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**Speech Community in the Virtual World: The Case of One Listserv**  
**By**  
**Nancy B. Wick**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

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Approved by Gerry Philipssen  
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Date July 29, 1997

**University of Washington**

**Abstract**

**Speech Community in the Virtual World: The Case of One Listserv  
By Nancy B. Wick**

**Chairman of the Supervisory Committee: Professor Gerry Philipsen,  
Department of Speech Communication**

**This dissertation examines the discourse of an electronic mail listserv. Two research questions were specified: (1) Does this listserv (called Pednet) constitute a speech community? and (2) If Pednet is a speech community, in what way does this knowledge contribute to the notion of virtual communities?**

**In pursuit of the first question, the data were compared to a framework to determine if a speech code existed. The following elements were looked for: (1) patterns in discourse, (2) metacommunication revealing rules or norms for communicating, (3) the invocation of metacommunicative rules to justify arguments or call others to account, and (4) culturally distinctive forms. In pursuit of the second question, articles critical of the idea of virtual community were analyzed in order to ferret out the authors' (unspecified) definitions of "community." The Pednet discourse was then compared to the elements of these definitions.**

**Results of the study show clearly that the listserv in question was a speech community according to the definition used: "A speech community is an organization of diversity, a group that shares at least one common language, that shares knowledge of the rules for the use and interpretation of speech and attitudes toward speech, and that constitutes itself in the speaking even as it creates a history to ground future speaking." The listserv also met many of the qualifications for "community" listed by critics of virtual community. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that there can be speech communities online and that there is nothing about the online environment per se that precludes such a group from being a community in the larger sense.**

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **BACKGROUND, RATIONALE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### **Introduction**

In the last several years, communication via computer has become increasingly important to an ever-increasing number of people. Once confined to the military and then to researchers, the Internet now has been opened up to ordinary people who are using it first and foremost as a way to talk to each other. Given that these vast numbers of people have been reaching out to others they know nothing about, it was perhaps inevitable that they would organize themselves into interest groups. And as these interest groups stabilized over time, it was equally inevitable that they would be referred to by some as communities. No sooner did this happen, however, than critics stepped forward to say that online groups could not be communities. This dissertation steps into the controversy described above by investigating the discourse of one online discussion group. Because the concept of "community" is so murky, it employs the narrower concept of "speech community," but follows up with an attempt to define what critics call "community," then compares the data to this concept.

The goal of this study was twofold: (a) to determine whether a particular online listserv could constitute a speech community, and (b) to increase understanding of the nature of speech communities and, to a more limited extent, the nature of community in the broader sense. To this end, I analyzed the discourse of the listserv Pednet using a framework for speech communities devised by Philipsen (1992). I begin this chapter with a summary of the research already completed on online groups, as well as the research on speech communities. I then present a rationale for this study's focus and design. I conclude with a discussion of my research questions.

## Theoretical and Empirical Background

### Computer Mediated Communication

As computers have become more common in settings other than the workplace and used for purposes other than crunching numbers or words, scholars have begun to pay attention to the communication that occurs via computer. Some have claimed that it needs to be studied because it is a new type of communication, not merely a new medium. As long ago as 1977, Ong was writing, "technology is important in the history of the word not merely exteriorly, as a kind of circulator of pre-existing materials, but interiorly, for it transforms what can be said and what is said" (p. 42). Ong did not have computers in mind, but if what he said was true for the change from orality to literacy, and later to what he called "secondary orality" (radio and TV), it certainly holds true for computers. Folklorist Dorst (1990), for example, urges his fellow scholars to look at the computer not just as a way of transmitting folklore, but as making possible a new kind of folkloric performance. Chesebro and Bonsall (1989) point out differences between computer mediated communication (CMC) and face to face communication, claiming that CMC may be altering something as basic as the nature of friendship. Hesse, Werner and Altman (1988) note that communicating via computer alters the sense of time; it may either speed up or slow down the communicative process, according to the desires of the interlocutors.

When CMC is invoked as a new type of communication, one thing that is frequently mentioned is that it falls somewhere between oral and written forms. Chesebro and Bonsall (1989), for example, say "Although a message must be transmitted, received, and then responded to in independent steps, thereby precluding a truly simultaneous and immediate exchange of information, this mode of exchange nevertheless approaches the character of a real-life conversation . . . ." (p. 102). Hiltz and Turoff (1993) report that new users of CMC experience culture shock, because ". . . the very complex rules for combining the various kinds of communication channels . . . do not work, because the

nonverbal channels are missing, there are some new channels or means of communication available, and the rules or possibilities for using the written equivalent of the spoken verbal channel work differently" (p. 81). Quoting Turkle (1984), Matheson (1992) tells of a person using the computer who says she does not feel as if she is typing: "I am thinking it, and there it is on the screen" (p. 75). In her studies of CMC, Murray (1985, 1988, 1991) claims that a "conversation" can take place over many media including CMC, and equates changing from one medium to another with code switching.

Any new form of communication is ripe for study, as scholars strive to understand what it is, how it works, the factors that affect it, and how it compares to more familiar forms. Accordingly, a number of studies of CMC have appeared over the last 15 years or so, increasing as CMC became more common. I have grouped some of the more prominent of these studies according to type, as follows:

#### Outcome Studies

When researchers first began to pay attention to it, they often made assumptions that computer mediated communication would be primarily a task-oriented communication (Connolly, Jessup and Valacich, 1990). They noted that in CMC cues are filtered out (Culnan and Markus, 1987), and that it lacks media richness (Trevino, Daft and Lengel, 1990). It was not surprising, then, that many studies considered how well tasks could be completed using CMC compared to face to face communication. Studies such as those performed by a research group at Carnegie Mellon University (e.g. Siegel, Dubrovsky, Kiesler and McGuire, 1986) gathered groups into the laboratory and presented them with a task to do or problem to be solved, then compared how the CMC groups did with how the face to face groups did. In the 1986 study, for example, researchers learned that CMC groups could produce a high quality outcome, but that they did better with task-oriented decisions than with human relations decisions, that the CMC groups generally took longer to reach a decision and that there seemed to be a greater equality of participation in the

CMC groups than in the face to face groups. Other researchers picked up other pieces of information, such as that participants were less influenced by their co-participants in CMC than in face to face communication (Smilowitz, Compton and Flint, 1989) and that pre-acquainted groups of extraverts produced the most uninhibited verbal behavior (known as flaming) in CMC (Smolensky, Carmody and Halcomb, 1990).

