

promote understanding of the recursive nature of writing (167). She outlines projects

such as web portfolios, using existing sites for class discussion, and collaborative web

authoring (172-176), As a rationale she states the following:

In other words, constructive, or recursive, hypertext encourages a

nonlinear movement back and forth between linked pieces of text and

related subjects among those texts. Hypertext, by its very nature, offers

multiple avenues from one text to other texts, offering readers irresistible

temptations to jump from one text to another. When students make these

jumps in a constructive hypertext, they begin to see connections among

ideas, among points of view. (169)

How then, does hypermedia differ from print in its abilities and effects on the

reader/viewer? Judging from Handa's response, it has the potential to accelerate the

necessary connections of critical thinking and reinforce the recursive motion of thought.

A successful hypertext argues in many directions at once with the reader/viewer

choosing the path needed for his/her own persuasion.

Finally, personal weblogs seek to persuade using both familiar tropes and those

distinctive to the web. Common tropes include the list, the vent, quizzes, visual rhetoric

using a sequence of photos, memes, and the essay enhanced by hyperlinks. Hypertext

technology makes rhetorical strategies possible that simply cannot work in print; it uses

multiple layers that enable richness in meaning or a depth of evidence not possible on

flat paper. For example, *the little magazine* volume 22.2 has a poem by Jason Nelson,

"Diseases of the Horse" which was first workshopped in text in the M.F.A. at Bowling

Green State University. As a fellow student in that workshop, I remember his frustration

working in a medium (print) that fell so short of his particular vision. Its current

incarnation uses rollover images, sound, flash movies, and a nonlinear use of text to

achieve its effect. His workshop version in 1999 was more of a list than poetry; the current incarnation is poetry.

Returning to the more discursive space of personal weblogs, when Handa states that "hypertext, by its very nature, offers multiple avenues from one text to other texts, offering readers irresistible temptations to jump from one text to another" she could have been specifically writing about blogs. Although both are fairly recent print sources, Handa's article and Bolter's *Remediation*, do not mention blogs. *Remediation* was first published in 1999, long enough ago that newsgroups and discussion boards, still a presence on the web, were cutting edge for multi-voiced discussion in text. Bolter does, however, detail an interesting parallel to the weblog's rhetorical methodology, the multilayered screen as typified by ESPN and Fox:

> Fox…has introduce further enhancements, including split screens, an overlay of the score and situation in the upper-left-hand corner of the screen, more textual and graphic overlays (such as a color graphic indicating a hitter's "hot" and "cold" zones), pregame interviews inserted in small windows on screen, and even the "catcher cam" (a camera attached to the catcher's mask) used by Fox in covering the 1997 All-Star Game. (191)

Bolter points out that "none of these digital interventions is felt to disturb the liveness of the broadcast, even though the viewer can no longer pretend that what she is seeing is the single point of view that she might occupy if she were sitting in the stadium" (191). Bolter sees this remediation as an accelerator of immediacy and adds that the stadium experience itself is now multimedia, augmented by gigantic screens

that "present statistics, 'human interest' images, and replays" (191). Even real life then,

has been remediated. Blogs in many ways emulate the appearance of the now multi-

layered sports or news channel screen. Frames separate the different areas and

competing windows display information, graphics, and images such as photos. Some

even have

ticker tape crawls with news links like the ones so ubiquitous on news and

entertainment channels these days. Blogs can also make rhetorical choices in what is

left out. Figure 3 shows a public "friends only" notice page. Readers, if they too are

LiveJournal bloggers, can choose to leave a comment asking to be added to the friends

list and the blogger then decides whether or not to add the fellow blogger, most likely

after checking their weblog or user page for shared interest or shared friends.

The unlocked friends-only journal then, works in the same way as a fully public one—for

the chosen readers. An additional interesting feature of the "friends only" page is
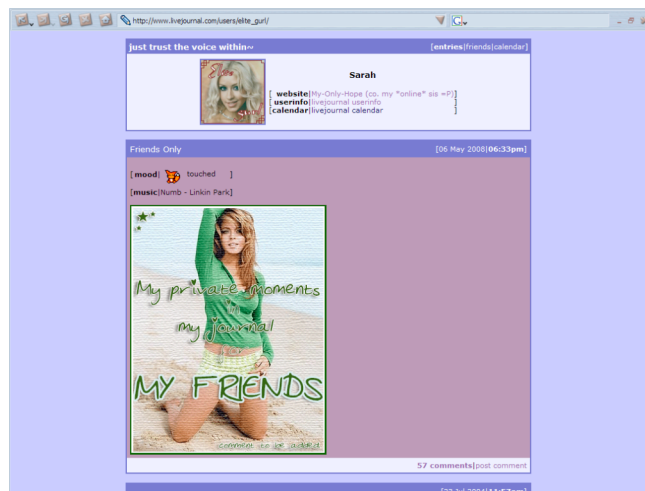
Figure 3: A Friends-Only Splash Page

the image choices made by the blogger. The image is frequently one of a teen idol, with

favorites including Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen, Cristina Aguilera, Paris Hilton, Avril

Lavigne, Kelly Clarkson, and Hilary Duff. The icon, the small personal image that is

attached to all posts, also shares this tendency. Representing the self with images of a teenager (or near-teen) who has achieved much at her age or who simply has a shared sense of style is a strong way to shape identity, both on the page and in staking out a sense of self.

Considering this multitude of representations, the weblog takes on a geography, one that the reader clicks through; it forms invisible space stacking layers of text shaped to persuade and to tell its story. There may be listed hyperlinks in a frame called a sidebar that lead to archived texts, other sites of interest, or recent comments to postings in the main area. Although the hyperlinks line up, they are not linear. Reader/viewers go where they will, shaping their own experience. Many personal weblogs also have a background image shadowing the text or even a sound file that plays music when certain pages are chosen, but the largest and most important section is where the primary posts go (with the most recent on top). Much information is packed onto the home page, for bloggers know that some element of the home page must appeal or the reader/viewer will not follow hyperlinks deeper into the site. Just as with text, engagement is the rhetorical goal—to engage and to enmesh the reader in the argument. After all, weblogs are intended to be read—and engaged with.

Even with the reduced visibility of the friends-only option, the girls using these personal weblogs intend to have an audience. Images, text, and links draw the reader into the site and invite a continued conversation in the comments. That conversation of shared interests, vents, cool links, and quizzes shapes an individualistic discourse, one shared and honed with others, and by defining who they are collectively and individually, also shapes who they become.

A Roadmap for the Journey

To begin, Chapter Two, project overview and methodology, gives the specifics: what was done in this pilot study and how it was structured. The main question is *how is the self refashioned or repurposed through digital media?* An examination of personal weblogs on LiveJournal using case studies will investigate this question as well as sub areas that include the following:

- What rhetorical elements or strategies are typical of the genre?

- What purpose do they serve (community building, persuasive, something else)?

- Which elements or situational effects from writing an individual weblog are perceived as positive (fun) by the participants?

- In what ways does the friends page interact with the individual blogs? How does it help to build identity?

- How do the participants perceive the friends and FOAF features?

- What do the participants see as a positive outcome of weblog writing for them, personally or even academically?

Chapter Three will review existing literature and contextualize journal-writing historically while analyzing the privileging of linear, logos-centric writing over personal writing. It will also highlight the feminine tradition within that history and its potential for feminist research in empowerment and identity issues for female writers. In Chapter Four, identity is the focus, and how identity is constructed through text image and the dimensionality of community spaces. The different focuses currently found within the online environment will be discussed in relation to the AAUW initiatives as well as the features and benefits of a feminist classroom and womens' online writing communities.

How technology use can be an inherently feminist agenda for adolescent girls in particular is another focus, and the chapter also addresses the importance of young women writers working within an online environment because of how it differs from print, and how those differences enhance personal writing. The role of community as an accelerator for personal growth and achievement is pointed out also and I argue that this acceleration of growth is especially pronounced in an online environment because of its immediacy.

Chapter Five: Case Studies gives an in-depth look at the texts and contexts of four of the participants. There will be a close look at features such as metadiscourse, persona use, hyperbole, critical thinking, links (including the friends list and FOAF), the comments feature, quizzes, and visual rhetoric. Interview excerpts and questionnaire results will also contribute to the results. Finally, Chapter Six: Analysis, Synthesis, and Conclusions, is just that. It concludes, and in doing so includes discussion of future research and possible classroom crossover benefits, such as increased writing fluency or the writing confidence successful writing for a web audience can give.

Conclusion

Because this is a pilot study, it is a natural venue for generating fresh questions that will lead to further research. Classroom connections may be one area for further study. Some Ohio high schools, including Bowing Green High School, retain a writing portfolio through the high school years; with school, parental, and student permission, some difference in fluency and/or effective writing creativity could be shown. One of the affirming pieces of evidence for personal weblog writing from my own family experience was the distinct difference in critical thinking, persuasive ability, and writing fluency my

daughter showed in her writing portfolio between the beginning and the end of her freshman year. It is more than a coincidence that she began writing in LiveJournal at the beginning of her freshman year. As she increased her knowledge in this digital realm, she also rewrote her own identity to one that sees herself as a writer, one who can choose strategies and adjust to the varying requirements that classroom writing can demand. Writing consistently on her own for her own creative purposes gave her this new writerly identity; that identity then merged with her classroom practice, giving her the assurance needed to try new things and progress as an academic writer as well. Future research could check participants' writing on and off the web at longer intervals, giving the possibility of demonstrating a more sustained growth.

CHAPTER TWO: PROJECT OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

<u>**Introduction**</u>

It was 2001 and my daughter had just finished a very rocky eighth grade, with more academically tense years to come. I noticed that she wrote freely and extensively online and couldn't help but think that any extended time spent writing and reflecting about the world had to have some positive benefit even though it didn't take place in a classroom. With this personal interest, reading Cynthia Gannett's *Gender and the Journal*, Margaret Finders' *Just Girls,* and Cynthia Selfe's *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention* built upon this idea about technological and textual literacy "outside the walls." As a writing teacher who sees such voluntary writing as a positive development, I had to wonder what made this particular writing space so appealing for adolescent girls in particular, even ones who actively avoid writing in the classroom. I also wondered if this space would connect to issues about feminism and with identity formation. One thing I knew for sure was that even though adolescent girls writing in personal weblogs are far from a minority in the blogosphere, their writing was not currently being looked at seriously and may not be for some time since it didn't fit what current popular wisdom saw as "significant." A snapshot of what these girls were doing in context was called for, with some rhetorical analysis, especially as it pertains to identity formation and reflective writing.

This chapter first gives the overall design of the study and a description of the digital spaces involved: the weblogs, email, and other pages needed such as my own eportfolio and LiveJournal. How these spaces are observed and how the chosen methods connect to feminist research preferences is also discussed. Next, the method

of soliciting participants is covered keeping those feminist methods in mind and the

case study participants are described. The specific research questions guiding the study

are then discussed, including how remediation of both genre and selves is a central

concern. The chapter then gives the methodology for data collection; post categories

are detailed and interview questions listed along with the end of study questionnaire,

giving a framework for the data collected.

The Design of the Study

The study lasted four months, from October 2004 to the end of January 2005.

The posts during that four-month window were available for study, quoting, and textual/

visual analysis. Screen shots of the weblogs during that time were taken, giving a

backup of the content in case of a server failure that resulted in loss of data. Nothing of

the sort had ever happened before on LiveJournal, but had happened more than once

on another service, Blogger.com, so some sort of backup seemed only prudent.

Besides having the weblogs themselves available for analysis, an email interview was

sent to the four case study participants who sent text replies. The original plan had the

interview (See Appendix C) conducted by AOL Instant Messenger, but in the meantime

AOL changed their Terms of Service to claim ownership over all information transmitted

over the service, so to avoid copyright/ ownership tangles, the switch was made. To

expand the perspective from just the four case studies, a questionnaire (See Appendix

D) with similar questions was set up as a poll on my LiveJournal so that other

LiveJournalers on the case study participant's friends lists could also answer some

questions about the blogging process. That gave three different types of information, an

important distinction if the study was to have the triangulation considered necessary for validity.

Solicitation of Participants

Method

The original plan for the study was to solicit participants through the local public school district and have them blog for four months both individually and in a LiveJournal community set up for the study called "the Cybermuse Community." This plan gained HSRB approval and was also approved at the district level. However, when forwarded to the principals at both the high school and the junior high, the official report back was that "No one is willing to take on the request. We have asked around but there is no one at this point in time." Since three months had passed waiting for the beginning of the new school year before even sending the project on to the schools, the fact that none of the teachers at either school were willing to pass out fliers soliciting participants for the study (their only responsibility) effectively shut down the project in that form. Rather than begin again at another district and add another, possibly extensive delay with no guarantee of success at the end, it was time to focus in on what the project needed and how those needs could be filled outside the public school system. In the end, the project remained the same except for the location where the participants originated from, and that change had some advantages. Since the participants were self-selected from already existing LiveJournal users, that led to a richer database of posts from committed bloggers; it also meant the Cybermuse Community, an artificial friends list concept, was no longer necessary and an actual, living cluster of friends on an existing friends list could be studied instead.

Web Self-Selection

Because of my position as both a LiveJournaler and the mother of a teenaged

LiveJournaler I was able to ask my daughter to spread the word unofficially that I was

looking for experienced LiveJournalers, limited to girls between the ages of 13 and 17,

who were willing to participate in a four-month long study of their weblogs. Those

interested were then directed to the Participant Letter (See Appendix A) posted at the

"Project" area of my domain, Techsophist.net. Those interested in participating then

needed to read and copy/paste the Informed Consent Letter (See Appendix B) into an

email sent to my BGSU email account. Before doing that they were also encouraged to

look over my eportfolio, academic weblog, and LiveJournal in order to answer any

questions they may have about my background. The fact that these were girls that my

daughter had interacted with online for at least a three year period also meant that I had

some assurance that they were who they said they were. In addition, it meant they were

experienced bloggers who didn't need startup time. Having existing archives available

was a plus in case there was any chance that my presence significantly altered their

writing during that time. A comparison could then be made and analyzed.

The Sample

Not everyone who initially expressed interest was able to do the study; Some

simply decided it wasn't for them, others, one in particular that I know of, opted out even

though she was extremely interested in the study because her parents had used

internet grounding as a punishment in the past and it was hard to predict if or when it

would happen again. Although not a participant, she is a technology mentor to one of

the case studies and her graphics work is evident in that blog.

Four girls gave their consent by pasting the Consent Letter into an email to me and typing the date and their signature. Miababe and Rabidperryfan were from Rhode Island and juniors at a private high school. They were on each other's friends list. Sugarkisses and Elitegurl were also on each other's friends lists, but one was a sophomore in a public high school in Oregon and the other was a freshman in a public high school in Ontario, Canada. Miababe, Rabidperryfan, and Sugarkisses were Caucasian-American and Elitegurl was Asian-Canadian. There were some indications of at least middle class to upper middle class status on the part of all the girls. For example, in the summer of 2004 Miababe was a Congressional intern in Washington D.C. and spent her extended Spring Break 2005 in Italy. Rabidperryfan traveled to Ivy League colleges during her spring break in order to help her college selection process. Elitegurl has her own desktop computer in her room and takes private piano lessons. Sugarkisses wants to go to Williams College and is looking forward to spending the summer in Boston.

To sum up, there were four case studies bloggers initially ranging in age from fourteen to fifteen with all four having birthdays during the study, moving the ages up to fifteen to sixteen. There were two friendship pairs forming two separate friendship clusters: Miababe/ Rabidperryfan and Sugarkisses/ Elitegurl. The first pair knew each other in real life, the second did not.

Feminist-Friendly Research Methods

My role within the study was that of a participant-observer, a common stance in feminist-friendly research. As part of the study, I was added to the friends list of all four

case study participants and since I continued posting to my LiveJournal as well, that
positioned me as a co-mentor rather than a teacher/ authority figure.

Figure 4 shows my LiveJournal, which has been online since July 10, 2003. I
previously had a weblog on *Blogger,* begun in 2001 and abandoned with the move to
LiveJournal. The links shown to Pierre's LJ and Sophie's LJ are fictional photo weblogs
kept for my two cats.
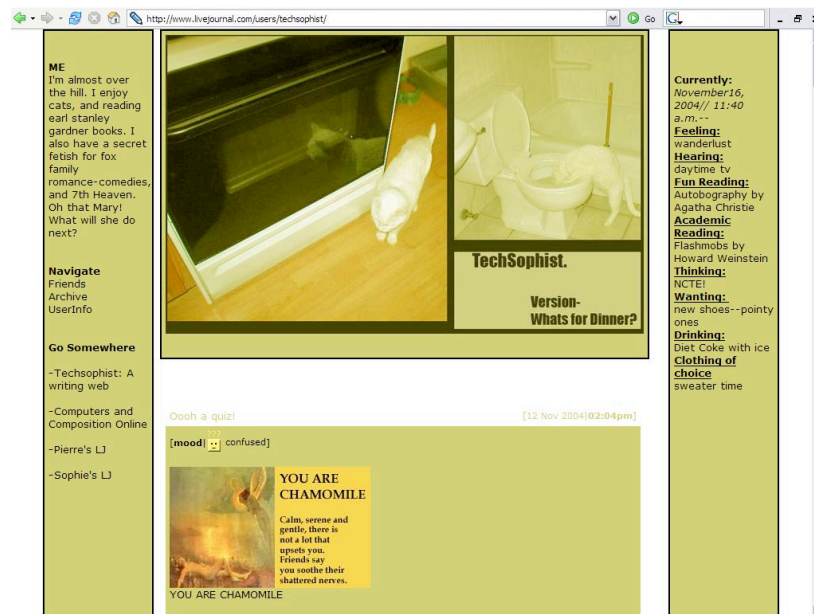
Figure 4: The Researcher's Own LiveJournal

The question could be asked, why did I feel so strongly about giving that context?
Placing myself within the study rather than being the outside, "impartial" observer could
be seen by some as a methodology flaw, one that could lead to equally "flawed" results.
In partial reply, making my context within the study so clear was important because the
kind of impartiality implied by the word, *impartial*, is impossible as long as humans are
humans. Context exists, and an honest researcher must see and understand the lens
she views the world through before making any assessments. As a researcher who is
also a feminist, I share Gesa Kirsch's position in *Ethical Dilemmas in Feminist Research*

when she writes, "Feminist scholars take the postmodern critique of knowledge as a

starting point for developing their research agendas, but add a distinctly feminist goal:

that research not only be *on* women, but also *for* and *by* women" (8). Viewing the

participants in the study as participants rather than subjects acknowledges their

ownership of their individual and group spaces on the web, an important point if what

they are doing within the personal weblogs is truly to be considered significant by

others. With that in mind, the time taken ensuring that the participants retained every

semblance of ownership over their words was worthwhile. At the same time, sharing the

results was a practical act as well as an ideological one; if I had seriously erred in any of

my perceptions due to the size of this pilot study, the participants could let me know

through feedback.

Other than the case study bloggers, my own friends list was brief, and the only

other posts my list contributed rather than my own was the Feminist of the Day RSS

feed posts that gave a historical or contemporary feminist bio daily, sort of like Feminist

trading cards, shown in Figure 5. That positioned me rhetorically and gave additional

context for my motivation for doing the study.
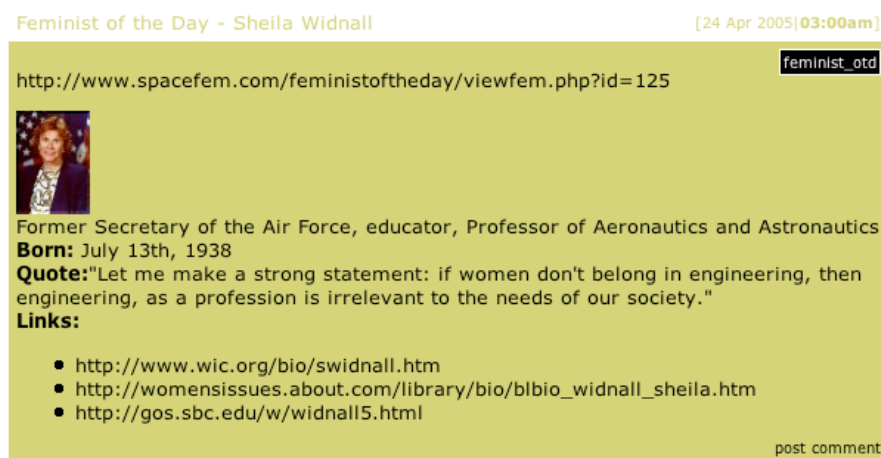
Figure 5: Feminist of the Day RSS Feed

As each chapter reached final form, it was added to my eportfolio and the URL made available to the participants. Preliminary presentations of the dissertation at the 2004 NCTE conference and at the 2005 CCCC were placed as PowerPoint presentations in the project folder on Techsophist.net and made available in advance in case any of the participants objected to any of the posts or images included in the presentations. No objections were made, but the depth of posts available made substitutions readily available. LiveJournal is open source software and acknowledges as part of its Terms of Service that the content of each weblog belongs to the user. I felt it was important to honor that ownership and not turn the participants into subjects by ignoring their preferences, even though they had given me prior permission for use of the posts collected during the four-month observation window.

The Research Question

As the project developed, several areas of interest were addressed, but the main question remained, how do blogs refashion both literacy and identity in the lives of adolescent girls? Within that question, how does this refashioning manifest itself, and what implications can this study provide for the role of blogs as a powerful new media literacy? I chose this as the overarching question after it became clear in the research process that more than just added confidence in writing or affinity with digital tools was happening for these girls—identity was involved. The space itself was also altered in significant ways from the traditional journal or diary used for identity formation in the adolescent; it was transformed through the addition of these digital tools to the mix, and I believe Patricia Bizzell's concept of a postmodern, feminist rhetorical authority was being put in action. Bolter and Grusin's *Remediation: Understanding New Media* then

made me look at things from yet another level: if the diary genre was being remediated to form another genre entirely—and it was into the personal weblog—then, how was the identity formation process that used to happen strictly through text modified? That was a more complete, and ultimately fascinating question that needed to be answered. The answer has to do with increased access to the changing self and multiple groupings of selves through what functions as a social software with strongly textual and visual expression used for glue.

Other questions that form building blocks for the main question include the following:

- What rhetorical elements or strategies are typical of the genre?

Although other groupings could be made, I chose the following categories:

- Daily log

- Vent

- Sexuality

- Photo(s)

- Meme

- Link or LJ cut

- School update

- Music lyrics

- Quiz

Some posts fit into more than one category and were tallied for all; at the same time, each post was given a primary category identification in order to judge proportion of primary types. The posts were placed in a database that sorted them by date, author, and type. Some tropes may not seem important at first glance, but became so as the

data collection progressed. For example, "School Update" was added because the rhetorical strategies used when writing a school update were significantly different from the "Daily Log" entries. Daily logs held more potential for complex structures and reflection. School updates, more often than not, listed the day's activities at school and might also forecast assignments yet due, forming a kind of running assessment of where the writer was academically.

Other categories such as "Sexuality" gained importance as specific sites for the identity construction process. Some blog scholars, notably Will Richardson of *Weblogg-ed: the read/write web in the classroom*, have mixed feelings about adolescents keeping personal weblogs and sexual posts have much to do with those feelings. In a May 2, 2005 post reflecting on a recent MSNBC article about teen sites on *Xanga* and *Myspace*, Richardson asks if personal weblogs go too far:

> From where I sit, the most discomforting part of this is the sexual nature of many of these kids' sites. I know it's not atypical behavior, but I wonder if there isn't a sense of one-up manship that is really nurtured by the online environment, if as the article says, the whole point is to grow your buddies list…It goes without saying that we need to show kids how to compete for attention with ideas, not bodies.

If personal weblogs reduce blogging to a popularity contest with the friends list and purposely appeal to prurient interests with sexual content, then Richardson has a valid point. However, I found no trace of that particular motivation. I find it interesting, though, that his alternative to what he views as too much personal content is "to compete for attention with ideas," a worthy goal for a traditional, information-focused blog, but not

the motivating force behind a personal weblog. Richardson and I may never agree about his limited definition of what a blog is (he has written more than once on his blog about his belief that personal weblogs are not blogs) or what the goal of most personal webloggers is. All the same, I wanted to know how large a proportion such entries took up within the mass of other posts; the answer might have interesting implications.

Another category that took on unexpected importance during data collection was "Song Lyrics." I originally lumped it in with "Memes," but quickly found that it served other purposes, ones similar to the copied texts in nineteenth century commonplace books. Lyrics are traded, analyzed, and used to express deeply felt emotions that otherwise couldn't be openly shared. A common use for song lyrics is to signal a struggle with a romantic situation—the song says what the blogger wants to say, only in ways she finds more pleasing or possibly more obscure. Photos gave another aspect of the personal weblog as gift culture that van Dijk writes about; commenters will ask for "pics" of events or objects discussed on the blog, such as a vacation, school event, family gathering, new purse, dress, haircut, or art project.

