Abstract

Interpretive Communities and Female Chinese American Diary Writing on the Web

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This paper deals with autobiographical acts on the Web in the form of online diaries. More specifically, it focuses on a cluster of female Chinese American diarists who present large-scale autobiographical narratives. In part, this cluster is defined by membership to Rice Bowl Journals, a large U.S. based Webring where the membership requirement involves having an active online journal/Weblog, and being Asian or of Asian descent. The diarists I deal with are 1.5 and second-generation Chinese American women, in their late twenties and early thirties. This community within a community (the “attitude chick clique”, as one of the online diarists puts it) is premised on the sharing of experiential life stories. Here, the production and consumption of autobiographical tales are intimately connected.

In the paper I address both the effects of remediation (the transportation of some characteristics of an old genre into a new medium), and the gendered articulations of “Chineseness” one finds within this cluster. Because of its capacity to bring together people based on shared interest without regard for physical proximity, Web technology has been hailed as the supreme tool in the imagining of diasporic communities. Yet, in looking at the situated performances of ethnicity within the cluster, I argue for the usefulness of a version of the concept interpretive communities, rather than the related concept imagined communities. Here and there does not blur in this specific case study; the autobiographical imagination is a situated one.