### Social Context Studies

It was not long before some researchers began to question the comparison of CMC with face to face and the assumption that it was the use of the computer that created all the differences between the groups. These researchers pointed out that other aspects of the context might influence the communication and its outcome. Fulk, Schmitz and Schwarz (1992), for example, argued that contexts are dynamic and are created in the talk itself, so that one group using CMC might create a very different context from another. Lea, O'Shea, Fung and Spears (1992) took on the contention that uninhibited verbal behavior (flaming) was more common in CMC. They argued that its visibility in the written text of CMC only made it seem more common. Spears and Lea (1992, 1994) and Matheson (1992) argued that it was social identity or self awareness that caused the differences between CMC and face to face, not the computer itself.

### Content Studies

Studies including close analyses of the content of CMC have been a more recent phenomenon, but are becoming more common all the time. Many of these have been surveys in which messages are categorized according to a coding system. McCormick and McCormick (1992), for example, analyzed the content of student e-mail and discovered that a third of it was socioemotional in nature. Rice and Love (1987) used Bales' categories and discovered a similar percentage. Brennan, Moore and Smyth (1992) coded the messages on an Alzheimer's disease caregiver support group, and found that social support could be and was given on line. In her work, Murray (1985, 1988, 1991)

concentrated on CMC as one means of communication among others, and looked at her subjects' choice of various means as a kind of code switching. And Myers (1987) talked about the playing with identities that goes on in computer game type environments.

A few CMC content studies have proposed that participants are forming a community on line. Reid (1991), for example, in analyzing the contents of Internet Relay Chat, claimed that the CMC environment "deconstructs" the usual rules of interaction and leaves participants free to construct their own version of community. Baym (1993, 1994, 1994a, 1995, 1996) claimed the soap opera fans of rec.arts.tv.soaps formed a community through their discourse.

#### Philosophical Studies

Many of what I am calling philosophical studies are not, strictly speaking, studies at all. They are essays containing one person's opinion regarding the significance and effects of CMC. Some of these are critiques, such as Beniger (1987). He sees CMC mainly as a way in which mass communication can be disguised as interpersonal communication, thus creating what he calls "pseudo-community." Stoll (1995) goes further, stating that CMC is a substitute for communication in real life, that people are spending hours on the computer talking to people around the globe while at the same time they do not know their neighbors. Other commentators give more mixed reviews. Schwartz (1994/95), for example, lists many advantages of CMC before concluding his essay with a caution that virtual communities are virtual, not real. Heim (1992) calls communities based on CMC "airy" and "ephemeral," but he later (1995) states that both virtual and real communities provide benefits for people and can complement each other. Rheingold (1993) meanwhile, is a complete fan, believing CMC to be the key to communities of the future.

### Communities

The discussion of content studies claiming that CMC participants form a community followed by philosophical studies, most of which claim they cannot, leads nicely into a discussion of the concept of community. Critics of CMC are inclined to say that groups of people who communicate only via CMC cannot form a "real" community. A number of reasons are given for this. CMC groups are said to be formed based on common interest rather than serendipity, and thus are non-diverse "lifestyle enclaves" (Bellah et al., 1985) likely to die as participants' interests change. It is too easy, critics say, to opt out of a CMC group when it does not please you, with few repercussions as a result. Perhaps most damning of all, participation in a CMC group is said to be a substitute for real life and real communities. But what do these critics (and fans) of CMC mean when they say "community"? Most often, they do not define the term directly. In this section, I intend to spell out the meanings I see implied in their definitions and to specify what definition I intend to use for the purposes of this study.

### Community

McLaughlin, Osborne and Smith (1995) ask directly--"What constitutes virtual community?" and say the question remains "unexplored territory" (p. 93). For their own part, they talk a great deal about who is or is not a member of such a community. They point out that in CMC groups, a relative few speak, so are those who do not speak members? Also, on some lists, participation does not mean membership, since some people's contributions can be ignored or so heavily criticized that they stop contributing or simply leave. Going along with this, MacKinnon (1995) claims that unless one's contributions are acknowledged by others, one does not actually "exist" on line. Even Baym (1993), a fan of CMC community, talks of how participants can construct "kill files" that automatically delete contributions by certain people or on certain topics. The matter

of membership is also of concern to Heim (1992), who talks about how participation in CMC groups is optional; there are many "lurkers" who log on but do not participate.

What these researchers seem to be getting at is the notion of community on the one hand as being open to all who want to be involved, and on the other as fostering a sense of obligation in all to be involved. Thus, one is automatically a member of a community by being there and one's contributions must be welcomed, and by being there, one feels an obligation to contribute. The question is, are these obligations on both sides weaker in CMC than in geographical communities?

Closely related to the idea of membership is that of diversity. Many of the people writing about the online world complain that it is not diverse. Barlow (1995) says cyberspace "is populated . . . by white males under 50 with plenty of computer terminal time, great typing skills, high math SATs, strongly held opinions on just about everything, and an excruciating face-to-face shyness, especially with the opposite sex" (p. 55). He goes on to say that diversity is essential to healthy community. Similarly, Kadi (1995) estimates it takes (or will take, when the Internet is privatized) \$120 a month to hook up; thus only those who can afford this price tag will be part of the electronic community. Furthermore, she claims, people gravitate to interest groups representing their interests, so they meet people like themselves. Again, no diversity. Stuart (1995) pointed out that in this country 26.9 million whites--but only 1.5 million blacks--used computers at home. Even at school, 10.7 million white children use computers, compared to less than 1 million black children. Rheingold (1993), on the other hand, points out that people who do not do well in spontaneous spoken interaction can do well with the written communication in CMC. So in a sense, they are adding a voice to the conversation that is often absent in real life.

What all these commentators are saying is that a real community has to have a diverse group of people. Barlow is the only one who says so explicitly, but since the

others complain about what they see as a lack of diversity in cyberspace, one must conclude that diversity is part of their definition of community. The question is, are the people connecting via CMC less diverse than those in real communities? Since people tend to live and work with others like themselves, this may or may not be true. In other words, if one looks at the geographical boundaries of a city, one can find plenty of diversity, but if one looks at who people come in contact with in the course of a typical day, one may not find much more diversity there than in their online contacts.

McLaughlin et al. (1995) go on to say that community is seen on CMC through the "discursive working out of standards" (p. 94-95). Much of McLaughlin et al.'s article is about the standards that have developed Net-wide. They state that about 15 percent of all messages are "corrective" in nature, meaning that one participant tells another that he or she has broken the rules. Similarly, in arguing for the influence of social context in CMC, Spears and Lea (1992) say there is "little evidence for the lack of social norms" (p. 42). And Hiltz and Turoff (1993) say that norms tend to develop in ongoing CMC groups so that a kind of "collective subculture" exists. Here the idea of community is that there are rules or social norms that members orient themselves to. Many researchers have said that the normal rules of interaction break down on line (e.g. Reid, 1991), but most seem to believe that alternative rules develop. Are these rules or norms enough to constitute a community?