"Memes" is one category that may need some explanation for readers unfamiliar with the term. It refers to a questioning or listing construct that spreads quickly through the blogosphere, jumping from blogger to blogger virally. A past meme that spread through the academic blogosphere was the request to "pick five books from your bookshelves at random right now, open them (also randomly), and give a quote from each." This kind of self-revelation through serial questioning is not new. Recently on late night television I saw the classic teen angst film, *Pretty in Pink* again and one of the first of a chain of embarrassing moments for the heroine played by Molly Ringwald involves

a pre-blogging version of the meme. A note is passed to her in class that asks a series of questions about whether she has ever "done it" leading up to the ultimately embarrassing question, "If you did, who would you do it with?" The assurance in caps, "No one knows who is answering this, so be very truthful" indicates that this is a "pass it on" kind of note that will generate a group response. The meme is a digital "pass it on" note that generates a self-questioning process that can be useful when reflecting about identity. The fact that bloggers typically cite and link who they got the meme from also gives a back trail of self-revelation.

"Quizzes" were also common, and sometimes spread virally like memes. The graphics that were the "payoff" for many quizzes made them a separate category. Finally, "Vents" at times seemed like an element in virtually every post, but of course it wasn't. However, using the personal weblog to blow off steam is a commonly claimed purpose, and differentiating posts that serve that function from those that do not was worth doing.

- What purpose does the rhetorical element or strategy serve (community building, persuasive, something else)?

This question takes the categories and adds dimensionality. Writing doesn't exist in a vacuum, and each category or cluster of categories serves some primary function. For example, sharing photos seals a community bond. Memes seem to link directly to identity formation, but quizzes connect more to the personal weblog as gift culture paradigm.

- Which elements or situational effects from writing an individual weblog are perceived as positive (fun) by the participants?

As first, this may seem more trivial than the other questions. However, we all like to do things that are fun more than things that are not, so finding out what the case study bloggers think is fun about keeping a blog will lead to knowing what motivated them to keep writing almost daily over the course of several years to the present day and beyond. Knowing that answer is not trivial.

- In what ways does the friends page interact with the individual blogs? How does it help to build identity?

This question became a behemoth and threatened to overtake the other, more central concern about the remediation of self. Since the friends page is the hub upon which LiveJournal differentiates itself from blogs that are information-driven, the answer to this question also gains importance. A brief answer is that one purpose for the friends page is to build and maintain social structures through the sharing of text or other visual data. A LiveJournaler without a friends list is essentially writing to a vacuum. Sure, others may comment on posts, but the possibility for community greatly diminishes. Also, the friends list makes the selected-public state on "Friends Only" possible. Chapter Five will investigate this further.

- How do the participants perceive the friends and FOAF features?

This question was answered within the interview and aims to understand the perceived place of the friend and friend-of-a–friend status for the case study bloggers. As part of that understanding, each was also asked to talk about the "friends cut," with the assumption that finding out how friends were dropped would lend insight into what made LiveJournal users friend-worthy in the first place.

- What do the participants see as a positive outcome of weblog writing for them,

  personally or even academically?

This question pertained to motivation. I wondered if the participants would make a

blogging/school writing connection or if it would be seen as purely personal. Other

options such as seeing the blog as a repository for idea were also possible.

Plan for Data Collection

I planned to collect data from three sources: the weblog posts and friends pages

from October 2004 through the end of January 2005, an emailed interview, and a

questionnaire that was posted as a LiveJournal poll. Each week I read posts,

categorized them, and looked for trends in content or rhetorical strategy. The interview

gave their view of the process that I was observing and the poll gave others on the

friends list the chance to weigh in.

The posts quoted in this dissertation retain the original look and content, so any

spelling errors, broken links, or images that may not work remain the same for this

project. Besides being an extension of the previously discussed ownership issue, noting

misspellings and other errors and seeing if the proportion changes over time because of

group interaction was one of the possibilities for future work. The archives for each case

study were also available if needed for comparison during the dissertation project or in

the future. I also retained screen shots of the four months of case study posts.

The interviews are housed in my email archives and are also saved as .DOC

files. Questions such as "What kinds of entries do you like to put in your blog?",

"What kinds of entries do you like to share with others (links, memes, images,

something else)?", and "What factors help you decide whether to have an entry be

public, friends-only, or private?" were asked. A question that gained importance as the study developed was, "When you have a "friends cut," what leads to the decision? How do you decide who to keep or cut?" The friends cut is an interesting audience limiter that has the potential for in-group/ out-group trauma, but in the case of these bloggers avoided that sort of situation.

Conclusion

Even though this was a pilot study, the number of posts written and the consistent pattern of reflective writing by these girls means larger, more far-reaching implications for the future of personal weblog writing and for these girls as they more on into adulthood. Chapter Three will discuss how feminism informs and investigates how personal writing is perceived and valued historically and online today in personal weblogs. The often pejorative phrase, "just personal," is analyzed and applied to adolescent girls and their concerns in these at times intensely personal spaces. Chapter Four builds on this concept of personal writing and its importance by honing in on the idea of personal weblogs as sites for identity construction. Future implications for the blog genre as a whole are discussed, with the large proportion of adolescent girls writing about personal matters and reasoning out their identities in public potentially changing the nature of what public discourse rightfully means.

CHAPTER THREE: WRITING WHILE FEMALE

Beginnings: Just Personal

While review existing literature and contextualizing journal-writing, this chapter

will historically analyze the privileging of linear, logos-centric writing over personal

writing. It will also highlight the feminine tradition within that history and its potential for

feminist research in empowerment and identity issues for female writers. As a blog

researcher with an overtly feminist agenda, the need to study women writing in different

contexts seems fundamental. Current research by others on the leading edge of blog

scholarship includes Clancy Ratliff's work in progress on women's blogs and political

punditry as well as Daisy Pignetti's more general look at political blogs as a new form of

Habermas's public sphere. Both of these projects will add greatly to the now lacking

theoretical base about how writing in blogs differs from writing on paper, with Ratliff's

project in particular lending a much-needed focus on women and an answer to the oft-

repeated question, "Where are all the women bloggers?" in political/journalistic blogs.

However, the obvious choice of one of the most populous writing spaces on the web,

LiveJournal, currently housing 7,064,519 weblogs with 4,401,972 female bloggers

making 67.3% of the total, is not so obvious for many researchers. Indeed, one of the

most common complaints about personal weblogs such as the ones found on

LiveJournal or Blogger is that the content is insignificant, that it is "just personal." A

typical example of that kind of distancing is found in a January 14, 2005 thread on

Slashdot, a forum centering on web development and internet culture, coincidently, also

a blog since it uses CMS software and has dated, sequential entries. In "LiveJournal

Servers Go Down," when LiveJournal has a massive server failure and is thus offline

some forum members mock LiveJournal members in a thread with a sly *Star Wars* reference entitled "A great disturbance in the Force..." and continue the comparison with "... as if millions of teenage girls suddenly cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced." Not surprisingly, this post was rated "Score: 5, Funny," which in a way, it was. However, the next thread entitled "The Pain " wryly laments, "Honestly! Now we have to wait a day or so to find out what MelissaMinx492 ate for breakfast today!" The subsequent thread answers, "Don't worry, it was waffles. But her dad used the last of the syrup. Man, he never can think of her needs, can he? I mean really, what's his problem?" Still another Slashdotter asserts, "Man, I need them to get those servers back up! I've got a whole pile of journals to not read. I'm getting behind on my ignoring."

It's interesting that the large proportion of teenage girls on LiveJournal is seen by these posters as just as regrettable as the supposedly inferior content. Even more interesting is the common claim that this kind of writing is not valid—its very identity as a genre is stripped away, making it not writing at all. Susan C. Herring, Inna Kouper, Lois Ann Scheidt, and Elijah L. Wright note this syndrome and its implications in "Women and Children Last: The Discursive Construction of Weblogs" as well as Andrew Ó Baoill in "Weblogs and the Public Sphere." Ó Baoill, connecting Habermas's concept of the public sphere with the idealized concept of a blogosphere points out that "Inclusivity, disregard of external rank, and rational debate of any topic are all necessary components of such a space. As we have seen, although some talk of the blogosphere as a conversation, it is in reality an overlapping collection of conversations." Graham Lampa in "Imagining the Blogosphere: An Introduction to the Imagined Community of Instant Publishing" also touches on the perception divide using statistics from the 2003

Perseus survey on blogging, finding that "those [blogs] which are frequently updated, widely read, and consistently linked—may represent the conception of blogs in the public mind, but they are not representative of blogs in general. They [Perseus] instead found that the 'typical blog' is written by a teenage girl who uses it twice a month to update her friends and classmates on happenings in her life." Being that the adolescent girl's typical blog of daily concerns, quizzes, icons, and photos is truly more typical in numbers that any of the A-list blogs, the low status awarded to such blogs is troubling. It seems that being "just personal" is a very serious charge indeed.

This kind of devaluing is not limited to the internet or current times. Historically, personal writing is rarely valued, unless, of course, it is literature; daily details in that case are seen as evidence of attention to the concrete. Outside the literary canon though, writers such as Dorothy Wordsworth wrote extensive journals. Were they really so different in quality or nature from her well-known brother's notebooks? Cinthia Gannett in *Gender and the Journal* points out "the lyrical descriptions she jots down also become raw material for his [her brother Charles Wordsworth] professional writing" (133). Her dreams and observations became, in some cases, his poems. When looking at personal writing especially as it connects to feminism, the question occurs, does the private nature of the act make it intrinsically less worthwhile or is it truly a matter of which gender holds the pen? Whether they called them diaries, journals, notebook, or commonplace books, the work done historically in those spaces by both men and women did far more than recount the days; the writing there shapes thoughts until, in some cases, those thoughts are ready to come out publicly. Gannett points out the historical place of the journal in an intellectual life:

> While I cannot imagine the journal ultimately "displacing" other kinds of
> academic writing in the male discursive territory, neither can I see it as
> discouraging complex habits of thought unless it is misused or
> misunderstood. When Bacon gave advice to young men to keep journals
> as they made their Grand Tours, he did so because he understood the
> journal to be particularly appropriate for developing critical observation
> and reflective skills. (198)

"Developing critical observation and reflective skills" sounds very much like a phrase from a contemporary writing syllabus, an admirable goal and a common choice on outcomes statements.

Why, then, has "personal," the adjective most commonly used when discussing diaries or journals, become a pejorative term when it comes to writing? Melissa Goldthwaite in a *College English* article entitled "Confessional" examines the tainted reputation of intensely personal writing as well as its appeal:

> It's the complexity of confession—its many faces—that draws me in: how
> "confessional" has been used as a term to dismiss personal writing and
> how "confession" has been valued as a site of academic study in feminist
> autobiography; how "confessional" is a school of poetry praised by some,
> detested by others; how in religious settings confession can be both an
> institutional obligation and a spiritual need; how confession can break
> traditional form or be rigidly formulaic; how the relationship between
> confessor and confessant is mediated by desire; how confession is

sometimes voluntarily practiced and other times demanded outside the

context of relationship. (55)

William Banks also has a positive view of personal writing and extends that view to the

classroom where he claims that rather than being the easiest writing assignment in the

first-year writing classroom, the personal narrative is potentially more complex than a

narrative without such personal elements because it "requires more confidence than I

had assumed," and a "greater knowledge of 'self,' regardless of whether that 'self' is

unified or fragmented, Cartesian or postmodern" (22). Banks goes on to assert that we

as writing teachers must be on notice that "when 'personal' writing becomes embodied

writing… it requires a new way of reading that teachers can miss out on if they're not

careful":

> As my discipline moves further and further away from the
>
> narrative/personal writings once central to expressivist discourses and
>
> pedagogies of the 1970s and 1980s, I want to suggest that we pause and
>
> reflect more carefully. For all the failings James Berlin and Lester Faigley
>
> have usefully suggested about a certain kind of expressivism, such a
>
> pedagogy reminds us of something important about teaching and learning:
>
> regardless of how distant we can get ourselves from the embodied
>
> experiences of our lives, if we do not find ways back to those bodies,
>
> those experiences, we run the risk of impoverishing our theories and
>
> pedagogies. (22)

Given that there is a strong undercurrent of support for personal writing in

academia, there must be other factors in play when it comes to more generalized

negative comment about weblogs and adolescent girls; it could be a matter of gender

alone that devalues these public/private texts, a literary version of the perceived crime

of "driving while black," the common syndrome of black drivers, especially in nice cars

or in neighborhoods "where they shouldn't be" being pulled over for no other reason that

their race. Lisa Gerrard addresses the historical basis of this idea of right and wrong

intellectual places for women in "Beyond "scribbling women": Women writing (on) the

Web":

> Just as societies in Europe and the United States have branded
>
> noncompliant women hysterical, they have also trivialized women with
>
> intellectual ambitions. For centuries, the belief that the womb made
>
> women captives of their emotions had a corollary: Women were
>
> unreasonable, incapable of abstract thought, and, therefore, could never
>
> be writers, critics, or philosophers. The female novelists of the nineteenth
>
> century were viewed with condescension or outright horror. (305)

Even though this historical prejudice may linger, especially in the testosterone-driven

world of web-writing with its roots in programming, development, and other, science-

driven writing and its new cousin subject area, politics, the actual cause for this view

that women writers on the web either (a) don't exist or (b) don't write about "significant "

subjects may be more complicated than that. The public nature of weblogs compounds

the issue, and may partially explain the outrage from others who feel that their public

space is polluted by merely personal musings. In that case it's possible that female

writers who veer over into the personal realm are being punished for stepping out of

safe writing neighborhoods, but if that were the only reason, then writers in more

traditional print venues such as Jim Porter in Composition Studies would have a much

shorter vitae. Nancy Sommers is another name that comes to mind, with her intensely

personal Braddock Award winning essay, "Between the Drafts." It's interesting thought,

that both writers had their most successful personal writing published later in their

careers, after they had paid their dues in more traditional work. Status, then, may be a

factor as well as gender. Another element to consider with blogs, though, is the speed

with which status is built up as opposed to the steady growth common in the print world.

A popular academic blogs such as Culturecat.net shows 335 links from 237 sources on

March 28, 2005 according to Technorati.com, a weblog watchlist and rating service, and

Culturecat.net only has archives going back to November 17, 2003 (including archives

from her earlier blog, *cyborg woman*).   All the same, when writing while female it seems

that a lose-lose dynamic is invoked: infusing "too much" personal detail or connections

and the work is not rigorous or "significant" enough. Veer the other way and accusations

can be made that she's trying to deny her sex. Dare to have a personal blog, especially

as an academic, that details the days and ventures into the "don't do it in the streets,

you'll scare the horses" topics of sex and politics only if she guards her anonymity as

jealously as blogger *Bitch.Ph.D*. Personal writing and a supposedly feminine mode of

writing may not be one and the same, but personal writing certainly has garnered some

of the same drawbacks as other "feminized" subjects, such as composition itself.

The Feminine Tradition in Writing: Perception and Texts

If there is a feminine tradition in writing, then it is a tradition with many starting

points. One is the first wave feminists and their struggle to speak publicly and be heard.

Yet another is the second wave feminists and the slick-paper literacy of *Ms. Magazine*,

well-meaning, but far from all inclusive, and the self-published 'zines, radical in conception and outlook. Still another is Donna Haraway and "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" and its predictive stance on where women and technology stand today. Running alongside these well-known figures is another stream, that of the vast number of texts by women through the years, writing their daily lives without fanfare or acclaim, most often saved because of their proximity to a great man rather than for their own worth.

For the sake of our subject, that of adolescent girls who write on the web, Haraway's cyborg is as good a place as any to start:

> The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the *oikos*, the household. (2270-2271)

Contextualize the text. Haraway's 1980's era cyborg woman used a modem that suction-cupped a telephone handset to directly connect to another computer. The World-Wide-Web didn't exist, although the internet (with a capital-I) did. Libraries used massive banks of wooden card catalogues with reams of paper cards to keep track of acquisitions. In order to use online bulletin board services (BBS), a precursor to the listproc or discussion board, users had to know the individual board's phone number and be willing to rack up potentially disastrous long distance charges. It really was easier to type a letter that to use word processing software—and the result was far more professional in appearance and readable because of the contrasting poor quality of dot matrix printers. Despite the seemingly prehistoric conditions, Haraway got it right.

Today's adolescent girls, not all, but those who choose to, let technology flow from their fingertips like a force of nature. The division between the so-called natural world and the equally artificially-defined and separated technological world falls away as if it never existed. After all, as Walter Ong reminds us, a pen is technology also (80-81); the main difference between that pen and its digital sisters is its relative transparency in use. Jim Porter also points out that "We didn't get excited about the technology of the pencil, why all the fuss about the computer?" (385), but goes on to detail a large reason why digital spaces are transparent for some, but not for all:

> The answer is simple: Because the computer per se is not the revolutionary technology. Rather the revolution is the networked computer and the social/rhetorical contexts it creates and the way its use impacts publishing practices. All *that* is revolutionary. The impact on social networks and publishing practices represents a significant change, of a magnitude that the pencil and typewriter (essentially print-based tools) don't achieve. (385)

The "social-rhetorical contexts" Porter refers to make a significant difference between paper journals and weblogs and will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapters Four and Five, but all the same, the young woman who writes in ink and the young woman who writes in her LiveJournal may use different technologies, but express sentiments unmarked by time or technology. The technology, however, enables a potential enhancement of the process.

Writing has long been a force for shaping identity, even in the days when whittling a pen point with a pearl-handled penknife was part of the technical process.

For example, in *Private Pages: Diaries of American Women 1830s-1970s*, a collection edited by Penelope Franklin, Yvonne Blue a fourteen-year-old high school student in Chicago, writes in 1926 about herself and her best friend that they "are planning to be *wonderful*—to improve ourselves. We want to be very thin and silent, but to say unusual things when we speak and have people hang on our words. We will wear our hair straight. We want very pale faces, and red lips and we will dress nicely" (72). Her focus on the physical as a marker of worth is echoed in a LiveJournal post by Sugarkisses, a fifteen-year-old in Oregon who expresses her feelings about body weight and a worthy identity. She writes on October 13, 2004, "i learned something from mrs. tilley today! i gain 1 pound every two days, because of the food i eat. that's why i went from being a 7/9 last year to an 11/14 this year. (i discovered tonight i am now a 14. i feel like the world hates me.)." On a more analytic note, Rabidperryfan, a sixteen-year-old from Rhode Island, meticulously compares her New Year's resolutions from a year ago to what actually was achieved [italics hers]:

> *I don't want to be afraid to express myself. I often find it hard to tell people what I really think about an issue and I get scared to give my own opinion because I feel they will criticize me and my ideas. I've had enough with hiding, I will not be afraid to express myself. I do not want to me blunt, but I want to give the truth, after all...* I've tried to get better, and I have taken some steps forward, but nothing really too profound....*I'd like to become a better person. I'd like to do stuff for the well-being of others, I'd like to help out. I want to stop being so jealous and I want to stop complaining. This year needs change-this years needs a better me.* While this year was

better for me, and I think I helped a lot of people out, I'm not really sure if

that happened. (Dec 18,2004 11:10 a.m.)

Mary Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule

in *Women's Ways of Knowing* show a similar trend in self-analysis, and extrapolate that

this is typical of a feminist approach to thinking about one's life. In fact, such

introspection is seen as distinctly feminist, and a way for positive change and growth.

They compare it to "the youths in fairy tales (as we recall, usually male) who set out

from the family homestead to make their way in the world, discovering themselves in the

process." Referring to the women contributing to the study, Belenky et al assert that

"Our women set out on this developmental journey with a sense of power in their

intuitive processes and a newfound energy and openness to novelty" (77).

          With a firmer connection to the process of writing as both expression and a

fulcrum for change, Adrienne Rich makes a similar call for writers "to write as if your life

depended on it: to write across the chalkboard, putting up there in public words you

have dredged up from dreams, from behind screen memories, out of silence—words

you have dreaded and needed in order to know you exist." She goes on to answer that

call by adding, " No, it's too much, you could be laughed out of school, they could expel

you. The politics of the schoolyard, the power of the gang" (33). Rich's point that this

kind of writing has a price is echoed in many feminist writings, notably Judith Butler's

Gender Trouble and Patricia A. Sullivan's "Composing Culture: A Place for the

Personal," where a female student makes it clear that she is not willing to pay the price

personal writing exacts. "Ellen" had prose "so replete with impersonal diction, vague

abstractions, and the passive voice" that Sullivan tried in conferences "to gently tease

out a self who might inhabit her sentences, her own experiences. Ellen resisted with a

sort of deferential, apologetic smugness. Thanks but no thanks, she seemed to say; my

writing's fine with me the way it is" (41). Conformity has its rewards, and the perception

that a text is too revealing, too feminine, and thus open to ridicule, could lead to the kind

of superficial, positionless writing discussed in this article. The beauty of personal

weblog writing then, is its potential as an anodyne for this kind of vacancy; it can act as

a repository for the shifting conception of self so necessary for growth in the adolescent.

It can also through its concentration on introspection, reflection, and support from other

young women through the comments feature, create the sort of "women helping

women" environment feminists heartily support.

Feminism and the Weblog

When focusing on the unique qualities of personal writing on blogs as opposed to

traditional pen and ink diaries, N. Katherine Hayles' view of *How We Became*

Posthuman may have merit. Her concept of "knowledge gained through incorporating

practices" (205) connects well to the way the personal weblog functions, with its

blending of text, graphics, and multiple threads contributed by a like-minded community.

Her claim that "when changes in incorporating practices take place, they are often

linked with new technologies that affect how people use their bodies and experience

space and time" (205) certainly predicts the way these girls view their LiveJournal

relationships as just as real as the ones they have in "real life." Virtual spaces are real to

them, and they also attend to their LiveJournal décor just as assiduously as any new

homeowner attends to her new living space. The use of icons, emoticons, and a

carefully constructed layout that consciously chooses an individual "look" based on

color, form, and style, fleshes out the text and literally *embodies* the blog, making it an individual expression of self.

Seeing the LiveJournal as an extension and expression of the body also brings to mind Hélène Cixous and her feminist call to write with the body. Reacting against the phallic-centered literary theory of Lacan with his revision of the female as male but lacking, she writes that a woman "must write her self because this is the invention of a *new insurgent* writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history" (350). Cixous more specifically connects writing to the body when she declares, "Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth" (350-351). She feels intensely that "it is time for women to start scoring their feats in written and oral language" and that by writing, a woman will "forge for herself the antilogos weapon. To become *at will* the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process" (351). Cixous' call is answered in unforeseen ways by adolescent girls who form a body of work in personal weblogs. Instead of "writing a little, but in secret" (348), they write a flowing stream of words about who they are publicly. Instead of letting the technology define them, they shape it and control it in ways that please them—be public if they wish, limit their posts to just friends, or even lock some moments away in private posts. The factor that might please Cixous is that they make the choices and shape their own writing spaces in a very public venue.

With the multidimensionality available in a blog, the full-*bodiness* Cixous calls for becomes more possible. For example, although pre-made templates are available,

newbies who take to the weblog genre quickly move up to a more individual look, first

by asking others with more expertise to customize parts of their space, perhaps by

making them personalized icons (Figure 8) or colorbars, as seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6. A Colorbar from Elitegurl's User Info Page Entitled "Chihuahuas Are Love."

Later, they are more likely to do their own work, as their skills progress. For example,

her friend in RL and in LJ, Sideway, who also contributed several icons, designed

Sugarkisses's stylish, mint-green original home page (Figure 2). Interestingly enough,

Sideway's own LJ uses a similar color scheme and retains a fondness for flash icons or

clips. Recently, however, Sugarkisses started making her own icons and banners and

has moved to a new LiveJournal with a new name and concept, all self-designed, seen

in Figure 7, below.
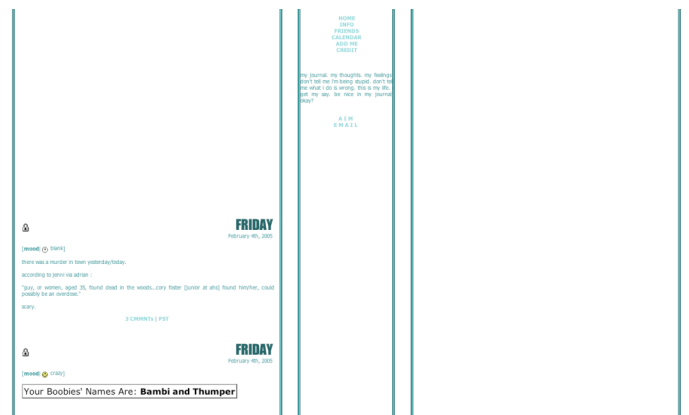
Figure 7. Sugarkisses' Self-Designed Home Page

It shows a sparer aesthetic, one that may be more in line with her own sensibilities and

points to a new direction in her self-concept. This mentoring leading to growth parallels

the feminist ideal of women helping women, of mentoring rather than directing. It also

strengthens the ties between body and text by enabling changing representations of self visually. For example, in Figure 8 a progression is shown from an icon incorporating a flash movie Sideway made of Sugarkisses dancing to two self-made icons, less extravagant technologically, but using colors and themes she chose herself. The differences are striking, but more importantly these icons show an increasing comfort level with the technology involved and a willingness to invest time in self-expression and customization using digital tools. Each blog becomes in time an individual embodiment of self, a clear step towards the feminist goal of growth through self-knowledge..

