I give permission for public access to my thesis and for any copying to be done at the discretion of the archives librarian and/or the College librarian.

Emily Merritt   06/22/12

An Analysis of the Discourse of Internet Trolling: A Case Study of Reddit.com

Student presenter: Emily Rose Merritt
Project advisor: Esther Castro-Cuenca

With the proliferation of social media and community discussion and forum websites, interest in understanding and explaining communication on the Internet (with an emphasis on language-based communication) is on the rise. Over time, new genres of interaction have developed that take place primarily or exclusively in online communication, and with them has developed the need to investigate the structure of these interactions, what their function is within conversations and communities, what their place is within certain Internet discourses, and over time what effects they have on communication on and offline. Thus far many of these genres have been deemed at best disruptive and at worst anti-social, but when studied from a judgment-free point of view show high levels of complexity and offer us excellent opportunities to understand how the Internet is shaping and being shaped by new kinds and contexts of communication. One of these genres of interaction that has gained significant fame on some very popular forums and discussion sites is called trolling. Trolling occurs on discussion sites or message boards when a user intentionally posts erroneous or inflammatory information with the intention of provoking a strong reaction out of other users. The objective of this study is to understand the complexities of trolling, as well as some of its functions and outcomes in anonymous online communication.

This study analyzes four online conversations between anonymous users, from the social aggregator website Reddit.com, using tools from the field of discourse analysis. The methodology of analysis draws from James Paul Gee's (2010) toolkit for discourse analysis, combining linguistic and sociological observations to answer questions about not only the qualities of the language of the conversations, but also the functions and results of the use of this language.[1] The combination of linguistic and social aspects of discourse includes questions about how participants structure their sentences, choose some words over others, etc. in order to draw attention to certain ideas, elicit particular reactions from other participants, create identities within an interaction, and ultimately shape the social structure of the communication.

Through this analysis, strides have been made in applying methods from textual discourse analysis and conversation analysis to Internet communication, for which the boundary between text and orality is much less clear. Conclusions have also been made about the role linguistic and paralinguistic features, such as sentence structure and prosody, play in interactions that involve trolling. Generalizations based on the analysis of the data also lead to conclusions about the role trolling

---

[1] Gee, James Paul (2010). *How to do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit*. New York, NY: Routledge.

can play in influencing online communication in a setting like Reddit.com, by de-incentivizing certain behaviors.

An Analysis of the Discourse of Internet Trolling: A Case Study of Reddit.com

Emily Merritt
Mount Holyoke College
Spring 2012

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to Mount Holyoke for being an institution that encourages growth and risk taking, and for allowing me to forge my own path as a Linguistics major. The past four years have been

I owe the successful completion of this thesis to my advisor, Esther Castro, whose feedback and encouragement kept me going all year. I am very grateful for her trust in me, when I came to her asking to do a thesis about a subject that has been researched very little up to now, using methods from a field neither of us had ever done research in. I could not have done this without her. Andrew Lass has been a great advisor and committee member, who was encouraging me to write a thesis before I even had a topic. His insights and great conversations in his office helped me expand my thinking as I wrote. Ana Rona has been an absolute pleasure to work with and a wonderful committee member. Her enthusiasm about the thesis and the topic of trolling always helped me continue to feel enthusiastic as well, and to keep the energy going, and I am so thankful for that. Last but definitely not least, I owe a huge amount of gratitude to Eleanor Townsley for agreeing to serve on my committee during her sabbatical, and for meeting with me this semester. She has offered an invaluable perspective on my writing and on the topic.

Index

Chapter 1. Introduction

With the proliferation of social media and community discussion and forum websites, interest in understanding and explaining communication on the Internet (with an emphasis on language-based communication) is on the rise. Over time, new genres of interaction have developed that take place primarily or exclusively in online communication, and with them has developed the need to investigate the structure of these interactions, what their function is within conversations and communities, what their place is within certain Internet discourses, and over time what effects they have on communication on and offline. Thus far many of these genres have been deemed at best disruptive and at worst anti-social, but when studied from a judgment-free point of view show high levels of complexity and offer us excellent opportunities to understand how the Internet is shaping and being shaped by new kinds and contexts of communication.

One of these genres of interaction that has gained significant fame on some very popular forums and discussion sites is called trolling. Trolling occurs on discussion sites or message boards when a user intentionally posts erroneous or inflammatory information with the intension of provoking a strong reaction out of other users. Trolling draws on the uneasiness of many Internet users about the truthfulness or reliability of online sources, and coaxes out those who are very

sensitive to the issue of misinformation online, with the intent of producing an overreaction from these users. While this and other forms of disruptive Internet communication are often labeled problematic or anti-social, these exchanges are in fact complex and purposeful, and may serve an important role in mediating or policing online communities, separating those who belong from the new or inexperienced members.

In this study I intend to analyze examples of trolling from the discussion site Reddit.com, using the tools of discourse analysis to attempt to answer some questions about this genre of interaction and the communities in which it occurs. Firstly, it will be necessary to answer questions about how trolling takes place, in particular why and how more experienced Internet users are able to identify an instance of trolling, and what causes a troll to be successful. It will then be necessary to try to understand whether trolling indeed serves the function of monitoring certain online behaviors and negotiating membership to online communities (an online community could either be a group of users who frequent a particular website or forum, or in a more abstract sense, users who frequently spend time online and are immersed in web culture). If this is true, more questions are opened up about how successful trolling is at performing these functions and what sorts of behaviors or membership it targets. In order to answer these questions I will use the tools of discourse analysis, and in particular conversation analysis, by looking at content, structure, and context, and drawing from James Paul Gee's discourse analysis toolkit.

Chapter 2. Review of Literature

2.1 Defining and Distinguishing Trolling

The objective of this study is to examine trolling as one of many elements of online discourse, using tools from various theories of discourse analysis, drawing particularly from the field of conversation analysis. Just a glance at what little literature exists that spotlights trolling as a genre of online discourse will reveal how little consistency exists with regard to the term. This study uses the term "troll" or "trolling" to refer to an action, according to the definition that trolling occurs on discussion sites or message boards when a user intentionally posts erroneous or inflammatory information with the intension of provoking a strong reaction out of other users. Since this is not the only definition used, it is helpful both to understand how this definition was derived for the purpose of this study, as well as to look briefly at some other uses of these terms. The term "troll" often is listed alongside other Internet behaviors that are labeled anywhere from benignly mischievous, to antisocial and damaging to online communities, all of which are very subjective claims and do little to identify these behaviors according to the characteristics of their discourse. Trolling originated alongside another distinct mode of interaction, which shares some similar characteristics, termed "flaming". In fact, in much of the literature about online social behavior will discuss flaming and its potential effects, but disregard trolling, or (more frequently) conflate the two. The confusion and subsequent taxonomic difficulty is understandable because of the very subtle nature of trolling. Establishing a less

morally-charged definition for trolling as a type of behavior, will both clarify the reasons for choosing some data over other, as well as facilitate an understanding of what tools will be used to analyze the data and to what end. Great efforts will be taken in this paper to maintain a less morally-based evaluation and definition of trolling. In order to achieve this, I will first present a definition of flaming (also known as "flame-baiting") and construct a working definition of trolling from this starting point.

Flaming is the purposeful, intentional posting of an inflammatory comment or message online, most often in the context of message boards, forums or news groups. A flame post is typically heated, insulting and derogatory, and challenges the value or validity of a group or individual and/or the views they espouse. The purpose is to get a rise out of other group members, and to start a heated argument on the subject. Flames, unless unsuccessful, are rarely a constructive means of behavior and can be damaging to the community, or even psychologically damaging to other group members, given a particularly emotionally-charged context. One specific kind of flaming that has received a great deal of attention in the media recently, and which in some cases has proven to be ground for legal prosecution, is the kind of harassment that can occur on website memorials to deceased individuals. Internet users in these cases have posted insulting, hateful, or even threatening messages on these websites and Facebook pages, often dedicated to teens who committed suicide, or victims of

other similarly tragic situations.[2] This kind of behavior is often cited in news stories as being a form of trolling, but for the purpose of this study, it can be more accurately categorized as flaming.

Trolling, as opposed to flaming, doesn't consist of insulting, harmful, or offensive statements, though it may result in these. Trolling may be frustrating to its victims, and may produce feelings of contempt, anger, or humiliation, but the goal is not to set out to cause psychological damage or affliction to an individual or group. Since trolling is a feature of online communication, it seems fitting to look to the Internet for a jumping off point in the attempt to define it. Two sources, Wikipedia and Urban Dictionary, will provide two distinct approaches to defining the act of trolling. While Wikipedia is highly monitored and citations are a requisite for information to remain in an article, Urban Dictionary accepts anonymous submissions, and moderation is minimal. In the case of Urban Dictionary, submitted definitions may be voted for or against by other users, producing a more democratically constructed definition.

The Wikipedia page for "Troll (Internet)" defines a troll as "someone who posts inflammatory, extraneous or off-topic messages in an online community [...] with the primary intent of provoking readers into an emotional response or of otherwise disrupting normal on-topic discussion." The article goes on to point out that the term "troll" may also be used to refer to the post itself, which is how it

---

[2] http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/it-just-makes-me-happy-when-i-can-make-someone-angry-a-special-investigation-into-the-dark-world-of-trolling/story-fn7bfu22-1226278282934

will be used in the majority of this study, and which I will explain in further detail. Wikipedia attempts to distinguish between trolling as a concept related to online discourse and the use that the media has made of the term, which is largely subjective.

Urban Dictionary, as was previously mentioned, accepts submissions from anonymous users, and evaluation of its definitions consists of positive or negative votes from other users. For this reason, finding a well-articulated definition of a term can sometimes be a challenge. One of the more highly rated definitions submitted for the word "trolling" (posted April 30, 2009) also articulates a relatively neutral definition of the behavior:

"Trolling is trying to get a rise out of someone. Forcing them to respond to you, either through wise-crackery, posting incorrect information, asking blatantly stupid questions, or other foolishness. However, trolling statements are never true or are ever meant to be construed as such. Nearly all trolled statements are meant to be funny to some people, so it does have some social/entertainment value.

'Trolling' isn't simply 'harmful statements'. Intentionally insulting/libelous statements are 'flaming'."

Many other definitions have been submitted to Urban Dictionary about trolling, most of them negative, but this definition offers a somewhat more neutral view, and attempts to describe the nature of the interaction itself, as opposed to its potential psychosocial consequences. This definition also adds the idea that there is some humor intended by the author of a troll, which is a very important point, and is critical to understanding how trolling distinguishes itself from flaming. Humor has not been integrated into the definition used in this study, however, due

to the fact that what is humorous is a very subjective issue, and cannot be used as a reliable means of determining whether or not an interaction constitutes an instance of trolling.

The writers of the Wikipedia article on trolling point out astutely that the mass media has adopted a very emotionally-charged definition of what a troll is, or who a troll is. A perfect example of this is the New York Times article from August of 2008, "The Trolls Among Us". The author of this article conducted interviews with some of the web's most notorious "trolls" and recounted the mayhem they cause online, from setting up massive flame wars against memorial web pages for teen suicides, or securing thousands of social security numbers. While these people self-identify as trolls, it is important to distinguish between these people (some of whom should more aptly be deemed hackers) and one particular facet of Internet discourse. Just as a person who puts out a fire (or several) is not considered, as a matter of course, a "firefighter" and the job of a firefighter consists of more than putting out fires, so it is the case that one who trolls is not necessarily a "troll", and those who we deem to be "trolls" earn the title by doing much more than trolling alone.

Finally, one of the most important distinctions that must be made when examining these kinds of online behavior is to be wary of deeming certain modes of interaction to be "disruptive" without answering the question "what is being disrupted?". As we will see, both Michele Tepper (1997) and Judith Donath's (1998) work represent trolling as a disruptive practice, but while Donath's

presentation of trolling focuses on the disruption of the proceedings and structure of the communities she studied, Tepper's trolling focuses on the disruption of discourse and conversation (which will be discussed more with regard to Grice's maxims), but with the goal of avoiding disruption of a different kind, and in fact providing a normative force for the community.

2.2 Credibility, Moderation, and Metacommunication in Online Communication

In order to understand trolling's place in online interactions, one must first step back in an attempt to understand the greater context of online communication and its unique characteristics. Much of online communication takes place in settings where the ability to contribute is open to just about anyone with an Internet connection, users are able to maintain anonymity, consequences for aggressive behavior are limited, and where authenticity must be questioned constantly. Because these characteristics pose some unusual challenges to social interactions, participants of online interactions (as well as the community leaders) employ various mechanisms to cope with these challenges and to provide order and structure to online communication.

Since the rise of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), researchers from a variety of fields have witnessed a need for further investigation into the social and interactional characteristics of online communities. Computer scientists must understand how users interact using their tools so that they can build better tools and online infrastructures. Those concerned with business have tried to gain

an understanding of the risks and benefits of bringing networking, hiring and marketing (among other economic activities) into online social environments. Sociologists and anthropologists have discovered the need to investigate these communities due to the sheer amount of time many people are now spending online. Here, I will examine three topics which have been studied in light of different kinds of communities and interaction than I will be examining, but which offer particularly significant relevance to the topic at hand. These topics are: credibility of information, moderation of online forums, and metacommunication in online communities.

Credibility of online information has been a serious issue since the very beginning of Internet usage. For many years, because there were few ways to verify information, a common approach was to not wholly believe or trust anything found on the web. Since then, however, many serious activities have found their place online, and certain online settings dictate that online identities should accurately portray information about real-world identities (social media sites, dating services, online resumes and professional websites, to name a few), and many Internet users have valid personal information stored online through social media sites, blogs, or professional sites of various kinds. Now the question has shifted from whether or not a user can trust any information on the web, but to how to determine what information can be trusted. One study focused on how to identify trustworthy information in an online personal context.

Ficarra, Vivas and Romo (2009) conducted a study of professional and

personal information found on public and private websites in Spain and Italy. Some of the kinds of information examined in this study included professional reviews, references, credentials, etc. Using the metrics they have developed to determine invalid information, Ficarra et al. determined that 89% of the data they had collected involved false information in one way or another, quite a high percentage considering many of these websites were hosted or run by colleges and universities. The conclusions made by the researchers were that in order to avoid accepting misinformation as valid, professionals should look for and post images of degrees or credentials, links to corroborating websites, etc. to support whatever information is given.

This study examines how information may be judged from a professional standpoint, but the concerns it addresses are the same as on many communication-oriented online settings. Professionals in academia or various industries require ways of interpreting the credibility or veracity of information without having to be proficient in a variety of Internet activities. In fact, across the Internet, the credibility of information is a vital issue, and those who surf the web must develop a sense of what information and sources can be trusted and to what degree. Some Internet users take it upon themselves to identify and even correct any erroneous information they encounter, by commenting on incorrect posts, editing the information on online encyclopedias (known as wikis) or emailing the owners of websites and blogs). This is the behavior that is targeted by trolling, as trolling attempts to elicit strong responses from those users who feel a strong

sense of duty to correct the false information found online. If we put this information together with the theory that trolling acts as a means of defining the boundaries of the community of experienced Internet users, separating them from the "outsider" inexperienced Internet users, that would indicate that membership to this community requires a certain level of comfort with the idea that not all information encountered on the web is or should be correct, and an understanding of what online contexts and markers indicate greater reliability as far as the credibility of information goes.

Now we move from credibility to the topic of moderating of online communities. Moderation is one aspect or role within the greater responsibilities of being a leader or authority figure of a web space where interaction between members is taking place, either in the form of chat rooms (conversation in real-time) or on forums or message boards (asynchronous communication). The act of moderating a website can take a variety of forms in different degrees of forcefulness, from replying to posts, referencing the site's guidelines for interaction, to the removal of spam or overly aggressive messages. Depending on the site's rules of conduct and take on moderation, those in charge can be involved directly or indirectly to greater or lesser degrees, and may choose to remove some posts, but simply post a reminder for members to behave themselves on another.

The debate over whether to take a more hands-on, dominant approach to online leadership, versus a subtler role, is important when considering how online

social groups and sites are structured and run. Jill Jameson (2009) performed a qualitative study looking at different approaches to leadership in online communities. Jameson examined discussion threads from online communities, looking at the development of conversations when leaders are clearly present and when they lack presence. All the threads in question exhibited some moment or moments when the atmosphere became less friendly and negative, aggressive comments began to appear. In some of these instances the presence of site leaders or administrators served to alleviate these situations, while in others their lack of presence or particular leadership style exacerbated the situation.

The evidence put forward by this study supports the hypothesis proposed by Jameson, that online leaders must adopt a somewhat paradoxical strategy of maintaining a level of both invisibility and high visibility in member interaction. Administrators must also be both friendly and informal at times, but formal and direct at others. While this is thus far the reported ideal for online moderation, this is not to say that most moderators use these tactics. Jameson's study shows how problematic interaction can become when a moderator chooses to behave in unhelpful ways or is not present in interactions. The need for better moderation in some online communities may give rise to alternative and indirect methods by which members themselves may attempt to police interaction and social structure in these communities. If analysis of trolling shows that it serves as one of these methods, more may be learned about what issues typically come about due to a lack of administrator intervention, as well as what social structures online

communities take on in these kinds of situations.

Lastly, metacommunication is an important facet of any interactive setting because it allows interlocutors to comment on the communicative activity in which they are participating. In Lanamäki and Päivärinta's 2009 study of metacommunication practices in online communities, the researchers outline six patterns by which metacommunication is used to refer to different aspects of communication online. The first two of these patterns relate to the community itself and its structure. The first of these two patterns refers to the roles and relationships of members of the community, while the second pattern refers back to how information is shared and the communicative styles or habits of members. As a whole, metacommunication can serve to shape interactions, guide the general atmosphere of the site, as well as reinforce and highlight its social structure. This is significant if we interpret elements of a troll-based interaction to be types of metacommunication. Trolling on its own provides critique or commentary on certain forms on online interaction through something akin to satire, and alone cannot be considered strict metacommunication. However, the commentary cannot be completed without some participant coming along and stating that a troll has occurred. Because of this need, trolling remains unfulfilled without the use of metacommunication. The results of this study may also find that metacommunication occurs with frequency when the genre of interaction is a troll.

2.3 Michele Tepper -- The Insider Troll

The first take on trolling that I will use as a base from which I analyze trolling is Michele Tepper's chapter "Usenet Communities and the Cultural Politics of Information", from *Internet Culture* (Porter, 1997). Much of Tepper's piece is dedicated to describing the characteristics and functions of trolling, as it occurs within the Usenet newsgroup known as alt.folklore.urban (also referred to as AFU). Tepper comes to the conclusion that trolling serves the primary purpose of demarcating and reinforcing membership of online communities, in the form of a subtle and complex game of discourse.

The objective of this newsgroup is to discuss what they call urban folklore, also known as urban legends, by posting questions or comments about stories they've heard and the potential veracity or falsehood of these. Occasionally, a post will be egregiously incorrect, to the point of being outrageous, and users will step in with varying degrees of assertiveness, to set the story straight. Posts like this are often considered troll posts, as the original poster may be a well-informed member of the community who is engaging in a particular kind of language game. Tepper explains that "In trolling's Usenet incarnation, the hook is baited with misinformation of a specific kind: if it is at first glance incorrect, and at second or third glance comically incorrect, in a deliberately comic way, it's probably a good troll." Experienced posters in the online newsgroup, according to this model of trolling, will take time out of their serious, intellectually-motivated posting, to send out some kind of erroneous

message and wait for posters who are not wholly familiar with the culture of the group to fall for the bait. Victims of a successful troll, in this case, typically reply with an incredulous, derogatory, or sometimes angry response. These responses may or may not be followed-up by more knowledgeable members of the community, either compounding on the confusion originally caused or informing the responders of their status as baited "newbies" (naive members of an online community).

