

LOGGING IN, BLOGGING “OUT”:
GAY COLLEGE AGE MALES AND THE BLOGOSPHERE

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for Mom, Dad, and Brandy

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Introduction

In her 2004 Chair's Address to the Conference on College Composition and Communication (and subsequent print adaptation of that speech in the December 2004 issue of *College Composition and Communication*), Kathleen Blake Yancey describes a change in the landscape of composition:

Never before has the proliferation of writings outside the academy so counterpointed the compositions inside. Never before have the technologies of writing contributed so quickly to the creation of new genres. The consequence of these two factors is the creation of a writing public that, in development and in linkage to technology, parallels the development of a reading public in the 19th century. (298)

A key element in the evolution of this new writing public that Yancey describes is the development of new technologies that make both writing and the sharing of that writing readily accessible to the public at large. Chief among these new writing technologies were the development of the computer and, subsequently, the Internet and World Wide Web. The birth of the digital age has ushered in new means of communication that expand the definitions of "composition" and "text" to include a new group of writers, people who not only compose in the traditional pen-and-paper manner but also "compose words and images and create audio files on Web logs (blogs), in word processors, with video editors and Web editors and in e-mail and on presentation software and in instant messaging and on listservs and on bulletin boards" (298).

Yancey's call for a revamped writing curriculum that integrates the digital domain echoes decades of previous studies in the field of computers and composition. Such researchers as Jeff Rice, Colin Brooke, and Anne Wysocki examine this intersection of cyberspace and writing by investigating the possibilities of working with new media and

visual rhetoric. Books such as *Teaching Writing with Computers*, edited by Pamela Takayoshi and Brian Huot, explore how to bring technology into the classroom and use it effectively. Journals like *Computers and Composition*, currently edited by Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe, explore these concerns as well. The history of *Computers and Composition*'s publication reflects the evolution of how writing teachers have examined the role of computers in both the classroom and the curriculum. Though *Computers and Composition* began with how-to articles on selecting hardware and software and integrating those choices in the classroom, current issues of the journal address a variety of issues regarding technology and literacy along with examinations of the issues and consequences resulting from the introduction of new technology into composition teaching methods. This research will pave the way for creating the curriculum Yancey calls for.

However, in order to create these new courses, composition researchers need to inspect closely the various genres of writing that have emerged from the technology of the Internet and Web. This includes dipping into the digital sea of the blogosphere—the ever-expanding collection of blogs permeating the World Wide Web—something that research until now has not adequately addressed. Although many compositionists maintain blogs themselves, it seems they currently spend more time examining the use of blogging as a classroom tool than they do examining the blogs themselves as a new genre: “Faculty see blogs—if they see them at all—as (yet) another site for learning, typically in school” (Yancey 302), using blogs as reading journals, for example, instead of examining the genre of the blog and learning its place among the writing public. This tendency to ignore the *genre* of blogs in favor of the *tool* of blogging renders the

technology “invisible” to faculty who “generally prefer [their] technologies and the material conditions so closely associated with them to remain in the background” (Selfe 413-14). As a result, the blogosphere disappears from view in the eyes of composition researchers intent on reducing blogging to a set of practices instead of a set of texts.

This relegation of blogging to the category of “useful tools” without examination of the genre of blogs ignores the questions of purpose for the writing. Blogging is not simply a tool that someone invented to create online diaries. Studying the blogs themselves, what motivates people to write in them, how people use them outside of school, and how bloggers represent themselves in the text of the blogs, will help teachers reexamine the uses of blogging and find potential ways to include blogging in the updated curriculum, both as a tool and as a genre. The study of blogs as a genre with an eye to applying that knowledge in the classroom dovetails with Yancey’s call, in her Chair’s Address, to redefine composition curricula to unite “the writing outside of school and that inside” (308).

In addition, the study of blogs opens doors for interfacing composition with other fields of study, such as queer studies. Queer studies have examined communication practices in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer (LGBTQ) community in such works as *Gayspeak* (edited by James Chesebro) and *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction* (edited by Andy Medhurst and Sally Munt), and in the work of linguists such as William L. Leap. Scholars such as Jonathan Alexander, William Banks, and Gregory Weight have carried those studies into cyberspace and examined the effects of the online world on writing practices and identity formation in the LGBTQ community. The October 2004 issue of *Computers and Composition* focused on the

intersection of writing studies, teaching, technology, and sexual orientation. The issue highlighted the interest in the field of queer studies to link issues of sexual orientation, gender, and identity to the wealth of identity exploration possibilities found throughout the Internet and World Wide Web, both of which still use written text as the main medium of communication. Extending this area of study into the blogosphere seems a logical step that echoes Yancey's call for updated composition curricula by including issues of multiculturalism and diversity in an increasingly technological classroom. Studying LGBTQ students' blogs with an eye to examining how this out-of-school writing affects these students' work in the classroom not only complements work done by Leap, Alexander, Witt, et al. but also dovetails with work by researchers like Harriet Malinowitz, Anne Herrington, and Marcia Curtis, who have examined LGTQ students' writing in academic settings.

The latter three's work is the starting point of this project. I developed an interest in studying how LGBTQ students brought their increasingly out-and-proud lives into the classroom. I sought to study the bridge between LGBTQ students' online lives and their autobiographical writing in the classroom by studying the connections between their blogs and their academic work. What I discovered was that current research in online queer identity stops at Web pages; it does not enter the blogosphere despite the possible impact of blogging on life experience writing in the classroom. With such a prominent gap in the research, I created an exploratory study to set the stage for future research in blogging, especially blogging in the online LGBTQ community.

A Brief History of Blogging

To set the stage for the project, I examined the history of blogging itself. In the early to mid-1990s, shortly after the birth of the World Wide Web, authors of various Web sites began to create regularly updated pages listing the URLs (Uniform Resource Locators, or “Web addresses”) of sites—or just pages—that had captured the authors’ interests. The authors usually included a brief blurb describing these links or providing some kind of commentary on or response to the content of the linked page. These lists of links, often grouped around specific topics the lists’ authors were interested in, supplemented the fledgling search engines of the time. Through these lists of links, Web surfers found a means of sifting through content for items of interest that was less time-consuming (and sometimes producing better results) than clicking through the results from a search engine: “The Web [had] been, in effect, pre-surfed for them” by the authors of these pages of links (Blood “History” 9). As the number of Web pages with lists of URLs and accompanying commentary continued to increase, they collectively acquired a name: *weblogs*, a term first coined by Jorn Barger in 17 December 1997 (7), when he began his own page containing links and commentary, separated by date. “Link-and-comment” remained the format of the early weblogs for the next few years.

During this same time, however, various Web site creators began keeping diary-style journals on their sites. One of the early keepers of an online journal, Justin Hall, chronicled the events in his life regularly, writing about everything from “romantic relationships to his father’s suicide to a bad case of shingles” in the eleven years he kept his online journal (Harmanci A1). Hall was not alone; the number of diarists writing their life stories on the Web grew, slowly at first, and the online diary format gradually began

to merge with the “link-and-comment” weblogs. By 1999, when the Web site Blogger (www.blogger.com) came online, the weblog had taken on a more freeform structure and acquired a new term to describe the new format: the *blog*. In turn, the online diarists became known as *bloggers*.

At first, bloggers published their writing on the Web by maintaining Web pages manually, which required knowledge of HTML and a server to host the sites. In 1999, however, blogging took on a simpler dimension with the creation of sites that provided Web-based interfaces for entering text, such as MetaFilter (Ali-Hasan), Pitas.com (Jensen 22), and Blogger (Blood “History” 8). Some sites, like MetaFilter, enforced the link-and-comment nature of the earliest weblogs, requiring bloggers to enter the URL of a site of interest, along with commentary. The majority of sites, however, followed the model of title and freeform text established by sites like Pitas.com and Blogger. In short order, the blog became defined “by its format: a frequently updated webpage with dated entries, new ones placed on top” (Blood “Introduction” ix). Although the “linking blogs,” as the link-and-comment blogs were sometimes called (Snider 40-41), remained, their number dropped, and currently some discussion has occurred online that suggests strict “linking blogs” should no longer even be considered blogs.

The new standardization of blogging format led to the development of Web-based tools specifically for blogs. Where blogs originally “could only be created by people who already knew how to make a website” (Blood “History” 8), the introduction of these new tools simplified the task of creating and maintaining a blog, making it possible for less HTML-savvy users of the Web to join the blogosphere (the collective network of blogs on the Web). The new ease of creating and maintaining a blog led to a blogging boom.

