Moving Beyond the Self: How Blog Posts Can Inspire Narratives of Representation

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Introduction

• Allows readers to see their own identities reflected in texts
• Increases empathy by exposing readers to varied experiences
  (Smolkin & Young 2011: 217)

• The literary canon was formed under ‘a politics of representation’
  • Exclusion of minority groups—particularly ‘female, black, ethnic, or working-class’
• Increased analysis of these texts to challenge lack of representation
  (Guillory 2013: 5, 7)

• Increased analysis to be coupled with increased prevalence of texts with the intent of increasing accurate, diverse representation
• Create ‘narratives of representation’
Research methods and limitations

• Analysis of secondary sources
  • Delay (Hale 1997: 223)
  • Limits amplification of voice

• Primary sources through interviews and surveys
  • Ethical considerations make this time-consuming and expensive (Wilkinson & Thelwall 2011: 387)

• Primary source through journaling and self-reflexivity
  • Limits scope of potential experiences (Méndez 2013)
Transcending the self

• Blogs provide access to ‘individual personal accounts’ and explore ‘the inner self’
• Allow researchers to access reflections on issues related to identity that are often excluded from popular discourse

(Guillory 2013: 5; Jones & Alony 2008: 2-11; Wilkinson & Thelwall 2011: 387)

• Using discourse analysis on blog posts written by members of the queer community has influenced my work by:
  • Determining a standardised, yet flexible, glossary of terms
  • Revealing issues faced by the queer community and how the community discusses these
  • Determining similar language choices and issues faced by connected social groups
'There are more terms than those that I know, and more people still who prefer not to use them at all, but it can be nice to feel as though you belong. It was a long time ago that I heard the word “queer”, and it’s the word I use for myself if asked. There was a girl I met in a forest once who proudly called herself “pansexual”. In a distant market I found the term “bisexual”, I have encountered a prince who used the label “omnisexual”, and once I met a water spirit who referred to herself simply as “fluid”, the Sea Witch said.

Coral flicked her tail, sending currents of water through the cave. ‘I like “fluid”’, she said. ‘I wonder if I’m that.’
Examples

• Extract from ‘Sienna’ in Queerly Ever After:

‘You said you were a lesbian,’ he said. ‘You just told me—you have a girlfriend!’

Sienna sighed. She turned and faced the wolf, immediately regretting it as he leaned towards her. She retreated. ‘I am attracted to men and women,’ she said. ‘And all other genders, while we’re on the topic.’

‘Bisexual, eh?’ the wolf said with a wink.

‘Pansexual, actually,’ Sienna corrected as she resumed walking.
Benefits

• Breadth and depth of information
  • Breadth in connections between participants
  • Depth in longitudinal nature
(Jones & Alony 2008: 9)

• Candid and genuine
  • Not subject to influence of researcher
  • However, potential bias based on audience or deception through anonymity
(Jones & Alony 2008: 9-10)
Ethics

• Two schools of thought regarding ethics
  • Publicly available, can be analysed and cited without permission? OR
  • Personal content and therefore similar to other forms of qualitative analysis?
  (Jones & Alony 2008; Wilkinson & Thelwall 2011: 394)

• Difference between an individual and a document
• Lack of researcher interaction with participant
  (Wilkinson & Thelwall 2011: 394)
Considerations

• Limit to use of blogs available publicly
  • Avoid blog posts or social media hosted on sites that require user identification / passwords
    (Wilkinson & Thelwall 2011: 394)

• Respect anonymity of writers
  • Protect identity of bloggers who use usernames / pseudonyms
    (Wilkinson & Thelwall 2011: 397)

• Sampling
  • Bloggers need to be attracted to writing, particularly via a digital medium (Jones & Alony 2008: 9)
  • Must have access and ability to use technology (Jones & Alony 2008: 9)
  • Do not invalidate, but must be used with caution (Wilkinson and Thelwall 2011: 389)
Conclusion

• Narratives of representation explore diverse perspectives of minority social groups

• Discourse analysis can be used to analyse blog posts and engage with experiences of individuals within these social groups

• Literary texts that are public works can be analysed without limitations imposed by the intentions of the author
  (Barthes 1968 cited in Barry 2013)

• Allow writers to traverse a middle ground between traditional interviewing or surveys, and self-reflexive research methods like journaling
  • Can be used in conjunction with established research methods to produce authentic narratives of representation
List of references

Barry, P 2013, Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory, Oxford University Press.
Hale, CJ 1997, 'Leatherdyke boys and their daddies: How to have sex without women or men', Social Text, pp. 223-36.
Thank you

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