

**THE DIARY:
GENDERED PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS**

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AUTHOR’S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Glynna Nathan, candidate for the BA degree in Culture, Politics, and Society (specialization in Gender Studies) declare herewith that the present titled “The diary: Gendered perceptions and practices of university students” is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person’s or institution’s copyright.

I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 26 May 2025

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ABSTRACT

Although the earliest diaries remaining in Europe and North America were mainly written by men, diary writing in the twentieth century and modern day has often been associated with femininity, believed to be practiced more by women, and sometimes seen as a feminist tool of women's agency. This thesis explores to what extent diary writing continues in this gendered legacy in 2025, looking both at perceptions and the actual gendered distribution of practice at a time when identities are more complex. To what extent is diary writing not equally available to everyone in our gendered world? My study investigates the diary writing practices of university students at Central European University and Bard College Berlin to analyze for gendered imbalances in participation. This study was inspired by a similar one done in 1987 by researcher Cinthia Gannett, who concluded that men were much less interested in keeping diaries—something they considered to be feminine—compared to women. (Gannett 1987) Compared to Gannett's work, my study also assesses how changes in gender socialization and emerging masculinities might lead to new results, and how the gendered legacy of self-reflective writing continues to effect interest in and perceptions of diary writing. The findings of my survey demonstrated that there is a lasting association with diaries as feminine, as perceived by all gender groups. Women and genderqueer students in my sample were also more likely to keep diaries than the men, based on the higher response rates and overall interest shown in diaries in the survey responses. This thesis adds to the growing literature on understanding gendered writing and gender's impact on self-expression.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CEU – Central European University

BCB – Bard College Berlin

UNH – University of New Hampshire

WES – Writing Experience Survey

I. INTRODUCTION

Men diarists like Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn are credited as beginning the diary writing tradition in the seventeenth century, with women diarists in Europe and North America only gaining traction in diary history post-Enlightenment and still often excluded from the world of published diaries. (Gannett 1987; Culley 1985; Dobbs 1974) However, in the modern-day diaries are often thought of as being more often taken up by women and discouraged in men based on gender norms. The literature on actual research about the gendered distribution of diary writing is limited, except for one widely cited study done by Cinthia Gannett in 1987. Gannett conducted a study at the University of New Hampshire on university students' perceptions of and personal practices with diary and journal writing. She found that her women students responded much more positively to assigned class journals than her men students, concluding that there is a gendered difference in journal writing practices and openness to the genre. (Gannett 1987)

After forty years, gender socialization and norms have indubitably changed, potentially influencing what gendered genres of writing could be available to newly emerging expressive masculinities. However, there have been no studies since Gannett about the differences in diary writing practices between genders. How have the perceptions and practices of diary writing changed among university students since Cinthia Gannett's 1987 study?

To answer my question, I conducted a survey of my own at Central European University and Bard College Berlin to ask students about their experiences with diary writing, the content and quantity of their writing, and their experiences with class-assigned journal writing. Via two university-wide WhatsApp group chats, I sent an optional Google Form survey to students at the two universities. A major limit is that Gannett studied students at an American public research university, while I surveyed across two highly international, liberal arts European

universities. However, since Gannett's primary dependent variable was gender, I focused on measuring students' responses based on gender rather than a complexity of impacting variables.

In this thesis, I first review the literature on gender and diaries, primarily with the 1980s research spike. Then I explain Gannett's work and how it inspired my own study. I discuss my findings and how they compare to Gannett's. My hypothesis was that my findings would be similar to Gannett's in that women students would be more likely to keep diaries—in particular more emotionally introspective diaries. I also hypothesized that the men students would not say their reasoning for not keeping diaries is that diaries are “too girly,” like Gannett's did. My findings turned out to be more complex: the gendered distribution of diary writing in my findings was not as extreme as Gannett's, and there were men who expressed passion for the medium. However, most of my respondents were women, students of all genders spoke to the feminine associations they have with the diary, and the most passionate professions of love for the diary were from women.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Gender

When I discuss gender in this thesis, it is through the lens that gender is not innate, but instead something that you *do* or a series of performances and actions, encouraged or discouraged by gender socialization since birth. This is in line with Judith Butler's ideas of gender performance.

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (Butler 1988, p. 519)

Judith Butler describes how actions create gender through repetition. Of many repeated actions people take every day to make up their gendered selves, diary-writing can also be considered as one of these potentially gendered acts. This thesis explores the construction of gendered norms via creative work or personal expression.

2.2 Diary vs. Journal

In this thesis, I use both “diary” and “journal” to refer to dated and often repeated self-writing practices, with a preference for “diary” for consistency of terms. In reading the literature, I found that most researchers and authors—like Thomas Mallon, Suzanne L. Bunkers, and many others—used the two terms interchangeably. (Mallon 1986; Bunkers 1990; Gannett 1987) Cinthia Gannett, who often uses the catch-all term “journal/diary” explained, “Although the terms ‘journal’ and ‘diary’ may refer to somewhat different sorts of writing in current

popular culture, most writers and scholars have always used the terms interchangeably, and I will follow in that tradition.” (Gannett 1987, p. 3) To avoid confusion, I use both “diary” and “journal,” especially when citing other sources.

However, it is important to note that “diary” and “journal” carry different connotations, which is part of what this thesis explores. “Diary” is often given a feminine coding by researchers, writers, and in popular use. The word “journal” naturally also carries another meaning of academic journal, or a publication of often peer-review scholarly articles, which diary does not share. For the purposes of this thesis, when I refer to “journal,” I refer to the definition synonymous with diary, or a personal and repeated writing practice. There are many different “types” of diaries and journals, including but not limited to specific writing practices like exercise logs, traveler’s journals, Morning Pages, gratitude journals, spiritual journals, dream logs, and so on. This thesis does not intend to explore only one type of diary or journal, but rather the vast expanse of possible uses and the ways in which it gender might influence one’s choice of writing content and intent.

III. GENDER AND THE DIARY

3.1 Gannett's Study

For her 1987 dissertation, Cinthia Gannett did a study at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) looking at the differences in length, content, interest in, and function of students' journals from when she taught a sophomore level writing class in 1984 and 1985. (Gannett 1987, p. 84) The journals were assigned to encourage freewriting and brainstorming, and to be used as a "seedbed for their developing ideas... as well as a log of their developing sense of themselves as readers and writers." (Gannett 1987, p. 83) Analyzing the assigned journals of eleven women and six men in her class, she found that the women wrote more and longer entries, and they wrote more personal entries about their inner lives and personal relationships during the freewriting and academic writing exercises. (Gannett 1987, p. 101) The women felt that their lives were more "textable," or understandable through being written about—using their journals as outlets to work out problems in their lives and search for solutions. (Gannett 1987, p. 112) She also found that most of the women (at least seven out of eleven) were also keeping "more personal" diaries outside of the class. (Gannett 1987, p. 86)