In her study of a listserv, Ogan (1993) stated that members of the group acknowledged the importance of group identity and a feeling of belonging. Both Hiltz and Turoff (1993) and Baym (1994a) mention that humor on line helps promote "group cohesion." Brennan et al. (1992) show how members of an Alzheimer's caregivers group gave support to each other on line, while Baym (1993) talks about how "personalization"--the expression of personality on line--helped her soap opera fans become a community. Arguing on the other side, Heim (1992) talks of how face to face communication supports

"long-term warmth and loyalty" and a "sense of obligation" to others, things that might be weak or absent in CMC. What seems to be implied here is community as a sense of mutual supportiveness among members, obligation to be there for each other and a conception of the group as a whole having a particular identity. Can CMC group members feel this way about each other and about the group as a whole?

The idea of mutual supportiveness is related to a characteristic of community mentioned by Barlow (1995). He says communities are held together by "a sense of adversity, generally shared" (p. 55). Sanders (1995) echoes him when he says that neighbors automatically help those in need--such as the family whose house has burned down--just because that is part of being in a community. In other words, the mutual supportiveness that others talk about comes out of facing adversity together. Can CMC groups, who do not live in the same place, feel the same sense of shared adversity?

### Speech Community

Although many studies have argued the question of whether CMC groups can be communities, few have studied them as speech communities, which is what I intend to do. Speech community is an old concept in communication research, and one with a variety of definitions. I therefore will explore the history of this concept before spelling out the definition I intend to use.

As long ago as 1933, Bloomfield included a chapter on speech communities in his book Language. The definition he gave was a simple one: "A speech community is a group of people who interact by means of speech" (p. 42). Because society is based upon language, Bloomfield argued, the speech community is the most important kind of social group. Although it appears from looking at his definition alone that the social group and its interaction is the defining factor rather than the language they speak, it is clear from the rest of Bloomfield's (1933) chapter that he considers all the people who speak the same language to be members of the same speech community. He says, for example, ". . . there

are great differences even among the native members of such a relatively uniform group as Middle Western American, and, as we have just seen, even greater differences within a speech community (e.g. English) as a whole" (p. 45). In taking this view, Bloomfield was merely following the typical practice of his time—which was to divide up people according to the language they spoke.

It was not until the 1960s that the traditional view of speech communities was challenged. Gumperz (1962) said he was responding to Hymes' (1962) call for a "new approach to the descriptive analysis of speaking" when he wrote about types of linguistic community. In that article he defined a linguistic (speech) community as follows: "A social group which may be either monolingual or multilingual, held together by frequency of social interaction and set off from surrounding areas by weaknesses in lines of communication" (p. 30). There is a shift in emphasis here from the language to the social group. Gumperz even explicitly says that the speech community can be multilingual; what counts for him is that the group interacts frequently. He presumes, then, that a speech community can be interacting frequently using more than one language.

Hymes (1968) also allows for the existence of bilinguals or multilinguals in his definition of speech community, but he adds an additional element. He says, "I would tentatively define the basic notion of speech community in terms of shared knowledge of rules for the interpretation of speech, including rules for the interpretation of at least one common code . . . It must be stressed that such rules include not only rules for the interpretation of codes (in the sense of grammars) but also rules for the interpretation of the use of codes . . ." (p. 19). Hymes' emphasis on the more general use of language rather than on mere grammatical correctness is an important change—one that later ethnographers built upon effectively. For example, Basso (1970) found that Western Apaches and whites interpreted silence in different ways and that this difference in interpretation caused misunderstandings between the two groups. This was a difference

between two speech communities that had nothing to do with the language each spoke or the linguistic features of that language.

By 1968, when Gumperz wrote the entry on "speech community" for the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, his own definition included Hymes' notion of usage: "any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language use" (p. 381). However, Gumperz still believed that a group must speak together often in order to be called a community. Hymes' (1968) definition allows for a more abstract application. Katriel (1986), for example, was working in the Hymes tradition when she identified a speech community among the Sabras in Israel who use the "dugri" code. Not all of her subjects knew one another or lived in the same communities, so mutual and frequent interaction was not possible. Yet, Katriel claimed, they were members of the same speech community because they shared rules for the interpretation of speech. For instance, a Sabra would be likely to interpret indirect speech as evasive or dishonest rather than polite, because directness in speech is a value the group holds dear.

The work of Labov provides a different point of view on speech community. In his 1972 book, Sociolinguistic Patterns, for example, he discusses how he compared the use of particular linguistic features to extralinguistic classifications such as the social class of speakers or their level of education. Though he found consistent differences in speech based on these extralinguistic features, Labov claimed that use of a particular linguistic feature was not the marker of a speech community. Rather, he claimed that all of New York City is a single speech community because New Yorkers are united in their attitudes toward language. He said "Speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in use of language elements so much as by participation in a set of shared norms; these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behavior, and by the uniformity of abstract

patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to the particular levels of usage" (p. 121). In other words, members of a speech community agree on the appropriate way to use language, even if individuals admit that they themselves do not use it that way. This can be seen in the way members of a speech community evaluate a particular speaker. Furthermore, when members of a group stray from their habitual way of speaking, they will do so in a predictable direction, based on their social class.

Labov has been criticized by others in the field (e.g. Romaine, 1982) as being simplistic in his explanations of linguistic change, but his work adds an interesting dimension to the idea of speech community in its insistence that speakers' attitudes rather than their performance are the mark of a speech community. Katriel, for example, (1986) found this notion to be important in her study of dugri. Many of her informants did not consider themselves to be good dugri speakers, but nonetheless held dugri speaking to be an ideal and admired those who managed to live out the ideal. Considering attitudes to be important implies that studying discourse abstracted from context is never enough to get an accurate picture of a speech community, and this has indeed been the position of those who have practiced the ethnography of speaking. Along with what is said, the ethnographer must consider who is speaking, to whom, about what, under what circumstances and so on.

The final notion of speech community that I would like to mention comes from Chaney (1982), who emphasizes community as process as well as product. He wants to achieve a balance between ethnomethodologists who "explore the ways in which utterances in everyday speech . . . constitute a community" (p. 5) and other theorists who see the community as a pre-existing entity to which individuals conform. For Chaney, the speech community is "something which grounds speech as meaningful communication and yet is simultaneously produced through speech" (p. 8). This is a very Hymesian notion. In fact, the only formal definition Chaney gives for speech community is a quote from

Bauman and Scherzer (1974): "the shared or mutually complementary knowledge and ability (competence) of its members for the production and interpretation of socially appropriate speech" (p. 8).

