Exploring a Nursing Community Online: A Breadth of Topics and a Depth of Understanding

Rebekah Fox, Department of Communication Studies, Texas State University-San Marcos, San Marcos, TX, USA

Kathleen Abrahamson, Department of Public Health, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY, USA

James G. Anderson, Department of Medical Sociology and Health Communication, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, USA

ABSTRACT

Online forums offer researchers opportunities to investigate communities in unobtrusive ways to understand better the experiences, concerns, and stories of those who contribute. In this exploratory study, the authors analyze content from one online nursing community to highlight the breadth of topics being discussed outside of the nursing workplace but within the nursing community (e.g., topics, that when taken together, begin to structure a collective narrative for this online community). Then, the authors explore one specific topic being discussed by this nursing community, nurse bullying, in an effort to better understand how the current nursing literature’s coverage of the topic compares with the discussion emerging from this online community. Finally, suggestions for using online forums as research sites are discussed.

Keywords: Nurse Bullying, Nursing Community, Nursing Forums, Nursing Narratives, Online Communities

INTRODUCTION

Researchers from a variety of fields are mining the content of online forums as a way to learn how specific online communities discuss shared interests. Within health services research, these types of forums have been used to study online social support for patients with breast cancer (Sharf, 1997), individuals with disabilities (Braithwaite et al., 1999), and smoking cessation (Schneider et al., 1990), to name a few. Additionally, researchers interested in understanding the phenomena of community building and maintenance among health care providers are also turning to online forums (Fox, 2008). Although exactly how they are used may differ between online communities, these types of forums typically allow multiple participants

DOI: 10.4018/ijrqeh.2013010105
to contribute information and/or respond to comments in an asynchronous manner. (For additional coverage of the benefits and drawbacks of social support in online communities, see White & Dorman, 2001.) As such, nursing focused online forums are potentially a rich source of information regarding the experiences, concerns, stories, and work-worlds of practicing nurses. Existing empirical research addressing nursing and internet use has focused on issues such as the internet as a teaching tool for students (Boulos, Miramba & Wheeler, 2006), internet communication of health information from provider to patient (Solomon, Wagner, & Goes, 2012), health communication using mixed samples of physicians, nurses, and consumers (Miller & Pole, 2010) and the privacy risks of on-line forum use (Lagu, Kaufman, Asch, & Armstrong, 2008). Research into how nursing professionals themselves use on-line forums as a means to create community, share narrative, and exchange knowledge within their professional domain is growing (Fox, 2008).

Scholars interested in the formation of communities have recognized the importance of communication and narrative in shaping community. More specifically, in recent decades scholars have explored how narratives emerge as a collective as opposed to an individual activity and therefore as part and parcel of community development (Mumby, 1987; Smircish & Calas, 1987; Boje, 1991; Clair, 1993; Taylor, 2003; Frank, 2005). In this current work we seek to better understand the relationship between nurse discourse and community building through the examination of threaded discourse of one online nursing forum.

The goals of this study are twofold. First, we analyze the content of threads within a nursing focused online forum to better understand the breadth of topics being discussed outside of the nursing workplace but within the nursing community (e.g. topics, that when taken together, begin to structure a collective narrative for this on-line community). Then, we explore one specific topic being discussed by this nursing community, nurse bullying, in an effort to better understand how the current nursing literature’s coverage of the topic compares with the discussion emerging from this on-line community.

THE SPECIFIC CASE OF ONLINE COMMUNITIES

For almost two decades, research has indicated that the use of on-line forums can encourage participation in communities and may allow people to engage in novel ways (Finn, 1995, 1999; Lawless, 1998, White & Dorman, 2001). The type of information that surfaces in on-line communities might not otherwise be told in face-to-face settings. Investigators interested in how individuals use the web suggest that users may be more comfortable discussing what they perceive to be unpopular or unfavorable topics in a semi-anonymous setting such as a discussion board (Joyce-Hasham, 2000; Ford & Gil, 2001; Bostdorf, 2004). Some research addressing on-line community building and narrative has focused specifically on the nursing community. While exploring the concept of rhetorical narrative exigencies, or the discursive frames that present openings in discourse for individuals to offer up stories, Fox (2008) found that conflict mediation (of content and relational level meaning), identification (both seeking and providing), care (both seeking and providing), and socialization emerged. In other words, narratives located in the threaded discussions of on-line forums were explored to determine the discursive frames that tended to call-in personal narratives. Rather than examining personal narrative and its relationship to collectively formed discourse, this current project seeks to compare current scholarship on nurse bullying to the discussions of nurse bullying in one on-line nursing community.
Related Content

Legal Issues in E-Healthcare Systems
www.igi-global.com/chapter/legal-issues-healthcare-systems/73886?camid=4v1a

Role Plays Used During A Humanities In Medicine Module: Selected Transcripts Part 2
www.igi-global.com/article/role-plays-used-during-a-humanities-in-medicine-module/115531?camid=4v1a

Intelligent Agent to Identify Rheumatic Diseases
www.igi-global.com/chapter/intelligent-agent-identify-rheumatic-diseases/78037?camid=4v1a
Privacy and Security in e-Health Applications  
www.igi-global.com/chapter/privacy-security-health-applications/73884?camid=4v1a