According to its “About Us” page, Technorati, a site that follows blogosphere activity, currently tracks 80.7 million blogs worldwide. A Pew Internet & American Life Project survey in 2006 estimated that 12 million American adults maintain a blog (Lenhart and Fox 22); of those 12 million, 54% are ages 18-29 (3), and the numbers are growing. David Sifry, founder and CEO of Technorati, maintains a regular “State of the Blogosphere” report (recently renamed the “State of the Live Web”). In the most recent report from April 2007, Sifry wrote that the blogosphere grows at a rate of 120,000 new blogs per day.

Despite this explosive growth rate of blogs, scholarly research on blogging is scant. A 27 March 2006 Kairosnews post by Clancy Ratliff, assistant professor of English at East Carolina University, details discussions by the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s Blogging Special Interest Group (SIG) about blogging research initiatives and suggested actions to pursue those initiatives. And in a response to a 30 March 2006 Weblogg-ed post linking to this Kairosnews post, Collin Brooke, director of Syracuse University’s graduate program in Composition and Cultural Rhetoric and a member of the Blogging SIG, writes, “there have been a number of small-scale, limited focus studies, each done in isolation from the others, with little attempt at articulating any hypotheses across institutions, curricula, differing student populations, etc.” in the field of composition studies. Most work on blogs appears in work from online commentators like Rebecca Blood, another blogging pioneer and a celebrated expert in the study of blogging. Her most popular work, *The Weblog Handbook*, is not, however, a study of blogging. It is “a distillation of my best thinking about weblogs based on what I have observed, what I have done, and what I have learned” (Blood *Handbook* xi-xii),

which results in a book focused primarily on how to create, maintain, and market a blog. While describing the process of becoming a blogger, Blood provides some reasons for blogging:

- Blogging develops writing skills through the practice of writing a post (a single blog entry as separated from others in the blog by its individual time and date stamp) every day.
- Blogging raises self-awareness through the act of recording one's thoughts in the blog and becoming aware of patterns in one's writing, interests, foci, etc.
- Blogging develops critical thinking skills, particularly when using the link-and-comment format of early blogs. Bloggers must sift through and process a site's information evaluate its perspective, sometimes against several other perspectives from other sites addressing the same topic.
- Blogging can be used to build reputations. When bloggers focus on particular interests and present enough research on those interests, they may come to be considered experts in those areas.
- On a business level, blogging can create or improve connections between businesses by disseminating information across a wide audience, or a wide array of audiences, simultaneously.

Although some of Blood's arguments for blogging still apply in the current blogosphere, other arguments rely on the use of the link-and-comment format to be applicable. For example, Blood's discussion of how blogging improves writing focuses on how the link-and-comment type of blog requires short commentary on the link the blogger selects for that day and thus requires that blogger to distill her/his thoughts to present the comment.

In today's blogosphere, however, the majority of blogs use a freeform format resembling a personal diary rather than the older link-and-comment template. Despite this focus on the older form of blogging, *The Weblog Handbook* remains the only book of its type available in print.

Blood's work also appears in *We've Got Blog*, a collection of essays (many from online sources) that examine the blogging phenomenon. However, though the book is only five years old, the essays therein stretch back as far as 1999, and they are often little more than personal ruminations on blogging. While these essays may provide some insight into the reasons why these particular writers blog, the rapid evolution of the blogosphere makes the applicability of these essays to today's blogging environment shaky at best. The usefulness of the book for scholarly research is thus limited, particularly in terms of research relating to composition studies. *We've Got Blog* is not a scholarly work aimed at compositionists; the book is more concerned with bloggers' motivations and observations on the phenomenon than it is with scholarly examination of blogs as a genre.

Much of the scant scholarly work I was able to find in the blogs-as-genre vein comes from a special issue of the journal *Biography* titled "Online Lives." Most of the articles focus on other aspects of online lives, but "Teaching an Old Genre New Tricks" examines how a "sense of intimacy through anonymity marks one of the key ingredients of the popularity of online journals" (McNeill 39) and how bloggers can affect that intimacy by controlling the access readers have to biographical data of the bloggers. "That Different Place: Documenting the Self within Online Environments" also examines the issue of intimacy with blogs and how bloggers rarely take advantage of controls on

blogging sites that allow the blogger to restrict the casual reader's access: "such constraints run counter to the logic of the Web diary community, which sees allowing public access to personal thoughts and personal space as a form of agency—a way to make one's life significant through the feedback and support of readers" (Kitzmann 56). "That Different Place" also examines the issue of audience in blogging, positing that "the audience is not only anticipated [by the blogger], but expected, and thus influences and structures the very manner in which the writer articulates, composes, and distributes the self-document" (56). "Teaching an Old Genre New Tricks" supports this notion of the blogger's audience awareness and further notes, "online writers extend the invitation to read not only to intimates but also to the reading public at large" (McNeill 35).

One final article, "The Digital Queer: Weblogs and Internet Identity," appeared in a different issue of *Biography*. "The Digital Queer" examines the presence of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) community in the blogosphere, concentrating on "the generation of queerness as an identity within blogs" (Rak 177). Julie Rak, author of "The Digital Queer," finds that queer-identified blogs mirror other blogs in that "the rhetoric of blogging, with its focus on experience as the link between online and offline worlds and its tendency to demarcate a grey area between public events and private identity, works to produce gay identity and the scene of its writing as an experience of the absolute in everyday life," much the same way other blogs produce slices of everyday life among heterosexuals (178). Rak further observes that queer identity in blogging is often integrated into other aspects of personal life in the queer blogs themselves. She notes "the untroubled way in which most of these bloggers discuss queer or GLBT identity in some entries" and concludes that bloggers "can present

themselves . . . because they do not experience persecution on a daily basis” (179)—at least not online.

Online Queer Presence and Queer Identity

“The Digital Queer” is the only example of research addressing the presence of the LGBTQ community in the blogosphere. LGBTQ (often shortened to “queer” in scholarly work) presence online has existed since the first bulletin board servers and computer networks sprang into existence to connect computer users with modems in various communities. When the Internet became available for commercial interests in 1985, the queer presence quickly established itself through forums such as e-mail discussion lists, Usenet newsgroups (multi-user discussion boards), and the Internet Relay Chat. With the birth of the World Wide Web, queer presence again quickly established itself, first through individual users’ Web sites and then through various organizational and commercial sites. Nina Wakeford, a professor of sociology at the University of Surrey (UK), describes this online queer presence as sending fledgling digital queers a message “that anyone who has not yet encountered the worlds of cyberspace cannot know the wonders which await them: the realization of global community! the remaking of queer identity! the discovery that whichever subculture of a subculture you inhabit, there will be a Web page, or discussion group, or real-time chat room just for your kind” (403-04). This freedom to express oneself and explore one’s identity is a “key thematic which unites almost all . . . studies [of online queer presence]. The importance of a new space is viewed . . . as a contextual feature for the creation of new versions of the self” (411).

Research by Jennifer Egan, Joanne Addison and Michelle Comstock, and Scott Silberman has focused on the ways in which members of the LGBTQ community have used available online tools to create, refine, and express their queer identities, from identification as queer to online forays into relationship building to political and social stratification. In particular, research in online queer identity has examined the presence of LGBTQ youth online and the use of the Internet and Web to form their *queer identities*—their expression of, and identification with, a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. The research explores such issues as the development of queer identity through online activism, profiling “a new kind of gay kid . . . already at home in the online convergence of activists” that forms part of the online queer presence (Silberman 117) and the use of the Internet “as a virtual stage—a space and time to safely rehearse the coming-out process” (Addison and Comstock 374). Researchers write of how a queer youth’s development of an individual online presence and identity enables the youth to live “out and proud” virtual lives and, in the words of Jennifer Egan (in a *New York Times* article reprinted online) participate in “the normal Sturm und Drang of adolescent life, which before was largely off limits to them,” including online dating.

Other research in online queer presence by Scott DeWitt, Jonathan Alexander, and Gregory Weight explores sites created by and for the queer community that provide a “wealth of opportunities for exploring how a variety of queers construct, represent, and articulate their own understanding of sexuality, sexual orientation, and sexual politics” (Alexander “Writing” 230). Some of this work, such as Weight’s, examines how markers of queer identity in mainstream culture also appear in cyberspace and establish queer presence online. Studies like Weight’s add to the work of such scholars as Sally Munt

and Alan Sinfield (who explore the nature of queer identity), and James Carlsen and James Chesebro (who examine aspects of queer identity and public image), extending into the online environment this previous work regarding the nature of queer identity and its presentation. In these studies, researchers often focus on standard “symbols” of queerness on LGBTQ-oriented sites, including “the frequent use of rainbow flags, pink pyramids (triangles), and other symbols generally associated with gays and lesbians” (Alexander “Homo-Pages” 86), presenting them as some of the markers of online queer identity. In addition to studying the visual rhetoric of queer sites, scholars also examine queer themes in the actual text of LGBTQ sites and the concerns some LGBTQ community members express regarding the responses such “out” pages may generate, with an eye toward how these themes reflect “the internal and external contests . . . students face as they begin the process of identifying” as members of the LGBTQ community (DeWitt 232). Following the lines of LGBTQ students’ formation of queer identities, other studies, including work by Alexander as well as Heidi McKee and Brad Peters and Diane Swanson, examine classrooms as “forums for discussion of the ways in which talking and writing about sexual orientation is tantamount to talking and writing about sexual orientation,” particularly how “networked classrooms offer an unparalleled opportunity for students and teachers to address issues of sexual orientation” (Alexander “Closet” 208). These studies often suggest that computer mediated communication can be used to open dialogues about sexuality and identity, using mechanisms such as pseudonyms, the semi-anonymity of the online world, and available online resources to help students create a safe space for this exploration of identity.

