"IS THERE A TRANSLATOR IN TEH HOUSE?": CULTURAL AND DISCOURSE
ANALYSIS OF A VIRTUAL SPEECH COMMUNITY ON AN INTERNET
MESSAGE BOARD

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

In

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by
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B.A. University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 1999
May 2005

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So many people have contributed to my success, both as a student and as a human being. My mother and father have been steadfast in their support and encouragement throughout my successes and my not so wise decisions. Without their help through the years, I would not be here today. To my husband, Jeffrey, who helped to postpone my thesis by one year but in the process, woke my heart up to the joy that is possible in this life, I will forever be grateful and proud to call myself your wife.

Were it not for Dydia DeLyser, I would not have birthed my chapter on ethics with such respect for qualitative research. Thank you for reminding me of the tenuous situation of field researchers. To Jill Brody, for convincing me to stick with it no matter how much I got discouraged and for opening my mind up to the amazing humanity of culture and language and all that it entails, thank you. You have been more than a professor to me. You've been a mother hen in the sometimes hair-pulling world that is graduate school. Miles Richardson, when I set foot in your classroom in the fall of 2002, I never imagined I would learn as much as I did under your tutelage. You have inspired me to think for myself and to always subvert the dominant paradigm. I owe you both a debt of gratitude payable only in my own successes in life.

And finally to the mighty Pens, my friends and fellow forum mates, were it not for your ideas and permission, this thesis would have never come to fruition. Tim, thank you for the ubiquitous emails back and forth over the last two years and for your infinite patience with my technological ineptitudes. I am forever grateful to all the Pens who have helped me realize this thesis – thank you so very much.

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ABSTRACT

In the newly emergent field of online ethnography, netspeak and online behavior are quickly becoming the next frontier of linguistic anthropology. The discourse analysis and cultural investigation of the virtual speech community of Penismightier.com reveal several salient aspects of culture through the lens of the internet and online human behavior. This thesis focuses on aspects of language use in the discourse on message board threads on the Penismightier website. The Pen speech community has innovated a lexicon of original and modified techie language, such as unique emoticons and alpha-numeric orthography. The orthographic innovations of this virtual speech community blur the division between spoken and written language. Covert categories for topic shifting and anti-Gricean maxims play an integral role in thread behavior. Flame wars are the apex of this community's language behavior, infusing power/knowledge with techie elitism and sharp, sometimes sexual wit. Discourse analysis of cyberspace netspeak is as new as the medium. My research reveals the creative patterns of interaction of this technologically mediated community and its importance in the field of linguistics and anthropology.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of my thesis is the *website* Penismightier.com. This virtual speech community has much to offer in the way of language and culture studies, which I will explore through analysis of play, themes, lexicon and covert categories used by members of this community on the w*ebsite*. Penismightier.com is a virtual place, comprising a bounded speech community that resides within one particular address on the *World Wide Web*. In 2001, when most of the data analyzed appeared was *posted*, the majority of the forty members of the community were males under the age of thirty. The *website* presents a front page that is similar in its aesthetic to that of *webzines*, with news, a *graffiti board* where anyone can say anything anonymously, *links* to other *sites* or to articles written by the *site's* staff, pictures, a running slogan that changes with *refreshes* of the page, and three separate *message boards*. For descriptions of pages, *postings*, etc., refer to Appendix A, where these are displayed, along with a glossary of all the words that are italicized in this thesis, which provides explanations of the meanings and context of use of these *techie* terms. This glossary constitutes an initial lexicon of the specialized vocabulary of this speech community, some of which is part of computer technology in general.

The *message board* is where much of the linguistic and cultural interaction plays out. The *message board* is set up as a *BBS*, or a bulletin board system, whereby a *poster* can write in real time, and any member can access the *posted* message from that point forward. *Posters* have the option to *register* a name on the *website*. The act of *registering* allows a *poster* to edit or delete his or her *posts*, and also helps create a familiar identity for the *poster* in the speech community.

Of the three main *boards*, the *general discussion board* is the richest in terms of anthropological and linguistic phenomena. Technological language, maleness themes, and sexual references are more prevalent here than on the other *boards*. Another *board* is devoted to *techie* issues, and the third *board* is for staff only. The *site* staff of eight includes only one female and exhibits a definite hierarchy with the *web administrator* at the top; the role of the *site* staff harkens to a council of elders, with the remainder of the Pen community as the proletariat. Specifically, the staff *board* is restricted from access by members through password protection; in contrast to the other two *boards*, discussion on the staff *board* is strictly professional.

I arrived at this topic after years of reading and *posting* on the Pen *boards*. I began to notice that this small community manipulates language behavior according to specific Whorfian covert categories that beg investigation (1956). Anthropologically informed discourse analysis is an ideal method with which to interpret this cultural and linguistic data. The advent of online communities is quite recent (1990's), and research has been published in this area only very recently (Crystal 2001, Cook 2004, Eisenlohr 2004, Paolillo 1999). Most "e-research" concentrates on *instant messaging* and email language (Booher 2001, Crystal 2001, Tapscott 1996, 1998). With this project, I can contribute to the research of online behavior in *message boards*.

The nature of the Pen *website* is technological, male, and sexual. Displays of Pen power range from *posted* pictures of a newly *modded* car or *box*, to *posting*, "*DYJGTIT*," to claiming the world should abandon cake for the love of pie. The name of the *website* is noteworthy as well. The *administrator* decided that a Saturday Night Live skit featuring Sean Connery as a contestant on the TV quiz show "Jeopardy" merited infamy,

and thus named the *website*, "Penismightier." The skit portrays Sean Connery reading from a "Jeopardy" quiz category, "The Pen Is Mightier." In his Scottish accent, Connery runs all the words together, making the sexual reading "penis mightier" blatant. He belabors the point in the skit, telling the "Jeopardy" host Alex Trebek (played by Will Farrell) that he is

"sittin' on a goldmine!" and asks, "but…will it mighty my penis?" The staff of Penismightier certainly believe the name is indeed a goldmine and reference the skit often.

"Language is the most massive and inclusive art we know, a mountainous and anonymous work of unconscious generations" (Sapir 1921:235). Whether spoken or written, language extends a social bridge between humans. The Penismightier.com community occupies a bounded cyberspace, involving humans who write to each other in an easily accessible format that resembles a written version of spoken conversation. On the keyboard, members innovate linguistic expressions that blur the line between spoken and written language. I pose the anthropological and linguistic questions: what are the themes that govern *posts;* how do *members* use lexical features to create community and label their world, how do members use and display community and individual power and knowledge; what linguistic innovations come out of the community; how do *members* display masculinity; and how do spoken and written language converge in this forum?

Penismightier.com is a *techie website*, that is, a *website* where a particular demographic of society, namely the technologically elite, can take refuge to talk about certain aspects of their lives. Most *websites* that are centered around groups of people rather than basic information (news media, entertainment) rest upon the premise of

community – whether gardening societies, doctors, linguists, or *l337 g33ks*. One can become a member of the group by *registering* a name, fictional or real, as a way to represent oneself as a *l337 geek*.

The speech community (collectively known as Pens) is relatively homogeneous, based on similar affiliations. The majority of the members are males who are college students in their twenties or graduate students, or are working in or studying internet technologies or computer-based fields, and are avid players of computer games, usually *MMORPG's*. Based on these affiliations, founding members met in person before the inception of Penismightier and periodically after its creation, at irregular but usually annual *Pen GTG's*, extending into the virtual world interactions of face-to-face contact. Since the boards are relatively "silent" in the morning and highly active in the late night hours, I can safely assume that many of the members either keep very late hours, or are working at day jobs during morning hours. The *boards* tend to come alive later after four o'clock EST.

The *website* administrator created Penismightier after reading and *posting* on various extant *websites* concerning tech support with *posters* who work in tech support. The majority of these *websites* have similar *message boards* and provide a similar forum where tech support professionals can talk to each other about the ineptitudes of most *end users*. Penismightier was born out of this shared background, welcoming as well car and pornography enthusiasts.

I first met the *web administrator* and his roommates in 2001, all of whom have been members from the inception of the *website*. I have also met several other members, either in person at parties or online through *instant messaging*. Since many of the regular

members know each other in person and also know each others' online personas, this cohesive group dominates the *board* dynamic through virtual interactions of varying degrees (reinforced by their face-to-face contact and extracurricular but parallel *IM'ing*). This enhanced peer relationship is central to the online joking and male domination play, and also influences the topics discussed on the *boards*.

The Pen *website* was created by the *administrator* in November of 1999, when he was 20 years old. He works in web technologies and enjoys building and *modding* cars and computers. These interests are generally shared by the group of *registered members*, who are predominantly male, and thus give way to discourse centered around topics of shared interest, including tech support (several members work in a technological capacity), cars (one members races cars), and pornography (two members pride themselves on being adept at *posting* pornographic pictures). Social and political issues also arise as thematic *threads* with significant frequency, creating argument *threads* involving issues current to the timeframe of the *thread's* inception. The members are understood as and known to be enthusiasts of many, if not all, of these topics. Topics are *posted* at the beginning of *threads* and thus ignite the talk. This thesis focuses on that talk, or *postings*, of members.

To conduct discourse analysis or any kind of cultural analysis, the behavior examined must be considered in relation to the context in which the behavior occurs. Context provides the background to any speech community, whether face-to-face or online. The contextual space of the *website* in question is vital to understanding the discourse therein. The *home page* of the *website* features several items (see Appendix B for an example of the page layout). The title of the *website* appears at the center of the

top of the main page. The background is blue with white writing; an embedded *link* appears on the side of the page that allows users to change the color scheme of the page. This *link* is called, "turn your penis a different color." The center of the *homepage* features a column of news that is not conventional network headline news. A staff member, one of eight members who has administration rights to the *website*, writes about a topic of his or her (there is only one female staff member) choice, usually of a technological, pornographic, political, or auto-industrial nature, with occasional appearances of off-beat stories from the news media. These stories may relate to current events in the world of technology, or they may be *posts* about events in the lives of the staff members. Changing with each visit to the *home page* is a running head, also atop the page, displaying one of several slogans coined by the administrator. For example, with one *refresh*, the slogan may read, "our members have members." Featured on the left side of the page are *links* to several sites of potential interest to members, including articles written by *members* or *webcam* pictures. Prominently displayed at the top of the *homepage* is the *link* to the *site's message board*, a page where members and non-members are free to *post* on a topic and engage in virtual, interactive discussion.

This *message board* is an advanced version of older, time-lag technology. Older users of the internet may remember using *Compuserve* as the first server for networked computers, which opened the door to conversing online through *IRC*. *IRC* is the extant version of time-lag technology and is still used worldwide as a *techie* version of a chat room. As with *Internet Relay Chat* (*IRC*), once a person *posts*, the message is immediately displayed on the *board*, so that anyone can read and respond to it, whether in real time or at a later date. The *message board* defines and drives the *website*; it is the

site of the discourse that is the focus of my investigation. With the exception of the *graffiti board* on the *homepage*, most of the interaction between *members* occurs on the *message board*. Several types of discourse occur on the *message board*, including short or extended discussion *threads* on topics related to a particular theme, instances of topic changes, *flaming*, and *members'* orthographic innovations.

An important feature of this technologically mediated discourse is its intrinsic binding to written and spoken language; what is distinctive here is the bi-directional influence of spoken to written and written to spoken. Very few scholars have dealt with written discourse as mediated technologically through a web-based frame (Cook 2004, Eisenlohr 2004, Wilson and Peterson 2002). Although written, the text produced online is similar in many ways to spoken language. This similarity is partly displayed through orthographic innovations that approximate characteristics of orality. The written text mimics speech in several ways: discourse markers function as quotations, commas appear where a pause or breath would occur in speech, and informal syntax and creative lexicon invoke spoken language and orthographic conventions.

Because of their shared backgrounds and interests, enhanced by recognition of contributors, the participant roles alternate at different turns. Fitting precisely into Erving Goffman's model of participation framework (1981), Pens assume various roles of participation, acting as speaker, hearer, and over hearer/*lurker* at different turns of talk. On another level, further supported by Goffman, Pen members create personas which take on a life of their own, bridging the fictional realm and the speech community, taking on multiple roles and sometimes multiple names. Pens may *register* with a different name as many times as they wish to act as an anti-persona to their other name(s) or to

create a hostile environment without revealing the true Author. Through *posting* a new topic and spawning a discussion, the Author, Animator and Principal of Goffman's discourse model may all be evoked. Whether a *thread* begins with a news article, asks a rhetorical question, or directs a question to a specific member, the Participation model is actively engaged on the *message boards*.

Writing on the board ascribes to speaking. Considering context and layout of the *message board*, the act of *posting* is analogous with taking a turn in spoken conversation. Penismightier members are not detached; in fact, they are plugged into the *board* through their regular reading and/or *posting*. The *message board* has considerable textual richness. The *posting* format presents simple lines of text framed by the *poster's* name on the left of the page with buttons (*links*) to allow participants to either reply directly or to reply with a quote from a previous *poster*. Also featured are *links* at the top of the page for several commands: a *link* to return to the *main page;* a *link* to send that particular page to a friend; a *link* for *HTML* only, which translates the page to text only without any graphics; *links* to profiles of *posters; members'* email *link*s; and an edit button to return to the typed message and alter the text which is further marked by a message under the altered text stating, "this message was edited by …" The *posts* display on the screen from top to bottom in the order of the most recent *post* to the earliest.