Figure 8. First Icon (by Friend) Is in Flash, and Shows Sugarkisses Dancing; Second and Third Icons Are Self-Designed.

Keeping Cixous' call for writing with the body in mind, Hayles' idea of the posthuman begins to have clearer feminist connections, especially when considering personal weblogs. In her chapter entitled "The Materiality of Informatics" she focuses on the "corporeality" of digital spaces, and notes that "to look at thought in this way is to turn Descartes upside down" (203). Centering on the body rather than a nebulous "mind," she asserts "the body exists in space and time and that, through its interaction with the environment, it defines the parameters within which the cogitating mind can arrive at 'certainties,' which not coincidently almost never include the fundamental homologies generating the boundaries of thought" (203). Jim Porter in "Why technology matters to writing: A cyberwriter's tale" from *Computers and Composition*'s

twentieth anniversary issue also connects these feminist concepts of writing and the body to a claim that the concept of the posthuman is a feminist concept:

> This view is feminist in three important respects: (a) It acknowledges the presence and significance of the body. The body matters, the material matters. Physicality (for example, of the body) is not secondary to form, or mind, or language (the privileged masculinist focuses of Western thought)—it is, rather, fundamental; (b) it does not bifurcate individuals from machines, or individuals from each other. Rather it looks at interrelationships—in a sense, at the interfaces of human experience (humans and machines, humans with each other); (c) this approach, at least in its postmodern and queer versions, acknowledges fluidity and hybridity. It acknowledges, explores, and celebrates variations of form and the complexity and fluidity of identity" (388).

In viewing adolescent personal weblogs as feminist writing spaces then, we acknowledge the interlayering of text, self, and visual, what Porter calls "the interfaces of human experience" (388). We also see the many chains of comments from other girls as an instance of feminist mentoring, a sharing of experience and support also advocated by Tulley and Blair in "Ewriting Spaces as Safe, Gender-Fair Havens: Aligning Political and Pedagogical Possibilities" (57). These enhancements of the purely textual paper journal or diary give the personal weblog its potential for an even more personal and expressive space, a potentially feminist space where constructing digital spaces can also construct self.

In the Classroom—or Not: Collaboration, the Journal, and Feminist Writing

This chapter's look at journals, whether on the web or not, lends itself also to a discussion of pedagogical applications. Since paper journals have been a mainstay for writing classrooms for some time, it naturally follows that blogs will migrate into those spaces. And they have. Practitioners such as myself, Samantha Blackmon, Colin Brooke, Dennis Jerz, Steven Krause, Clancy Ratliffe, and Jill Walker all use blogs in their writing classrooms and, not so coincidently, blog about the experience as well. Charles Lowe and Terra Williams in "Moving to the Public: Weblogs in the Writing Classroom" raise some interesting questions about weblogs in the classroom, especially about the choice between group and individual blogs. They found that the sense of community fostered by communal content management system-type blogs was well worth the added effort in setup and teacher training. Valerie A. Clifford asks the even more intriguing question "Does the use of Journals as a Form of Assessment put into Practice Principles of Feminist Pedagogy?" in her *Gender and Education* article. For the most part, she finds journal writing itself does, but cannot escape the dilemma of how "current tertiary education folklore suggests that students will not complete work unless it is to be graded" (119). She then quotes Welch's 1994 claim that "assessment is at the heart of the unequal [classroom] relationships" and notes as a practitioner of feminist pedagogy that if is this is true, then "grading, per se, becomes problematic for feminist pedagogy" (119).

Clifford's point is well taken, but besides the issue of assessment and possibly wrapped within it, is another potential problem, that of perceived audience. If the teacher is seen as the only audience, and a word-counting, grammar-checking

audience at that, one more interested in points awarded than growth, then assessment truly is problematic in the feminist classroom. However, if assessment is seen as more qualitative than quantitative, the dilemma recedes. Blogs positioned as the well that students go to when drawing out the substance that turns into other, more definable writing projects create far less anxiety and can turn into a writing "comfort zone," a place where students can work out ideas and house insights without worrying about minutiae.

Another issue that can arise is the one faced by Dennis Jerz in his "New Media Journalism" class weblog. Over the past couple of years he found that some experienced bloggers in his classrooms resent what Jerz calls "forced blogging" and fail to discern the differing goals of personal and classroom blogging. Such resistance may minimize contributions to group classroom blogs, lending their infrequent posts a generalized air similar to the prose found in the dreaded five-paragraph theme. It's possible that an agonistic approach to writing and persuasion tends to undercut a collaborative and communal writing space, but that's not the case in his classroom. More likely is one "resistor's" claim that "I am a quiet person and prefer to keep my ideas to myself," an echo of "Ellen's" reticence described in Sullivan's article. This stance undercuts the possibility of community in a group blog. Michelle Gumbrecht in "Blogs as Protected Space" investigates how the idea of community contributes to a successful blog:

> Our research also found that the importance of feedback and commenting
> hinged upon our bloggers' sense of "communitymindedness". Bloggers
> who used their blogs within educational settings, for open exchanges of
> ideas, or solicitations for advice greatly valued feedback because it

increased interaction and made for lively discussion. However, those who

didn't embrace "community" didn't place as great an emphasis on

feedback. These particular bloggers appreciated the features of protected

space and limited interactivity that blogs afforded them. (5)

Fostering a sense of community-mindedness seems to be the pivotal factor for

classroom teachers who want an engaged and lively group classroom blog. Interestingly

enough, not all of the case study bloggers for this pilot study enjoy traditional classroom

writing. One in particular, Elitegurl, works through her classroom writing frustrations by

venting about them in her blog. The irony that a teacher may find in this choice of writing

about hating writing goes right by her—she is too busy living it. A group classroom blog

where she has clear writing prompts, can see other student's writings, and has the

support of her peers through the comments feature sounds like a potential cure for the

disconnect she and some other bloggers feel between their outside writing world and

the classroom.

<div align="center">**<u>Conclusion</u>**</div>

Further study of how blogging affects writing resistance in the classroom is

needed, but more fundamental may be a better understanding of personal writing and

its value, even though the personal may be hard to quantify and turn into points in a

grade book. If we truly value process over product when teaching writing, using blogs

for a wellspring should become foundational for the writing classroom that incorporates

technology. For that matter, keeping the AAUW initiative *Tech Savvy* in mind,

incorporating blogs and content management system software such as Blackboard or

Drupal into the writing classroom lends one more visible way to value technology use and tech culture in a way that both genders can claim and make part of their identity.

Even more fundamental than pedagogical transfers at this point is a clear look at what is going on in these digital spaces, a snapshot, so to speak, which allows for thoughtful analysis. The case studies in chapter five will concentrate on that analysis, but along the way little breadcrumbs of screenshots and posts, such as those in this chapter and the next two on identity and methodology respectively, will act as guideposts to visually define the spaces.

However, in answering the question, are personal weblogs by adolescent girls feminist spaces, the best answer may be to flip the question and investigate potentialities rather than insist on a particular agenda for each girl in this highly individualized form of web writing. These blogs can act as an incubator for some goals that feminists hold dear—introspection leading to clear thinking, collaboration, mentoring, and an even-handed valuing of others' ideas regardless of gender, race, or sexual orientation. The weblog structure itself lends this focus rather than an overt desire by the participants to take on that identity, although that may be as well.

At the same time, the intersection of writing, introspection, and digital tools also lends the possibility of answering another feminist goal, that expressed in AAUW's *Tech Savvy* of bringing more girls to the sciences and to make them more comfortable in digital spaces. The following chapter will investigate that call as it pertains to identity by connecting existing scholarship on identity to these digital spaces. The role of community as an accelerator for personal growth and identity development is pointed

out also and I argue that this acceleration of growth is especially pronounced in an

online environment because of its immediacy.

CHAPTER FOUR: REMEDIATING IDENTITY

<u>Introduction</u>

This chapter examines identity as it applies to adolescent girls exploring their personal and group identities in a hypertextual, digital environment, specifically, a LiveJournal cluster. In doing so, it defines identity textually and visually while situating the dissertation project in the general discussion about identity in writing as well as within digital environments. I begin by exploring different aspects of identity, first with the proposed increased focus on computer science and digital affinity that the AAUW report, *Tech Savvy* calls for, and how writing in personal weblogs answers that call. I then move on to define personal weblogs as a "technological comfort zone," a place where a technological identity can develop using peer *mentoring* rather than as a place where individuals compete to show *mastery.* That discussion expands to speculate how that empowerment and competency through that identity can spill over to an affinity with other, yet-to-develop technologies.

From that discussion of how personal weblogs help these adolescent girls "own the space," I focus in on individual identity beginning with the public face and how it is a constructed textual face complicated by rhetorical decisions. Bizzell's concept of Folly as a postmodern rhetorical authority fits the personal weblog authorial situation and explains the lack of respect this discourse elicits in more traditional venues such as weblogs focused on informing. Following this look at the public face is a discussion of the very private face of sexual identity and how the friends-only option of LiveJournal makes an ongoing semi-public textual construction and reconstruction possible. Emotion and the emoticon is also discussed, and emoticon use as a way of defusing

overwrought emotion is given as a possible reason for recent findings on decreased gender differences in emoticon use.

Later in the chapter, community and identity is discussed, with several ways of defining that communal identity given. Viewing the posts, links, photos, and memes as an expression of what anthropology calls gift culture is one; another is the multidimensional neighborhood of simulation games such as *The Sims*, a digital expression of Bachelard's concept of "intimate immensity." A combination of both metaphoric views may explain the importance of community to identity development in digital spaces.

The chapter concludes with predictions for the future of personal weblogs as they relate to adolescent girls and their identity development needs. I propose that identity development and the need for a space that is both public and private may be behind the steady increase proportionately and numerically of adolescent girls in the LiveJournal user base.

Identity and Empowerment

Owning the Space

The American Association of University Women's Educational Foundation's 2000 study, *Tech-Savvy: Educating Girls in the New Computer Age* highlights the importance of identity in digital spaces such as personal weblogs, particularly for adolescent girls. It calls for more situations where adolescent girls write in computer-mediated environments and engage with the burgeoning online culture itself. The AAUW report also approaches the goal of gender equity with a two-fold approach that intends "to get more girls into the 'pipeline' to computer-related careers" and encourages "ways that the

computer culture itself could be positively transformed through the integration of girls'

and women's insights" (3). Although it doesn't specifically address issues of identity, the

actions endorse a restructuring of self-concept to include an affinity with digital tools and

online culture. As part of the reasoning for its advocacy for change, the AAUW cites a

1997 Gannet Foundation survey of 652 high school students intending to go on to

college that shows "50 percent of both males and females feel that computer science is

'geared toward men.' The stereotype of computer science is both masculine and

negative. When asked, girls and women describe a prevailing concern that computer

science will stunt their diverse range of intellectual pursuits and interests, and that it

involves work that is tedious, sedentary, and—most critically—antisocial" (41).

Rightfully so, such a negative self-view finds few advocates. No one wants to be the

dweeb. The advantages of making digital affinity part of one's identity, though, are far-

reaching. The commission points out that "in the next few decades, the field is likely to

become an integral part of several disciplines, ranging from architecture to the life

sciences and medicine" and predicts there will be "multiple paths to competence,"

making it "imperative that a broader range of students achieve some fluency with it"

(41). If adolescent girls don't feel that they "own" digital spaces, or worse, feel that

competency there is not worth having, a large part of their potential future fades from

the screen.

Technological Comfort Zones

With that in mind, fostering identity development with web writing using digital

tools can be an inherently feminist agenda for adolescent girls in particular. In other

words, in order for gender equity to happen in online culture, a feminized technological

identity also needs to occur, and personal weblogs create a nexus of technology use in

a very non-threatening, inclusive way. For example, over the course of the four-month

study, Rapidperryfan posted almost daily, at times posting twice in one day. This

indicates a high degree of fluency and technological literacy; it also means digital affinity

is assimilated into her identity without converting her self-image into the traditional

"geek." As support for that view, her entries indicate a girl who balances her days with

success on the softball team, academics, and the normal day-to-day social interactions

typical of a heterosexual teenaged girl. This is not a girl who lives for the hours alone

hunched over the computer screen. Her competency online integrates with the other

aspects of her identity; it does not define her.

Truly, men and women both gain when the male introverted-tech-geek

stereotype is complicated, expanded, and put in clearer focus with a spectrum of

identity strata, all competent and comfortable in digital realms. At the same time,

adolescent girls because of their historical under representation in the sciences

especially benefit from this enhanced identity. One thing the examination of personal

weblogs has made abundantly clear to this researcher is that it's more than possible to

be female and still be highly competent in HTML, Flash, Dreamweaver, and Photoshop.

The tech-identity and the feminine identity need not clash. The technological identity

implied by the AAUW study is being developed now by adolescent girls in their personal

weblogs. An example of this would be Elitegurl, a self-declared girly-girl who alternates

icons between the blonde, curly incarnation of Cristina Aguilera and an equally blonde

Paris Hilton. She posts daily, sometimes several times daily, venting about her rigorous,

education-focused Asian-Canadian life and the split between her goals and that of her

parents. For instance, a long sequence of posts and comments dealt with argumentative strategies she could use to overcome her parents' opposition to her taking Latin in addition to French. She saw it as a way to improve her language arts ability; they saw it as a dead language that no one uses and supported her taking domestic arts instead. The other girls on her friends list volunteered possible arguments and gave support. By asking others for comments on strategies, she embraces the mentoring culture these girls share. In her interview she describes another way she uses mentors when she writes, "I, personally am not good at setting up layouts on lj, thats' why i ask my friends to do it. Otherwise, i'd love to change them often." When her desire for a cool-looking blog exceeds her ability, she collaborates with others, allowing mentoring again, to get the look she wants.

Another place students like Elitegurl should feel comfortable is the computer-mediated classroom, but current literature and lore still shows some problem with the gender stereotyping and power politics that hinder peer-to-peer mentoring and make it less likely that even students who start out with some degree of competency will share their knowledge with others. Angela Haas, Kristine Blair, and Christine Tulley answer the question, "Why doesn't this feel empowering?" in "Mentors versus masters: Women's and girls' narratives of (re)negotiation in web-based writing spaces":

> Inevitably, the resulting gender/knowledge/technology variables in Electronic Discourse and Pedagogy led to a redistribution of power and authority to several male students in the class who served as a primary knowledge source for both women and men. Yet rather than sharing technological knowledge through more decentered collaborative methods,

often the very males who possessed the most expert of knowledge did not

communicate such knowledge to the class or to individuals through

presentations or "tutoring" in ways that empowered students to experiment

with the process. (239)

Interestingly, Haas, at the time a student in the class described, experiences this

negative dynamic despite her competency with and talent for working with technology.

Going back to Elitegurl's example where she was willing to give up the illusion of total

mastery of the weblog form and collaborate with others to achieve the look she wants,

Haas' experience may mean this preference for the mentoring mode over the mastery

one does not always mean a conflict-free road to learning even in a classroom that

values mentoring; students who feel a need to show off their mastery still exist.

At the same time, it's possible that the generational difference between Haas and

the junior high students Tulley describes elsewhere in the article translates into a higher

degree of comfort sharing competencies and learning new ones in the computer-

mediated classroom for the younger students. Referring to the "Cybergrrl Project," a

webpage and digital tools mentoring project for junior-high age girls, Tulley asserts that

the study "reinforced the fact that mentors don't have to be masters" (243). Elitegurl,

who is much closer to junior-high age than Haas, has a preference for mentoring over

mastery that echoes Tulley's results. The contrast between age groups indicates a

potential for increased crossover benefits in the future for the feminist classroom, or

even in other spaces that privilege collaboration, such as software design. Once again,

the peer-to-peer mentoring that happens on personal weblogs through the comments

feature and the friends page impact identity in positive ways by creating a technological comfort zone.

Along the same lines, there is evidence that the mentoring mode is winning over the mastery one even in more traditional blog discourse, and that may be due to the increasing number of women who embrace inclusion of traditionally "feminine" modes of journaling within the public space of the Blogosphere. Speaking as an academic blogger who also maintains a LiveJournal, keeping the two halves separate becomes onerous, and at times difficult to divide. My solution has been to post a redirect link to my academic blog and to combine. With this in mind, academic weblogs with their more traditional blogrolls and goals that more closely approximate knowledge-building, will still have personal posts that vent. When venting happens, the outpouring of support from peers through comments gives academic bloggers a support network that is both faster and larger than that available face-to-face. For example, in an August 23, 2004 post on Techsophist.net entitled "Blogging and Warm-up Time" I vent about a frustrating experience with summer school composition bloggers. Not coincidently, that post is the most linked and viewed post on the site because it gave others the opportunity to work this situation through using the multitude of their experiences until consensus was reached. A very few commenters (the dialogue extended to several weblogs at the same time including *Kairosnews* and *Weblogg-ed*) chose the mastery mode over the mentoring one, misreading the situation as a call for an "authority" to "fix" the situation rather than a "let's think this through together because it opens up interesting possibilities" one, but the weblog form assures that theirs won't be the only words. This kind of collaborative support structure can also assist the kind of questioning and

working through that identity construction calls for. As a sort of bonus, the open

structure of linked blogs and comments gives hope that blogs, especially personal

weblogs, can create the technological comfort zones needed to incubate an identity that

includes all things techy (including the textual technology of writing itself) for these

adolescent girls.

Empowerment and Competency

Yet another benefit of the technological identity that personal weblogs can foster

is how it can cross over to learning other new technologies. For example, the

advantages of newer technologies such as text messaging and moblogging didn't need

to be explained to the eighteen teens from Kingman, Kansas I was recently on a plane

with—as soon as the plane landed and the interminable wait for deplaning began a

curious series of dinging sounds escalated—they were busily texting each other since

getting out of their seats wasn't possible. It's possible some were also moblogging

about their journey to New York City in their seats; telephoning entries to LiveJournal is

an increasingly used option, and an obvious application for this cell phone-conscious

age group. Howard Rheingold in *Smart mobs : the next social revolution* tells about the

even more pervasive texting culture in Japan and makes predictions about living in a

world that's always "on":

> If mobile telephony and texting alone were the only agents of change, the
>
> world's cultures would be facing a major shift in norms, relationships, and
>
> social power. Today's mobile devices, however, are only part of a larger
>
> smart mob infrastructure. "Peer-to-peer" methodologies like the one that
>
> made Napster possible are converging on mobile internet devices,

providing opportunities for massive device-to-device collective actions.

(28)

Given Rheingold's concentration on mobile technologies, the current trend for cities to provide free wireless in their urban centers, for example, as in Philadelphia, has massive implications. Keep in mind that when adolescent girls make tech a part of their identity, new technologies are embraced and sometimes manipulated into unpredicted new uses. A world where this kind of innovation is not the exclusive province of a single gender will be a richer one for all.

Defining the Individual: Who Am I Today?

Identity and the Public Face

The foundation of the personal weblog for the adolescent girl is the question, "Who am I today?" The answer may be expressed by a daily log, a vent, a quiz, photos, song lyrics, or a list of "100 Things About Me," but the primary function of the personal weblog is to construct identity in text and in public. One interesting entry point into the idea of constructing identity in personal weblogs is Patricia Bizzell's foundational examination of the public face of woman in the rhetorical sphere, "Praising Folly: Constructing a Postmodern Rhetorical Authority as a Woman." In it she moves the female Folly from Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly*, pictured in an academic gown with bells and motley hat, to a more contemporary sphere when she proposes that since "a woman would have to be a fool to speak in public, if to do so means incurring such sanctions" (33) a closer examination of what being a fool means may have merit, may even form a more complex and enriching way to envision a female authority. Certainly the overwhelmingly male Slashdotters mentioned in Chapter Three felt that they had a

good handle on what foolishness was and just who embodied it. Bizzell positions the postmodern rhetorical Folly as "ineffectual, marginal," and compares her to "the early Greek Sophists, who owed their rhetorical success to their wanderings across the boundaries of many city-states" (41). Bizzell's concept of a woman's rhetorical authority expresses "compassion from the margins, a rhetor who speaks as a woman-fool might find ways to make common cause with those who speak from the margins of other racial, sexual, or social-class positions. Exactly what we need now is a rhetorical authority that moves from margin to center, a center reconceived as expanding to the circumference" (41). This view of Folly fits well with the needs of a society such as the United States that wishes to include formerly excluded social, racial, and gendered groups into public discourse, but is hampered by a tradition that excludes them and their interests by default. The constructed "folly" these girls embody in text when they dare to write about subjects "on the margins" benefits other writers in more mainstream venues by making personal concerns less easily marked off and out. By sheer numbers, they are making the definition of what acceptable public discourse is more diffuse and inclusive.

Identity and Authority

Applying this reading of a postmodern rhetorical authority to what adolescent girls are doing in spaces such as LiveJournal also gives an interesting twist to the idea of authority. By constructing themselves textually, visually, and in public, these girls open themselves to charges of foolishness by those ascribing to a more traditional vision of public discourse. For example, on November 18, 2004, partway through the four-month study, Rapidperryfan gets a "flame" comment and consequently converts

her public weblog to friends-only with an occasional public post. The comment, titled in

shouting all-caps, "SHUT THE FUCK UP YA FUCKING LOOSERS" with its telling

misspelling of "losers," declares "it doesnt matter that queerbaits not a word, i could call

u a cuntface (also not a real word...) but it doesnt mean that u bitches arent one! YA

FUCKIN CUSTIESSSSSS." Not very pretty language, and a direct attempt to silence

Rapidperryfan and take away her authority over her space and words by denigrating her

person, sexuality, and friendships. Her initial response was a quiet, "Another stupid

random comment, one more reason to make my lj friends only. Sounds like a plan to

me." Later, she replies directly in the comments area and writes, "I found it rather funny

how you would never be able to say any of this to any of our faces, yet like always you

are able to say anything online. Hey, why don't you get some balls and say it to our

faces. But I know that would never happen, but in person you'd just be like "oh, hi..."

Good try." Her reasoned response to this outright attack shows a fairly sophisticated

rhetorical strategy, one that seals her authority.

When she refuses to back down after this direct attempt to silence her,

Rapidperryfan shows that her identity includes a constructed rhetorical authority, a

different one from the agonistic one more common in blogs where flame wars are

accepted and considered by some to be an art form. Adolescent girls in personal

weblogs also begin an inquiring life, a public one that includes what Bizzell calls

"wanderings across the boundaries" (41) of what others insist public discourse must be.

Developing the habit of expressing "compassion from the margins" (41) at an early age

also means a greater likelihood of developing learning habits that cross over into other

areas of life, including the feminist classroom with its focus on mentoring and

collaboration.

As pointed out by Belenky et al in *Women's Ways of Knowing*, constructing and

reconstructing oneself textually can have far-reaching benefits. One rhetorician who

agrees and examines this idea using digital space is Ellen Cushman. Her thoughtful

multimedia examination of identity construction, "Toward a Rhetoric of New Media:

Composing (me)dia" in the Spring 2004 *Computers and Composition Online* describes

the process as "a circular process that involves fluency with the topoi of performance,

space, time, arrangement, multimedia, and interaction" and cautions that "one must

have a sustained tolerance for dissonant harmonies, for opaque transparencies, and for

overlapping divergences." Positioned as this text is, scrolled and overlapping an image

of a beadwork on a loom, lends the text an additional layer of persuasive authenticity as

it argues for "overlapping divergences."
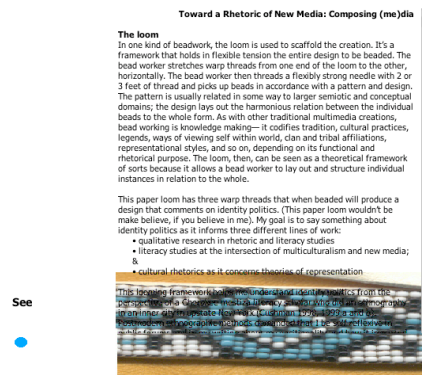

Figure 9. "Looming" from Ellen Cushman's "Toward a Rhetoric of New Media: Composing (me)dia"

Cushman's placement of her Native American Mestiza heritage in the center of the

argument rather than the usual cultural placement to the side also fits well with Bizzell's

privileging of the boundaries and borders as rhetorical home ground in a feminist

postmodern rhetorical authority.