Her men, however, wrote fewer and shorter entries, and wrote primarily to vent their frustrations and anger, particularly about academics or university-related problems. (Gannett 1987, p. 89) They did not write about their inner lives or personal relationships, and they sometimes commented that it was impossible to write essays or stories about specific experiences—that their lives were sometimes not "textable." (Gannett 1987, p. 107) The entries that the men students did write were primarily about their frustrations with coursework, sports, or adventures and close encounters with danger they had recently experienced. (Gannett 1987, p. 98) Gannett found that none of the men were keeping diaries or journals outside of class and even felt that women were more suited to keeping diaries or journals. One man said, "...[G]irls

are more used to keeping diaries, so they are used to writing about themselves.” (Gannett 1997, p. 79) Many of the men commented that they were less comfortable with freewriting because they felt a lack of control over the outcome or of their writing and didn’t want to risk too much self-disclosure. (Gannett 1987, p. 111)

After the course had finished, the women responded that they mostly enjoyed the experience of being assigned journals, while the men almost all responded completely negatively to the experience of writing personally and the assignment. (Gannett 1987, p. 108) Gannett argues that her students’ gendered pattern of behavior and perception follows a gendered legacy of diary writing generally, with women being more comfortable writing about personal lives and internal events, and men being more comfortable writing about day-to-day recountings and external events. Gannett writes, “Women, marginalized with regard to public discourse, have tended to write discourses ‘close to life,’ such as journals and diaries, and have valued personal writings not only as texts of their lives, but also as ways to rename and reclaim themselves, to find ‘life in their texts.’...Men, I propose, who have been the creators and primary users of public discourse, tend to be more comfortable with public discourse and its forms.” (Gannett 1987, p. 84)

Gannett also drew her findings from a UNH questionnaire given to students of all sections of an expository writing course in 1986 called the Writing Experience Survey (WES). (Gannett 1987, p. 115) The survey asked students about previous writing experiences both in and out of school. Across four sections, 76 students (41 women and 35 men) were surveyed. (Gannett 1987, p. 116) Similar to Gannett’s earlier findings, the WES showed that far more women kept journals or diaries outside of class than men did, with nearly three-fourths of women saying they did and only four men. However, two of those four were rigid exercise logs done in set periods of time. One was a “day to day book” kept by a student during his time in the navy, but he “lost interest quickly” and “soon after lost the book.” (Gannett 1987, p. 116)

Only one man kept a current journal to vent and let out frustrations. Many of the women reported keeping a journal or diary since early childhood and sometimes since they learned how to write. (Gannett 1987, p. 120) Of the students who disliked course-assigned journals, the men and women disliked them for different reasons, with the men primarily saying they were “a waste” or “boring,” and the women primarily saying they were an “invasion of privacy” or “too personal to be graded.” (Gannett 1987, p. 121)

3.2 The Gendered Legacy of Diary Writing

In the 20th and 21st centuries, or at least at the time of Gannett’s writing, diaries seem to hold a feminine connotation, and there is a cultural understanding that primarily women and girls keep diaries. Particularly in the 1970s to the 1990s, a lot of academic research was done on women’s close relationship to diary writing or possibly the inherent feminist qualities of diaries too. (Schiwy 1994, p. 235) In the literature, diary writing is very often connected to women, either seen as pejoratively feminized by writers like Philippe Lejeune; inherently feminist by writers like Adrienne Rich, Cynthia Huff, and Marlene A. Schiwy; or in the “realm” of women and girls, more often practiced by them, according to Thomas Mallon, Laurie McNeil, Suzanne L. Bunkers, and so on. (Lejeune 20204; Rich 1979; Huff 1989; Schiwy 1994; Mallon 1986; McNeil 2003; Bunkers 1990; Cully 1985; Gannett 1987) When discussing the private and emotionally introspective diary in *A Book of One’s Own: People and their Diaries*, Thomas Mallon wrote that it “is, or certainly has been, pre-eminently a female genre. (Mallon 1975, p. 210) “We are still not likely to give boys diaries on Christmas...inner lives are for girls, baseball is for their brothers.” (ibid.) Although the literature shows a modern feminization or feminine association with diaries, it is still under researched historians how and when exactly the gendered association came to be.

The first famous diarists and the writers in Europe credited with “inventing” the antique genre were men, like Samuel Pepys, John Evelyn, and Montaigne, the creator of personal

essay—which is often credited as a precursor to the diary. (Dobbs 1974; Gannett 1987) Although Gannett and Culley agree that it is mainly men who are credited with starting the diary tradition, Gannett argues that it does not necessarily follow that women wrote diaries significantly less than men throughout the history of the diary. Although women’s literacy rates have been lower than men’s up until quite recently in the countries surveyed, Gannett argues that the male-dominated history of diaries is likely indebted at least in part to how male diary historians recount a history skewed to exclude women as well as men’s diaries being better preserved than women’s—particularly when it comes to ordinary, non-famous diarists. (Gannett 1987, p. 148)

The historiography of diaries shows a gendered legacy of diary writing, with women writing in the “private sphere” or concerned with the family and self, compared to men writing in the public sphere of published works. Many have argued that women became forerunners of diary literature because it was the written medium most available to them, as they have often been excluded from the published world. (Gannett 1987; Culley 1985)

3.2 The Past Forty Years

In the past forty years since Gannett’s study, naturally a lot has changed in gender socialization and gender relations. In the countries this thesis is concerned with, it is arguable that fourth wave feminism has influenced childhood socialization in relation to gender, sex education in schools and the discourse on gender relations, changing legislations in women’s and LGBTQ+ rights, and the understanding of “toxic masculinity’s” effect on people of all genders in our patriarchal societies. If not in practice, then at the very least the discourse surrounding gender relations evolves continuously, particularly looking at college educated samples of people, which my study and Gannett’s focus on.

Specifically, Gannett cites “male inexpressiveness” as being one impacting component of why emotionally introspective personal writing might be less available to men,

as they are discouraged from childhood to express emotion besides anger. (Gannett 1987; Sattel 1976l; Forrest 2010) Building from this research done in 1976, new research on emerging different forms of masculinities and male socialization has been done in recent years, exploring potential new “softer” or “expressive” masculinities. (de Boise & Hearn 2017; hooks 2004; Forrest 2010) Many researchers like Sam de Boise and Jeff Hearn in recent years have argued that it is significant how many men have responded to the feminist critique of male inexpressiveness in order to examine critically their own socializations and perform more emotion. (de Boise & Hearn 2017) With the potential that gender—specifically the performance of dominant masculinity—has changed, my study explores if the way gender effects one’s interest in personal and emotionally introspective diary writing has evolved too.

IV. METHODOLOGY

To investigate what has changed in the perceptions and practices of diary writing among university students, I conducted a survey of my own inspired by Cinthia Gannett's. I chose to survey students via Google Forms across two universities: Central European University (CEU) and Bard College Berlin (BCB.) CEU is a small social sciences university in Vienna, Austria with a highly international student body of both undergraduates and graduates. Master's and PhD students from CEU were included in my survey. BCB is a small liberal arts college in Berlin, Germany, also with a highly international student body. BCB only offers an undergraduate program. I sent my survey into two large, WhatsApp group chats—one group chat per university community. I chose these universities to act as my equivalent to Gannett's University of New Hampshire because I have attended both universities and therefore have a method of contacting the students directly via WhatsApp group chats. In the CEU-wide group chat, there were around 950 members at the time of sending, and in the BCB-wide group chat, there were around 450 members. The Google Form survey was completely anonymous, and no emails were collected. Respondents were informed before taking the survey that responses were anonymous and that they would be used in my thesis findings, which would be published, and the data collection is in line with the [CEU ethical research guidelines](#). The survey was optional with no bribery or influence over the students to respond. Only my thesis supervisor and I have had access to the responses.