However, Chaney would go further. To him it is not enough that a group of people produce "socially appropriate" speech according to a set of shared norms, or even that they continuously re-create their speech community as they talk. To him, "community is moral commitment" (p. 11). The people in a speech community have a commitment to each other, and it is this commitment, rather than their norms of language use, that makes them a community. This means, Chaney says, that "as social reporters we can aspire to do more than provide descriptions of everyday social habits and hope to encompass the possibility of creative extension of those habits" (p. 11).

I have provided a summary on Page 14 of the major ideas of the theorists already discussed (Table I). As for my own definition of speech community, it draws most heavily from Hymes. I would say, like him, that a speech community is a group that shares knowledge of the rules for the use and interpretation of speech. Like all the theorists above except Bloomfield, I believe a speech community can contain within it more than one language, but I believe there must be at least one common language. Like Labov, I believe a speech community shares an attitude toward speech, although I would not confine this--as he apparently does--to attitudes about what is "correct" or what is a "prestige" pronunciation. The Western Apache of Basso's (1970) study, for example, share an attitude about when it is appropriate to speak at all, which in turn reflects attitudes about people's relationships to each other--much broader matters than Labov would claim a speech community shares attitudes about. Finally, like Chaney I believe a speech community is constituted in the speaking itself, but that it also develops a history which in turn grounds future speaking. I would not, however, go so far as to say community members necessarily have a moral commitment to each other. That is a matter

that requires knowledge of the human heart, and is, I feel, beyond the scope of my investigation.

**Table I, Speech Community Definitions**

Bloomfield, 1933	All people who speak the same language are members of the same speech community.
Gumperz, 1962	A speech community has regular and frequent interaction in one or more languages.
Hymes, 1968	A speech community shares rules for the interpretation of speech in at least one common language.
Gumperz, 1968	A speech community has regular and frequent interaction in one or more languages and is differentiated from other communities by differences in language use.
Labov, 1972	A speech community shares a set of norms consisting of attitudes towards speech. These can be seen in evaluative behavior and in patterns of variation.
Chaney, 1982	A speech community is a shared a set of norms that grounds speech as meaningful communication and yet is simultaneously produced through speech. Community members have a moral commitment to each other.

Before I lay out my own definition of speech community, I would like to add to the mix a later formulation by Hymes, contained in his 1974 article. He said, "We start from the speech community conceived as an 'organization of diversity'; we require concepts and methods that enable us to deal with that diversity, that organization" (p. 433). In other words, although Hymes sees a speech community as sharing many things, he also recognizes that people within it are individuals and not uniform. Therefore, one needs to pay attention not only to the organization of the group, but to its diversity.

As I ask whether the listserv that is the object of this investigation is a speech community, then, I will be orienting myself to the following definition: A speech

community is an organization of diversity, a group that shares at least one common language, that shares knowledge of the rules for the use and interpretation of speech and attitudes toward speech, and that constitutes itself in the speaking even as it creates a history to ground future speaking.

### Speech Communities and Communities

The relationship between speech community and community in the larger sense is, as I said earlier, murky. Speech community is a technical term, not used outside the academy. Accordingly, it can be defined rather precisely, and although not all theorists agree on its meaning, they do not greatly diverge in their various definitions. Community, on the other hand, is a folk term--used by everyone and rather indiscriminately. Pinning down a definition is difficult, which is why I have decided to respond to the critics by relying on their own implied definitions rather than coming up with a definition of my own which might be different from what they meant.

In general, I think community is a larger and more inclusive term than speech community. Thus, speech communities are not necessarily communities in the larger sense. One might assume, on the other hand, that all communities are speech communities. Yet, many of those who write about community emphasize the differences among community members. The point for them seems to be that a group of people who are not much alike, who may not even like each other, have found a way to interact for the good of all (Barlow, 1995; and Bellah et al., 1985, seem to argue this way). Are all these people necessarily a speech community then? One could argue that when people have found a way to interact regularly to get things done, that they have found a way to communicate that works for them. This would imply "shared rules for the use and interpretation of speech," and thus, a speech community. Nonetheless, I find it difficult to say categorically that all communities are speech communities. I cannot help thinking of geographical communities made up of people who manage to interact regularly to get

things done, but who are also part of subgroups that are quite different from each other. These subgroups, I would argue, are more likely to be speech communities that have found a way to translate messages to other subgroups for the good of the larger group.

All of the above notwithstanding, it is obvious that speech community and community are related concepts. At this juncture it may be useful to juxtapose my definition of speech community with the definitions of community implied by the online theorists and essayists already cited. This I have done in the following table:

**Table II, Speech Communities and Communities**

Speech Community	Community
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is an organization of diversity</li> <li>2. Shares at least one common language</li> <li>3. Shares knowledge of the rules for the use and interpretation of speech and attitudes toward it</li> <li>4. Constitutes itself in the speaking even as it creates a history to ground future speaking</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is open to all who want to participate; is diverse</li> <li>2. Fosters an obligation to participate</li> <li>3. Has rules or social norms to which participants orient themselves</li> <li>4. Fosters mutual supportiveness, sometimes in the face of shared adversity</li> <li>5. Creates a sense of a group identity</li> </ol>

The most obvious idea that the two notions of community share is that there are rules or social norms to which participants orient themselves. The speech community definition says that these are rules for the use and interpretation of speech, and since "speech" is all online groups have (written speech to be sure, but as noted, it has been compared to conversation), it follows that their rules or norms will revolve around speaking. Moreover, in my definition of speech community I have said that the group "constitutes itself in the speaking." McLaughlin et al. (1995) say that online groups find community through the "discursive working out of standards." Hiltz and Turoff (1993)

imply the same thing when they say that norms "tend to develop in ongoing groups" (emphasis mine). As groups work out these standards, it seems to me that a group identity would tend to develop among them. Certainly face to face speech communities studied by researchers have had a group identity. The Teamstervillers about whom Philipsen (1975, 1976, 1992) wrote distinguish themselves from those around them, and even the dugri speakers of Katriel's study (1986)--though they are not a geographical group--tend to think of themselves as different from other Israelis. The matters of membership being open to all and fostering an obligation to participate are interesting ones with respect to speech communities. Among most face to face speech communities, membership is in fact not open. No white person could ever be part of the Western Apache (Basso, 1970, 1979), nor could anyone not from "around here" be a Teamsterviller (Philipsen, 1975, 1976, 1992). Could a non-Sabra (Katriel, 1986) be a dugri speaker? Perhaps, but I think he or she would always be suspect in the group. Hymes (1974) said a speech community was an "organization of diversity," but he did not mean "diverse" in the same sense intended by critics of online groups. He meant that speech community members are individuals and do not agree on everything. The critics mean a group containing people of different races, ages, genders, sexual preferences, and so forth. Theoretically, speech communities could contain that kind of diversity, but I think they rarely do. If we considered very broad speech communities such as the Nacirema (Katriel and Philipsen, 1981) or Donahue aficionados (Carbaugh, 1988), we might find some diversity, but I think even there, the majority are middle class and white. However, I think speech communities on line, if such are possible, may stand a better chance of this kind of diversity in some respects because in most online settings the participants are blind to each other's physical characteristics. As to fostering participation, speech communities seem to be selective about this. Among Teamstervillers, for example, men are encouraged to participate--that is, to communicate-- among their peers