I will refer to this model as the "Insider Troll" as it hinges upon the idea that the user posting the troll is a member of the community, whose goal is to enforce certain norms that are widely held in interaction among members, but which are unfamiliar to new users. The context of this model is that of a community (AFU) that senses it is being overrun with new members of the community who behave as if they held the same status as "old hats" (the name for more experienced community members). Because on the surface, everyone in this community looks the same (they appear as an email and a name, and little more), the need for greater distinction is necessary, and a complex game of deception begins, where the objective is spotting sincerely misinformed posts from troll posts, and behaving accordingly.

It is necessary to point out that the book in which this article was published is from 1997 and there have been huge changes since then in the nature of online communities. On the other hand, this piece uses Usenet as a case study for the phenomenon of trolling, and Usenet is generally considered to be the

precursor to the kinds of sites will be examined in this study. Therefore this article will offer some basis for understanding certain basic features of this particular kind of interaction, but given that trolling may have changed considerably since Tepper's research took place, it is best viewed as a look at the precursor to the trolling Internet users encounter today. Tepper considers the possibility that "trolling's continued effectiveness is also hampered by its previous successes." In other words, as trolling as a genre of interaction increases its presence on the Internet, less time spent online in necessary to become aware of this practice, which reduces its effectiveness as a way of separating the Internet veterans from the newer users.

2.4 Judith Donath -- The Impostor Troll

Judith Donath presents a different take on trolling, which I will refer to as the "Impostor Troll", in her 1998 paper "Identity and deception in the virtual community". Donath's community of interest is also Usenet users, though she provides examples from three different newsgroups, one dedicated to motorcycle riding, maintenance, and culture, another whose objective is to give cat owners and prospective cat owners a forum to share and request advice about their pets, and a third which is a wedding newsgroup, for brides and those planning weddings to share their experiences and ask questions. Donath argues that the presence of trolls, who she claims are outsiders who dedicate time to learning about the communities and infiltrate them with misinformation, causing confusion and irritation, are harmful to the proceedings, structure, and openness of these

communities.

Donath conducts her research from a slightly more discourse-oriented perspective than Tepper, who combined looking at instances of trolling with interviewing Usenet users. Donath only examines the posts and replies, however she only examines the content of the messages, as opposed to looking at their form or structure. The three examples she provides cover a spectrum of situations and consequences of trolling, ranging from a post that could be either judged as a relatively neutral troll or as simply a naive posting by a new user, to a post written with relatively malicious intentions. Donath primarily uses member responses as primary evidence for determining the consequences of these trolls to the community, which is a useful starting point, but limits the scope of the conclusions that can be made.

An example of the limiting effect of this kind of analysis is the conclusion that Donath draws from the serial troll-poster (I will refrain from using the term "troll" to refer to a person) who frequents the wedding newsgroup. This user's online identity is that of a woman named Cheryl (bearing the username Ultimatego) who tended to express a formal, traditional, and highly prescriptive set of opinions on how weddings should be planned and conducted. According to Donath, these posts were off-putting at the outset, but became mean-spirited and rude. Firstly, whether or not these posts would be considered "trolls" according to the definition being utilized in this paper is up for debate; however, if we consider that they are trolls (or set aside those posts which would be better considered

"flames"), we must examine more than the reactions of other individual users or simply the potential for these posts to produce hurt feelings and user anxiety. While it is impossible to know exactly what other evidence Donath used to come to her conclusion that these posts were harmful and only harmful to this community, I would pose some hypotheses that may begin to expand what we consider to be the consequences of interactions like this. Firstly, Donath states that the majority of users provide a welcoming, supportive atmosphere within the community, but just as there is a range of interactions within any community, we can safely assume the same is true here. It may be possible that Ultimatego's intent is to parody a certain sub-group of users who share similarly traditional, prescriptive views, and attempt to show the problematic nature of these by taking this kind of perspective to the extreme. On the other hand, Ultimatego's posts may be a negative response to the notion that there is a right or wrong way to carry out a wedding or reception, and is attempting to elicit in other users an equally negative response, through the use of a kind of reverse psychology. To really understand the consequences of this type of posting would require much more analysis, and more reflection on the place trolling has in a greater discourse among online communities.

2.5 Social Realism and Trolling

The newness of the field of internet studies means that, despite there being increasing numbers of academics and researchers interested and active in this field, there has yet to be a widely agreed upon standard for most aspects of online

research. As we enter a relatively new realm of study, one of the most crucial determining factors in what results are produced is the approach to research and our assumptions about the nature of the conclusions that may be reached. Cameron et al. (1992) explore three possible approaches to analyzing social interactions in "Power/Knowledge: The Politics of Social Science". The three approaches that are in question in this piece are positivism, relativism and realism. While positivism could be characterized as what we consider to be the scientific method, relativism takes the position that there is no truth or reality free of values, while realism holds the stance that there is a reality that exists outside of human observation, but that this reality may be beyond our ability to perceive and represent it. Cameron et al. settle on this last approach as one that can produce the most informed, well-reasoned results in social science. By accepting the realist's view, we can rely on the notion that much of what exists can be known and possesses some objective reality, though even our best efforts may prove ineffective in producing a perfect representation of this reality.

This realism-based approach extends to the notion of social reality, as described by Cameron et al. One of the salient consequences of realism in the social sciences is that researchers may presume to know what phenomenon they are witnessing (in real time or after the fact) but this understanding is something that should not be taken for granted. An argument for this is that a researcher may observe an action that s/he recognizes, but to the agent who is performing it, it may be a different action entirely, constitute a different meaning, or provide a

different function in ways not initially understood. As Cameron et al. put it, "the question 'what is going on here' cannot be answered without reference to the agent's own understanding of what she is doing." This brings up, then the question of how to judge what is going on in a scenario where it is not possible to find out from the agent what s/he considers her/himself to be doing. Such is the case in this study, where participants in the interaction are anonymous, and an alternative set of cues will be necessary to determine each agent's understanding of the situation and their own actions.

2.6 Interactional-Normative Framework

Similar to Donath's negative framing of trolling, many interesting and unique types of online interaction have typically been grouped together, labeled as "anti-social" and treated in a very subjective way, both in the media and in much of the academic literature that exists on internet behavior. The challenge at this stage is to begin to build a reliable, objective taxonomy and to work to understand how concepts relate to one another in different online contexts.

One of the most helpful theories that combat the traditional view of disruptive Internet communication behaviors (both flaming and trolling) comes from O'Sullivan and Flanagin (2003): the Interactional-Normative Framework. The objective of the Interactional-Normative Framework is to highlight the complexity of aggressive online discourse. In most previous literature, only two perspectives (or even only one) were examined, that of the recipient of the aggressive message and, principally, that of the onlooker of the interaction, in

other words, the interpretation of the researcher about what is happening. No regard was given to the perspective of the sender of the aggressive or disruptive message. O'Sullivan and Flanagin applied this theory specifically to the case of flaming, which is arguably a much more straightforward form of interacting online than trolling, as the Normative-Interaction Framework states that in a successful flame, all parties agree that the message was both intended to be aggressive and was recognized as aggressive. In a troll, on the other hand, the success of the troll relies on at the receiving party/ies misinterpreting the message. One adaptation to the Interactional-Normative Framework that is required for it to apply to trolling is to change the terminology for the participants. Whereas flaming includes three participant categories, sender, recipient and onlooker, trolling would require four categories, and a change in terms, due to the fact that a troll may be posted in response to an original post or it could be an original post itself. The four participants are: sender (the poster of the troll), troll-aware responder, troll-unaware responder, and onlooker. The second and third categories depend on the awareness of the individual of the existence of trolling as a type of online interaction, not on their interpretation of the post in question.

Understanding intentions and interpretations will be both a critical part of analyzing trolling and one of the biggest challenges, due to the anonymous setting and indirect nature of the interaction. It is a process of give and take, where intentions are used to deconstruct and analyze the discourse, while the structure and characteristics of the discourse will be formative in building hypotheses about

the intentions of participants.

2.7 Discourse: More than Language-in-use

Discourse analysis has the potential to offer a well-rounded and comprehensive analysis of this kind of interaction. The data that will be collected and analyzed will be entirely text-based, partly due to the nature of the medium being examined and partly due to the anonymous nature of the community. Discourse analysis (and in particular, conversation analysis) focuses on the examination of texts and language to show both how language is used and to learn about deeper, unarticulated structures and relationships in human communication. Jaworski and Coupland (2001) stress the notion that discourse is language in use, but it is also more than that, as it also reflects and shapes the interplay of social structures and dynamic social orders. Along with this approach to discourse is the view that although discourse analysis originated from the tradition of linguistics, it evolved to be much more than a simple linguistic analysis. These assertions are critical to the fulfillment of the goal of this study, to use discourse to understand what trolling does and says about online communities and the way they are structured, conceived and maintained.

Another important theory of discourse is the multi-voiced nature of texts, which comes from M.M. Bakhtin's (1986) work, and is based on the idea that texts often contain many voices, are sometimes directed at multiple audiences and refer back to other texts. This is critical to note in interactions as complex as the ones seen in situations of online trolling, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the idea

of multiple voices is crucial because troll posters can be serious posters in other contexts, so we may consider that the voice they are using or reflecting is different from that of other posts, or that it may even change part way through the discourse. Secondly, because the cases being examined here are public, they will by nature have multiple audiences, and the act of trolling specifically targets two main audiences, the first being the poster who was caught up in the troll and the second being those members of the community who see the interaction and understand what the troll poster is doing (this was discussed in greater detail with regard to the Interactional-Normative Framework), therefore the troll must think carefully about how s/he phrases the troll and any subsequent messages, so as to successfully address both audiences. The concept that texts are referential is particularly relevant in online contexts, due to the proliferation of memes (which will be touched on briefly in this study) which are highly referential, as well as internet lore.

James Paul Gee's (2005) theory of Big D Discourse and Little d discourse adds to these concepts of discourse, by defining two concepts, Discourse with a capital "d", which refers to language in use along with all of the accompanying social forces and hierarchies, meanings, messages, etc., and discourse with a lower-case "d", which refers to the purely linguistic aspects of discourse and its analysis. This second kind of discourse is represented mainly in the texts or conversations that can be pointed to and studied, while Discourse is a much more abstract concept. Gee explains the various elements and characteristics of

Discourses, for example the transiency and dynamism that allows them to divide to form sub-Discourses, or combine into a new Discourse, as well as the loss and emergency of old and new Discourses. While one individual will participate in, prescribe to, and evoke a variety of Discourses over time, these Discourses always represent some community or other, be it abstract or concrete. Because of this, there is overlap among the members of these Discourse Communities. While the Internet could be considered a community, composed of hundreds of thousands of members, with its own Discourse attached to it, this Discourse is very large and amorphous, with few identifying features, due to the huge variability among its members. In reality the Internet contains within it many Discourses, some of which are unique to this online setting, while others simply get transposed to this environment. A website itself represents its own Discourse Community, particularly if it offers interactive and interactional features.

2.8 Logic and Inference in Conversation Analysis

An observation that is frequently made about communication is the huge quantity of information or knowledge that goes unspoken (or written) but which is understood by all parties involved, when compared to the quantity of what is actually said or written. This observation is even more important to make when discussing an interaction like trolling, which is subtle and intentionally indirect, and even involves intentional misunderstandings. H.P. Grice (1975) provides a starting point for understanding these kinds of interactions in his "Logic and Conversation".

Grice attempts to understand what logic governs the course of a conversation and allows a conversation to proceed normally, or conversely, to be unsuccessful due to the mismanagement of one or more parties. Grice begins by illustrating how often we imply what we mean rather than say it directly, in conversation. This leads him to go in search of the logic that allows these interactions to be successfully understood and built upon by the participants. He develops a series of maxims and important qualities of conversation, the set of which are critical to understanding what makes trolling a very particular form of interaction. The first general principle on which conversation is based, which Grice calls the Cooperative Principle, is the idea that participants must make their "conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged." (Grice, 78) In effect, there is a general assumption that all parties in a conversation share a general purpose that they are agreeing to cooperatively work towards by making conversation. Going back to the discussion of the disruptiveness of trolling, it is now possible, on the basis of what Grice has written, to indicate the first level of disruption that occurs in trolling. This first level is the absence of a shared goal among parties. While the goal of most members of an online community is to comply with the objectives laid out by the moderators or founders of that community (which may be explicitly stated on the site, or may be implicit in the nature of the community), while the user who posts a troll clearly has an ulterior purpose. To discover that purpose or set of purposes

is one of the primary goals of this study.

Grice goes on to outline four categories of maxims of discourse: Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner. The maxims can be paraphrased relatively easily and represent fairly typical rules of conversation. The category of maxims of quantity, for example, can be paraphrased broadly to say "do not say too much or too little", or in more words "be as informative as is possible at the time for the purposes of the conversation, but do not share more information than is called for." I will gloss over the other two categories of relation and manner because they are not quite as relevant at this time as that of quality, which I will discuss in detail. The maxims of quality are particularly important to the issue of trolling, because they are violated by troll posters. The maxims dictate, in Grice's words, "Do not say what you believe to be false," and "Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence." (Grice, 78) This is violated when posters intentionally write messages that they know to be absurdly false. If Grice's maxims are what mediates a conversation and facilitate a certain logic and fluidity of interaction, the breaking of one or more maxims cause a disruption in this flow. To return to the brief discussion that was made earlier about precautions that should be taken when using the term "disrupt", the "what" that is being disrupted here is the discourse or conversation. Compliance or noncompliance with the maxims says nothing about a subjective, qualitative evaluation of the consequences of the interaction, only whether or not the logic of the conversation was maintained.

Another characteristic of trolling, which must be kept in mind during

analysis, is the potential for different interpretations of the message (in accordance with the Interactional-Normative Framework) and how this both influences and is influenced by the discourse. Relevant to this issue is John J. Gumperz's (1977) work on the place of sociocultural knowledge in conversation. The core of Gumperz's discussion of discourse is his definition of the term "conversational inference": "the 'situated' or context-bound process of interpretation, by means of which participants in a conversation assess others' intentions, and on which they base their response." (Gumperz, 98) The centrality of intentions in this definition makes it particularly relevant to this topic, as troll posts may be structured in such a way as to make the poster's intentions unclear to some, but perceivable to others. According to Gumperz, conversational inference is demonstrated in the very act of conversing, in which we build upon ideas and utterances to develop a context-based conversation. One very pertinent assertion about the dynamic nature of discourse as a social act, goes as follows: "Assumptions about role and status relationships vary as the conversation progresses, and these changes are signaled through speech itself." (Gumperz, 99) This allows us to open up the conversation to issues of group formation and the status of participants as belonging or not belonging to imagined communities, based on discourse. He also makes the point that some utterances cannot be initially interpreted without inferences that can only be drawn from utterances that come later on in the discourse. He illustrates this with an example of a wry joke that cannot be understood immediately after it is uttered, until another utterance is

made that creates a pattern that creates context for the original utterance. From here, Gumperz goes into greater detail about the methods we use to infer meaning in the utterances of others. The key concept here is that of the "contextualization cue", which Gumperz says "refers to any aspect of the surface for of utterances which, when mapped onto message content, can be shown to be functional in the signaling of interpretative frames." (Gumperz, 102) An important goal in the analysis of examples of trolling will be to discover whether any reliable contextualization cues exist which indicate whether or not a certain posting is a troll. Given that some readers will be able to initially identify a troll and others will not, there must be some cues which lead knowledgeable readers to recognize the interaction for what it is, but it remains to be seen whether those cues are mostly situated in the content of the message or if some are also found in its form or structure.

2.9 Talk and Technology: Infrastructure Meets Communication
As the Internet is a new and evolving technology and medium for communication, the study of online language is also still new and few standards or models have been put forth, to provide methods for conducting inquiries into online discourse. Much speculation has been made about the ways that the Internet is changing the way people communicate and how they use language. Hypotheses have been constructed, regarding the consequences of the observed hybridity of Internet language, a fusion of talk and text. Language on the Internet seems to be more informal in the way that that spoken conversation tends to be,

but graphic and sometimes much slower in the same way that written text is. David Crystal, in *Internet Linguistics* (2011), claims that this debate over Internet language's relative similarities to speech versus text is pointless because it relies on the fictitious dichotomy between speech and text. Crystal suggests that, rather than a dichotomy, or even a spectrum, language be evaluated on a "multidimensional continuum", where different characteristics that can be applied in lesser or greater degrees to talk and text, as well as a wide variety of other media.

In this continuum, which characteristics need to be highlighted and which are not necessary to mention varies depending on the medium. For example, with respect to talking on the phone versus speaking to someone in person, it is necessary to point out that the medium restricts the use of interpersonal visual cues (for example, body language) as a factor in discourse. On the other hand, when comparing talking on the phone to writing emails, the lack of body language is a characteristic that is shared by both, and it would be better to highlight different characteristics. The analysis of these different characteristics, and the model we begin to create of the medium on the basis of this analysis, come together with other factors to construct the context of the conversation. With regard to context, Emanuel Schegloff (1991) presents us with the concept of procedural consequentiality. The theory behind this concept is that the contexts which we feel should be applied to a given discourse require that it have some kind of effect on the structure of the discourse. For example, stating that a certain

interaction takes place in a courtroom has very clear implications for the structure and manner of discourse that transpires, while stating that the context is "in the morning" may or may not be relevant, depending on the particular instance. In order to adapt this theory to the present needs, it will be necessary to develop a sense of what is of procedural consequence when describing discourse online.

Factors with procedural consequence online can be of a social nature as well as a technical nature. The focus of a particular newsgroup, along with the (explicit or implicit) rules for posting and discussion, either outlined by the moderators or acknowledged by the community, are examples of social factors that contribute to the context of the discourse. Depending on the forum or website, there may be restrictions or limitations of a technical nature, which affect the discourse in a variety of ways. For example, different websites may offer more or less options for text formatting, inclusion of hyperlinks, embedded images, or even time constraints for the number of posts a user may write.

Another important component of a thorough analysis of a conversation is the careful labeling of participants. Schegloff, again, offers a basis from which we can begin to consider which labels are most appropriate given a discourse or conversation. Schegloff attempts to construct some kind of logic that can determine which categories may be used to describe the members present during a particular discourse. The categories, as he defines them, are composed of different labels that one could apply to members or contexts, and are typically distributed such that a member, for example, could receive different labels from different

categories, but only one label per category, although multiple members may receive the same label. An example would be in a conversation between a mother and son, under the category gender, one would receive the label female and the other male, but they could also receive labels from the categories of age or occupation (for example). Schegloff's question here is what determines our choices of categorization in particular instances. For example, we would not deem "religion" to be an appropriate category to select in the context of a job interview, unless something about the content or context of the interview led us to believe it was relevant. It is this idea of relevance that Schegloff intends to address.

One concept that Schegloff draws upon, from Harvey Sacks (1972) is that of Pn adequacy, which describes certain categories that describe the entire population. Age, for instance, is Pn adequate because anyone in a population can be labeled according to this category (i.e. everyone is of a certain age), whereas the category of employee-type at a hospital is not, because it only applies to a section of the population (those who work at a hospital). At the end of his deliberation on the issue of what choices are most relevant in analyzing discourse, he determines that there is no formula for deciding upon a category to draw from, but rather it is an analytic process that can show the significant consequences of social structure in interaction. In other words, in working to decide what we, as researchers, or the members of discourses themselves, decide to label others can provide us with clues as to what statuses and roles are relevant in human interaction.

Just as conversation analysis as a whole is not formulaic, there is also no exact formula by which the most appropriate labels for context and participant may be determined. The process, here, will be to begin to generate an understanding of what differentiates an online medium from others, in terms of where we find procedural consequentiality. It will also be a matter of discerning to what degree the participants dictate the context or the context dictates the labeling of participants. To what degree does the anonymous, public nature of an online community dictate how categories become applied to its members? In what ways do the characteristics of these members contribute to the context of the discussion? These will be crucial questions in the analysis of data.