After a brief historical background of computer-mediated communication and its novel medium of keyboard speech, I will describe the data analysis methods I employ and discuss my findings with reference to existing theories in anthropology and linguistics. Investigating the Pen community's unique language as an example of online

speech events and discourse can further the understanding of the quickly evolving virtual

language realm of the *web* world.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The increased use of the internet and the ongoing development of technological capabilities therein have opened a number of new research areas, especially those in language study and discourse analysis of online speech communities. From the early *Internet Relay Chat* to *email* and *instant messaging*, communication on the internet has progressed exponentially in the last decade and merits analysis (Cook 2004, Eisenlohr 2004).

David Crystal's book, Language and the Internet (2001) is an important work on the newly surfacing study of online communities and language. In this text, he chronicles the progression of internet use and the language behavior in which internet users engage online. He focuses on chat groups and instant messaging, but since 2001 many developments have arisen, creating gaps in the literature where *netspeak* is concerned. One book concerning the advent and evolution of internet communication and online behavior, with an emphasis on business elements, is Bill Zoellick's CyberRegs: A Business Guide to Web Property, Privacy, and Patents (2002). This source is useful in understanding the intellectual and physical property of *websites* and *online* information, for example, the role of *web administrators* and their rights as owners of virtual property.

Early literature dealing with the internet and the exchanges that take place online were focused on e-business. The Digital Economy: Promise and Peril in the Age of Networked Intelligence (1996) was written at a time when the internet was at an interesting crossroads. Increasing numbers of people had access, and the content was expanding rapidly; more *websites* were in existence than at the internet's inception but at that time still only numbered in the hundreds. Businesses began taking advantage of the

commercial possibilities offered via the internet providing the global economy with a new facet of virtual business.

Online communication blurs the distinction between spoken and written language. Online speech communities are so new that few scholars have yet approached this particular subject, although others have been writing about orality and literacy for decades. Walter J. Ong chronicles the evolution of technology relative to orthography and literacy in Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (1982). He wrote, of course, before the advent of the modern internet and of online, written communication. His ideas focus around the premise that literacy provokes a new or different thought process, and this idea extends to the internet; the online facet of communication forces people to think on a different plane than with writing or speaking, as both are combined online. Online communication presents another medium for the blurring of the division between spoken and written language. This new realm of communication creates a new kind of literacy.

Current popular literature abounds in the area of *netspeak* and what authors term netiquette. Don Tapscott offers two particular works on netiquette and on prescribed online behavioral norms, suggesting that an online community has developed cultural norms (1996, 1998). The Pens certainly have behavioral norms, and in The Digital Economy, Tapscott relays this idea that communities forming online at the advent of the internet are a new culture (1996). In Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation (1998), Tapscott demonstrates young people's use of the internet as a primary source for information and communication, enforcing the impetus of Pens *posting* news on a *message board* only minutes after the news is published online.

Internet participants' usage of succinct, short sentences harkens to spoken language. This prescribes careful writing while simultaneously emulating verbal speech, which is usually informal. Again, the blurring of a distinction between spoken and written language is accomplished through internet communication. Diana Booher, in <u>E-Writing: 21st Century Tools for Effective Communication</u> (2001), also explores *netiquette*.

For my project, the concept of prescriptive *netiquette* offers a fascinating antithesis to the Pen members' online behavior. The members do not adhere to the guidelines Booher extends about writing and editing carefully for an audience. In fact, Pen members seem to force contradiction to this prescribed online behavior with their deliberate misspellings of words, withholding of greetings and leave-takings, constant topic shifting within one *thread*, and *flaming*. Booher focuses on email etiquette in professional settings, where I see the usefulness of the behavior she advocates. However, I do not see them in the discourse I am analyzing.

Ethnographic participant observation has contributed to the methodology of my data gathering process, since I have been a member of the Pen community since 2001. James Spradley, with <u>Participant Observation</u> (1980), not only details the methodology of participant observation, but he provides a guide to ethnographic analysis which I follow. In Rene Lysloff's 2003 article, "Music Life in Softcity: An Internet Ethnography," the author appreciates the delicacy of the virtual nature of the community, while respecting the humanity of the group with regard to ethnography; I share these goals. Academic issues concerning ethnography extend into the novel field of online ethnography. Dydia DeLyser raises the issue of insider researcher ethics in her article, "Do You Really Live

Here: Thoughts on Insider Research," (2001) which provides ethical background for this thesis. Michael Moffatt also successfully conducted insider research, reported in Coming of Age in New Jersey (1989). Moffatt not only conducts participant observation, but he relays his experience to the reader with reflection, advice, and humor.

Discourse analysis is a large component of my data analysis, and the theoretical backdrop is comprised of several leading linguists' and anthropologists' works. Deborah Tannen's The Argument Culture (1998) examines gender language differences as well as discourse analysis in modern American language. She investigates hate words or hate language and its use, which bridges well with the aspect of *flaming* behavior of Pen members. Robin Tolmach Lakoff's The Language War (2000) also looks at modern language and its diversity in hate words, political undertones, and different utterances that have surfaced throughout the past two decades. Both these sources reveal the aspect of power in hate language, which connects directly to my thesis' theme of power and knowledge and the use of *flaming* to exert power over other members. Several sections of Roman Jakobson's On Language (1990) can be applied to current issues in linguistics as well as semantics, such as Pens' creation of a lexicon to describe their world within a *website message board*. Pierre Bourdieu, in Language and Symbolic Power (1982), builds on linguistic theory and political philosophy, and delves into language use for the purpose of power as well as symbolic power. This approach is useful in understanding the power structure within the Pen community.

One of my theoretical foundations, Michel Foucault, has studied power and knowledge in his book, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977 (1980), which serves as an index to all of Foucault's work, his theories, his

understanding of political assertion through language and other actions, and postmodernism itself. The pastiche of the *message board* reveals the overt use of power through the members' knowledge of the internet and computer technology, as well as other power displays (characterized as overt male dominance, e.g., *own3d*) on the *message board*. Combining Bourdieu's theory of practice and Foucault's theory of power/ knowledge is another collection of interviews and essays of Foucault, Language, counter-memory, practice (1977), which applies to the scope of the Pen community. They practice the habitus of power and elitism through the Pen discourse.

Benjamin Lee Whorf's notion of covert categories is central to the theme of the thesis. In Language, Thought, and Reality (1956), Whorf ties together language and culture through language use in society. He also frames the study of linguistics in a scientific field, giving more validation to the school of linguistics within the realm of human behavior and culture. Joel Sherzer reinforces the concept that language and culture are so intricately and tacitly intertwined; I have adopted his call for a sound research question addressing linguistic and cultural analysis focused on discourse as he advocates in his article, "A Discourse-Centered Approach to Language and Culture" (1987).

ETHICS

In any research arena, issues of ethics arise. Especially in the social sciences, where the focus of study is humans, researchers must tread carefully to remain ethical in their approach. Every fieldwork situation is different, whether in distant locations or in local institutions, in remote areas or in urban inner cities; whether undertaken from the disciplinary perspective of human geography, anthropology, or countless other social science fields. Each situation requires different approaches to the ethics of gathering, analyzing, and presenting data. Qualitative researchers have long been aware of the ethics of research, and have written about their experiences, providing a range of perspectives (DeLyser 2001, Hay 2000, Moffatt 1989, Myers 2001, Parr 2001, Spradley 1980).

In the literature regarding the ethics of qualitative research, disparate views expose approaches to the ethics of research as varied as research itself can be; since each situation is different, there can be no single recommendation. When undertaking a research project, the researcher must not only be aware of what methods are available, but must also choose carefully which are the most appropriate; the consideration is not only methodological but ethical. Insider research, overt study, participant observation, and interview each gain the researcher access to different kinds of data, and each pose different ethical problems. In guidelines provided by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), a code of ethics in social science should consist of informed consent, no deception, privacy and confidentiality, and accuracy. The American Anthropological Association holds its membership to the highest ethical standards, and has published guidelines for anthropologists, which are periodically updated according to new research opportunities

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(http://aaanet.org 2004). Ethical issues discussed by the Association include both

working with government agencies as investigators and with informants to safeguard

them from government agencies. Ethics is the first consideration in anthropological

fieldwork, as a responsibility to the individuals and community studied, as well as to the

investigator's professionalism. Above all else, no harm should come (socially, legally, or

otherwise) to informants, nor to the researcher. If the anthropologist appropriately adapts

the responsibility guideline to the setting, the research should be safely ethical

(http://aaanet.org 1986).

Thomas Eley and Cheryl Northon provide justification for what they call

undercover research, lamenting what other academics feel about covert research.

"Even the concept of undercover geography disturbs many academics, conjuring visions

of spying, espionage, being a government agent – James Bond, Geographer – or

appearing to be less than a proper academic" (2001: 388). They feel strongly, however,

that in certain cases, remaining undercover is the best way to gain the greatest insight for

the sake of the research, since, they claim, most non-academics are leery of fieldworkers.

"A great deal of the world is less than enamored with the role of academic research and

what it is purported to do for the citizens of the Earth" (2001:389). They even suggest

spying as a valid method, and advocate "undercover geography" in extreme cases.

"Many people view researchers with suspicion, fear, or hatred. And, if any data are

going to be collected under those conditions, extraordinary and unorthodox means may

have to be employed, even if that involves assuming a different identity" (2001:389). In

personal reflections on her covert research of mental health patients, Hester Parr (2001)

reveals that she assumed an alternate identity, mimicking the patients' behavior in order

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to fit in with the group so that she might gain access and win the trust of her unaware informants. In the case of mental health patients, she deemed that a covert approach was necessary. The American Anthropological Association guidelines may challenge the position these geographers have taken; the AAA Ethics Statement (1986) asserts that if any questionable methods arise, the research should be abandoned, or at least altered to remain safely within the bounds of the highest ethical standards.

Advocating an overt approach, Garth Andrew Myers (2001) writes about conducting research in a community where he is not a native, and he discusses the strengths and weaknesses of overt outsider research. While being an outsider has the advantage of not carrying preconceived notions, it also has the disadvantage of pure ignorance. Again, especially in the social sciences, a Western fieldworker working in non-Western locations raises the awareness of the ethnocentrism of outsiders, even though they may be trained social scientists. In other words, individuals are only as objective as their culture, socialization and training permit them to be. Even if an individual is a trained social scientist, remaining objective and unbiased toward any other group is difficult. As an American working in Africa, he reveals, "selfishness is inherent in individuated Western fieldwork in non-Western settings, an arrogant assumption that somehow one person develops explanatory powers. One quickly learns that selfishness must give way to a sharing, an open-ended identity enmeshed in a community" (2001:192). This insight was gained through his fieldwork, and he found that it enhanced his ongoing endeavors there.

Unlike Myers' dilemma, my position in the Pen community is one of being both an insider and an outsider. The community is not distant to a Western fieldworker; most

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members reside in the United States and in that regard, I am an insider. On the other hand, the community thrives within virtual space, and could thus be considered exotic, in that it presents a new venue for fieldwork and research. Few academics have ventured into cyberspace to investigate behavior and culture; this factor would make any researcher an outsider. I am female, which also grants me no special entry to the elite group of *posters* on the *site* who are overwhelmingly male. I have been an active participant on the site almost since inception, making me an insider. Although, the fact that I am not as technologically savvy as most Pen members is an outsider trait. I have increased my knowledge of technology through my presence on the *site*. The members have accepted me and have offered information freely toward increasing my understanding of technology. As an insider/member of the community, I am afforded the luxury of *posting* questions which I could potentially have used to seek insight into the code of the Pens, since many *thread* topics begin with interrogatories. My dual position as insider and outsider is conducive to both gathering and interpreting data. Although I am not an outsider as an active participant, I was concerned that members would alter their behavior if I revealed my research interests. If they knew they were being observed, they might begin, intentionally or unintentionally, to modify their behavior. Although my research community is a public entity of which I am a member, I was reluctant to be a covert researcher. These concerns led me to approach my data collection as follows.

The Pen *web administrator* has provided me written consent (see Appendix C), as well as a disk containing the *message boards* archive with all *threads* from every *board* on the website before May of 2003. I was concerned that members might be uncomfortable with my recording and analyzing their behavior in real time, and that

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knowing they were being observed and analyzed might lead them to be more aware of their behavior and perhaps change their attitudes and behavior on the *boards*. By using archived *message boards*, I am not observing behavior in real time. The data is public record; anyone who visits the website can read the *threads* I am analyzing. The fact that the data is public in nature is helpful in avoiding ethical dilemmas; the discourse in question occurred in the past; furthermore, it is technologically mediated, and as such, the problem of face-to-face interaction is obviated. Having secured permission from the *web administrator* and the pre-May 2003 archive, I then announced my research intentions to the Pen community, using my insider language:

> "As some of you already know, even though you aren't supposed to, I am writing a Master's thesis on the language and culture of the Penismightier community. Yes, you are a community. *Make love, not war!* Anyway, I want to do this right, and I need all of your help here: In order to do ethical research on a public entity, such as this forum of sorts, I need to first notify all of you, and secondly, get your permission. Permission for what, you ask? For any written text that can be found in the archives (not the present stuff cause it wasn't copied). I'm cutting the date off somewhere around April. I WILL NOT, I REPEAT, NOT USE YOUR NAMES, because it's just too easy to find people these days. So, I have created an email addy for those of you who do not want any of your material used in my thesis. ANY. You can click on me: countmeout2003@hotmail.com and just write your name in the subject heading line. I don't need an exhaustive exposition on why you don't want to be used; I'll understand completely. Since I'm putting this post out there, for you all to read, I'm giving you the chance to opt out of the research. Thank you for your time and please do not hesitate to email me with the opt out thing. If you don't, your material is fair game. *MWAH*

And btw, don't hate me because I'm a spy. I love you all, especially for your wonderful

lexicon and it's being my ticket to a Master's degree. Gotta love America for that."