In designing my survey, I was inspired by the questions Gannett asked herself in her own study and findings discussion. She analyzed her students' journals based on gender, the content and quantity of the journal writing, the associations or feedback the students had about the assignment or this type of personal writing, and if they kept a journal outside of class. My questions covered all these fronts as well as why students do or don't have diary or journal

writing practices, and when they started writing them. I decided not to recreate Gannett's study and instead design my own merely inspired by her findings and questions because 1) I am not a university lecturer like she was and therefore don't have access to a group of students I teach and meet with regularly and 2) I did not find her methods ideal for her thesis question. In looking for insights about diary and journal writing in general—often written to be completely private—she only looked at semi-private journals assigned for class credit. Her findings were naturally swayed by her readings the students' journals, which is a limit I wanted to avoid. In my survey, I focused more on personal diaries and journals, opposed to Gannett's focus on journals for pedagogical use. However, I am faced with a different limit by using a self-administered survey rather than looking directly at primary sources: my findings are based purely on self-reporting. There is no way for me to know the “true” content, qualities, and quantities of my responders' diaries and journals.

A major limit in my choice of population is that Gannett studied students at the University of New Hampshire—a university in the United States with a primarily American student body. Our samples have major differences, bringing more caveats in the comparison of the two. However, Gannett's main dependent variable was gender, which is what I chose to prioritize in differentiating students, and therefore I don't consider our samples to be so significantly different as to be incomparable. A similar limit is that I did not ask about other identifiers in my survey (such as which university the student comes from or their degree level) to make gender the most important variable. I prioritized the conciseness of my survey over the comprehensiveness of questions so as not to dissuade students from answering, especially those who were not interested in diaries and journals. I also decided that my findings would be much too complex if the survey were to include degree level, university, and nationality.

Another limit in my survey is that based on my gender question, gender identity is essentially held to be synonymous with gender socialization. If a student answers that their

gender is one option, but they were socialized in another way based on their sex assigned at birth, I will have no way of knowing about this inconsistency. This particularly affects the way in which I might analyze nonbinary or genderqueer students' responses, as I will have no way of knowing how they were socialized into a gendered world from childhood. However, this is a problem that affects all genders listed in the survey. Further research could be done specifically on gender socialization's impact on gendered writing, rather than synonymizing it with gender identity, as is not always the case. I decided to use the simple question of "gender" rather than specifying further in the survey because 1) Gannett did not differentiate between identity and socialization, 2) I did not want to overcomplicate the survey or confuse responders, and 3) it felt inappropriate to inquire about one's biological sex versus gender identity in a data collection method as impersonal as an online survey.

V. FINDINGS

My hypothesis was that my findings would show a gendered difference in diary writing but that my sample's distribution would be more even across genders than Gannett's findings. I hypothesized that there would be at least some men who kept diaries, opposed to Gannett's findings that no men in her class kept diaries and that only one kept a diary/journal in the entire four sections of the course that semester. I also hypothesized that the perception of diaries would not be so explicit now as it was then, with her men students openly saying that women are better suited for diary writing and that they fear they "should not" keep diaries or journals because of masculinity norms. (Gannett 1987, p. 114) I based this hypothesis on the literature of emerging expressive masculinities, as discussed in the literature review. (de Boise & Hearn 2017) My hypothesis is that diary writing could be included in these changes.

5.1 Findings Confirm Hypothesis

First, I will analyze the results that confirm my hypothesis. Each sub-heading corresponds to either a single question or two related questions from the survey.

5.1.1 Do you keep a diary or journal?

To this question, respondents were given the choice of answering either "no, never," "tried it but didn't stick with it," "yes, but not consistently throughout my life," "yes, as a consistent practice," or with an alternate write-in option.

My findings showed that women students in the sample were likely to keep diaries, and that men students were less likely. Refer to [Appendix A, Figures 1-4](#) for data. Only 4 people out of the total 72 answered "no, never," and three of those were men. In Gannett's study, she also found that about a third of her women students kept diaries outside of the journal assignment, which is similar to my findings if some inconsistent writers are included. However,

my findings are quite different from Gannett in that her men students almost never kept diaries where my survey shows that the men in my sample do, if only inconsistently.

Of all the 72 respondents, 48 (66.7%) said they have a diary writing practice either consistently or inconsistently. I have no other data to compare this to and have no way of knowing whether this rate of diary writing is accurate to my entire population of the two universities. It is likely that students already interested in diary writing were more likely to respond to this survey about diaries and therefore would be overrepresented. However, it is still significant when compared to Gannett's study to see that indeed diary-writing men exist and are also passionate about this medium of writing in 2025.

5.1.2 What topics do you write most about?

Respondents had choices of checkboxes and could select as many as were relevant to them. Refer to the blank survey in [Appendix B](#) for the options. Surprisingly, every diarist checked that they write (or wrote) about "emotional introspection or well-being" save for two women. Since there were so many combinations of answers and many respondents who used the "other" section for more detailed responses, I will not examine every option's gendered distribution.

Besides the popular "emotional introspection or well-being," I have identified four significant options to discuss my findings, in part based on the kinds of writing Gannett identified as being most gendered in her students' journals. She found that her women students were more likely to write about "frustrations or problems in life, for finding solutions," while her men students were more likely to write about "frustrations or problems in life, for venting." She also found that her men students were more interested in writing about "travel" or "adventures."

Venting vs. Finding Solutions

Refer to [Appendix A, Figure 5](#) for data. Because it was possible to choose multiple options in the survey or none at all, some of the respondents may have chosen both “Frustrations or problems in life, for finding solutions” and “Frustrations or problems in life, for venting.” There was not a significant difference across genders in these choices. My findings do not seem to support Gannett’s claim that men use diaries more to complain while women use them more to find solutions. However, it is important to note that because the survey was self-administered and there is no way for me to confirm the “true nature” of the students’ writing, it might yield different results from Gannett’s study purely because of research method.

Travel Writing

Refer to [Appendix A, Figure 6](#) for data. Men were only slightly more likely to do travel or adventure writing. Overall, the rate of interest in writing about traveling or adventures did not seem to have a significant gender imbalance.

5.2 Findings Somewhat Confirm Hypothesis

Next, I will explore the results of questions that simultaneously somewhat confirm my hypothesis and somewhat align with Gannett’s conclusions.

5.2.1 Gender distribution

Although the CEU group chat I sent my survey into is intended to be representative of the CEU student body, although there is no demographic data specifically for the group chat itself. According to the CEU Institutional Factbook, the gender distribution of the entire student body in the 2024/25 academic year is 61% women and 39% men, including bachelor’s, master’s, doctoral, and non-degree students. (Central European University 2025) The survey was also open to Bard College Berlin students and sent into the largest BCB group chat with 450 members. It is also open to all BCB students and intended to be representative of the

student body, although there is unfortunately no public data available about BCB demographics. There is no information available from either CEU or BCB about the genderqueer demographics of the student body. For the purposes of this survey, I will compare my findings to the available CEU demographics data. Refer to [Appendix A, Figure 7](#) for data.