Since adolescent girls certainly aren't occupying cultural center ground in digital spaces—though in sheer numbers they very well may—Cushman's use of multimodal expression is a good fit for their situation as cultural explorers of inner space in a digital public place. For example, after getting her driver's license, Miababe changed her journal to a visual format that scrolls her posts next to a photo of a lush, Canadian road that invites a long afternoon drive. Driving changes her life significantly, and her weblog shows it as well as tells it.
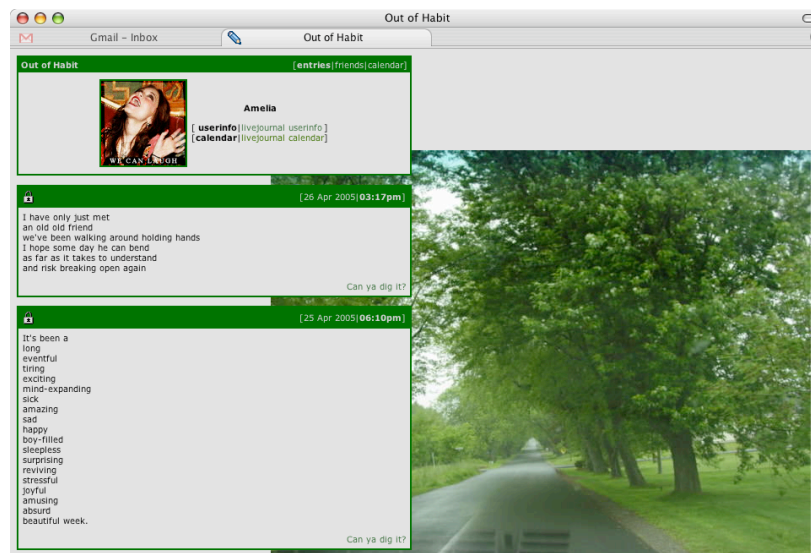
Figure 10. Visual Boundary Blurring in Miababe's Weblog

Some dealing in more traditional discourse may trot out the "not significant" and "just personal" labels for the ultimately very significant work that's being done by adolescent girls in LiveJournal. Constructing a fluid, growing self using text, sight, and sound is significant when judged by criteria such as the importance of the process itself; the outgrowth of skills; the habit of daily writing and reflection; and the habit of mentoring others as wells as seeking peer-mentors. As Herring el al point out in their conclusion to "Women and Children Last: The Discursive Construction of Weblogs," "Excluding personal journals—defining them as less important or "not weblogs"—not

only minimizes women's and teens' contributions to the evolution of blogging, but overlooks broader *human* motivations underlying the weblog phenomenon." Sure, the product may seem banal at times; for that matter, so does some punditry. However, the process itself is valuable, as are those "broader *human* motivations."

Sexual Identity

Another aspect of personal weblogs and identity formation that some find marginal is its tendency to include discussions about sexuality and romance. Earlier this year when informally presenting my work to a group of education students, one non-traditional student, a mother of a teenage daughter, showed enthusiasm for my project in a way I, as a feminist researcher and also a mother of an adolescent daughter and son, found deeply troubling. She was thrilled that I was researching LiveJournal because, she reasoned, I could tell her how to break into her daughter's "Friends-Only" LiveJournal.

Setting aside how, ethically speaking, I could sanction such an act, she reasoned that as a mother I would automatically see her point of view, which was, "I want to know what she's doing and who she's doing it with," a clear expression of the fear and anxiety the onset of sexual awareness and activity in our children can produce. Needless to say, she was disappointed in my viewpoint, which is that I wouldn't help her in her quest, even if I could. We talked about how this space is not necessarily a detailed, accurate recounting of the days; in fact, some significant dramatizing and "trying on" of different viewpoints can happen. Weblogs are different from other genres where fact and fiction are clearly delineated, and a parent may be too close to the day-to-day reality of her child's life to read such a space comfortably. In "Blogging thoughts:

personal publication as an online research tool," Torill Mortensen & Jill Walker reflect on the differences between a weblog and other genres:

> …weblogs straddle the boundaries between publication and process, between writing towards others and writing for oneself. A weblog is always both for oneself and for one's readers. If it were only for oneself, a private diary would be more useful. If it were only for readers, and not a tool for oneself, a more polished and finished form of publication would probably be more appropriate. Blogs exist right on this border between what's private and what's public, and often we see that they disappear deep into the private sphere and reveal far too much information about the writer. When a blog is good, it contains a tension between the two spheres, as delicate a balancing act as the conversation of any experienced guest of the French salons of the 19th century. (256-257)

The tension between writing for self while overtly writing for others, especially a selected set of others in the case of "Friends Only" blogs, makes a unique space, one well-formed for working through issues of identity that include sexuality. The tendency to "disappear deep into the private sphere" (256) Mortensen and Walker mention is much more acceptable and less presumptuous when the audience is limited to selected peers.

Such intimate writing does not, however, translate well for an unintended audience, i.e., an enraged mother expecting evidence of dirty deeds. Parents are rarely part of the intended audience for this group, and my placement as a blog scholar who is also the mother of a fellow blogger hinged on my authority as a "real" blogger with a

traceable web-presence over time. It also hinged on establishing trust. Consequently,

as a mother and researcher, I do not even want to know the address of my daughter's

LiveJournal. As soon as my daughter knew I would be doing research in this area, she

made her space "Friends-Only," just in case I stumbled on her journal one day. Instead

of feeling threatened by this or assuming that deep, dark things were going on, I see

this as a good move for both of us. She keeps her safe peer space and I don't have to

worry about knowing far more about my daughter than I really need to know. The case

study bloggers know this, and it adds to their comfort in letting me read their weblogs.

They know I'm there in my researcher role and not my mom role. Luckily, since the

weblogs have archives going back as far as three years, it is easy to track any possible

chance in subject frequency or "silencing" my presence may have caused; there was

none.

Trying on sexual identities, thinking through crushes, taking sexually explicit

quizzes *a la* Cosmo girl, or sharing the down-and-dirty details are meant to be peer-to-

peer exchanges. The anonymous or pseudonymous status of most personal weblogs

helps open things up also. David A. Huffaker and Sandra L. Calvert in "Gender,

identity, and language use in teenage blogs" agree, and point out that "In a virtual world,

where flexibility and anonymity are possible, adolescents may feel more comfortable

expressing their sexual orientation and exploring their sexual identity beyond social

prescriptions. In online forums, including weblogs, language is a key means through

which sexual identity can be expressed and explored." Not surprisingly, some of the

case study bloggers did just that. Sugarkisses felt comfortable enough expressing her

sexual orientation to come out as a lesbian in her LiveJournal. Elitegurl gave day-to-day

details of the flirty boy-girl interactions typical of late middle school/early high school

years and an occasional quiz with sexual content (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Sexually-Focused Quiz. Note the number of times this quiz has been taken.

Rabidperryfan, the only fully public blogger in the project (who switched to friends-only

after the four-month project window), was somewhat more buttoned-down, but still

wrote about flirtation and dating situations. Not unexpectedly, Huffaker and Calvert find

that "half of all bloggers discuss sexual identity and love relationships,

boyfriends/girlfriends, or 'crushes.' Discourse of this type dovetails nicely with the kinds

of developmental issues, e.g., establishing a mature sexual identity (Erikson, 1993), that

adolescents are experiencing in real life." Such a large part of the developing

adolescent identity flourishes in a place where it can be discussed, dissected, and

examined from several angles by others also in the midst of a changing self. Miababe was the only blogger to resort to private entries about sexual situations, but she augmented these private writings with long passages of song lyrics from Ani Di Franco, sometimes with the significant lines and phrases in bold, leading a canny reader to deduce that the private entries were most likely about a romantic or sexual situation gone wrong (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Song Lyrics Used as Commentary on a Romantic/Sexual Situation.

She also apologized more than once to the people on her friends list for having so many private entries and promised that it wouldn't be a permanent trend.

Clearly, to Miababe and the others, the interaction between bloggers and the collaborative energy that produces was just as important as the writing itself. José van Dijck in "Composing the Self: Of Diaries and Lifelogs" asserts that personal weblogs "are perhaps primarily about synchronizing one's experience with others, about testing one's evaluations against the outside world" and calls blogging "a ritual of exchange:

bloggers expect to be signaled and perhaps to be responded to." Michelle Gumbrecht in

"Blogs as 'Protected Space'" finds that even with a blogger who mainly uses her blog as

a place to vent, "she [the blogger] did believe that with a blog, there is the "possibility of

life-altering exchanges with others", as opposed to a diary, which has "no interaction",

and "it won't change my life." Given that the quoted blogger sets up a simplistic binary

between paper and digital that discounts the documented benefits the paper diary or

journal has on identity development, how then, does writing in digital spaces construct

or develop sexual identity in a different or better way?

Especially when it comes to issues of sexual identity, the advantages of the

personal weblog over a locked paper diary for adolescent girls are many. Using the

aforementioned increased affinity with technology as well as with peer mentoring and

the crossover benefits that garners and the obvious benefit of increased writing time,

personal weblogs as a zone for identity construction takes those benefits and enhances

the already ongoing identity process. Studying this process in place through the four

months of posts with the case study bloggers lends an up-close insight into the process

rarely seen. The frequency of posting also indicates that this process fills a need that is

not satisfactorily being filled elsewhere.

One reason could be that in this increasingly mobile culture where families and

friends move often, a girl may not have a best friend right next door to talk with over

cookies and milk. Even if she does, chances are that after-school activities, sports,

work, or family responsibilities get in the way of what used to be ample time to go over

to a friend's house and aimlessly chat. The chatting is still going on, but it is far more

likely to be on IM or asynchronously using LiveJournal (or another space like it) while

simultaneously doing homework and watching television. Given that discontinuity in

support networks formerly common face-to-face, the personal weblog becomes more

than just an alternative space for identity construction; it may be the primary space,

especially for a rich, textual investigation of identity-related issues such as sexuality.

Emotion and the Emoticon

Allied with the idea that personal weblogs are spaces where adolescent girls

discuss sex, which they do among many other things, is the idea that these personal

weblogs are hotbeds of overweening emotion with little "real" discussion going on.

Bizzell's concept of the female Folly as a postmodern rhetorical authority explains the

quickness with which this particular taunt is given. She reminds her readers of the

historical view of women who speak publicly as "unchaste" and points out the related

implications that "one must by definition be a sexed being in order to be susceptible to

the charge of unchastity, and this charge is almost always applied only to women. On

the other hand, to be charged with unchastity is to be unsexed, in the sense that the

unchaste woman has had her sex held up to public scrutiny as worthless" (31). Defining

women as uncontrollable founts of sexuality and emotion is a longstanding Western

rhetorical tradition and a useful one for excluding them from public discourse. One way

its usefulness is still exhibited on the web is when women do step out and "join the

conversation" and exhibit any degree of justified emotion within their public discourse in

a weblog, say, an expression of anger about their gender being defined as emotional

and irrational, their position is then used as proof that women as a gender are too

emotional to rationally discuss "important topics." Ironically, the most irrational and

nonproductive emotional tradition in online discourse, the "flame war," is a typically male

behavior that fans the flames of anger for its own sake or for the amusement of the inciter. This, of course, is acceptable because it is a form of competition similar to other male preening competitions such as doing the dozens and not to be taken "personally."

Within the world of adolescent personal weblogs, expressing emotion is far more acceptable for young women—and young men. LiveJournal builds emotion into the template by giving users two options unique to LiveJournal and other blogging software based on the LiveJournal model. In the header area of each post, users may choose to fill in the blank for "music" and can pick from an extremely detailed list of emoticons for "mood."
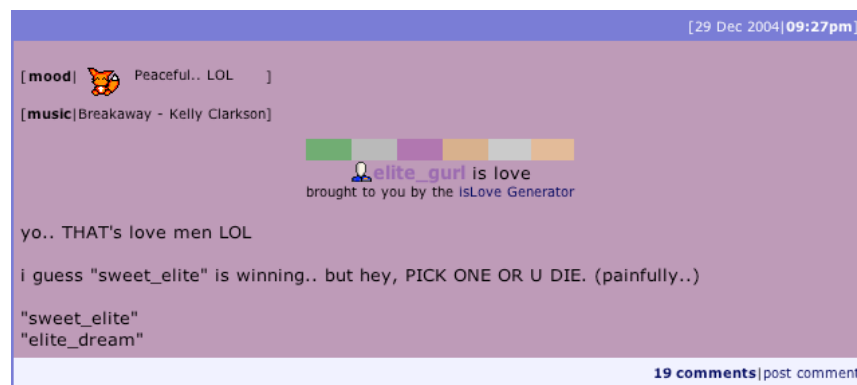
Figure 13. A Weblog that Uses Both the Mood and the Music Indicators.

There are also multiple sets of emoticons available that center on different themes, colors, or both. Figure 13 shows a typical heading with both of these options used. Elitegurl chose the Foxies set of emoticons, but other common forms include jumping kittens, Mac screens, Goth girls, or hamsters. Not every user takes advantage of these options, but the fact that they exist gives users an easy way to immediately give an emotional context for their post. The use of emoticons within the text of weblog posts is a subject in and of itself that is outside the scope of this project, but Huffaker and Calvert have some statistical data that have interesting implications. They found that

contrary to their expectations, adolescent males and females did not use emoticons differently. Even more interesting was their finding that males used emoticons more often that females, a finding very much contrary to their expectations. The fact that only one of the four case study bloggers in my project routinely used the mood and music indicators may mean that emotion for these girls is more easily expressed with the nuances possible with textual detail. Huffaker and Calvert's findings about male bloggers and emoticons may have much more to do with the emoticon's functional ease: just like the gendered journal entries typical of males Gannett mentions in *Gender and the Journal* that were "not very interested in self-disclosure or self-examination on paper" but were "quite candid in other ways, documenting their academic and social achievements, lapses, and irritations almost meticulously" (164). Rather than expanding on implications, emoticons for adolescent males may form an emotional shorthand that takes away the messiness of prose description. If the case study bloggers are any indication, analysis and detail are fundamental elements of a blog post that inspires others to link and to comment. For these girls, overuse of emoticons and using them to box off emotion into a limited space doesn't fit well with the personal weblog agenda. The process of writing about identity itself allows for far more nuances than emoticons can handle, and personal weblogs value nuanced writing more than lists.

Defining the "We": Community and Identity

Even though the discussion in this chapter so far centers on identity development for the individual, the role of community has been an integral part of that discussion. It can be argued that the most significant aspect of personal weblogs in a community such as LiveJournal is just that—community. Obvious pedagogical connections to Bruffee's

work on collaboration in the classroom can be made, but even more interesting is how frequent commenting and linking by others acts as an accelerator for personal growth and achievement, one more pronounced in an online environment because of its immediacy.

It sounds so simple that it may not need to be said, but bloggers who get many comments on their entries tend to write more often than bloggers who metaphorically stand alone. Frequency of posting connects directly to the common wisdom that frequent writing practice translates into improvement and an increased likelihood of more complex thinking, in other words, "writing to learn." When Jim Porter writes that "the revolution is the networked computer and the social/rhetorical contexts it creates and the way its use impacts publishing practices" (385), his words not only describe his present tense, but also predict the social/rhetorical context blogging now forms. The writing, meme passing reminiscent of folded notes in school, venting, and the related supportive comments personal weblogs generate connect well to what José van Dijck in "Composing the Self: Of Diaries and Lifelogs" calls a "gift culture":

> Opening up one's secret diary to a selection of friends and relatives, and expecting them to do the same, is an old practice refurbished by bloggers. Attaching items of cultural contents is quite similar to swapping music albums, books or personal accessories—a system of sharing symbolic meanings with friends that is firmly rooted in the material culture of gift exchange. But the potential to open up this process to an anonymous and potentially large readership is new; bloggers are constantly connected to the world at large, and aware of their exposure.

Van Dijck's comparison of personal weblogs to their paper cousins is apt and becoming a common trope in weblog definition, but may prove inadequate when examining community in personal weblogs more closely.

A better metaphor for the joined weblogs LiveJournal makes possible may be simulation computer games such as *The Sims* with its three-dimensional feel, sense of ownership through building houses and designing avatars, emphasis on gaining and maintaining friendships, and groups of constructed families housed in neighborhoods. This dimensionality better describes the living, breathing aspects of LiveJournal friends groupings; each member connects to another in a web of transparent, threadlike words, forming bonds that may be as strong as those they have to friends in the flesh. Indeed, many friends groupings center on girls who know each other in real life, including some who may have moved too far away for daily contact due to parents and jobs. These core girls will then draw in friends from their new location into the group, forming a larger, more diverse grouping. Further study in how these groupings grow and what ratios of known/unknown in real life friendships develop could lend insight into what aspects of personal weblogs attract readers. Blogs with higher web-only friends ratios could mean a blog with good writing and compelling content.

Applying Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places* to this view of personal weblogs as a neighborhood simulation adds another interesting idea—that of Bachelard's concept of "intimate immensity" (183-210). Analyzing images from poetry that convey "vastness," he writes the following:

The two kinds of space, intimate space and exterior space, keep

encouraging each other, as it were, in their growth. To designate space

that has been experienced as affective space, which psychologists do

very rightly, does not, however, go to the root of space dreams. The poet

goes deeper when he uncovers a poetic space that does not enclose us in

affectivity. Indeed, whatever the affectivity that colors a given space,

whether sad or ponderous, once it is poetically expressed, the sadness is

diminished, the ponderousness lightened. Poetic space, because it is

expressed, assumes values of expansion. (201)

To continue Bachelard's idea of intimate immensity and apply it to personal weblogs,

the feelings of intimacy evoked by the solitude and feelings of contemplation usually

found when writing an entry fuses with the feeling of vastness triggered by the equally

immense structure that the entry joins. The individual then is immersed. Some bloggers

when talking about how time passes quickly when working on their weblog, describe

that feeling in ways that mirror descriptions of the ecstatic state more traditionally

claimed by poets when in touch with the "muse." Laura Berry in "On the Subject of

Blogs" takes a more poststructuralist view:

…blogs, in form and in content, act out the vexed nature of subjectivity as

we poststructuralist readers have come to think of it. The performative

nature of the supposedly discrete self, the permeable boundaries of that

self, its incoherence, historical position, and a necessarily fluid relation

between the larger and largely imagined world of people and things and

commerce and our imagined selves - that's what blogs are all about. Blogs

don't record or reflect on the complexities of subjectivity; blogs enact the

complex self by always being several things at once, and above all by

making the very idea of a private self a publicly constructed, and playfully

imagined, virtual object of desire.

What Berry calls "the performative nature of the supposedly discrete self" gives a more

down-to-earth reasoning for why blogging about supposedly private things is so

tantalizing for so many. It's possible that the emotion Bachelard attempts to describe,

that feeling of being both contained in oneself and yet part of a much greater, even

infinite whole, and this performative need are really different facets of the same

syndrome. Observing the "vastness" is not enough—one needs to dive in, to "perform."

Berry's term, "permeable boundaries of the self" also explain how a sense of community

builds and why bloggers find it compelling. Bloggers using the LiveJournal system, like

others, simply want to belong, and the personal weblog structure gives a unique and

ultimately supportive way to achieve that goal through a selected and growing

community.

That unique nature may also build a sense of community more effectively than

the traditional blog with a blogroll. Anita Blanchard in "Blogs as Virtual Communities:

Identifying a Sense of Community in the Julie/Julia Project" examines what constitutes a

sense of community and whether a more traditional blog that utilizes a blogroll inspires

such feelings in its readers/participants. She claims it does, and that it "may create

communities of blogs who share an audience. If this interlinking of blogs develops

around particular topics, it is possible that a sense of community may develop and be

shared between these interactive blogs."

Given the more limited interactive nature of the traditional blog, this claim means an even greater chance for a sense of community to develop within a LiveJournal cluster. An individual blog with a blogroll, defined as a list of links to other blogs that the home blog author finds interesting and wishes to share with her readers, lacks the tightly integrated structure LiveJournal gives for reader's "Friends" blogs. In order to be equivalent, a blogroll would need to set up a linked RSS feed page that included each of the designated blogs' posts, similar to what Bloglines or Kinja.com does. That is not the case; interactivity in a blogroll depends on "the kindness of strangers" while the LiveJournal Friends page gives a more open look at what each blog is without the insulation of another layer of links. The blending of posts available on the Friends page is even augmented by an optional email system that alerts "friends" when there is a new comment to one of their posts. Clearly, fostering a sense of community is the point, and a fundamental aspect of the personal weblog. This community sets it apart from blogs with the one-way communication of a blogroll of links and may be an indicator of a future where sharing communities and interests through technologies such as Bloglines and de.lirio.us will be a more common way to define self to others.

Conclusion

The personal weblog as a site for identity formation for the adolescent girl is more than theory at this point: it is theory in action. Identity construction is addressed on several levels within the personal weblog. First, the format itself heightens familiarity with digital tools and the online environment, making it more likely that adolescent girls will embrace digital culture, as called for by the AAUW report, *Tech Savvy.* Next, the contemplative and intimate nature of the space, especially for those girls who choose

"Friends Only" journals, lends an accepting atmosphere for those who wish to vent or speculate about their day-to-day lives or their aspirations. Within that role, it also gives a uniquely apt space for reasoning through textually sexual identity and sexual issues. The sense of community evoked by the heightened interactivity available also works towards these aims.

I propose that identity development and the need for a space that is both public and private may be behind the steady increase proportionately and numerically of adolescent girls in the LiveJournal user base. Even over the course of the past year, the increase has been steady, with the female user base rising from 65.2% to 67.3%, the majority of those being between the ages of 15 and 21 as per the statistics on April 30, 2005. This indicates that a need is being filled and provides an important part of the rationale for my study, "A Public View of Private Writing." This increase is significant also because by sheer numbers, adolescent girls in personal weblogs are making the definition of what acceptable public discourse is more diffuse and inclusive. This change can do nothing but benefit all who use the internet as a public venue for discourse by altering the technogeek stereotype to include a wide range of people, all competent.

If the future of blogs is to be a digital version of Habermas' public sphere, enriching and enhancing what is acceptable for public discourse must happen if the definition of public is to include all races, ages, and genders. Currently, the choice the four case study bloggers made to eventually convert to friends-only access is justified by the at-times intensely personal texts generated by the identity-formation process. How I entered that community as a researcher without significantly altering its structure and outcomes was detailed in Chapter Two. Needless to say, it would not have been

possible without the previous work of feminist researchers such as Gesa Kirsch who writes about similar situations.

I'm not sure that the need for an adjustable audience filter for personal weblogs will ever change, at least for adolescent girls. Blogs such as the ones these girls write, blogs that truly work through the day-to-day identity formation issues these girls deal with, need the security that a self-selected audience provides. Some trust to the vastness of the internet to give them that security. Others prefer knowing precisely who their audience is. However, as these girls get older, chances are the online writing habit will remain after that need for privacy passes and theirs may be the generation of online women to finally blur the boundary between personal and objective writing and make "women's subjects" mainstream.

CHAPTER FIVE: CASE STUDIES

Introduction

When I first thought of doing this project, my goal was, like most researchers, to answer some questions about what was going on in the space I chose to look at. I wondered. I wondered why adolescent girls chose this digital space, personal weblogs, in such large numbers. 67.3% and still growing says that something is going on there that fills a need for them, and finding out what that need is and how it connects to writing could help classroom writing teachers find that all-important "hook" we all look for when dealing with students who are resistant to writing. I also wondered as a parent who cares deeply about her children's academic and personal success how these spaces contributed to the identity-formation process, how they contributed to that intricate, delicate dance that leads to what Carl Rogers calls self-actualization. Clearly, this was not the entertainment site some school administrators feel justified in blocking from in-school use: it was an expansion of the diary's traditional task of self-investigation, and thus, an important interface with self. At the same time, it is an important literacy site for both technological and textual literacy; places where adolescents choose to play with text, where they write without an academic assignment and in a digital framework that is worth investigating, not condemning.

Chapter Five interprets this look at four months worth of posts from four very distinctive bloggers by first describing the participants themselves and the social and cultural context they bring to the project. After that, the choices they make in designing and utilizing the space are described. I wanted to begin with global features in the structure rather than the posts because that was the participants' most basic way into

the space and their first interaction with the technology that, according to research by

the AAUW and others, is often rejected by adolescent girls. As an open source software

community, LiveJournal actively encourages its users to contribute to the project, with

aptitude and interest the main requirement rather than age or gender; this gives those

interested an excellent opportunity to develop programming and graphic design skills.