In exploring how the Web has allowed LGBTQ students, in particular, to represent their queer identities online, research also often examines how students “experiment with crafting a ‘public’ queer identity” through the use of Web sites and pages that “highlight . . . their sexuality and its importance to their lives” (Alexander “Ironies” 122). One method of highlighting sexuality is through the use of blogging on sites created specifically for the LGBTQ community such as Oasis Journals (<http://www.oasismag.com>), a site that began as a webzine for LGBTQ youth but is now a site for LGBTQ-specific blogging, mostly by LGBTQ youth. However, though LGBTQ-specific blogging sites allow “a diversity of users to contribute to the site, and prominent blogging topics include gay characters on television, being out, writing poetry, meeting people, having crushes, and navigating relationships” (Alexander “Writing” 257), the queer presence in the blogosphere does not seem to focus on LGBTQ-specific sites. Instead, the queer presence seems to be spread across the more “general” blogging sites (e.g. Blogger and LiveJournal). Although Jonathan Alexander briefly mentions LiveJournal in “Writing Queer Digital Youth,” it is only in passing, and what little mention he includes focuses primarily on blogs found on LGBTQ-specific sites. Aside from Rak’s “The Digital Queer,” I could find no other scholarly work addressing the issue of queer presence in the blogosphere at large. Although several factors may account for this lack of research (e.g. compositionists see “blogging as a tool” rather than “blogs as a genre”), the simplest explanation seems to be that not enough time has elapsed for scholarly studies on the genre of blogs to reach publication.

Gap and Rationale

Whatever the reason for this dearth of research on blogging, scholars online have expressed a need to address this absence. Their calls for research address hint at the wide range of possibilities for studies of blogging, from blogging by professionals in their fields to the effects of blogging on writers' sense of audience to the development of self-identity through blogging. This last area of study seems to intersect with studies of online queer presence and exploration, formation, and representation of queer identity online, particularly Alexander's notion of the public queer identity. The idea of studying the intersection of blogging and queer identity also echoes across academia and studies of LGBTQ students' writing. In college composition classes requiring life writing about significant events in their lives, LGBTQ students in the classroom may find themselves "caught in the midst of various forces that, on one hand, ask them to be honest about themselves, and on the other, disapprove of what they have to reveal" (Alexander "Closet" 209). This paradox creates a situation that inhibits the exploration of identity even as many students find themselves in the midst of that exploration.

The "prominent discourse of homophobia" in academia frequently prompts LGBTQ students, especially those still forming their public queer identities, to shy away from life writing and/or writing about issues of importance to them if that writing will reveal the students' queer identities in the classroom (Malinowitz 37). Anne Herrington and Marcia Curtis's case study of Steven, an openly gay student, highlights the tendency to self-censor queer identity in the classroom. Steven was able to take several classes focusing on LGBTQ topics by participating in a program allowing him to design his own major, and in doing so, Steven experienced classroom environments that were queer-

friendly as well as mixed environments where he felt a pressure to self-censor. Although Steven openly expressed his queer identity in his writing, he admitted he was more comfortable writing in academic environments supportive of LGBTQ students:

[T]he freedom he experienced in College Writing to say what he wanted to say to—and in the face of—an overwhelmingly heterosexual group had been replaced by the more profound sense of freedom to say what he wanted among his own. Those contexts in which he described finding comfort were his milieu, specifically, classrooms in which the shared topics and expected talk were of cross-dressing, homosexuality, and the like; classrooms in which Steven’s respondent classmates—largely gay men, lesbians, and their “allies”—were truly peer readers; classrooms within whose confines, at least, the answer to the question he had posed in English 112—“Is homosexuality normal?”—was “yes.” (Herrington and Curtis 180)

The idea that LGBTQ students face barriers to exploring their queer identities in the classroom is not limited to traditional academic settings. Even online classrooms and classes utilizing computer mediated communication that allows pseudonymous posting still pose threats to students’ safety. The “inherent public nature” of the Internet and Web, even in classroom-related online settings, often results in “the disclosure of sexual orientation . . . on a much larger scale as the size of the audience and the potential for confrontation, bashing, and attacks on free speech increase dramatically” (DeWitt 234).

The awareness of LGBTQ students’ concerns for their safety, physical and scholastic, in online academic settings, suggests that any attempt to study the development of queer identities in such environments will yield limited results. Thus, studies of queer identity formation through writing, particularly online writing such as blogging, may be more effective if these studies begin with the writing produced outside the classroom and then reach an intersection with studies of writing done by the same students in the classroom. Since almost no published research exists in this area, it seems the logical starting point of such work is the examination of queer identity formation,

exploration, and representation in blogging. To start the process of inquiry in this area, I narrowed my focus to gay college age males (i.e. gay males between the ages of 18 and 25), thus leading to this question: *How do college age males self-identifying as gay present an online queer identity in their blogs?* My study, presented in the following sections, is an initial foray into this area, a first step to building a body of research on queer identity and blogging that will help to anchor studies bridging the gulf between queer blogging and LGBTQ students' academic writing.

Methodology

Selection Process

I chose to focus on gay college age males because they represent a significant percentage of the blogosphere's population. The 2006 Pew Internet Project report on bloggers suggests that gay college age males comprise a subsection of a considerably large category of bloggers. Not only are 54% of American bloggers male and 54% of male and female bloggers combined ages 18-29 (Lenhart and Fox 3), but also 37% of American bloggers have a college degree and 38% are full- or part-time students (23). These statistics suggest that many of the gay male bloggers are therefore of the age of "traditional" college students (undergraduates ages 18-25) and are likely pursuing college degrees.

I used bloggers' profiles on LiveJournal (<http://www.livejournal.com>) to begin my selection of blogs for analysis. I used LiveJournal's "interests search" feature to generate a list of blogs in which the keyword "gay," a keyword mainly used by gay males on LiveJournal, appears in the "Interests" list in the blogger's profile. Because I wished to focus on bloggers who are either in college or are at least college aged (generally 18-25 for "traditional" college students), I selected the first five blogs that were written by bloggers no older than 25 years old and who, either in their blogs or in their LiveJournal profiles, publicly identified as gay or queer. Further, I selected bloggers whose posts (single entries in their blogs, distinguished by date and time stamps) are public (i.e. they do not require a reader to be on a "friends list" of LiveJournal users whom the blogger grants access to). I added this criterion because LiveJournal posts that are not public mean that the blogger does not allow random Web surfers to see this representation of the

blogger's queer identity. Bloggers who do not allow the public to see their blogs are arguably not presenting a public queer identity.

I am a registered user of LiveJournal, and as such, I have a friends list and have access to entries marked "friends only" among the blogs of those who have reciprocally added me to their friends list as well. To prevent the possibility that some of these friends-only posts would creep into this analysis, I chose five blogs of total strangers, meaning I can only read the parts of their lives (including their public queer identities) that these five bloggers choose to make public. The text I read for this study is available to anyone who Web surfs to these blogs.

The blogs, along with the bloggers' birthdates (taken from user information in their profiles and the text of the blogs themselves), are as follows:

- deno3001 (<http://deno3001.livejournal.com>), born 18 August 1985
- fiver00 (<http://fiver00.livejournal.com>), born 27 February 1985
- moonboy137 (<http://moonboy137.livejournal.com>), born 19 September 1986
- tennoarashi (<http://tennoarashi.livejournal.com>), born 9 July 1985
- thewingfan (<http://thewingfan.livejournal.com>), born 27 January 1986

I read twenty posts per blog—one Web page of posts in the standard LiveJournal viewing format.