2.10 Tools and Transcriptions

Finally, I will begin to touch on some issues regarding methods. As has been discussed throughout this chapter, the first challenge in conducting an analysis of an online conversation is deciding how to adapt pre-existing theories and methods to a new medium. The challenge faced traditionally by conversation analysts has been how to establish a set of methods for representing a spoken conversation graphically, combining content along with phonetic and prosodic information. Text-based conversations in an online setting eliminate this kind of dilemma. However, conversation analysis has shown how significant phonetic, prosodic and non-linguistic data can be to understanding discourse. The challenge now will be to discover what equivalent information can be gathered from this new setting. Because of this, the literature on transcription notation and discourse

analysis methods and tools will not be as useful as a model for conducting the analysis itself, of online conversations, but rather it will be useful to examine the process by which conversation analysts have deemed certain kinds of data (phonetic, prosodic, etc.) to be significant, and to use this kind of process to search for equivalent in this new medium.

Elinor Ochs's (1979) work on the theory of transcription notation or representation poses some important questions that must be addressed in the process of constructing a model for Internet conversation analysis. The objective of her writing is to suggest that discourse analysts look critically at what may seem superficial or obvious kinds of structures during the process of transcription, but which can affect the way that data is perceived. Ochs discusses top-to-bottom and left-to-right biases, suggesting that directional choices with regards to the layout of our data can strongly impact the potential interpretations of the content itself. These kinds of considerations will be critical in the process of making choices about how best to represent the various textual and technical layers of an online conversation.

2.11 Research Questions

As a result of these considerations, I have developed the following research questions for my study of trolling on the message board website Reddit.com:

What are the linguistic resources that users employ in a troll?

What function does trolling serve in Computer Mediated Communication?

What are the various outcomes of a troll and how do they come to pass?

What are ways in which trolls disrupt online communication?

Chapter 3. Methods

This chapter covers information regarding the details of the context from which the data used in this study was taken, the social aggregation website Reddit.com. It covers information on the history and policies of the website, as well as information on the site's user-base. In addition, information will be laid out about the infrastructure and technical functions of the webpage, as well as how those relate to the proceedings of its users and the communication for which it serves as a venue.

The discussion that follows also provides information on the data to be analyzed in this study, including information on the conversations that will serve as the data, characteristics of these, and also how data was collected and will be represented in the appendices.

Finally, the chapter discusses the methodological framework, the theoretical basis for analysis. This includes a detailed description of the tools that will be used in the analytical process. The last piece of this chapter is a table that outlines both the tools to be used, as well as their connections to the conceptual basis of this study, as described in the review of literature.

3.1 Reddit.com: An Introduction to the Social Aggregation Website

In order to best understand the online comment threads that comprise the data to be analyzed in this study, it is first necessary to understand the context in which these conversations arose, including the history, infrastructure, and some elements of the culture of the website where they are found.

Reddit.com falls under the category of "social aggregation website",[3] although it is also referred to as a "social news site",[4] and less accurately as a "social networking site".[5] It is a forum for the aggregation of links to images, videos, articles, and other webpages, as well as text-based posts hosted on Reddit itself, and user comments about all of these. In that sense it is a social aggregation site, as links are aggregated onto a single site, along with commentary about them. It can also be considered a social news site because the content it displays is constantly changing. While all of its content cannot be considered news, in the journalistic sense, it functions as a way of seeing what topics, articles, events, or sentiments are in the spotlight within the rather vast Reddit community on a given day. The fact that Reddit can function this way is in large part due to the fact that it receives millions of pageviews everyday,[6] and has hundreds of thousands of registered users who can vote on and contribute content (more on voting and contributing will be discussed later).[7] Reddit fits the description of a social networking site to a lesser degree because of its anonymous nature, the lack of detail in user profiles, and the limited ability for users to form networks.

An important point to consider, particularly for this study, is the labeling of Reddit as an online community. The term "online community" has existed for

[3] http://www.webpronews.com/reddit-topped-two-billion-pageviews-in-december-2012-01
[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reddit
[5] http://www.itworld.com/security/246339/reddit-makes-gross-mistakes-trying-write-bill-replace-abusive-sopa-pipa
[6] http://www.webpronews.com/reddit-topped-two-billion-pageviews-in-december-2012-01
[7] http://www.reddit.com/reddits/

many years since the Internet first was established, and pushed the boundaries of what was traditionally considered a "community" in the fields of sociology and anthropology, which was typically conceived of as a group of individuals who interact face-to-face on a regular basis; however, there is still debate over what criteria or methods to use in positing a definition for what constitutes or does not constitute an online community. While some researchers have proposed methods that focus on analyzing the content or purpose of a website to determine whether it deserves the label of "online community", others, like Amy Bruckman and James Hudson, have proposed that this term will remain somewhat vague, but that a community should be judged based on membership, and the differences between new users and those users who are considered to be within the community (Hudson, 2005).

The huge number of Reddit members makes it somewhat difficult to define them as a community based on a discrete set of unifying interests, characteristics or behaviors, though posts will sometimes allude to the "likes" or "interests" of Reddit, as a collective. Users on this website are also often classified according to their degree of participation or membership in the community. For example, someone who spends time on Reddit, particularly if they spend time contributing links or comments, is considered to be a "redditor", and the term occurs frequently on the site.[8] The term "lurker" is also used to describe membership within the community, and denotes someone who spends

---

[8] http://www.reddit.com/search?q=redditor&restrict_sr=off&sort=relevance

time reading posts, but does not contribute.[9] Together, these characteristics about Reddit's user-base provide reasonable justification to designate Reddit as an online community.

3.2 Subreddits and Moderators

In order to organize the huge amount of content that is posted to Reddit everyday, it is divided into pages called subreddits. These sub-sites are separated thematically, and are referred to either by name (e.g. AskReddit, Pics, WorldNews) or with the prefix r/[subreddit name] (e.g. r/politics, r/pics, r/gaming). Subreddits are essentially small communities within the larger user community, due to the fact that each individual subreddit is moderated according to its own set of guidelines and rules of conduct, users may subscribe to the subreddit, allowing them to see posts from that page immediately when they log in, and subreddits often develop a culture of inside jokes or frequently dicussed topics. Reddit is moderated, meaning a staff of users exists, known as moderators, with special privileges that allow them to remove certain posts and comments that violate the rules of conduct for particular subreddits; however, there is also a strong devotion on the part of the founders and staff who run the website, to the notion of user-driven content, meaning that subreddits dedicated to any legal content may be created, even if the theme is deemed by most to be in bad taste.

Moderators of subreddits will remove different kinds of posts, depending on the rules of the particular subreddit, but official Reddit moderators will also

---

[9] http://www.reddit.com/search?q=lurker&restrict_sr=off&sort=relevance

remove certain content from anywhere on the site according to a few general

rules. Illegal content (such a child pornography) is strictly forbidden and is

removed from the site by moderators, as is any kind of personal information or

links to personal information.[10] Reddit is strictly an anonymous site, in large part

as an effort to prevent the kind of online and offline harassment that can happen

when personal information is shared.

3.3 Content Distribution and Reddit's User Interface

Whereas many websites are known for eye-catching designs, unique color

pallets, or intuitive navigation, Reddit has retained a very simple, minimalist

design, with the content at the forefront. The front page of the website (Appendix

1, Fig. 1) consists mainly of a list of links, with some metadata about each one,

and thumbnails of images next to the links that lead to an image only. Tabs at the

top of the list allow the user to reorganize the links according to various criteria

such as "hot" (links receiving a lot of attention), "new" (the newest links to be

added), and "top" (the links receiving the most positive feedback). At the very top

of the homepage is a bar with various links to some of the most popular content-

based communities, called subreddits, which allow the user to see only the links

submitted to these individual forums. Along the side is a link that takes the user to

the form to submit a link. There is also a box that allows registered users to log in,

or unregistered users to create an account. If a user is logged in with a Reddit

---

[10] http://www.reddit.com/help/faq#Ispostingpersonalinformationok

account, more links appear, one that leads to the user's profile, and another that leads to the form for creating a new subreddit.

A link or post on Reddit along with a variety of information about its submission (Appendix 1, Fig. 2). The link is given a title by the user who submits it, according to certain guidelines. Some of the guidelines include that a title should be at least somewhat descriptive, and if the post is a joke, for example, that the title not give away the punchline. While a post will not be taken down for not adhering to the guidelines, it is likely to not receive positive feedback. Other information given along with the link title includes the account name of the user who submitted the post, how long ago the link was submitted, the web address that the link directs to (in other words, the website that hosts the link), the subreddit to which the link belongs (every link must be posted to a particular subreddit), the number of comments that have been made about the post, and the number of votes a post has received. There are also two arrows, one pointing upward and one pointing downward, which can be used by registered users to vote for or against the post, which has various consequences for the post itself as well as for the user who posted the link (more on voting will be discussed later). If the link directs to a video or photo, there may also be a thumbnail (a small picture) of the photo or a part of the video.

Another very important section within the infrastructure of Reddit, and the section that will be at the center of this research, is what is called a "comment thread". The comment section of a post can be reached either by clicking the link

that says "[#] comments" or simply "comments" in the metadata of a post, or by clicking the title itself if the post is a text-based post, hosted on Reddit, which will be identifiable from the self.[subreddit] label on the post. These links lead to a page containing all of the comments about the post, made by other users. Besides comments, a few other notable pieces of information are located on the comments page (Appendix 1, Fig. 3). One of these is the title and logo of the subreddit to which the link has been posted, as well as the guidelines for commenting and submitting links to that particular subreddit. Other important information that is available on this page is the number of votes for and against the link and the net number of votes given to the link. This is significant because it affects the standing of the link on the front page. As was discussed before, the posts can be sorted according to various criteria on the front page, and the most popular is to sort by score, or number of votes. The ability to vote will be discussed in greater detail later, but in short it allows users to weigh in on what content they believe should be viewed by the most people.

The comments are organized into what are referred to as "threads" (Appendix1, Fig. 4). The term "thread" is used to refer to the hierarchical structure of the comments, and is also occasionally referred to as a "conversation thread". On Reddit, the highest comments in the hierarchy are found closest to the left hand side of the screen, comments that are made in response to these are justified further and further toward the right hand side of the screen, as they decrease in levels in the hierarchy. The highest comment in the hierarchy of a

particular thread is referred to as the "parent", and any comment made in response is a "child". Any comment made in response to another, and that also has a response, is considered both a parent and a child, relative other posts in the hierarchy. This organizational structure of comments is semi-chronological, due to the fact that comments made at the top of the hierarchy must be made before subsequent comments, responding to these first comments. Reddit, however, allows comments within the same levels of the hierarchy to be shifted around according to certain quantitative measures. Sorting comments by "new", for example, arranges all of the comments that belong to the same levels in the hierarchy according to how recently they were posted. Sorting by "best" or "top" puts the comments receiving the most amount of positive feedback (positive votes) at the top of the page, in descending order as the page scrolls downward. Just as posts can be voted on, comments can be voted on as well, so that users who sort by "best" or "top" see primarily the comments that received the most positive feedback.

A single comment displays the content, along with the username of the user who made the comment, the time that it was posted, and the net total votes that the comment has received. Comments, as well as text-based posts, can be formatted using text format tools built into the Reddit submission system, which allows users to use bolding, italics, a variety of other text tools, and even make the text into a hyperlink.

3.4 Voting

As has already been mentioned, one of the most effective methods by which users may offer feedback or make a judgment in favor or against a particular post or comment is by voting. Every post and comment appears with two arrows next to it. Registered users who click on the upward pointing arrow add what is referred to as an "upvote", which adds a point to the post's overall score; users who click the "downvote" button subtract a point. The overall score of a post influences how it behaves relative to other posts on the front page and on the main pages of the subreddits to which they belong. Most of the options for browsing the front page take into account the scores or posts in one way or another.

3.5 Registered Users: Names, Identity, and Karma

Registering for a Reddit account is not ultimately necessary to spend time on Reddit, as unregistered users can browse all of the content, click any link and read all the comments. Users who do register themselves have the ability to submit content, vote and comment. Compared with social networking sites, like Facebook or LinkedIn, whose profiles provide a relatively large amount of information on the user, Reddit user profiles are very plain and limited in the kind of information that can be gathered about the real identity of the user. As was mentioned before, Reddit has a firm policy of anonymity, so there is no information in the user profile that can connect it to the real-world identity of the

account owner. The only connection that is possible to make is to verify the account with an email account, which cannot be shared with anyone.

At the user profile level (Appendix 1, Fig. 5), votes become significant for more than individual posts, but ultimately alter the profile of users themselves. Votes in favor and against posts made by any given user affect a score attributed to the user, which is called "karma". An account possesses two kinds of karma scores, "link karma" and "comment karma", which are influenced by upvotes and downvotes for links and comments, respectively, submitted by the user. A user's level of karma doesn't affect any technical aspect of their participation on the website, save for in a social aspect. Anyone can click on a username that appears next to a comment or link and see how much karma a user possesses, based on his or her previous participation. Because karma is determined by feedback from other users, it serves as a gauge of the overall reception to the user's previous submissions.

A user's profile also contains a list, similar to the front page or the front page of a subreddit, of all of the user's comments and link submissions. The right hand side box, called the "trophy case", contains the badges that the user has gained by performing a variety of actions, such as providing an email address that becomes attributed to the account, or receiving consistently good feedback on submissions. While this information is significant within the Reddit community, it tells very little about the user herself or himself. For this reason, the study does not attempt to answer any questions about the identity of the user. For all intent

and purposes, here, the real-world identity of the user offers limited significance in the analysis and interpretation of the discourse of the conversations that make up the data.

Despite the limited availability of information about the real-world identities of users, the fact is there is still great variation in the kind of user account that is created. These variations have no manifestation within the technical infrastructure of Reddit, but influence a great deal of how a user will interact with others and what the user will post, in terms of content, style, purpose, etc. Two kinds of accounts will be discussed here: throwaway accounts and novelty accounts.

A throwaway account is typically a username that is created and used once for the purpose of posting on a very personal subject. While in theory no personal information is shared by Reddit users, over the course of time, enough stories or information may be shared that a user could be identified in real life. Users may also share their Reddit names with friends or family, or they simply create and maintain friendships and rapport with other Reddit members. In cases like this, users may want to ask for advice about a particularly personal or difficult life experience or share a story that they feel would have negative repercussions for any of these kinds of relationships that may be tied to their main account on Reddit. For the purpose of maintaining extra anonymity, users will create a single-use account, and post with more freedom than would be possible otherwise.

Novelty accounts manifest themselves with greater variation of purpose and style than throwaways. A novelty account is an account for which the content of comments or posts is consistent with or described in some way by the username of the account. Novelty accounts can be very intuitive, such as in cases where the name dictates nearly exactly what the user will post. An example of this is the novelty account named guywhosaysTHIS, who always posts the word "THIS" for every comment.[11] Other novelty accounts are slightly less predictable in the exact content or format of the comments or posts. The Reddit user joke-explainer, for example, comments on funny or joking posts, explaining the joke for a humorous effect.[12] Another novelty account, POLITE_ALLCAPS_GUY typically posts non-humorous comments to a variety of types of posts, but does so typing in all capital letters (commonly understood as the online version of yelling), while also being very polite.[13] Other novelty account names may indicate that the user posts using the voice or point of view of a famous person or pop culture character. Some novelty accounts are very elaborate, for example the account named Related_Magic_Card who posts nearly complete sentences, in reply to other comments, with the last couple of words left off the sentence. The sentence itself is a hyperlink to an image of a card from the fantasy card game Magic: The Gathering, and the title of the card completes the sentence of the

---

[11] http://www.reddit.com/user/guywhosaysTHIS
[12] http://www.reddit.com/user/joke-explainer
[13] http://www.reddit.com/user/POLITE_ALLCAPS_GUY

comment that was posted.[14] Novelty accounts appear multiple times in the data

for this study, and play interesting roles with respect to these instances of trolling,

as will be seen later during analysis.

3.6 Data

The data collected for analysis in this study is comprised of a selection of

comment threads, made in response to a variety of kinds of posts. The comment

threads are selections, and do not consist of every comment made about a

particular post. In theory and mostly in practice, responses to a parent comment

are made lower in the hierarchy, and are typically not posted at the same level as

the parent. For this reason, selecting a parent comment and all of its child

comments should contain an entire conversation based on the topic of the highest

comment in the hierarchy.

3.7 Selection of Data

Data, in the form of these comment threads, was selected within the span

of time between December, 2011 and February, 2012, from a variety of

subreddits, and a variety of kinds of posts. Selection was made on the basis of the

clarity of the occurrence of trolling. As was discussed in the Review of Literature

of this study, trolling, like flaming, can be performed with varying degrees of

success, depending on the intentions and interpretations of the different

participants, with regard to the comments made (pp 17-18). Just as an attempted

flame may not be successful if the recipient or observer is not aware of the flame

---

[14] http://www.reddit.com/user/Related_Magic_Card

or does not take offense to the content posted, a troll may be unsuccessful if it does not receive any response, or if it ultimately did not seem like a troll to any of the observers or responders. Consideration was made when collecting data, as to the clarity of the troll post in question, and efforts were made to select comment threads that had fairly clear instances of trolling. Criteria for deeming something a clear and definite troll, and a worthwhile conversation to analyze, included the following:

- A responder referring to a comment as a troll at some moment in time. While this is not an unequivocal method for deeming a comment or interaction a troll, if there are other signs that lead to that conclusion, it can be a distinct way of obtaining confirmation.

- Indication of some kind of humorous intent. As was mentioned in the Review of Literature, one of the distinguishing factors that define trolling as opposed to flaming is some kind of humorous intent or effect. Posts that seemed to have been submitted with only the intention of insulting, harassing, or humiliating other users were not included in this study.

- Factual erroneousness. This is not a required component of a troll post, but very frequently one method of starting off a troll is by posting blatantly incorrect information as if the user believed it was true. The posting of false information in a comment cannot in itself constitute a troll, however, given that it could also be due to real misinformation on the part of the

poster. This factor can be, however, an additional indication of the status

of a conversation as containing trolling.

Using these criteria, several of conversation threads were selected to be analyzed.

More on how individual cases were determined to contain instances of trolling

will be discussed when each conversation is described.

3.8 Presentation of the Data

The complete set of conversations can be found in the appendices. Much

of the analysis will take place on the basis of the conversation threads as they

appear on Reddit, due to the fact that using the data as it appears in its original

form provides a relatively clear structure, and retains as much significant

information as possible. In some cases, when the data contains a great deal of

irrelevant information, or comments that fall outside of the topic of the troll post,

other formats for displaying the information may be used, for the purpose of

clarifying or highlighting certain information.

3.9 Criteria of Analysis

The primary theoretical basis for the analysis of the discourse of this study

comes from James Paul Gee's (1999, 2011) writing on the theory and practice of

discourse analysis, which was described in the review of literature. Gee mixes

sociological, cognitive, and linguistic approaches to the understanding of

discourse. The result is a set of practical tools for discourse analysis that focus

more on consideration of the data and raising questions than on establishing rules

and conventions. The Gee's toolkit for discourse analysis is made up of 27 tools

that each seek to examine a different aspect of the data at hand, all of which generally aim to answer questions about how participants are using language, what they are doing with language, and how the context is influencing and being influenced by the language and participants. Of the 27 tools, 14 are being employed to a larger degree in this study, and have greater relevance to the objective of answering the research questions at hand. The 14 tools will be discussed here, though for the sake of simplicity, five related tools will be combined into one. Except for the five tools combined into one, all of the tools will be given the same names in this paper as they appear in Gee's (2011) toolkit. The following table lists and elaborates on the tools that will be used in this analysis, and their relationship to concepts discussed in the review of literature.

