

One Does Not Simply Sample The
Internet:
On Coding The Race of Pokémon and
Other First World Problems. A Thematic
Analysis of Popular Internet Memes.

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What Is An Internet Meme?

- Biological metaphor (Dawkins, 1976; Blackmore, 2000)
- Idea or concept propagated via the Internet
- Several forms – hashtags, videos, quizzes, image macros
- Blend an image and text
- Easily created and shared, sites such as memegenerator.com
- Easily remixed and reworked



Rationale

- Current literature on memes explores spread – fields of mathematics and networking (e.g. Bauckhage, 2011; Coscia, 2013)
- Bridge the gap and expand on “traditional” humour research (e.g. Billig, 2001; Shifman & Lemish, 2010)
- Memes produced and consumed online – basic level of ability required to participate
- IT focused memes exist, decision to sample popular memes due to novelty of study
- Image macros only due to ease of creation and sharing

Research Aims

- Explore if and how women are represented in popular Internet memes
- To see if memes are being used to marginalise groups, as seen in other studies of Internet humour
- Probe the content of this as yet untouched, contemporary source of Internet data

Methodology

- Devised purposive sampling strategy based on popular search engines, popular sites (with specific criteria) and then popular memes from those sites
- Downloaded 240 image macro format Internet memes total
- Coded using NVivo – allowed easy demographic coding and sorting of data
- Analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) from a feminist standpoint

Theme One: Technological Privilege

- Specific practices and activities juxtaposed to create an ideal identity – white, male, technologically savvy.

Internet &
Technology

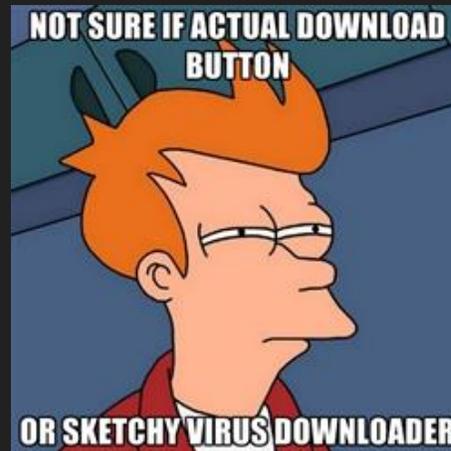
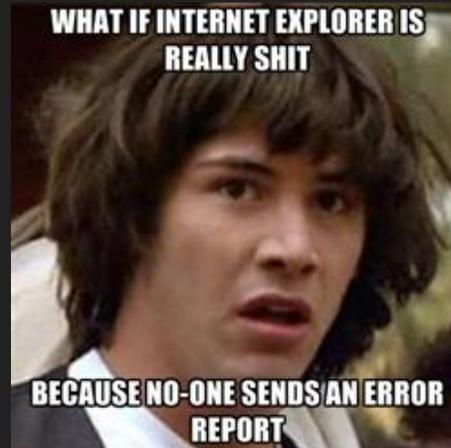
Mememes
About
Mememes

Sexy Geeks

Internet & Technology: Examples

Internet & Technology

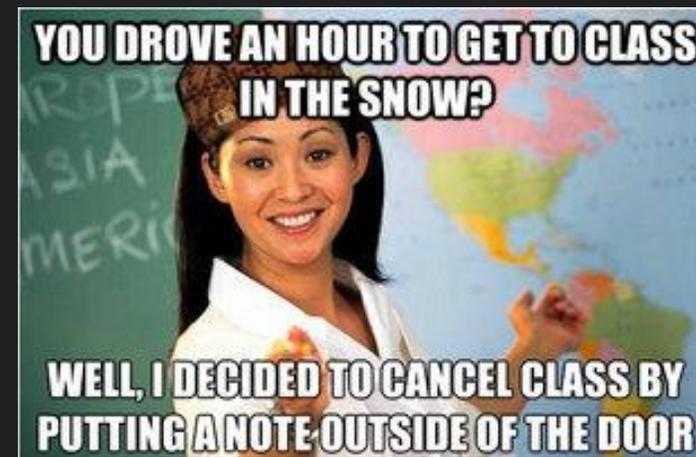
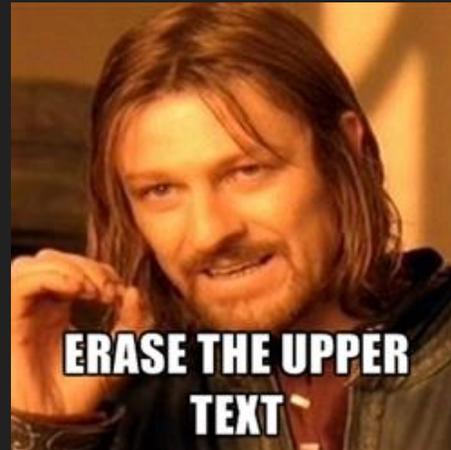
- Assumed knowledge
- Specific software
- Specific websites
- Illegal practices
- Pornography