Another way users, including adolescent girls, can contribute to the LiveJournal project

is through contests. The current one at the time of this dissertation is a custom template

contest where the best five templates will be added to the template catalog. Chances

are that with adolescent girls forming a key group in LiveJournal, some of the winning

templates will be theirs.

After examining the visual aspects of the personal weblog and the rhetorical

choices the case study bloggers made, the chapter goes on to detail the posts and their

categories. Some categories were far more frequent that others, and how that may

connect to function is discussed. Charts showing category proportion and posting

frequency will act as evidence for the analysis. Besides looking at the posts as

individual expression, the chapter will also look at how they act as community

expression. Post categories that specifically reach out to others such as memes,

quizzes, and photos will be detailed. Following interpretation of data is a discussion of

the community functions of the personal weblog and how the bloggers themselves view

that sense of community.

Finally, no look at the personal weblog would be complete without a look at how

the participants themselves see the experience. Woven throughout the analysis of what

the texts say and what they accomplish rhetorically will be the participants' voices,

heard through their interviews and their posts; clearly these girls have voices and decided opinions, and no study of what they are doing in personal weblogs would be complete without lending expression to their specific viewpoint about what is happening in those digital spaces.

The Case Study Bloggers: A Comfortable World

Geographically, the case study bloggers were a fairly diverse group for their size. With Miababe and Rabidperryfan in Rhode Island, Sugarkisses in Oregon, and Elitegurl in Ontario, Canada, they were far from monocultural. In personality and degree of textual or graphical orientation they were also diverse. Racially they were more monocultural, with Miababe, Rabidperryfan, and Sugarkisses Caucasian-American, and Elitegurl Asian-Canadian. Economically they positioned themselves as either upper-middle to middle class. With a pilot study of four case study bloggers, some lack of economic and racial diversity is to be expected. Also, past examinations of technological literacy such as Cynthia Selfe's *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention* have rightfully pointed out that existing socioeconomic factors out-trump benevolent educational intent every time and in fact, the very projects that intend to break down digital divides in public schools end up reinforcing them through unequal access, funding, and needlessly limiting definitions of literacy (136-137). Speaking of large-scale government-based literacy projects such as *Getting America's Students Ready for the Twenty-First Century*, Selfe writes that despite its intent, "citizens of color and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds continue to have less access to high-tech education and to occupy fewer high-paying positions that make multiple uses of technology than do white citizens or those from

higher socioeconomic backgrounds" (137). With that in mind, the limited economic range encompassed by the case study bloggers is not surprising. Each has their own computer in their room, a luxury that many families cannot afford. In contrast to their ease of access, the depth of involvement these girls have with their weblogs, at times posting multiple times a day, would be difficult to achieve by others with public library or school access only, especially when one considers that a disturbing number of schools block access to blogging sites, limiting access even more. When all is considered, the case study bloggers' economic status fits well within the technological literacy situation that Selfe describes. The following accounts seek to contextualize the case study bloggers socioeconomically and culturally.

Miababe

Although Miababe gives through her weblog the epitome of day-to-day life for a typical American girl, that broad picture of school plays, dances, academic concerns, an active social life with a large group of friends, and family life with her parents and brother holds finer details that tell a slightly more privileged story. She travels often with her family and on her own to places like Maine, Canada, Italy, and Florida. Her family recently bought a second vacation home in Florida, certainly part of the "American Dream," but not something most Americans can say they have. The summer before the case study period, Miababe lived in Washington D.C. and worked as a intern for The Freedom Forum, a nonpartisan foundation dedicated to a free press and free speech which focuses on issues concerning First Amendment and newsroom diversity; once again, a common type of experience for children of a certain class, but not a universal teenaged experience.

She is a junior at a Catholic, co-ed, college-prep high school with impressive statistics for its graduates. The school's web site points out that 98.9% of the students in Ivy High School's (a pseudonym) Class of 2003 have gone on to college. 93% are pursuing a degree at a four-year college or university. Of those at college, 48% were accepted at Ivy League, first-tier or second-tier schools. In addition, 67% of the 2003 graduates received merit scholarships from colleges or other organizations. Not unexpectedly with those results, 74% of the current students are members of the Rhode Island and National Honor Societies. Like many other high school juniors, Miababe took the PSATs this year, but has not indicated in her blog any particular university that she is interested in.

One thing that is important to her is finally being sixteen and able to drive. She had her birthday during the study, and immediately took the drivers test, passed, and got to drive the Volkswagen Passat that had been waiting for her in the garage. It is her pride and joy. Having a car changed some things for her; she now can be the one giving rides and is now more able to go out with friends whenever she wants rather than being limited to when she can get a ride. Unfortunately, also during the study she crashed the car, injuring her writing hand and putting the car in the shop for some time. She blogs about this also, and it gives her the chance for some writing and thinking about responsibility and consequences. Other interests from her LiveJournal interests list includes Ani DIFranco, Ben Folds, big vintage sunglasses, consignment stores, hating Sundays, Mary Kate and Ashley, *The Bell Jar*, travel, and sleeping late. Judging by these interests and her blog, despite her somewhat privileged background, she seems to be a normal, likeable teenaged American girl without any pretensions or attitude.

Miababe is the blogger with the longest blogging history in the study, beginning her LiveJournal on April 7, 2002, and currently has 885 entries as of June 3, 2005. She has posted 666 comments to other blogs and her blog has received 835 comments. Transposed to paper and ink, that would make a hefty stack of paper. She also was the only blogger to extensively use private entries during the study. Although others admit to using them from time to time, Miababe had a personal situation—judging from the song lyrics posted during that time, most likely a romantic situation gone wrong—that she wanted to write about while keeping to herself. The LiveJournal option of private entry worked well for her, but for the purposes of the study also made her entry total lower than it actually was.

Rabidperryfan

Also a sixteen-year-old junior at Ivy High School in Rhode Island, Rabidperryfan gains the academic advantages of this college-prep school as well. She writes far more about academics than her friend, Miababe, and intends to be a Veterinary Medicine or Pre-Med major in college. Her pet schnauzer, Schatzi, may be at the root of that interest, but an honest interest in the natural sciences is evident. She took Anatomy as a freshman and continues to take challenging, college-prep classes. Unlike her friend Miababe who went to Italy over Spring Break, Rabidperryfan spent her time visiting potential colleges with her mother. They visited The College of William and Mary, University of Richmond, University of Mary Washington, and University of Virginia, with Richmond remaining a top choice.

Sports are important for Rabidperryfan and she is a member of the school's girls' softball team, which was a contender for the state title this year. She also attends other

school sporting events such as football games and blogs about them. How she performs on the field is important to her, and more than one blog post includes an intricate analysis of her softball training sessions or an analysis of the team's current strengths and weaknesses. She is also active in her church, is a lectern (Sunday school teacher) and attends Mass. Her LiveJournal interests list includes Abercrombie, baseball, books, dogs, the television show *Friends* and Matthew Perry (the source of her user name), sticky notes, John Mayer, Tracy Chapman, Jack Johnson, and softball.

Economically, her background closely fits that of the corporate child. She self-identifies herself as middle class, and moved to Rhode Island just before her freshman year from a major metropolis in the Midwest in a job-related family move. Her blog also indicates a time when she lived in yet another Northeastern city; frequent job-related moves are typical for families where one or both spouses work for major corporations. As a researcher, this was a situation I understood well. My father moved us every three to five years for Boeing Aircraft. For corporate families, each promotion has a new city attached, and corporate children learn to quickly socialize and fit in to each new location. Activities, sports, or talents such as piano or violin help these children make their transition into each new community. Rabidperryfan's softball talent may fit that need, and keeping a blog is one way to keep in touch with friends from different locations.

Rabidperryfan began blogging on LiveJournal September 16, 2002, soon after her move to Rhode Island. She has 749 journal entries, has posted 592 comments to other LiveJournals, and has received 315 comments to her posts. She also uses private

entries, but they were not a significant factor during the study. She and Miababe are friends in real life, and occasionally comment on each other's posts.

Elitegurl

Elitegurl is a fourteen-year-old freshman in a public high school in Ontario who was thirteen at the beginning of the study. She lives in an apartment with her parents, and for half of the case study period, two cousins from China (a mother and daughter) lived with them while they got settled in Canada. This meant she had to share her room and computer access with her college-aged cousin, a situation that generated frequent vent-posts when she blogged from her friend Rosiepie's house during that time.

She ranks her socioeconomic status as middle to high-middle class, and the details of her life bear this out. Her life is highly structured, with private lessons in piano and French. School is important to her in equal parts as an academic and social outlet. Through the internet she keeps up cultural and personal contacts in Asia, and occasionally mentions anime or a new Chinese computer game that she's found. She views her mother as the family's main breadwinner, and posts fairly often about conflicts with her father over school and the social limits he imposes.

Elitegurl began her LiveJournal on December 31, 2003. She has 121 journal entries overall, but has posted 3,950 comments to other LiveJournals and received 1,677 comments to her own posts. For the length of time blogging this marks an unusual degree of interactivity and sociability, and her written voice confirms this. She gives the impression of being a bubbly, outgoing, essentially cheerful girl, despite the fact that her vent posts equaled her Daily Log posts. She may be Chinese-Canadian, but her persona and Livejournal icon is blonde and a diva.

Her LiveJournal interests list includes acting, anime, bubble tea, drawing, Harry Potter, Hilary Duff, Lindsay Lohan, manga, the Olsen Twins, Paris Hilton, and Tom Felton. She also maintains another site that is co-designed with a friend in Japan and has an anime look. Friendships are important to her, and her commenting history reflects a habit of commenting on virtually every post made by all the people on her friends list. Many of them, in turn, comment back on her posts.

Sugarkisses

Sugarkisses is a fifteen-year-old sophomore at a public high school in Oregon who was fourteen at the beginning of the study and fifteen at its end. She self-identifies her family's economic status as upper-middle, and was the only blogger to also give a dollar range—100,000+. She is active in drama activities at her school, and blogs about social activities with groups of friends. Her family is Catholic and regularly attends Mass, and she blogs about church, as well as more frequent posts about school, friends, and family. Because she has the least number of posts during the four-month period, her textual personality is most difficult to define except by its directness and the state of flux her life appear to be in, according to her posts. She appears to be in the throes of the wildly changeable, dramatic state that defines adolescence for many. Her LiveJournal interests list includes Abercrombie and Fitch, Andy Warhol, acting, artsy fartsyness, church, comfy beds, dogs, fashion design, Kerry '04, Marc Jacobs, *Mean Girls* (a movie), Mary Kate and Ashley, photography, pop art, *The O.C.,* Scarlett Johansson, sharing my faith, Urban Outfitters, and *Vogue.* All of the case study bloggers have LiveJournal Communities listed, but only Sugarkisses's LiveJournals show concrete

evidence of participation in some of those communities. Her graphics work connects

well to her membership in communities such as "Icon Makers" and "IconGradients."

Even though she was the most recent to come to blogging, Sugarkisses had two

sequential LiveJournals during the course of the study and a third, duplicate-post blog

maintained at blog-city.com for a friend who prefers to read from that location rather

than LiveJournal. The first began on May 17, 2004 and ended December 3, 2004 when

she migrated to a new user name and location that eventually became a paid account.

Having a paid account was necessary for her because of her keen interest in the visual

aspects of LiveJournal, especially the icons. The social aspects were important as well,

as her total statistics indicate. In her first LiveJournal, she had 156 entries, posted 2,380

comments, and received 1,199 comments. She has posted 97 entries to her second

LiveJournal, posted 1,317 comments to other LiveJournals and received 723 comments

to her posts. Her combined totals are 253 posts, 3,597 comments posted by her, and

1,922 comments received for her posts. A fair number of her posts are private, but the

friends-only posts are numerous enough to generate multiple comments.

The Weblog Itself: Visual, Textual, Personal

The Look

The first thing a web visitor notices about a personal weblog is its look and how

that differs from other weblogs of its kind. Each of the case study bloggers had a distinct

look for their blog, and the software chosen for this study, LiveJournal, is based on

Drupal, an open source content management system (CMS) known for its flexibility in

use. The LiveJournal version is very customizable, and allows for a range from slap-up

pre-formed templates to made-from-scratch Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) using their

own input system. Figure 14 shows a few of the pre-made templates available.
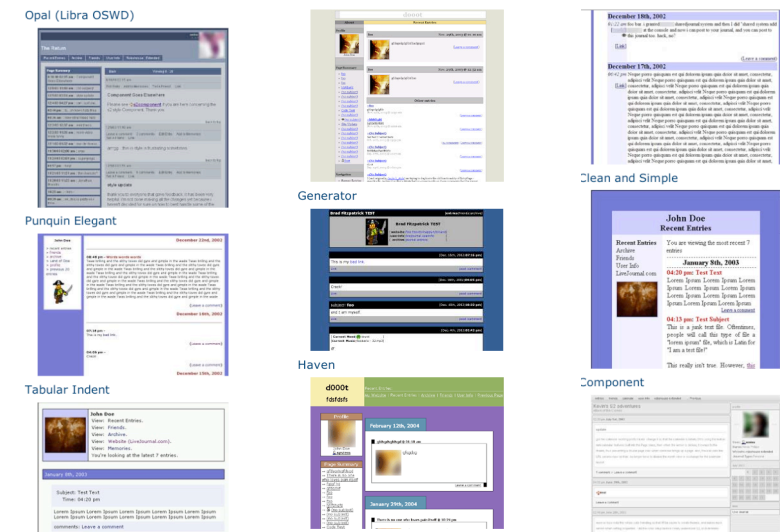
Figure 14. LiveJournal Templates

The above figure shows a variety of color choices and layouts, with additional variation

available through changes in preset color choices. The user's own photos or graphics

can be easily inserted in preset locations within the template. Like much web design,

the template choices are blue-heavy, but all are functional and easy-to-read. In addition

to the default color choices, some templates have several preset color combinations to

choose from besides the usually blue, beige, or grey default setting. Of the case study

bloggers, Rabidperryfan is the only one using a preset template. Miababe, Elitegurl, and

Sugarkisses all use custom templates, with varying degrees of involvement in the

design and implementation. In her interview, Miababe tells about her design choices:

> I can't use html, so I asked my friend from school to set up my journal for
>
> me. I did pick the color though (green) because it's my favorite color. I

took the background picture from my car in Canada, and I used it because

I love nature. My future designs include a black and white picture, maybe

from my trip to Italy, with black and white the colors.

Elitegurl also called on a friend to help her get just the look she wanted with her

personal weblog, admitting that "I, personally am not good at setting up layouts on lj,

thats' why i ask my friends to do it. Otherwise, i'd love to change them often."

Changing often is exactly what Sugarkisses did during the span of this

dissertation. The cool, citrus greens of her initial weblog (Figure 2) changed to a stark,

linear turquoise design with an abundance of white space (Figure 7). That design was

quickly deleted taking its few posts with it and the current design as of May 2005 is a

posh mixture of pink pinstripes on a rich wheat-toned background with a wheat center

section for the posts. It is still a work-in-progress; there are text-overlaps that hint at

coding problems, but this is her space even though the work on it is collaborative.

Sugarkisses's level of involvement with weblog design grew during the study mainly

because her interest in the space seemed to be more strongly visual than that of the

other case study bloggers, thus explaining the frequent visual changes. Not

surprisingly, she was also the least frequent poster and the only blogger to delete posts

during the study. Interacting with the visual space was her primary motivation, and In

order to do that, she had to learn more about the technology behind it. She explains,

"As of right now, I have a simple layout my friend made me. I am working on a new one

with Nicky Hilton (a custom template name). I love customizing things so that they are

mine, and unique." Figure 15 shows the three weblog designs together.

Figure 15. The Three Incarnations of Sugarkisses

In the same way that Sugarkisses's frequent visual weblog changes connect to how she privileges the visual over the textual, Rabidperryfan's choice to stick with one of the LiveJournal templates may connect to her degree of textual orientation. She was by far the most frequent poster in the study, with a high proportion of longer posts as well. It was all about writing for her, and her design comments in her interview reflect that:

> My layout is pretty basic because I'm not really sure how to change it,
> although I mainly picked the design I do have based on its easy but fun
> layout and the monochromatic lighter blues. If I knew how to change it I'd
> probably do an ocean scene with a beach or Jack Johnson's latest CD

cover from In Between Dreams and to go along with both of them I'd

choose a Jack Johnson song. But right now it's fairly basic.

Unlike Sugarkisses, design ideas fail to motivate Rabidperryfan to actually go out and

learn the mid-level HTML or CSS skills needed to work the LiveJournal customization

interface. Figure 16 shows the design's simplicity.
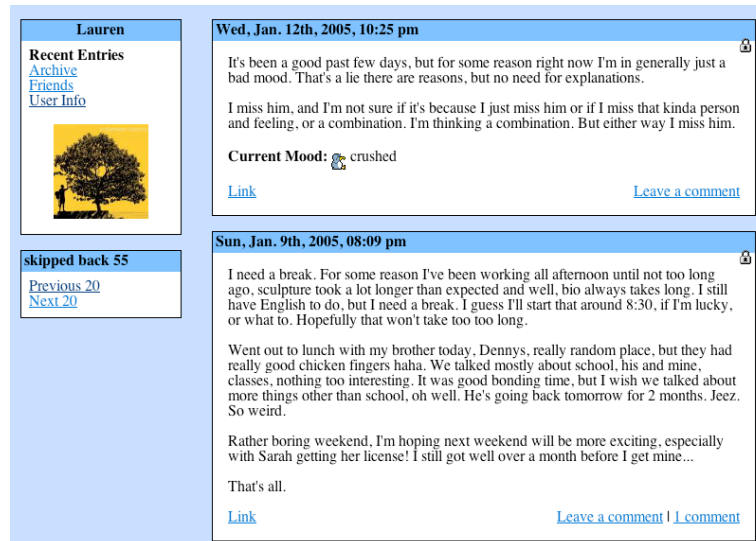
Figure 16. Rabidperryfan's LiveJournal

Rabidperryfan also doesn't collaborate with a friend who has more web design

knowledge to get a look that's closer to her ideas. Since others such as her real-live

friend Miababe did make the effort to find a friend with more knowledge to work with, it's

possible that she is simply too textually focused to care about how the weblog looks

beyond the basics of color and a functional layout.

Color choice itself can also be a reflection of identity and the theoretically infinite

variety of colors and combinations available for use with custom templates give the

bloggers free range for expression. That the case study bloggers made conscious color

choices in their blogs is evident, with Miababe mentioning in her interview that she

chose green because of her love of nature. The basic blue fits Rabidperryfan's

straightforward style, and Elitegurl's Hydrangea blue and Orchid pink/ purple fits her decidedly feminine stance. Sugarkisses's posts reflect an adolescent in a period of rapid change and her changing weblog colors fit that situation.

Icons and Identity

Icons are another basic design feature that express personal identity in the LiveJournal format. LiveJournal has both free and paid accounts, with the paid accounts allowing for more features and additional customization options. One reason some LJers may choose the paid account is the expansion of icons allowed from three to fifteen. Since the icon is attached to both the home weblog and all comments made to posts on other weblogs, the icon is an important expression of identity. Choices commonly made include pop-culture divas such as Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen or Paris Hilton; interest-based choices such as hobbies or sports; scenes from favorite movies; music album covers; or self-portraits. Text can be added to the graphic choice, and flash animation is allowed as well. Figure 17 shows a variety of user icons from the case study bloggers with Miababe first, Elitegurl second, Rabidperryfan third, and Sugarkisses in the last two rows.

Figure 17. Case Study Bloggers' Icons

Figure 17 shows only a few of the many icons that Sugarkisses has available. Her

current Icons page shows forty-two icons, fifteen of which could be used with a paid

account, while the other bloggers stick to the three icons allowed with the free account,

occasionally deleting one to add another. Two of the case study bloggers, Miababe and

Sugarkisses, have self-portrait icons in their rotation. The others do not, but of the four, two—Elitegurl, and Sugarkisses—have female icons from the entertainment world with Cristina Aguilera, Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan, Ashley Olsen, Rachel Bilson, and Hilary Duff shown here. Rabidperryfan shows her pop culture literacy differently with two album covers from acoustic-rock musician Jack Johnson and scenes from the movies *Serendipity* and *Love Actually*.

Although human representations are the most common, icons that show interests or that are just plain quirky exist as well. Sugarkisses describes why icons appeal to her in her interview when she asserts that "Images are great. Nothing speaks your mind better than a picture." Figure 17 shows two of Sugarkisses's more abstract icons that speak her mind, one showing a map of Norway with text that claims "No. of lions=0, No. of tigers=0, main export= trees" and concludes "more like Snoreway." The other is a collection of the "Blue States," the states that supported the Democratic candidate for president, John Kerry, in the 2004 election. With her variety of icon images, Sugarkisses is the clearest example of a blogger who consciously uses visual rhetoric to both persuade others and to define self. The "Blue States" icon was produced with her most frequent collaborator, real-life friend Sideway, as a visual testament to their continued political support for John Kerry. The week after the election was an emotional one for all the case study bloggers, and this icon was a favorite representation of support for her readers, judging by the comments she received.

The remaining case study bloggers focus more on text overall, but still use icons to show mood, personality, or preferences. For example, Miababe has two self-portraits, one smiling in full makeup and the other pensive and clean-scrubbed. Elitegurl's icons

could lead a first-time reader to believe she is a bubbly, outgoing blonde based on the

physical characteristics of her teen queen icons. Her default icon is of a blonde Cristina

Aguilera with "Elitegurl" added in pink script, a possible match in personality, but not in

appearance for the outgoing Asian-Canadian. In contrast, Rabidperryfan has no female-

face icons. Her default icon is the album cover for "In Between Dreams" by Jack

Johnson, which replaced her former default icon, "Brushfire Fairytales," also by Jack

Johnson. The "Brushfire Fairytales" cover depicts a head and shoulders view of Jack

Johnson in a blue rain slicker, which could cause some gender confusion for inattentive

readers, but her frequent citing of songs by Johnson in the "Current Music" line on posts

gives some clue to the icon's source. Her two remaining icons show scenes from

movies—*Serendipity* and *Love Actually*—that both center on the triumph of true love

against all odds, giving a shared-context argumentative stance. It appears that all four

of Rabidperryfan's icons hold an advocacy position, two for her musical preference, and

two for a philosophic point-of-view.

In all cases the icons as well as the total look of the personal weblog speak for

the blogger in ways that text may not be able to do as well. The blog's appearance

gives another layer to the more overt rhetoric expressed textually. The bloggers choose

the colors, textures, layout, and icons with as much thought, and for some with more

thought, as they give their most detailed textual analysis about their daily lives.

The Individual and Her Posts—It's All About Me

After a lifetime of hearing from family members and friends to get a sense of

proportion and that "it's not always all about you," think of the resulting freedom felt by

adolescent girls in a space where it *can* be all about you. Especially when the personal

weblog is Friends-Only, the blogger is free to write about whatever she wants, and the most compelling subject for the case study bloggers was themselves, at times compelling enough to post more than once a day. Figure 18 shows posting frequency for the four case study bloggers.

	Number of Posts	2 Post Days	3 Post Days	4 Post Days	Deleted Posts	Uses Private Posts
Elitegurl	36	3	0	0	0	No
Miababe	72	10	2	1	0	Yes
Rabidperryfan	87	17	2	0	0	Yes
Sugarkisses	31	2	3	0	5	Yes
Total	226	32	7	1	5	
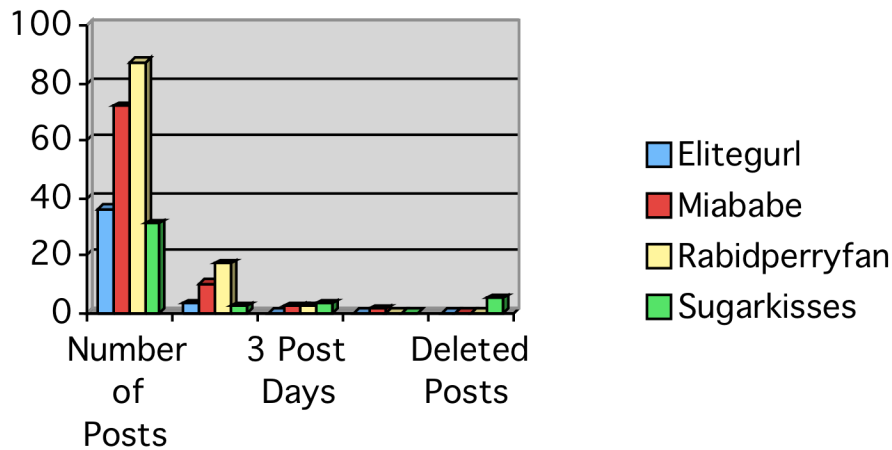
Figure 18. Post Frequency by Category

Rabidperryfan was the most frequent poster, followed by Miababe, Elitegurl, and Sugarkisses. She was also the highest multiple poster, with seventeen two-post days and one three-post day. Miababe was in second place here as well with ten two-post days, two three-post days, and the only four-post day.