Tool	Description, Relevance to current study
"The Fill In Tool"	• The goal of this tool is to ask what has not been stated overtly in a text but is understood by one or more of the participants in an interaction. In other words, one asks what has been or must be inferred in order to make meaning or the communicative act. • "The Fill In Tool" is particularly relevant to analyzing instances of trolling due to the subtle nature of trolling itself. Inferences must be made in order for some participants or observers to interpret a message as a troll, and others to misunderstand and interpret the post as sincere. • The question being asked here on the basis of this tool is: What inferences are made that lead to two possible interpretations and on what bases (linguistic or otherwise) are these inferences being made?
"The Intonation Tool"	• In spoken language, the intonation that a

	speaker gives an utterance can greatly influence the meaning of what it said. This tool suggests that the discourse analyst ask how intonation has been used to produce a certain meaning.
	• In the case of online language, intonation does not exist in the aural sense that it occurs in spoken language. Despite this, an effect similar to intonation can be produced, particularly on Reddit where there are a variety of text tools, by altering the visual features of the text in certain ways that influence the meaning, in similar ways to how it is influenced by intonation.
	• Some of these text-based characteristics include:
	• All capital letters (All caps): denotes shouting or yelling.
	• Italics or Bold: typically denotes a strong emphasis on the italicized or bolded text.
	• Emoticons and Ascii: these are symbols that, when assembled correctly, create a picture (typically of a face). While sometimes these pictures convey meaning on their own (for example, :) can convey a smile) when combined with text they can influence the intonation with which the text is intended to be read.
"The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool"	• This tool encompasses one of the greater goals of this study, with its focus resting on not simply what is being said by the participants in an interaction, but also what the participants are doing or trying to do.
	• One of the goals of this study is to understand both how the phenomenon of trolling is achieved through the use of language, but also what trolling itself is aiming to achieve, or rather what users aim to achieve by trolling. This tool reflects both of those goals.
"The Vocabulary Tool"	• Gee (2011) suggests that this tool should be used by examining the etymological origin or words in English (the historical language family to which they belong) as an indicator of what register, social language, etc. is being

	invoked by the language. In this study the use of this tool will not be as rigid as this, but rather will take the form of an examination of what words are used, in cases where synonyms or other possible words were available, why, and to what effect.
"The This Way and Not That Way Tool"	• This tool is very broad in its application, as it requires that the analyst ask the question: why did the participant construct the message in the way he or she did? This tool mostly focuses on syntax, and related linguistic characteristics such as morpho-syntax and word-choice.
	• This tool is particularly helpful in answering questions about how trolling comes to be created or produced by its author. This involves working backwards, starting from the point of asking how could the user have constructed the message in a way that would not be considered trolling, but rather be some other style of interaction. Through this method, it becomes easier to reach conclusions about what linguistic and paralinguistic features influence the status of a comment, creating a troll.
"The Context is Reflexive Tool"	• This tool is related to the idea that the context of communication influences the meaning and outcome of the interaction. Here, however, the point is made that the language that is being used also creates and influences the context of the communicative activity. The question, here, is how language is being used to create this context, and how the context is influencing the language.
	• In online settings, the context may be somewhat vaguer than in face-to-face interaction, particularly when the real-world identities of the participants are not disclosed. The context and the activity in which the participants are engaged may be more closely tied. The context may also become clearer as the participants begin to create identities for themselves within the interaction (more on building activities and identities will be covered in the Building Tools section).

The Building Tools[15]	• This tool is essentially a compressed and generalized version of five tools in Gee's (2011) toolkit. The focus of this tool is on how participants use vocabulary choices and grammar to construct elements of an interaction. The five elements are: significance, activities, identities, relationships, and sign systems and knowledge. The five will be discussed individually below. • Significance: Using the Building Tool can offer insight into how participants use grammar and vocabulary to build significance for certain topics over others. • Activities: The Building Tool provides a way of examining how participants are using language to construct the activity in which they are engaging. • Identities: This tool allows a discourse analyst to think about how various linguistic features and structures can be manipulated by participants to construct and identity in a given interaction. • Relationships: The Building Tool can provide insight into the relationship-building power of participants' syntax and word choice in a message. • Sign Systems and Knowledge: Finally, this tool can also help in analysis by inquiring as to how grammar and word-choice can be used to invoke certain registers, or indicate a level of knowledge or ability to use certain sign systems, and to what effect this is done.
"The Topic Flow or Topic Chaining Tool"	• This tool suggests that, during analysis, we ask how topic flow occurs and about the ways topics are carried through a conversation or interaction.

---

[15] This tool is a combination of five related tools in the toolkit, all of which are related to the construction of some element of the communication. The five original tools according to Gee (2004) are: "The Significance Building Tool", "The Activities Building Tool", "The Identities Building Tool", "The Relationship Building Tool", and "The Sign Systems and Knowledge Building Tool".

	• This issue may be particularly important in trolling, when the conversation becomes somewhat confrontational, or an argument ensues, in order to understand how the troll attempts to continue the argument, without appearing overly aggressive.
"The Social Languages Tool"	• The aim of this tool is to ask how word choice and syntax can be used to enact social languages, which share similar characteristics with a language register (a style of language used in contexts of varying formalities), but are used among particular social groups. • There exist a number of words and styles of writing that can be identified as an online social language, or rather a type of language that is typically used online. This tool will be used in an attempt to understand at what point, if any, in the trolling process this kind of language is enacted, and to what effect.
"The Intertextuality Tool"	• Intertextuality is an important concept in online interactions, due to the widespread use of what are known as "memes", short, sometimes pre-constructed segments of language that are used frequently online. These snippets of language not only make reference to some original text from which they were drawn, but also are linked to every other instance of the snippet. The collective set of uses creates the overall meaning of the meme. This tool sets up the question of how this kind of intertextuality is used in trolling, and for what purpose.

These tools make use of both sociological factors and linguistic factors that form part of the data. Based on these tools, information such as syntactic constructions, word choice, emphasis, and other prosodic elements, and a variety of other characteristics will be taken into account upon analysis.

Chapter 4. Analysis

The following is an analysis of the four conversations found on Reddit.com. The conversations in their entirety can be found in the appendices. For each conversation, the first section of analysis consists of a description, a narrative account and some observations about each conversation, followed by the application of several tools from the set of tools elaborated on in the methods chapter. While nearly every tool has some application to each of the four conversations, only a few have been chosen to highlight the salient points of each conversation, with respect to the instance of trolling.

4.1 Ebay Troll

This conversation occurred in November 2007 and revolves around a post consisting of a link to an Ebay.com listing, under the title "Ebay seller trying not to sell windows vista". At the time of the post, users were allowed to post links under the general category "reddit.com", which is no longer allowed, as users must now attribute their post to a specific subreddit. The post did not receive much attention, with a net total of 10 votes. The consensus among the commenters elsewhere in the post was that the user who posted the Ebay link was in fact the one trying to sell the item listed, due to the fact that both the Reddit user and the Ebay listing used very similar usernames. In general it was determined that this was a spam post. This conversation was selected for analysis for two reasons: firstly, unlike many of the other conversations that were found,

the troll post of this conversation includes a factual statement that can be proven to be erroneous, as opposed to simply an opinion or a subjective statement; secondly, participants in this conversation make direct reference to the fact that this is an instance of trolling, corroborating to some degree that that is what is happening.

The conversation in question starts with the parent comment by the user ThaiTai, and involves a total of 7 users (Appendix 2.1). Because the post is now quite old (by Reddit standards), 3 of the 7 participants have since deleted their accounts. A deleted account on Reddit is signaled by the word "deleted" in brackets in the location where a user's name would typically appear. Because of this it is impossible to definitively judge the exact number of participants in the conversation. However there is no reason to believe the same person posted multiple times because the three deleted users all posted at the same level of the thread hierarchy, which is not likely to occur if the users are the same.

The troll begins with the first post of the conversation thread (Comment 1 in Appendix 2.1), submitted by ThaiTai. The user posts mostly in all capital letters (or all caps), with the apparent intention of warning users against clicking the original post (OP) link. This user makes the claim that the web address that the link leads to is untrustworthy because it begins with cgi.ebay.com instead of simply ebay.com. The comment also suggests that the site is in fact a phishing scheme, or in other words a fake site designed to record user's personal information when they try to log in to what they believe is a reputable site. This

claim, as the rest of the comments suggest, is completely false, and the cgi element of the web address does not indicate that it is not really an Ebay.com link, but rather indicates what area of the internal structure of the site the link is located. The evidence that this is a troll post is not solely based on the content or form of the post itself, but rather partly on common knowledge and in great part on the responses this message received. The fact that this kind of web address is perfectly legitimate is relatively common knowledge among frequent Internet users, but of course there is no way to tell whether or not this user knows this. The user's exaggerated use of all caps and extra punctuation may be an indicator that the poster is doing more than attempting to inform other Reddit readers. More on this will be discussed later.

Comments 2-6 rebut this warning with varying attitudes and styles, providing more evidence for the nature of this troll post. The first reply (2), Reddit user otatop, simply states that ThaiTai's post is incorrect. The second commenter (3), spiker611, takes this message further, by explaining that ebay.com is what indicates the website that the link leads to, and that the cgi does not indicate the site is a threat. One of the deleted users replied with only the word "FAIL" in all caps (5). Another deleted user responded with a similar message: "Hi. You fail at the Internets." (4). The final comment at this level of the hierarchy (6), written from another deleted account, provides the first really solid evidence that this is an instance of trolling. This user seems to chime in with the OP, but with a more exaggerated writing style. The message states that this

address prefix, cgi, is a powerful tool for hackers, and suggests that other users be wary of this. This user employs spelling typical of Internet message boards that can be considered a kind of Internet slang. Much more on this user's use of spelling and Internet slang, as well as what these are being used for will be covered in the analysis.

Lastly, maybe the most concrete evidence that the OP was a troll posting was the response to comment 4, written by the user YHBT, that seems to be accusing this deleted user of having fallen for the troll (7). YHBT posts: "Five responses. Who's the one that failed? HAND!" At first glance, this message seems rather cryptic, but on further examination it is making reference to the troll and the apparent failure of the deleted user to detect the troll. First, because YHBT makes reference to the 5 comments under the OP parent comment, it is clear that the message was posted last of the 7, and by asking the rhetorical question: "Who's the one that failed?" the user implies that the author of comment 4 is the only one who fell for the troll. Secondly, in addition to the question, YHBT signs off his message with "HAND!" which at first may seem like a non-sequitur. In this case, however, the capital letters indicate that this is an acronym. Going back to the 1990s and trolling in Usenet communities, "HAND", standing for "Have A Nice Day" was a popular way to conclude a troll. In addition to "HAND", another popular acronym to use is in fact YHBT, the user's own Reddit name, which stands for "You Have Been Trolled" (Tepper, 1997).

Now it is clear that there are at least two users, YHBT and the author of comment 6, view the OP as a troll post.

This instance of trolling is particularly interesting because it offers a look at a variety of user responses, some of which seem to have successfully navigated the interaction, while others seem to have been baited and fallen victim to the troll post. This allows us not only to ask how the original poster crafted the OP message to be an apparent troll to some but not others, but also to ask what characteristics qualify a response as one that avoids or averts the troll, and what characteristics indicate that a user has fallen for a troll. Four of the tools outlined in methods will be highlighted and put to use here: "The Fill In Tool", "The Intonation Tool", "The This Way and Not That Way Tool" and "The Social Languages Tool".

4.1.1 "The Fill In Tool"

This tool allows us to ask what information is not being stated explicitly in the text of the conversation, but that the participants must know or conjecture in order to allow the interaction to proceed. The most evident piece of information that is not stated is that ThaiTai's post is a troll, and the other tools will be used to attempt to explain how some of the participants were able to fill in this information, while others were not. Another piece of information that initially must be assumed or known prior to the interaction, but which later one of the participants explains, is technical in nature. In order to understand the OP and first response (comment 2), one must understand a bit of technical information about

domain names and web addresses. In the OP, the cgi affix is referenced. This is a part of the domain name of the link and is located next to the title of the link. In the OP, the user ThaiTai claims that the domain name cgi.ebay.com indicates that the link does not really lead to Ebay.com but rather to a fake site designed to gather private information. While these kinds of web sites do exist, the critical element of the web address, as the user spiker611 states, is the section connected to the .com suffix. Because ebay is connected here to .com, the link really does lead to Ebay.com. ThaiTai's warning would be valid, on the other hand, if the domain name were listed as ebay.cgi.com.

A much more subtle unuttered distinction in this conversation is the various uses of the word "to fail". This verb is used three times by three different participants, shown here:

4 [−] [deleted] 10 points 4 years ago
Hi.
You fail at the Internets.
permalink parent

7 [−] YHBT -1 points 4 years ago
Five responses. Who's the one that failed?
HAND!
permalink parent

5 [−] [deleted] 9 points 4 years ago
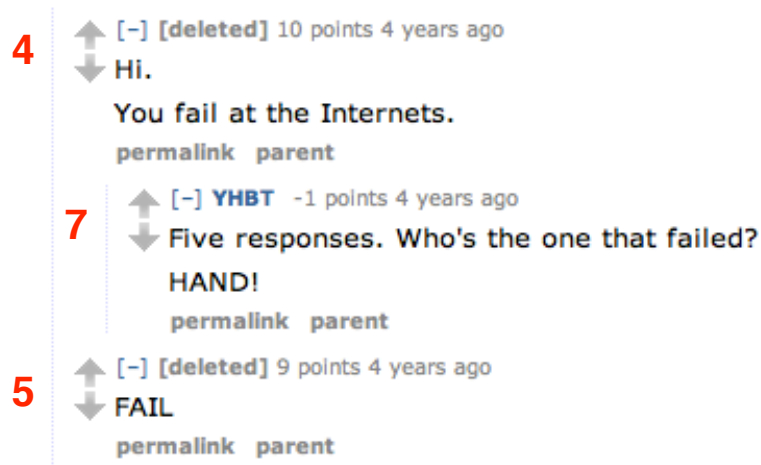FAIL
permalink parent

Figure 2.1

Each of these uses of the word "fail" refers to failure in a slightly different way, changing the meaning of each message. The first use, in comment 4, refers to the fact that this user has interpreted ThaiTai's OP to indicate a lack of

knowledge or failure to understand the technical workings and structure of the Internet. In addition, this user specifies the subject of the verb "fail" by saying "You fail at the Internets." By doing this, the user calls out ThaiTai not only as having made a mistake, but also, because the verb is in the present tense, indicating that the action is in process or continuing, that ThaiTai fails in a general and continuing sense. This user is not simply stating a mistake was made, but that there is a persisting failure on the part of the user ThaiTai. The second use of the word "fail", chronologically, is by another deleted user (comment 5). This is, in fact, the only word of the comment and is written in capital letters. The distinction that can be made between this use of the word and the use of the word in comment 4 is primarily based on specificity. While the author of comment 4 used "fail" in a specific sentence, with a clear subject and morpho-syntactic information, this user's use can be interpreted in a number of different ways. It could be interpreted to mean that ThaiTai fails, in the same sense as the previous comment, but it could also be interpreted as referring to a single failure, as opposed to prolonged failing. It could even be seen as a general assessment of the interaction, and the inability of the other responders to notice the troll. Finally, we come to the use of the word in YHBT's message, responding to comment 4. What must be filled in to understand this comment is that the rhetorical question "Who's the one that failed?" is intended to imply that the author of comment 4 is in reality the only responder who did not successfully navigate the interaction. This use of the word "failed" refers to a failure on the part of this deleted user to

look beyond the truth of the statement, and grasp the social aspect of the communication.

4.1.2 "The Intonation Tool"

Intonation is a critical element of this interaction, and is key to the interpretation of several of the messages. While in spoken conversation, intonation or prosody typically refers to things such as loudness, verbal emphasis, pausing, the same kinds of qualities can be found in online text-based communication based on characteristics like use of capital letters, punctuation, etc. Within this conversation, participants not only respond to each other in the content of their messages, but also use varying intonations as direct responses to other participants.

The intonation employed by ThaiTai in the OP message is perhaps the most important factor in identifying this post as a troll. In Internet communication, using all capital letters or mostly capital letters is understood as the online equivalent of yelling, and in online etiquette it is highly encouraged that caps be used sparingly, as it is generally considered rude to post messages in all caps. The fact that ThaiTai writes in nearly all caps is the first sign that there is something unusual about this post. Punctuation, also a form of intonation, also offers a hint about the intention of ThaiTai's message. Rather than using one exclamation point, or even three, this user chooses to use six exclamation points at the end of the second sentence, and rather than using three periods as ellipses in the fourth sentence, ThaiTai uses four. From the perspective of someone looking

at the full interaction, these atypical uses of punctuation and capitals seem to be functioning as a way of drawing readers' attention to the post, and soliciting comments. These characteristics, along with the use of words like "bastard" and "urgently" seem to also be eliciting an emotional response from the reader, and could either be interpreted as a means to evoke fear in a reader, or to produce irritation in the readers who know that the information is false, which would be likely to provoke them to respond in ways similar to the author of comment 4.

The user otatop uses an ellipsis as well, but rather than using it to grab readers' attention, this commenter uses it in a more traditional way, as a kind of pause. While ThaiTai's intonation evokes a kind of frenetic attitude, otatop responds very calmly, including a pause between "No" and the statement that the link is in fact a real Ebay.com link. The next responder, spiker611, uses a similarly calm intonation, employing standard capitalization and punctuation. Spiker611 is also the most informative responder, explaining why exactly the domain name does not indicate that the link is fake.

The author of comment 4 uses a considerably different intonation. This commenter uses periods to punctuate the two sections of the message. A line break is also placed between the two sections which, combined with the periods, gives the message an abrupt tone. Combined with the content of the message, the result is that the author comes off sounding curt and disparaging. This intonation and its effect is the main distinguishing factor between this comment and the others.

Lastly, a look at comment 6 reveals a style of prosody similar to that of ThaiTai's message, but with some variation. The all caps is employed here as well, as is a somewhat exaggerated use of punctuation. In addition to this is the alternate spellings of some words like "TEH" for "the" and "HAXXERS" for "hackers". The way the author adopts and exaggerates ThaiTai's intonation seems like either a sarcastic mockery of the original message, or a signal to readers that the original message is a troll, indicating to a degree "this is only slightly more absurd than the original message, and therefore is clearly a troll." Either way, the intonation indicates that the author has some understanding of the subtleties of the conversation.

4.1.3 "The This Way and Not That Way Tool"

The question of why the responses to ThaiTai's original message were written the way they were, and which messages were acceptable for what reasons is central to understanding this conversation. Reddit user YHBT felt that of the five responses, only comment 4 had really fallen for the troll and while there are no other opinions to which we can compare it, we can still ask what the criteria was by which this judgment was based. As discussed previously, the primary difference between comment 4 and comment 5 is the distinct uses of the word "fail", indicating two different assessments or evaluations of the original message. Comment 6 distinguishes itself from the rest through its prosody and the indirect nature of its message. The author could have chosen to write a straightforward comment stating that the original post was a troll and its content was ridiculous,

but instead chose to communicate the same thing by writing an exaggerated parody.

Comments 2 and 3 distinguish themselves from the rest due to the fact that, while they take ThaiTai at face value as far as the original comment goes, neither otatop nor spiker611 makes any judgment about ThaiTai in their posts. While this does not clarify whether either author was able to identify the post as a troll, the important element seems to be that they were not insulting and did not pass judgment on the author of the original message.

4.1.4 "The Social Languages Tool"

Within this conversation there are two very clear instances of users invoking a social language, both of them social languages related to the Internet. By using the alternate spellings "TEH", "HAXXERS", and "GRAYTEST", the author of comment 6 is invoking a popular kind of internet slang, which involves reversing letters in words, using plural forms for singulars, and replacing letters for one with similar phonetic characteristics. This kind of language is often used to humorous effect, as is the case here. This author uses it to evoke an exaggerated online personality, and to signal the presence of a troll.