Out of the 72 responses to my survey, 49 were women, 12 were men, 11 were nonbinary or genderqueer. This shows the women and nonbinary students in the CEU and BCB group chats were more interested in taking (or completing) a survey on diaries than the men were.

5.2.2 Define or freely associate about "diary" *and* define or freely associate about "journal."

The intention of these questions was to see if "diaries", opposed to "journals," had a gendered association for my sample group, like Gannett and others have pointed to. I also wanted to see if the understanding of diary writing was different between genders, potentially influencing willingness to partake in it.

Of the 12 men who responded to the survey, many agreed that the diary is a place to write about one's "experiences," specifically focusing on day-to-day experience. Significantly, two of the responses explicitly references a feminine connotation, like respondent M7 who simply wrote that the diary is "very girly," or M3 who answered, "A personal notebook more associated with kids, girls and secret."

Four answered either that there is no difference between journals and diaries or that they were confused about the difference. Three of the men pointed to a more scientific or structured association with journals compared to diaries, and four found the journal to be more about "activities" or "planning" rather than the more emotional diary. However, two respondents found the journal to be *more* emotional and *less* structured than the diary.

The nonbinary and genderqueer respondents also did not record a consensus on diary and journal definitions, but many used the key words "feelings" or "emotions" when describing

the diary. N7 described the diary as “a daily, writing down what happened, teenagers documenting their break-ups, ‘dear diary.’” Most of the other respondents said more neutrally that the diary is a place to write down “experiences” or “thoughts.” In response to the question on defining “journal,” three of the respondents said that the journal is more structured or “serious” than the diary, like N10’s response that “journal feels more factual than diary. Rational. A keeping of accounts.” Most other respondents did not see significant differences between diaries and journals and described the journal to be a place for self-reflection, writing down of thoughts or feelings.

One particularly interesting response (N8) said, “If someone uses the word ‘journal’ to describe a general diary, I assume that they are somehow insecure about keeping a diary (usually as a result of fragile masculinity).” This response implicitly describes the diary as feminine and the journal as less feminine or perhaps gender neutral (and therefore still accessible to those with fragile masculinity.) It is very much in line with hypothesis that the diary is perceived as feminine and therefore discouraged in certain hegemonic masculinities.

Of the 49 women respondents, 19 of them used the word “feelings” or spoke to an emotionally introspective type of writing when describing the diary. About half of the respondents more broadly described the diary as being a place to record inner thoughts and introspection, with much of the rest describing the diary more briefly as a place to write about daily activity. Many of the women also pointed to a secretive quality of the diary: 11 women called the diary either “private” or “secret,” like W40 who wrote, “Somehow i associate diary with a book that has a lock on it. A secret diary that i used to write in as a kid.” Some of the women respondents also, like the men and genderqueer respondents, wrote about the feminine connotation of the diary. W24 said, “Diary seems to be more associated with a stereotypical feminine connotation, with feelings and emotions.” This is echoed by W22 who described the diary as, “Personal/private, teenage girls, movie characters, decorations like glitter, youthful.”

In response to the question on journals, only 4 of the respondents said that the journal was less emotional than the diary, like W48 who described journals as, “A record of daily life, loosely similar to diary but perhaps less reflective in one's emotions.” This is quite different from the men and genderqueer respondents, of which about half said the journal was less emotional, more serious, or more rational.

Multiple women wrote about the feminine connotation of the diary and the journal being the potential neutral counterpart in the question on journals. W22 wrote about journals, “Gender neutral, private or published, many purposes,” and W24 wrote journals have “less feminine connotations, more of a universally used term for what I would actually call a diary.” This is reminiscent of what N8 said about “journal” being the accessible synonym for “diary” for those with “fragile masculinity.” Some of the women also commented on the youthfulness of the diary versus the “maturity” of the journal, perhaps also related to the academic connotation of the journal, as pointed out by two respondents. W40, for example said, “Journal for me has become much more the term for my writing practice as i have grown older. I think i perceive this term as being more mature. That is not to say that i believe so, its just how i have come to associate the term.”

The women’s responses were similar to the men’s and genderqueer respondents’, although notably they identified the journal as more emotionally introspective than the other groups. All groups had at least one respondent identify the diary as feminine and the journal as neutral, or even “manly.” (M7) Overall, it is difficult to make a consensus on how the gender groups define “diary” and “journal” since there was so much variance within the groups.

5.2.3 Why do or don’t you keep a diary/journal?

My hypothesis was that men respondents would not explicitly say they don’t want to keep diaries because they are “too girly” in 2025, as some of Gannett’s students said

unabashedly in 1987. I found instead that at least one respondent of every gender group pointed to a feminine connotation of the diary at some point in the survey.

Of the men who had never kept diaries, none of them mentioned the content or connotations of the diary. One man (M11) said, “Find it hard to stick to a certain journaling routine. Also verbalising stuff so much makes me anxious, but I really am thinking of trying it out again.” This points not to a discouragement based on gender to any specific quality of the diary medium, but instead potentially to writing more generally. Gannett’s study did not include insights on students who weren’t already interested or skilled at writing, not to mention students with dyslexia or ADHD. Further research would be required to understand this aspect of the equation. One man who said he keeps a diary but not consistently also said, “i have lost the rhythm. also, thinking too much about my day-to-day life fills me with a certain amount of dread,” which echoes M11’s sentiment about (personal) writing causing anxiety. This could potentially be connected to an anxiety about verbalizing one’s emotions, related to previously discussed male inexpressiveness. (Sattel 1976)

Of the men who did keep diaries, either consistently or not, many referred exactly to this emotionally introspective aspect of diary writing that Gannett said her men students disliked. Respondent M2 said, “It is a helpful way to process thoughts or emotions in a protected safe way,” and respondent M6 said he writes “for the sake of catharsis... It also helps me to remember what my struggles where in the past and havr i made progress.” Both M2 and M6 write about emotions and inner lives. M2’s response is also significant when he says the diary is a place to process emotions in a “protected safe way.” This might point to the private diary being a “safe” place to be emotional (opposed to in public or in conversation) precisely because it is completely private. This is something Gannett overlooked: how certain inexpressive masculinities might still be able to partake in emotional expression as long as it is secret or completely private, and how this might impact gendered diary writing. Because she

was reading her students' journals, the inexpressive masculinities she encountered could have been extremely swayed by the fact of her gaze.

The genderqueer respondents who did not have diary writing practices also said they did not have time or could not remember to write—or remember what had happened during the day. The genderqueer respondents who did keep diaries had a variety of positive reasons for writing, like this beautiful passage for example: “When I write in my journal I am reminded that I am in control, that I have the power to make decisions and that these feelings that hvae found some place in my body are also a part of who I am in that moment. Keeping a journal helps me reshift my perspective, reset my mindset, and reconnect with my positivity.” Another respondent echoed this more succinctly with, “because if i dont ill go crazy.”