I created an email address by means of which those who wish their *postings* to be

excluded from the research can contact me to remove their contributions from any

material I might quote. I have further ensured the anonymity of the *posters* by omitting

their names and *avatars*. The decision to omit the *avatars*, although necessary, causes

me some regret, since members invent witty and sarcastic *avatars* that contain puns, and

they certainly enhance the colorful and clever language use I analyze. However, with

internet search engines being the finely tuned machines they are, finding someone's

information online is easy enough without having their actual name in my thesis. It is

unfortunate that removing names from the text results in the *poster* receiving no credit for

his or her linguistic innovations; yet, with security and privacy a priority, anonymity

outweighs giving credit to the interlocutors.

What I have explicitly sought to avoid is spying on friends as entities to study;

whether online or in person, research of human behavior is fraught with potential

problems. Any research project poses ethical questions; each researcher must justify his

or her cause and take this issue seriously. After reflection and weighing both sides of the

research issue: to be or not to be public and inform my informants, I came out to the

group. In this community, coming out as a female or as a researcher is equal in taboo to

coming out as a homosexual, so I deem use of the phrase "coming out" pertinent. Having

studied the literature on ethical research, I made the decision to be overt and to inform the

group, asking their permission to conduct research. My community is not guarded by any

formal organization requiring special entry, nor are most of the member*s* modest or shy

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individuals. I remained concerned, however, about the ramifications of coming out as a researcher to my group, because I did not want my changed position to affect the dialogue on the *boards*. When people are told they are being watched and recorded, they are naturally more aware of themselves, and may alter their behavior and their speech. This is why I decided to use archived material only.

After *posting* the message about my research, I immediately (not even 24 hours later) received very positive feedback. Most members are excited to have this *website* referenced across an intellectual medium. Many of the member*s* requested that I show them the final results, and I have also received advice on approaches to the analysis, an unforeseen consequence of my coming out. I have only received email from one individual who elected to opt out of the research. The overwhelming majority of the feedback is very encouraging, and the members seem supportive and even flattered to have me analyze their language and behavior, including the member who did not wish to participate in the research. No member has mentioned negative feelings of violated trust from my decision to use their data. Members of this speech community harbor no feelings of linguistic insecurity, and are proud of their articulate and clever language use.

Since the member*s* now know about my project and have had the opportunity to remove their participation from my research data, I feel confident that I have avoided any ethical compromise in my research of the Pen community and of its identity. Qualitative research involves multiple methods for data collection and analysis, particularly for ethnographic research. Using qualitative methods from anthropogeography, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, social psychology, while tying in the insider researcher's

personal experience, provides a significant gauge that allowed me to determine how to conduct my research in the best, most ethical way possible.

The ethical issues posed by my research are now resolved to my satisfaction, justified as overt research. I now have a newly accepted position in the community, a result of my coming forward about my intentions and the use of an archived data set that is public record on the *world wide web*. The Pen members have become newly empowered, proud *l33t geeks* whose clever language use is worthy of study. They have further taken on roles as supervising, participating, and encouraging me in my work. Members periodically inquire into my progress and offer suggestions. For these reasons, I am satisfied that my thesis research is safely grounded ethically and has been embraced by the community I am studying and of which I continue to be a "member without a member."

METHODOLOGY

Since the internet has become a new canvas for cultural texts created by online communities, this medium has come to be considered the apex of "the word and the world" or a "public culture" (Lysloff 2003:233). Lysloff finds a lack of scholarly, ethnographic study of the "new social spaces the Internet makes possible" (233). Specialized speech communities are a common component of human discourse, but only in recent decades have they come into widespread study (Lakoff 2000:13). The online specialization of a speech community provides the latest frontier of discourse analysis. The Pen community is a special discourse community, and I am harvesting for analysis the linguistic and cultural data they provide through their *posts*.

One salient characteristic of Pen discourse is its use of profanity. "Our sociopolitical discourse sometimes brings into sharp focus disagreements about the meanings, or connotations, of words like 'addiction, drug, baby, fetus, and sexual harassment'" (Lakoff 2000:89). When members of the Pen community use words like "addiction," "sex," and "fuck," the meanings of these will be in part determined by their context of use; these meanings may not reflect the force of these words to individuals outside the community. The members have engaged in conversations about sex so frequently and for so long that the word "fuck" does not have as much intensity for them as for outsiders. Overuse or even frequent use of taboo words may eventually render those words less offensive to an audience, but not necessarily less powerful; the nature of taboo language is fluid and contextual. The way I understand this flux in word meaning stems from the process of trying to make sense of how language is used within the Pen speech community. As an anthropologist searching for meaning, a subjective approach is

inevitable; an individual's culture filters everything he or she observes. Therefore, the best guideline I have is cultural relativism and careful, thorough methodology.

My primary methods are discourse analysis and retrospective participant observation. I have secured written permission from the *web administrator* to undertake this study, and he has provided me a copy of the entire *site* archive (2000 – 2003). I am a well-respected, long-term member of this community, and most *posters* trust me as a fellow member. I have been a *registered* member since March 2001. I *post* on the topics deemed acceptable by the community, and I abide by its unwritten rules of conduct; I practice the habitus of the group. I am a minority in the Pen community as a female *poster*; the community discovered my gender several months after I first began *posting* on the site. For a short time thereafter, I was relatively marginalized, but eventually regained status as a respected member of the community. Since I have been researching the archives and scrutinizing the discourse within the *website*, I have noticed phenomena as an observer that I had not noticed simply as a participant, such as the assumption that members would be all male. Even before deciding to use this *message board* for a thesis project, my inner anthropologist was scrutinizing the speech events, like *flame wars*, and the way male domination is neatly contained within virtual space.

In linguistic anthropology, language is most typically approached through the primary channel of speech; the spoken words of a speech community (Brody 2000, Johnstone 2002, Scollon and Scollon 1995). In the Pen speech community, language behavior is not orated, but it is typed on a keyboard. The special orthography, used by Pen members, conveys aspects of spoken language in ways that are not part of standard written English. For example, the act of interrupting a speaker, easily accomplished and

recognized in spoken interaction, can be accomplished successfully on the *message boards*. Using the "reply with quote" button (*link*) allows the *poster* to quote another member's *post* and edit their own *post* in quotes to focus on the particular comment to which they are replying. In this way, the *poster* can achieve interruption. The edited *posting* is a post hoc interruption, but the interplay between the words of the original *poster*, and the insertions by the interrupting *poster* give the feel of real-time interaction. Perhaps due to the advantage of time for forethought, the opportunity to formulate a witty retort (a highly valued feature of Pen discourse) is enhanced over a comparable immediate response in real time. In the *thread* titled, "QWERTYUIOPASDFGHJKLZXCVBNM" (see Appendix D for the text of the full *thread*), on the 04-21-2001 07:56 PM *post*, a member engaged the "quote" option of editing a *post* to accomplish two things: 1) to direct his *post* at a particular member and 2) to disrupt the flow of the *thread* by reverting back to earlier discourse within it. He successfully accomplishes the act of interruption as best as it could be done online by quoting a previous *post* to re-engage that line of conversation as if it were in real time. The edited text format makes the act of interruption clear.

Although it will not be necessary to re-transcribe since my data is already written, the typography used by *posters* requires deciphering. I will analyze the Pen orthography, purposeful misspellings, *emoticons*, and other discourse conventions with a native speaker's confidence in my level of accuracy, since I am accepted by the Pen community as a "communicatively competent" participant (Hymes 1971). Taking into account the possibility that I may harbor assumptions of a native speaker, I have enlisted several theories and methodologies to ensure the most objective analysis possible.

The archives flawlessly store the transcriptions verbatim, dated and indexed by *thread* topic and the original *poster*, allowing me to search the entire history of *posts* for examples, themes, changes in use, and violations of community rules as marked through *flaming*. By analyzing several *threads* of conversation, I can list and define the lexicon (see Appendix A), reveal the covert categories through instances of their violation, interpret content, quantify how many times a topic changes within one *thread*, and determine how topic change is accomplished. I have not chosen *threads* randomly, in part because *threads* differ greatly in size and content. A *thread*'s first *post*, which labels the topic, can be misleading if the topic changes often. A *member* may open a *thread* with political commentary, but another *member* may not enjoy engaging in political debate and reply with, "I like boobies." The analysis of the frequency with which topic change occurs, and how topic change is accomplished is also vital to understanding the community's covert categories. Accordingly, I have selected from the archives of the *website threads* which are both sufficiently complex to display informative content and meaningful forms and do not contain *postings* by the member who asked to be excluded.

The *site* archives *threads* by topic, which is titled by the first *poster* who began the *thread*. Topics are usually expressed as phrases rather than complete sentences. Topics are often interrogatory, sometimes exclamatory, and may be written in *l33t speak*, like the topic, *DYJGTIT???!?!@!@?!!@!@!!* Within topics, there are several categories of *threads*. *Thread* categories provide information on the material culture, hobbies, language, and opinions about these. I sought *threads* containing the words "sex," "fuck," "*leet*" (or variants thereof), "*pr0n*," and any words standing out as marginal or deviant within the Pen conventions.

I will devote special concentration to the labeled speech genre *flaming* in The Flame War chapter. This speech event is common to interactions on many *websites' message boards*. *Flaming* is usually the act of one or several members of the community in berating a new *poster*. Although a *flamee* is not necessarily new to the community, *flames* directed at established members are rare. *Flaming* can be undertaken through several different avenues of attack of the *flamee*, including defamation of character, disparaging of the *flamee's* techie status, signifying (Mitchell-Kernan 1972) and argument by analogy. *Flaming* is the verbal equivalent of a public defamation, and the social effects in the virtual community are comparable to those in face-to-face public berating. At the end of the *flame war*, the *flamee*, will either leave the site, or will stand and defend. If the *flamee* survives the *flame war*, he or she will usually be welcomed (back) into the community. After *registration* and an undisclosed yet significant number of *posts*, a *poster* becomes a bona fide member of the speech community, if he or she continues to *post* on a regular basis. Although it is a rare occurrence, an established member may be *flamed* as well. *Flaming* is the electronic speech community equivalent of "cussing out." "Alternative events (linguistic or non-linguistic) are possible in the same situation, such as dismissal or beating" (Blount 1995: 257). Hymes considers the verbal act of cussing out:

> "With regard to factors, who cusses out whom, when and where, in what style or code, about what? With regard to function, is there an aesthetic element, are speakers rated as to ability, what does 'cussing out' do for speakers, what effect is expected or follows for hearers? What is the role of 'cussing out' in maintenance of social system, cultural values, personality systems? An interesting question about speech events concerns what can serve to close them, or to close a sequence within one" (1995:257).

I will use this model to explore electronic *flaming*, informed by the recognition that a *flame* also signals a violation of a covert category rule.

I could have chosen to employ interview methods to elicit personal observations and reactions of members in the Pen community. I chose not to do so for this project, however, especially because the covert categories I am interested in are not usually available to conscious articulation, so their investigation is not amenable to interview techniques. Michael Moffatt reinforced my decision to exclude interviews in his ethnography, <u>Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture</u>. In this ethnographic study of undergraduate culture, he considered interviewing, but realized that, "most of what I was interested in they were learning or experiencing tacitly or implicitly. They could not redescribe these things to me" (1989:19). James Spradley agrees that "most cultural themes remain at the *tacit* level of knowledge" (1980:143). Interviewing members of the Pen community would not yield much in the way of a member's thoughts or sense of his or her own culture. Performing interviews could in fact jeopardize my status in the community for asking invasive questions. Conducting research as an insider is tenuous; DeLyser (2001) discusses the careful balance necessary in order to be both a researcher as well as an insider. In the same way, I must be critical and mindful of the tacit knowledge I possess while trying to obtain the most well-rounded information through my observations.

Ethnographic research sensibilities underlie my entire project. I travel to the field each time I visit the *message boards*, recording data through *thread* topics and participation (*posting* at regular intervals). When the *administrator* of the *website* gave me permission to undertake this project, he agreed with the stipulation I proposed for

respecting the anonymity of *members*, not using personal names or avatars. I adhere to Spradley's "verbatim principle" (1980:67) which stipulates that the researcher should never re-phrase, redefine, or in any way skew what the participant has said. The researcher can infer meaning; this inference is more reliable if the researcher is an insider, but in relaying a text example, the use of a verbatim reference is not only preferable, but ethical. Since I use data archived in its original form, I will have no opportunity to skew the data in the fashion that worried Spradley. In addition, when I quote members, I am quoting exactly what they posted; therefore, typos are reproduced as they exist in the archived boards. Removing others' mistakes is tampering with data. I will, however, rely on close reading and careful interpretive methods to attain the most accurate possible answers to my research questions.

PEN FAMILY LANGUAGE

In this and the subsequent two chapters, Morphing Threads and The Flame War, I discuss the findings of my cultural discourse analysis of the Pen discourse as informed by both my insider status and my linguistic training. Pens exhibit communicative techniques and practices that are guided by attitudes of technological elitism and covert categories of Pen appropriate behavior. The following table illustrates how the linguistic and behavioral mechanisms that Pens apply stand apart from other online speech communities. Examples, taken from the *message boards*, accompany each technique to demonstrate how the language play works. Additional examples appear within the text; the table is simply a format with which to view the characteristics of the Pen speech community. Following the table, I discuss the meanings of the play in greater detail.