Multiple posts serve an important rhetorical strategy: they allow the blogger to set out the events of the day in a fairly detailed first post that is usually a daily log or vent, then follow it with a second post a few hours later that allows the blogger the necessary time to breath before diving in and analyzing what the previous post means. This

connects to Nancy Sommers' work on revision strategies and could be seen as a form of the "looping" she found was common with professional writers. With this in mind, the fact that the two most prolific writers in the study also had the most multiple post days is significant. They had learned the advantages of returning to the day's work for a second, more reflective look. Length of time blogging may also be a factor; Miababe started her LiveJournal on April 7, 2002; Rabidperryfan on September 16, 2002; Elitegurl on December 31, 2003; and Sugarkisses on May 17, 2004. The start dates tally up if one takes into account that Miababe also had a significant number of private posts during the four-month observation period, posts that if added to the visible ones could have placed her in the lead.

Public, Private, Friends-Only, or Gone

All of the bloggers in the study used the Friends-Only option at least part of the time, but only Miababe, Rabidperryfan, and Elitegurl talked about using private posts. In her interview, Miababe talks about her audience filter choices:

> I don't have any public entries because it creeps me out when I don't know who knows what about me. I like to be in control of who knows certain things. So mostly all of my entries are friends-only. I post privately when I'm posting AIM conversations that other people shouldn't read, or song lyrics that other people don't really want to read. In December I had a big secret that I was keeping from my friends, so I posted an unusual amount of private entries.

What Miababe calls "control" is the flip side of what composition theorists call audience awareness. Knowing what posts are appropriate for which audience is a vital step

toward successful persuasive writing in other genres, including academic writing.

Elitegurl also thinks seriously about who her audience is and says that her choice

between filters "all depends on the information i put out, even though it's not that private,

i still put it as friends-only, because internet isn't THAT safe."

On the other hand, Sugarkisses's decision to go Friends-Only has a more

concrete base. She writes, "I am afraid of people I don't like reading my blog, so I make

all entries Friends Only. There is a girl I know from school, and I cannot stand her, and

she also has an LJ. I don't want her reading about my life." Rabidperryfan also has

some history behind her choice to use Friends-Only for a large number of her posts, but

reasons through the different layers of privacy with a bit more reflection:

> As I said before I don't do too many Public entries, random people were
>
> reading them and commenting on them and I really didn't feel comfortable
>
> letting my life open to anonymous individuals. Like am I really going to go
>
> up to a random person on the street and be like "Hi, I'm having boy
>
> troubles, care to listen?" No, I'm not. Making the entries Friends Only
>
> gives me a sense of security because I know who can and cannot read my
>
> entries and I feel safe with them knowing anything I right about, and I trust
>
> them not to go tell others. Private entries come when I'm giving great
>
> details of certain occasions, things I really don't want anyone else to know,
>
> except maybe my best friends; things I wouldn't want to get in the wrong
>
> hands and out there. I also use those entries to let my guard down and
>
> say how I'm really feeling, things I don't want anyone else to know, or are
>
> often embarrassed to share; just as the name is, they are "Private." While

they are things I want to remember and keep tract of in the future, I also

want them private.

Shifting from level to level like this gives these bloggers the security they need to write

freely, and by having that security, they also write more. Because it is self-selected

privacy, incidents like the offensive comment left on Rabidperryfan's blog mentioned in

Chapter Four can still happen; at the time her blog was public. However, rude

comments can be left even on Friends-Only blogs, at least on the splash page. The

usual result is that those comments are deleted, if the blogger is sufficiently motivated to

do so, and that too is a form of control over the space.

During the four-month study another audience selection technique played out—

Sugarkisses abandoned her original weblog and moved on to another weblog with a

new username. She announced the move on her old journal with a "friends cut"

announcement, telling all who wished to migrate to the new space to go there and ask

to be added. Abandoned weblogs are a fact of life on LiveJournal. Of the 7,127,390

LiveJournals in the May 16, 2005 statistics, only 2,642,079 have been updated within

the last thirty days, so having one of the four bloggers migrate was not that unusual.

She then designed a new look, but must have been dissatisfied with some aspect of it

or with blogging as an activity, as she then deleted the new template and all the posts.

Luckily, there were only five posts at the new location, but it was a bad moment for this

researcher all the same. Extreme as it sounds, this too is something that happens with

some regularity with personal weblogs, and even within the limited parameters of a pilot

study it needs to be mentioned. Just as with pen-and-ink diaries, web writers sometimes

throw their work onto the virtual fireplace and roll a log over it so the pages burn better.

In Sugarkisses's case, she left an entry that said she was done with blogging, but the comments left convinced her to start up again. Her new template, one that is graphically a more challenging project, may hold her attention better. The community support and feedback may also keep her writing long enough to succumb to the habit of writing.

The Categories and Primary Use

Even though the posts for the most part were complex enough pieces of writing to easily fit several categories, all had a single category that functioned as the primary reason for the post. Figure 19 shows the posts sorted into primary categories.

| Primary Post Category	Daily Log	Vent	Sexuality	Photos	Meme	Link	School Update	Music Lyrics	Quiz	Total
Elitegurl	9	9	0	1	8	3	4	0	2	36
Miababe	37	16	4	0	0	3	7	5	0	72
Rabidperryfan	31	20	11	0	5	1	14	3	2	87
Sugarkisses	11	8	3	1	3	4	1	0	0	31
Total	88	53	18	2	16	11	26	8	4	226
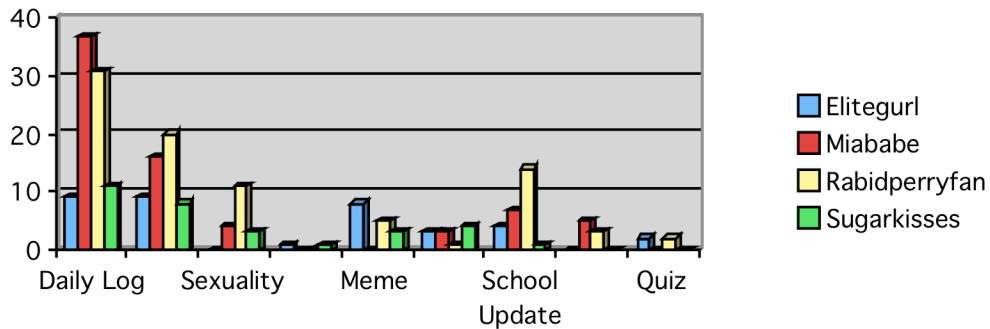
Figure 19. Primary Post Category Frequency

By far the most frequent primary post category was a Daily Log that also reflected on the day's happenings, with eighty-eight total entries fitting this category. It was also the most frequent primary category for each of the case study bloggers, with entries ranging

from Miababe's thirty-seven to Elitegurl's nine. Close behind was the Vent, with fifty-three total posts, followed by School Update with twenty-six, Sexuality with eighteen, Meme with sixteen, Link with eleven, Music Lyrics with eight, Quiz with four, and Photos two.

The Daily Log

The Daily Log may be the workhorse for the personal weblog simply because it is so flexible. Another reason could be the prior expectations based on what paper diaries do. If the second is true, it is an example of what Bolter and Grusin see as an incomplete remediation into the new form; since past diaries contain day-to-day details, bloggers new to the personal weblog form may take that historical referent as their template for the newer form. That could very well be true, but at the same time there are literally millions of other LiveJournals to read and use as models. A more long-range study could track changes, and that would give the best answer to how the genre is shifting. In any case, the result is that almost half the posts recount the days somewhat, but they change from the traditional Dear Diary by also actively speaking to an audience that is very real and able to respond quickly, perhaps within minutes through the post comments. They also reflect more; much thinking about activities and investigation of the interior life goes on in these posts. For example, Miababe has the highest proportion of Daily Log posts, and her answer to the interview question, "What has been hard about blogging?" tells much about why she had so many Daily Log posts and also about her motivation for weblog writing. She writes, "The hardest part about blogging is keeping up with the entries. Once I don't update for a couple days, updating seems like a daunting chore." Clearly, keeping some kind of record of her life is one of the reasons

why she maintains a personal weblog and a prime motivation for blogging regularly. She continues this thought and adds the qualifier, "if I want to write about everything I did everyday" and clarifies that "Those kind of entries are mostly used so that I can look back on them in a few years and remember what my life was like, they are not to entertain others." In other words, although those posts detail her days, she does not see that as the main reason to write in a personal weblog. An example of this kind of writing would be this excerpt from her November 22, 5:35 p.m. entry (last names have been edited for privacy):

> I met SB at Ivy High School, we went over to Devin's surprise party for a very short time. On our way out of his bumpy little road the bottom of my car hit a drain and made some weird sounds. I looked under and saw that something was kind of hanging out of the bottom of my car. I got Dan R--, Dylan, AND Mr. B to look at it and they all said it should be okay.
>
> Then we went over to Ben G—s house to watch a movie, but we ended up just talking. We decided SB is the cutest person ever. I love her laugh. SB and I went back to Ivy to pick up her sister and her friends but SB couldn't unlock her car. The key was messed up. So Mrs, J—took a few of the girls and I took a few. We drove back to Newport along side these dorky guys in a Porsche who thought they were so cool. I def raced them across the bridge and won.

The entry is much longer than the excerpt, approximately five pages double-spaced converted to print. It gives a listing of activities, but it chooses the details carefully and

structures them into a sequence of anecdotes that have coherence and aim to do more than simply inform. It sets up the post as a persuasive narrative with supporting details.

Many of Miababe's post are like this; she is meticulous about reporting her days, and her self-described motivation of creating a record her future self can refer to and reflect upon later explains much. At the same time, she also knows that others will be reading her blog and need more to chew on than finding out she had Grape Nuts for breakfast. Ten minutes later than the excerpted entry she shows that audience awareness when she posts again and gives this explanation for what she views as one of a series of posts that lack the kind of depth she prefers to give. She apologizes to her readers when she writes, " By the by, the lack of updates with depth is because of the fact that there's lots of stuff going on right now that I need to keep private. Hence, lots of private entries. Yeah. Boo." This is also an example of how multiple posts can act as a strategy for adding layers of reflection to a more detail-focused post, but it mainly acts as an acknowledgement that she knows her personal weblog writing cannot be entirely what Linda Flower calls writer-based prose. Miababe knows that too many of these lighter posts will eventually alienate her readers who expect more.

An example of a Daily Log post that accomplishes the desired balance between daily details and reflection is this January 16 post entitled "It's times like these you learn to live again," also from Miababe:

> This week has been surreal. On Thursday my life was upside down. By Friday the gravity of the situation was sinking in, and permanent damage became a reality. Saturday I felt the effects of what I'd done be the need to avoid certain people and places. And today, Sunday, was spent at the ER

for 4.5 hours. I have to go back to the doctor's tomorrow to get a

permanent cast, the one I have now is just temporary.

How I fractured my navicular bone in my hand is kind of a long

story, and it hurts to type so I'll tell you in person. It's probably the funniest

thing that's ever happened to me. But it also taught me a lesson. Lately I

have been going through life thinking I'm invincible. That my actions don't

have consequences. That I can get away with anything. "Oh, that would

never happen to me." "No one will ever find out." Well, this week has been

full of consequences, from which I have received a severe slap in the face

from reality. I needed that.

The entire post is twice as long, but the looping motion from action to introspection

shown is typical of longer Daily Log posts. Having a place to think about the day's

events and their possible longer-term effects is an important expression of writing-to-

learn, and based on the Daily Log post frequency for all the bloggers, may be the key to

what keeps them writing in personal weblogs.

The School Update

Other bloggers balanced their posts differently from Miababe, although the Daily

Log remains important. Rabidperryfan had more School Update posts than the other

bloggers, and those posts served a similar function to the Daily Log posts, but at the

same time used a different rhetorical strategy. Many of the School Updates were far

less reflective and similar to the kind of journal writing Gannett in *Gender and the*

Journal identifies with primarily male journal writers—the activities are listed, forming a

kind of accomplishment tally that acts as a score sheet which gives the writer some idea

where she stands in the at times demanding academic world. For example, on January

5 Rabidperryfan writes what she calls a "Recap of this week":

> …went back to school, Prout asked for money, finished mod.leg. bill, got
>
> ACT scores back.
>
> –School: je ne suis pas fana—my new fav. phrase in French, I am not a
>
> fan. Homework has been a decent load.
>
> –Ivy asking for MORE money: Not going to happen, I think we give that
>
> school enough money. I'd like to go to college thank you very much.
>
> –Finished model legislature bill: Caitlyn and I completed our bill, just have
>
> to hand it into Reece.
>
> --Got ACT scores back: rather surprised with how well I did considering I
>
> thought I did HORRIBLE. And somehow I always manage to score higher
>
> in English on ACTs than SATs, because I am good at English? Oh well, I
>
> am happy, and went up 3 points, hopefully next time I take them I'll go up
>
> another three, then I'd be estatic.

In this entry she clearly lists the school-related events, even using dashes to form a

bulleted list with categories set off by colons. The first sentence forms a sort of preview,

a scratch-outline of sorts that forecasts the upcoming, more detailed list.

Somewhat more reflective were the entries Rabidperryfan writes about softball. A

member of the school team, she meticulously analyzes her performance, compares it to

past efforts, and speculates about future possibilities, forming a kind of sports

metadiscourse. These posts were closer in strategy to the Daily Log posts, but since

they were about school activities, still fit in that category. The posts that move past the

simpler, listing strategy tend to use an incident or series of incidents and expand, a similar strategy to that used in the more reflective Daily Log posts. This excerpt from Rabidperryfan's October 28 entry is one example of that kind of strategy:

> Realized that our class as a whole is pretty immature, not that I'm against it or anything, because hey, I will admit, I can be immature to. But just certain things we still find great amounts of humor in. For instance, English class today, Dave H. had a long strand of toilet paper on his shoe, VERY funny. Some people could not control themselves, luckily, I know I had to, since Mr. P—is RIGHT there. But still, quite funny. And many of us still think the work "penis" is quite funny. Well, it is. Brianna S. mentioned it to me earlier this week, and I agree. We've been learning about "penis envy" in psych (I won't go into it) but everytime she says it we all smirk and laugh, then again it's weird to talk about "Penis envy" haha. Idk. I think its interesting that we aren't so mature.

When one considers how large a proportion of their days these girls spend in school, it is interesting that the School Update posts aren't evenly distributed among the bloggers. It could connect to age, performance, or simply interest. Not everyone is all that interested in school. A study that connected GPAs for the year with number of School Update posts would tell more. Elitegurl also wrote fairly often about school, but often it was a secondary status in the post, with the Vent taking the primary position.

The Vent

When most people think of adolescent girls writing in personal weblogs they think of over-the-top emotion and dramatic posturing, just the sort of thing that does happen

in the Vent category, but with some differences. The main difference between the stereotype and the reality is that the vent more often connects to a detailed analysis and writing-to-learn sort of synthesis of ideas either within the post, in a later post that day, or within more than one post stretching over several days depending on the complexity of the issue that triggered the vent. The vent was the second most frequent primary category for posts with fifty-three entries. It was also in second place individually for the case study bloggers, except for Elitegurl who had an equal number of Daily Log and Vent posts.

When writing about blogging in her interview, Sugarkisses claims, "It is a great way to vent, and LJ works great letting your feelings out. Some people get bored with it, but I have actual friends on LJ, so I love updating." Elitegurl also views venting positively and adds that she likes to write about "Anything that's on my mood, what ever that is bugging me, or what ever it is that i want to share with my friends." Both privilege the idea of sharing feelings over the idea of sharing information, giving the vent an honorable status in this particular writing world. An example of a typical vent would be this entry from November 28 by Sugarkisses:

[mood | bitchy]

usually, when someone gets mad at you, they don't tell you everything that's wrong with you and scream in your face. not my mother.

this morning, on our way to church, or more ... when we got to church, i got yelled at for not bringing in my mom's bag of cans; i had no idea it was my responsibility to bring in something i didn't know about. so for the next 15 minutes, i change seats at church about 5 times. i end up

in the balocony watching my mother cry about what a fuck up i am. i walk down the stairs, completely neglecting the fact that church is in progress (in espanol), and find my mother in the bathroom bawling. i sit around a while, and end up asking why she's crying.

"oh come on, you know why i am crying."

"because of me"

then she goes on to say how she can only take so much my negative comments, and how i am never happy - not happy at home, with my parents, with church; i never have anything positive to say about anything.

i wait around some more and decide i can't sit there and watch my mother cry anymore, so i leave. i have no idea where i am going, but i didn't want to stay there. i end up walking to shanahs house and crying there for about 45 minutes when my parents call and pick me up. minimal conversation since then.

i don't know how many more times i am going to leave. i can't stand this home. my parents. the shit i get for everything. i never do anything right. i am never trusted. i have to call if i change stores i am at downtown. NO TRUST. i hate it.

don't mind me if i call randomly saying i am coming over to sleep.

School is another common topic for venting. An example would be Elitegurl's December 6 vent that intermingles the topics of school and her father:

[mood | melancholy]

Mad. I'm so mad. That's the best word to describe how I feel right now. Why? Can it be any easier? My father of course. I just told mom I might be a bit late after school, because I want to go to the Latin club (to check it out), since I'm suppose to have Latin next semester, not any more. My father acted as if no one told him, and he grew angry. He screamed about how Canada has two main languages, English and French, and it'd be usless if I studied Latin. You might be wondering "Why did you choose Latin anyways?" "well, when I was choosin my corses, I wannted to become a vet, don't get me wrong I still do, but well, he have banashed that idea. besides, Latin is the main core, where English and French and many other language are from, I thought if I can do Latin, it'll help out with my English." Apparently it's all a waste-of-time subject, he screamed how I should have shown him - I did, he didnt' care. You know what? Nor did I, I don't care what he thinks about me, it's my life, shouldn't I be able to choose what to do? He rumbled on about how I'm not good and that, how I don't study the right thing. He brings up the most painful memory as well, something I don't want to talk about. He is such a loser with no life and spends all the money my mom works hard for. I hate him, I hate this.

Through the wall, I can hear him bitch about it all, now blaming it on my mom, WHY? Oh what's the point, whenever I do complain.. i'd prob get a hug or some "i'm sorry" and all.. I doubt anyone actually bothered to

read it all.. I'm so hurt.. I don't know what class to choose.. why all me??

I'm so lost, in this pityful place i called - home.

School remains a high priority for her and writing in her weblog gives her the chance to reason through her academic decisions even through the haze of strong emotion. The seventeen comments this post garnered also help. The length of both of these posts indicates a reasoning-through process; simply telling the tale is not enough. The Vent post aims to persuade. Some analysis of the situation is needed, and the basics of persuasive writing demand that the concrete evidence of the tale be joined to a position or thesis and these posts do so.

Vents aren't always long. Another common strategy is the very brief vent followed by a more detailed post later, echoing Wordsworth's claim that "All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility." In their weblogs these girls do both. They allow the "overflow of powerful feelings" its place in the shorter Vent, and then come back later to the source to write more when they're closer to tranquility. For instance, Miababe's January 25 post is a brief and cryptic "I was wrong when I said life couldn't get any worse." The next post on January 26 says a bit more within the "100 Things" meme. Passed on from another LiveJournaler, she bolds the statements that apply to her and also makes addendums in red to the statements that she feels are very different from herself, making a sort of enthymeme. The added, "Too bad the whole school does" to the unbolded "My crush has no idea" tells much about the previous vent, as does the "I have no car" followed by "Temporarily, since I crashed it into an SUV." In this case, the meme itself acts as a kind of antidote to the vent, giving the blogger a space for self-

investigation that also is entertaining and connects to others. The line between venting

and updating can be thin, but the posts where expressing some kind of strong emotion

appears to be the main motivation were placed in that category. Rabidperryfan in her

interview may have described the motivation behind the category best when she writes

the following:

> However, there are those days when I update quite a few times in one
> day because of certain things that happened during the day. Usually on
> those days I'm frustrated and I need some place to vent and let out
> anything and/or everything that's bothering me. Sometimes lj is like that
> friend you never had where I can release all my burdens and not have to
> worry about her response, sounds stupid, but it's the truth.

Girls writing to their nineteenth and twentieth-century paper diaries express the same

sentiments, often giving the diary a girl's name, but the personal weblog takes that

feeling of intimacy and places it in a shared space where others (or chosen others) join

together to form a virtual and composite "best friend" that, like Dear Diary, only

demands that you write, hopefully often and well.

Memes and Quizzes

Memes were popular with all the bloggers, and the joy of passing on a new

meme to others is something each of the girls talked about. Alone they formed the fifth

most frequent category, but when combined with Quizzes, they formed the fourth most

frequent primary category. Memes fall into two main subcategories: text-based and

generator memes, with Quizzes bridging the two with a series of questions that lead to a

result tied to an appealing graphic. Text-based memes take the questions familiar to

earlier generations of Cosmo Girl quiz-takers and flips them into lists of answers. These

lists then spread from blogger to blogger with each substituting or bolding their own

responses. Figure 20 is a text meme.

🔒*Stolen from everyone, though who really reads them?*

01. French fries are love.
02. I hate exams. Only the studying part.
03. I like green apples.
04. I have too many bad habits
05. I like to sleep
06. I wish I was asleep right now.
07. Music is a big part of my life.
08. I love to listen to the piano.
09. Guster is great for every mood
10. I have pockets.
11. I have been to Germany.
12. I'm a bit of a procrastinator.
13. I never say what's on my mind
14. HTML is cool, but rich text mode is better for this thing
15. I get distracted easily.
16. Whoever invented reality TV should be dragged into the street and shot.
17. I forgot to unbold and bold some of the numbers
18. Damn you Garcia-Marquez! NOOO I LOVE GM
19. I have watched an entire tv series in one sitting. A long one.
20. I have given myself a superhero name
21. Cigarettes are nasty.
22. I love my hoodies.
23. Cats are drag queens
24. I say funny stuff sometimes...
25. I like being online
26. Some people should be strapped to chairs and beaten with hammers
27. I like food that's easily prepared.
28. I enjoy physical confrontations
29. The Italians have far too many pastas
30. I took gymnastics when I was little.
31. Pizza is exciting
32. I pretend that I can play 1 or more musical instruments.
33. I've never gotten pregnant. (nor have I gotten anyone pregnant...)
34. The spoon is pure genius
35. I am not a truck
36. I talk to less than 15 of the people on my buddy list regularly.
37. I think crazy people are more loveable.
38. I want to be in love someday.
39. I've fallen asleep in class before.
40. My crush has no idea. Too bad the whole school does.
41. I never tell people that I like them
42. I don't like fishing, except when I actually catch stuff
43. I spend too much money on manga
44. It never seems like there's enough time in the day.
45. I daydream every second of the day
46. I find myself a generally confident person.
47. I make little wishes every now and then
48. I love to drive. More than anyone I know. Too bad I fucked that up.
49. I have walked barefoot through deep snow to plug in christmas lights
50. I've never had allergies, broken bones, or any kind of serious disease.

Figure 20. A Text Meme. Note the bolded text for shared responses and the added red text for digressions.

The above figure shows exactly half of a "100 Things" meme. Originating with some distant blogger's actual list of one hundred things about herself, this meme and many others like it spreads to reveal shared interests and qualities between bloggers. The form provides a sort of shared genre for identity-exploration and community-mindedness. Both Miababe and Rabidperryfan use and share text memes and both spend time annotating their responses with expansions that briefly analyze some of the bolded sections. For example, on November 27 Rabidperryfan expands the choices with her own analysis, "ugly, ya sometimes…" and "pretty, on rare occasions."

The generator memes are more visual, more random, and much less serious. Figure 21, a fun meme shared by Elitegurl, is an example of this kind.

Figure 21. A Generator Meme

The above meme generates its colorful responses when the blogger plugs in her LiveJournal username and presses the button. The meme then uses the user's friends list to form an amusing list of various types of things, in this case, Christmas presents.

As expected, the two bloggers who are more text-oriented, Miababe and Rabidperryfan, use the text memes more heavily. Elitegurl uses the most memes with eight memes and two quizzes in her primary post categories. She also prefers the generator memes, and this combined with her love of quizzes indicates a more graphically-oriented blogger.