The user YHBT on the other hand, invokes an older online social language, which originated on Usenet, using both acronyms "YHBT" and "HAND". The use of these references results in a similar effect as the language used by the author of comment 4, which is to signal that trolling has occurred, but in slightly different ways. The author of comment 4 is pointing to the fact that the

original message is a troll, while YHBT is stating that another participant has fallen for the troll.

4.1.5 Conclusion

The results of the analysis of this conversation according to these tools allows for some preliminary conclusions to be made about trolling and its functions and consequences in interactions on Reddit.

Firstly, the analysis of this conversation begins to build a picture of the importance of prosody and intonation, both in a paralinguistic sense and in an aesthetic sense, in online trolling. Both ThaiTai and the user who posted comment 6 show this to different degrees. ThaiTai uses a slightly more subtle prosody, while the other user who authored the last comment employs an extremely exaggerated version of this. This can be tied to the objectives of the act of trolling, in that if a successful troll results in a long, drawn out argument, the original post at which a user begins to troll must be crafted so as to be both noticeable and displeasing to other users. By exaggerating a message's prosody, a user both makes it more noticeable on the page, and may even violate some elements of online etiquette, which provides an initial point of criticism for other users. Similar cases of prosody's role in trolling can be found in the analyses of the conversations that follow, particularly in the case of the Justin Bieber Troll.

Secondly, this conversation also provides insight into the effects of trolling within the discourse of the community. As can be seen in the analysis, users who troll are not the only ones who receive negative feedback or reprimands

from other users. Instead, it is possible for some users to receive negative feedback as well, based on the ways that they respond, as responding aggressively or insultingly to a user who is trolling may seem rather foolish and unnecessary. This may have the effect of disincentivizing aggressive behavior in arguments within this community, particularly in cases where it remains unclear whether a user is trolling or sincere. This can also be seen in continuation in the conversations that follow.

4.2 Justin Bieber Troll

This conversation took place in July of 2011 in the subreddit called "pics" which hosts links to pictures and photos of all kinds, and is one of the most popular subreddits on the site. When a user first creates an account on Reddit, he or she is automatically subscribed to a number of subreddits, one of which is r/pics. The photo link, posted by the user named harypoddur, is entitled "da hawtest men alliv <3 <3 <3 :)))))" which, when modified from its alternative spelling, reads "the hottest man alive", and leads to a photo on Wikipedia of Justin Bieber singing. Three initial observations about this post are instant clues that it is a troll: the non-normative spelling, the adoration of Justin Beiber and, the fact that the link leads to a Wikipedia page for a photo rather than the photo itself, each of which on its own would not be significant, but together they flag the post as unusual. While some troll posts begin as such because the author touts erroneous knowledge, other trolls are based on the posting of unpopular content that the author knows will not be well received. In this case, this post could not be

better tailored to be unpopular with redditors, who are notorious for their dislike of alternative spelling systems (only a few alterative spellings for words have been integrated into common communication on Reddit) and of Justin Bieber. The final observation, that the link leads to a Wikipedia page instead of only the image itself is not on its own an annoyance, but it is something so infrequently done on r/pics, that it would serve as an indicator that the author of the post is not familiar with the proceedings of this subreddit.

The reception from the community as a whole was predictably negative, as the post received a negative net total votes, with about two thirds downvotes. This post is not representative of a very successful troll, due to the fact that it did not receive much attention (only about 30 votes total) and the comment thread is relatively short. In total, five users participate in the interaction. It does provide a good example, however, of a variety of user responses to trolls, and also provides some insight into both how users identify trolls and how the authors of trolls attempt to continue a troll.

The comment thread (Appendix 2.2) begins with the disgruntled response by user TillyOTilly that states "Kill you with fire." (1) As there is no other comment before this one, the comment seems to be directed at the author of the original post. Given that the "you" in the message is not made explicit, an alternative interpretation could be that it is directed at Justin Bieber, but given the nature of Reddit and the fact that comments are typically directed from one user to another (though this is not always the case), the first hypothesis seems more

likely. Another interesting observation about this comment is that there is no explicit subject or agent of the sentence, thereby removing focus from its author.

Comment 2, posted by the user idacalledyouwoodyjoe, says "that's not how we do things 'round these parts", and again seems to be directed to the author of the OP, reminding or suggesting to the user harypoddur that it may be wise to rethink posting style. The phrasing of this comment evokes a certain representation in popular culture of the dialect used by cowboys and frontiersmen, as seen in movies of the Western genre. In particular, the phrase "'round these parts" stands out in this way.

Next, the user harypoddur, the original author of the post comments in a flurry of alternative spellings, punctuation and emoticons, and appears to be responding as much to the readers who have not commented as to the other two users present thus far in the interaction (3). First, harypoddur appeals to users not to vote negatively on this post, because of the reported attractiveness of Justin Bieber. After a long string of exclamation points and hearts, the user states that it is mean to downvote, then proclaims "jusinbeber3eva", referencing the popular abbreviation of the word "forever" using the number 4 to make "4ever". The troll poster then asks users to request friendship on Facebook and posts what was presumably a link to a Facebook user profile, but that is now nonexistent, after which comes more punctuation, emoticons and a proclamation of love for Justin Bieber.

Comment 3 is the first and only parent comment of the conversation, as it elicited a dismissive response from idacalledyouwoodyjoe, the author of comment 2, saying "never mind, you're a troll" (6). The response from the user harypoddur (7) first makes reference to the fact that the word "never" was used in comment 6 and alludes to Justin Bieber's song called "Never Say Never". As an afterthought, the author adds the question "n wutz a toll?" [and what's a troll?], a question that may have been an attempt to elicit more from idacalledyouwoodyjoe and continue the troll. Asking a question in any interaction is a method of eliciting a response and prolonging an interaction, and is particularly useful in trolling if other participants begin to lose interest. One such kind of troll message that has been popularized on Reddit and other sites is the message "I'm 12 and what is this?"[16] Victims of this kind of troll begin to answer these questions, thereby continuing the interaction and adding fuel to the troll.

After comment 3, but at an indeterminate time relative to comments 6 and 7, Tabor91 enters the conversation with the comment "Don't feed the trolls people." (4) This is a common expression used in online discussion sites when other users are being provoked into an argument with a troll. Because of the sorting and structure of a comment thread, it is impossible to determine based on data from the interface of the site whether comment 4 was written before or after the child comments in response to comment 3 (6, 7), so it is unclear whether this warning was made before or after idacalledyouwoodyjoe identified the post as a

---

[16] An example of this message used on the Troll subreddit:
http://www.reddit.com/r/troll/comments/clzjb/im_12_what_is_this/

troll. The warning makes the most sense if the troll has not yet been identified, though even so it is not clear that either of the prior comments could be interpreted as falling victim to the troll post. Because of the lack of responses that can be viewed as "feeding the trolls", comment 4 could more logically be interpreted as a kind of declaration that the post is a troll, not a commentary on what has already been written.

Finally, the last comment, written by the user named hyundai_guy, says "He's dead. I saw it on CSI last night, Nick shot him." (5) The comment makes reference to an episode of the television series CSI, in which Justin Bieber appears as a character and is shot. Two possible interpretations of the purpose of this comment are that it is an attempt to appeal to other users who dislike the artist, and who have clicked on the comments to read other negative reactions, or that it is designed to elicit a negative reaction from the author of the original post. Ultimately, this comment did not contribute much to the overall interaction, due to the fact that it was potentially the last post made on the thread, and because it received little attention and no response.

This interaction was selected not because of the effectiveness of the troll (as was mentioned before, the troll was in fact rather ineffective at baiting other users), but rather for the user idacalledyouwoodyjoe's attempt to guide what appeared to be a new and inexperienced user, and the subsequent realization that the post was a troll. Both of these users, harypoddur and idacalledyouwoodyjoe, exhibit parallel behaviors in the interaction, first creating an identity within the

conversation and then attempting to influence the behavior of the other. Five of the tools from the methods of this study can be used to highlight these elements of the discourse. These tools are: "The Intonation Tool", "The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool", "The Building Tools", "The Social Languages Tool", and "The Topic Flow or Topic Chaining Tool".

4.2.1 "The Intonation Tool"

Intonation, or prosody, seems to be both the user harypoddur's primary method of creating the account's online identity or character, as well as a key element of the troll itself, and ultimately what caused the troll to be ineffective. As was mentioned in the analysis of the Ebay Troll, as discussed by Crystal (2011), language on the Internet is often found somewhere in the middle of the continuum between orality and textuality, which results in a need for a reexamination of what is understood by "prosody" or, as Gee (2011) calls it, "intonation". Within this conversation, a number of elements contribute to the overall intonation of the users, including orthography, punctuation, typeface, etc. The user harypoddur uses a combination of exaggerated punctuation, capital letters, emoticons and the duplication of letters (particularly vowels, as seen in the statement "you mak judten kryyyyyy") together to produce a manic, almost childlike intonation throughout the messages posted by this account. While the account's use of intonation is not revelatory initially, by the second post made by the user harypoddur (comment 3), the intonation has become so overly exaggerated, that it gives away the troll.

While the premature unveiling of the troll resulted in a failed attempt to troll here, the gaff makes the troll's methods more transparent, and therefore more easily analyzable. This confirms the analysis of ThaiTai's troll (Appendix 2.1) and the use there of intonation.

4.2.2 "The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool"

This tool is particularly useful in this conversation as a means of understanding what effect the participants of this interaction intend to produce through the act of posting certain messages. The segment of this conversation that is most telling in this way is the interaction between the two accounts idacalledyouwoddyjoe and harypoddur (comments 2-3, 6-7), shown below.

Figure 2.2

In comment 2, the user idacalledyouwoodyjoe attempts to establish a role as an informal kind of moderator, something of an online sheriff, by attempting to inform this "inexperienced user" that this post does not conform to the informal code of conduct on this subreddit. By referring to how "we do things",

idacalledyouwoodyjoe is locating this identity within the community of this subreddit, which is reinforced by the use of the phrase "'round these parts".

Then, in comment 3, harypoddur addresses the users who have been voting against the post, asking that they not do so. This comment seems to be a second attempt at drawing in more users to comment, offering a plethora of Reddit etiquette errors to which other users could respond, including: orthography "errors" (alternative and semi-phonetic spellings), a facebook profile link (compromising anonymity, although it is likely it was not the user's real facebook profile), and exaggerated use of punctuation, to list a few. This garnered no response, except for a dismissive reply from the user idacalledyouwoodyjoe, who posted "never mind, you're a troll" (comment 6). While this comment is posted as a reply to the original poster's comment, what the new comment is doing suggests that it is not entirely directed at the user harypoddur. By posting this message, the user idacalledyouwoodyjoe is saving face in front of other users who may read this interchange. Comment 2, posted by idacalledyouwoodyjoe, treats the original poster as if it were a newcomer to the community, explaining that the user's posting behavior does not correspond to what is considered proper within the community, a useless sentiment when presented to a user who is trolling, because he or she knows very well what kinds of behavioral standards he or she is violating. In order to not appear to have fallen for this troll, idacalledyouwoodyjoe must come in and clarify, more for other users than for harypoddur, that the troll is now understood as such.

Finally, harypoddur comments again in a last effort to bait another user, despite the fact that the post has already been identified as a troll (comment 7). By seeming to be seeking information and continuing to fain ignorance, the user attempts to prolong the troll, though the move is unsuccessful.

4.2.3 "The Building Tools" and "The Social Languages Tool"

For the purpose of analyzing this conversation, these two tools are being used in conjunction. Both of the users in this short interchange, harypoddur and idacalledyouwoodyjoe, draw on social languages to build identities within the interaction. In all three comments, including the original post, harypoddur uses punctuation, creative orthography, as well as pop culture knowledge about Justin Bieber, to construct the identity of a teenage girl. The attempt to adequately build the identity fails, however, when elements like the alternative spellings of words and the use of punctuation are overemphasized, and used to a degree that would not be viewed as sincere, possibly even in a context where the participant is known to really be a teenage girl.

The user idacalledyouwoodyjoe, on the other hand, by shortening "around" to "'round" and using the phrase "these parts", evokes a social language associated with movies of the Western genre. The Western genre is often associated with a certain amount of chaos and lawlessness, and the need to establish order through unofficial means. By drawing from this social language, idacalledyouwoodyjoe is establishing an identity in this interaction, of a kind of

unofficial keeper of the peace. This identity, however, becomes useless when the troll is revealed, and the user drops this social language in comment 6.

4.2.4 Conclusion

This conversation reinforces the conclusions based on the results from the previous conversation, in particular the role that prosody plays in the construction of troll messages. Of course, in this case, the prosody is exaggerated to the point that it loses its effectiveness in the troll, because it became a giveaway. But in a way, the loss in effectiveness is advantageous for this analysis, because it offers a window into the strategies employed by the user. The exaggeration of the prosody and of the identity created through the use of alternative orthography and social languages, together show how a troll selects characteristics that may make a message displeasing to other users and elicit other user responses, initiating an argument.

The analysis of this conversation also allows us to understand how user identity and trolling interact. Users like idacalledyouwoodyjoe and harypoddur in this conversation, use language to construct identities relative to each other. By constructing an identity as an enforcer of conduct, relative to harypoddur, idacalledyouwoodyjoe also helped to reinforce the identity of harypoddur as an inexperienced user. Once the troll became more obvious, idacalledyouwoodyjoe came back and ceased to reinforce both identities as a way of saving face. It seems that the false or insincere identity of the troll may be as dependent on other users as it is on the construction of the troll messages.

4.3 Bender Troll

This next interchange occurred in the comment thread about a text-based post to the Atheism subreddit, made in January of 2012. The post is entitled "How I Became an Atheist. (First Post)" and was made by the user BendingUnitSN271605 to the Atheism subreddit. The content of the original post at first seems to be a very dramatic story about a person's life and conversion to atheism; however, by the end of the story, it is subtly revealed that it is in fact the life story of a character from the adult animated show *Futurama*, and the account name BendingUnitSN271605 refers to the character, Bender, from that show (Appendix 2.3). The post received generally positive feedback from the community, with a majority of upvotes, and many of the other comments made about this post mention when the authors of the comments discovered the joke, while other comments made clearly show that some users did not pick up on the subtle reference.

Given a different set of conditions, this kind of post itself could be considered a troll, due to the fact that it sets up readers to believe one thing, then subtly reveals itself to be another, but only to those who possess a certain set of cultural knowledge. What makes this post not a troll, however, is that what is revealed is simply a joke, albeit a subtle one. Because the post produces primarily humor, rather than annoyance, it is a joke rather than a troll. The user BendingUnitSN271605 is what is known as a novelty account, an account with a specific identity tied in some way to the account name. In this case the conceit of

this novelty account is that the identity it has is that of the character Bender from the show *Futurama*. This character is an angry and drunken robot who despises humans.

In the interchange being examined here, a user named David1337 comments on the original post, initializing a troll and attempting to provoke the original poster (the novelty account) into an argument. While what ensues is an argument between the two users, in the end David1337 is not successful in completely baiting BendingUnitSN271605 into falling for the troll. The argument, rather than being based on any specific content, is simply a superiority contest, with each user trying to establish some kind of superiority over the other. Ultimately the novelty account manages to deflect the troll by staying in character and maintaining this fictional identity.

The conversation in question consists of 12 comments made by a total of four participants, although 10 of the comments are posted by two of the four users (Appendix 2.4). The interchange begins when the user David1337 comments on the original post with the message "And none of that is true." (1) This is the beginning of the troll. It is impossible to determine whether or not the user David1337 realized that the original post was not intended for anyone to understand it as a true story and that it was a joke, or if this user simply thought it was an elaborate lie designed to sound like a good story. In either case, it is clear that the user BendingUnitSN271605 is aware that the original post is not a true story, and other users understand this as well, based on other comments.

David1337 uses the information that the story is not true to bait the original post's

author into an argument.

The user BendingUnitSN271605's response to this first comment is the

first and only time during the conversation that the user breaks out of the Bender

character momentarily (2). Although the novelty account responds using the word

"meatbag", a word that the robot character uses to refer to humans, it also asks the

question "ever heard of a novelty account?" outing itself within the dialogue as an

account with a fictional identity. This would be something of a stumble on the

part of the novelty account user, but only if David1337 had already known about

the fictional identity. Instead, it seems that this news is a surprise to the user

David1337, who claims not to have read the original poster's username, but

continues to attempt to bait the novelty account with a barrage of insults, saying

"Didn't even read the account name because I'm not a total faggot like you." (3).

BendingUnitSN271605 counters with a rhetorical question, and a statement

intended to counter the insults, and lastly points out a typo in the last post made

by David1337 (4).

At this point in the interchange, a third user comes along and interjects a

quote from *Futurama*, said by the character bender, and attributes to "you" in the

message, referring to the novelty account (5). This may have been in response to

the comment "*sigh*, humans" at the end of comment 4, but seems to show little

awareness of the argument, taking place between the other two users. David1337

ignores this comment in the response, which makes reference to the user

BendingUnitSN271605's status as a "redditor" (a frequent user of Reddit), saying "Typical redditor talks shit about a type-o when they have nothing else to say." (6) By doing so, this user makes reference to the novelty account's last post, insulting it on the basis of that. In comment 6, the novelty account makes a parallel remark, first quoting an insult-riddled section of David1337's message in comment 3, and then saying "Typical adolescent talks shit about nothing when they have the intelligence of the average ape." (7)

Now, a fourth participant enters the conversation, responding to BendingUnitSN271605's comment. This user, OneWarning13, states only "Don't feed the trolls…" (8) Because this advisory is directed to the novelty account, it implies that David1337 is the one doing the trolling, or attempting to do so. While engaging with a troll at all would normally constitute "feeding the trolls", the novelty account seems to be staying much more cool, calm, and collected than someone who has fallen for a troll. This warning, however, is ultimately ignored as David1337 goes on to respond to comment 7, once again drawing parallels with both 7 and 6 by beginning the message with the construction "Typical [identity classification]" (9). This time, David1337 calls BengingUnitSN271605 a "Typical robot redditor" and claims superiority for himself on the basis of being human, as opposed to a robot. He states "At least my idiocy is my own and not some man made programmed idiocy." Comment 9 will be particularly important in analysis, because it marks the shift in David1337's attacks on the novelty

account from speaking to the user to speaking to the account's fictional robot identity.

In comment 10, the Bender identity's voice comes through very strongly, as the message makes reference to information about the character from the show (that he was made for basic manual labor) and refers again to David1337 as "human". BendingUnitsN271605 makes the point that even as a machine created for a very simple manual task, he can still win in a battle of wits, an attack on David1337 to which the other user does not seem to have a comeback. Instead, this user argues that what separates the two of them (the person and the robot) is emotions, and that possessing emotions is what grants David1337 superiority (11). The final comment of the conversation is made by BendingUnitSN271605, and reads "I have plenty of emotions, buddy. Mostly intense hatred towards all humans. Which is because of flesh sacks like yourself not being able to outsmart a drunken half-fried processor programmed for construction work." (12) At this point, either the other participant in the conversation got bored or could not come up with a response, as the conversation ends.

This troll is interesting to analyze because, although the user BendingUnitSN271605 continued to respond, the troll was only partially successful. While in a successful troll, the user posting the troll messages ideally stays removed and does not become emotionally invested in the outcome of the argument, the user David1337 seems to become invested and loses a position of detached superiority partway through the interchange. It is also interesting to see

how the user BendingUnitSN271605 is able to deflect the troll by staying in character. The tools to be used in the analysis of this conversation are: "The Building Tools", "The Context is Reflexive Tool", "The Intertextuality Tool", and "The Topic Flow or Topic Chaining Tool".

