Rekeying, Contrastive Individuation, and Othering:
An Intertextual Analysis of White-Knighting in an All-Women Fandom

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Social networking websites have made increasingly apparent the degree to which the internet is becoming a communal space. When users get together on the internet, they engage in their own rituals of social practice, creating their own communities of practice (cf. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992) around the written word. Within the communities of practice on the internet, ways of making meaning are constantly being negotiated, however, the internet as a location of communities of practice has thus far gone relatively unexplored.

This study examines a particular interactional phenomenon, called "white-knighting," with an all-women's online fan fiction community in order to understand the ways in which stance and footing are negotiated in the creation and maintenance of group identity, and in the rejection of persons as members of the group. In order to unearth the ways these relationship are negotiated in the online world, I use the framework of intertextuality (Kristeva and Rouidez 1980), particularly the notions of entextualization, decontextualization, and recontextualization as conceived by Bauman and Briggs (1990), Tannen's (2006) interpretation of the process of recycling, reframing, and rekeying of discourse, and Agha's (2005) concept of the processes of contrastive individuation, biographic identification, and social characterization to explore the ways in which the interactants in this community ultimately authenticate their communities of practice and negotiate who may and may not participate.

In white-knighting (WK), one member of the community is perceived as joining an online conversation for the express purpose of making positive comments, and thus is considered easily discredited and/or a disingenuous participant in the conversation. Yet not every instance of positive comment making is understood as an instance of white-knighting. This paper considers data from two contrasting communities in instances which the members identified as WK. By using the frameworks provided by Tannen and Agha, I show that the process of WK is one where those to whom the WK is directed ultimately reframe the situation and then rekey the comment as an attack, which causes the commenter to be contrastively individuated (Agha 2005) as an "other" to the community, ultimately biographically identified as a white-knighter, and entextualizing the entire encounter as an instance of WK. By blending the approaches of Baumann, Tannen, and Agha, and allowing them to work in consort, this paper explores a certain intertextuality within the theories of intertextuality themselves, and suggest that a combined approach may lead to explanations which move deeper than any one theory can explain on its own.