Table: Pen communicative techniques and examples

Techniques	Examples
Alternative spellings	L337 h4xx0r "elite hacker" Teh "the" I wub joo "I love you"
Acronyms	DYJGTIT? "Did You Just Get The Internet Today?"
Font change (capitalization and size increase)	YOU ARE TEH FUNNY!!!!!@!@!@!@!!
Color change	OWN3D "owned"
Techie terms	modded box "augmented computer"
	(table con'd)

Emoticons (smileys)	(.)(.) or <3 "boobies" or "heart"
Representation of non-lexical speech sounds	Hrrmmm… (ruminative)
Repetition (punctuation or phrases)	Posting a picture repeatedly throughout a Thread; *spamming* or *trolling*

The many creative orthographic innovations and manipulations of conventional written language on Penismightier.com comprise one of the defining features of this online community and merit careful attention. The advent of the internet brought with it the mediated communication model of typing on a keyboard, mediated by a computer, onto a screen which then reflects back to the writer and ultimately out to the reader(s). Email technology and *chat rooms* allow the participants in these media to interact with other participants at remote locations. Without face-to-face interaction, the keyboard becomes the main translator and the screen the vehicle for translation of conversation elements.

The Pen speech community sets itself apart from other online communities through its distinctive use of the keyboard to convey messages. Many members' *posts* adhere to ordinary English writing without the succinct or brief standard held to for much e-communication (see Table above). However, the anomaly of word usage among members is noteworthy. What I call the Pen family language involves use of a lexicon derived from internet technology, computer literacy, *techie* elitism, online *gaming* language, mathematical symbols, and while a subset of the features may be shared with other *techie* sites, one feature unique to the Pen speech community lexicon is the editing

of only one taboo word. The creation of this collective lexicon, its meaning, and its use accomplishes a community goal of group solidarity and elite identity. In addition to identity issues, the lexicon represents a new dialect of English, containing elements of technological vocabulary that did not exist even five years ago. This new dialect could come to be known as the new pidgin of the digital 21st Century. The Pen community is on the frontier of language and culture change, exhibiting creativity and borrowing from *techie* and other areas of culture.

Several *thread* titles contain keyboard manipulations. A March 2001 *thread* titled, "Perhaps, a 'leet' or should I say 'l33t' day?" exemplifies the way that choice of the keyboard strokes contributes to a new lexicon (see Appendix A). The term *l33t h4xx0r* or *l337 h4xx0r* is an innovated transcription or spelling of the phrase "elite hacker." Many users describe themselves as *l33t* because of their ability to write computer languages, or to build and augment computers. Systematic replacement of the "l" with the number 1, "e" with the number 3, "t" with the number 7, "a" with the number 4, and "o" with the number 0 evoke the numerical appearance of coding without actually writing in code. The innovative orthography not only catches the eye, but it appears familiar enough to a reader to allow him or her to understand the intended words, while distancing itself from ordinary or conventional writing. Precursors to this new writing were the messages typed onto a calculator, using numbers to make words, such as "80081355" for "BOOBLESS".

Other orthographic innovations include the formation and use of the term *own3d*, which stems from users' *gaming* language. In one particular computer game, a narrator voice ominously bellows the word, "OWNED!" when a player is killed. *"Owned"* is

applied to one participant that another participant has beaten, whether in a game or in an argument. Pens usually write this word in a larger, colored font which conveys the raised pitch of spoken language, such as $OWN3D$. Here we see manipulation of the written language to convey oral speech qualities through the use of font and color. The term *owned* has evolved over the past few years to become *pwned* or *pwnt*. The new spelling did not originate, however, on Pen *boards*. I have in Appendix E, a cartoon titled "verbal advantage" which was referenced on the Pen *boards*, in which this new spelling appears, along with several other nuanced words of *techie* jargon.

Quite a different facet of gaming language's influence on the Pen family language derives from the game, Dungeons and Dragons, a role-playing game from the 1970's that continues to be popular today. Many members have mentioned having played the game, and the evidence surfaces in *threads*. At times where a member writes something extraordinarily witty or erudite, the subsequent *post* could be: "+5 intelligence" or "+5" or "+++++++++++++++ [name]." This is a direct allusion to a character sketch aspect of the Dungeons and Dragons game. This older non-technological gaming language and Pen members' incorporating it into their *techie* language is of a cultural implication. The simple use of the plus sign with one word to describe one member's wit ascribes to the brevity valued covert category of elitist attitudes, but the significance of its use in the *message board* is the melding of old and new. The result is not only a new usage of the phrase but of a sentimental tribute to of role-playing games that have evolved over the internet into the *MMORPG's* today.

Another orthographic manipulation occurs with "I wub joo," a baby-talk transcription of "I love you." The effect is again to blur spoken and written language by

emulating baby talk and emotive speech. This phrase appears quite frequently on the Pen *boards*. When spoken aloud, "I wub joo" sounds silly and juvenile. Appropriately, the term "I wub joo" will occur in a *thread* where one member is supporting or defending another member, whether sarcastically or literally. However, the goal of emulating spoken language is accomplished as much as it can be on a computer screen through the alternative spelling and high frequency of use.

The manipulations of orthographic conventions contribute to making Pen discourse unique. What I call the "teh" phenomenon is one of several prominent elements of the Pen family language. The origin of the practice is the frequent and consistent misspelling of the word "the" which has become both conventionalized and intentional in Pen family language. Used in a variety of contexts, "teh" often appears in conjunction with "funny" as in "teh funny" or "you have lost teh funny." In one *thread*, a senior staff member mocks a naive question *posted* by another member concerning the customization of his computer desktop by misspelling *techie* words and using all capital letters. After the staff member answers the question, he ends his *post* with

"NOW YUO ARE TEH H4XX0R!!111!!!" meaning, "Now, you are the hacker!" He is marking his mocking of the member's *techie* abilities by using "teh" instead of "the" and other intentional misspellings, while still providing helpful information to further educate the *poster* in technology.

Another blurring of spoken and written language occurs when orthographic conventions are articulated orally. A member once admitted to me that she now pronounces "teh," [tʰəh] aloud in conversation, a result of so many instances of reading the intentionally misspelled word on the Pen *boards*. The spoken citation of the repeated

intentional typo seeps through the keyboard when members begin to speak the Pen lexicon aloud. Another use of "teh" is to insult or question the intelligence of a *poster*. The extension of using misspelled words in addition to "teh," as seen in the above example of "Now yuo are teh h4xx0r," heightens the level of the insult. A *posting* with a string of purposely uninterpretable words and numbers both mimics computer coding language and conveys the message that the *post* to which it is responding was substandard for Pens, and functions to insult participants who are not the elite *end users* that the Pens purport to be. An example of the elitism inherent among Pens with regard to technology and *h4xx0r* status shines through a *thread* titled,

"I GOTS TEH INSTRAWEBAOLWIRELSSS!11111111,"

or "I got wireless internet!" This also alludes to a mockery of what Pens call *AOLer sp34k*. Members who believe they are more elite than those people who use *AOL Instant Messenger* and *IM* language, such as *BRB*, *LOL,* and *ROFLMAO,* mock these abbreviations as sub standard, hence the *AOL* infix in the quotation. Pens generally feel that computer users who use *AOL* are not *l33t* and are much younger than they are, hence the mockery and condescension.

When quoting from *threads*, I use letters to replace *posters'* names, and I repeat the same letter for the same *poster* throughout the *thread* for coherence. The initiating *Poster* A of the *thread* title above brags,

A: "Just installed a new wireless network card and, lo and behold, the neighbors are running a password-less, unencrypted, wireless network. Yes, folks, I'm posting this from my bed for free.

Before I go off and surf the pron, where can I get some good info on wireless networks? I wouldn't want to jeopardize my newfound network."

Poster B offers a response with *l33t* information:

> B: "www.netstumbler.com
>
> good win32 software, it's what i use to war drive.
>
> airsnort for linux
>
> BRING IT BABY"

Poster C expresses disdain for criminal activity, and acts to police the *thread*, writing:

> C: "And people wonder why I always try to steer 'em away from wireless… half the
>
> time it DOESN'T reach places in the house you DO want it to, and the other half it
>
> DOES reach places you obviously don't. Like wherever 1337 **h4xx0rz** and [name] can
>
> line up and fuck you."

The "*l337 h4xx0r*" in the quote refers to the braggart, *Poster* A.

A variety of acronyms play an important role in the Pen family language. *OMG*, *OMFG*, *WTF*, *HTML,* and *DYJGTIT* are high frequency acronyms for "Oh My God," "Oh My Fucking God," "What The Fuck," "Hyper Text Markup Language," and "Did You Just Get The Internet Today," the expanded versions of these acronyms. The use of acronyms displays in-group language use and skills. The latter example above is the most original of any acronyms used on the Pen *message boards*. One member created the acronym more than three years ago and deserves credit for his innovation, but unfortunately I have omitted names. The acronym plays two roles, one of which is when the acronym is verbally expressed; the sounds approach "did you get it." The second meaning and intent behind its use is a blatant insult: when a *poster* provokes the response, "DYJGTIT?!?!??!!!@!@!@!," it is a response to the fact that he or she has *posted* a topic, article, or picture from the internet that has already been mentioned on the *site* or has previously surfaced on other *websites*. This response reflects the community's high value for novelty, and disdain for lack of elite, in-group knowledge. This orientation

leads to the invocation of the covert category that old news is devalued, deserving ridicule via the response "DYJGTIT?!?!?!!"

Celebrating profanity and spoofing censorship are also characteristic of the Pen community. Overt recognition of general usage conventions is revealed through the only word on the site identified as overtly taboo. This one taboo word, cake, evolved into what members call *Pen lore*. This taboo originated during the second year of the website's existence, when one staff member decided to *post* on the main page that he loved cake more than pie, and that cake was far superior to pie. The battle over cake vs. pie is ongoing. However, the *web administrator* decided that since he was on the pie side and since Penismightier overtly contains no filters for profane language or sexually explicit content, but in fact celebrates them with frequent use that, the one taboo word would from that point forward be "cake." Since then, whenever a *poster* types the word "cake" anywhere on the *message board*, it is filtered through the *administrator* and appears on the screen as four asterisks. The only taboo word in the Pen community is now "****." The replacement of words or letters with asterisks denotes censorship, and the author realizes the ironic implications. If a non-member were not familiar with the *Pen lore*, or with the covert category of placing taboo on cake and not on other four letter words, he or she could incorrectly assume that the four asterisks replace the four letters of the word, "fuck," as with most edited texts of the larger written or journalistic community. This practice of celebrating the use of mainstream taboo words, while also identifying an otherwise innocuous word as taboo further strengthens the community by invoking insider knowledge and adherence to covert categories.

Use of non-alphabetic keyboard characters to create communicative symbols plays a large role in conveying messages with the fewest keystrokes possible, while revealing special in-group meaning and in-group status through their use. Many keyboarded symbols have been innovated over the years, one of which is the word "heart" sometimes being replaced with "<3." For example, one Pen *posts* as his signature line, "I <3 (.)(.)," which translates in the Pen family language as "I heart [love] boobies." The "<3" is considered to visually depict a heart turned on its side. A member later mentioned that "<3" looks like an ice cream cone turned on its side and that Pens should use "ICC" instead of "<3," but the two are interchangeable today. Commonly known as *emoticons* in the electronic realm, these pictorial representations are precisely the fruit born of new contact points between spoken language and computer-mediated-communication. The Pen family language is rife with *smileys*, or *emoticons*, some not exercised in mainstream online speech communities, such as *AOL*. These include variations on the original smiley face which alter the facial expressions and add motion to the image, for example, a *smiley* vomiting or a *smiley* performing fellatio on another *smiley*. A covert category concerning use of *emoticons* or other keyboard manipulations is creating one's own variation to be clever and witty, and if clever enough, sexual in nature. A second covert category is that brevity holds a higher value over length. These two categories work together in the Pen *emoticon* repertoire which shares several emoticons (*BRB*, *LOL*, *OMG*) with the broader assembly of virtual speech communities.

The typographic representation "(.)(.)" is a visual representation of human female breasts. Again, the iconic nature of visual communication manifests through pictorial representations. Pens value brevity over length, hence they began replacing the

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phrase, "I love boobies" with, "I <3 (.)(.)." Once a member understands that "<3" means "heart," and "(.)(.)" means "breasts," the sequence is coherent and meaning is established.

The family language of Pens establishes and consolidates community and solidarity, but more importantly, the unique lexicon that members use creates a Pen language similar to but not identical with that of other online speech communities. Covert categories of in-group knowledge use of Pen *emoticons* govern the lexicon and language use.

Coherence and cohesiveness are key to discourse analysis. Topic *threads* on the Pen *boards* exhibit textual richness. The interactional communicative performance of topic change, continuity, and derailment (both intentional and unintentional) appear overt to readers and follow a pattern that aggressively flout Grice's maxims of communicative order (1989). "The ongoing organization of talk itself – that is, the actions and responses of all participants – is the critical social activity" (Brenneis 1988:228). Pens engage in this activity by *posting* on the *boards* through the topicalized *threads*. Once *posting* on a *thread* begins, the opportunity arises to maintain discourse within one particular *thread* on the subject at hand. However, topic change on *threads* is frequent, and covert rules for successful and appropriate topic change are in force.

Grice's maxims are intended as prescribed rules of communication. Pen members are unaware of linguistic prescriptions by scholarly standards. Whether a covert category or unintended, Pens break Gricean maxims on many *threads*. Changing topics within a *thread* works against many prescriptive principles, especially "being relevant" (Morgan 1977). One *thread* may begin with "teh rennaissance is nigh! cast out ye demons and embrace teh funnay!" and within three posts, members purposefully "derail" the *thread*, but are unaware of their flouting communicative prescriptions. "I like boobies" and "I like c4k3" are two major examples of Pen *thread* derailment.

