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Poster Presentation P25

WITHHOLDING THE TRUTH: A STUDY OF TRENDS IN PERSONAL
WRITING AMONG COLLEGE-AGED MEN AND WOMEN

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Research suggests the central purpose of girls' personal writing is not the resolution of separation from parents and others (Gilligan, 1992). Rather, for some girls, personal writing helps to "resist separation from others and from oneself, and in turn to strengthen resiliency" (Gilligan, 1992, p. 32). Personal writing is defined as "any type of writing that one does to reflect on one's life" (Magee, 1999). Very little is known, however, about the prevalence and frequency of personal writing among adolescent girls, as well as the types of personal writing that they do.

This study sheds new light on each of these aspects of girls' personal writing through a retrospective investigation of college-aged students' personal writing. To answer our overarching question, "What role does personal writing play in adolescent girls' personal writing?," the study's design necessarily posed questions to both men and women that allowed for data analysis by gender.

At a small, private, mid-western liberal arts university, 394 college-aged men and women volunteers were surveyed using a pencil-paper instrument, the *Personal Writing Questionnaire* (PWQ) (Magee, 1999). The PWQ asked 125 open-ended and closed questions in a wide variety of areas. This poster session presents a select set of statistically significant results in three areas related to women's use of personal writing: incidence, prevalence, and their most favored form of personal writing. In brief, when compared with the personal writing habits of the men and women in this study, our results suggest that women have a stronger tendency to have ever done personal writing ($f(152.86)$, $df\ 392$, $p<.000$), write more often ($f(35.00)$, $df\ 380$, $p<.005$), and use diaries for their personal writing ($f(193.85)$, $df\ 374$, $p<.000$).

One additional gendered comparison had to do with an individual's intention of sharing personal writing with others. The results suggest that when compared to women, men are more likely to share their personal writing than the women in this study ($f(47.91)$, $df\ 362$, $p<.000$).

These results have implications for clinicians, developmental psychologists, and educators who are interested in a full understanding of the role of personal writing in adolescents' lives.