4.3.1 "The Building Tools"- Building Identity

The challenge for any novelty account user is to successfully establish the novelty identity. For some novelty accounts this is very easy. For example, all the user who creates a novelty account named, say, always_says_whatever, has to do is respond with the word "whatever" to any post. That kind of novelty account is at the farthest end toward simplistic on a continuum of complexity of identity, and there is plenty in between, but one of the most challenging novelty account types is that of a character. Using the identity of a fictional character, whether taken from a piece of literature, movie, television series, etc. or created by the user, requires that the account's linguistic mannerisms, personal information, and opinions all be consistent with that of the character, and that these be apparent from the posts made by the user.

In this conversation, the user constructs BendingUnitSN271605's identity mostly through the use of key words and phrases taken from the television show, including catchphrases, as well as information from the show about the character's life. This is done initially in the original post very subtly, making few direct references to names or places in the show (the only one of these is the name "Rodriguez", which is the character Bender's last name). By being vague and not

referencing the fact that the character is a robot, only alluding to this by saying things like "I was made right in Mexico", the narrative builds up to the punch-line "bite my shiny metal ass", a catchphrase used by the character on the show. Because the identity of the character is so subtle in the original post, with very few linguistic markers that would distinguish or characterize the novelty account, the user is at somewhat of a disadvantage at the start of this conversation, as far as building up an identity.

The character Bender presents no linguistic mannerisms, as far as syntax or phonetics, that distinguish him as a robot, so the primary means the user has of constructing the account's identity is through word choice, and in particular choosing words that distinguish others as different. This is seen through the use of several words and phrases that draw a contrast based on David1337's (assumed) humanity, including calling the user "human, "meatbag", and "flesh sack". This identity starts out weak in the conversation, and becomes more so during the first half, until in comment 7, nothing about the message is indicative of the characteristics of the persona or even of its status as a robot. It may be this fact, the failure to keep up the novelty identity, that prompts the user OneWarning13 to intervene and say "Don't feed the trolls…" It is possible that the feeding referred to by OneWarning13's message is the fact that the novelty account appears to become so involved in the argument itself, that the account's identity loses priority and disappears.

4.3.2 "The Context is Reflexive Tool"

This conversation is marked by a distinct shift in the context at comment 9. From the start of the conversation and up until this point, the context can be summarized as "an argument between two users of Reddit". Starting at David1337's first comment that "none of that is true" through when this user calls BendingUnitSN271605 a "typical redditor", it is clear that the addressee is considered a user, who is presumably human and most likely sitting at a computer. The statement that "none of that is true" leads to the logical conclusion that if the story in the original post is not true, there is some "true life story" pertaining to the user, a person. And by calling BendingUnitSN271605 a "typical redditor", not only is it being implied that the account is being authored by a person, a person defined by frequent participation on Reddit.com, but also that within this group of people, the novelty account's author is very average.

At comment 9, a shift occurs, at which point David1337 first acknowledges the fictional robot character identity of BendingUnitSN271605 by referring to the user as a "typical robot redditor", behaving as if this were the user's true identity. By subscribing to the fiction that the novelty account is really the *Futurama* character, Bender, David1337 strengthens this identity within the conversation and, as will be discussed as a function of the "Intertextuality Tool", allows the novelty account to achieve and sustain emotional detachment and superiority in the conversation.

While the change in contexts from "an argument between two users of Reddit.com", to "an argument between a user of Reddit.com and a fictional robot

character", may be caused by the user David1337, the effects are seen in the responses from BendingUnitSN271605. As soon as comment 2, BendingUnitSN271605 admits to the fictitiousness of its identity, albeit while still maintaining traces of the identity by using words like "meatbag" and referring to "humans". By comment 7, very little of the qualities of the novelty account identity can be seen in the text of the post, immediately after being referred to as a "typical redditor". By reading comment 7 alone, there would be no way to distinguish this account from an account whose identity is that of a typical, human user. However, as soon as David1337 legitimizes the fictitious identity and establishes a new context by referring to a "typical robot redditor", the voice of the novelty account becomes clearer, as BendingUnitSN271605 begins to make more references to facts from the television show and distinguish itself from "humans" and "flesh sacks".

4.3.3 "The Intertextuality Tool"

One of the strongest tools at the disposal of the novelty account BendingUnitSN271605, in this exchange, is its intertextuality. Because the identity of the account is that of a fictional character, and what's more, a pre-established fictional character from a television series, the user is afforded both an external source to draw from for arguments in the conversation, as well as the ability to feel emotionally removed or detached from the outcome of the exchange.

Once the user David1337 legitimizes the novelty account's identity, by referring to BendingUnitSN271605 as a "robot", this identity is reinforced, and eventually becomes a key argument in the effort to establish its superiority of David1337. In comment 10, the user posts "I was constructed to bend girders into 'U' shapes and I can outwit you, how does that make you feel, human?" The user draws from an element of Bender's character on the show in order to establish superiority. In addition to taunting David1337 with the implication that "you are being outwitted by a robot construction worker" there is also the implication that "you are waging an argument against a fictional character" that begins to give weight to the user's bid for intellectual and moral superiority.

4.3.4 "The Topic Flow or Topic Chaining Tool"

Both participants in this conversation tend to build arguments against one another off of previous things said in the conversation, for example when BendingUnitSN271605 criticizes the user David1337 for mistyping "because", in comment 4, which leads David1337 to typify redditors as users who expect strict correctness in spelling, and group the novelty account user into this category.

Perhaps the most interesting topic chaining performed by these two participants is seen in comments 6, 7 and 9, when the users respond to each other's previous comments by calling each other a "typical [social category]". This begins when David1337 uses the phrase "typical redditor", then is called a "typical adolescent" by BendingUnitSN271605, and then revises the previous statement to "typical robot redditor". By doing this, both participants attempt to

discredit one another through this status of being "typical". This trait may also be linked to a kind of predictability, and therefore the underlying message may be "what you just said was predictable, meaning you are not very clever." After comment 10, BendingUnitSN271605 does not go on to continue the chain. This could be a sign that the previous use of the "typical" accusation was not very effective, which is probably the case considering the previous comment referred to the novelty account as a "typical robot redditor". Given that there are very few "robot redditors", being a typical one does not mean much, and therefore the insult is not very effective.

4.3.5 Conclusion

The findings of the analysis of this conversation indicate that trolling, when it results in an argument, is primarily a struggle between users to establish superiority (intellectual, moral, cultural, or otherwise) over one another. Not only do we see this occurring in this conversation, but the analysis also shows that identity plays a large role in this debate. These two users have at their disposal both the content of the comments posted (the explicit message of the comment), and the identity being constructed as a function of these comments, which are available to be used against each other. We can see that as BendingUnitSN271605 becomes more invested in the argument, the identity that had originally been created becomes less evident from the user's posts. This also coincides with the part of the discussion where David1337 addresses the other user's non-fictional identity. This seems to offer additional information to what was found in the

previous two conversations. Not only is the outcome of trolling determined by the user's apparent emotional involvement, as seen in the content and tone of their messages, but it is also strongly related to the user's identity, and how a user constructs an identity, relative to the interaction. In continuation, we will see how users adopt registers and vocabulary choices that help and hinder them in an instance of trolling.

4.4 Meme Troll

This final example of trolling represents the more aggressive side of trolling, where the distinction between trolling and flaming becomes less clear. The conversation is taken from comments on a post, entitled "Good Girl Gina" in the subreddit called AdviceAnimals, made by the user pinkzebraprint. AdviceAnimals is a subreddit in which the posts are largely what is known now on the Internet as "memes" (although they do not bare a very strong resemblance to what has previously been termed a "meme" in sociolinguistics). These memes consist of either a photo with a caption, or more frequently a colorful background with the face of an animal in the middle, bearing a caption and the top and bottom of the picture. The memes are categorized based on particular sentiments or attitude, such as Socially Awkward Penguin, Courage Wolf, or Condescending Fox. The captions on the photos typically correspond to thoughts, moments, or hypothetical situations that correspond to the sentiment of the meme. The captions for Socially Awkward Penguin memes, for example, describe moments of social awkwardness or discomfort (see Figure 2.3).
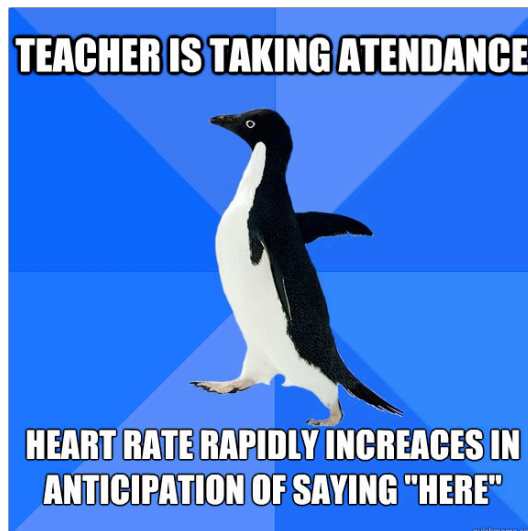
Figure 2.3

This meme is called Good Girl Gina, depicts a very pretty young woman, and

typically bears captions that the creators feel typify the ideal ways that girls

should act. This particular meme had the captions "KNOWS SHE'S

PRETTY//DOESN'T SAY SHE'S FAT TO GET ATTENTION".[17] A recreated

version of the meme can be seen in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4

---

[17] Captions on these memes are always written in all capital letters. The double
slashes indicate a line break.

The conversation in question begins with a comment by the novelty account of somewhat significant Reddit fame, POLITE_ALLCAPS_GUY, and the entire comment thread contains a total of 28 posts by 25 different users. Of these, however, only 7 comments will be examined as part of the analysis of the troll in this interaction.

The initial post about the meme, upon which the rest of the interaction, is posted by the account called POLITE_ALLCAPS_GUY, the premise of whose novelty account is that the user always posts using all capital letters, and always uses a polite and friendly tone in messages. This post points out that, while some women may complain about feeling ugly to get attention, there are many women who could generally be considered pretty who do not see themselves in that way, and may feel real insecurities (1). This becomes the basis for the troll message (comment 4), posted by the user BTK_Killer. In this comment, the user mimics POLITE_ALLCAPS_GUY's use of all capital letters, but for the purpose of disagreeing with the content of the initial post, saying "let me type so you can understand it." The poster then goes on to make a series of outrageous accusations against all women, some of which are opinions and some of which are quantifiably untrue. The message claims that a majority of women are overweight, and in this context it can be inferred that this means unattractive as well, and that all women are starved for attention. The user then makes a relatively illogical argument that attractive women have no hardships, which

causes them to feel insecurity, and seek affirmation by pretending to feel unattractive.

While this comment may not appear to be a troll at first glance (a quality of a successful troll), it possesses certain attributes that indicate that it most likely is a troll. The first of these is the exaggeration of the claims made, past the point of being unrealistic. The second is that the troll is not targeted at a user, but rather at the content of a user's previous post, whereas a flame would most likely contain attacks on users within the conversation. Another indication that this is a troll is the fact that, despite the opening flurry of belligerent language, the user BTK_Killer does not come back to post again, indicating that perhaps the outcome of the argument or the point being made were not the goal of the post, but rather the baiting of users into posting similarly combative comments.

Several users fall for this troll post, the first of which is the user Electric_Trout, who posts a condescending and insulting message (19). In response to BTK_Killer, Electric_Trout explains the former's motives for posting the message as being based on a misogyny stemming from being emotionally hurt by a woman in the past. In addition to this, the user writes that "[BTK_Killer] is most likely fat and/or hideous", a comment on which Electric_Trout is called out by the user canigetarefund in comment 24, who says "Kinda ruined the illusion that you were superior."

In addition to Electric_Trout, the user yayayayasmin is baited into insulting BTK_Killer, in comment 20. This user comments "It's funny, 'cause

you're a retarded person." This user does not receive the same reprimand as Electric_Trout for the insult, but can still be considered to have been drawn in by the troll, due to the fact that the reaction entails the belief that BTK_Killer was completely sincere in the posting of comment 4. The comment also fails to demonstrate a certain amount of emotional distance, as troll messages often appeal to other users at an emotional level, with the objective of eliciting emotional or angry responses.

Finally, the user with the account name ThisIsYourPenis also chimes in and is baited by the troll post, but not as a negative reaction to the post by BTK_Killer, but rather in disagreement with Electric_Trout. In comment 23, ThisIsYourPenis seems to be claiming that biochemical processes in the female body cause to be disagreeable, while men are simply trying to maintain composure in the face of a parallel set of biochemical processes. The commenter uses capital letters to indicate emphasis on certain words, and finishes the message with an all-capitalized, generalized insult. This user has fallen for the troll by thinking that the sentiment behind the troll post was sincere enough to agree with.

This troll is interesting to examine because it exemplifies a less benign side of Internet trolling. While it is not as aggressive and hateful as flaming can be, it demonstrates how negative attitudes and emotionally-charged statements can be used to provoke others into taking an insincere post seriously, and reacting in equally emotionally-charged ways. It also shows that falling for a troll cannot

be avoided simply by agreeing with the content of the troll post. This conversation

will be analyzed using the following tools: "The Vocabulary Tool" and "The

Building Tools".

4.4.1 "The Vocabulary Tool"

Vocabulary choice, as we will see, played a crucial role in the elaboration

of the troll and the reactions of other users to the message. Users employ a

combination of words from colloquial and formal registers, as well as sets of

quantifiers in varying degrees of exactness to promote a sense of expertise in the

debate. The troll poster uses the most extreme qualifiers and the most colloquial

vocabulary, making it most susceptible to objections, another indication that it is a

troll. As the goal of a troll is to receive emotionally-charged responses,

elaborating a weak argument could be a more effective way of eliciting replies.

4.4.2 "The Building Tools"

Significance- The participant BTK_Killer not only emphasizes the content of

comment 4 by writing it in all capital letters, but also constructs significance

around the fact that the message is in response and in disagreement to

POLITE_ALLCAPS_GUY, a well-liked Reddit user (judging by other comments

in the thread). By writing a line at the beginning of the post saying "let me type so

you can understand it" and then proceeding to write the body of the text in all

capital letters, BTK_Killer draws attention to the aggression toward

POLITE_ALLCAPS_GUY. This also may play a role in eliciting an emotional

reaction from other users, as this user emphasizes a degree of rudeness toward a novelty account known for being polite.

Activities- Four of the participants in this interaction take part in using language to build an activity: the activity of describing a person or group of people. POLITE_ALLCAPS_GUY begins this activity in comment 1, by describing what some kinds of women are like, as opposed to some other kinds. By using phrases like "even girls who most folks would say are super pretty", "not all", and "some are", the user relinquishes any expert or definitive knowledge. BTK_Killer, on the other hand, seems to claim precise and complete knowledge of the issue by using words like "most women", "all women", "have nothing", "the only way". Although this use of "all" and "nothing" words and phrases should indicate a high degree of knowledge on an issue, the vocabulary of the post is relatively colloquial, particularly when compared to the vocabulary used by Electric-Trout in comment 19. Electric_Trout, this time, goes about describing a single individual: BTK_Killer. Similar to comment 4, comment 19 contains words like "likely", "probably", and "sole purpose", offering a sense of understanding of the issue, but also elevates the vocabulary by using words like "misogynist" and "vents". Comment 23, by the user ThisIsYourPenis, combines some aspects of each of both comments 4 and 19. This participant uses vulgar language next to scientific terms and words like "whomever", seeming to attempt to display knowledgeable certainty and strong emotion.

Sign Systems and Knowledge- As mentioned, several participants attempt to promote their knowledge and understanding of a highly controversial topic through a use of vocabulary and syntax. The user Electric_Trout does this in particular, by beginning comment 19 with "This, children is a misogynist," the user has immediately set up a position from which to talk down to the comment's audience. This user also attempts to evoke a more formal register by using phrases such as "vents his rage" and "whose sole purpose is", and by using less common punctuation, for example by placing a semi-colon in the second sentence. This attempt at superiority, however, fails according to the author of comment 24, who claims that the accusation that BTK_Killer is "most likely fat and/or hideous" ruins the superiority that Electric_Trout had built up in the rest of the message.

4.4.3 Conclusion

The most significant conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis of this conversation have to do with how vocabulary choice and linguistic registers play a role in trolling. As was mentioned in the discussion of the Ebay Troll, if the objective of trolling is to provoke others into a long, drawn-out argument, a troll post must be crafted in a way that is likely to elicit negative user response. BTK_Killer does this in three ways in this conversation. The first is the choice of topic, which was highly controversial and the message expressed very unpopular vies. The second way was through the use of very colloquial vocabulary and expletives, which create an informal register, potentially making it easy for other users to see this response as being less thought-through and well-reasoned. Lastly,

BTK_Killer also uses a considerable number of universal quantifiers, relative to the other participants of this interaction. This allows the troll message to be easily contradicted, because the statements made in it are so exaggerated.

On the other hand, the users who attempt to counter BTK_Killer's message, unaware that it is a troll, tend to display many strategies that have opposite effects to the troll message. These user attempt to elevate the vocabulary of their posts, which could fulfill the objectives of evoking a register associated with higher intelligence, and of displaying certain social languages with the objective of instilling confidence in the reader.

4.5 Analysis by Tool

The following is a summary of the analysis that has been made in all four conversations on the basis of each of the analysis tools. While most of these tools had applications in each of the conversations, some of the tools were more relevant to certain conversations over others. The way that the tool was applied to individual conversations will be described first, followed by the tool's application to the conversations in general.

