

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.

Jessica Drakett

Dr. Bridgette Rickett

Dr. Katy Day

Leeds Metropolitan University, UK

# 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](http://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

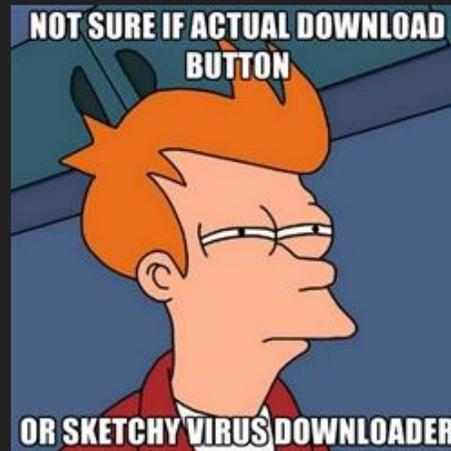
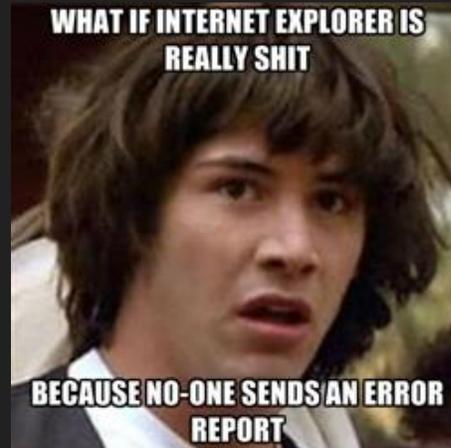
Mememes  
About  
Mememes

Sexy Geeks

# Internet & Technology: Examples

## Internet & Technology

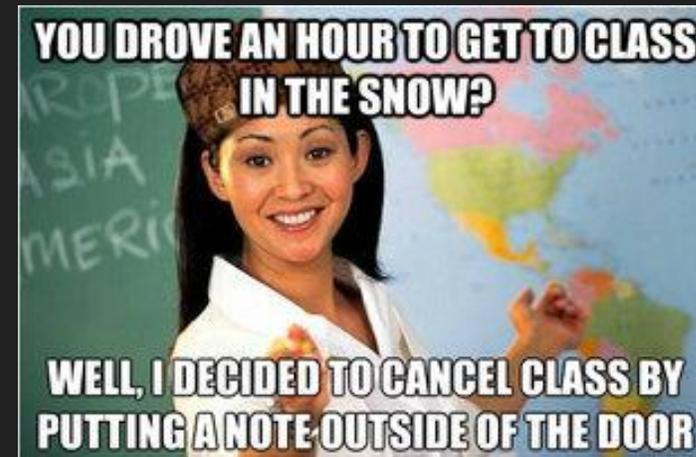
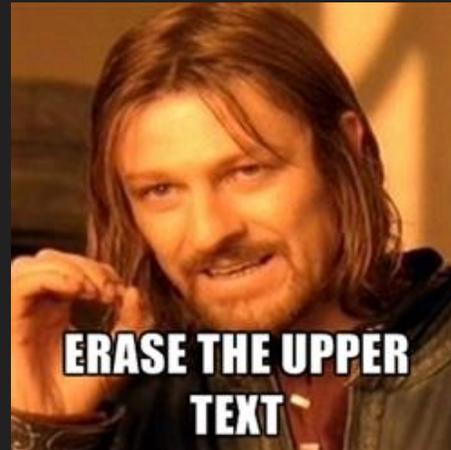
- Assumed knowledge
- Specific software
- Specific websites
- Illegal practices
- Pornography



# Mememes About Mememes: Examples

## Mememes About Mememes

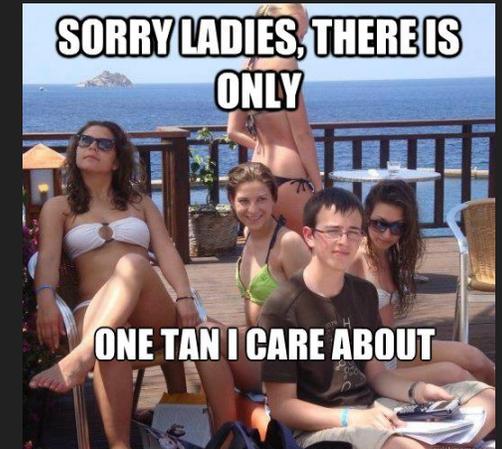
- Self referential
- Knowledge of characters, conventions, formats
- Elements of other mememes remixed
- Elitism, exclusionary and inclusionary mechanism