Analysis Method

My analysis method for this project was born from Jonathan Alexander's "Homo-Pages and Queer Sites," which examines "the ways in which queers represent themselves—and each other—in an increasingly trans-national communications medium"

(85)—namely, the Web. Alexander builds on the work of Gregory Weight’s “Closetspace in Cyberspace,” which outlines some ways in which LGBTQ Web authors reveal their queer identity:

[P]eople on the net often out themselves through verbal or, in this case, written language. This is done most often in one of two ways: people either blatantly mention their homosexuality (“I’m gay”) or they mention their “partner,” “lover,” or, less frequently, “husband” or “wife.” However, just as many people, if not more, perform their sexuality through symbolic or visual language, by selecting “obvious” queer images and icons. (Weight)

These simple methods of disclosure are associated with early LGBTQ Web pages, which “narrate gayness as the core and relatively unchanging component of selfhood” (Alexander “Homo-Pages” 86). Alexander refers to these kinds of pages as “homo-pages” and examines samples of them. Alexander also explores a second, newer trend in online queer identity: “queer sites,” which “emphasize crossing boundaries, questioning identities, and exploring the queer as it permeates, but does not *center*, one’s life” (96, emphasis in original). Alexander suggests that these queer sites, with their integration of queer identity into the overall life narrative instead of serving as that narrative’s focus, had begun to overshadow homo-pages as of the article’s publication in 2002.

Because it was possible that the blogs could either focus on the blogger’s queer identity, incorporate that identity into a larger narrative, or do both simultaneously, I used a dual-level approach to read the blogs. Rather than just looking for the blatant textual and visual markers of a homo-page, I also looked at references to LGBTQ-centric culture and community, including how the bloggers’ identity representation touched on stereotypical perceptions of gay men. This process allowed me to examine the blogs for evidence of both types of narrative—the focus on queer identity in a single post and the permeation of queer identity throughout the blogger’s life narrative. I believe this duality

is possible because blogs are generally more dynamic than the pages Alexander studied; Web surfers coming to a blog see the newest posts at the top of the page, with posts proceeding in reverse chronological order. Thus, a post that displays the elements of a homo-page, where queer identity is at the core of the post, might be replaced at the top of the page by a post that displays no markers of queer identity whatsoever. A blog's dedicated readers may know the full life narrative presented in the blog and be aware of the blogger's public queer identity, but readers of a single post might not. I chose to limit the number of posts to twenty instead of setting a time frame (e.g. six months' worth of posts) to equalize the number of posts and also examine whether frequency of posting (i.e. the time lapse between posts) affects establishment and maintenance of the public queer identity. With these factors in mind, I began my analysis of the blogs.

Data

[deno3001's Blog \(http://deno3001.livejournal.com\)](http://deno3001.livejournal.com)

The first blog I studied belonged to a student known as “Deno.” According to the text of his 21 November 2006 post, Deno is Dan Wilson, a 21-year-old college student currently participating in a Study Abroad program in Japan through Springfield, Ohio’s Wittenburg University. Deno’s school information is available in his user profile, as are markers of his public queer identity, starting with his “Bio” section: “I’m in my Second Year of College, and what’s great about college you ask? COLLEGE BOYS! Totally hot!” Several lines down in his bio, Deno includes a rainbow “bar” with the message “marriage is love” under it (see Figure 1). This graphic began as part of a LiveJournal-wide campaign in support of same-sex marriage; bloggers displaying this graphic are usually (but not always) queer.



Figure 1. The “Marriage is love” graphic.

At the time of this study, the dates of the posts on his initial blog page were 30 September 2006 through 26 November 2006.

As Deno writes about his experiences in Japan, he reminds the reader of his sexual orientation through various references relating to his public queer identity. For example, he mentions that he “Kind of made out with a cute Scottish boy” in his 26 November 2006 post, which reminds the reader that Deno is interested in romantic and physical/sexual relationships with other men. In his 31 October 2006 post, while describing an experience involving some Japanese women, Deno directly references his

sexual orientation when he remarks, “They weren’t bad looking at all, but it was just squiggly to my gay mentality.”

In his 1 October 2006 post, Deno emphasizes his sexual orientation further when he discusses a book about religion and sexual orientation:

If anyone wants to read good academic essays on Homosexuality throughout the various world religions (Roman Catholic, Protestant, Judaism [sic], Islam, Buddhism, Hindu, Tribal Religions in the Americas and Africa, and Those Religions of China and Japan: Confucianism, Taoism [sic], and Shinto) then I would suggest *Homosexuality and World Religions* edited by Arlene Swidler.

Deno provides three additional paragraphs describing the book and its contents. He concludes his review of the book with, “I’m really glad that I picked up this book. Not only is it informative on something that is important to me [i.e. his sexual orientation], but it’s a lot of fun.”

The clearest example of Deno’s public queer identity in his blog, however, is not in the text but in the visual representation of his orientation that he establishes with his user icons. Three of these icons are queer-specific, one of which being an animated icon that morphs into a naked young man briefly before re-clothing him (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Deno’s animated user icon, all frames in sequence.

The text in the corner of his user icon, “Boysinc.com,” is a reference to the Web site of the same name (<http://www.boysinc.com>). The title of the home page is “Boysinc.com - Gay shopping, events, travel, news, and much more!” A quick look at the Boysinc.com site reveals the queer-specific erotic/sexual nature of the merchandise.

Other user icons include graphics specifically showing two men together in provocative images that imply intimate contact, as shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Other user icons in Deno's blog showing explicit images of same-sex interaction.

It is plain that Deno's user icons clearly provide visual representation of his sexual orientation as well as his specific interest in the male anatomy and sexual acts between two men; however, not all sites are as sexually explicit as Deno's (and some are far more explicit). The second blog, for example, focuses on representing the blogger's public queer identity through less sexually explicit means.

fiver00's Blog (<http://fiver00.livejournal.com>)

The profile for fiver00 lists this blogger's first name as Jared (text in his blog indicates his last name is MacPherson). Jared attends NSCAD University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and according to his 28 February 2006 post, he is 21 years old. Jared does not update his blog as often as Deno; the twenty posts I examined in his blog spanned 21 July 2006 through 4 October 2006. Jared's LiveJournal profile (which, according to his bio, he has not updated since 6 August 2004) does not mention his sexual orientation, although he does list "boys," "gay," and "gay rights" among his interests.

In representing his queer identity, Jared's blog persona often refers to elements of gay culture that are not restricted to the LGBTQ community but, when taken as a whole, often suggest (mostly through stereotyping) that he is a gay male. He writes about buying

and assembling furniture from IKEA, a popular store among gay men. He mentions an afternoon spa appointment in one post. In another post, he writes about seeing a stage production of *Phantom of the Opera* (theater has long been associated with the gay community, particularly musical theater). He devotes his 4 August 2006 post to complaining about having to shave daily, and in the post, he describes his daily grooming routine:

For anyone curious, my typical schedule:

- Shower
- loofa with soap
- wash hair
- condition hair
- moisturize with shower cream
- towel dry
- apply heat-protection cream to hair
- blow-dry hair
- more heat-protection cream
- straighten hair
- style hair with molding wax
- hair-spray
- brush teeth
- rinse face
- use toner for face and neck
- moisturize face, neck, arms, chest
- get dressed

The extensive time spent moisturizing and fussing with hair are characteristic of the gay male stereotype which emphasizes gay men having an interest in personal grooming and appearance similar to stereotypical perceptions of straight women's focus on physical appearance. Mentions of IKEA, the spa, and the theater, the detailed itinerary of personal grooming creates a collection of references to stereotypical aspects of LGBTQ culture that paints a clearer picture than any single reference would. In addition to queer culture references in the text, Jared includes visual representation of his queer identity in the form of embedded YouTube videos featuring clips of the Comedy Central television show *Drawn Together*, a cartoon that includes a gay character named Xandir, particularly embedding the episode in which Xandir comes out.

Jared's main representation of his queer identity, however, takes the form of references to his long-distance relationship with his partner, Mike. Of the twenty posts that visitors to Jared's blog can read on the first page displayed, half of them include references to his boyfriend, usually small references like conversations between Jared and Mike. In the space of these twenty posts, readers learn that Mike lives in Edmonton, Alberta (over three thousand miles from Jared) and that the two of them spent approximately two weeks together, from 21 August 2006 to 5 September 2006. During that time, Jared has five posts—one-fourth of the page of posts—discussing their time together. The posts in this period also contain some of the aforementioned references to queer culture, thus making some of the posts serve double duty in representing Jared's public queer identity. For example, in the opening lines of the 3 September 2006 post, Jared writes:

The boy and I went to see Phantom of the Opera last night. Holy. Freaking. Crap. Despite being on the third balcony, the show was breath-

takingly awesome. I don't have the vocabulary to properly describe it so I won't try . . . but damn. I know I'm a huge queen when it comes to things like this, but I was nearly teary-eyed at the end of the performance.

In these few short sentences, Jared refers to his same-sex relationship with Mike ("the boy"), one of the mainstays of stereotypical gay men's culture (musical theater, particularly *Phantom of the Opera*), and his own orientation ("I know I'm a huge queen when it comes to things like this"). Jared's 3 September 2006 blog post demonstrates how bloggers can use several markers to represent their queer identities in a single post and display a clearly queer public self in the narratives of their lives.

