

Adolescent Diary Blogs and the Unseen Audience

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Abstract:

Dairies have traditionally been used “as a spiritual exercise, personal therapy tool, and literary production” (Mcneill, 2003, p. 29). While there is much variance between examples, most dairies display such trademark features as dated entries focusing on the diarist’s experiences and interests, tone that can run from confidential to confessional, and a concern with the everyday details of the writers own life (Mcneill, 2003, p. 45).

These features have been transitioned to the dairies’ online descendent, the weblog (blog). Significant numbers of adolescents have adapted the personal diary to this new format. In their genre analysis of weblogs Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, and Wright (2004) found that teenagers made up 40% of the 203 weblogs analyzed with female accounting for 58% of the teenager weblogs.

The picture of weblogs as online dairies, often written by women and girls, has not been part of the popular construction of the genre. In their article “Women and Children Last: The Discursive Construction of Weblogs,” Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, and Wright (under review) found that male bloggers are mentioned more than females in popular press articles – 88% to 12%, and 93 of the 94 males mentioned were adults. One published article (Orlowski, 2003) asserts that teenage girls make up the majority of bloggers. Herring et al. (under review) found that the numbers of teenage female bloggers slightly exceeds the numbers of adult male bloggers, with female teenagers dominating the ‘personal journal’ category.

Unlike the paper-based adolescent diary of previous generations that primarily served as personal archives, in monologue, for thoughts and daily activities, blogs are publicly accessible spaces where adolescents can target their words to a variety of different external audiences in spaces that allow the writer to develop active dialogues with their audience. In these spaces the “time-worn assumptions that the diary is kept only for the diarist and that it is an intensively secretive and private enterprise are unworkable” (Bunkers, 2001).

Who are the audiences envisioned by the writers of accessible online dairies? Clues to their idealized or known audiences can be found in the narratives the diarists’ create. Langellier (1998, p. 210) postulates five types of audiences for narrative performances, audience as: witnesses to the experiences reported upon in the story, therapists and emotional supporters of the storyteller, cultural critics commenting on the events that produced the story, narrative analysts of the systems of discourse embedded in the narrative, and passive observer. This paper looks at the types of adolescent diary blogs currently posted on the web and applies Langellier’s five definitions of audience to the implied and explicit audiences of adolescent diary blogs.

Reference List

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