Reading the Academic Library Blog Through the Lens of Genre Theory: A Preliminary Discussion

Mellissa J. Hinton

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.liu.edu/post_libfacpubs

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation

Hinton, Mellissa J., "Reading the Academic Library Blog Through the Lens of Genre Theory: A Preliminary Discussion" (2008). Post Library Faculty Publications. 4.

http://digitalcommons.liu.edu/post_libfacpubs/4
Reading the Academic Library Blog through the Lens of Genre Theory: A Preliminary Discussion

Mellissa J. Hinton
Mellissa.Hinton@liu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://demo.liu.bepress.com/post_libfacpubs

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
http://demo.liu.bepress.com/post_libfacpubs/1

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Library at Digital Commons @ LIU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Post Library Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ LIU.
Reading the Academic Library Blog through the Lens of Genre Theory:

A Preliminary Discussion

Mellissa J. Hinton
B. Davis Schwartz Memorial Library
C.W. Post Campus/Long Island University
Brookville, New York 11548
Mellissa.Hinton@liu.edu
Phone: 516-299-3525
Fax: 516-299-2470

Mellissa Hinton, M.A., M.S. is Head of Acquisitions at the B. Davis Schwartz Memorial Library, C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University in Brookville, New York.

Abstract: A theoretical discussion that introduces examining the emerging library blog of the public academic library from the approach of genre theory. Genre theory classifies texts not only by form but by the social actions performed, a definition developed by Carol Miller. Public and private spheres are found to intersect in the library blog, complicating the traditional role of the librarian as objective information provider.

Keywords: blog, weblog, genre theory, public sphere, library
Introduction

The Director of the National Library and Archive of Iraq, Saad Eskander, made headlines in February 2007 when the *New York Times* reported on his weblog, made available via the British Library web site. The article focused attention on the daily operations of the library and the plight and on-going crises faced by the staff in a wartime environment. Eskander’s blog recaps the day-to-day activities of the Library: the administrative functions such as meetings, financial concerns, and staff shortages; the unreliability of Internet access; concerns about materials preservation, cataloging and acquisitions; and other issues that are recognizable to the seasoned library professional. At the same time, Eskander reports on the effects of the war on the Library in very personal ways. In a sensitive but at the same time matter-of-fact way, he writes sympathetically, but objectively, about staff members who have lost family members to violent bombings, but also highlights how he has been personally impacted by the war. One blog posting in April 2007, for instance, notes the difficulty he experienced in hiring an available driver. In the posting, Eksander recounts conversations with family members, including his own wife and mother-in-law, who both caution him about threats that appear to be forthcoming—and often, in fact, do come to fruition. Thus, while using his position as a cultural leader in the Iraqi society, he manages to portray the continually-escalating crisis in Iraq in both professional and personal terms. The public and private roles of the library director converge in a worldwide forum through the mushrooming medium of the weblog, or familiarly, the blog.
Eskander’s blog is newsworthy and reading it is an eye-opening, if somewhat surreal experience, given the convergence of the recording of routine professional activities, personal and family communications, and the description of the war torn environment. Working within the original form of the blog as an online diary, the work becomes not only a record of library activities, but more importantly, is transformed into a civilian war diary.