and discouraged when among those above them in the hierarchy. So it seems that speech communities have a less democratic idea of community than the online critics and boosters do. However, the online theorists' idea of community may be more democratic than actual communities. Simply living in a town or even a neighborhood does not necessarily provide diversity or make one a member of the in crowd, nor will any individual necessarily be encouraged to participate.

The final characteristic of community cited--mutual support--seems related to Chaney's (1982) idea of moral commitment, which I have not included in my definition of speech community. Although it is possible, perhaps even likely, that members of speech communities share mutual support, that has rarely been a focus in studies of them. When it is considered, it usually comes up as an attitude behind a rule for speech. Phillips (1970), for example, found that when one Native American student in a classroom gave a wrong answer, others would not then give the right answer. This was because of a speech community rule to not make the other look bad. In other words, it was a way of being supportive to one's fellows. Katriel and Philipsen (1981) found that among the Nacirema, "supportive" was one definition of communication, as opposed to "mere talk," so supportiveness was one characteristic of the communication ritual. Although I may see and will comment upon mutual supportiveness in the study group, it is not part of my definition of speech community and so will not be formally considered as evidence.

### Summary

Past studies of CMC have brought us to the point where it is reasonable to ask questions about the group that is brought together only through their computer linkage. Researchers began by comparing such groups--usually artificial groups created in the laboratory--to face to face groups with regard to their performance of some tasks. Later the question was raised, is it the computer itself that makes the difference? Perhaps it is some other element of the context. With the development of the Internet and the

formation of thousands of CMC groups outside the laboratory, it became possible to look at the content of these groups' communication and to ask questions about it. Finally, researchers began to consider more philosophical questions, such as "Are CMC groups 'real' communities?" and ultimately, "Are CMC groups 'good' for our society?" However, few who have asked these last questions have done so with any real data at hand. Baym (1993, 1994, 1994a, 1995, 1996) is a notable exception. Still, McLaughlin et al. (1995) say the question of what constitutes virtual community is unexplored territory. Gurak (1996a) contrasts philosophical essays that have no evidence with "narrow" experimental studies and calls for "language based studies of life on the Internet" (p. 2). This study is exactly that. Using the definition of speech community that I have specified, I intend to analyze the discourse of one CMC group to see if it meets the criteria. If it does, then--as shown above--it will have met some of the criteria for a broader notion of community

#### Study Rationale

I stated at the beginning of the chapter that I had two goals in this study: (1) to determine whether a particular listserv could constitute a speech community and (2) to increase understanding of the nature of speech communities, and to a lesser extent, communities in general. Both these goals and my research questions have arisen from the newness of computer mediated communication and from gaps I have seen in the literature about it.

As noted above, early studies of CMC assumed that it was a medium most appropriate to performing tasks. Considering that the first of these studies were designed in an era when most computers were located in the workplace and the Internet was not yet accessible to the average person, that is not surprising. But some researchers went on to make the mistake of thinking that computers were not suitable for anything other than task-oriented communication. Their error was remedied when others began to take a close look at the content of CMC and found what they called "socio-emotional" messages

and sometimes, "uninhibited" communication (flaming). Still others began to speculate that something other than the computer itself might be involved in making CMC distinctive.

Running parallel to these studies based on data has been a whole series of essays critical of CMC. These essays have claimed that people not only cannot form community via computer, but that in attempting to do so they are undermining real community in their lives offline. These essays almost never present data to support their claims, yet their arguments continue to be published, and one assumes, believed by at least a segment of their audience.

There are a variety of ways to test whether or not community exists among a group of people, depending of course on one's definition of community. So far, most of those who have spoken of community have not defined what they mean by it, and so it is difficult to tell whether or not their claims are valid. I intend to remedy this problem in the current study by specifying one definition of speech community, operationalizing it, and then comparing the group I am studying to the operationalization. As noted before, I am choosing to ask whether my group is a speech community, rather than a more general community. This gives me the advantage of a well researched concept that can be easily operationalized. It leaves a question, however: If I can show that a CMC group can be a speech community, does it add anything to the debate over whether such a group can be a community in a more general sense? I think it does. As noted above, speech communities share some characteristics with communities more generally--at least in the implied definitions of online theorists, and many face to face speech communities seem to contain all the characteristics specified in these definitions. A speech community may not be the same thing as a community in the more general sense, but it is certainly in the same ballpark, so to speak. I believe, then, that this study fills a gap in the literature on CMC groups in that it asks directly the question, can such a group be a speech community, using

a particular definition of speech community, and if so, does this furnish some evidence to suggest that it may also be a community in the larger sense?

My study is also unique in another sense. It explores a group almost from its beginning. The study group, Pednet, went on line for the first time in January, 1995. The study period ran from February through July, 1995. Thus, I followed the actual formation of the group, the "discursive working out of standards" that McLaughlin et al. (1995) talk about. Bormann (1983, 1985) has written about what he calls "symbolic convergence" that occurs when a group forms and becomes a "rhetorical community." But much of Bormann's work has been based on groups assigned to be together in his classes, so they are not quite the real world entities that Pednet is. Thus, in determining whether Pednet is a speech community, I may also be able to contribute something about the formation of such communities over time.

Finally, I hope that my work will contribute something not just to scholars, but to the people who frequent the Internet on one listserv, discussion group or another. People are feeling their way along as they communicate with one another via computer, learning a whole new way of making connections in which the context is carried in words on the screen and one has to remind oneself who is behind those words. Thus my work on how words make community may be valuable to those involved in the effort.

#### Research Questions

My primary research question is as follows: Does the CMC group Pednet constitute a speech community? In answering this question, I will use the following definition of speech community: A speech community is an organization of diversity, a group that shares at least one common language, that shares rules for the use and interpretation of speech and attitudes toward speech, and that constitutes itself in the speaking even as it creates history to ground future speaking.

