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The Agency of Anonymity: Reading Women’s Autobiographical Blogs

Abstract

This thesis uses previously unstudied female authored blog narratives to explore the role the author’s anonymity plays in the way they textually construct themselves and their offline experiences. It thereby reconceptualises not only what it means to be anonymous online, but also how anonymity is utilised by users regardless of their perceived level of hiddenness. Unlike previous research into the genre, it considers blogs as part of the trajectory of life-writing, which includes autobiography and diaries, and therefore examines the narratives using close textual literary analysis. The thesis also acknowledges the fact that the content of blogs is inherently influenced by the form itself, and therefore looks at the texts in the context of their online platform and its technological features. It subsequently shows blogs to be a constantly updated example of contemporary culture, which represent not just an individual voice, but new ways of examining broader social realities.

The analysis examines how the blogosphere could specifically offer a platform for women, who are often discouraged from speaking up in the offline public sphere, to share their stories and have a ‘public’ voice online. It therefore provides a detailed insight into a selection of female authors who have chosen this medium, interrogates the ways in which they utilise the potential anonymity that the online world offers them, and demonstrates to what extent the blogosphere could therefore be regarded as a space where women can represent alternative, and potentially transgressive, performances of self. Its methodology and theoretical framework mean that the analysis provides a more detailed insight into how and why women are seen to dominate this platform than existing research has thus far been able to. The findings therefore go beyond previous conceptualisations of female blog users, and of the blogosphere more broadly; highlighting the extent to which the medium of blogging represents a powerful place for women to write themselves.

Keywords: blog, blogosphere, anonymity, autobiography, self-representation, women’s writing, female users.