The women who did not keep diaries mainly said they did not have the discipline for consistent writing or were “too lazy.” One other said, “with my ADHD I have a hard time staying consistent with things, and i fear that journaling has become a victim of that.” The only respondents to say they don’t keep diaries because of the emotionally introspective feature were two women. Respondent W35 said, “It makes me slightly uncomfortable to wrote down feelings,” and respondent W9 said, “...I also find the concept of journaling - unless it's to deal with intense feelings - quite cringeworthy.” This actually shows the opposite of Gannett’s findings that men don’t write emotionally introspective diaries and women always do. However, W9 also said earlier in her response that diaries were “very culturally promoted in 2000s movies, so it felt like something a girl should do,” which is in line with this feminine perception of the diary.

There were many passionate paragraphs of responses from women about the diary. Some spoke to the diary as being a measure of growth or a self-learning tool, and one said, “it's also a good way to learn and strengthen my emotional awareness...” Another that said it “allows me to better understand my thoughts/feelings.” These responses show not only an interest in

emotionally introspective writing but also introspective writing with the intention to grow from it. Others called it “meditative” or “self-soothing.” No two responses were the same, but almost all focused on the processing of emotion and life events or connecting with and understanding the self. One response struck me as showing attachment to the diary and bringing together many of the other responses’ ideas into one,

Writing is maybe the best way for me to process my feelings, thoughts, and impressions. While you don't get the kind of feedback you would from a friend or confidante, it's very liberating to just vent, play, think things through, and write with total freedom and abandon. The practice is meditative and clarifying; I sometimes call it my only spiritual practice. I usually feel better and calmer afterwards. It's almost impossible to write about your problems without coming to some sort of a conclusion or at least relief - the writing compels it. I used to write every day for years, but then the PhD hijacked my life and time. Still, I noticed that if I skip it for too many days in a row, or even weeks (the horror), my mind gets cloudy and I just no longer know why I feel the way I do. I become dissatisfied and overwhelmed, cluttered somehow. The diary keeps me centered and in touch with myself. It's a space where I can come as I am and just be. I honestly don't know how I used to live without it.

The men respondents showed less interest or depth of thought about the diary and its potential benefits, compared to genderqueer and women respondents. Gannett’s findings were quite extreme—showing that her men students had very little interest in diaries or emotionally introspective writing and her women students had very much interest—which is very different from my students’ more complex responses. Although not to the same extremity of Gannett’s students, there does seem to be a gendered difference in interest in diaries.

5.3 Findings Refute Hypothesis

A significant portion of my findings refuted my hypothesis, in favor for Gannett's conclusions that women are much more likely to keep diaries or journals.

5.3.1 When did you start keeping a diary/journal?

Refer to [Appendix A, Figures 8-10](#) for data. The earliest response from the men responders was 6 years old. Most respondents began writing or tried writing diaries for the first time much later as teenagers. Most men began keeping diaries in their late teens or early twenties.

Of the genderqueer respondents, the earliest age of diary writing was 9 years old, with more than half older than 16 years. The genderqueer age responses were more varied than the men's.

Of the women, over half said that they were young children when they began. Multiple women said that they began writing diaries as soon as they were able to write, like W10 who said, "As soon as I could write, maybe when I was like seven years old," or W11 who said, "Since I was 7 (when I learnt how to write)." Another significant portion began as teenagers.

This mirrors Gannett's findings that many of the women in her sample reported first keeping a diary in early childhood or something since they learned how to write. (Gannett 1987, p. 120) Over half of the women in my sample were under 15 when they began. W26 (albeit a non-diary writer) said, "Since I was really little and someone gifted me a diary." Respondent W9 also pointed out that in her experience, the diary was "culturally promoted in 2000s movies, so it felt like something a girl should do." If diary writing is not only socially permitted for girls based on gender norms but even encouraged, this gift giving can be seen as part of that encouragement.

5.3.2 What do you call it? (i.e. diary, journal, commonplace book, Tagebuch, etc.)

This question was intended as a complement to the questions on defining “diary” and “journal.” Gannett found that the only man to keep a diary in the four sections of the course called his practice “journal,” not “diary,” and felt negatively towards the word “diary.” My hypothesis was that this sentiment would be less explicit among my students’ responses. However, the idea that “diary” has a feminine connotation has already been confirmed by some respondents. Refer to [Appendix A, Figures 11-13](#) for data.

The men respondents had highly varying answers. The largest group of common answers for the men was “journal.” One respondent out of the men answered with “diary,” and said, “Diary I think, did not pay attention to the semantics as much.” However, he does not keep a diary or journal. Respondent M6, a diary-writer, said, “Diary sounds cringe. I don’t really call it anything. But it never pleases me when i see it in plain sight.” This response is reminiscent of a student (man) in an anecdote Gannett described who wrote, “Sure, I keep a journal too, but I fear it has almost degenerated into a Diary (a label which has always suggested to me something an emotional preadolescent keeps, furiously writing out her thoughts every time the captain of the football team looks at her or whenever she develops another pimple.)” (Gannet 1987, p. 114) M6’s response to the word diary reminds me of the student’s fear of his “journal” being labeled as a “diary,” and the shame that might be surrounding this emotionally introspective practice that doesn’t seem to appear in the women’s responses.

The genderqueer students were not as shy about using the word “diary,” although there was also variance in terms used. The largest group of common answers was “journal,” with the next largest being “diary.” The rest were mostly different from each other.

Overwhelmingly, the women respondents were much more likely to call their writing practices “diary,” especially compared to the men where none of the men who had writing

practices called it “diary.” This fits with the idea that “diary” has a feminine connotation and therefore is a more accessible word for women based on gender norms. This gendered association could potentially extend to whether someone might *keep* a diary—not only call it the more gendered word.

5.3.3 In one entry, how many pages do you write on average?

This question was to test if Gannett’s findings—that her men students wrote much less in their assigned journals than her women students did—is also accurate to my students. Since many respondents gave written, detailed answers or broad ranges of page numbers, I sorted each response into categories based on the average amount of pages. Refer to [Appendix A, Figures 14-16](#) for data.

Half of the men responded with “one to two” pages, with the lowest amount being half a page and the highest being two to three.

Many genderqueer respondents said “less than one” page, with the rest having higher amounts. The highest number of average pages was “up to 6.”

Few of the women said they write “less than one” page on average. The largest group of common number of pages was “1 to 2” per entry. About half of women said either “2 to 3” or “3 to 5.” My findings were similar to Gannett’s, in that the women respondents seemed to write more pages per entry, especially compared to the men who wrote the least of all gender groups on average.

5.3.4 Have you ever kept a diary/journal as a class assignment *and if so, what was that experience like for you?*

After being assigned journals for class by Gannett, her women students responded mostly positively to the experience, while her men students responded mostly negatively. This question was to compare my students’ responses to hers, with the hypothesis that it would be less clearly divided into men’s negative reactions versus women positive reactions.

Only one of the men respondents had kept a diary or journal for a class. M3 said, “It was when I was very young, I thought it was not nice to have to share it with others.”

Three of the genderqueer respondents had, with slightly more mixed experiences. Two of them disliked sharing their journals with others, like N2 who said they “hated it exxxcept like when they give us prompts then its nice to try out but i hate having to journal like to show others.” However, one respondent N7 said the journal assignment was a “grounding experience for me, considering it made me aware of my surroundings...Still, there is something odd about writing a personal diary knowing it will not stay with your person.” Here, the student felt at least somewhat negatively about sharing the class journal with others.