It is obvious when a group shares a common language, but how does one learn whether it shares rules for the use and interpretation of speech? How does one see (or hear) attitudes toward speaking? And how can one tell when the group is being constituted in the speech? In order to approach these questions, I am choosing to use a framework created by Philipsen (1992), who in turn based this framework on 30 years of ethnographic studies of speech communities by himself and others. This framework states that elements of speech codes (the community's ideas about speech) are woven into speaking in four ways: through distinct patterns in discourse, through metacommunication (talk about talk), through rhetorical invocation of this metacommunication, and through culturally distinctive forms such as social dramas, rituals or cultural myths. These parts of the framework generate subordinate research questions for me, and each part is explicated below as I state these subordinate research questions.

#### Discourse Patterns

RQ 1A: Does Pednet manifest distinct patterns in discourse? One way of getting at the rules and attitudes mentioned in the definition of speech communities is through patterns in the speaking itself. In other words, what is the answer to the question, "Who speaks to whom, about what, in what circumstances?" Patterns may be found in the types of people who consistently speak together, in the topics that they speak about, and in the circumstances under which they do and do not speak. Philipsen (1976), for example, found that the Teamstervillers he studied injected something about place into virtually everything they said. This concern with place as a topic translated into rules about who could be in what location and about who did and did not belong. Basso (1970) found that among Western Apaches, there were certain people to whom one did not speak. These included people in mourning, people returning after a long absence and people one had not met before. This lack of speech with certain people translated into a rule about not speaking in circumstances where there was uncertainty. Phillips (1970) found that the

Warm Springs Indian children were reluctant to speak out in the classroom even when asked. The lack of speech in this circumstance translated into a rule that speaking out about one's knowledge constituted immodesty and lack of respect for one's peers. In the context of CMC, patterns in discourse may relate to the question raised by a number of researchers (McLaughlin et al., 1995; MacKinnon, 1995; Baym, 1993) of who is a member of a CMC group and whether there is encouragement to participate.

### Metacommunication

RQ 1B: Does Pednet's metacommunication reveal rules or norms for communicating? Metacommunication—or talk about talk—has also proved useful in ferreting out both rules for the interpretation of speech and attitudes toward it. Particularly useful in this regard have been terms for talk. Abrahams and Bauman (1971) were able to use them to show the St. Vincentians' respect for talk as a way of attaining status; St. George (1985) used them to show how gender roles were assigned in 17th century New England. And Carbaugh summed up the usefulness of terms for talk in his (1989) survey. Other aspects of metacommunication have been useful as well. Huspek and Kendall (1991), for example, learned that the workers in their study used disparaging terms to refer to their fellows who spoke up to the bosses, indicating that for them, speaking out was a useless exercise. Basso's Western Apaches (1970), likewise, made fun of the white man for talking all the time.

Metacommunication tends to reveal in a rather direct way what the rules for interpretation of speech in a given community are. When a community member describes a given speech act in positive or negative terms, he or she is more than likely referring to a community rule. The rules in turn point to attitudes, such as Huspek and Kendall's workers' feelings of powerlessness that are manifested in their belief that speaking out is useless.

### Rhetorical Invocation of Metacommunication

RQ 1C: Do members of Pednet invoke earlier metacommunication in order to justify arguments or call others to account? Another aspect of metacommunication that is useful for the ethnographer is the rhetorical invocation of metacommunicative rules. When, for example, one of Basso's (1970) Apaches chides another for talking "like a whiteman," he is invoking a rule that he assumes his target is aware of. When a Donahue participant (Carbaugh, 1988) criticizes another for "intolerance," he assumes the other knows that this is a cardinal sin in that setting. The rhetorical invocation of metacommunication is one way we can see the speech community being constituted in the speaking itself. One participant criticizes another for a particular behavior. Then, sometime later, two completely different participants might be involved in a similar exchange, with one citing the earlier talk to say "I thought we agreed that was inappropriate." Thus the rules are created in the talk itself, and this is especially true in CMC groups, because talk is often all there is.

### Culturally Distinctive Forms

RQ 1D: Is there evidence of culturally distinctive forms in the Pednet discourse? Culturally distinctive forms may also provide clues to rules and attitudes. These include totemizing rituals, cultural myths and social dramas. Philipsen has provided examples of all of these in his work.

#### Totemizing Rituals

In his study done with Katriel (1981), a totemizing ritual among the middle class Americans called the Nacirema was uncovered. A totemizing ritual is defined, after Turner (1980) as a structured sequence of symbolic actions, the correct performance of which pays homage to a sacred object. Katriel and Philipsen described what they called the "communication ritual" in which two parties sit down to discuss their problems

communicating, with the result that their relationship is reaffirmed. The existence of the ritual indicates a rule among Nacirema that problems should be talked about.

### Cultural Myths

The cultural myth is illustrated in Philipsen's (1992) work on the film "Kramer Vs. Kramer." The story of the movie, Philipsen contends, is an illustration of a cultural myth-- that is, a story that, in the telling, provides its hearers with resources for interpreting their own experiences and telling their own stories in ways intelligible to them and their interlocutors. In "Kramer Vs. Kramer," a woman feels that her identity has been obliterated in marriage. She therefore leaves the marriage and goes off in search of herself, eventually returning when she begins to feel like a real human being. The story indicates a rule that persons must act alone in the world and learn to express themselves as individuals in order to be considered functioning adults.

### Social Dramas

Philipsen (1986) found a social drama illustrated in his work among Teamstervillers, particularly his study of Mayor Daley. A social drama is an incident in which someone invokes a moral rule challenging the conduct of another. A reply is made, after which the offender is either alienated from or reintegrated into the group. In Mayor Daley's speech to the City Council, he challenged the behavior of a certain councilman who had, in his view, inappropriately complained that nepotism played a role in a certain political appointment. In Daley's mind, such appointments were his prerogative and not to be challenged by others. But the councilman, not understanding Daley's code of conduct, could not properly answer him and so, in Daley's mind, would remain an outsider from the group. The rule in this case had to do with who may properly challenge another. As noted above, the notion of place is important among Teamstervillers like Daley, and this includes metaphorical place. In the world of Daley's speech community, it was the

mayor's place to make appointments as he saw fit and the councilman's place to simply approve them. The councilman had challenged when he should have kept silent.