# 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

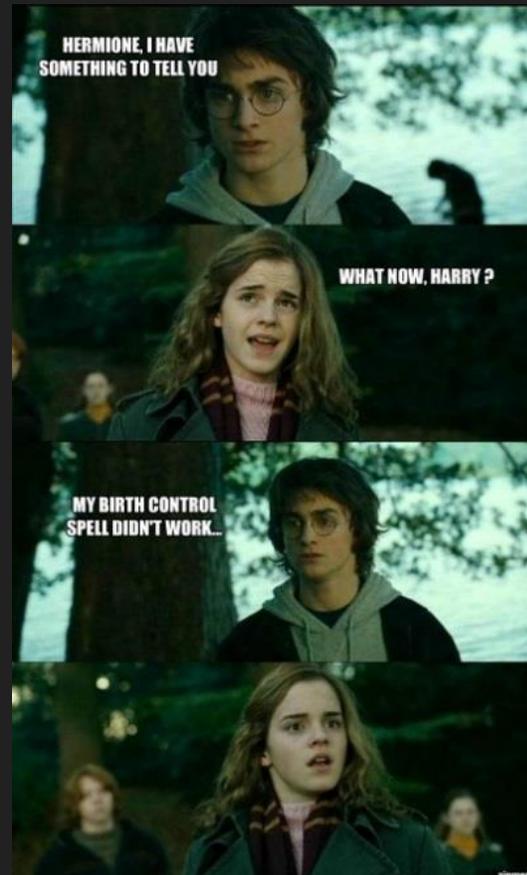
Violence

Women &  
Work

# Sexuality: Examples

## Sexuality

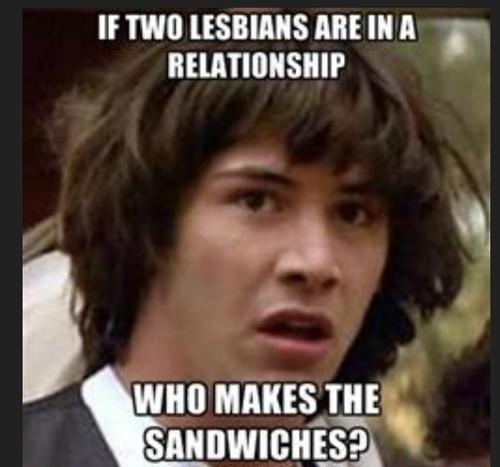
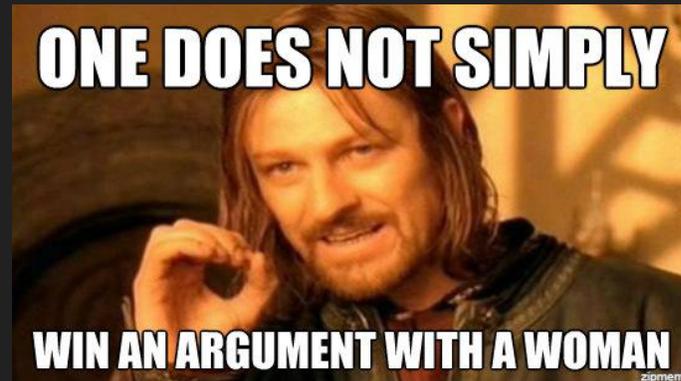
- Seven memes featured men and women together
  - every one of these had sexual connotations
- Sexually passive or oblivious
- Abortion, contraception tackled with no sensitivity
- Sexual violence



# Women Are / Women Say: Examples

## Women Are / Women Say

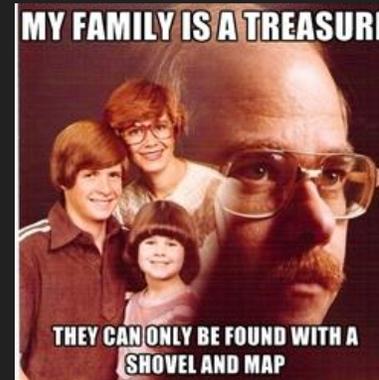
- Argumentative
- Indecisive
- Jealous, vengeful
- "Men are all the same"
- Get back in the kitchen...



# 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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