Fifteen of the women said they had written journals for a class assignment, with truly mixed reviews. Of the 15, three responses were only positive (20%). One such response said, “It was nice to have that moment of writng everday, and to go back to what one had written previously.” Another said the assigned journal was “useful for better focus and keeping relevant info for the research.” This kind of positive response did not exist in the genderqueer or men’s responses. Five of the women’s experiences were recorded as neutral or more of an explanation of the assignment. Another woman W31 wrote, “A teacher once assigned us to write and submit 2 months of journaling. Needless to say, whatever I wrote was really really superficial.” This points to the problem of students being more (emotionally) filtered or “superficial” in assigned journals than in personal journals and diaries, which Gannett did not consider in her study. Four of the women’s responses, including W31, were concerned with the privacy and audience of assigned journals. However, unlike the men’s and genderqueer respondent’s experiences, the women’s responses were more neutral. For example, one said, “We could write anything in it and had the option of asking the teacher to not read it in the comments box. I would usually keep it private and use it to vent.” Another—perhaps the most negative response about privacy and audience from the women—said, “Okas, it helped me

clarify my thoughts and expectations - writing is never not helpful - but it's different when you know someone will be reading it. It becomes more like a letter than a diary.” Even so, this response is mostly neutral, if not positive. Of the 6 women’s responses that were truly negative, none of them were concerned with the assigned journal being read by other people.

My findings were similar to Gannett’s in some ways: the women respondents were much less negative than the other students, and the (sole) man respondent did have a negative experience precisely because it not being private. However, the women’s responses in my study were not overwhelmingly positive like in Gannett’s, with some women responding simply with “hated it” or “Boring.” My findings opposed Gannett’s in other ways: the women in her sample who disliked class-assigned journals primarily said they were an “invasion of privacy,” while the men who disliked them commented that they were “boring” or “a waste” of time. (Gannett 1987, p. 121)

VI. CONCLUSION

I found that there were gendered patterns of behavior in my sample, with women being much more likely to respond to the survey in the first place and mostly reporting that they have some kind of practice, especially compared to the men who were less interested. The women in my sample generally started their practices earlier or reporting on being encouraged to start diary writing from early ages of six or seven years old. The men in comparison often started their practices much later in life, in late teens or early twenties, if they had a practice. However, my hypothesis was partly correct that compared to Cinthia Gannett's students in 1987, the men in my sample were more interested in diary writing and did sometimes have practices or emotionally introspective writing outlets.

If I were to design my survey study again knowing what I know now, I would spend more time on the diarists' degrees of secrecy about their practices. Secrecy is potentially more important to gendered patterns of diary writing than privacy and audience. Who is more often proud of or willing to tell people about their private, personal diary, or who would not have disclosed that they keep a diary if my survey hadn't been anonymous. More research could be done on this variable.

I also went into this thesis with a belief that the parameters of what a diary *is* was self-explanatory, with no need for further exploration. In my research, I found that where a diary begins and ends is unclear in our digital age, when we consider private vlogs, personal and private Spotify playlist, private Instagram accounts with only one or two close friends following, private photo blogs of travels, family group chats for sending updates, email lists of friends to send monthly life recaps, and so much more. More research could be done on how different mediums of private or semi-private self-expression interact with gender in willingness to participate.

APPENDIX A: FINDINGS DATA

Figure 1: All responses to “Do you keep a diary/journal?”

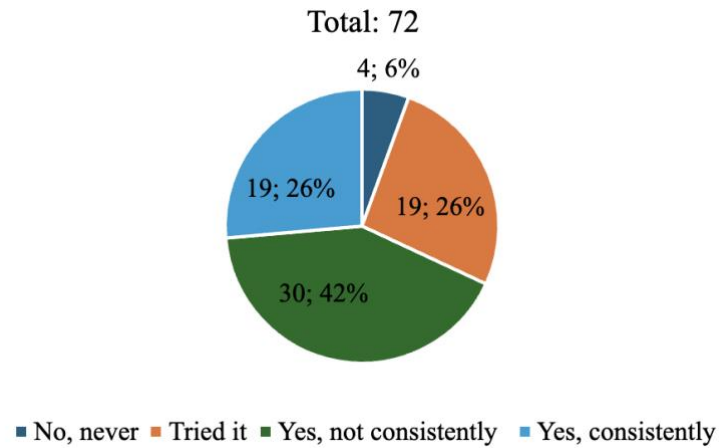


Figure 2: Men’s responses to “Do you keep a diary/journal?”

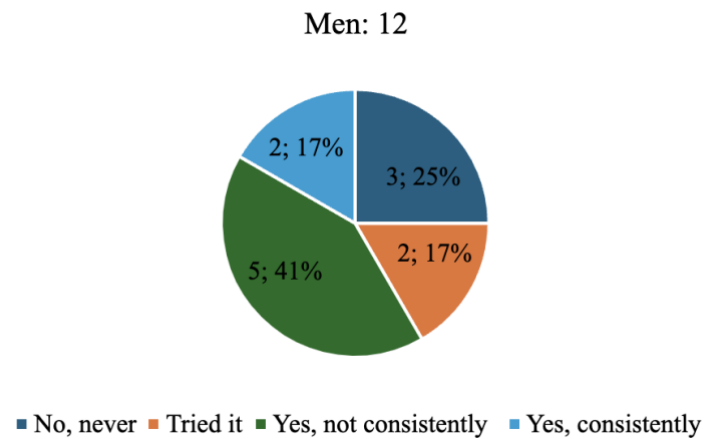


Figure 3: Genderqueer responses to “Do you keep a diary/journal?”

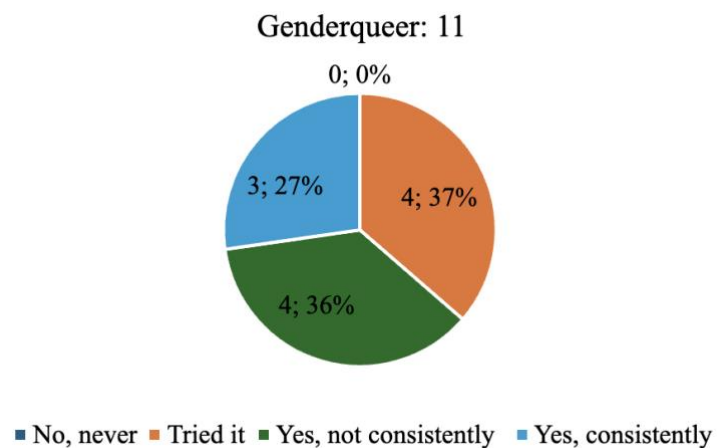


Figure 4: Women's responses to "Do you keep a diary/journal?"