In another example of multiple methods of representing his public queer identity in a single blog post, Jared, in his 5 September 2006 post, mentions "leaving Mike this morning" and "crying like a pussy in the cab" on his way to the airport. In the same post, he describes meeting a celebrity (either Shawn or Aaron Ashmore; he wasn't sure which twin it was) at a stopover in another airport, writing that he finds this particular celebrity "freaking hot" and adding that he was "mometarily [sic] overwhelmed by my fanatic queer side and almost got all creepy." In this brief paragraph in his post, Jared, who has already referenced his same-sex relationship again, references his sexual orientation (his "fanatic queer side") and adds a second reference to same-sex relationships in the form of a physical attraction to a celebrity who is, of course, of the same gender as himself.

Jared's blog shows a marked contrast from Deno's in that Jared's representation of his public queer identity is not predominantly sexual in nature; however, Jared's queer self is as clear as Deno's, if not clearer, by how he presents his public queer identity to the reader and assembles different means of revealing queer identity with the rest of his life to present his narrative of self.

thewingfan's Blog (<http://thewingfan.livejournal.com>)

The third blog in this study belongs to thewingfan, whose LiveJournal profile identifies him as Andrew (no last name appears in the data). Andrew refers to himself in his Bio section as a 20-year-old “[q]ueer nerd attending the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, majoring in Women’s Studies” and contains an icon (Figure 4) that bears the caption “i support hot gay sex” underneath it. This graphic-and-caption combination merges a reference to same-sex relationships (in the form of referencing gay sex) with a visual representation of sexual orientation.

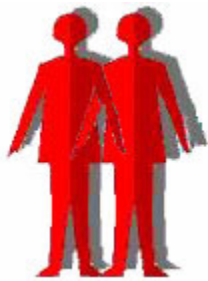


Figure 4. The “i support hot gay sex” icon.

This combination of methods for representing queer identity makes Andrew’s LiveJournal profile the most explicit of the blogs studied, in terms of public identification as queer before a casual reader even reaches the blog itself.

Andrew is the least active blogger of the three studied; at the time I examined his blog, the most recent twenty posts covered the period from 4 April 2005 through 19 September 2006. However, these posts cover a great deal of LGBTQ-centric territory. Three of Andrew’s posts reference same-sex relationships. The second sentence of his 4 April 2005 post mentions that Andrew has “finally found [his] very first boyfriend,” a fellow University of Michigan student named Jurgo. In the 2 June 2005 post, Andrew writes about taking Jurgo home to meet his family and that things went well, but in the 19

September 2006 post, Andrew relates that he has broken up with Jurgo. Although Andrew's blog is scant on details of his relationship, Andrew is the only blogger in the study who discusses his emotional state both at the beginning of the relationship (where Andrew is ecstatic, content, and happy) and at its end (where Andrew writes of how he feels he has probably hurt Jurgo emotionally).

Scant though the details of Andrew's life may be in his blog, he still indicates his sexual orientation in other posts when he mentions, in his 21 September 2005 post, that he has gotten a job at the University of Michigan's Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Affairs. This is the most specific example in the study of a reference to LGBTQ community affiliations in the form of groups that focus on LGBTQ concerns. Where Jared's blog presented queer culture references in a mosaic that became clear when the reader assembled the references together, Andrew specifically mentions his connection with an office on the University of Michigan's campus that addresses concerns about LGBTQ culture and community.

Andrew also, like Deno, presents his queer identity by addressing issues that deal with sexual orientation. In his 1 July 2005 post, Andrew sums up his feelings on Canada's and Spain's passage of same-sex marriage legislation even as he laments the retirement of Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor in the United States, expressing concern that the replacement Justice would be a "right-wing, fundamentalist nut job." He juxtaposes his comments on the Supreme Court with his mention of the same-sex marriage legislation that passed in other countries, potentially presenting a connection in the form of possible Supreme Court hearings on the question of same-sex

marriage in the United States and the slew of individual states' legislation banning such unions.

In addition, Andrew ties issues relating to sexual orientation with LGBTQ community involvement when he announces, in his 28 February 2006 post, that he has received a grant to work in India over the summer. In the same post, he mentions that his plans for his stay in India focus on “work[ing] on gay rights activism in Mumbai with the Humsafar Trust.” This reference to a community affiliation—building connections with the LGBTQ community in another country—is reinforced by Andrew’s indication of his interest and involvement in gay rights activism. Although Andrew’s blog contains no visual references to sexual orientation outside his LiveJournal profile, the density of references in his brief twenty posts clearly establishes his sexual orientation and his public queer identity. In addition, the lesser frequency of Andrew’s public posts means the casual reader of his blog will see these references to his queer identity more often, thus reinforcing its representation.

[moonboy137's Blog \(http://moonboy137.livejournal.com\)](http://moonboy137.livejournal.com)

According to his LiveJournal profile, moonboy137 is Nick, a.k.a. “NickyPooh,” who lives in San Jose, California and is twenty years old at the time of the study. Like Andrew’s blog, the twenty consecutive posts in Nick’s blog cover a large time span, from 29 July 2005 through 19 February 2007. Unlike Andrew’s blog, however, Nick’s public queer identity is not prominent.

The main indicators of Nick’s public queer identity occur in his LiveJournal user profile. Some of the interests Nick lists include “boyfriend,” “boys,” and “gay.” In his “Bio” section, he lists some favorites that reflect an interest in queer culture, specifically

references to the movies *Camp* (one of his favorite CDs is the *Camp* soundtrack), *The Broken Hearts Club*, and *Trick*—three movies that carry “cult” status in the LGBTQ community.

In his actual blog, however, Nick’s public queer identity borders on nonexistent. In only four posts are even the vaguest of references found. Two of these posts apparently refer to a short-lived relationship. The 31 January 2006 post includes a sentence that reads, “I love chris [sic],” but the following post, dated 22 March 2006, reads, “Chris and I . . . rocky rocky friendship there . . . questioning if its [sic] worth the effort after the messy breakup.” Although these sentences clearly refer to a relationship, the gender of “Chris” is potentially ambiguous. While “Chris” is usually a nickname for “Christopher,” it can also be a nickname for “Christine” or even “Crystal.”

The other two references are also ambiguous. In his 3 November 2006 post, Nick writes, “Dina rescued me today from my day off and sickness. Damn i [sic] love that lesbian.” Although in another context this might clearly indicate an affiliation with the LGBTQ community in the form of friendships facilitated by sharing the factor of sexual orientation, in this case the reference, standing alone as it does, merely indicates that Nick has a lesbian friend. It does not necessarily point to either factor.

In his 19 February 2007 post, Nick writes, “Christy is teaching me how to purl so i [sic] can make patterns when i knit.” The notion of a man knitting is a stereotype of gay culture; however, this reference is again hazy. Unlike in Jared’s blog, where a multitude of stereotype-oriented references to stereotypes work together to flesh out a clear image of public queer identity, Nick’s single reference to a queer stereotype in the course of twenty posts does not create the same collective image as Jared’s blog displays.

The time frame spanned by these twenty posts, as with Andrew's, suggests that Nick does not put much emphasis on creating public blog posts—or on blogging at all, given his 19 February 2007 comment, “Theres so muc to catch up livejournal that I just dont [sic].” The difference is that Andrew's public posts, despite their infrequency, often include surface markers of public queer identity; however, Nick's posts contain, at best, hazy references to his queer identity.

tennoarashi's Blog (<http://tennoarashi.livejournal.com>)

The final blog analyzed belongs to tennoarashi, a.k.a. Rian, a 21-year-old gay man living in Markham, Ontario, Canada at the time of this study, according to his user profile. The posts studied fell within the period of 6 November 2006 through 24 February 2007.

Just as Nick's blog presented only a hint of public queer identity, Rian's blog also contains ambiguous markers of public queer identity; however, part of the ambiguity lies in verifying that Rian's gender is male. Rian seems to be more androgynous than the other bloggers I studied; in fact, in the comments for the 11 December 2006 post includes an exchange with another LiveJournal user who writes, “wait, are you saying you're a boy?” Rian confirms his gender for this commenter, but a reader who skips the comments may wind up puzzled about whether Rian is a boy or a girl. (Even his name provides no definite clue to gender. Some baby name books list “Rian” and the alternate spelling of “Ryan” as a name for either a boy or a girl, though some books list it solely as a boy's name.)