Tool	Results
"The Fill In Tool"	• In the Ebay Troll, two key elements of the conversation must be filled in by the participants in order to understand the logic of the conversation. The first of these is the fact that the original post is not sincere in nature, and is a troll. This is filled in based on the erroneousness of the information, and the exaggerated intonation. The second piece of information being filled in is the subtle differences in use of the word "fail". By giving

	different emphases to the sentences containing this word, three different participants use it in contrasting ways. • In three of the four conversations, at least one participant identifies the troll post as such, while others fall for the troll or attempt to interact with its author on a sincere basis. This shows that some participants are applying knowledge not located within the conversation to the interaction, while others are not filling in this information or have not acquired this outside knowledge.
"The Intonation Tool"	• The author of the Ebay Troll utilizes a combination of capital letters (understood online as yelling) and exaggerated punctuation to both draw attention to the post and to produce a frenetic, urgent tone to the message. • In the Justin Bieber Troll, the user harypoddur's troll posts contain a huge amount of punctuation and capital letters along with alternative orthography that mimics the intonation of a certain subculture of young people. This intonation evokes a particular social language, in order to evoke strong reactions from other users. • In most of these conversations, at least one participant uses some form of intonation to draw attention to the post and to evoke an emotional reaction in the reader.
"The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool"	• In the Justin Bieber Troll, both the user idacalledyouwoodyjoe and the troll author harypoddur use language in an attempt to perform certain actions. First, the user idacalledyouwoodyjoe attempts to police the situation by evoking the role of a sheriff, establishing order in the face of an outsider's ignorance. On the other hand, harypoddur uses a question as an attempt to prolong an interaction that has ended. • Participants in these conversations use language as means to a variety of ends. The most common of these actions that are accomplished as a function of trolling and

	responding to trolls is to establish oneself as superior to another participant.
"The Vocabulary Tool"	• Vocabulary plays a critical role in the Meme Troll. Participants employ vocabulary from different registers to produce different effects. While the user BTK_Killer uses a very colloquial vocabulary, leaving the message vulnerable, and therefore creating a more inviting troll to other posters who may fall for it by responding angrily or condescendingly. On the other hand, the user Electric_Trout attempts to use an elevated vocabulary to establish superiority over BTK_Killer. • This is one of the broadest aspects of the discourse of these four conversations. Authors of trolls and responders to trolls alike use vocabulary in a variety of ways. A successful troll post receives replies from users attempting to establish superiority, so troll posts often consist of vocabulary that leaves the message vulnerable to attack on this level, while the victims of trolls often use aggressive or elevated vocabulary as a means of asserting dominance.
"The This Way and Not That Way Tool"	• The Ebay Troll's conversation contains a variety of responses to the troll, some of which successfully avoided the bait, while the authors of others fell for the troll. This allows for success and failure of replies to be analyzed on the basis of how they contrast. It seems that the angry, aggressive, or disparaging responses are those that are considered to have fallen for the troll. • The same conclusion from the Ebay Troll can be drawn about most of the conversations analyzed here. Those users who respond in ways that suggest they have become emotionally involved, who reply aggressively, or seem to insult the author of the troll are considered to have been baited. Users who respond helpfully or non-aggressively have failed in that they did not recognize the troll, but managed to not show emotional

	involvement.
"The Context is Reflexive Tool"	• Context is created by the participants in the Bender Troll, as the user David1337 begins the interaction seeming to orient responses toward the human author of the posts from the novelty account. Halfway through the conversation, David 1337 creates a new context by beginning to address the novelty account as if a robot were really authoring the messages. At this point, the user BendingUnitSN271605 begins to assume the character of the robot to a greater degree, responding to the change of context. • In a general sense, the users who fall for a troll do so by attempting to participate in a context where they are arguing with a user who is sincerely mistaken or ignorant, while the troll has already established the context of "trolling". This is the fundamental difference between those who avoid a troll and those who fall for it.
The Building Tools	• In the Ebay Troll, the user harypoddur uses social languages to build the identity of a teenager, using alternative orthography, exaggerated punctuation and emoticons. • In the Bender Troll, the author of the troll poster, under the novelty account constructs the identity of a fictional character by making intertextual references and including typical catchphrases of the character, contrasting the identity of the character from "humans". • In the Meme Troll, participants use language to build significance of concepts, the activities in which they are participating, and to evoke certain sign systems and knowledge. All of this is done with the objective of establishing a sense of superiority to the other participants. • Judging by these conversations, much of trolling relies on constructing identities in order to create emotional distance from the outcome of the interaction. Those who can create distance in this way, are able to troll and avoid being trolled, while those who become ensnared emotionally or who fail in the

	construction of an identity are more susceptible to being trolled or fail to plant a successful troll.
"The Topic Flow or Topic Chaining Tool"	• Both main participants in the Bender Troll chain topics by criticizing the other on a previous post made. In this participation, this allows each individual to claim superiority based on perceived mistakes in the other's past messages. • In addition to the kind of topic chaining found in the Bender Troll, other trolls construct posts by responding in a contradictory way to a previous user's message, or by asking questions based on something said by another participant.
"The Social Languages Tool"	• Both the Ebay Troll and the Justin Bieber Troll display exemplary instances of participants evoking social languages. In comment 6 of the Ebay Troll, the author evokes a spelling system and intonation typical of "Internet speak" as an exaggerated way of pointing out the troll. In the Bieber Troll, the user harypoddur evokes a social language that redditors tend to disparage, in order to elicit emotional reactions from other users, to limited avail. • Social languages, in these four conversations, are used primarily in identity construction. Part of the process of identity construction using social languages seems to be creating a comparison between one user and the other participants in the conversation.
"The Intertextuality Tool"	• Intertextuality is a key element in the Bender Troll, as the identity hinges upon references to the character Bender from the television series *Futurama*. • Other kinds of intertextuality occur in these conversations, such as references to other genres of media or communication, references to other users or knowledge of Reddit.com, etc.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

In March and April of 2012, Arizona state legislature attempted to pass a bill intended to protect Arizonans from the threat of cyberbullies and other forms of online threats and harassment, but that would also effectively criminalize trolling. According to the Los Angeles Times, the bill read, "It is unlawful for any person, with intent to terrify, intimidate, threaten, harass, annoy or offend, to use any electronic or digital device and use any obscene, lewd or profane language or suggest any lewd or lascivious act, or threaten to inflict physical harm to the person or property of any person."[18] This bill raises a host of questions, from the practical: "how does a government prosecute a misdemeanor committed by individuals who make a point to mask their identities and take advantage of anonymity?" to the theoretical: "how should terms like 'annoy', 'offend' or 'obscene' be defined and employed in a courtroom setting?" and "should obscene or annoying forms of communication be prohibited if they are found to fulfill a purpose in the community within which they take place?" The bill's broad and general language eventually halted its progress in the Arizona House of Representatives, but its success in the state senate suggests that this is not simply an isolated case of a few lawmakers who wish to control online communication, an, as of yet, little studied area of communication. Trolling falls into this gray area

---

[18] Maltais, Michelle (2012). "Trolling, a criminal offense in Arizona?" *Los Angeles Times*. Accessed April 5, 2012.
http://www.latimes.com/business/technology/la-fi-tn-arizona-internet-trolling-law-20120405,0,4138953.story

of online behaviors that are considered annoying by most Internet users, but whose function within online communities remains relatively unstudied.

The obvious question that emerges as a result of this bill is: is the act of annoying or offending another person online serious enough to be considered a crime? Some would say it is, while others would claim that it is simply bad or antisocial behavior, but that lawmakers and politicians have no place infringing upon citizens' freedom of speech in order to prohibit it. This is not a new debate, and can be tied to the debate over hate speech and what role the government can play in protecting citizens from verbal harassment. The broadness of the wording in the Arizona bill, however, brings up another, even more fundamental question…

Is the act of annoying or offending someone over the Internet, by definition, bad or antisocial behavior and does it speak to a character flaw of the individual? This suddenly becomes very hazy when considering all possible scenarios. For one, all cases in which one participant of an interaction is left annoyed or offended are not the result of another participant intentionally seeking to upset anyone. Often times this is simply the result of two or more individuals with different perspectives, trying but failing to understand one another. Even if one were to only consider cases in which it was the intent of a participant to annoy or offend, is placing the blame, or identifying a "bad guy" in the scenario as simple as finding that ill-intentioned participant? The analysis of the conversations in this study suggests that the situation is much more complex than

that. While many kinds of online interactions fall under the purview of "annoying and offensive" (and even more fall under the purview of the Arizonan bill), here I will consider trolling as just one example of these interactions, and show how the analysis of trolling in conversations on a discursive level, can begin to complicate the thinking behind its condemnation.

If we apply O'Sullivan and Flanagin's (2003) Interactional-Normative Framework, originally used as a framework through which to understand flaming, another online communicative act, to trolling, we see how much more complex the picture becomes. This framework deconstructs instances of flaming (and can be expanded to include trolling) according to their participants' perceptions of the messages, showing that every instance is not the same: some flames may not have been intentionally written to be aggressive, but the recipient interpreted it as a verbal attack, while other authors of flames may have intended to be insulting or inflammatory but were unsuccessful and the messages were not interpreted as flames by others. By applying the same framework to trolling, this communicative act ceases to be conceived of as a static concept, arbitrarily defined by the supposedly malicious motivations of one participant in the interaction. Instead, we begin to see the potential for great variation between instances of what we call "trolling", a fact that is clearly reflected in the conversations analyzed in this study. Some trolls appear more benign, while others seem quite bellicose. Some trolls attempt to anger others, while others attempt to confuse. It may even be possible that some trolls were not initially

written to be trolls at all, although the kind of analyses performed in this study cannot speak to that directly.

Through the analysis of the four conversations from Reddit.com used in this study, the conclusion can be made that aggressive, angry, or derisive replies are precisely the kinds of responses to a troll most frowned upon by the participants of these interactions. Successfully avoiding a troll does not only entail identifying it immediately. A gradient exists of tones and attitudes in responses to a troll, with kind or informative responses at the more acceptable end, and the emotionally charged and aggressive types of responses at the other. Troll posts in these conversations typically receive very negative votes from other users, but angry replies to these trolls often get equally negative votes, and occasionally reprimands from other users. Because trolling is a subtle kind of communication, and it exists on a continuum among other genres of communication and may mix with some of these, it is often not immediately clear when a user is confronted with an instance of trolling. Users of forums, message boards, and even social networking sites, often must be very wary of the messages to which they choose to respond. The threat of being trolled may serve as a reminder to some users to be less aggressive in responses to a variety of kinds of posts.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study analyzed four conversations that included instances of trolling from the social news aggregator site Reddit.com, using tools and methods from the field of discourse analysis, focusing primarily on conversation analysis.

Discourse analysis allows us to examine not only the characteristics that form part of the linguistic system (syntax, morphology, phonetics, etc.) but also to look at how individuals use language to perform actions and create contexts, identities, and relationships. The tools used to perform the analysis were borrowed from James Paul Gee's (2010) *Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit*, and include a set of 10 "tools" in the form of questions or ideas to be considered about each conversation. While each of the four conversations, and trolls, is very different, some trends could be identified in the analysis of each.

Firstly, several linguistic and paralinguistic elements played a large role in most of these conversation; the first of these is intonation. Gee uses the word "intonation", but the term could also be understood as "prosody", paralinguistic characteristics that come together and often add additional meaning to the message. In spoken communication this can take the form of characteristics such as emphasis, tone, volume, etc. In online communication, however, because it shares some characteristics with written text and some characteristics with spoken conversation, what constitutes prosody has not been formally systematized for this new field. In this study, characteristics of the text, such as all capital letters, italicization, bolding, punctuation, and orthographic characteristics like elongating words through duplication of letters, and the shortening of words, often using apostrophes, were all taken into consideration when examining for prosody.

The results show that prosody is used for a variety of purposes in these conversations. The use of all capital letters, for example, which typically denotes

yelling, is used in a variety of ways in these conversations, just as yelling is used for a variety of purposes in spoken communication. In some cases, it is used to draw attention to the message, while in other cases it seems to indicate emphasis on a particular word, or even sometimes anger or forcefulness. Punctuation also may be used purely for aesthetic value, although it also seems to play a role in creating the tone of a message, particularly when it is exaggerated. In trolls, intonation and prosody is often used to draw attention, to produce a somewhat exaggerated or frenetic tone in the message, producing an emotional reaction in the reader, or as part of a larger process of identity creation.

The next element is the participants' use of vocabulary. Vocabulary choice plays a role in other processes that will be described in greater detail later on, like the creation of identities within an interaction, and the creation of context and activities. Vocabulary is also used to evoke social languages, also linked to identities and activities. In these four conversations, the authors of the troll posts often choose either overly exaggerated or very colloquial vocabulary, in order to elicit responses from other users. A troll becomes successful when it receives responses, particularly aggressive or condescending responses, from other users, so it is important for the message to seem worthy of these kinds of replies. On the other hand, users responding to trolls often choose a more elevated set of vocabulary in order to appear to have a sound argument or to be superior to the author of the troll.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of discourse in these conversations is the use of language to build identities. Identity, or rather the identity created within the frame of a particular interaction, seems to be a critical element of trolling. If the objective in a conversation centered around a troll is to remain emotionally removed and to not respond aggressively, maintaining an identity that does this can be a very successful means of avoiding excessive involvement, even while carrying on a conversation with a user who is trolling. In some of the conversations in this study, the users who are trolling attempt to construct a persona in order to do so. This identity serves both to maintain a level of emotional distance from the conversation, as well as to provoke other users, if the identity is one that other users may find annoying or offensive. On the other hand, for the users responding to trolls, a persona or character, if constructed adequately, can be a means for this user to reply to a troll while not appearing to become involved emotionally. In one conversation in this study, a user who adopted the persona of a character from a television series was even able to appear more composed than the user who authored the troll.

While trolling is still a possible genre of interaction in contexts that lack anonymity, where participants maintain identities that are not exclusive to a single website, account, or exclusively online, anonymity does play a role in the phenomenon. Anonymity allows users to be more flexible in the kinds of identities they create within an interaction. Psychologists and sociologists may ask whether anonymity increases the likelihood that individuals will perform

these kinds of behaviors, and while this study cannot speak to that, it would be interesting to see a comparison between online trolling and face-to-face trolling to understand what role anonymity plays in the discourse itself.

Finally, social languages (as described in the discussion of the analytical tools in the chapter on methods) also play a large role in all four of these conversations. Social languages involve combining prosody, registers, vocabulary, etc. to evoke the language of a particular social group. Because social languages are tied to larger cultural entities, they can be used to elicit responses in the readers that are tied to how one might respond to a member of this cultural group. A user who wishes to construct a troll may choose to use a social language that typically receives unfavorable responses, in order to elicit a strong negative reaction from respondents. A user who is unknowingly responding to a troll may attempt to show intellectual or cultural superiority by invoking the language of a well-respected social group.

The results of analysis allow for a variety of generalizations to be made about trolling, although much has yet to be seen. The first, and perhaps most apparent conclusion that can be made about trolling based on this study is that it is a genre of communication that poses a challenge to identify. Flaming, which has been discussed earlier as another form of online communication, is much less complex than trolling, but is also quite difficult to identify with certainty. Given the subtleties and complexity of trolling, it stands to reason that it is even more difficult to identify on a case-by-case basis, and in some cases it may even depend

upon the interpretation of the reader, with various possible interpretations. The fact that the users who post trolls are not unanimously given negative feedback and that other users receive admonishments from readers suggests that there is more of a function to trolling than simply being annoying or cruel. The threat of being trolled may even serve to socialize Internet users in certain communities into what is appropriate online communication. It acts as a reminder to users that even if a post offers erroneous information, a politically incorrect statement, or seems ill-conceived, responding angrily or aggressively is still not an acceptable path to take.

This study shows that trolling as an online discursive phenomenon is complex, multifaceted, and serves a purpose in online communication, and it should not be written off as without purpose, or classified as deviousness for deviousness's sake. Whether the users who troll realize it or not, they play a role in the online communities in which they participate. They are also not the first to play such a role in an interactive medium like this. Trolling is not a unique genre of interaction, as humor is frequently used in poignant social criticism, and disruptive behaviors can be used to establish order. I am reminded of the Shakespearean fool, a character that invites laughs and derision, but who uses wordplay, feigned ignorance, and mockery to make insightful commentary and cause even the most intelligent characters to themselves seem foolish. Trolling is simply a new face to this kind of behavior, or perhaps better put, a new iteration of this kind of phenomenon, lacking a face and disguised in anonymity. As we

continue to embed new communicative technologies and online communication into our lives, it will become increasingly necessary to understand these kinds of behaviors, their characteristics, and the functions they serve, rather than discount and attempt to abolish them.

5.2 Limitations of this Study and Further Research

This study covers a very small amount of ground in a field filled largely with uncharted territory. There is a great deal yet to be explored and studied. This study serves as a jumping-off point in many possible directions, as far as the study of trolling goes. Discourse analysis provides a relatively well-rounded approach, but there is plenty of room for more detailed linguistic analyses of trolling, as well as room to study the sociological and psychological factors and effects related to trolling. With a sample size of only four conversations, all from a single website, this study is relatively small in its scope. There are many other venues for collecting both conversations and other forms of data on trolling, from other anonymous message board and forum sites like 4chan, to social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. Each of these websites represents both different groups of users and different configurations of communicative infrastructure, both of which are sure to have a huge effect on the kinds of trolling that occur.

In addition to additional research on trolling, there is much more to study with regard to how trolling relates to other kinds of online communication, such as flaming. At the moment the two words "trolling" and "flaming" are used nearly interchangeably in the media (though "trolling" seems to appear more often), and

a huge variety of behaviors and kinds of communication fall under these terms. These terms are often loaded, not only representing a kind of behavior, but also labeling the behavior according to a certain set of social norms. It seems that the field of internet communication could use a good deal of research and work on a taxonomy of kinds of behaviors, labeling genres of communication in a value-free system.

Appendices
Appendix 1.1

1 subreddit navigation toolbar

2 links to login and register

3 search bar

4 user login

5 link to link submission form

7 tabs to change browse settings

6 a single post with its metadata

MY REDDITS ▼ ALL - RANDOM | PICS - FUNNY - POLITICS - GAMING - ASKREDDIT - WORLDNEWS - VIDEOS - IAMA - TODAYILEARNED - WTF - AWW - ATHEISM - TECHNOLOGY - ADVICEANIMA MORE »

want to join? login or register in seconds English

search reddit

username
password
□ remember me   reset password

Submit a link

reddit this ad

to anything interesting: news article, blog entry, video, picture...

what's hot | new | controversial | top | saved

< >

sponsored link what's this?

Hurry Reddit! Get a Free Pair of Designer Glasses with lenses at Coastal.com today while offer lasts. (US ONLY) | Use Code: FIRSTPAIRFREE (coastal.com)
promoted by achong20
283 comments share

1 2315 **Awesome Warning** (i.imgur.com)
submitted 2 hours ago by man_in_the_mirra to funny
507 comments share

2 1824 **Moving out of France by train gave me a unique opportunity: this is a picture of me, 25, with every single thing that I own** (i.imgur.com)
submitted 2 hours ago by LeJavier to pics
792 comments share

3 1319 **A Maryland republican had a change of heart after mistakenly being seated next to and speaking with a group of gay couples. The next week he voted FOR the gay marriage bill. One of only two republicans to do so. The bill squeaked by 72-67.** (latimes.com)
submitted 3 hours ago by whyteguy to politics
197 comments share

4 1015 **This will really fuck with him** (qkme.me)
submitted 3 hours ago by chuckie2389 to AdviceAnimals
59 comments share

5 2282 **A wonderful story for children** (i.imgur.com)
submitted 10 hours ago by Willow_Rosenberg to WTF
635 comments share

6 2178 **Court rules that TrueCrypt user cannot be compelled to decrypt hard disk [PDF]** (ca11.uscourts.gov)
submitted 10 hours ago by wekt to technology
747 comments share

7 493 **Every once in a while I actually "lol" at a comment** (imgur.com)
submitted 2 hours ago by Gfresh404 to gaming
13 comments share

8 703 **Reddit, what's your best "No time to explain, let's go," story?** (self.AskReddit)
submitted 6 hours ago by Kodemar to AskReddit
465 comments share

9 1088 **What if Star Wars Episode I were actually good?** (youtube.com)
submitted 9 hours ago by nirdefchains91 to videos
282 comments share

The power of prayer (i.imgur.com)

Appendix 1.2

Annotations:

8 purple text indicates a link has already been viewed

9 gray text in parentheses indicates the host url (i.e. the webpage that the link directs to)

10 name of subreddit the post belongs to

11 username of the member who posted the link

12 self.[subreddit name] shows the link leads to a self-post, a text-based post hosted by Reddit

16 time of submission

15 thumbnail of a photo or video post

14 number of user comments on a post and a link to read them

13 number of votes a link has received

Reddit content:

A Maryland republican had a change of heart after mistakenly being seated next to and speaking with a group of gay couples. The next week he voted FOR the gay marriage bill. One of only two republicans to do so. The bill squeaked by 72-67. (latimes.com)
submitted 3 hours ago by whyteguy to politics
197 comments share
1319

This will really fuck with him (qkme.me)
submitted 3 hours ago by chuckie2389 to AdviceAnimals
59 comments share
1015

A wonderful story for children (i.imgur.com)
submitted 10 hours ago by Willow_Rosenberg to WTF
635 comments share
2282

Court rules that TrueCrypt user cannot be compelled to decrypt hard disk [PDF] (ca11.uscourts.gov)
submitted 10 hours ago by wekt to technology
747 comments share
2178

Every once in a while I actually "lol" at a comment (i.imgur.com)
submitted 2 hours ago by Gfresh404 to gaming
430 comments share
493

Reddit, whats your best "No time to explain, let's go," story? (self.AskReddit)
submitted 6 hours ago by Codemar to AskReddit
465 comments share
703

What if Star Wars Episode I were actually good? (youtube.com)
submitted 9 hours ago by nlrdefchains91 to videos
282 comments share
1088

Appendix 1.3

funny   FUNNY   comments   related   other discussions (1)   want to join? login or register in seconds | English

search reddit

this post was submitted on 24 Feb 2012
3,200 points (56% like it)
14,235 up votes 11,036 down votes
shortlink: [http://redd.it/q41dg]

username   password   (login)
□ remember me   reset password

funny
unsubscribe   1,455,127 readers

New Rule:

No posts with their sole purpose being to communicate with another redditor. Example. Sorry, you're going to have to use a different form of communication.