Sexuality

One thing many readers would expect of personal weblogs and a common cliché in the popular press when talking about them is that the subject of sex and romance would be by far the most frequent post category. As Figure 19 shows, Sexuality was in fourth place with eighteen entries, positioned after the Daily Log, the Vent, and the School Log. Along with its more subdued placement in the posting hierarchy, it was also a far more reflective category than some would think. Of course, that makes sense when personal weblogs are defined as spaces where identity-construction happens. These girls have full, busy lives and romance alone, whether opposite or same sex, doesn't define them. At times, though, it did, and the primary-category Sexuality posts were for those times.

The main rhetorical strategy used in these posts was the declaration. The primary-category Sexuality posts tended to put it all just out there, declare, and wait for the commenting fallout. An example would be Sugarkisses's succinct post on October 25:

[mood | cold]

i can't take it anymore. let me just scream it to the world :

I LOVE GIRLS.

i love them. i want them. i need them. forheavenssake, i fricken love girls.

who's going to tell my father? not i.

i think i may be completely gay - this is kind of odd. i don't find that

attraction to guys so much as i used to. but girls; woah. they are just too

wonderful.

Those were very big words for such a small space and the seventeen comments that

quickly followed began an extended conversation about such a major life change. A

more subdued example of a primary Sexuality category post would be Rabidperryfan's

post on November 6 entitled "the sun was just yellow energy." Following a longer post

earlier in the day that was a Daily Log, it muses about the implications of meeting a

certain boy at a mixer:

I think when I fall... I fall hard, and it's probably only going to get me in

trouble. I guess I'll wait and see... ya.

And I think I made a big mistake today, maybe not, but I'm getting

the impression that I did. And I really don't know how to change it or ...

well fix it. I think I got myself got in this one. Maybe it's all my

imagination... but... I'm thinking, no. Shit.

Current Mood: worried

Current Music: chariot-gavin degraw

More than any others, these posts fish for responses and more will be said about that in the upcoming section on community.

Another category that clearly connects to Sexuality is Music Lyrics. In each case when lyrics are the primary category, the subject is a sexual or romantic relationship. I believe the lyrics are used as a mask category for sexuality, perhaps forming a more socially acceptable way to talk about sex without actually talking about it. The songwriters chosen for highlighting during the four-months observed were certainly a literate bunch: Ani DiFranco, John Mayer, and Jack Johnson. The case study bloggers could easily be transforming the tradition that adolescents from my own generation followed of painstakingly transcribing the latest Joni Mitchell, Buffy Saint Marie, or Bob Dylan lyrics, studying them like runes, and making connections between them and our current lives or current events. Instead of face-to-face gab sessions, or perhaps to supplement them, these lyrics hang out there in web space with no analysis beyond bolding the applicable text, the bolded text forming its own argument separate from the lyrics themselves. The real analysis happens later in the comments or the interaction between comments and later, more forthcoming posts.

Primary vs. Secondary Functions: Interlayering of Purpose

Sexuality was the fourth most frequent primary post category, but when secondary post categories are considered, its significance increased greatly, forming a sort of shadow category that weaves through many of the others. Figure 22 shows how the categories rearrange when each post's multiple functions are considered. In the chart, all the post's multiple categories are tallied, and then the primary post

designations are subtracted, leaving the secondary functions to be compared in a new

hierarchy.

	Daily Log	Vent	Sexuality	Photos	Meme	Link	School Update	Music Lyrics	Quiz
Secondary	101	81	57	4	24	21	39	16	9
Minus Primary	13	28	39	2	8	10	13	8	5
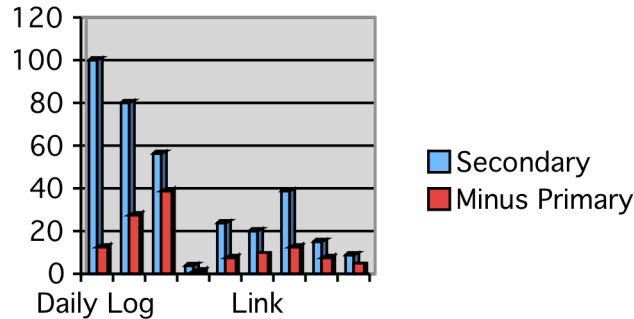
Figure 22. Secondary Post Categories

When the primary post functions are separated out, an interesting reversal occurs.

Sexuality is the most frequent secondary post category at thirty-nine. The Vent retains

its second place rank, and the Daily Log drops from first place to third and is tied for that

position with the School Update. Sexuality seems to be a shadow subject, one that

although important, is one that often needs to tag along after a purportedly more

important first subject. The secondary Sexuality posts are different rhetorically from the

primary ones as well. They are longer entries because of how the subjects tangle

together, and they also commonly pair up with either the Daily Log or the Vent to lend

them structure. There are also a large number of generator memes about sexuality (See

Figure 11 in Chapter Four) with titles such as "Sexual Position Therapy" or "Are You

Hott?" that are thrown in a post now and then as they get passed along from blogger to

blogger.

Music Lyrics are also a solid secondary category, and the secondary Music Lyric posts retain their strategy of being another way of dealing with sexuality in print without overtly being sexual. The question must be asked, why do these girls bury their writing about sexuality within other subjects or subdued song lyrics, but the answer to that question comes too quickly. There are still strong cultural mores in the United States and Canada that perpetuate the historical rhetorical strategies of substitution and sublimination when women write about sex. It is still so self-evident that most female readers of this dissertation need only delve back to their own teen-years memories to remember why.

Another secondary category that retained its minor status is the Link. A common strategy within a post was to use a link called a LJ cut for text, photos, or memes/quizzes. These additions connected to the main post at times, but just as often did not. The rhetorical strategy common in other types of blogging of using a "teaser" text above the fold to entice the reader to click the link and read more below the fold was absent in the case study bloggers' posts. I believe that was due to the distinctive nature of the personal weblog; since the motivation was not to increase readership and their place in a hierarchy such as Technorati by counting how many sites linked to them, strategies that serve solely to increase hit counts lacked merit.

Yet another category that unexpectedly turned out to be a minor one was Photos. There are LiveJournals that use many photos and little text, but they are also often focused on travel or are a celebrity blog. A current example that combines both which is extremely popular is Elyse Sewell's LiveJournal. Sewell was the runner-up in the first *America's Next Top Model* competition and is now spanning the globe modeling for the

Elite agency. Well within this study's age range, she keeps her readers who come first

for the novelty with her wry humor, cross-cultural observations, and many photos of

herself in places like Hong Kong or Santiago. Photo blogs such as hers are fairly

common on LiveJournal, but do not serve the same purpose as the personal weblogs in

this study.

Community: Positioning Self

One of the most interesting things about LiveJournal that distinguishes it from

other single blogs or Content Management Systems is its combination of the Friends-

Only setting; the RSS feed Friends Page; and the LiveJournal Interest Communities.

Although each of the case study bloggers belonged to several communities, studying

how those communities work and interact was too large a subject to effectively fit within

this pilot study and was also a side issue. The other interactions however, were vital to

how the personal weblog works.

The Comments

The community element the case study bloggers found most compelling was the

comments. In their interviews, the case study bloggers discuss why they write in a

personal weblog and a common thread is the interaction between friends. Elitegurl

writes, "When people reply back to you, you feel special. Your not alone, there's people

alone with you, to share your joy and grief. I love that feeling :D." Miababe also loves

comments and says, "The most fun aspect of blogging is leaving and receiving

comments. I love to know when other people are actually reading my journal, and what

they think about it." Sugarkisses agrees, and says, "I know I have said this, but meeting

people is the best thing. You get positive responses from your posts, and people are

there to help you when you need it." An example of that kind of support and feeling of

community would be the comments to the previously shown November 28 Vent post

from Sugarkisses about a fight with her mother. This post generated twenty-one

comments, a portion of which is shown in Figure 23.

narcissus_bitch
2004-11-29 01:27 (link)

poor you, that sounds really awful.

(Reply to this)(Thread)

sugarkisses
2004-11-29 01:37 (link)

it kind of sucked. like, a lot of sucked. :(.

(Reply to this)(Parent)

sideway
2004-11-29 01:38 (link)

i say,

don't think that YOU have no trust until you live with my parents. remember how i wasn't allowed out past 7 pm for several weeks in the summer because i "didn't need to be out that late"? how my mom called the police because sarah p. and i went over to feed the neighbor's cats for fifteen minutes without telling her? how my mom has gone through all of my old paper journals and diaries? how she threatened to put spyware on my computer? how i'm still not allowed to ever spend the night at anyone's house because i'm "too old for it"?

count your blessings, colleen. both your parents accept your sexuality and i think they genuinely love you, no matter what they say. my parents yell at me all the time (i mean, whose parents NEVER get on their case? anyone's?), but we always end up acting civilly in the end. i'm sorry to hear your mom's mad at you right now, though. :(

(Reply to this)(Thread)

sideway
2004-11-29 04:07 (link)

DAMN LIVEJOURNAL STOLE THE END OF MY COMMENT. HO. anyhow, i said i'm sorry about what your mom said to you; i don't know how i could have dealt with that. i *hate* hearing my mom say things like that to me, so i know what it feels like. :(feel better, daahhling! you can live with me anytime!

(Reply to this)(Parent) (Thread)

sugarkisses
2004-11-29 04:33 (link)

i have have nothing to hate when it comes to your parents. but no one likes being treated like crap.

i | you

(Reply to this)(Parent)

Figure 24. A Partial Chain of Comments

The comments form an asynchronous dialogue with alternating comments from others and replies from Sugarkisses. Strings like this can be quite extended, but usually after about four exchanges the dialogue moves to a better venue, usually some kind of instant message system such as AIM or MSN.

Another interesting thing about that particular string of comments is how Sideway, although supportive, also takes evidence from shared experience that Sugarkisses will know about to give context to Sugarkisses's vent, and hopefully help her get past it. This is a good persuasive strategy used in university-level First-Year Writing courses, one that many freshmen lack the confidence to use at first, thinking that their lives hold no facts or evidence. It also is a good example of where a friend graciously points out that after the emotion subsides, the facts may not be as grim as believed. Having evidence from real-life, Sideway sees Sugarkisses's parents as basically very caring, and wants her friend to remember that.

The Friends Page and the Friends Cut

The Friends Page itself also has its appeal for the case study bloggers, and Rabidperryfan gives her reasons why:

> Even though I do it myself, I sometimes get tired of the mundane class-by-class entries. I enjoy reading about people's weekend adventures. I think I enjoy reading people's entries of those who hardly update just so I know what they are up to even if it's a simple as one line. And I know it's not great to say, and I don't neccessarily call it "enjoying it" but I find great interest in other's peoples troubles, not in the fact that I get joy out of them at all, but just to know how other people really are doing and what troubles

they are facing and seeing if I can help them or not, offer them some

advice.

Another view of the Friends Page is Miababe's view that "I love reading photo entries. I

also like trying to interpret the random entries that don't make sense, like trying to apply

lyrics to events in people's lives." Given her love for putting song lyrics in her own blog,

that makes sense. However, her next comment reminds me of the advice given me in a

fiction workshop to only include the interesting parts in my story—good advice, but

difficult in practice. She agrees with that advice, and asserts that "Usually the only

entries I don't read are the boring one's about every little detail of people's weekends.

I'd prefer they only write about the interesting details." We all would prefer that. Figure

24 shows a typical Friends Page.

Figure 24. Rabidperryfan's Friends Page

How those friends were selected and how they may later be cut is another part of this selected community. Every so often bloggers will make an entry that says something like "Friends cut—please comment to be added." This gives notice that if you the reader are not reading the blog often enough to know about the cut--usually within a week or less—the next time you come to visit all you'll see is the Friends-Only splash page. Not all bloggers use this weeding out strategy; Miababe answered the interview question about it with "I don't even know what a friends cut is, sorry." The three others did, and of the three Elitegurl explains it in the most detail:

> My time is limited, i don't want to visit someones journal and comment, when they don't even pay attention to me, so i keep all the people that comments to me. Of course, there are few that are so close, i wouldn't cut them no matter what. but otherwise, i'll just keep people thats soemwhat close and comments.

Of the four, Elitegurl was the most assiduous commenter on Friends blogs, and her attitude towards other bloggers and how their comments or lack of comments express their interest in her blog explains that. Especially if this blogging community is seen, as Van Dikjk points out, as a gift culture, keeping some kind of comment parity makes sense. Also, the "Add me!" comments themselves, although brief, form a sort of affirmation chain that more traditional writers would love to have. How nice to know that there are readers that not only regularly read your work, but are willing to say so every now and then simply to keep reading it. When the idea of personal weblogs as a site for identity construction is added in, the affirmation becomes even more personal.

Another reason for the friends cut is simple logistics. After a while, the number of feeds on the Friends pages simply gets too long to read several times a week. At that time, some way to sort out the keepers from the nots needs to be found, and the friends cut is a simple and practical method. Yet another reason that Rabidperryfan implies, that of broken friendships offline, could be another motivation. She has never done a friends cut, but adds that "I've thought about it just because I wouldn't want certain people knowing certain things, either because of fact that he/she could relay that information to someone else (which has happened) or because it has been because of a circumstance when it is about that person." Her solution for this dilemma is to "either wait to put those thoughts down in a private entry or just forget about it entirely."

Sugarkisses sees friends cuts as blog maintenance. She writes, "Usually, friends cuts are when I don't know the person on my list. I either never read their journal, or they never read mine, or I just don't like them. I do friends cuts often." It is interesting though that the blogger who had the most entries during the study, Rabidperryfan, uses writing strategies that avoid using the friends cut while the blogger who has been writing in a personal weblog for the shortest duration has frequent friends cuts. It may be simply a matter of personality, or it may have more to do with commitment to both the blog genre and the blogging community itself. The people may simply seem more real as each year goes by.

It would have been interesting to see how a larger sampling of bloggers felt about friends cuts through the questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to give members of that extended community a chance to give their take on the same questions in the interview, but as it turned out, few people took the poll. It will remain

up, and the final tally as of this dissertation's publication date will be found in Appendix

F.

Conclusion

This study began with me wondering about personal weblogs, literacy, feminism,

and identity. In taking a four-month long snapshot of what four girls did with their

personal weblog, some things became clear, but others simply led to more questions,

which may be the nature of research itself. Chapter Six will take some of the findings in

this chapter and make a more concerted attempt to answer some of the research

questions that were the impetus for this study.

CHAPTER SIX: PERSONAL WEBLOGS, LITERACY, AND IDENTITY (REMIX)

It has become increasingly clear over the past five years that we also have two much larger and more complicated obligations: first we must try to understand—to pay attention to—how technology is now inextricably linked to literacy and literacy education in this country; and second, we must help colleagues, students, administrators, politicians, and other Americans gain some increasingly critical and productive perspective on technological literacy. (Cynthia Selfe, Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention)

I update every other day or so. Sometimes I update like 5 times in a day, usually most of those are private entries though. Sometime I have writers block and won't update for a week or so, but when that happens I always feel guilty for not updating. So I guess I have different patterns of updating. When I'm feeling particularly annoyed by people, and I close people off, I update much less. The most fun aspect of blogging is leaving and receiving comments. I love to know when other people are actually reading my journal, and what they think about it. I also love looking at people's photo posts. (Miababe)

Introduction

I began this look at personal weblogs and adolescent girls by asking how blogs refashion both literacy and identity in the lives of adolescent girls and have come up with several separate ideas about the site as a nexus for individual and group identity construction as well as the technological literacy that develops alongside this very natural activity for adolescent girls. For example, it's clear that the primary function of the personal weblog remains the same as the traditional diary in that the Daily Log posts are far and away the most frequent primary post category. Slightly below the surface though, the secondary categories in each post complicate that initial view and place Sexuality and the Vent categories in a much more primary position, especially when memes, quizzes, and music lyrics are used as a rhetorical mask for writing about sexuality. These additional categories, not available in the same way to pen and ink diarists, change the possibilities for personal writing. At the same time, the expansion of audience from paper to internet and the choices available for selecting audience also

reframe the possible for these digital diarists. A real audience, oftentimes one selected by the blogger through the Friends-Only option, gives the blogger a clear conception of exactly who she is writing for, and makes what is put on the virtual page a conscious and necessary choice. All of these things affect literacy in ways somewhat different from the expected and already examined ways the traditional diary does. The digital tools expand and remediate the form, as predicted by Bolter and Grusin, but the acts involved, on the surface, are little changed. Identity is the focus of the content, and those looking for high art or political insights, for the most part, will be disappointed. The value here is the process itself, the duration of that process, and the record that remains, which can act as a wellspring for future writing.

All of these things are important and contribute to identity formation, and in some part to literacy. What needs to be considered most, however, is how these functions are not separate, and how the fusion of technological literacy and identity in this digital space enhances both. Forming an identity that includes technological literacy is a vital goal that is currently not valued by many adolescent girls. Being called a geek is still far from a compliment, and in none of the interviews with the case study bloggers did any of the girls state that they loved working with technology or with computers. The appeal of personal weblogs is elsewhere for them, mostly with the interaction with others online. Even so, the fact that they must work with digital technology in order to achieve their social, design, and rhetorical goals means that as they refashion their identity they necessarily include an identity as a competent digital citizen. The technology becomes invisible, much as the pen for former generations is no more seen as technology than is the hand. In that way, the geekiness, the obsession with machinery these girls see as

objectionable is no longer attached to the skills educators identify with technological

literacy. In other words, a fascination with the form is not needed to achieved

competency or even superior ability with the function. They love what they can

accomplish in LiveJournal without becoming centered on how the digital space itself

works.

Literacy Applications

How This Fits in the Classroom

Writing classrooms already rich in technology can tap into the preference for

online community these personal webloggers show by integrating blogs into their

existing curriculum using open source CMS software such as Drupal or wiki hybrids

such as Tikiwiki. The advantages include the multiplicity of views and the compounding

of insights possible when twenty-two or so students all write visibly on the same subject.

Experienced bloggers, especially ones with personal weblog experience who are "pre-

sold" on the value of feedback given by comments, are more likely to comment on

others' posts and to utilize strategies that encourage others to comment on their posts.

In this way they act as seeds that accelerate others' development within the academic

weblog form. The experienced bloggers are also available for more direct action as

mentors for others who may be new to writing in an online, communal setting. The key

to success may be in how the instructor presents the blogs to the class; if the blogs are

positioned as new and exciting technology, the only ones who will be excited about

them will be those whose identity is invested in appearing technologically adept, not

generally the majority view in a writing class. However, if the community writing aspects

are pushed to the forefront, the appeal will be more general and the chances of success greatly increase.

How It Doesn't Fit: The Possibility of Resistance

On the other hand, resistance to academic blogging by personal webloggers unable to transition to another blogging genre is not only possible, it has happened. Dennis Jerz writes about what he calls "forced blogging" on his classroom blog, and Chapter Three points out how early definition of the differences between different blog genres such as personal, academic, and informational can head off such problems. Similarly, Steven D. Krause examines the downside of blogging in the writing classroom in more detail in his recent article for the Fall 2004 issue of *Kairos*, "When Blogging Goes Bad: A Cautionary Tale About Blogs, Email Lists, Discussion, and Interaction." In that article he details his own crash and burn experience with classroom blogs in a situation that appears to be ideal for their use: motivated graduate students in a class that focuses on writing and technology theory. His experience is cautionary in several ways, the main caveat being that no new technology is teaching magic. Krause admits he purposely made the blogging open-ended and set up blogging groups. However, the space he chose, Blogger.com, is meant for single-user blogs and lacks the capabilities for taxonomy, does not allow multiple users with their own on-screen identities including user icons, and does not have searchable archives, including for comments, that full-feature Content Management Systems such as Drupal have. Even so, if his goals had been clearly defined with definite writing assignments, things might have turned out differently; even something as simple as giving prompts and word count parameters might have helped. More importantly, Krause admits he did not give models of good

blogging sites that produce the sort of writing he was looking for—the examples he gave in the article were Kairosnews.org and Crooked Timber, but his students did not have such insight. Once again, technology does not replace good pedagogy. In his defense he adds, "And yet, that is ultimately the power and even charm of web logs: it is very easy to master [a] technology and interface in which just about anyone who wants to can post their writings and thoughts about anything." He then adds the writing teacher's lament that "like the paper diaries and journals that web logs are so often compared, the writer has to have a reason—and generally, a personal reason—to write in the first place." If we as writing teachers fail to give students a reason to write, we have no basis for complaint if they fail to spontaneously pour out torrents of text. Even paper journals in traditional writing classrooms need some direction in order to be effective, and blog software does not erase that need.

Another concern with blog use in the writing classroom is course length. Before this study, I found that writing courses shorter than a full semester, even eight-week summer classes, are too short for effective blogging if the students are all or even mostly blogging novices. One thing this study notes is that bloggers with the stamina to stick with blogging past the first year write more often than those who have blogged for a shorter time. The two case study bloggers with significantly shorter blogging history—Elitegurl who reached her one-year blogging anniversary on New Years Eve during the study, and Sugarkisses who had only been blogging five months at the start of the study—had far fewer posts during the study than the two bloggers who began in 2002. Effective blogging is a habit, and establishing writing habits take time. My experience and the examples of the case study bloggers show that an eight-week writing course

with six weeks of concentrated writing time is not long enough to set up that habit. A

semester can be long enough, but barely, with the best writing lumped towards the end

of the semester. An integrated writing program than consistently requires blogging

through its two or three-course sequence would be ideal. In that way a true writing habit

can develop and each semester can build on the previous semester's growth rather

than starting from scratch each time.

A main advantage of blogging over other writing technologies such as discussion

boards or listprocs is their potential for transfer to the student's personal writing habits

after class ends. A discussion board ends at that point, but a blog can continue, either in

the same space, or in one of many available free spaces elsewhere on the web. For

example, when I used Blogger for classroom blogs in 2001, I later checked to see if the

blogs were still active, and found that a number of them were, but with classroom

content deleted. The students had co-opted the writing space as their own. During the

class I emphasized that the blog gave them a unique opportunity for a space where they

could write and reflect about their college experience in a way that could be easily

shared with others back home and I was pleased to note that some had done just that.

The writing habit remained over a year after the class ended. Barclay Barrios in "Blogs,

A Primer," a Spring 2005 remediation and expansion of his Spring 2003 *Computers and

Composition Online* article, "The Year of the Blog: Weblogs in the Writing Classroom,"

gives several reasons why blogs fit the writing teacher's needs well, and agrees with my

classroom experience that "It's addictive." He adds, "Students don't tend to write unless

they have to. Blogs are one way to change that. My students never keep using an

asynchronous discussion board once my class has ended, but students may maintain

their blogs or start new ones. Introducing students to blogging gets them writing and may keep them writing." If, in addition to the natural appeal of blogging the student has previous experience with personal weblogs, there is a greater likelihood that the classroom blogging experience will expand their online writing repertoire and give additional writing flexibility to their existing writing habit.

Blog Use in the Blended or Traditional Classroom

The previous section assumes that a computer-mediated classroom is used where students can go to their individual seats and start blogging, and where posts can be shared and discussed by the whole class using a video projector. Clearly, that is not the case for the majority of writing classrooms. Some instructors schedule computer-mediated classroom time for drafting once a week or once every two weeks; some are limited to paper and pen drafting in a desks and chalkboard classroom with no computer classroom time at all. Other instructors, regardless of the technology level in the classroom itself, may be technophobic or simply feel that students already know everything there is to know about word processing, internet research, and digital writing, and teach writing as usual without the added context of their student's technological framework—which the students may not actually have mastered. In that case the student may well learn to write, but will lack experience adapting to the digital contexts that writing often take today.

In contrast, what happens when a web-savvy blog-hound of a writing student is placed in a classroom where she or he must write in a spiral notebook journal using a pen? Some resistance is to be expected. I know from my student experience that I am keyboard-oriented enough to turn down pen and paper journal options even when they

count for extra credit or add an extra layer of reflection in a course I otherwise enjoy. With the case study bloggers, Elitegurl posts more than once about her struggles with her English class, which uses more traditional Language Arts pedagogy. Rabidperryfan fails to connect her good English ACT score with her considerable writing experience on blogs. She still sees herself as not particularly strong in English, at least compared to her strength in the sciences. Instructors in more traditional writing classrooms who use journals instead of blogs should at least be aware of blogging and how writing practices have changed since the age of the typewriter. When considering that, they should consider also that some of their students would write in their journals more if at least given the choice of using a Word file, turning in hole-punched pages in a three-ring binder. If the instructor is willing to go so far, those students used to blogging could be given the option of setting up a classroom-only blog on a free site such as Blogger and give the instructor the URL. Perhaps then the instructor would at least see the physical advantages for both—no more stacks of notebooks to carry home each week, and no turnaround time when the notebook is unavailable for students to write in.

