

Qualitative Content Analysis of Girl Spoken Submissions

Includes:
Final Report

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Follow up to Critical Literature Review and outline of this Semester's Activities

In our work with **GirlSpoken** last semester we researched and wrote a critical literature review, examining books and **anthologies** written by **girls** and **young women** for girls and young women. The point of reviewing literature was to identify gaps and particular themes that are being addressed in current publications of the above nature. Through this review we were able to give GirlSpoken a number of suggestions with the intention of providing them with more vision and concrete direction for the compilation of a new anthology by girls and young women for girls and young women across **Canada**. GirlSpoken has been appreciative of our suggestions and are taking steps to include them within the preparation and process of creating the anthology.

This semester we have been working on a number of projects related to the preparation of the GirlSpoken anthology. We have distributed submission gathering materials through a variety of different mediums. We have gone through and analysed the submissions and have created and compiled a qualitative content analysis in an attempt to quantify what kinds of themes and gaps are occurring within submission content. This report will discuss the objectives, process and conclusions we have reached after conducting the qualitative content analysis. The findings have been very interesting and pointed

of positives and negatives that may inform the writing of the GirlSpoken anthology.

Submission Gathering Process

We developed a strategic recruitment plan in order to continue the process of gathering submissions for the GirlSpoken anthology. We decided to continue outreaching to girls and young women across the country through the **POWERCamp National Network** by forwarding a call for submissions letter along with suggested art activities throughout the network. In addition, we also posted submission calls on various **blog** internet sites where girls and young women dialogue, as well as alternative media websites. We also sent the letter and suggested art activities to school boards in Peterborough and surrounding area. Short presentations at nine high schools across the province were also done with the help of a volunteer who was touring the region conducting body image awareness workshops. The original deadline for submissions was January 31, however it was extended until March 31.

We recognized that not every girl would have access to or interest in internet sites, or be involved in the programs that were passing along the information, so we also used **workshops** as a method of attaining submissions. We conducted workshops in **Peterborough** and **North Bay**.

The workshops were an important method of gathering submissions because a call out for submissions can bring limited and biased results. The recruitment material could be intimidating to some girls who do not identify as

artists or relate to way the material is presented. An approach that emphasizes '**creativity**', 'ranting', 'bluntness', 'truth tellings' and 'artistic ramblings' has potential to be alienating to some, while appealing to others. In a workshop setting, we emphasized the fact that there is no right or wrong way to make art or creative writing; that everyone can be an artist and we are not looking for any specific 'masterpiece'. Our intention in a workshop was to create an empowering and safe space for girls to dialogue with each other and experiment with words and art supplies. We would structure the workshop around a particular topic, such as Identity, Assertiveness and Communication, Body Image, Sexuality, and Women's Health. However, we found it important to be prepared for adaptation and change, depending on the energy of the group, the interests of participants, the space, time, and other circumstances. As facilitators, our objective was to guide and encourage rather than teach or dominate discussion, thus creating a forum for participants to frame their own issues and perspectives on their own terms. This way, the process of gathering submissions through a workshop also became a political strategy of breaking down barriers amongst girls and creating safe communities of inspiration, empowerment, and support. Often, the workshop would be a catalyst for girls to engage in creative practice, as they would leave a workshop and then submit art that they have created after the workshop.

Qualitative Content Analysis

The objective of the qualitative content analysis was to go through the anthology submissions and identify a multitude of themes that are reflected in submission content. Through exploring and naming the different issues that submissions reflected, GirlSpoken will have a clearer understanding of what kind of girls are submitting to the anthology, what girls are not submitting, and what is important to the girls who are. The intention behind the qualitative analysis was also to identify gaps in themes that could point out what experiences girls are giving voice to through creative expression. Through identifying the above factors, GirlSpoken can respond to inequalities found within submissions and conduct more submission outreach. Also, through looking at current submissions and their content, GirlSpoken is also provided with a number of ideas and outlines that assist in creative visioning and the process of constructing an outline and structure for the book.

To conduct the qualitative content analysis we both looked at/read submissions that GirlSpoken had received thus far. After reading each submission we identified the four most prominent themes that stood out to us, wrote down the themes on the submission and then compiled a list of the themes we identified on a master tally sheet. Each time we identified a new theme we would add it to the list, and each time we identified a reoccurring theme we added another tally. We identified only 3-4 themes in each submission, even though some pieces displayed multiple themes, in an attempt to keep numbers more concise.