In the context of genre theory as denoted by Carolyn R. Miller, Eskander’s blog performs a significant social action. Social actions, as defined in sociological terms by Seumas Miller (2001), “are the actions of ordinary individual human persons. These include the actions of individuals performed in accordance with conventions, rules and norms, and the actions of individuals qua occupants of social, institutional, and professional roles” (2). Seumas Miller distinguishes social actions from those that fall under the categories of individual, joint, or interpersonal actions. Thus, although the authoring of a blog might be considered an individual action if it is the work of one writer, it becomes a social action in that it is targeted for an audience. The blogger posts information not only for his or her own benefit, but to share this information with a (potential) audience where the make-up of the audience might be predicted, but where the prediction may not necessarily be accurate. As Seumas Miller notes, “Social actions involve a certain kind of interdependence of action and of attitude between the members of sets of individuals, and this interdependence in turn creates the possibility of social groups” (6). The writing of the blog creates the opportunity for a social group that in the Internet world is amorphous and without boundaries.
But Eskander’s writing of the blog is not unique in the library world. Many libraries and information providers employ the blog as a means of communication with their intended audiences, although it is doubtful that they are filled with as much pathos and drama as the blog authored by the Iraqi library director. A very broad search in Google, conducted for this paper, combining the terms “library and blog” resulted in 528,000 hits. Results of this magnitude reveal that the blog has become a mainstay in the library field, one that may be considered in light of genre theory.

*Genre Theory and the Library Environment*

Amy J. Devitt (2004) defines genres as “types of rhetorical actions that people perform in their everyday interactions with their worlds” (2). Citing Carolyn Miller, Devitt asserts that such actions are based on recurrent situations. Devitt’s early research focused on the study of rhetorical genres in the context of the work of accountants. Correspondingly, genre construction is not unusual in the library field. Consider the myriad variety of genres that are constructed by staff members in the modern library of which these are only a fraction: bibliographies, pathfinders, notification lists, overdue reminder notices, even the catalog records themselves. These genres have prescribed forms, purposes, and coding that are familiar means of communication for library staff members and/or their patrons. Generations of librarians have followed rules and conformed to standards set by major organizations, such as the Library of Congress and the American National Standards Institute, that have molded these genres. Their forms are fairly standard and vary little from one library to another. Even the library newsletter, a less standardized, and one might argue, more creative, library public relations tool, prescribes to certain expectations in providing information as to the who, what, when,
where, and why of the material covered. The blog, however, lacks such standardization and in its evolution, how one library might use it varies greatly from how another might. Although most libraries using blogs are doing so to fulfill a public relations purpose (the social action), the library blog often merges the private opinions of the author(s) in a public space, one sponsored by a larger organization. Consequently, examining the blog in the realm of the library becomes an interesting area for analysis. Does the library blog constitute a unique genre among the many other blogs exploding on the World Wide Web? Or is it merely a container for the information held within it? If it fits the definition of a genre, what makes the library blog unique? Who is the anticipated audience for these many blogs? What social actions are performed in these blogs? While it is admittedly limited in scope, this paper will seek to shed some light on these questions.

Examining library blogs under the scope of genre theory is important for library practitioners for several reasons. First, those individuals who use the latest means of media to share information of whatever sort should be able to conceptualize the underlying issues when they create such communiqués. Second, unlike the standardized, rigid, vocabulary-defined genres that librarians probably never even considered as genres usually found in the library setting, library blogs are open ended and allow for greater freedom of expression than other types of traditional library genres. With this opportunity comes greater potential for vulnerability. Librarians authoring institutional blogs, as opposed to personal blogs, must be cognizant of the hosting library’s mission and support that mission, withholding any personal bias. Viewing library blogs as genres has the potential to make bloggers aware of such vulnerability.
Background and Setting the Terms

Providing background information on the web log and defining the terms may be helpful in examining the weblog for its uses in the library field. Considering the blog as genre, Laura Gurak and her colleagues at the University of Minnesota (2004) call blogs more than mere tools for communicating online; rather, they provide new possibilities for the Internet as a rhetorical space. Blogs … have revolutionized the way we receive information and connect with each other in online environments. … [B]logs allow anyone’s voice to be heard and resist hierarchical models of information dissemination and communication. … In this way, blogs allow for the possibility of developing new cultural practices of online communication in relation to previously established modes of ownership, authorship, and legitimacy of content and access to information. (“Introduction”) Clearly, blogs have altered the playing field in dissemination of information, one of the primary missions of the library.