Whether the topic change is understood by readers of the *thread*, the covert category of acting against Grice's maxims of quantity and relation (Grice 1989 and Morgan 1977) is apparent only to the analyst. Members on the *boards* engage in a playful discourse through conversation spurred on by topics. Conversation commences

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once a member *posts* on a topic he or she provides. Usually, the topic is of a Pen nature –
sex, computers, political news, or ranting on various issues.

Pen members will address the topic of a *thread*, but usually the original topic
survives only for a small number of *postings*. A member may *post* a non-sequitur such as
"I like boobies," to intentionally derail a *thread* off topic. Another member, aptly
deemed by Pens the "topic nazi," may attempt to steer the conversation back to topic, but
does not always succeed in doing so. In response to an off-topic post in one *thread*, a
member *posted*, "Don't make me unleash the goatse on you!" The "goatse" (short for
"goatsex") is an image circulated on the internet that is a favorite of the Pen community.
It shows a highly pixilated image of a man holding his anus open, magnified to revolting
proportions. Many threats like this surface when someone *posts* off topic, or tries to
change the subject of talk within a *thread*. The image of "goatse" is used both as a "topic
nazi" threat and as a form of *thread* derailment, both context dependent.

Another instance of *thread* derailment is evidenced in the *thread*, "It's that time
again! GHETTO MODDING!" The specific topic shifts frequently, but coheres under
the general umbrella of augmentation of computers. For four consecutive *posts*, the
members stay on topic.

> A: "Hey kids! Its your buddy [name] again. Last time we left off, he modded his p90 to
> take a 233 board. Well now, he has an old AT case, and wants to use it!
> As you can see the view from the back, the psu overlapped the mobo and had to be
> mounted sideways.
> And the card rack wasn't meant for an ATX mobo, so that went too.
> Note the fine machining around the peripheral slots. Courtesy of a powerdrill, and some
> aviation snips.
> Sideways view, note the mounting of the hd.

Again, a wonderful mount job on the hd. Sideways and held in by two screws. Truly worthy of the term 'ghetto'

Needed zip ties, so the top of the mobo is using em, in lieu of spacers/screws theres foam tape/ties.

Again, wonderful machining job. Look at how much metal I had to remove.

Well, hope you liked it. Enjoy.

Your brother ghetto modder.

[A]"

Poster B also references the computer, staying on topic of the *thread*.

B: "Wow… I bet there is some great air flow through that baby.

I hope you don't have cats though… They may discover a 'shocking' new hiding place."

Poster C remains on topic as well.

C: "my friend's hard drive is held in place by duct tape.

mine is not held in place at all. just sitting on top of my floppy drive. OH YEAH!"

Poster D writes:

D: "I wish I had a camera so you folks could bask in the orderly magnificence of my Antec case.

Well, digital camera anyway. Fuck paying for film development."

From the slight change in direction of topic in this *post*, the subsequent *post* shifts to making fun of [A].

E: "i didn't think [A] had a home pc?

thought he communicated with us through running-messengers and hand written statements"

This immediately incites a new line of conversation referring to communication:

F: "I thought he sent smoke signals from the great white north."

D: "I thought he was a bot, or a clever ruse."

G: "Wait [A] is not a bot? Since when? Shit man I'm sorry when I chewed you out I thought I was yelling at a bot. I guess you should ignore the time I tried to make you and the other bots have a bot orgy. You should of been included in my human orgy in the other channel."

This line of discourse veers far from computer *modding* into multiple modes of communication ending up in the realm of deviant sexual behavior, a favorite Pen theme. Also in this *thread*, the incorrect grammar in various *posts* is not noted by other Pens. Normally a *poster* making these kinds of errors would be addressed with insults, a result of the covert category of consistently correct grammatical usage. Instead, since the main point of the *post* is to mock one member's inability to *post* pictures of the computer he built, the question of correct grammar is overlooked to focus on the mocking.

The next *post* involves code-switching in its most basic form for Pen members (from binary computer language to English) and is also a response by *Poster* A to the mocking:

A: "01001000 01100101 01101000 00010011 01100010 01001001 01001001 01001001 01011100 00010010 01100010 01000110…"

This apparent nonsense computer code language continues for ten pages of exchanges, interspersed with "And I say back" and "and btw [by the way]." A longtime Pen member then responds:

I: "Resisting the urge to put this in binary, I say back: try stripping the whitespace before you convert that."

The members continue down this "train" of derailment. Some of the binary code sequences in this *thread* were binary code translations of written English. The actual code is interspersed with gibberish code. The last *post* is advocating that if a member wishes to flaunt his or her prowess in computer language, he or she should write correct

code, which involves removing spaces in the text before converting the code into another language. He is simultaneously assuming a superior position to the previous *posters* by giving criticism. *Poster* A is actually using a translator device on the internet which converts ASCII code (the closest computer equivalent to English) into binary code. The next *post* reveals metalinguistic awareness, whereby Poster J states the realization of the linguistic mechanisms at work, both the bi-directional translations of one code into another code and the code used by the computer to read the human code of English.

> J: "d00d…I just realized something. We're posting messages converted from ASCII to binary, but we're posting them in ASCII, which is converted into binary when it is sent to our computers and then back into ASCII to be displayed. Then, the ASCII/binary message has to be converted to ASCII/ASCII to read it. That's fucked up."

Poster J then comments on the multiple translations using purposeful misspellings to make fun of himself:

> J: "OMG WAHT IF 'DOG' SPLELED 'CTA'???/////,"

which is answered with more binary code for five more pages. *Poster* J extends the ASCII/binary theme while moving even further away from the topic first initiated.

> J: "Hrrmm… If you had a thousand pseudo-random number generators on a thousand computers generate random 1's and 0's, how long would it take until you got the binary equivalent of *MacBeth*?"

Finally, the original *poster* of the thread ends the *thread*:

> A: "Took me 30s [tries] to get the binary version of the goatse guy.."

This *thread* exemplifies the type of topic shifting that occurs quite often in Pen *threads*. The subject wanders from the topic to a related off-shoot of the topic in a recursive fashion. Depending on the length of the *thread*, the last *post* may have little or

nothing to do with the first. When reading these *threads* for the first time or as a *lurker*, one may be confused and think that coherence relations are skewed. In fact, the coherent relation resides in the cleverly incoherent order of *posts* within a *thread*. The anti-maxim for Pens is to be as obtuse and shifting as possible, a covert category of near coherence, going against the Gricean grain in itself.

Another example of topic shifting appears in a *thread* titled, "Candy makes you dandy." Thirteen members *post*, seemingly randomly, responses to the first *post*,

> A: "Candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker."

> B: "Die in the eye from a pie in the sky?"

Poster B shifts the subject, but retains the formulaic word play from the previous post.

> C: "Fine and dandy like old-time cotton candy…"

Poster C uses the word "dandy" and "candy" as a parallel response to enhance word and rhyme play. However, as *Poster* A eventually reveals, the topic was originally a quote from Ogden Nash. *Posters* B and C are working against the topic here, while still engaging in the lexical play. The originator of the *thread* replies:

> A: "Ugh…it seems that no one can appreciate the genius that is Ogden Nash."

The topic shifts into a mild *flaming* of the *poster* with,

> C: "Nash is dead (but then so's Dorothy Parker)- get over it."

The topic shifts after this *post* to drugs, seeming to have no bearing on the *thread* topic whatsoever.

> D: "were they hitting the nose candy too hard?"

> A: "Nose candy? Is that some sort of weird sex thing? Man, that'd be cool,"

I assume the ones "hitting the nose candy" were Ogden Nash and Dorothy Parker, but *Poster* D has no referents. *Poster* A shifts the topic to sex, while *Poster* D incorporates the sex theme into his drug theme.

> D: "oooh, nostril sex. now there's something I havent seen much of. actually, i've only
>
> seen ONE anime page with drawings of nostril sex. it was impressive though. It was kind
>
> of weird that i happened to see the page on the same day that i asked someone if it was
>
> possible. tres weird. peehole sex is the smallest hole sex type i've ever had the pleasure
>
> of seeing images and videos of."

In the next *post*, *Poster* A further laments on "peehole sex," but also returns to the original form of word play, incorporating "hole sex" into a limerick.

> A: "See, all the peehole sex I've ever seen distorts the peehole into this huge, floppy,
>
> split-hotdog looking thing, even on chicks. So I don't know if it can technically be then
>
> considered the 'smallest hole sex'. Earhole sex, now, that's great.
>
> There once was a man from Nantucket,
>
> whose dick was so long he could suck it.
>
> He said with a grin,
>
> As he wiped off his chin, 'If my ear were a cunt I would fuck it.'"

Topic shifting also occurs in *threads* if a *thread* has been idle for some time, or has not been *posted* on for a day or more. This is the case for the current *thread* which after several days, resurfaces to the front page of the *message board*, by way of *bumping*. *Bumping* is simply the act of *posting* on a *thread* in order for it to appear at the top of the *thread* titles page.

> E: "BUMP!!!!"

Poster E is signifying a desire to see more *posts* on the *thread*, while simultaneously marking his speech as a directive. A problem with topic stasis in this case is if a *thread* is

indeed *bumped*, the readers of the thread may only read the current page, containing only the most recent *posts*, and consequently, the *thread* continues on a shifted path. The next two *posts* contain no relevance to or continuation of word or rhyme play.

F: "DUMBEST VANITY PLATE EVER: COOLWHIP"

G: "this is SAMPSON, SMARTYPANTS !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!11"

After these two purposefully random *posts*, *Poster* H picks up the play and an earlier Dorothy Parker reference:

H: "If all the girls at Wellesly were laid end to end, I wouldn't be a bit surprised. –
Dorothy Parker"

The themes of sex, literature, word and rhyme play all return. As an observer of *thread* behavior, I assume that *Poster* H has read the entire *thread* before *posting*, as his typical behavior on the *boards* suggests - his *posts* are usually relevant and on topic. However, the topic is so fluid at this point that most members do not notice his covert behavior of erudite subtlety, typical of this member.

The next two *posters* in this *thread* write about folktales, and instead of keeping with the form of short, rhyming puns, drug themes, or sex jokes, they go on at length about Korean folktales and steer the conversation toward literature. Several other *posts* ensue, containing arguments for the validity of references for certain folktales and their origins. Then someone is proven wrong, and the next *post* is simply,

K: "SIT!!!"

The argument continues on for a few more posts, and finally concludes with a decisive *post*, in large font with black background, the word,

N: "OWN3D."

Poster N signals that the argument has been won and the topic terminated. This exchange hints at a covert category – do not attempt to be smarter than you are, else risk being ridiculed. When a member writes in bold, large font the word "owned" or "OWN3D," he or she proclaims victory in an argument. Usually, this declaration also marks ending of a thread, or as Pens say, "killing" a thread.

THE FLAME WAR

Joel Sherzer speaks of heightened discourse in his article, "A Discourse-Centered Approach to Language" (1987). The Pen *boards* are teeming with this discourse. One exemplary heightened discourse event is the *flame war*.

Flame wars are common to online speech communities, especially those of close-knit enthusiast groups who commune online with those of similar interests (http://www.vwvortex.com, http://www.ezboard.com). The structure is that of a power struggle, each member trying to defend his or her position while adding a few insults to the argument. *Flaming* often consists of a negative discourse that conveys anger or ire. Some *flames* serve as a proving ground for in-group status, similar to face-to-face verbal disputes. If a *poster* survives a *flame*, he or she gains respect within the community. Another function of the *flame war* event is bonding, which constructs a social bridge between members, which I will discuss later in the chapter. The covert categories governing the *flame* event are 1) valuing brevity over length, 2) exhibiting superiority in grammatical and debate prowess, 3) knowing when to quit of a *flame,* 4) understanding one's place in the community, and 5) knowing when another member has broken a covert rule and when to *flame* that member for it.

Several elements converge to make a uniquely Pen *flame war*. What Dell Hymes (1964) considers "verbal flogging," combines with displays of power and an invocation of covert categories within particular discourse contexts to create a situation conducive to *flaming*. These speech events, which I call ideological pissing contests, occur frequently on the Pen *boards*. A new member or an established one can find him/herself within a pissing contest context at any given juncture of conversation. The basic sequence

structure of the *flame* is inciting, responding, insulting, and either a simple win/loss marked by a *post* such as "OWN3D" or a drawn-out lengthy argument spanning several days and involving several other members who were not originally involved in the exchange.

Flames occur along a continuum of playfully mild to character-attacking to full-blown verbal warfare. *Mini-flames*, or sparks, can consist of a single *post*, e.g., "you are not teh funny" or "*own3d*." Mild *flames* involve more than one *post* ranting against one or more other members that may further escalate into severe *flame fests*. *Flames* are overtly labeled as such on the *boards* by members, but the marking of this speech event is not consistent. Depending on the context, the words "flame war" may never actually occur within the *thread*. In other cases, someone may interrupt an argument in media res and *post* a meta-commentary, such as "this flame war r0xx0rz!" or attempt to halt the process by a command such as "sit!"

In the following example, "flame" is not mentioned, but the *thread* exemplifies a *flame war*. An established member, *Poster* A, *posts* a new *thread* titled "grammar.[X] < grammar.Yoda," and *Poster* A has quoted a main page *post* from Poster X, making his distaste clear. The quote, which sparked the new *thread,* is:

> "all of this is well and good, and helps me to focus my energy on **projects which are**
> **likely to better the collective self portrait all of us dorian gays paint of humanity;**
> instead of focusing it on bellyaching about having not even a prospect for a girlfriend"

Poster A begins the *thread*:

A: "Okay, I'm less than enlightened here. Does that sentence mean what it looks like it means?
'Cause it looks like you're saying you, and all of us, are 'dorian gays' – whatever a 'dorian gay' is.
And considering one of the links in those words was to someplace called 'gaystation', I'm pretty
sure I get enough of the idea to know VERY well I'm not one.

I have a sneaking suspicion this wasn't quite what you meant to say, but fuck if I could

manage to parse that sentence any other way. Clue me in here, willya?"

This first *post* is relatively long for a new *thread*'s first *post*. Generally first *posts* consist of only one to two sentences, usually in the form of an interrogatory, and seldom involve long narratives. The first *post* above does, however end with a question and also contains coded linguistic conventions for inciting a *flame war*. One of these is the strategic placement of "fuck" in the text accusing the author of the quote of a lack of clarity. The defensive tone of *Poster* A responds to what he has perceived as an accusation that Pens are gay. While not homophobes, most Pen members identify as heterosexual and could be offended at the suggestion that they are gay. *Poster* A's incendiary comments early in the *thread* lead to *Poster* X's misconception that *Poster* A is ignorant of Dorian Gray. The *flame war* ensues over this misunderstanding and possible insult.

The next three *posts* veer off subject and perhaps insult *Poster* X:

B: "'I'm not gay. I didn't…gay.'"

C: "wang can wang"

C: "wangismightier.com"

X: "it is a play on words of the title of a novel by oscar wilde: the picture of dorian gray.

i was saying that people's unwillingness to internalize the ugliness, to love the beauty as

well as the ugliness of humanity while earnestly trying to better humanity is, in short,

gay. and that we all collectively paint the ugly picture of humanity we see before us.

thus, we are all dorian gays."

In this context, the word "gay" does not connote homosexuality; it is a play on the word and simply means "silly."

X: "and the gaystation link had 2 purposes.

1) it solidified the word play.

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2) it is funny as hell. the review of the movie right above the picture of dorian gray in that

link is hilarious. pickle: tales of mere existence.

a boy eats a pickle to see if he's gay.

some of the other reviews are funny, too.

anyway, sorry you had a tough time understanding my post, [name], but it wasn't the

fault of my grammar. but, feel free to let me know when my English usage is too cryptic,

so I can clarify."

The word play to which *Poster* X refers is a valued interaction and thus leads to the two covert categories that stand out of this thread: the importance of word play and the importance of correct grammar and literary knowledge. He continues with a third *post*, explaining the premise of the novel, A Picture of Dorian Gray, and the *flame* begins to heat up, as *posters* becomes more argumentative and character-attack with more ferocity.

Power elements come into play here, as the first *poster* and the defender of the quote vie for ultimate literary and grammatical prowess. *Poster* A replies now with a *link* to pictures (no longer available online) of an increasingly angry member, the defender of the quote, *Poster* X. He then proceeds:

A: "I have no idea what sort of odd internal dialogue led you to progress from the first

face to the last over a three hour period: all I know is it had nothing to do with me, since I

had no more contact with you elsewhere than I did here.

Regarding your belabored protests, I was actually quite familiar with the premise of The

Picture or Dorian Gray. This familiarity, however, was no adequate preparation for the

Sisyphean labors inherent in parsing your tortured syntax.

In short, my advice to you is this: **eschew obfuscation**.

</highbrow>"

This *post*, in particular, contains numerous elements essential to the Pen dynamic discourse. The "highbrow" comment at the end of this *post* indicates metalanguage for the Pen community. *Poster* A is not only letting the reader know that he is taking a highbrow tone in his post, but he uses the symbols "</" from HTML code in doing so. Code-switching between informal language like "clue me in willya" and elevated language like "sisyphean labors inherent in parsing your tortured syntax" is a byproduct of both the Pen members' display of their intelligence and the informal nature of spoken language. The use of literary referents and the scholarly tone are means to claiming superiority over the other member. This usage can be understood through the power/knowledge theories of Michel Foucault (1972). When one asserts his or her knowledge in a power struggle, whether political or social, he or she takes the verbal advantage and usually prevails in an argument. This *post* not only displays power wielded through language use, but also demonstrates control of the dialogue thereafter, with compounding insults imbedded in complex syntactic structures and *flaming*.

Pen *flames* are covertly organized into both competitive insult and in-group bonding. Some *flames*, however, achieve both insult as well as bonding. As the important covert categories become apparent through analysis, the *flame war* is intrinsically tied to bonding as well as asserting power over another member or non-member. One major theme among the *flaming* Pens is survival, driven by intellectual power. Survival can be the ability and desire to continue *posting* on the *message board* or winning a *flame war* outright. New members are at a disadvantage in *flame wars* for several reasons, including being unaware of covert categories of talk, and not yet having

established power in the community. This power and knowledge inequality shapes the talk, and quite often, the result is *flaming*.

Anthropological and sociological research reveals that disputing events are common in male groups (Arensberg 1972, Brenneis 1988, Bricker 1973, Dundes et. al 1970). The generalization from the literature is that young males argue as play behavior, practice for interactions and the aspiration of achieving prosperity in society. Verbal dueling (Dundes et. al 1970, Hymes 1964) is constitutive of maturation and success in society, especially for males. The Penismightier speech community is predominantly male, and although verbal dueling on the Pen *boards* is not oral, the means of writing with *emoticons*, quotes, interruptions, and font changes for emphasis invoke the spoken word.

Of course, the internet is not the first frontier of verbal dueling. Victoria Bricker chronicles the ritual insulting via fiestas in Mayan cultures of the Chiapas region of Mexico (1973). Alan Dundes et al. suggest folklorists and anthropologists should give detailed descriptions of verbal dueling, as many scholars only mention the element of social fabrication of dueling and merely skim the surface of its importance in adolescent development (1970:325). The similarities between the Turkish boys' verbal dueling and the Pen *flame wars* are close on several levels. Both groups exchange insults, incorporate sexual innuendo in their insults, and rely on power domination. The Pen members are much older, however, which has a mitigating effect upon the content of their *flaming*. The Turkish boys are more sexually explicit, insulting friends' mothers and their sexuality. "This may be done by defining the opponent or his mother or sister as a wanton sexual receptacle. If the male opponent is thus defined, it is usually by means of

casting him as a submissive anus, an anus which must accept the brunt of the verbal duelist's attacking phallus" (Dundes et. al 1970:326). In the Pen community, someone may simple be labeled as "gay."

The Turkish verbal encounter mirrors that of the Pen *flame* encounters. Insults teem with sexual innuendo and are often specific in insulting the participants' sexual prowess, sometimes ending in "pwnt" or "own3d," suggesting one *poster* using these terms has dominated the other verbally, and perhaps sexually as well if challenged. Dundes et al. (1970) suggest the extension of a code of conduct among the Turkish boys' verbal dueling behavior. In this study, they suggest that the rule, if the boys are aware of the potential loss of an argument, is to assume a role as thruster of insults instead of taking a passive, more submissive role and thereby losing the battle. The motivation of the Turkish boys is similar to that of Pens who, if they do not assert the role of thruster and become aggressive instead of passive, will lose the *flame war*. "It is important to play the active role in a homosexual relationship; it is shameful and demeaning to be forced to take the passive role" (327). It is ironic that this *flame war* I analyze above contains homosexual undertones in its insults and reactions. Given that the Turkish verbal dueling of young boys is more violent and sexually explicit, the presence and implications of a similar pattern are clear. The result is not animosity, but a structuring of a societal hierarchy, in the case of the *message boards*, of the Pen elders and the other members.

One exemplary Pen *flame war* occurred after the September 11th attacks in the United States.

A: "UPDATE FIVE: I just heard live audio of Palestinian ~~ragheads~~ **politically concerned citizenry** cheering in the fucking streets because 'the mighty United States has been harmed.'

Am I wrong that I should be offended by this?

And they say the south isn't racist. Sheesh."

The self-edited line with the word "raghead" visible but crossed through is significant here. *Poster* A and anyone else who desires can edit his or her *post* using a tool on the *message board* that will cross through, underline, italicize, or bold any letters or words. *Poster* A decided that instead of removing the incendiary word from the *post* altogether, he would only cross through it to make the point that he should not have to edit his *post* at all. This *post* sparks a huge debate, spanning 65 pages, only the first thirteen of which I will comment on.

The majority of *posters* in this *thread* are offended by the "raghead" comment, while only a few others are not. The debate centers around the attitude of foreigners toward the US and its position that fateful day. *Poster* C continues:

C: "All it takes is for one little thing to be said to coerce a group of people into thinking it's okay to classify some of the group.

Would it be okay if some white person got killed by a black person and was followed by a group of blacks cheering and laughing to call them a group of 'niggers.'

You know what? I don't fucking think so. All we know in the west about Islam, unless we make an active effort to learn about it, is that they're a bunch of 'raghead', ak47 toting, group ranting, flag burning, fucking crazies hellbent on destroying the US.

Well, folks… that's the fucking media for you.

I don't like that that group of Palestinians was cheering the good graces of the explosions on my home soil, but anti-racism is something that shouldn't just take a break, because we THINK that it was somewhere in Islam that causes all this pain.

If we wanna rid ourselves of racism, we can't just take days off."

Four *posts* later, after more racial slurs and jokes (self labeled as such), *Poster* E writes:

> E: "Wups, my bad, the people lined up cheering in the streets at the news that thousands
> of civilians were deliberately killed without ever knowing WHY they were killed ARE
> GREAT WONDERFUL PEOPLE AND I WOULD LIKE TO OFFER THEM A
> BLOWJOB FROM MY SISTER.
>
> I'M not concerned with their religion or the color of their skin, I'M concerned with their
> actions. YOU are the one concerned with their religion/race.
>
> Which one of us is the fucking racist here?"

This *post* is dripping with sarcasm, articulated through the use of capital letters throughout whole words, an insincere apology, and an exaggerated sexual reference to his sister. He is defending his position while attacking other *posters*. This is typical *flame* behavior. A female member then *posts*, trying to calm the *flame* fires.

> G: "In any case, there will ALWAYS ALWAYS ALWAYS be things you don't want to
> read/see/hear. [name] is ENTITLED to his opinion, however wrong everyone thinks it is.
> [name,] I also were calling them ragheads most of the day…
> doesn't make ME right, either.
>
> In my life, I have lost count of the number of times non-caucasians have called me cracker
> or honkey, white trash, redneck or whatever…. I still didn't like it and it didn't make
> THEM right either.
>
> Relax. Opinions are like assholes, everyone has them."

The Pens purport to have no censorship and celebrate profanity. However, the group polices the political and racial discourse environment, which inadvertently produces an atmosphere of censorship. A hint of the workings behind the disputed issue (unregulated v. regulated society) and off-limit words of the Pens surfaces in the next *post*. *Poster* A takes a defensive tone:

A: "I said it [raghead] twice. The word 'terrorists' in the very first part of the post –
before any updates – was originally 'towelheads.' I changed it to 'terrorists' after you
messaged me because I agreed with you that it was inappropriate there – inappropriate
simply because we still haven't proved who's actually responsible for the action. It *could*
still turn out to be some whacked-ass home-grown militia group… though I seriously,
seriously doubt it.

Neither the word 'towelhead' nor 'raghead' ever appeared in any other place in that post
on the page, much less 'every other word.'"

This member is referring to the *instant message* he received from the *web administrator*
who reads the *website* regularly to ensure he will not incur legal action for explicitly
racist or illegal pornographic material. Although this monitoring could be considered as
censorship, the intent is not to squelch the writing of Pens, but to protect the *web
administrator* from legal repercussions. He wrote an *unposted*, *instant message* to the
Poster A, instructing him to change his wording because he found it inappropriate for the
website. The *web administrator* also mentioned that the word "raghead" was used too
many times in the main page *post*. Metalinguistically, these two members are negotiating
the use of epithets or taboo language. The *thread* spawned out of this *instant message*
exchange. Pen members often simultaneously communicate online outside of the Pen
boards, whether through email or through *instant messaging*. The following is an
extension of the *flame war*.

E: "If one person murders another person, and another group of people follow him
cheering and laughing, should you maybe have better things to worry about than what
word is used to describe the people following, cheering and laughing at the murder?
You people need to get your fucking priorities straight."

I: "Yeh. Maybe keep in mind that people were saying the same shit right after Oklahoma
City.. We have quite enough words in this language to insult people without involving

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race. If you spent your entire life with no access to any news except for state propaganda about the Great Evil, and then heard that noble brother citizens might have sacrificed their lives in defense of their homeland by fighting the great Satan, you'd be happy too. We all have out little cages to rattle. What say we keep the aim on the retaliation nuke focused as finely as possible? Fifty years ago, we hated the Japs. Now, most people probably know a Jap personally, so you can't hate the entire race as easily if you know that Mr. Yoshitomo down the street shares your sentiments. That's not yet as true of Middle Easterners. But I'm not terribly interested in increasing the number of people the world over whom I'm required to hate in order to be a good American.

I heard that they have (from a flight attendant) the seat number of one hijacker.. do we know a nationality or name?"

C: "People die because of racism. The vicious cycle that you create by calling the killers racist slurs will insure more oppression and killing in the future. It starts with one person changing a few words in there vocabulary, to start a total revolution.

I have my priorities straight. Don't ever fucking question my ethics."

J: "Let's just refer to them as 'vermin' and get it over with.