We attempted to be fairly descriptive when identifying themes in an attempt to quantify diversity in submissions. We found that because of the abstract nature of some of the content it was difficult to clearly define the intentions behind different contributor's pieces. We found that it was difficult to identify themes in the artistic submissions if the contributor did not include a written description of what the piece meant to them, as many were very abstract, artistically impressive, but hard to pin point what particular emotions and themes the contributor was trying to convey. It is also difficult to gauge what is being said in a piece of creative writing or visual art, because of the nature of art being often more figurative than literal, therefore communicating multiple or complex meanings that may only be known in depth by the creator of the piece. The process of us reading and analysing each piece became a creative process in itself, as our own individual subjectivities, perspectives, and experiences mediated how we read each piece and what stood out as being prominent. Identifying particular themes was challenging because of the fluidity of art and creative writing; it often felt difficult to categorize themes in the work without feeling like we were making assumptions. So, we approached the analysis with the theoretical awareness that the art and writing speaks for itself and has integrity, while the purpose of the content analysis is to help create a more inclusive and anti oppressive strategy for submission gathering and selection. This way, the analysis that we are doing does not attempt to make claims or conclusions about what the submissions are saying because the point is for girls to speak for themselves. Through looking at themes, we are not trying to make

definitive claims, but rather look for similarities amongst girls and young women's creative expressions and experiences.

One of the problems that we encountered in identifying themes was how to pick and choose which themes stood out to us within pieces when there were many. Some pieces identified a multitude of issues, although we only tallied off the themes that had not been seen many times before. This is a site of potential conflict within our content analysis and a possibly hypocritical action on our part. Last semester we discussed how one of the possible tensions within the books we reviewed could have been how submissions were chosen to be published. Through identifying themes that we thought were 'most' important we imposed upon girls' creative expressions our own ideas of what was most note worthy within their pieces. For example, in a piece that identified themes such as rape, crushes, eating disorders, cutting, happiness, friendship, peer pressure and substance abuse, we chose to identify the four themes that had been cited the least within the over all content analysis. Through our subjective choosing we prioritized certain aspects of girls experiences over others, creating a hierarchy of experience in which we chose what was most important among a variety of themes that girls identified as affecting their lives. In order to avoid placing different girls' experiences into a subjective hierarchy, it may have been useful to have quantified what themes came up in percentage rather than in numbers.

Within the artistic submissions, many of the girls who chose to submit artwork very obviously self identified as artists. Many of the artistic pieces reflected dominant notions of 'good art' and therefore, the artistic submissions

that will be included in the book may only reflect the artistic expressions of girls who feel confident expressing themselves in a particular artistic fashion, most likely because they have been praised for their merit in this field by others previously. Not very much artwork was submitted that reflects diversity in artistic skill which could present a possible discrepancy in the anthology as the artwork will not point out different kinds of artistic ability and the varying ways that art can be used as a means to create dialogue between girls, and as a site for self reflection.

The dominant themes identified were Crushes, Family and Parental Conflict, Social Isolation, Depression, Suicide, Cutting, Message of Hope for Other Girls, Conflicting Self Image, Peer Validation, Sadness, Coming of Age, Love, Growing up, and Relationships. Some results were very surprising, as we found themes that came up less frequently than we assumed would be more popular. These include Body Image, Race, Class, Sexual Violence, and Substance Abuse. Although some themes were explicit in certain submissions, other themes could be found within the same submissions, however more implicitly. For example, the theme of Conflicting Self Image was popular, and it is likely that the contributor was referring to issues of; for example, the body even if that is not made explicit in the piece. Also, themes such as Depression and Social Isolation may be connected to other more implicit themes, such as Eating Disorders, Body Image, Sex, and Violence. There was a huge amount of submissions dealing with Crushes and Relationships, however hardly any of these made reference to Queer Relationships, or Diverse Sexual Identities. Only

one submission made reference to the questioning of ones own gender, however quite a few explored the concepts of Gender and Gender Roles. Quite a few submissions referred to Desire; both portraying the self as desirable and as a desiring subject. It is interesting to note that the few Same – Sex Crush submissions were more focused on desiring than being desired, which may say something about heteronormative conditioning. It is hopeful to note that many of the submissions sent hopeful messages to other girls. It was common for pieces that communicated issues such as Depression, Social Isolation or Suicide to also have a clear message of Hope for other girls.

Currently much is missing within the GirlSpoken anthology submissions, as overall, the pieces do not speak to a diversity of social locations and experiences. If the anthology is going to truly represent girls and young women's diverse experiences, more outreach needs to be done to girls and young women who's voices have not yet been reached or heard. Within the process of choosing submissions to be published, some subjectivity will need to be enacted to ensure that a variety of themes affecting girls' lives are published. The possibility of enacting this subjectivity does illicit a number of important ethical questions, many of the same questions we brought up after reviewing anthologies first semester. If GirlSpoken chooses to publish the one piece they received that discusses or points out race are they tokenizing this young woman's experience? Is it wrong to include the only submission on rape simply because it is about rape? Through subjectively choosing submissions that point out a diversity of themes that affect girls and young women's lives, will GirlSpoken be objectifying

girl's experiences through an attempt to be inclusive? These are the questions that need to be continually worked through and addressed when attempting to act within an anti-oppressive feminist framework.