According to Carolyn R. Miller (a renowned scholar on genre theory) and Dawn Shepherd in the online article “Into the Blogosphere” (2004), the blog developed during a unique historical moment (the 1990s) where the lines between public and private lives became blurred and the “cult of celebrity” mushroomed. Thanks to such media events as the launching of the MTV television show, “The Real World,” and the very public, yet private, marital problems of Bill and Hilary Clinton, especially those that came to light in the aftermath of the Monica Lewinsky affair this “cult of celebrity” became a
phenomenon. During this time, citizens became “mediated voyeurs,” a term Miller notes was coined by Clay Calvert in his 2000 book Voyeur Nation: Media Privacy, and Peering in Modern Culture; people became conditioned to looking in on real life situations of others. Certainly, the early twenty-first century continues this trend with the proliferation of reality-based television shows that now run the gamut from “Survivor” and “The Apprentice” to “Dancing with the Stars”.

Voyeurism works in conjunction with exhibitionism, forming a symbiotic relationship. “Central to exhibitionism is the social psychology of self-disclosure, which serves four purposes, according to Calvert: self-clarification, social validation, relationship development, and social control, and we can see all of these at work in blogs” (quoted in Miller & Shepherd 2004). What defines the blog for Miller and Shepherd is its structure: one based on reverse chronology, frequent updating, and combining links with personal commentary:

Blogs are composed of “posts,” which include a date, a time stamp, and a permalink and often include a link for commentary and the author’s name, especially if multiple authors contribute to a blog. The reverse chronology and time-stamping of posts create an “expectation of updates” (Miller & Shepherd 2004).

In Devitt’s terms, one might suggest such a focus on form places the blog within the “container model of genre,” a traditional view of genre that divides form from content; the genre becomes the form into which the content is placed (2004, 5). Form alone, notes Devitt, does not define genres. She notes that “attempts to use form to mislead us about the actual genre … indicate the separability of formal features from the essence of
a genre” (12). To paraphrase, what a genre does, is of more importance than what it actually is in terms of form.

Miller and Shepherd recognize the difficulty of focusing purely on form: “It is when bloggers discuss the purpose of the blog, its function and value as social action involving rhetors and audiences, that the nature of the generic blog becomes problematic” (Miller & Shepherd). Blogs have been classified by various sources, with content being the most important feature of the blog cited by bloggers surveyed in Miller’s study. The classificatory nature of genre is “defined rhetorically rather than critically, by the people who use it, for the purposes of operating in the everyday world” (Devitt 9). Thus the bloggers themselves define how the blogs are used. Miller & Shepherd (2004) identify several schemes that have been developed by Todd, Walker, and Blood for classifying blogs. Founded by Brent Todd, Weblog Review, an online site that reviews and rates blogs, categorizes blogs in fourteen areas under such labels as adult, anime, music. Walker developed the categories of “subgenres” noting that while most blogs are textual in nature and are primarily nonfiction, other types of blogs have evolved that include photoblogs, videoblogs, and audioblogs. Blood categorizes blogs according to type: a filter-style “where the blogger is primarily an editor and annotator of links, and a later, more personal ‘blog-style’ weblog, where bloggers” use it as a forum for self-expression. Miller & Shepherd add to these the development of other subgenres: the j-blog (journalism blog), work team blog, tech support blog, and political campaign blog.

Library Blogs as a Unique Genre

Library blogs contain elements of many of the identified specific subgenres, depending on the blog, but also contain elements of Blood’s scheme creating a hybrid
where links are provided to various resources. In her article “Blogs in Academia: A Resource Guide,” Laura B. Cohen (2007) outlines the various types of blogs employed in academic libraries. She classifies blogs into the following categories by the function they perform: providing information about news and events; announcing new resources; providing a forum for subject specialists to communicate with their corresponding departments; providing access to topics of professional interest; providing organization or conference proceedings information; and providing a means for internal communication (Cohen 9-11). With the exception of the last stated function, all of these functions fall under the broader umbrella of public relations. But with such a diversity of topics operating in the library blog, clearly, designating the library blog as a genre begins to be problematic. Tempting as it is to define the library blog in terms of form alone by examining structure, such a notion runs counter to contemporary genre theory. In the seminal article, “Genre as Social Action,” Miller writes, “Recurrence is implied by our understanding of situations as somehow ‘comparable,’ ‘similar,’ or ‘analogous’ to other situations” (156). Within these recurrent situations may be found the justification for considering the library blog as a unique genre.