Welcome to r/Funny:
You may only post if you are funny.
Please No:

- Screenshots of comment threads. Post a link with context to /r/bestof instead.
- Posts for the specific point of it being your reddit birthday.
- Politics - This includes OWS & SOPA posts.
- Rage comics - Go to /r/F7U12 instead.
- Memes - Go to /r/AdviceAnimals instead.
- Demotivational posters - Go to /r/Demotivational instead.
- Pictures of just text - Make a self post instead.
- DAE posts - Go to /r/doesanybodyelse instead.

Rehosted webcomics will be removed. Please

top 200 comments   show 500
sorted by: best ▼

Awesome Warning (i.imgur.com)
submitted 3 hours ago by man_in_the_mirra
858 comments   share
permalink

[–] juicehenderson 255 points 2 hours ago
No one has said this looks fake to them. Looks fake to me.
The kerning is off and there is a capital Y after purchasing.
permalink

[–] b0wzy 117 points 2 hours ago
take it into photoshop, crank the levels and it usually helps show if things have been shopped.
http://imgur.com/2q72I
permalink parent

[–] BanginNLeavin 83 points 1 hour ago
I know the best way to tell if it is shopped, go to a hat shop and ask to see their newest LRG shipment. This, of course, would require actually removing oneself from the internets.
permalink parent

[–] Katsime 63 points 1 hour ago
Don't you try and con me into disconnecting...
permalink parent

[–] caternet 24 points 54 minutes ago
You know, I know this steak doesn't exist. I know that when I put it in my mouth, the Matrix is telling my brain that it is juicy and delicious. After nine years, you know what I realize?: Ignorance is bliss.
permalink parent

load more comments (2 replies)

load more comments (2 replies)

[–] AptMoniker 16 points 1 hour ago
Unless you call, email, tweet.
permalink parent

[–] I_am_sad 10 points 32 minutes ago
Or you can just google and find the original sticker:
http://i.imgur.com/FRZpS.png

Appendix 1.4

Appendix 1.5

Appendix 2.1

Original Post (OP)

▲ Ebay seller trying not to sell windows vista (cgi.ebay.com)
12 submitted 4 years ago by PlasmaWhore
▼ 24 comments share save hide report

sorted by: old ▼

you are viewing a single comment's thread.
view the rest of the comments →

1 [–] ThaiTai -13 points 4 years ago
DO NOT GO TO THIS WEBSITE OR CLICK ON ANYTHING IF YOU ARE ALREADY THERE. THIS IS A PHISHING SITE DESIGNED TO GET YOUR CREDIT CARD DETAILS!!!!!

NOTE THE cgi. in front of the domain name. That is the BIG CLUE….DON'T GO THERE AND BAN THIS BASTARD PLEASE….URGENTLY.

permalink

leads to http://cgi.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?;ViewItem&item=180181973575

2 [–] otatop 7 points 4 years ago
No…this is an actual eBay page.
permalink parent

3 [–] spiker611 9 points 4 years ago
No. cgi.ebay.com, the last two phrases are what really matter and it's ebay.com, not anywhere else. cgi. is just a different internal server or address.
permalink parent

4 [–] [deleted] 10 points 4 years ago
Hi.

You fail at the Internets.
permalink parent

7 [–] YHBT -1 points 4 years ago
Five responses. Who's the one that failed?

HAND!
permalink parent

5 [–] [deleted] 9 points 4 years ago
FAIL
permalink parent

6 [–] [deleted] 4 points 4 years ago
CGI IS TEH HAXXERS GRAYTEST TOOL!!! BE WARE!!
permalink parent

Appendix 2.2

da hawtest men alliv <3 <3 <3 :)))))   (en.wikipedia.org)
submitted 7 months ago by harypoddur
7 comments   share   save   hide   report

all 7 comments

sorted by: old ▼

1   [–] TillyOTilly   2 points 7 months ago
Kill you with fire.
permalink

2   [–] idacalledyouwoodyjoe   4 points 7 months ago
that's not how we do things 'round these parts
permalink

3   [–] harypoddur [S] -4 points 7 months ago
hay dunt giv it bad votz cuz he i da hawtest guy eva!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! <3 <3 <3 bad votz r meeeeen
jusinbeber3eva b m frind http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100001888500467 !!!!!!!!!!!!!! :)))))
<3 <3 <3 <3 yaaay :)))))0)00)) and 1rd!!!!!!!!!!!!111 xoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxjusin ILY
ILYJUSSINBEBER OS
MICH!!11111!@@$%&() <3
permalink

6   [–] idacalledyouwoodyjoe   1 point 7 months ago
never mind, you're a troll
permalink   parent

7   [–] harypoddur [S] -3 points 7 months ago
u sed neval!! :((((oh nnnnnnnnoez u mak judten kryyyyyy n wutz a toll?
permalink   parent

4   [–] Tabor91   2 points 7 months ago
Don't feed the trolls people.
permalink

5   [–] hyundai_guy   2 points 7 months ago
He's dead. I saw it on CSI last night, Nick shot him.
permalink

Appendix 2.3

How I became an Atheist. (First Post) (self.atheism) **Original Post by BendingUnitSN271605**
submitted 2 months ago by BendingUnitSN271605

Warning: The following story is a long one, full of loneliness, alienation and discrimination. It is not for the faint of heart nor the impatient.

I won't give out a full name, but you can call me Rodriguez. As it sounds, I was made right in Mexico. But from then on I was alone. No mother. No father. I trudged around with nothing, I had little purpose, but one thing I did have was faith.

After being around some of the Catholics down there, I fully believed there was a God. I had found an old bible laying in the street, and I held onto it for dear life. Of course at that age I couldn't read, but I wasn't too young to feel the presence of God in my heart. And I swore I'd find my way out of the degenerate slum I lived in and pledge my life to Him.

I worked in construction for several years and managed to pay my way to New York. I figured someone would have some use for me there, and I could pursue my religious ideals. I managed to hold a small job in shipping and went out to pursue a life of faith.

Much to my surprise, however, I was met with hatred and discontent. Everyone I spoke to about my faith, they told me, because of my origins, and who I was, I could never be a man of God.

I fell into a deep depression. I started destroying myself with tobacco and alcohol. My coworkers would always marvel at how I was never too far from a beer or a cuban, even at work. They urged me to go see the medical professional on site at the company, but hell, he was a mess. He needed a shrink more than I did.

So I spent my days drunk and hacking phlegm, it was like I was back in Mexico again, except I was lacking any purpose at all now. I became enraged at the injustice, and decided I was going to renounce my faith. I was going to burn that bible I'd hung onto for so long.

I cracked the dusted covers, looking at the pages I'd folded in to mark my favorite passages, and I realized that I'd never actually given the filthy thing a good read. So I started. I read it all. Cover to cover. And something changed inside me. I read deep into Leviticus and Deuteronomy. I was stunned that the God I thought I believed in could have sanctioned such heinous crimes against humanity that were written in this book. I mean, after years of cynicism I hated humans as much as the next guy, but no 'god' could have ever wanted these things to happen. I decided I wasn't going to burn this. I was going to leave it in the streets like the man who left it before me. I like to think whatever man left the bible for me in the street was as enlightened to the ways of Christianity, Catholicism, and religion in general as I was.

In a drunken, fearless haze I stumbled, bible in hand, to a nearby 'chapel'. I use quotations because it was a dump, full of bigots and self important nobodies that rejected me because of what they saw in my outside, not my inside. In a fierce rain I threw the bible at the door, and the pastor walked out. And ugly, fat creation. He almost looked like a triangle through my inebriated vision.

I inhaled and said in my loudest, angriest voice:

"No room for me, eh? FINE. I'll just make my own religion! With blackjack! And, and hookers! In fact! FORGET RELIGION!"

And that's how I told God to bite my shiny metal ass.

28 comments share save hide report

Appendix 2.4

1 [−] **David1337** 3 points 2 months ago
And none of that is true
permalink report reply

2 [−] **BendingUnitSN271605** [S] 3 points 2 months ago
No shit, meatbag, ever heard of a novelty account?
permalink parent report reply

3 [−] **David1337** -3 points 2 months ago
Didn't even read the account name baceause I'm not a total faggot like you. Go fuck yourself dick head I hope you have a shitty life.
permalink parent report reply

Quoted in comment 7

4 [−] **BendingUnitSN271605** [S] 5 points 2 months ago
Because only faggots read account names? And I have a great life. With blackjack. And hookers.
Also, what's a 'baceause'? *sigh*, humans.
permalink parent report reply

5 [−] **goboatmen** 3 points 2 months ago
"Humans are dumb and they die easy!" -you
permalink parent report reply

6 [−] **David1337** -1 points 2 months ago
Typical redditor talks shit about a type-o when they have nothing else to say.
permalink parent report reply

7 [−] **BendingUnitSN271605** [S] 4 points 2 months ago
Go fuck yourself dick head I hope you have a shitty life.
Typical adolescent talks shit about nothing when they have the intelligence of the average ape.
permalink parent report reply

Vertical line indicates that the first line of text is a quote

8 [−] **OneWarning13** 3 points 2 months ago
Don't feed the trolls...
permalink parent report reply

9 [−] **David1337** 0 points 2 months ago
Typical robot redditor talks shit about my lack of intelligence when the only intelligence he has is a fake computer simulation. At least my idiocy is my own and not some man made programmed idiocy.
permalink parent report reply

10 [−] **BendingUnitSN271605** [S] 2 points 2 months ago
I was constructed to bend girders into 'U' shapes and I can outwit you, how does that make you feel, human?
permalink parent report reply

11 [−] **David1337** 0 points 2 months ago
A lot better than you because at least I have emotions you dick bender.
permalink parent report reply

12 [−] **BendingUnitSN271605** [S] 0 points 2 months ago
I have plenty of emotions, buddy. Mostly intense hatred towards all humans. Which is because of flesh sacks like yourself not being able to outsmart a drunken half-fried processor programmed for construction work.
permalink parent report reply

Appendix 2.5

sorted by: **old**

you are viewing a single comment's thread.
view the rest of the comments →

[–] **POLITE_ALLCAPS_GUY** 280 points 7 days ago

HEY, PINKZEBRAPRINT!

I JUST THOUGHT I'D POP IN TO POINT OUT THAT SOMETIMES EVEN GIRLS WHO MOST FOLKS WOULD SAY ARE SUPER PRETTY CAN, IN FACT, BE WORRIED ABOUT THE WAY THEY LOOK!

THEY'RE NOT ALL JUST TRYING TO GET ATTENTION, ALTHOUGH I'M SURE THAT SOME ARE.

I'M SURE YOU HAD THE BEST OF INTENTIONS POSTING THIS, THOUGH!

TAKE CARE!

permalink report reply

[–] **dontlikeclowns** 15 points 7 days ago

You really are everywhere :O

permalink parent report reply

[–] **pinkzebraprint** [S] 83 points 7 days ago

you really are a polite, all caps guy

permalink parent report reply

[–] **Martin_The_Warrior** -15 points 6 days ago

these people

permalink parent report reply

[–] **iEatBlackPeople** 2 points 6 days ago

No shit

permalink parent report reply

Appendix 2.5 continued

[−] **BTK_Killer** -56 points 6 days ago

stfu. Here, let me type so you can understand it.

MOST WOMEN ARE FAT AND ALL WOMEN ARE ATTENTION WHORES. SKINNY GOOD LOOKING ONES HAVE NOTHING TO BITCH ABOUT SO THEY CAN'T PLAY A SYMPATHY CARD- WHICH UPSETS THEM. THIS IS THE ONLY WAY THEY CAN GET PEOPLE TO GIVE THEM A SENSE OF REASSURANCE IN AN OTHERWISE CAREFREE LIFE.

permalink parent report reply

> [−] **Electric_Trout** 1 point 6 days ago
>
> This, children, is what's called a misogynist. He is likely fat and/or hideous, and he has probably had his feelings hurt by some girl in the past; he vents his rage by arguing with novelty accounts whose sole purpose is to be as polite as possible.
>
> permalink parent report reply
>
>> [−] **ThisIsYourPenis** -17 points 6 days ago
>>
>> Wait, isn't fat synonymous with hideous? Being a woman gives free rein to ride rough-shod over the feelings of whomever gets in the way male or female because, "It's my time of the month".
>>
>> So for a quarter of a woman's life it's ok to be a cunt, it's glorified, it's expected.
>>
>> Estrogen cause bitchiness, testosterone makes you want to kill things, really, it does. Men have to control that urge all the fucking time, not once a month but every day, until some ADULTEROUS woman drives them to an early grave after taking away their children and their money, SO, FUCK YOU.
>>
>> permalink parent report reply
>>
>>> [−] **Electric_Trout** -10 points 6 days ago
>>>
>>> Congratulations, you've turned me off of Reddit forever.
>>>
>>> permalink parent report reply
>>>
>>>> [−] **canigetarefund** 3 points 6 days ago
>>>>
>>>> You're leaving?
>>>>
>>>> permalink parent report reply
>>>>
>>>> [−] **midbc** 1 point 6 days ago
>>>>
>>>> i am going to keep checking to see if you ever post again
>>>>
>>>> permalink parent report reply

[−] **canigetarefund** 10 points 6 days ago

> He is likely fat and/or hideous

Kinda ruined the illusion that you were superior.

permalink parent report reply

[−] **yayayayasmin** 11 points 6 days ago

It's funny, 'cause you're a retarded person.

permalink parent report reply

[−] **deityofanime** -16 points 6 days ago

Yes, but I'm sure those girls don't go posting all their worries to everyone on Facebook.

permalink parent report reply

[−] **RedHeadedNerd** 6 points 6 days ago

Yes. Thank you.

permalink parent report reply

[−] **satiredun** 11 points 6 days ago

I AGREE, P.A.C. IT'S CALLED 'BODY DYSMORPHISM' AND WORKS BOTH WAYS. A LOT OF GIRLS ARE VERY SELF CONSCIOUS ABOUT BEING SKINNY, AS WELL.

permalink parent report reply

[−] **Computerology101** 16 points 6 days ago

Shouting is only polite when it's POLITE_ALL_CAPS guy.

permalink parent report reply

[−] **whruppl967** -11 points 6 days ago

Why are you shouting his name?

permalink parent report reply

[−] **NBegovich** 6 points 6 days ago

Also: Good Girl Gabby

permalink parent report reply

[−] **newtothelyte** 5 points 6 days ago

I love this guy

permalink parent report reply

[−]   **scurvebeard** 3 points 6 days ago

Not sure if upvotes for presenting alternative viewpoint or for being a reddit celebrity.

permalink parent report reply

[−] **SatanGetsMe** 1 point 6 days ago

Thanks POLITE_ALLCAPS_GUY!

permalink parent report reply

Appendix 2.5 continued

[−] **saigus** 2 points 6 days ago
I like you.
permalink parent report reply

[−] **theonlydrawback** 2 points 6 days ago
agreed. i'm dating one.
permalink parent report reply

[−] **Shuttlecock** -7 points 6 days ago
MADE THIS ONE JUST FOR YOU
permalink parent report reply

[−] **ZestyMordant** 3 points 6 days ago
How did you ever get banned in r/shitredditsays? I guess they really have lost their minds.
permalink parent report reply

> [−] **POLITE_ALLCAPS_GUY** 3 points 6 days ago
> LOL! THEY ALSO BANNED ME FROM SRSDISCUSSION FOR MENTIONING IT. I GUESS WE JUST AREN'T ON THE SAME WAVELENGTH!
> permalink parent report reply

[−] **herco** -8 points 6 days ago
Nah if your a hott chick just fucking own it, don't need to hear about how u shouldn't eat that Mars Bar, in fact if ur fat don't need to hear it either
permalink parent report reply

References

Atkinson, J. M. & Heritage, J. (2001). The Discourse Reader. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds..), *Jefferson's Transcript Notation* (p. 158-166). New York, NY: Routledge.

Cameron, D., Frazer, E., Harvey, P., Rampton, B., & Richardson, K. (2001). The Discourse Reader. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds..), *Power/Knowledge: The Politics of Social Science* (p. 141-157). New York, NY: Routledge.

Cicourel, A. V. (2001). The Discourse Reader. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds..), *Interpretive Procedures* (p. 89-97). New York, NY: Routledge.

Coupland, N., Jaworski, A. (2001). The Discourse Reader. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds..), *Introduction* (p. 1-44). New York, NY: Routledge.

Crystal, D. (2011). *Internet Linguistics: A Student Guide*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Donath, J. (1998). Communities in Cyberspace. In P. Kollock & M. Smith (Eds..), *Identity and deception in the virtual community* London: Routledge.

Fairclough, N. (2001). The Discourse Reader. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds..), *Linguistic and Intertextual Analysis Within Discourse Analysis* (p. 183-211). New York, NY: Routledge.

Ficarrra, F., Vivas, E., & Romo, J. (2009). Online Communities and Social Computing. In A. Ozok & P. Zaphiris (Eds..), *Credibility On-Line: Quality Metrics for Evaluation* (Vol. 5621, p. 172-181). Berlin: Springer.

Gauntlett, D. & Horsley, R. (2004). *Web Studies*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.

Gee, J. P. (2005). *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Gee, J. P. (2010). *How to do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Grice, H. P. (2001). The Discourse Reader. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds..), *Logic and Conversation* (p. 76-88). New York, NY: Routledge.

Gumperz, J. J. (2001). The Discourse Reader. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds..), *Sociocultural Knowledge in Conversational Inference* (p. 98-106). New York, NY: Routledge.

Hudson, James M. and Amy S. Bruckman (2004). The Bystander Effect: a Lens for Understanding Patterns of Participation. *Journal of the Learning Sciences* (Vol. 13, 2, pp. 165-195).

Jameson, J. (2009). Online Communities and Social Computing. In A. Ozok & P. Zaphiris (Eds..), *Distributed Leadership, Trust and Online Communities* (Vol. 5621, p. 226-235). Berlin: Springer.

Lanamäki, A. & Päivärinta, T. (2009). Online Communities and Social Computing. In A. Ozok & P. Zaphiris (Eds..), *Metacommunication Patterns in Online Communities* (Vol. 5621, p. 236-245). Berlin: Springer.

Malinowski, B. (2001). The Discourse Reader. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds..), *On Phatic Communion* (p. 302-305). New York, NY: Routledge.

Myers, G. (2010). *The Discourse of Blogs and Wikis*. New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Ochs, E. (2001). The Discourse Reader. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds..), *Transcription as Theory* (p. 167-182). New York, NY: Routledge.

O'Sullivan, P. B. & Flanagin, A. J. (2003). Reconceptualizing 'flaming' and other problematic messages. *New Media and Society*, *5*(1), 69-94.

Preece, J. & Maloney-Krichmar, D. (2005). Online communities: Design, theory, and practice. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 10(4), Retrieved Dec. 09, 2012, from http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol10/issue4/preece.html

Sacks, H. (2001). The Discourse Reader. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds..), *Everyone Has to Lie* (p. 252-262). New York, NY: Routledge.

Schegloff, E. A. (2001). The Discourse Reader. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds..), *Talk and Social Structure* (p. 107-120). New York, NY: Routledge.

Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting Qualitative Data: methods for analyzing talk, text, and interaction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc..

Tepper, M. (1997). Internet Culture. In D. Porter (Ed.), *Usenet Communities and the Cultural Politics of Information* (p. 39-54). New York, NY: Routledge.

Thurlow, C., Lengel, L. B., & Tomic, A. (2004). *Computer mediated communication: social interaction and the Internet*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc..