Reviewer's report

Title: Developing an online learning community for mental health professionals and service users: a discourse analysis

Version: 1 Date: 18 October 2011

Reviewer: Rebekah Pratt

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Major compulsory revisions

In the first paragraph of the background, the authors describe the gap between service user and professionals in relation to familiarity with using social media and the internet. The authors argue that service users are usually more experienced than professionals. This assertion surprised me somewhat, and I think it would be good to back this up with a citation if possible. Often it is assumed that is the other way around, in that professionals may have the advantage, although perhaps that is more in relation to access issues.

The last paragraph of the background should be restructured to more clearly state the research questions being explored in this paper, currently the research question does not read as well defined.

In the analytic approach second of the methods, the authors must provide more information about what type of discourse analysis was used, by citing key work here. It currently reads as if there is some confusion about discourse analysis and conversation analysis. I would expect to see a clear statement of what approach was used, what constituted the data under review, how the data was reviewed, was software used in this process, and what processes were used to ensure rigour in the analysis. Also, were the researchers both the discussion moderators and the data analysts here? And if so, was there any other review of the analysis to allow for further reflection given these dual roles?

In the first paragraph of the results the authors assert that they provided a 'non-hierarchical space' for MHPs and MHSUs, and yet it seems that both groups asserted their relative hierarchical positions rather quickly. I would like to see more explanation about this in the text, and reflecting on the way in which this may have been a goal that wasn't achieved, or if it was, to say more about it.

In the fourth paragraph of the results, the authors state 'the researchers, Ray and Emily, farmed their questions neutrally', however I'm wondering how we know that? Also, if the researchers also analyzed the data, does it make it more challenging to claim this?

In the discussion section there is no section on limitations, and likewise, no section of final conclusions or thoughts about future work. The paper would be greatly strengthened by including both of these sections.
Overall I take some issue with the assertion of moderator neutrality in this project. I would like to see some discussion about the potential of MHSUs being the moderators. It seems at the moment like the moderators were professionals, an MHSP’s, but the authors seem to negate the potential impact of that on the discussions.

Overall I would like to see the research questions more clearly stated and the results and discussion more closely related to those. At times I lost the thread of what the goal of the work was, and that makes it challenging to review if this paper is achieving what it set out to do. I think too, being more explicit about the methods of analysis in relation to the research aims would be helpful. I was a little concerned that this is a small pilot study that has been fragmented into too many different papers, and perhaps that runs the risk of decontextualising some of the work from the broader picture. To overcome that, this work would need to focus in much more detail on the discourse analysis approach used, and perhaps considering Foucauldian discourse analysis might be one way to draw more fully on the issues about power and collaboration across the different roles.

Minor essential revisions:
In the last paragraph of the background, could the authors please clarify if it is actually an average of 23 seconds, in relation to Marvel's work.

In the last paragraph of the background, the fourth sentence needs one full stop removed.

In the last paragraph of the background, the second to last sentence should read ‘recently’, not ‘recent’.

In the second paragraph of the background, the authors reference their own unpublished work, ie work in submission. I feel there is too much reliance on these reference, and it would be best to minimize this, ie, reference 5 and 6 could also cover the same content perhaps? It might be best to only use reference 6, rather than run the risk of drawing on so much work that is under review.

In the section ‘Authors’ contribution, I would like to also see the funding source for this work.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
'I declare that I have no competing interests'