### Speech Codes

**RQ 1E: When the patterns in discourse, metacommunication and rhetorical invocation of metacommunication, and culturally distinctive forms are considered together, do they add up to a speech code? The case of Mayor Daley and the councilman illustrates how when people are members of different speech communities, they may easily misunderstand each other. This is because of the different rules they have for the interpretation of speech, but it is also because of the attitudes behind those rules and what those rules add up to. I have already given some examples of attitudes evidenced by rules: the workers who refuse to speak up because they do not believe they are powerful enough to effect change by doing so (Huspek and Kendall, 1991); the St. Vincentians who believe good speaking is so important that they accord power to people who speak well (Abrahams and Bauman, 1971); the Warm Springs Indians who refuse to speak out in a group because they believe to do so shows immodesty (Phillips, 1970). We can take the analysis one step farther by considering all the rules evidenced in the speech of a given group and what they add up to. Collectively, these rules can be referred to as a code (Philipsen, 1992). Philipsen bases his definition of a speech code on Geertz's (1973) definition of culture: A speech code is a "historically transmitted, socially constructed system of symbols and meanings, premises and rules pertaining to communicative conduct" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 124). Specifically, Philipsen and others (e.g. Carbaugh, 1986; Katriel, 1986) suggest that the patterns, rules and attitudes that make up a speech code will help to indicate how the group answers three key questions: (1) what is a person? (2) what is society? (3) how are persons and society linked through communication?**

With regard to Pednet, the speech code may be another place in which it is possible to see the speech community constituting itself in the speaking even as it creates a history to ground future speech. Note that a speech code is defined as a "historically transmitted" system, meaning--one supposes--handed down from one generation to the next. In CMC terms, that could be from one month to the next, since new members are constantly joining the list. It is also "socially constructed," meaning it is created in the discourse itself.

### Distinctiveness

A speech community by definition has distinctive ways of speaking. It could be asked, then, if I find the patterns, metacommunicative rules and culturally distinctive forms listed above, can I be certain that these prove the existence of a way of speaking that is distinctive? To this I would answer that distinctiveness exists in two places: (1) in the minds of the group participants and (2) in comparison with other groups. When a group considers itself to be distinct from other groups, and talks about this, it has achieved a kind of group identity. Thus, the group has become a speech community in its own eyes. One can see this kind of distinctiveness largely in the contrasts that group members draw in their talk. When they talk about who they are and who they are not, they are naming themselves a distinct group.

The belief in distinctiveness does not necessarily make one distinct, however. This can be seen only in comparisons. Ethnography progresses, as I explain in Chapter II, largely by means of individual case studies which are then compared to other, similar case studies. Because I am among the first in the ethnography of speaking to study an online group, I had little basis for comparison in my study. I did compare my data with that of another ethnographer of online discourse, Baym (1993, 1994, 1994a, 1995, 1996), finding some similarities and some differences. This provides some evidence of distinctiveness,

but I will have to await the entry of other ethnographers into online research in order to make further comparisons.

### Speech Communities and Communities in General

**RQ 2: If Pednet is a speech community, in what way does this knowledge contribute to the notion of virtual communities? As stated earlier, there has been considerable controversy over whether "community" can exist among participants in groups who meet only via computer. Although in most cases those who write about this issue have not spelled out exactly what they mean by "community," they have implied definitions in what they have said. I have attempted to create definitions based on their words and then will compare my results with what they have suggested community is. In this way I hope to contribute to the debate on virtual communities, although I can provide no definitive answers.**

### **Summary**

**In this chapter I have laid out the background research on both computer mediated communication and speech communities. I have argued that there is a gap in the CMC research in that few studies have analyzed content closely, asking the question, "Is this a speech community?" This is what I intend to do. I have presented a definition of speech community, operationalized it using a framework created by Philipsen (1992), and will analyze my data according to this framework to see if it meets the definition of speech community. I will further compare my results to the implied definitions of community found in studies of online discourse to determine how this speech community (if indeed it is one) compares to ideas of community in general.**

## **CHAPTER II**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To answer my research questions, I spent the bulk of my time working with the actual discourse of the listserv I was studying. If, as Philipsen (1992) claims, the elements of speech codes are woven into speaking, then it is the speaking itself that will provide clues to these elements. And if a speech code exists, one can reasonably assume that a speech community has created it and maintains it. To get a close look at the "speaking" of my subjects, then, I downloaded messages from the listserv onto my personal computer. There they were combined into one large, computer-searchable file and also printed out as separate messages. It was in this corpus of actual online conversations that I looked for evidence of a speech community. In this chapter I will explain the rationale for such an approach, describe the study site and participants, detail the data collection and analysis procedures and address issues of validity and reliability.

#### **Research Design Rationale**

As described in the previous chapter, a growing number of scholars have become interested in computer mediated communication over the last decade and have used a variety of approaches to studying it. Of these, however, only a small minority have focused on the actual content of the messages, and some of these did so using a coding scheme. That is, they classified messages according to whether they contained particular elements such as "supportive communication" (Brennan, Moore and Smyth, 1992), "socioemotional content" (McCormick and McCormick, 1992), or "corrective content" (McLaughlin, Osborne and Smith, 1995). Although there is nothing wrong with taking this approach, and certainly something has been learned from it, it is a one-step approach that presumes the researcher knows what he or she is looking for before the study begins. Typically, a researcher using a coding scheme is working from previous studies that have isolated and defined the phenomena he or she wishes to study.

There have been a few studies that have taken a more open approach to studying the content of CMC. Wilkins (1991), for example studied entries on a particular "topic" of an electronic conferencing network. Using no particular coding scheme, she simply looked at various language features in her data--turn-taking, lexical repetition, strategies for maintaining the topic, and so forth. Reid (1991) appears to have conducted her analysis of Internet Relay Chat asking only the general questions of how IRC members deconstruct social boundaries and construct their own form of community. Baym (1993, 1994, 1995, 1996) is the researcher whose work most resembles my own. Taking an ethnographic approach to the entries on rec.arts.tv.soaps (r.a.t.s.), she sought to learn how the participants created individual identities and group coherence. The framework that Baym built based on her studies (1995) will be described in some detail in Chapter IV.

My plan in the current study was to consider the messages from PedNet with no preconceived notions as to what might be there. In this I follow the ethnographic tradition of observing and listening to a group of people, then looking for order in what I have seen and heard. That does not mean, of course, that I do what I do with no guiding framework. As outlined in the previous chapter, I was looking for patterns, metacommunication, rhetorical invocation of metacommunication and culturally distinctive forms. However, these elements constitute broad categories, not specific, well-defined phenomena. My process, therefore, was a two-step process. First, I needed to identify a pattern, then search for examples of it in the discourse. A "pattern," after all, can be anything from an obsession with place (Philipsen, 1976) to a simple, unvarnished style (Katriel, 1986). This contrasts sharply with "supportive communication," for example, which is a pre-defined type of message that is either in the discourse or not. To use Shuy's (1984) explanation, I was permitting the language data to suggest the units of analysis rather than beginning with a unit of analysis and then searching for it in the language data.