The ambiguity of Rian's gender carries over into his queer identity in his blog. Several ambiguous references to public queer identity occur in terms of visual

representation, starting with Rian's single user icon. His user icon at the time of the study is a picture of Diana Prince, the alter ego of the DC Comics superhero Wonder Woman. Wonder Woman is a popular character among gay male comic book readers, but the single image is not specifically an indicator of a queer public identity; it merely hints at it. Other visual representations come in the 18 January 2007 form of scans from various issues of *Marvel Illustrated*, specifically the "swimsuit edition" issues. Rian has scanned in images from these comics, specifically the images of various Marvel Comics male superheroes in swimsuits. He titles the post, "Marvel Beefcake Finale" (it is the third of three posts with the scans; the other two were posted in a LiveJournal community called "scans_daily"), and his comments transform the set of scans into an expression of his tastes in men. For example, commenting on an illustration of the superhero Namor, the Sub-Mariner (which features a strategically-placed shell covering his groin), Rian writes, "I still love his . . . shell. Thing. Hot. Do me." Still, even the combination of visual representation and sexually charged commentary can remain ambiguous if the reader skips blog posts' comments (the only place where he makes his gender clear); a reader unaware of Rian's gender may presume that this is a woman who is admiring the scantily-clad Mighty Marvel Men.

Another combination of visual reference and commentary text is only clear if the reader knows the cultural reference. In his 31 December 2006 post, Rian includes a picture of the DC Comics superhero Uncle Sam, a member of the superhero team called the Freedom Fighters. His comment in the text underneath the picture is, "Yum, Uncle Sam. Oh, I am so anti-shota I went *the other way*" (emphasis in original). The word *shota* is a shortened version of *shotacon*, a Japanese word that refers to a psychological

complex involving either an adult's attraction to an underage boy or the mutual attraction of two underage boys. For readers who know Rian's gender, his comment suggests that he feels so little attraction to younger men that he in fact has swung the other direction and become attracted to older men. (Whether this is completely true or somewhat tongue-in-cheek is unclear.) However, even readers who know what *shota* means—and that this use of *shota* is the foreshortening of *shotacon*) might not be aware of the homosexual overtones of the word when used in Western culture. (*Shotacon*, in Japan, more often refers to a relationship between a young boy and an older woman—like the relationship between the titles characters of the movie *Harold and Maude*—than intergenerational, potentially pedophilic, relationship between two males.) Without this knowledge, public readers would completely miss that this reference broadcasts Rian's public queer identity like a beacon to anyone well versed in anime and manga.

Other methods of indicating public queer identity are not as frequent as the visual representations in Rian's blog. In a post dated 11 December 2006, however, Rian incorporates brief references to LGBTQ culture a total of three times, though potential for ambiguity still exists. The first reference, early in the post, involves a school project that he identifies thus: "The curious can know that my thesis is, more or less, *the fact that homosexually-oriented and homosexually-friendly media has detrimental body-image practices which negatively impact the psychology, self-esteem and emotional state of gay and lesbian communities*" (emphasis in original).

Later in the post, Rian mentions registering with y!Gallery (<http://yaoi.y-gallery.net/>). Readers unfamiliar with anime and manga terms are likely to be unaware that y!Gallery is a gallery for images of *yaoi* (a genre of anime and manga that focuses on

homosexual relationships between men, often with sexually explicit imagery). However, the nature of the images becomes clear if the reader follows the links Rian provides to some of the gallery's images. (Rian also warns readers that the images are NSFW [Not Safe For Work]—a typical caveat often employed by bloggers whose posts either link to such material or contain such material themselves.) A reader following these links receives a clearer image of Rian's public queer identity from their subject matter. The final marker of public queer identity in the post further enhances his identity: "Isn't smut fun? Especially if it's men." Some ambiguity may still exist, however, for readers who may understand what *yaoi* is but may not know that Rian is male. While the references in the 11 December 2006 post are the clearest indicators of Rian's public queer identity, readers familiar with manga might also know that *yaoi* is popular among women as well as men (in Japan, *yaoi* is marketed to a female audience).

Rian includes a self-portrait in this post as well, but his art style renders his self-portrait rather androgynous. He positions his self-portrait next to a portrait of one of his female friends, and the combination of his androgynous looks next to the clearly female appearance of his friend result in yet more potential ambiguity about his gender. This ambiguity continues to obscure Rian's public queer identity. If readers cannot clearly discern that they are reading a blog written by a male, any references to an attraction to men may lead readers to believe Rian is a heterosexual female interested in American comic books, manga, and anime. Without knowing the manga and anime terms he uses and how those terms link to his queer identity, readers may find Rian to be an enigma.

Rian's public queer identity is thus one that involves a certain amount of "in the know" for public readers. While his identity is more clearly defined than Nick's (and,

arguably, more clearly defined than Deno's, since Deno relies heavily on user icons that he can change in a "cascade effect" in LiveJournal), Rian's public queer identity would not be as clear to readers who do not share specific such as the specialized terms from anime and manga. In addition, since Rian's posts were more frequent than Andrew's, Nick's, and Jared's, any specific blog post that clearly defines his public queer identity will more quickly move down in the list of posts (and thus off the initial display page) than some of the others. This lessens the influence repetition of these markers has on reinforcing his public queer identity.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the data produced results that help to refine Gregory Weight's and Jonathan Alexander's work in identifying characteristics of LGBTQ Web sites and blogs that reinforce the queer identities of their authors. As mentioned earlier, Weight used simple criteria of explicit "I'm gay" text and queer-themed images to show how LGBTQ Web authors use these markers to out themselves, and Alexander extended this study to address the different types of life narratives that resulted from a shift in the focus of that narrative on the queer identity of the author. My study carried these analysis tools into the blogosphere, where these tools underwent further refinement, resulting in separate categories of textual representation of bloggers' public queer identities.

Categories of Textual Representation of Public Queer Identity

One aspect in which Weight's and Alexander's analysis tools underwent refinement is in the study of the blogs' actual text. The results of my study indicate that bloggers' techniques for revealing queer identity in the text of their blogs moved beyond the simple declaration of "I'm gay" on a publicly accessible Web page to create a public queer identity. These methods of textual "outing" appear to fall within three broad categories: 1) references to/discussions of sexual orientation, 2) references to same-sex relationships, and 3) references to queer culture and/or LGBTQ community affiliations.

References to/discussions of sexual orientation are the simplest indicators of public queer identities. This category encompasses and expands upon Weight's use of "I'm gay" as a textual marker of online queer identity. On LiveJournal, bloggers often reference their sexual orientation in the "Interests" section of their user profiles by using

keywords or key phrases such as “gay,” “homosexuality,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” “transgender,” “LGBTQ,” “gay rights,” or more explicit references such as “gay sex,” “boys kissing boys,” “girls kissing girls,” etc. In addition, the “Bio” section of the LiveJournal user profile allows the user to provide additional references to orientation. In the blogs I studied, these references to sexual orientation occurred as passing references—Deno’s mention of his “gay mentality,” Jared’s comment that he’s a “huge queen” about musical theater and his mention of his “fanatic queer side” when seeing a celebrity.

However, in Deno’s, Andrew’s, and Rian’s blogs, reference to sexual orientation also involves discussions of issues about sexual orientation. Deno’s review of a book about religion and homosexuality is a clear example of how some of the bloggers in this study bring attention to their public queer identities through discussions of topics relating directly to their sexual orientation. Other examples exist in Andrew’s mention of working with gay rights activists in India and discussion of issues surrounding same-sex marriage legislation worldwide, and Rian’s school project focusing on media’s effect of body image in the LGBTQ community. These discussions about sexual orientation, clearly from the point of view of gay man, are not the same as Weight’s original notion of outing through simple declaration of one’s sexual orientation; however, the thematic similarity is clear.

References to same-sex relationships evolved from Weight’s assertion that some LGBTQ Web users out themselves by referring specifically to a “partner” or “lover,” or less often, “husband” or “wife” (as appropriate). Jared’s mention of Mike, his partner, in several of his blog entries follows this category, particularly when he refers to Mike as

his “boyfriend” (or, in one instance, “the boy”). Andrew also refers to Jurgo as his “boyfriend” when he begins his relationship with him. By contrast, Nick’s references to his boyfriend are ambiguous; the only two mentions of his apparently short-lived romance involve using his boyfriend’s name, Chris, which is gender ambiguous.

Deno and Rian, however, are both single throughout the entire period of time covered by the blog posts in the study; thus, references to same-sex relationships take on different dimensions. These include mentions of brief physical/sexual encounters with other gay men (e.g. when Deno mentions he “kind of made out with a cute Scottish boy”) and mentions of romantic or physical/sexual attractions to members of the same sex (e.g. when Rian makes comments about certain comic book characters he would like to have sex with—such as his “Do me” reaction to a picture of the Sub-Mariner that he finds erotic). As with references to sexual orientation, this category of public queer representation appears to be more complex in the blogs I studied than Weight’s original criteria seems to suggest.