What so you do with vermin? Exterminate them."

E: "1. How many times do I have to say it has nothing to do with race?

2. I'll 'question your fucking ethics' at any time they appear suspect. You're free to call me a racist – I'm free to disagree. I'm free to question your fucked-up priorities – you're free to indignantly protest your perfection. It's a Free Country. See how that works?

3. Apparently I haven't said this often enough, so I'll say it again – This Has Nothing To Do With Race. I see people of Middle Eastern descent on a daily basis; I work downtown in a reasonably-sized city. I don't look at them any different today that I did yesterday, which is no differently than I look at white people – they're Americans. And they're not jumping up and down in the street celebrating civilian massacres…"

The *flaming* continues down the defensive track until one of the interlocutors announces that he will quit *posting* on the *thread*. *Poster* L writes:

L: "I was ok with all this up to now. I refuse to say my stance on this because its fueling a pointless debate that is overshadowing a horrendous event.

I[f] you don't want your ethics questioned, dont ever fucking write on this board again. A message board is the essence of questioning other on the internet.

There is an unspoken concensus here that we are allowed to voice our own thoughts, opinions, and ideas without too great a repurcussion from our peers. Sure, some og us may disagree with that the other has said. But you know what? That happens a fucking lot. Get over it.

You may feel angry that others have challenged the direction of your moral compass, but stop bitching because its more than likely to happen again in your lifetime. Especially here.

I may not agree with what you, [name,] or anyone might say. Sometimes they may even offend me. Maybe they don't. Who knows. But one thing is certain: I will defend to the death the right for anyone to voice whatever what he thinks or feels because that is his inherent right to do. I feel especially strongly about this because of current events. I will not silence anyone based upon my distaste about how I see or feel he has wronged myself or others. IF that is the case. People have died to defend our rights and our freedoms, and sometimes a disaster is all it takes to show how ugly, but precious, it really is.

Now go back into the white tower of goodness you've erected for yourself, put the pearl-coated shafted back into your rectum, and shut the fuck up about what we can and cannot say.

I will no longer contribute to this discussion.

Thank you."

Poster L silences himself to protect his reputation and to avoid being called a "nazi." Within the last *post*, the articulation of the covert category of free and sometimes hostile expression and the awareness of it is under stress. The delicate line between being considered a "nazi" and being labeled an "asshole" rests upon

the delivery and outcome of the *flame war*, the winner thus gaining more respect within the community. In this case, however, no one is a clear winner, but in the end, the interlocutors come together under the umbrella of a speech community mourning the September 11th attacks. By the end of the *thread* everyone has apologized, thanked others for participating, and come back together, rebonded, ceding their competition for superiority to the greater issue of terrorism and what happened that day in 2001. This *flame thread* is atypical in one large respect – no one is *OWN3D* at the end of the thread and no one claims victory. In most other cases, the *flame* will contain a marked ending with a winner and a loser.

Flaming is vital to this speech community, for it creates the hierarchy within the group and strengthens ties among members. Power displays are functional and necessary for sustaining relationships among and between members, just as they are between teenage boys in other parts of the world. The *flame war*, or ideological pissing contest, is the most defining speech event of the Pen speech community, and members practice the art of *flaming* regularly.

CONCLUSION

The Pen Code derives from a very complex set of rules which are covertly organized and implemented through the textually and contextually rich discourse on the *message board* of Penismightier.com. It involves several aspects of grammar, orthography, and norms of interaction. Anti-Gricean cohesion behavior, understanding how and when to topic shift, and *flame war* conduct are among the rules put forth covertly and enforced both covertly and overtly within the *threads*.

One who *registers* on the *site* and who *posts* with regularity is considered a member of the Pen speech community. He/she should adhere to several coexisting rules if he/she wishes to be positively acknowledged on the *message board*. These covert categories include: use correct grammar, else be called out on it by a "grammar nazi;" when providing a *link* as new, be sure that it is indeed new and has not surfaced on the *mainpage* or elsewhere on the internet, else be called out on it as well in the form of "DYJGTIT?!?!?!?!!;" be as brief and simultaneously witty as possible, else draw negative attention in the form of mockery; do not incite an argument unless prepared to defend oneself in a *flame war*; appreciate nudity and celebrate it within the appropriate *threads*; celebrate profanity without inhibition, because the word "fuck" is prevalent throughout the entire *website*; consider the debate of cake versus pie as a part of *Pen lore*; understand that the word "cake" is taboo and if typed, will be replaced with asterisks or other *emoticons* because it is inferior to pie; hold a high value for *modded boxes* and the elitism that comes with the ability to *mod* a *box*; obscurity and uniqueness are superior to readily-available and colloquial; when attempting to derail a *thread*, be sure to do it with wit and some form of sexual innuendo such as "I <3 (.)(.)," or a "topic nazi" will

appear and re-direct the *thread*; appreciate a worthy adversary in debate and defend an argument if *flamed*, else attract various insults to character and sexuality; use character-attacking *flames* when provoked beyond the point or ability of arguing intelligently; understand the existing hierarchy within the Pen community, else be ignored or attract a *flame*; and use the most elevated vocabulary and knowledge possible or the most unique lexical variations of *netspeak* in settings where the focus is on intelligence (literature, art, music, technology), else be "OWN3D" by a more intelligent member.

Communities exist in society that self-label as elite; they maintain their elite status through both linguistic and non-linguistic means. The Pens, however, only have their linguistic knowledge and unique usage to set themselves apart from other groups. The keyboard's unique structure and its translation devices, coupled with the screen as a vehicle for translation provide a portal into the culture and language of the Pen speech community. Within this thesis, I have outlined covert categories of practice by Pen members. Pen Family Language consists of original and modified *netspeak* terms that Pen members employ at each possible turn of talk, which reinforces the technologically elitist attitude of members. Maintaining and shifting topics play an integral part of the Pen covert code of conduct. A *thread* contains an overall theme, and whether a member remains on topic is second only to the manner in which he/she does or does not. Gricean maxims are flouted and in lieu of linguistic prescription, members adhere to a separate yet covert prescription of topic shifting behavior. The *flame war* is heightened Pen discourse that operates in a covertly organized code involving competition, insult, and in-group bonding. Inciting a *flame* occurs at different junctures of talk on the *message board*, but the exchanges within a marked *flame* adhere to covert categories detailed

throughout the thesis. Foucault's power/knowledge theory is engaged in every *flame* through the ideological pissing contests and the ultimate goal of "OWNING" an opponent by way of superior intellect and debate prowess.

Patrick Eisenlohr provides a term for the exchange of interactive text that is "stored, displayed, and circulated" on the internet: "electronic artifacts" (2004:21). Examining symbolic behavior enacted through material culture, anthropologists are thus positioned perfectly to examine these electronic artifacts, and report on their meaning and use. Susan Cook implores anthropologists to explore the way human communication in general has been influenced by the internet and instant communicative technologies (2004:103). She also writes that "relatively few ethnographic studies of the impact of new technologies on language use have been published" by anthropologists (103). The information that I have harvested for this thesis is grounded in ethnographic fieldwork in cyberspace. My findings suggest that the impact of the virtual medium is tangible through language change and communicative evolution.

Anthropologically informed discourse analysis of a communicative cultural phenomenon, specifically those within cyberspatial parameters, should be as richly descriptive as possible. My analysis of the language and behavior of Pen members reflects one aspect of the evolving world of the internet through the innovation of a subset of its users fusing written and spoken language into a new genre of language: *netspeak*. Pen members, however, liken *netspeak* to *AOLer speak* and surpass it with their complex, innovative *techie* language.

The overarching themes from this analysis are 1) power displays marked by *flaming* and 2) covert categories of behavior that regulate the community despite its

overtly articulated commitment to being completely unregulated. Pen members engage

in discourse centered around ideological pissing contests, elitism concerning technology,

and the claim that the word "cake" constitutes the single taboo word. The essential

feature of this virtual speech community, however, is that they are in fact a speech

community that happens to be on the internet. They have mediated the face-to-face

boundary of speech and blurred written and spoken language to arrive at a *message board*

discourse of awesome implications.

Pidgin languages arise to create a business-oriented trade relationship between

speakers of different languages. Similarly, *l33t geek sp34k* is a new kind of contact

language spawned from creativity, advanced technology, and the human drive for social

interaction. Using a superstrate of the English language and a substrate of computer

language, *netspeak,* symbols, numbers, and intentional typos, a relationship is forged –

one of exclusivity, of membership, of *l33t geeks*. Creativity, intellect, and technical

proficiency of the Pen speech community merge to create a new, innovative and elitist

language, carving a new dimension in discourse and in discourse analysis and

anthropology.

The new contact point between language and technology, where the Pen speech

community and countless other online communities reside, is now fast becoming the

origin of a new pidgin language of the 21st Century. The Pen speech community has

contributed significantly to the creation and evolution of this pidgin. Exotic locations on

the globe are no longer exotic, thanks to the internet and its shrinking of the global

landscape. *L33t sp34k* is the newest exotic language, or pidgin, and will no longer need a

translator in the next few years as the cyber world is shrinking as well.

This thesis lays out the basic covert categories of the Pen community that underlie each *post*, whether tacitly or explicitly. The speech community's innovative language and behavior patterns coupled with their shifting topics and *flame wars* forge a new field of discourse for academics to recognize and interpret. *Netspeak* analysis through cyberspace ethnography is the next opportunity afforded to linguistic anthropology. The self-described "Penizens" of the "PenTerNet" have contributed to the study of linguistic anthropology and helped thrust open the door to potential research in this fascinating medium where conversation meets technology.

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APPENDIX A: PEN LEXICON

AOLer (AOLer Sp34k): America On Line speak; those users of the internet for communicative purposes that do so through the internet access provider, AOL. AOL provides *emoticons* and users of AOL Instant Messenger employ acronyms such as *BRB* (Be Right Back) and *LOL* (Laughing Out Loud).

Avatar: a second name placed under a member's name, given by the administrator and is usually a play on the member's name. This could be a phrase, picture, emoticon, one word, or a generic variation of the word "Pen."

Box(es): computer(s)

BRB: Be Right Back

Chat Room: A space on the internet where people can "chat" with other people and the typed messages are available on the screen for all participants to see.

Compuserve: the first instance of inter-computer communication via the "internet."

DYJGTIT?!?!?!!!@!@?!@!@!@!??@?!: Did You Just Get The Internet Today?

Emoticons: pictorial representations of ideas, states of being, or thought. e.g. the smiley face

End User: a person who uses technology concerning computers, especially on the internet.

Flame/flaming/flame war/flame fest/flamee: a type of response to new visitors to the website, and sometimes established members, if they somehow get off topic or say something inflammatory. This event usually involves scolding or chastising. *Flame war* ensues when more than one person is involved and the event occurs over time. A *flame fest* occurs when more than one *flame war* merges onto one *thread* or when the community considers a *flame* to be out of hand, but entertaining. The *flamee* is the recipient of the flame.

Gaming (language): the act of playing a computer or video game on the internet with other players also on the internet.

Graffiti board: anonymous space on the front page of the website for short, witty banter.

Hacker: One who is proficient at using or programming a computer; a computer aficionado; one who uses those skills for illegally gaining entry or access to a file.

HTML: Hyper Text Markup Language; "the coding language used to create hypertext documents for use on the *World Wide Web*. HTML looks a lot like old-fashioned

typesetting code, where you surround a block of text with codes that indicate how it should appear" (Enzer 2004:11).

HTTP: Hyper Text Transfer Protocol; "the protocol for moving hypertext files across the internet" (Enzer 2004:11)

Homepage: the first page which is displayed when visiting any website; also known as the *mainpage*.

Hypertext: "Generally, any text that contains links to other documents – words or phrases in the document that can be chosen by a reader and which cause another document to be retrieved and displayed" (Matisse 2004:11).

I wub joo: I love you

Instant Message: a typed message on a computer, through the use of the internet, which is instantly conveyed on the reader's screen. The act of *IMing* comes from this term.

L337 or *1337 h4xx0r(z)*: elite hacker(s), anyone possessing above average skills with *HTML* or programming, as well as anyone who augments their technological equipment.

Leet geek speak: elite geek speech

Link: any word or phrase or website address that if clicked on, will bring you to another page. Also sometimes called *hyperlinks*.

LOL: Laughing Out Loud

Lurk(er) (ing): visiting the website without *posting*. This usually implies reading the *message boards*.

Message board: place on the website where members can hold discussions.

MMORPG: Multi-Member Online Role Playing Game

Modding/modded: augmentation of any kind to ameliorate an item, usually a computer.

Netiquette: internet etiquette; usually referring to email production.

Netspeak: Language which some scholars deem is solely used on the internet.

OMG/OMFG: Oh My God/Oh My Fucking God

Own3d/OWN3D: beaten, or owned. Reference to video or computer gaming.

Pen lore: Stories passed down through the years of Penismightier's existence about members' histories or funny anecdotes.

Post(er): the action of typing a message and sending it to the *message board* via a link, usually depicted by a button on the page. A *poster* is the person who *posts*.

Pr0n: pornography

Refresh: reloading a website from the address. This brings the page up to date.

Registering: logging into the website using your name (can be fictional) and answering a few questions about location, interests and email address. This allows for permission to edit *posts*.

ROFLMAO: Rolling On Floor Laughing My Ass Off

Script kiddie: a talented web designer or one who is proficient in HTML, Flash or JavaScript programming.

