

Chapter 17: Research Remix: Soundwriting Studies of the English Language

By Jennifer J. Buckner, Gardner-Webb University, Boiling Springs, NC

with Benjamin Flournoy, Katie Furr, Sarah Johnson, Katie Lewis, Angela Meade, Hannah Ray, Garrett Simpson, Kate Vriesema, and Ally Ward

4. Katie Lewis's Discourse Ethnography: Be Your Own Beautiful Cancer Support Group

Katie Lewis visits a Be Your Own Beautiful cancer support group to learn how language works to help cancer victims reshape their notions of beauty.

Transcript

[Music begins as the following narration begins and plays under it: gentle, thoughtful piano chords with acoustic guitar plucking.]

Katie Lewis: Most people have a scar of some sort on their body. This scar could possibly come from surgery, or if you're like me I have one from when I fell down when I was a little kid. But for many people, scars are not only a physical reminder of what has happened to them, but they have been proven to greatly impact a person's self-confidence and their self-esteem. But you have to remember that there are those people with scars that have them mentally and emotionally and those are not visible to others, but they still suffer greatly from negative body image and insecurity.

Most people will never notice the ones with scars that can't be seen because the majority of them walk around with smiling faces and forced positivity. And so many of these people are still left with questions, and these could include questions like, "How can I even look at myself again in the mirror?" or "Can others tell what I have been through when they look at me?"

[Music ends.]

Now, imagine a few months ago you had been diagnosed with cancer. And so far, you have went through several rounds of chemotherapy, and you are beginning to lose your hair, you have no energy, and you just don't feel yourself anymore. So, what do you do, and where do you go? While sitting in the doctor's office last week, you overheard some ladies discussing "be your own beautiful." What? "Be your own beautiful"? I haven't felt beautiful in months. I think I'm gonna give this a try.

[New music plays briefly, still piano and guitar, under just the next sentence before stopping.]

It's the second Monday of the month, and Be Your Own Beautiful is in session.

Interviewee 1: Be Your Own Beautiful provides all women diagnosed with any cancer an opportunity for support and encouragement and valuable information. Be Your Own Beautiful also teaches tips for staying well while letting your inner beauty shine through. Instructions on how to style and wear wigs, scarves, turbans, we provide that as well as a safe way to care for your skin and nails. They also receive a gift bag appropriate for, of, um, skin care products that are appropriate just for their skin.

[Same music plays under the following narration.]

Katie: Cancer can take so much away from a person and especially as a woman. You know what many now see are the scars that are left to remind them daily of what they have been through and what they have lost because of it. But it is very evident that the

ladies of Be Your Own Beautiful are learning that beauty comes from within and even though cancer can rob their self-image they are reminding themselves that they are survivors.

[Music fades out.]

Interviewee 1: We just tried to come up with a name that would suit what it is we are trying to be for these women and what would sound something that would be like an inviting name for them. So from that we just came up with “be your own beautiful” because each lady is beautiful in their own way and each lady’s journey is different, but yet it’s still a beautiful journey in its own.

[New, calming acoustic guitar music plays under the following narration.]

Katie: Well, Be Your Own Beautiful does focus a lot on building relationships with the other women that are in the group, so building these relationships seems to be a big part of the community when you relate it back to the support that the team does provide for these ladies. But the name “be your own beautiful” itself is unique to this discourse community in that each lady there is beautiful despite the unpleasant journey that they have been on, and the name itself does convey a message to others even if they are not part of the group, because I can instantly think positivity when I see the name “be your own beautiful.” I can see the friendships made, the listeners and the women experiencing the same journey as another and how it acts as a safe place to come when one may feel that they are alone on their journey.

[Music fades out.]

Interviewee 1: The goals for this group mainly are to provide friendships and a listening ear when people need it the most, with women that are on a similar journey. And um, but there are also goals in just . . . our shared goals of teachers in this group is to teach them how, and ways to be sanitary with their skin care and their makeup so that they can keep down any type of infection when going through treatment of any kind.

[New music plays under the following narration, but matching the instruments and tone of what's come before, with piano and guitars.]

Katie: You know the majority of people know someone that has been diagnosed with cancer, and from those beginning signs on to the diagnosis and treatment, cancer does have the ability to reshape a person whether that be mentally, physically, and even emotionally. Even though you may not always be able to see the scars that cancer leaves behind emotionally and mentally, I believe that they are there.

[Music fades out.]

Interviewee 1: Also, just cancer itself, just cancer the word itself, is a word that people don't understand unless they have it themselves and have been diagnosed with it themselves.

[Similar music fades in, this time with a female vocalist singing very quietly beneath the following interview tape.]

The purpose for these gatherings is just there again to not only promote friendships but just to be with other women that understand what you have been through, whether it be physically, mentally, emotionally—just support and just friends in itself, just to know that you have somebody close to you that has been through and experienced what you have, and it makes all the difference in the world.

[Acoustic guitar music plays under the following narration.]

Katie: It is evident that cancer can affect a woman physically, mentally, and emotionally. However, through Be Your Own Beautiful new friends are made, learning is active, and even the creation of a positive attitude is formed and being connected with others that know what cancer truly means in itself can help a woman to look good and feel better about her scars.