The Need for the Feminist Classroom—What's In a Name

Clearly self-motivated writers, such as the type of writer the case study bloggers are developing into, work best where they have the option of placing the responsibility of learning in their own hands. A top-down education model where the instructor is the all-knowing authority, what Friere calls banking education, fails in the ever-growing technological world educators must deal with. A student-centered classroom works best in the kind of situation where both knowledge and delivery infrastructures are being rapidly redefined, and one of the hallmarks of the feminist classroom is that it is student-

centered. Blackboard, WebCT, wikis, weblogs, discussion boards, and even older

technology such as listprocs and MOOs change how writing is executed and presented.

Clearly, it is not reasonable to expect all writing instructors to be experts in every one of

these ever-expanding technologies. However, when the instructor acts as a mentor and

experienced resource for students, the responsibility diffuses, and student knowledge

can better be shared and implemented. The habit of feminist mentoring fostered by the

many chains of comments in personal weblogs can continue in the classroom as the

kind of sharing of experience and support advocated by Tulley and Blair in "Ewriting

Spaces as Safe, Gender-Fair Havens: Aligning Political and Pedagogical Possibilities"

(57). Weblogs in the classroom integrate well with the feminist goals of introspection,

collaboration, mentoring, and an even-handed valuing of others' ideas regardless of

gender, race, or sexual orientation; they have a greater chance of failure in other

classroom environments where single-authorship only is valued or writing product

without reference to process is the goal. The weblog structure itself lends this focus

rather than an overt desire by educators or students to take on a feminist identity,

although that also may be the case.

Another advantage to the feminist classroom for writing instructors who wish to

be technologically aware is that students are then more likely to model their instructor's

mentoring behavior and integrate it into their learning practice. Future research needs to

concentrate on blended classrooms that meet in traditional desk classrooms and also

utilize off-site educational technologies, but for the purposes of this study it is clear that

instructor awareness of their students' varying levels of technological literacy and a

willingness to use a feminist pedagogy that stresses mentors over masters fits today's

shifting needs. In this way the writing classroom can gain the technological flexibility necessary for a still developing future.

Blogs and the Language Arts Classroom

Current blog scholarship centers on first-year writing in a university setting and one reason for that may be the understandably more stringent HSRB (Human Subjects Research Board) requirements for research with participants under the age of eighteen. At the same time, my own experience shows a gap between district administrators willing to approve research in this area and school-level administrators more concerned about issues of liability and classroom time constraints. Even more disturbing is the number of districts that classify blogging sites in the same way they classify other objectionable web sites such as pornography or prurient-themed chat rooms. They block students from accessing blogs, even during free time such as lunch period. This across-the-board condemnation means that Language Arts teachers who wish to implement classroom blogs are also prevented from a clearly educational use of an extremely beneficial writing technology. If blog scholarship is to gain the research needed for better academic use of blogs, Teacher-Scholars including Language Arts classroom teachers need the freedom to investigate blog use in the classroom. Also, a less adversarial relationship with personal weblog writing by adolescents within schools needs to happen as well. Using a hypothetical example, administrators, one would hope, would not confiscate a student's paper and ink diary if she were to sit on the bleachers and write in it during lunch. Why, then, are the words in her personal weblog so much more dangerous to the school's safety? I believe they are not. This study has shown that the case study bloggers were very savvy about audience and with few

exceptions wrote Friends-Only entries. If anything, the Friends-Only weblog is more secure than the paper diary. It cannot be read by anyone who is not pre-approved by the writer and the paper diary can.

That very security may be the root of the problem for administrators. They do not know what's being written, but still feel responsibility for the student's words. Student newspapers through the years have had similar battles, but lack the scary new technology stigma that currently make blogs an easier target. Classroom blog advocates such as Will Richardson of Weblogg-Ed give good resources and examples of best classroom blogging practices that Language Arts teachers can pass on to concerned administrators. Barclay Barrios's Spring 2005 web article, "Blogs, A Primer" is also rich in links to sample blogs in many genres and online resources the classroom teacher will find useful. However, until schools that block blogging sites stop lumping weblogs in with other categories they feel are dangerous or unsuitable in some way, that leaves the personal blogger who may not have home computer access out in the cold and reinscribes the economic inequities the public schools should be dedicated to overcoming. If schools truly are committed to the ideal of technological literacy for all students regardless of socioeconomic class, it behooves them to give access without shackles. Otherwise, the cycle of technology haves and have-nots will continue.

Conclusion

The way personal weblogs refashion both literacy and identity in the lives of adolescent girls manifests itself as a more technologically confident self, not necessarily in the geeky, chips and wires obsession way, but in a more integrated way that concentrates on the technology as a way to accomplish self-directed writing or visual

design goals that aim for a new rhetoric of blended persuasive devices. Enthymemes become memes, and Sommer's looping revision strategy becomes a series of sequential posts that build on the previous thoughts without deleting the previous versions. The addition of other voices to the textual conversation gives a resulting dimensionality that takes an onerous stack of paper for even a partial hard-copy reproduction. Future research that studies how the blog framework affects the writing process would be worthwhile, and the personal weblog is a natural place to start since it is wholly self-motivated rather than a reflection of student-teacher interaction.

The mass of text produced by these bloggers cannot be overemphasized, and a longitudinal study that layers a view of personal weblog writing with the more public classroom blogging by these writers in First-Year-Writing classrooms needs to be done. In that way, any use of the personal weblog as a writers notebook, the kind of resource professional writers have used for hundreds of years as a repository and source for future writing, can be traced and evaluated. Studies longer than one semester that follow student bloggers through their First-Year-Writing sequence are also needed, and briefer studies concentrating on academic writing prompts in classroom blogs would also be beneficial.

Given that blog scholarship is very much an emergent field, the possibilities for future studies are legion. Some work on how political or academic-content weblogs are remediating Habermas's concept of the public sphere already exist, most notably in *Into the Blogosphere*, but much more needs to be done, especially concerning how gender issues and community interaction in these weblogs develop and change discourse. The adolescents coming up into adulthood with their own, more fluid ideas of gender roles

and possibilities who also have the technological literacy in place to simply use these digital tools as a matter of daily life rather than see them as artificial constructs will change things, and that change needs to be researched as it happens.

One thing is certain—the time for privileging one form of weblog over another for purposes of research or definition is not at hand, if it ever will be, which is doubtful. Relegating personal weblogs to a sort of discourse back room where they do their work unattended by "significant" research cannot be sanctioned. The not very subtle ridicule of the important work in identity formation and technological literacy that gets done in personal weblogs by adolescent girls is a throwback to the less enlightened days in Rhetoric and Composition when product was king and any attention to process in the writing classroom was merely incidental. Future research in personal weblogs needs to pay close attention to writing process theory and any attempt to tie the writing that goes on in personal weblogs to the end product alone is shortsighted. The all too common public denigration of the writing these girls do as "just personal" and "not significant" also can be seen as an extension of the sort of conflict Patricia Bizzell notes and analyzes in "Praising Folly: Constructing a Postmodern Rhetorical Authority as a Woman." Constructing a feminist rhetorical authority is generational, not short-term work, and flack from the status quo in this new media literacy is to be expected.

Most importantly, this intensive personal reflection and self-examination in a chosen-group setting by so very many of a single, upcoming generation of adults means that as the number of public blog forums increase, these bloggers won't be satisfied with the limited nature of what past dead-white-men have defined public discourse to be. The line between personal and political will become increasingly blurred, and for a

time it may seem that a certain something has been lost by that new lack of clarity.

However, if weblogs are to truly be the powerful new media literacy they potentially can

be, they must make their own path, and these girls, soon women, will be there defining

that new digital discourse.

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Appendix A

Participant Letter

Fall semester, 2004

Dear Potential Blogger:

Do you blog? If you don't, have you thought about starting a blog? Blogs are webpages with dated, sequential entries where people write about many things, both big and small. I am conducting a study about teenage girls (14-17) who write in blogs and enjoy writing on their own, whether it be fiction, poetry, or just messing around with words. As a teacher with seven years of classroom experience, as a creative writer with poetry and book reviews published in well-respected literary journals, and as an editor with experience in both literary and academic journal editing, I have always been interested in how—and why—people write. The idea for this study began for me when I noticed that my daughter and many of her friends were spending time outside of school doing what they usually disliked doing in school--writing. The difference was that writing on the web using a blog wasn't assigned work and gave them more of a chance to write what they wanted to write. Statistics show that lots of girls blog: 65.8% of LiveJournalers are women with the peak ages being 15 to 22. I believe that girls who stick with blogging and write consistently over a period of time will become more confident writers, a benefit that could spill over to the writing classroom.

In this study you will

• Write in your own blog every week for four months.
• Use your existing blog if you already have a LiveJournal.
• Give me feedback in an interview at mid-study using Instant Messenger
• Fill out an end-of-study questionnaire

If you are interested in learning the results of the study, I'd be happy to share my findings with you. Please feel free to call or email me for more information.
While I expect the study to answer questions I have about literacy, computers, and writing, I also believe there is a positive side for you, the participant. Tinkering with technology, creating your own web page, and writing what you want to write can be fun. If you would like to participate, please sign and return by email the informed consent form.

Sincerely,

Lanette Cadle   APPROVED - BGSU HSRB
                                           EFFECTIVE ___6/1/04___
                                           EXPIRES _____5/19/04_

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Informed Consent: Participant
Study Title: ""A Public View of Private Writing: Personal Weblogs and Adolescent Girls"
Investigator: Lanette Cadle
Faculty Advisor: Kristine Blair

I give my consent for participation in the research study ""A Public View of Private Writing: Personal Weblogs and Adolescent Girls."   It has been explained to me that weblogs, or blogs, are webpages with dated, sequential entries where people write about many things, both big and small, in the same way that professional writers use a writer's notebook or journal. I have also been informed that the purpose of this study is to see if girls who write consistently over a period of time in blogs become more confident writers.

   As part of this project, I will

      * Write in a blog every week for four months.
      * Use my existing blog if I already have a LiveJournal.
      * Give the researcher feedback in an interview at mid-study using Instant
Messenger
      * Fill out an end-of-study questionnaire

I have also been informed that this study could benefit me by giving me increased familiarity with web design, an opportunity for consistent writing practice over a period of time, and a chance to practice writing outside of school—just like practice in any other hobby or sport.

My writing will be treated confidentially; the blogs and any reports of research will not use real names. If at any time I wish to withdraw my consent or discontinue my participation in the study, I may do so, without penalty.

It has been explained to me that if I have any questions or comments about this study, I can contact Lanette Cadle at 419-575-2470, cadle@bgnet.bgsu.edu or Kristine Blair at 419-372-8033, kblair@bgnet.bgsu.edu. I may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, (419) 372-7716 (hsrb@bgnet.bgsu.edu), if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study.

_____
   To show informed consent, copy/paste this into an email to cadle@bgnet.bgsu.edu and add your signature and date.

   APPROVED - BGSU HSRB
   EFFECTIVE ___6/1/04___ EXPIRES _____5/19/04_

<u>Appendix C</u>

Interview Questions

Interview questions
Adolescent Girls and Personal Weblogs
Lanette Cadle

Now that the four-month observed-blogging time is over, I'd like to ask you all a few questions about what the process is like.

1. Tell me about setting up (or changing) your LiveJournal. What design decisions did you make to make it your own (colors, style, mood icons, music)? Do you have interesting design plans for the future? If so, tell about them.
2. How often do you update (most of the time)? Why do you update as often (or little) as you do?
3. What has been the most fun about blogging?
4. What has been hard about blogging?
5. What kinds of entries do you like to put in your blog?
6. What kinds of entries do you like to share with others (links, memes, images, something else)?
7. What kinds of entries do you enjoy reading in other Friend's blogs?
8. What factors help you decide whether to have an entry be public, friends-only, or private?
9. When you have a "friends cut," what leads to the decision? How do you decide who to keep or cut?

Appendix D

Questionnaire Posted as LiveJournal Poll

Wrap-Up Questionnaire
Lanette Cadle

Now that the project is officially over, I'd like to ask you a few questions. These questions are not only for the case studies participants, but for anyone on their friends lists as well. Feel free to write longer responses by leaving comments if the choices given do not fit. Some questions have more than one possible answer; those questions allow you to mark more than one response.

10. When setting up or changing your LiveJournal, what design feature was most important to you?
    a. Colors
    b. Layout
    c. Mood icons
    d. "Music now-playing" description
    e. Other _____
       _____
       _____
       _____

11. How often do you update (most of the time)?
    a. Twice a week
    b. Once a week
    c. More often than twice a week
    d. Less often than once a week

12. What has been the most fun about doing LJ?
    a. Writing the entries
    b. The people
    c. Sharing cool links and stuff
    d. Designing the page
    e. Other _____
       _____
       _____
       _____

13. What has been hard about doing LJ?
    a. Thinking of things to write
    b. Dealing with flamers
    c. Finding the time
    d. Figuring out how to do it (the techy part)

e. Other_____
    _____
    _____

14. How do you decide to do a friends cut?
    a. Friends list is too long to read
    b. Want to weed out those who don't comment on mine
    c. Want to cut list for reasons tied to RL
    d. Don't do friends cuts
    e. More complicated than that (write it out here) _____
        _____
        _____
        _____
        _____

15. What kinds of entries do you like to put in your LJ? (You can pick more than one)
    a. What I did today
    b. Writing projects (poems, stories, and so on)
    c. Memes
    d. Quizzes
    e. Links to cool stuff
    f. Photos
    g. Other writing (describe) _____
        _____
        _____
    h. Other_____
        _____
        _____
        _____
        _____

16. Which kind of entry is your favorite (for your own LJ)?
    a. What I did today
    b. Writing projects (poems, stories, and so on)
    c. Memes
    d. Quizzes
    e. Links to cool stuff
    f. Photos
    g. Other writing (describe) _____
        _____
        _____

Appendix E

Post Categories Database

Date	Elite gurl	Miababe	Rabid perryfan	Sugar kisses	D	V	S	P	M	L	S	ML	Q
2-Oct-04	Elite1 school	Mia025 daily			1		1				2		
2-Oct-04				S1 daily	1		1						
3-Oct-04	Elite2 vent	Mia024 daily		S1 daily	1	1					1		
3-Oct-04	Elite2 vent					1							
3-Oct-04													
6-Oct-04		Mia023 school	S1 vent		1	1				1			
7-Oct-04	Elite3 daily		R01daily		1		1				1		
7-Oct-04													
8-Oct-04	Elite4 vent		R02 vent			2							
8-Oct-04													
9-Oct-04	Elite5 daily	Mia022 lyric	R03 daily	S2 daily (cut)	2		2					1	
9-Oct-04													
9-Oct-04													
11-Oct-04	Elite6 photos	Mia021 daily	R04 daily		2	1		1					
11-Oct-04		Mia021 daily			1								
11-Oct-04													

Date													
11-Oct-04													
12-Oct-04		Mia020 daily	R05 school		1					2			
12-Oct-04													
13-Oct-04				S3 link						1			
13-Oct-04				S3 school		1				1			
14-Oct-04		Mia019 lyric	R06 vent			2	1					1	
14-Oct-04													
15-Oct-04	Elite7 meme	Mia018 daily				1	1		1	1			
15-Oct-04	Elite7 link									1			
15-Oct-04													
16-Oct-04			R07 daily	S4 daily	2	1							
16-Oct-04			R07 link	S4 link						2		1	
17-Oct-04		Mia017 school	R08 vent			1	2		1	1	1		
17-Oct-04													
18-Oct-04		Mia016 daily			1								
19-Oct-04			R09 vent	S4 vent			2						
20-Oct-04	Elite7 daily		R010 meme	S4 vent	2	1	1		1				
20-Oct-04													

Date												
21-Oct-04	Elite8 vent	Mia015 school	R011 school	S5 daily	1	1			1		1	
21-Oct-04												
21-Oct-04												
23-Oct-04	Elite9 vent			S5 vent		2						
24-Oct-04		Mia014 daily			1							
25-Oct-04			R012 school	S6 meme		1			1		1	
25-Oct-04			R012 vent	S6 sex		1	1					
25-Oct-04				S7 link						1		
27-Oct-04		Mia013 daily	R013 school	S7 daily	2	1					1	
27-Oct-04												
28-Oct-04			R014 school	S7 vent	1	1	1				1	
28-Oct-04		Mia012 daily			1							
29-Oct-04	Elite 10 meme	R015 daily			1			1				
29-Oct-04			R015 daily		1	1						
30-Oct-04	Elite11 meme					1		1				
31-Oct-04				S8 link						1		
1-Nov-04				S8 daily	1					1		
1-Nov-04				S8 meme					2	1		

Date												
1-Nov-04			S8 daily		1							
2-Nov-04		Mia011 daily			1							
2-Nov-04												
3-Nov-04	Elite12 daily		S9 vent		1	2	1					
5-Nov-04		Mia010 link								1		
6-Nov-04			R016 daily		1		1					
6-Nov-04			R016 sex				1					
7-Nov-04			R017 daily	S10 meme	1				1			
8-Nov-04			R018one school							1		
8-Nov-04			R018two sex			1						
10-Nov-04			R019 sex			1	1					
11-Nov-04	Elite13 school	Mia09 daily	R020 daily		2	2	1				3	
11-Nov-04												
13-Nov-04		Mia08 daily			1							
14-Nov-04		Mia07 daily	R021 daily		2	2					1	
15-Nov-04		Mia06 school	R022 daily		2						1	
15-Nov-04			R022 sex				1					
17-Nov-04		Mia05 daily	R023 lyric	S11 vent	1	1	2					2

Date													
17-Nov-04			R023three daily		1		1					1	1	
18-Nov-04		Mia04 vent	R024 vent			1	2						1	
18-Nov-04			R024 vent				1							
19-Nov-04	Elite14 vent						1							
20-Nov-04			R025one daily		1	1	1							
20-Nov-04			R025two vent			1								
22-Nov-04		Mia03 daily		S11 daily	2	1						1		
22-Nov-04		Mia03 daily				1		1						
22-Nov-04														
24-Nov-04	Elite15 daily		R026 daily	S11 daily	2	1	1							
24-Nov-04	Elite16 meme						1	1	1					
25-Nov-04	Elite17 quiz	Mia02 daily			2		1						1	1
26-Nov-04		Mia01 lyric	R027 daily		1		1						1	
26-Nov-04														
27-Nov-04			R028 meme	S12 sex			1		1					
28-Nov-04	Elite18 link	Mia1 daily	R029 quiz	S12 vent	3	1			1	1				1
28-Nov-04														
29-Nov-04				S13 photos	1			1		1				

30-Nov-04		Mia1 daily	R030 school		1						1		
30-Nov-04		Mia1 daily		S13 sex	2		2						
2-Dec-04		Mia2 lyric		S13 daily (cut)	1		1					1	
3-Dec-04	Elite18 meme	Mia2 daily	R031 vent			1	1		1				
4-Dec-04	Elite20 link		R032one daily		1	1	1		1	1			
4-Dec-04			R023two sex		1	1							
5-Dec-04	Elite21 meme	R033 daily			1			1					
6-Dec-04	Elite22 vent					1					1		
7-Dec-04			R034 vent			1					1		
8-Dec-04		Mia3 daily			1								
9-Dec-04		Mia3 vent				1							
9-Dec-04		Mia3 vent				1							
10-Dec-04	Elite22 daily				1								
11-Dec-04		Mia4 vent				1							
12-Dec-04		Mia4 sex	R035 sex			1	2						
12-Dec-04		Mia4 sex					1						
12-Dec-04		Mia4 daily			1								
12-Dec-04	Elite24 quiz	Mia4 daily			1					1			6

Date													
13-Dec-04		Mia5 lyric	R036 daily		2		1				1	1	
13-Dec-04			R036 sex			1	1						
14-Dec-04			R037 vent			1	1						
16-Dec-04	Elite25 vent	Mia5 daily	R038 sex		2	1	2					2	
18-Dec-04			R039one daily	1	1	1							
18-Dec-04			R039two daily	1									
19-Dec-04		Mia5 daily	R040 daily		2								
20-Dec-04			R041 school								1		
21-Dec-04	Elite26 daily		R042 vent			1	1	2					
22-Dec-04	Elite27 meme	R2 school							1		1		
22-Dec-04			R2 vent			1							
23-Dec-04			R3 daily		1								
24-Dec-04		Mia6 daily	R3 sex		1	1	1						
24-Dec-04		Mia6 vent	R4 vent			2							
25-Dec-04		Mia7 daily			1								
25-Dec-04		Mia8 sex					1						
26-Dec-04			R4 daily		1								
27-Dec-04		Mia8 daily			1								

Date									
28-Dec-04			R4 daily	1					
29-Dec-04	Elite29 daily			1			1		
29-Dec-04	Elite30 meme						1		
30-Dec-04	Elite30 daily			1				1	
31-Dec-04		Mia8 daily		1					
1-Jan-05			R5 daily	1					
2-Jan-05		Mia8 vent	R5 vent		2				
2-Jan-05		Mia9 vent	R6 sex		1	1			
2-Jan-05		Mia9 daily		1					
3-Jan-05		Mia9 daily		1					
4-Jan-05		Mia9 school						1	1
5-Jan-05			R6 school						1
6-Jan-05		Mia10 daily	R7 daily	2					
6-Jan-05		Mia10 vent	R7 vent		2				
7-Jan-05	Elite31 vent		R7 vent		2			1	
7-Jan-05			R8 daily	1					
8-Jan-05		Mia10 vent	R8 meme	1	1		4		
9-Jan-05		Mia11 daily	R9 meme	1			1		

Date												
9-Jan-05		Mia11 daily	R10 daily		2							
11-Jan-05		Mia11 school		1						1		
12-Jan-05			R10 sex			1	1					
13-Jan-05		Mia13 vent				1						
14-Jan-05	Elite31 school	Mia 13 vent				1	1				1	
16-Jan-05		Mia13 vent	R11 daily		2	1				1		1
16-Jan-05		Mia14 vent				1						
17-Jan-05		Mia14 daily	R11 daily		1	1	1					
17-Jan-05			R12 vent			1	1					
17-Jan-05			R12 vent			1						
20-Jan-05	Elite32 school	Mia15 vent	R12 school			2	1				2	
21-Jan-05			R13 lyric				1					1
22-Jan-05			R14 school								1	
22-Jan-05			R14 quiz				1					
22-Jan-05			R14 lyric									1
23-Jan-05			R15 school								1	
24-Jan-05		Mia15 vent	R15 meme			1			1			
24-Jan-												

05														
25-Jan-05		Mia15 vent					1							
26-Jan-05		Mia16 link								1	1			
26-Jan-05		Mia16 sex						1					1	
29-Jan-05		Mia16 link	R16 school								1	1		
30-Jan-05		Mia17 school	R17 vent			2	2	2				1		

Appendix F

Questionnaire Results

Poll #480491 Adolescent Girls and Personal Weblogs Project
Open to: All, results viewable to: All

When setting up or changing your LiveJournal, what design feature was most important to you?

Color
2 (66.7%) 2 (66.7%)

Layout
1 (33.3%) 1 (33.3%)

Mood icons
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Music now playing description
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Banners
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Something else (leave comment)
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

How often do you update (most of the time)?

Once a week
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Twice a week
1 (33.3%) 1 (33.3%)

More often than once a week
1 (33.3%) 1 (33.3%)

Less often than once a week
1 (33.3%) 1 (33.3%)

What has been the most fun about doing LJ?
View Answers

Writing the entries

1 (33.3%) 1 (33.3%)

The people
1 (33.3%) 1 (33.3%)

Sharing cool links and stuff
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Designing the page
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Something else (leave comment)
1 (33.3%) 1 (33.3%)

What has been hard about doing LJ?

Thinking of thinks to write
1 (33.3%) 1 (33.3%)

Dealing with flamers
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Finding the time
1 (33.3%) 1 (33.3%)

Figuring ot how to do it (the techy part)
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Something else (leave comment)
1 (33.3%) 1 (33.3%)

How do you decide to do a friends cut?

Friends list is too long to read
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Want to weed out those who don't comment on mine
1 (33.3%) 1 (33.3%)

Want to cut list for reasons tied to RL
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Don't do friends cuts
2 (66.7%) 2 (66.7%)

Something else (leave comment)

0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

What kinds of entries do you like to put in your LJ? (rank them)

Daily log
1 (33.3%) 1 (33.3%)

Vent
1 (33.3%) 1 (33.3%)

Memes or quizzes
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

School log
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Photos
1 (33.3%) 1 (33.3%)

Song lyrics
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Other writing (poems, stories, etc.)
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Which kind of entry is your favorite (for your own LJ)?

Daily log
2 (66.7%) 2 (66.7%)

Vent
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Memes or quizzes
1 (33.3%) 1 (33.3%)

School log
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Song lyrics
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)

Other writing (poems,stories,etc.)
0 (0.0%) 0 (0.0%)