Mememes About Mememes: Examples

Mememes About Mememes

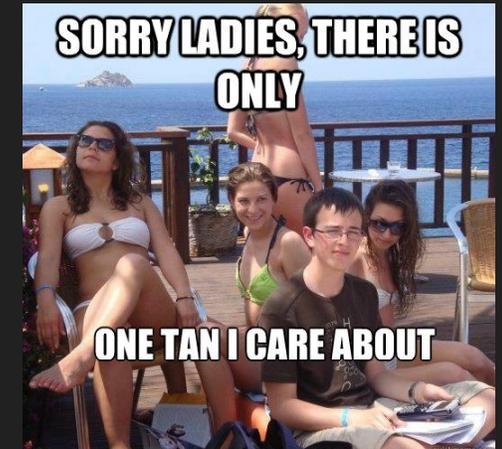
- Self referential
- Knowledge of characters, conventions, formats
- Elements of other mememes remixed
- Elitism, exclusionary and inclusionary mechanism



Sexy Geeks: Examples

Sexy Geeks

- Broad content - “geek stuff”
- Some overlap with previous themes – games, comics, etc.
- Prior knowledge of niche hobbies/interests
- Meshing of science or maths with sex and innuendo



Theme Two: Others

- Very broad theme, contrasting the activities and practices championed in the first theme
- Groups constructed in specific ways, working to subjugate them and promote traditional hegemonic masculinities
- Focus here on *women as other* to contrast the first theme, but also saw issues around race, class, hipsters, religion, LGBTQ during analysis

Women As Other

- Women pictured in only 39 of 240 memes sampled, though many spoke about women

Sexuality

Women Are
Women Say

Appearance

Violence

Women &
Work

Sexuality: Examples

Sexuality

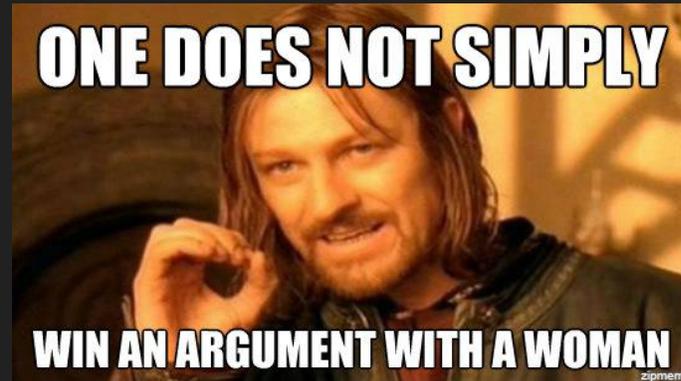
- Seven memes featured men and women together
 - every one of these had sexual connotations
- Sexually passive or oblivious
- Abortion, contraception tackled with no sensitivity
- Sexual violence



Women Are / Women Say: Examples

Women Are / Women Say

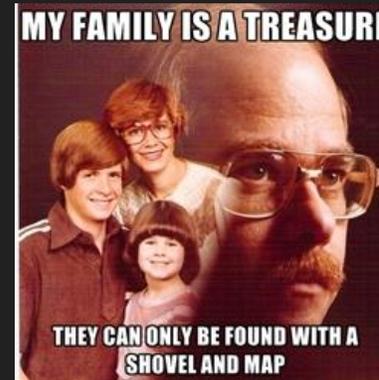
- Argumentative
- Indecisive
- Jealous, vengeful
- "Men are all the same"
- Get back in the kitchen...



Violence Against Women: Examples

Violence Against Women

- Sexual violence
- Domestic violence
- Women *and* children
- Grooming / paedophilia



Appearance: Examples

Appearance

- Weight
- Anything not traditionally attractive
- Not limited to women – handful of memes featuring men, but not proportional to sample (139 men/boys, 39 women/girls)



Women & Work: Examples

Women And Work

- Lazy
- Lack of respect
- Revisit the kitchen/sammich memes discussed previously...



Conclusions

- Memes analysed are working to construct a particular ideal identity, whilst policing possible alternatives
- Memes about technology show men using it, being familiar and capable, however women seen to be complaining about it or shown as unfamiliar, naïve
- Memes use established techniques to create humour – visual aspects, puns, repetition
- Memes are rule based, enabling those “in the know” to participate, whilst excluding those who are not

References

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- Memes sampled from <http://memegenerator.net>, <http://quickmeme.com>, and <http://weknowmemes.com/memegenerator>