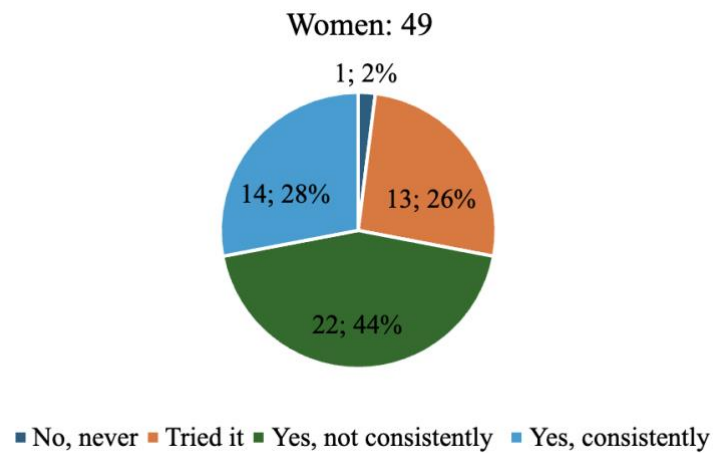


Figure 5: Responses to "What topics do you write most about?" who answered "Frustrations, for finding solutions" or "Frustrations, for venting"

	Men (8 Total Responders ¹)	Genderqueer (11 Total)	Women (46 Total)
Frustrations, for finding solutions	6 (75%)	9 (81.8%)	38 (82.6%)
Frustrations, for venting	4 (50%)	6 (54.5%)	27 (58.7%)

Figure 6: Responses to "What topics do you write most about?" who answered "Travel writing or adventures"

	Men (8 Total)	Genderqueer (11 Total)	Women (46 Total)
Travel writing or adventures	4 (50%)	4 (36.4%)	21 (45.7%)

¹ One of the men who had "tried [diary writing] but didn't stick with it" responded to other questions on diary habits but abstained from answering this section.

Figure 7: Gender distribution of responses²

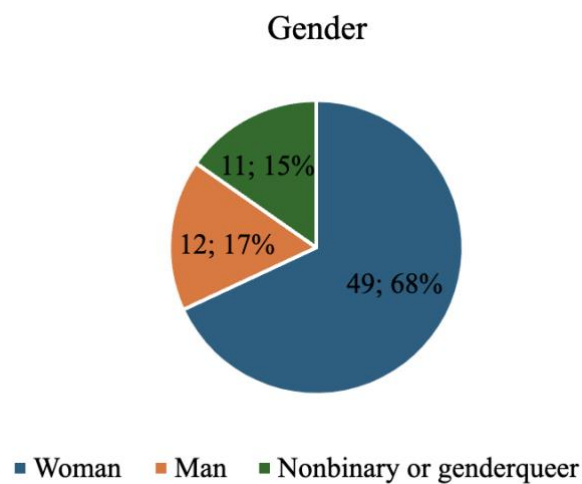


Figure 8: Men's responses to "When did you start keeping a diary/journal?"

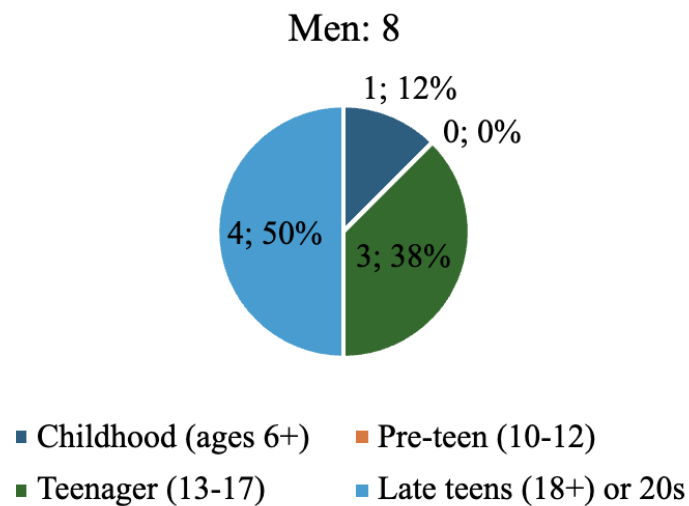
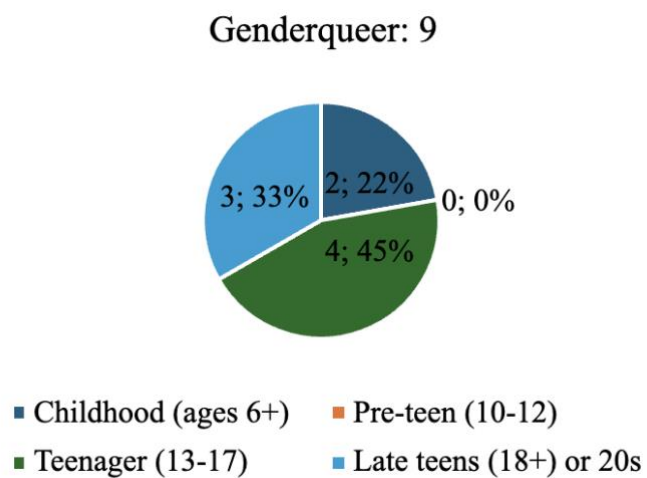


Figure 9: Genderqueer responses to "When did you start keeping a diary/journal?"



² One respondent chose the write-in "other" option and wrote "Human," which I included in the nonbinary or genderqueer category.

Figure 10: Women's responses to "When did you start keeping a diary/journal?"

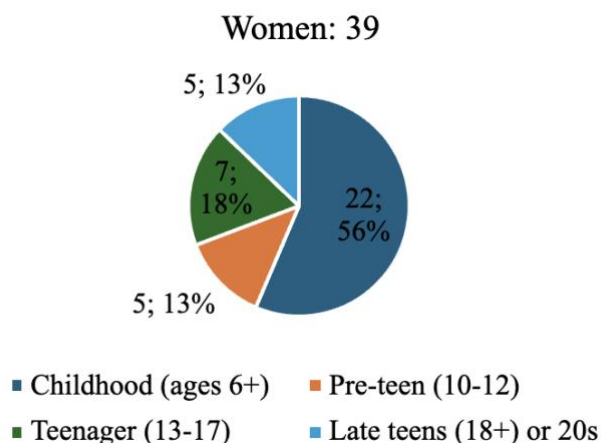


Figure 11: Men's responses to "What do you call it? (i.e. diary, journal, commonplace book, Tagebuch, etc.)

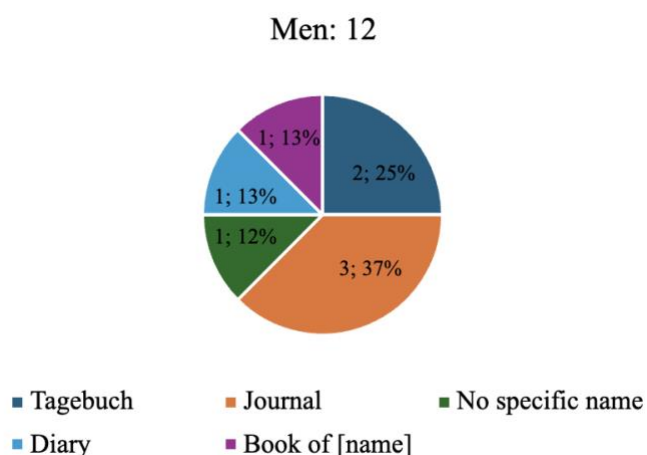


Figure 12: Genderqueer responses to "What do you call it? (i.e. diary, journal, commonplace book, Tagebuch, etc.)

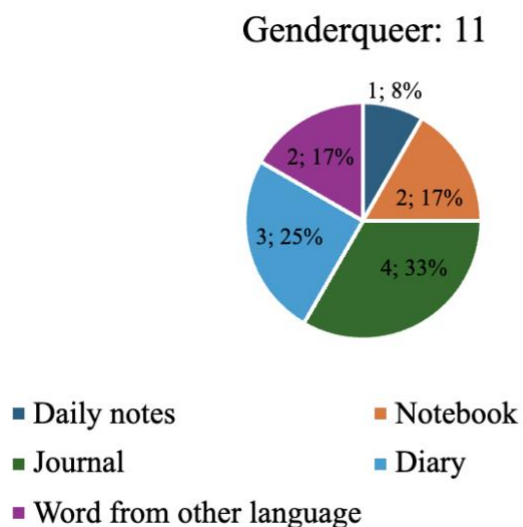


Figure 13: Women's responses to "What do you call it? (i.e. diary, journal, commonplace book, Tagebuch, etc.)"

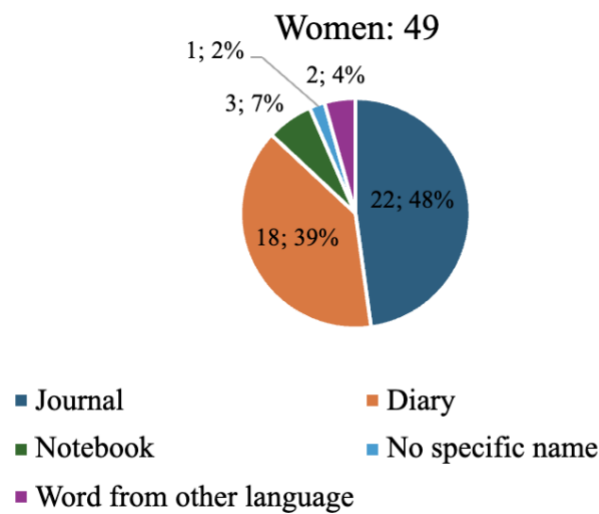


Figure 14: Men's responses to "In one entry, how many pages do you write on average?"

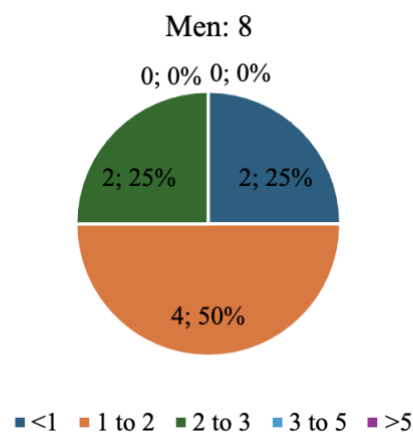


Figure 15: Genderqueer responses to "In one entry, how many pages do you write on average?"

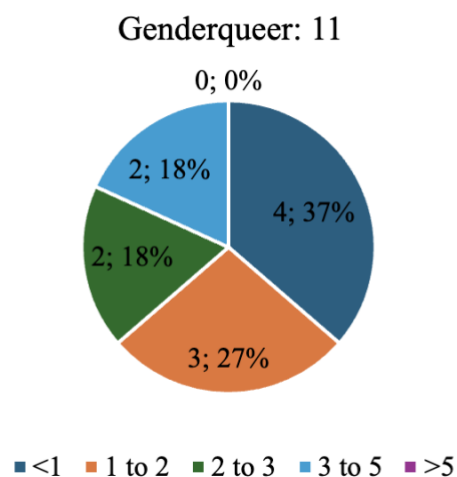
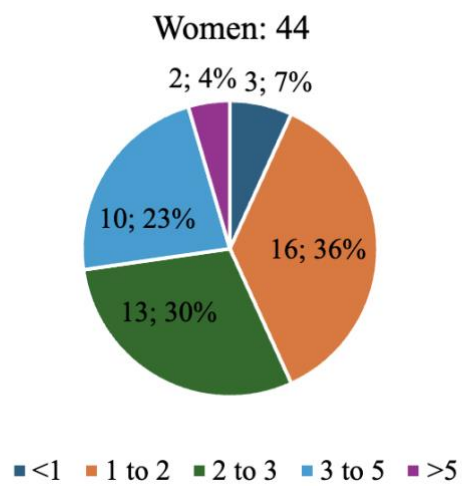


Figure 16: Women's responses to "In one entry, how many pages do you write on average?"



APPENDIX B: BLANK SURVEY

Gender and the diary/journal

I'm doing my BA thesis at CEU on gender socialization's impact on diary/journal writing among university students. These findings will be used in the thesis and compared to a similar 1992 study by Cinthia Gannett. Participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw until submission of the form. All data obtained from participants will be kept anonymous and emails will not be collected.

1. Do you consent to have your data anonymously included in my findings?

- ☐ Yes³

2. Gender

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Nonbinary or genderqueer
- ☐ [...] ⁴

3. Define or freely associate about “diary.”

- ☐ [...]

4. Define or freely associate about “journal”

- ☐ [...]

5. Do you keep a diary or journal?

- ☐ Yes, as a consistent practice
- ☐ Yes, but not consistently throughout my life

³ The circle icon represents a response where you can only choose one option.

⁴ This represents a short answer text space.

- Tried it but didn't stick with it
- No, never
- [...]

6. Why or why not do you keep a diary/journal?

- [...]

7. When did you start keeping a diary/journal (Write N/A for the following questions if you have never kept one)

- [...]

8. What did you call it? (i.e. diary, journal, commonplace book, Tagebuch, etc.)

- [...]

9. What format do you use?

- ☐ Handwritten⁵
- ☐ Via Computer
- ☐ Via diary-specific app on phone
- ☐ Via note-taking app on phone
- ☐ Audio recording
- ☐ Audio-visual (i.e. video)
- ☐ [...]

10. In one entry, how many pages do you write on average?

- [...]

11. Who do you share your diary/journal with? Do you keep it completely private?

- [...]

12. What topics do you write most about?

- ☐ (N/A)

⁵ The square icon represents a response where you can choose multiple options.

- ☐ Emotional introspection or well-being
- ☐ Personal relationships with others
- ☐ Goals for the future
- ☐ What happened during the day
- ☐ Travel writing or adventures
- ☐ Exercise log or measuring personal improvement
- ☐ Quotes or passages from other writers
- ☐ Drafts/ideas for creative or academic projects
- ☐ Frustrations or problems in life, for finding solutions
- ☐ Frustrations or problems in life, for venting
- ☐ [...]

13. Have you ever kept a diary/journal as a class assignment?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

14. If so, what was that experience like for you?

- ☐ [...]

15. Do you have a blog?

- ☐ Yes, public
- ☐ Yes, semi-public or only for a specific audience, like family and friends
- ☐ Previously but not anymore, public
- ☐ Previously but not anymore, semi-public
- ☐ No
- ☐ [...]

16. Other comments

- ☐ [...]

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