A discussion of actual library web logs is helpful in finding the overlap of the recurrent situation essential to Miller’s definition of genre. The admittedly small sampling of the five weblogs below (all of them blogs of academic libraries in publicly funded institutions) is certainly not meant to be exhaustive, but a starting point for analysis of features that might be unique or of interest within the concept of genre theory. Several criteria were used in selecting the library blogs. First, sites were selected from such directories as the “Open Directory” website for library and information science
weblogs which provides links to blogs in the library fields, as well as links to other directories on the subject. Technocrati.com was also used to locate library weblogs. Recently, the Open Directory website provided links to 33 collaborative weblogs, 133 organizational weblogs, and five additional directories; however, many of the links to weblogs are no longer valid or up to date. Blogs were chosen if they were not abandoned and contained links and dates that were current. To guarantee a degree of authority, the library blogs had to be maintained on the server of the parent institution, indicated through the URL of each. Links to blogs through privately-owned, commercial venues such as blogspot.com were excluded for this study in favor those blogs sustained on public servers supported by governmental funds. In addition, some of the blogs that were originally found on blogspot.com appeared to be prototypes. Either way, their parentage was often indeterminate and they were subsequently disregarded. Many of the links available from the Open Directory fell into this category. Blogs from public institutions were selected exclusively because the majority of their funding is provided by the “public” in the form of taxes, etc., thus extending the paradigm of the public/private domain. Private institutions were excluded from this study because the majority of their funding is usually derived from tuition or foundational funding.

The five library weblogs ultimately selected for this study are as follows: the Morrisville State College Library, a two- and four-year degree awarding institution in Morrisville, New York; the Springfield Technical Community College Library, Springfield, Massachusetts; the University of Wyoming Library, Laramie, Wyoming; the Western Kentucky University Libraries, Bowling Green, Kentucky; and the Georgia State University Library, Atlanta, Georgia. Comparing the blogs of a two-year institution with
those of a two- and four-year institution, and with institutions that also offer graduate programs, provided contrast, but surprisingly, pointed out similarities, despite the different missions of the institutions.

Examining the weblog of the Morrisville State College Library provides an interesting example of the library weblog as genre.\(^1\) The form of the weblog is the most obvious area for discussion. Although the blog provides many links to other sites, it is updated infrequently. By its very nature, the limited updating flies in the face of the general expectation (and genre definition) that a blog is frequently updated. A recent visit to the site showed a time lapse of nearly a month since the most recent posting and a six month delay from the previous posting. Following the archival links back to its origins, evidently this library blog began in January 2005, and is seemingly authored by Bill Drew, who is named in the initial posting. But weblogs in institutional settings may have multiple authors in the event of staff changes, etc., so one cannot assume the author remains the same in an ongoing weblog. After the initial weblog creation, no author’s name is listed again although personal interjections of opinion are offered in various postings on the blog. Consequently, one can never be certain whose opinion is being expressed in any particular posting.

The blog is full of an eclectic array of information: library hours, reports of new acquisitions, links to various library databases, examples of citation formats, news reports such as information on Hurricane Katrina, and perhaps the most interesting posting on the archived log: the obituary of Octavia Butler (posted 2/28/06). What makes this last posting so interesting from a genre evaluation perspective is the following quote: “This was reported on \textit{LISNews}. She is one of my favorite contemporary authors.”
statement points to the intersection of the private domain (the author’s opinion) with the public (the blog is sponsored under the auspices of the College’s Library). This point is important to recognize because it demonstrates the melding of the public and private spaces between an individual’s opinion and the institution’s responsibility to provide information. Including opinion in a public forum provides an opportunity to humanize an endeavor that may seem to be disconnected from its audience. According to Carolyn Miller (1984), “A genre is a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence; it motivates by connecting the private with the public, the singular with the recurrent” (163). The unnamed, but perhaps assumed author of the posting shares personal feelings in a very public space, attempting to build a bridge with the reader. His targeted reader, one would assume, is a member of the SUNY Morrisville community. However, a conundrum for the reader arises in trying to determine if the opinion expressed is that of the blog’s author, or of the initial writer of the reporter from LISNews. Although one may feel sympathy for the writer of the statement and his/her loss, one cannot be sure exactly for whom the feeling is expressed. The weblog provides a degree of anonymity for the writer. Thus, while a bridge may be erected, the toll gate must still be opened before true connections can be made.

In the most recent posting as of this writing (3/29/07), the author announces, “I am going to post this great newsletter whenever I receive it. It is one of the best resources, plus being nice and short, for new websites.” While the “I” of the posting writes with authority, once again, the reader cannot be sure exactly who this “I” is. Obviously, the author is someone with access to the Morrisville Library’s blog (Is it still Bill Drew?), but again, the reader lacks access to the identity of the blog’s author.
The next weblog to be discussed is that of the blog of the Springfield Technical Community College Library in Springfield, Massachusetts. The blog contains an archive that dates back to 2002—a lengthy period of time in comparison to other library weblogs. All postings are credited to their authors through links to a site outside the blog. While the usual information is included in the blog, the postings are very chatty in nature, informal and extremely personal, and once again introduce the private into the public space. For example, on a posting dated 4/12/07, Barbara W. informs the reader, “My husband and I are thinking of buying flood insurance,” and uses this tidbit of personal financial information as a springboard to a discussion of Google Earth and how it helped her determine the elevation of her home. Unless she is fictionalizing the account in the very public space of the library’s weblog, a practice that is taboo in the blog environment, the reader learns a great deal about Barbara: she is married, owns property, and plans to pursue her insurance purchase. The sharing of personal information humanizes the poster and attempts to create that link between blogger and reader of the blog, ideally, a patron of the STCC Library. The breakdown of the private and public spheres pervades not only the library blog, but more broadly within the culture at large. More importantly, however, if the blog’s main social action is to serve as a public relations tool for the STCC Library, the fact that the blog contains no link back to the main library page is a significant drawback because it provides a disservice to its potential targeted audience of STCC Library users.

Like the SUNY Morrisville blog, the blog of the University of Wyoming Library includes on its blog notices of important events for students and affiliates of the University. The anonymous author states the purpose of the blog, “Welcome to the UW
Libraries blog, home of news about collections and events at the University of Wyoming Libraries as well as items of interest in the wider world of information and publishing” (entry posted May 18, 2006). The blog announces its purpose loudly and clearly. In addition to providing links to other sites discussed in each posting, the blog includes photos and an opportunity for the reader to respond by adding comments to each posting, comments that are moderated by library staff members and deleted if they are deemed inappropriate as stated in the library blog itself. In other words, according to a statement on the blog, the hosting blogger reserves the right to censor comments from a private individual for whatever reason. A value added feature of the blog is the provision of access to the blog organized by topic.

In the University of Wyoming blog, despite its declared mission, the private point of view once again invades the public space. A recent posting (4/12/07) on the blog includes the obituary of the famed science fiction writer Kurt Vonnegut. Responding to the New York Times article on Vonnegut, the posting’s author writes, “I can’t imagine high school or college without Vonnegut’s books. Cat’s Cradle and Slaughter-house Five were for me two of the rarest and best kind of books, novels that changed the way I thought about writing, reading and the world.” As happened in the Morrisville posting on Octavia Butler, the author provides personal commentary about the deceased Vonnegut indicating his influence on the blog poster’s life. But once again, as the posting’s author goes without credit, the reader of the blog has no idea who this fan of Vonnegut actually is. The genre of the library blog provides a safe space for the writer—a public forum, but one that provides anonymity. The authorship of this blog is even more uncertain than that of the Morrisville blog; as the disclaimer on the bottom of the blog indicates,
copyright belongs to the Author(s) suggesting more than one voice may be found in the
text of the blog, not necessarily including the comments. Comments (few as they are), by
contrast with the library’s postings, are authored, although it appears the author need not
provide a real name. In a comment in response to the 4/3/07 posting, the commenter calls
him/herself “Someone,” extending the blanket of anonymity (and the safe space) to the
comment level. Clearly, a pattern is developing here in terms of authorship/anonymity
and private/public.

By contrast with the seemingly anonymous postings of the weblogs noted above,
many (but far from all) of the postings on the weblog of the Western Kentucky
University Libraries are signed postings. While many of the postings reproduce news
releases important to the University community, the postings specifically about library
issues often contain editorial comments that blur the distinction between the public and
private spaces. A posting dated 3/25/07 and authored by the Head of Technical Services,
Connie Foster, announces the purchase of several new electronic journals collections.
The headline “Less Is More, Electronically Speaking” reports on the purchase of these
resources which give “users access to over 1,200 Springer titles and subsidiary
companies, but we pay only for our current titles. 33 titles = 1,200+ titles. Not bad!” The
author of the posting informally celebrates the library’s good fortune in providing more
information to its patrons for the same money and gives the proverbial “pat on the back”
to the library community. The public relations function in this very specific case carries
the underlying message that the library is fiscally responsible. In another signed posting
of the blog, Dan Forrest promotes the libraries’ DVD collection, listing the highest
circulating titles, and indicating the breadth of its scope. The signing of the entries in the blog provides a great degree of authority that the reader can interpret with confidence.

A radically different and extremely sophisticated approach to the library blog may be found at the “Library News and Subject Blogs” of the Georgia State University Library. The site provides links for a chronological blog, but also separate links for blogs within subject areas providing the reader with greater and more refined access to the blogs of the library. According to its statement of purpose, the “blog provides information on new resources, new services, changes in hours, facility news, system status and alerts,” the typical public relations function. In reality the blog provides much more. Subject specialists provide links to electronic reports they consider of interest to library patrons in their areas of expertise. By monitoring news events in their respective fields, the bloggers in turn disseminate the information to interested readers. But this, then, raises the question as to who comprises the audience of interested readers, the audience the posters are attempting to reach. The categorization by subject of the postings provides an indication of who the targeted audience might be—most likely library users (students, faculty members) interested in the specific subject information.

A posting on the GSU blog dated 4/20/07 is located in its chronological location but also in a category entitled “Issues in Scholarly Communication” and provides a specific example as to intended audience. In the referenced posting entitled “Librarians are Irrelevant,” the author (William Walsh, who can be discovered by tracing the link from the posting) recaps the salient points of a news article, summarizes it from the original source, and provides a link to it. Although it might easily be missed, at the same time he interjects his own editorial comment at the end, noting: “Nice. Librarians are
irrelevant, while publishers buying advice from Dezenhall are merely wrong-headed. Apparently, a good many of you raising your voices needn't have bothered.” In the blog, following a live link from “voices” opens another window to the “Petition for Public Access to Publicly Funded Research in the United States.” Walsh clearly has a relevant opinion about the irrelevance of librarians and uses the public space of the library weblog to assert his opinion in a not-so-subtle manner. In this blog posting, the function is less about promoting the library’s resources and more about extending the discussion as to the professionalism of librarianship in the world of open access. By categorizing the posting, Walsh has the potential to target others interested in the subject and promote political action. He uses the forum of the blog in a way that contrasts greatly from how others use the blog within a library setting. Walsh’s posting, minor and seemingly irrelevant itself, brings the blog to life, personalizing it, and inviting others to consider the issue, provide feedback, and further political action.

Conclusion

In such a brief, preliminary analysis of library weblogs as genre, drawing firm conclusions about the library weblog as a genre becomes presumptuous. Certainly, though, the library weblog is unlike other genres constructed within the library if only because of the vast styles and varieties the blog takes from one library to another. While historically genres in the library take forms that are fairly consistent across libraries, the blog as a rhetorical structure is consistent only in its form—a form dictated by the RSS software used to create it. However, certain commonalities pervade all the blogs discussed. While all the blogs serve their institutions as public relations tools, they also
provide a forum for commentary from individual authors to share what are essentially personal, private, or political ideas.

Returning to the original question of whether the library blog might be considered a genre, perhaps it is helpful to look at how a set of discourses might not be considered a genre by looking once more at the work of Carolyn Miller. She delineates in her seminal 1984 article three ways a collection of discourses may fail in being considered a genre.

First, there may fail to be significant substantive or formal similarities at the lower levels of the hierarchy. … Second, there may be inadequate consideration of all the elements in recurrent, rhetorical situations. A genre claim may be based on similarities only in exigence or only in audience. … The third way a genre claim may fail is if there is no pragmatic component, no way to understand the genre as social action. (163-164).

In the extremely limited analysis of this paper, the library blogs represented lie out of the realm of these three negative criteria. Their form is consistent in the chronological dictates of the blog. Situations recur from one library to another. And the social action may be understood in its most basic of terms as a public relations action, although that does not appear to be the only action at work in the library blog. These other actions are what make the study of the library blog more interesting.

When creating blogs in the academic library setting, authors/bloggers should consider and remember their intended audience, especially when including personal information. What is the intent in doing so? Is it only to follow the “cult of celebrity?” Or does the blog have the potential to contain more authority if, in the words of Sergeant
Friday on the old “Dragnet” television series, it contained “just the facts, ma’am.”

Incorporating private information into the public sphere of the academic library blog also presents a paradox in an age of the constant threat of identity theft: a blogger who includes personal thoughts and opinions shares private information in a very public forum. While admittedly, the information is not of a nature that might jeopardize one’s financial standing, it nevertheless points to a paradigm shift in the modern age.

As this paper has only scratched the surface in examining the library blog as genre, perhaps a wider study of blogs could refine the social actions at work and create a hierarchy of actions that are produced by the library blog. This study could be broadened to include additional academic libraries, including those of private institutions of higher education; public libraries; or other types of libraries to look for additional patterns of social action. What is even more interesting, however, is the intersection in the genre of the private and public spheres, and it warrants further inquiry of a broader, cross-disciplinary nature. While Saad Eskander’s sharing of such information might be considered to have a greater purpose in the documentation of the current Iraqi war, the rationale for the inclusion of personal and private thoughts within public relations outlets of the library is not so clear cut. The cult of celebrity has invaded much of the media in the modern world, and the library blog as genre is no exception. The willingness, perhaps even eagerness, of people to share personal information in a professional, public environment is an area of study that calls out for further discussion and requires philosophical and psychological interpretation. Perhaps the library blog provides an outlet for expression and a means of connection for people who, however ironically, feel disconnected in a society that continues to expand and provide additional means for
connection. As blogs continue to proliferate in the library setting, the traditional role of
the librarian as objective information provider will become further complicated and the
lines between public and private action blurred.
Notes

1 Shortly after the writing of this paper, the link to this blog and its archives were abandoned, and a new blog for the SUNY Morrisville Library was created by the same author at blogspot.com. The new blog is linked to the Library’s web page. Such are the perils in performing this type of web research.
References