Spam(ming): the act of *posting* ubiquitously on one *thread* or across several *threads* to annoy members; also known as *trolling*. *Spam refers, in other electronic realms, to junk email that an *end user* did not request to be sent to him/her, but on the Pen *boards*, it represents any material *posted* in an annoyingly repetitive manner.

Techie: related to computers or technology.

Thread: a vein of conversation, or thread of conversation. Each *thread* resides within a *message board*.

Video/computer gaming: playing video games, preferably online computer games that require playing with other online users.

Web administrator: The person(s) who writes and publishes a website; may also be the person(s) who maintains the website periodically.

Webcam: a camera used specifically to present photographs or streaming media on the internet.

Website or *site*: a location on the *world wide web* with a specific address.

Webzine: an online publication similar to a print magazine.

World Wide Web: "the whole constellation of resources that can be accessed using several types of web servers and browsers" such as Internet Explorer, Netscape, or Mozilla (Enzer 2004:28-29).

WTF: What The Fuck

APPENDIX B - MAINPAGE LAYOUT

penismightier.com - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View Go Bookmarks Tools Help

http://web.archive.org/web/20020802054122/penismightier.com/main.html   Go   maps.google.com

Getting Started   Latest Headlines

Disable▾ CSS▾ Forms▾ Images▾ Information▾ Miscellaneous▾ Outline▾ Resize▾ Validation▾ View Source Options▾

Pen Forum - General Discussion   penismightier.com   Pen Is Mightier Links

news board
media
articles
crapper
links

penismightier.com

link of the instant

penismightier

(View 10 newer posts)   Search Posts   (View 10 older posts)

Thursday, Aug 1, 2002

eod: "join seti, I need a freaking challenge!" --   @4:29 EST

Name (and URL)	Results received	Total CPU time	Average CPU time per work unit	Date Last Result Received	Country
1)	7660	10.675 years	12 hr 12 min 30.2 sec	Wed Jul 31 23:12:37 2002	Canada
2)	4344	3.281 years	6 hr 36 min 57.1 sec	Wed Jul 31 23:41:59 2002	United States

= owned_by_canadian;

Wednesday, Jul 31, 2002

Whoa.. Am I the only one slicing my way up the downstream?   @13:52 PST

This news bit brings a yar har har from my belly.

Source: Washington Post

When Web operator Jon Messner gained control of one of al-Qaida's prime Internet communication sites, he offered it to the FBI to use it for disinformation and collecting data about sympathizers.

FBI agents struggled to find someone with enough technical know-how to set up the sting. By the time they did, the opportunity was lost as militant Islamic Web users figured out the site was a decoy, said Messner of Ocean City, Md

"It was like dealing with the motor vehicle administration," said Messner..
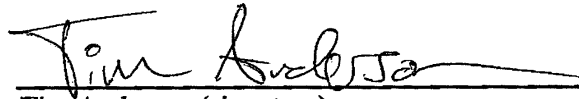
Turn your penis a different color:

BBS Server:
penternet.dns2go.com
Port: 31337

Pen on IRC
efnet #penismightier

Pen Net:

Done
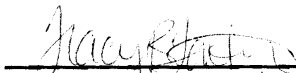
March 10, 2003

I, Tim Anderson, founder and administrator of the website, www.penismightier.com, give Tracy Fontenot permission to cite material from the website up to and including texts from the main page and message boards in the context of writing her Master's Thesis for the Department of Geography and Anthropology at Louisiana State University. Tracy Fontenot will take all possible steps to ensure anonymity of participants, deemed appropriate by the administrator. The administrator shall have final say over any material used in the final draft of the thesis.

_____
Tim Anderson (signature)

_____
Tracy Fontenot (signature)

Pen Forum > Pen Forums > General Discussion > QWERTYUIOPASDFGHJKLZXCVBNM

Pages (2): **[1]** 2 »   ◄Last Thread   Next Thread ►

Author	Thread		

⚠ **QWERTYUIOPASDFGHJKLZXCVBNM**

This is a new thread. I would like to be the first to help usher this new thread into the world.

Often times, new threads are neglected. This is an epidemic in this message board, and it must stop. [sob] I remember there once being a thread, a very nice and wholesome thread, that consisted of nothing but the word "Meow". It was so neglected that I, personally, had to euthanize it. Oh, and to watch it go... [/sob].

People of the PenTerNet, this must stop! Please, I urge you, respond at least once to every thread on this board, starting with this one!

This PSA brought to you by the most non-important PenIs staffer, me.

Ain't that the drizzlin shits?

_____
Even my best intentions come to naught, and hope itself is but an obstacle.

IP: Logged

04-21-2001 10:17 AM

Moo

IP: Logged

04-21-2001 10:35 AM

76

thar yee go

[This message has been edited by [name] (edited 04-21-2001).]

There. Fixed it.
You must link to a picture, not a webpage.

[This message has been edited by [name] (edited 04-21-2001).]

_____
"I will fuck your mothers asshole" - Brandon Dicamillo

04-21-2001 10:48 AM

Nice edit there, [name].

Ain't that the drizzlin shits?

_____
Even my best intentions come to naught, and hope itself is but an obstacle.

04-21-2001 11:01 AM

Wait wait wait...

YOU'RE the most non-important PenIs staffer? Noooo....

That honor has to be someone elses. But... who's?

77

[/open ended question sure to get flames]

04-21-2001 11:49 AM

vulva

04-21-2001 02:15 PM

Hrm. In that case, I'd have to say [name] is the least important staffer. Tied with [name], of course.

Ain't that the drizzlin shits?

_____
Even my best intentions come to naught, and hope itself is but an obstacle.

04-21-2001 06:21 PM

hey, i know that goat!!

04-21-2001 06:49 PM

I would rather fuck the goat than that awful thing on the left side of the picture... Those guys made a wise choice. Or is it choise? choice choise. no choice..

IP: Logged

04-21-2001 06:53 PM

anyone got a pic of [name] in about the same position? preferable with either a surprised look or a look of strain or pain.

_____

"I will fuck your mothers asshole" - Brandon Dicamillo

IP: Logged

04-21-2001 07:42 PM

quote:
_____
Originally posted by [name]:
anyone got a pic of [name] in about the same position? preferable with either a surprised look or a look of strain or pain.
_____

to be the guy or the goat?

_____
i am a jolly snowman. i eat cheese!

IP: Logged

04-21-2001 07:56 PM

oh i was thinkin for the aldy

79

but either of those will work too

_____

"I will fuck your mothers asshole" - Brandon
Dicamillo

04-21-2001 08:03 PM

Anybody else notice the SMILE on the goat's face?

_____

Don't laugh at Jesus, or he will have a crow pluck
your motherfucking eye out.

04-21-2001 08:28 PM

What's a aldy?

Yeah, I've got plenty of pics like that, [name]. One
of them is here.

Ain't that the drizzlin shits?

_____

Even my best intentions come to naught, and
hope itself is but an obstacle.

04-21-2001 09:03 PM

Damn, the best thing about that pic is that the
guy is wearing a wedding ring! Musta been
engaging in some of that...schlopping?
Schtupping? Whatever that word is where your
significant female other wears a strap on and you
pretend you're [name]....damn, what was that

word again?

Ain't that the drizzlin shits?

_____
Even my best intentions come to naught, and
hope itself is but an obstacle.

04-22-2001 04:29 AM

---

swakking man, swakking.dont make me bring
[name] over there *again* to show you. i thought
we swakked that concept home the last time

04-22-2001 04:34 AM

That pic is.. ummm.. intersting?

04-22-2001 04:49 AM

BAAAAA

[name], i hear it calling for you. I wish goats wore
thongs.

04-22-2001 04:51 AM

Dammit, it's TOOLING. As in using a tool to get
your significant other/paying customer off.

That guy at the uhmm.. end of the goat has made a poor choice in facial hair. It's like he's trying to match the goat. And the moustache looks like a smudge. Did he rim the goat first? Ugh. He'd do better with a voluptuous tickler like [name]'s.

[name], I couldn't look at your picture. As soon as I recognized a gaping orifice too large to be found in nature I covered my eyes and screamed until [name] closed the window. He TOLD me not to click on it, but did I listen? No. You're getting to be as bad as [name].

_____

Nose Avoidance Tilting: the first signpost on the road to intimate squelching

IP: Logged

04-22-2001 04:59 AM

i wanna see this photo! show me show me please?

IP: Logged

04-22-2001 09:06 AM

quote:

i am a jolly snowman. i eat cheese!

IP:

04-22-2001 09:12 AM

V

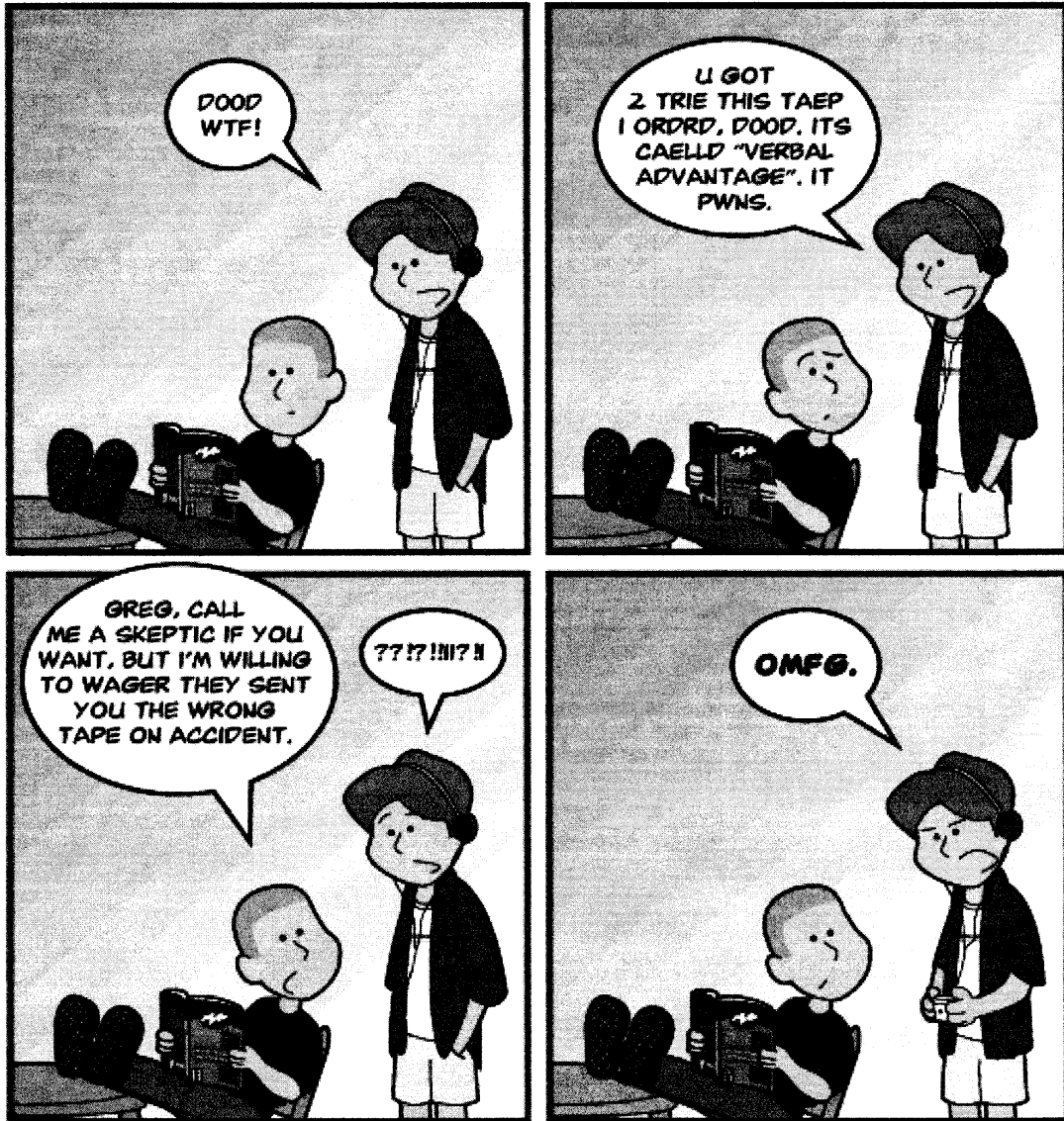**All times are GMT. The time now is 09:23 PM.**

Thread:
(Optional)

Post It

Pages (2): **[1]** 2 »

Last Thread   Next Thread

< **Contact Us** - **Penismightier** >

VITA

Tracy Rene Fontenot was born in Lafayette, Louisiana, in June of 1978. She was first raised by her mother, Lisa, and her grandparents. Her upbringing continued with the addition of her profoundly patient stepfather, Mark LeBlanc, in 1987. She attended Lafayette High School where she was an honor student, and upon graduation in 1996, was awarded a full scholarship to attend the University of Southwestern Louisiana. She graduated in December of 1999 from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in the first graduating class of the newly named college. Tracy grew up in "Cajun Country" with Francophone, Cajun, and American cultures influencing her. She came to appreciate her diverse cultural landscape, observing how language was vitally infused into her everyday life - in food, music, folktales, and funerals. She was instrumental in the production of the 2000 Festival International de Louisiane in Lafayette. Afterwards, she roamed the country to self-develop and finally fell back into the embrace of the warm, meandering bayous. Appropriately, she decided to develop her sense of language and culture and applied to graduate school to major in anthropology. Her graduate endeavors began in 2002 at Louisiana State University under the wings of Dr. Jill Brody, where she learned the meaning of linguistic anthropology and humanities. She married Jeffrey LeBlanc in January of 2004, gladly taking his name. She resides in Baton Rouge with her husband and their Greek cat.