References to LGBTQ culture and/or LGBTQ community affiliations were not specifically mentioned by Weight; however, such references may fall under the “other ways” LGBTQ Web authors—and bloggers—represent their queer identities online. In the blogs, this category of representation contained the greatest variety of textual cues to create these references. Some instances of this reference category are simple, as with Andrew’s announcement that he has gotten a job at the University of Michigan’s Office of LGBT Affairs or his development of connections with India’s LGBTQ community when he is in that country, working with Indian LGBTQ rights activists. In Jared’s blog, however, a different phenomenon occurs. His references to LGBTQ culture appear

clearly when taken as a whole instead of singly. Jared's references to aspects of culture stereotypically associated with gay men—shopping at IKEA, musical theater, visits to spas, intensive personal grooming routines and attention to personal appearance—work together as a pattern to embody this category of public queer identity representation.

Rian's contributions to this category take the form of wink-wink-nudge-nudge references to esoterica that indicate LGBTQ connections in other interest groups, mainly references to *shota* and *yaoi*, which in anime and manga circles in Western culture are known to refer to stories featuring romantic and sexual situations between two males. Other examples of wink-wink-nudge-nudge references in Rian's blog include the picture of two Marvel superheroes, Hector and Northstar, who are openly gay in the comic books, and the user icon of Wonder Woman, whose status as an iconic figure in LGBTQ culture is more widely known than the other references but still may be misinterpreted. Rian's references to LGBTQ culture are reminiscent of gay men's culture in the middle of the twentieth century, when gay men often inquire whether another man was gay by asking if the other man was "a friend of Dorothy." ("Dorothy" referred to Judy Garland, who played Dorothy Gale in the 1939 MGM film version of *The Wizard of Oz*. Garland was a gay culture icon, particularly in the 1960s.)

The various ways that references to LGBTQ cultural and community affiliations appear in the blogs I studied suggest that this may be the most versatile category of textual representation of public queer identity. This difference between Andrew's, Jared's, and Rian's references to LGBTQ culture reflect a difference in the nature of the narratives of their blogs. Andrew's blog tends to follow the pattern of Alexander's description of homo-pages; the explicit references to LGBTQ culture clearly define his

sexual orientation as a core of his identity as it is presented in the blog. By contrast, Jared's blog presents a mosaic of cultural references that permeate the narrative and define his sexual identity when taken as a whole, much like the queer sites Alexander describes as a counterpoint to homo-pages. Rian's blog, however, falls somewhere in the middle of the homo-pages/queer sites distinction; although his references to LGBTQ culture are explicit to those who understand them, they remain open to misinterpretation by casual readers who may not know the comic book, anime, and manga contexts of many of his references. The distinctions between the three blogs show how this category of textual representation, like the previous two, engage in a more complex and linguistically richer manner than Weight's original simplistic observation suggests.

Visual Representation of Public Queer Identity

Just as textual characteristics of public queer identity are a rich, complex area of examination, so too does the visual component present more variety in execution than Weight's and Alexander's original studies showed. While visual representation of sexual orientation would have focused on the "frequent use of rainbow flags, pink pyramids (triangles), and other symbols generally associated with gays and lesbians" (86), as Jonathan Alexander noted in "Homo-Pages and Queer Sites," visual representation in the blog posts I studied tended to eschew traditional LGBTQ Pride images other than using these symbols in user profiles. Jared, Andrew, and Nick used few images, and their posts mostly consisted of text. Rian and Deno, however, used graphics that tended to involve sexually charged male imagery, some of which was explicitly homoerotic (e.g. Deno's Boysinc.com user icon), some of which was implicitly homoerotic (e.g. Rian's scans of Marvel superheroes in very brief swimsuits). These images reinforced the sexual

component of Deno's and Rian's public queer identities, something traditional LGBTQ Pride symbols (rainbow flags and pink triangles) steer clear of to avoid controversy over imagery the public may consider to be too sexually explicit. However, this does not mean that the focus of visual references to sexual orientation has shifted to solely erotic imagery. In his study of LGBTQ sites, Alexander noted that sexually explicit imagery often coexists with traditional LGBTQ Pride images. Given that Pride symbols still permeate the LGBTQ community and still appear on Web sites, both personal and commercial, it is likely that the near-total absence of these images in the blogs I studied is a limitation of the study itself, and a broader study would show that these symbols still appear frequently.

Other Possible Factors

In addition to textual and visual representations of public queer identity in the blogs, I examined three other factors that may influence the perception of bloggers' public queer identities. These factors move beyond the predominantly post-by-post examination of the blogs, exploring how each blog, as a whole, represents each blogger's public queer identity. Although the limited nature of my study made drawing conclusions about these three factors difficult, I formulated initial observations and conclusions for them that future larger-scale studies can confirm or disprove.

Proportion of LGBTQ-centric text to overall text is a factor created by cross-referencing the categories of textual and visual representation with factors of length and time (presented later) to impart a sense of how much of the blog's text focuses on LGBTQ issues in relation to the text of the blog as a whole. Textual and visual cues can represent a blogger's public queer identity on a post-by-post basis, but if a blog contains a

heavy concentration of these identity markers for a certain period of time, followed by an absence of these markers, examining a single blog post to ascertain the blogger's orientation could be misleading, depending on the post being read. While this factor does not necessarily provide insight into whether sexual orientation is the core of the blogger's identity (as presented in the narrative) or whether the identity permeates a larger life narrative, it could potentially provide insight into the significance that blogger places on queer identity in the blog as a whole. If, for example, a blogger writes twenty posts over the course of three years, but each post utilizes textual and/or visual indicators of queer identity, then the proportion of LGBTQ-centric text is high and suggests that the blogger may place a high emphasis on establishing a public queer identity. By contrast, someone who generates twenty posts in less than a month and only rarely includes the same markers of queer identity may place less emphasis on establishing the public queer identity as a feature of the blog's narrative.

One factor affecting the proportion of queer-centric text in blogs is the *length of blog posts*, which consists of simply counting the words for each post. These lengths can then be compared both internally (against other posts in the same blog) and externally (against posts in other blogs). Internal comparisons may yield patterns that relate post length to queer identity for a particular blog. For example, a blogger may write comparatively long posts that focus on queer identity and shorter posts that do not, which implies an emphasis on queer identity throughout the blog; the reverse may indicate a de-emphasis on queer identity. External comparisons of post lengths across blogs may yield patterns that indicate longer posts lead to more emphasis on queer identity, or such a comparison may yield results to the converse.

Different patterns of identity markers appeared to emerge for each blogger I studied, and these patterns do not necessarily correspond to the length of posts in each blog. Much of Deno's markers, for example, consist of visual references that often bear no connection to the text of his blog posts, even though he has the longest average post length of the blogs studied (683 words). Only in one post does Deno focus on sexual orientation for a significant amount of text, when he discusses the book he has read about religion and homosexuality. Though the average length of posts in Jared's blog is nowhere near as high as Deno's (205 words), Jared's posts contain more queer-oriented text and minimal visual representation. His identity markers focus mainly on his relationship and, to a lesser extent, on references to stereotypically queer culture. Andrew's posts, though the shortest (averaging 90 words per post), are the most focused on his public queer identity. Rian's posts, by contrast, combine images and text that provide a complex representation of his identity, but these references are concentrated in less than one-fourth of his posts despite his average of 276 words per post. Finally, Nick's posts, usually short as well (averaging 135 words per post), contain almost no queer-centric text at all, making his public queer identity one that is established almost exclusively through a few references in his LiveJournal profile page. In my study, therefore, an external comparison of post length showed that post length did not appear to affect the focus the bloggers placed on their public queer identities; however, a study conducted on a larger scale may have a better chance of finding any patterns that might exist in post length.

The other factor affecting the proportion of queer-centric text in blogs is the *frequency of blog posts*, which examines how often individual bloggers post. Many

reasons exist for why bloggers post with varying frequency, including issues of available time to post and the relative importance the blogger assigns to posting with regard to other life activities (dating, working, school, friends, etc.). Once the frequency of posts is established, looking at the subject matter of those posts may provide clues to the emphasis a blogger places on representing public queer identity throughout the blog. If, for example, posts are infrequent but usually focus on events relating to the blogger's queer identity, it may suggest that the blogger puts a great deal of emphasis on queer identity in this blog's narrative. By contrast, a blogger who posts frequently but rarely includes markers of public queer identity may not put much emphasis on that identity.

My study yielded mixed results in this area. Both Andrew's and Nick's blogs, for example, covered large periods of time, suggesting infrequent blogging, yet Andrew's blog presents a strong public queer identity while Nick's public queer identity is almost nonexistent. While Deno, Jared, and Rian posted more frequently than Andrew and Nick, Deno's posts often contained no textual markers of his public queer identity, and the potentially ambiguous nature of Rian's posts tended to confuse the issue of queer identity. Jared's blog was the only one in which a pattern emerged from his frequent posts (eleven of the twenty contained some form of textual marker), primarily because he was blogging at the time about his visit with his partner (before, during, and after the visit itself). However, a study on a larger scale may clarify the patterns hinted at by my work for this project.

Public Queer Identity: Integral or a Focus?

In "Homo-Pages and Queer Sites," Jonathan Alexander posited two types of narratives emerging from the different LGBTQ sites. Some of these sites, often created

early in the Web's existence, tended to focus sexual orientation as a core component of the author's identity; other sites, generally created later, explored the notion of sexual orientation as permeating the author's identity rather than residing as the central component of that identity. Similarly, the different blogs present different foci of public queer identity in the narratives the blogs present, and the means by which they establish these foci—distilled into the proportion of LGBTQ text to overall text in the blog—may reveal variations in and suggest something of the nature of these foci.

Each blogger uses different textual and visual identity markers with different frequency. In Deno's blog, for example, reference to LGBTQ relationships is minimal and often in passing (perhaps because Deno is single and in a foreign country), while several of Jared's posts mention his long-term relationship and occasionally include descriptions of activities he shared with his partner. Although Andrew's posts are all fairly short (nothing over a few paragraphs), the posts in which he references his relationship are focused almost totally on the relationship itself, where Nick's references to relationships are almost nonexistent. Rian has no references to relationships whatsoever, but he makes up for this lack of relationship references in his more frequent discussions of men he finds attractive, usually with accompanying images.

The suggestion of different foci of queer public identity hints that a narrative continuum exists in these blogs. At one end of this continuum, where queer identity is central to the narrative, is Andrew's blog. Andrew's text presents a queer identity that is central to the self he has presented in his narrative. His focus on LGBTQ community and relationships focuses his blog's narrative on his self-identification as a queer man, drawing attention in his short posts to various events in his life that revolve around his

sexual orientation. At the other end of the continuum, where queer identity is integrated into or subordinate to the overall life narrative, is Nick's blog, which lacks a clear sense of public queer identity, relegating its significance in the narrative to a realm of near-nonexistence. The other three blogs fall somewhere between these two extremes. Deno's blog draws attention to his orientation primarily through its visual imagery, suggesting that the significance of his orientation in his narrative is secondary to his experiences with Japanese culture. The minimal number of Rian's posts dealing with his queer identity balance against those posts' often decidedly sexual nature to present a relatively strong image of identity nonetheless—provided the public reader knows certain anime- and manga-specific references and realizes that Rian is male.

Jared's blog represents a midpoint in this continuum. Although his public queer identity is a strong presence in his narrative, that identity permeates his blog instead of standing out as the central focus. Markers of queer identity emerge in the text of Jared's blog as a natural result of relating events in his life, which does not have the focus in LGBTQ activism that Andrew's narrative includes. Instead, readers become aware of Jared's orientation primarily through his non-masking of pronouns when referring to his partner or through his relation of daily activities that echo a pattern of almost stereotypical queer culture.

That three of the blogs studied (Deno's, Rian's, and Jared's) seem to cluster toward the middle of this continuum reflects Alexander's observation, in 2002, that personal Web sites by members of the LGBTQ community have begun to move away from a queer-identity-as-core-of-self model to a queer-identity-integrated-into-self model. This integration of queer identity into the overall life narrative of a blog may reflect the

increased level of societal acceptance and self-acceptance that has allowed many members of the LGBTQ community to come out at a younger age and integrate their sexual orientation into their senses of self instead of being forced to maintain it as a discrete identity. These blogs, and others like them, also feed back into the atmosphere of acceptance by raising visibility of the LGBTQ community and by presenting a variety of narratives that represent the diversity within the community, which helps to break down stereotypes and humanize an otherwise demonized group. Blogs like the five in my study also provide support within the LGBTQ community by giving current and future generations of LGBTQ students—part of the demographic comprising the largest number of bloggers—the opportunity to connect with peers across the blogosphere.

A future study on a larger scale may either validate or contradict these observations. In either case, this study has attempted to set forth some initial principles of conducting future research and identify characteristics of blogs that help to establish a sense of bloggers' public queer identities.

Conclusion

My study combines a first look at blogging as a genre with the extension of research in online queer identity into the dynamic arena of the blogosphere. It is a first step to blogosphere studies that move beyond blogging as a tool, studies that work toward the goal of incorporating blogs in the classroom, meeting Kathleen Blake Yancey's challenge to create an updated curriculum that reflects the writing students do outside academia. This foray into the genre of blogs sets the stage for expanded studies to confirm and/or challenge my conclusions, providing a first step for researchers in online queer identity like Jonathan Alexander, Gregory Weight, and Scott DeWitt to move their studies into the blogosphere.

The possibilities for other queer-centric blogging research include performing the same study on a larger scale. I designed this study to be scalable, which allows researchers to expand sample size and either retain the original criteria for selection or modify that criteria to include the entire LGBTQ community or subgroups of it. Larger-scale studies can provide further insight into the nature of public queer identity as it appears in blogs, further refining the textual and/or visual markers of public representation and fleshing out patterns of representation across blogs as well as in individual posts. Other studies examining LGBTQ blogs can include comparative and contrastive studies of queer identity among the subgroups of the LGBTQ community or comparing characteristics of LGBTQ blogs with the work of heterosexual bloggers. Such expanded studies will add to the foundation of knowledge concerning blogging in the greater LGBTQ community and how characteristics of LGBTQ blogging vary from

blogging by heterosexuals. Such studies can also provide insight into bloggers' narratives of self.

This study is also a stepping-stone to further research in the online LGBTQ community, examining how queer presence in the blogosphere works both with and against other forms of queer identity exploration and expression available on the Web. My study takes the work of researchers like Alexander, Weight, and DeWitt across the threshold of the blogosphere to examine the ways in which queer identity permeates the Web outside those queer-centric spaces, providing research into online queer identity the opportunity to go both ways—between the static, traditional Web pages of LGBTQ sites and the more dynamic LGBTQ blogs. Other studies of LGBTQ blogs can apply the work of other researchers of online queer presence who examine patterns of activism, politics, community, and culture. These studies can trace the connection that these patterns in the blogs share with each other and with the outside reader.

Additional blogging studies can move outside LGBTQ-specific issues to examine the different types of blogs in the genre itself. Some blogs serve purposes other than a personal journal. These other purposes include professional blogging (e.g. Alfred Thompson's blog on teaching computer science, and Clancy Ratliff's CultureCat, which focuses on rhetoric and feminism), current events blogging (e.g. Colby Buzzell's blog on the Iraq War and Good As You, a blog edited by Jeremy Hooper that focuses on LGBTQ news and commentary), and news blogging (e.g. Newsblog, maintained by the UK's *Guardian Unlimited*). Examining the different types of blogs outside academia (as opposed to blogs created to meet class assignments) can again feed back into the development of new composition curricula that embrace writing outside the classroom.

Such studies can reveal differences in identity formation and blog structure between professional/academic blogs and personal blogs, perhaps leading to studies of how one type of blogging affects the other. Further research can additionally explore the connection between blogging and academic writing, examining the ways in which bloggers in school apply skills acquired by blogging to the writing required in their classes.

Examining the genre of blogs and the purposes for creating and maintaining blogs can also supply compositionists with new ways of including blogs in the classroom, augmenting the current use of blogging as a tool with studies of how blogs incorporate audience awareness and rhetorical strategies of narrative and autobiographical writing. Pedagogues interested in issues of diversity and multiculturalism in the classroom can study the variety of life narratives in the blogosphere and bring samples of this variety into their own classes. They can use these real-life examples as models for students in how to use blogs to write life narratives in a classroom environment that encourages self-expression and discourages the self-censorship in which minority students (such as LGBTQ students) engage.

The possibilities for additional blogging studies are vast. The significance of blogs as a genre and as a means of networking, coupled with the growing number of bloggers among students, indicates that academia would benefit greatly from seeing these possibilities realized. Future studies will continue to enhance the understanding of blogs and their implications in the classroom, providing a bridge between the writing public and the writing academics. These opportunities for future study emphasize the significance of the blogging boom in a society plagued by a fear of decreasing literacy in

its younger and even unborn generations. Contemporary society constantly reevaluates the value of print media, demands increased attention to issues of diversity and tolerance, and expresses concern over depersonalization brought about by ever-increasing time spent online as it simultaneously raises questions over the privacy of individuals' information both off- and online. The examination of blogging—a medium that has been shown to build community, requires the very literacy skills that society fears losing, and allows an intimate yet semi-anonymous connection with others—may yield insight into the future of these issues. The time is ripe to enter the blogosphere, to examine the richness of its life narratives and its influence on queer identity, and to develop a greater understanding of what students write outside the classroom in order to move composition curricula forward and reflect the practices of the writing public of which Yancey raised awareness in 2004.

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