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Young Women Experiencing 'Self': The Psychoanalytic Functions of Personal Journal Written Encounters

This paper explores the uses of personal writing by young women as they attempt to construct meaning from the context of their private journal texts. Issues of gender identity and symbolizations of the self are approached from the perspectives of 17 female university students who are passionate journal writers since their teen years. This paper is based on the findings of a qualitative inquiry which attempts to explore how the intellectual and emotional processes involved in this form of self expression and representation may be functioning as defense against difficult knowledge. The findings in the study attest to the importance of considering the ways in which the organization of the psychic life interacts to place young women into positions that produce and reproduce them as females. More specifically, young women use the private journal as a Potential Space, where deeper self-understanding is attained through approaching the personal in terms of a shared experience with cultural implications. Journal writing is also used as a Transitional Object enabling the interaction with others within this inner world and allowing the transition from being merged into separate being. Additionally, this paper investigates how these young women embrace fear, anger, loss, loneliness and distress and how they use symbol formation as a process for ego development. By investigating the psychoanalytic functions of personal writing when it involves pain and difficult realities, this paper registers how these functions of traumatic writing can inform us about the possibilities of personal expressive narrative engagements of young women.

Nectaria Karagiozis is a visiting professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa. She studied the effects of reading on young children and how written symbolizations of the self are used by young women to symbolize, to create, defend against painful realities.