By restricting myself to the actual content of the messages and not imposing a coding scheme on the data, I believe I have helped to close a gap in the research on CMC. As Baym (1995) says, "there has been little work addressing computer mediated community directly" (p. 139). She further says that this community is an emergent one, growing out of the communication itself. If that is so, then it is the communication itself that should be studied.

Because I chose to focus on what was said and what those words added up to, I did not conduct any surveys of the participants in my listserv. I know nothing about them other than what they chose to reveal in the content of their messages. I hoped, by using this method, to avoid reading things into what anyone said based on their demographic characteristics.

## Research Sites and Study Procedures

### Research Sites and Participants

#### Pednet

The study is based upon data collected from a group called Pednet over a period of six months. Pednet is a listserv; that is, it is an electronic mail list administered by a particular group and made up of subscribers. I chose PedNet as the group to study for several reasons. First, because I wanted to study the "way of speaking" of a group, I needed discourse that was as much like natural conversation as possible. I therefore did not want to study a group where the use of pseudonyms is prevalent, such as a multi-user dungeon (MUD). In such groups, people make up a role for themselves and then must act according to their role. In some cases they even pretend to be a different gender than they are or to possess certain supernatural powers. On PedNet people used their real names and told each other things about their offline lives. I therefore believed the conversation among them was much like that among people face to face.

Second, as a listserv, PedNet offered several advantages. A listserv is administered by a known individual or group of individuals who can be contacted easily for information. In this case, the listserv was administered by an established walking group. Listservs generally write and post statements of their purposes, as well a list of frequently-asked questions. This gives the researcher a point of reference as to what the group was designed to be when it began. And as subscription services, listservs attract people who at least intend to be part of the group over time. Members have all the posts delivered to them daily, which tends to lead to a higher stability level than is likely on a site that people must deliberately access if they want to participate.

Third, PedNet had the advantage of being small and relatively new. Because it had only been in existence a short time when I began, I was able to study its discourse right from the beginning and see its complete evolution. Its small size allowed me to avoid being overwhelmed by data and to easily "get to know" active posters.

Finally, there are two personal matters that made PedNet a good choice for my study. First, the list administrators were in Portland, making them easily accessible to me; and second, as an enthusiastic walker, I had been a subscriber on this list almost from the beginning. This made me a known quantity to the people I was dealing with, so trust was not a problem. At the time of the study, Pednet was administered by the Willamette Pedestrian Coalition (WPC), a non-profit political action group for walkers based in Portland, Oregon. The list came into existence in January, 1995. Since January of 1996, it has been administered by Ottawalk, a walking group in Ottawa, Ontario; it can be accessed at [pednet@flora.ottawa.on.ca](mailto:pednet@flora.ottawa.on.ca).

The purpose for Pednet, as stated in its general information bulletin, is as follows:

Pednet is a mailing list for pedestrian advocates around the world. It covers issues of interest to walkers, pedestrians with disabilities, and urban and transportation

planners. In other words, the list carries information of interest to people interested in a friendlier living and traveling environment.

It is clear from this description that Pednet was intended to be for both ordinary walkers, that is, people who were not involved in a related professional field, and those who were. Disabled people, who are often unable to drive, are specifically mentioned.

Pednet is an unmoderated list, which means that when members sent messages, they sent them directly to the list, rather than to a moderator. There was, therefore, no censoring of messages, nor was there ordering of messages. Members had the option of receiving a "digest" form of the list, meaning they received messages in batches--every 48k or every day, whichever came first--or they could receive each message as it was sent.

#### Participants

The WPC solicited subscribers for its list in many places, including other lists devoted to walking and in walking publications such as The Walking Magazine. The membership varied during the course of the study, but averaged about 150. I did not attempt to survey participants to collect information about them, but I did do a one-time downloading of the membership list, which merely records the e-mail addresses of all participants at that moment in time. By matching these addresses with messages on the list, I was able to determine that 97 of the 157 addresses on this list were those of men, 27 were those of women and 33 were indeterminate. The 33 were people who did not post any messages during the six-month study period. Based on what people said in their posts, it was possible to determine that 28 held positions in professional fields related to walking--primarily city planning, architecture and engineering. A few were specifically responsible for pedestrian programs. The "edu" extension on 46 addresses indicated they were affiliated with colleges and universities, either as students or faculty/staff.

There were two administrators for Pednet. Rusty is a computer professional who served as technical support for the list. He rarely posted. Paula, a non-professional,

disabled walker, was a very active poster who served as contact person for the list. Paula functioned as the person to whom participants made personal appeals, often through private e-mail that she would allude to on the list. Paula was always at the center of discussions, and I think tried to guide them to a certain degree, but she did not have the powers of a moderator. I have written in more detail about Paula and other frequent posters in Chapter III.

As I stated before, I was myself a participant in Pednet (any post labeled "Nancy" is my own). I am an enthusiastic walker, and joined the list after seeing an ad for it in The Walking Magazine. People on the list had already seen posts from me at the time I notified them of the study, so they had built up a certain amount of trust in me. I was careful never to discuss my work on the list, and I did not engage in evaluative metacommunication that might have pushed the list in one direction or another. In short, I was certainly not an objective observer, but I was one who attempted not to change what I saw.

### Participant Rights

When I decided that I would like to study Pednet, I first sent a note to the list administrator Paula, telling her of my plan. She in turn contacted other members of WPC who were involved with Pednet's administration, and wrote back giving me their blessing. I then posted a message to Pednet explaining what I was doing. I told participants that my study had to do with the discourse of Pednet, not with its subject matter, so I would not be arguing for or against any subject area issue that came up on the list. I further assured them that no one's real name would be used (the names of the list administrators above, and all names in this dissertation except my own, are pseudonyms), although some messages would be quoted verbatim in my printed dissertation. I invited anyone with concerns or questions to send me e-mail and I would reply promptly.

I did receive a few notes from participants, mainly asking questions about my field and what exactly it was that I was studying. No one, however, objected to having quotes used in the printed dissertation. I am as certain as I can be that knowing a study was in progress did not have an impact on the messages posted. The tenor of the communication did not change after I posted my announcement.

### Data Collection

The data for the study consisted of the 925 messages from Pednet over a six-month period. I downloaded these messages to my personal computer, then combined them into a single, searchable file. I also printed out individual messages and filed them, in the order received, in separate files for each month of the study period. I made no changes in the messages during this process. All the messages that appear in the dissertation are exactly as they were written--including spelling and grammatical errors. I have left out portions of some of them, and this is indicated by an elipsis that looks like this: . . . When participants used an elipsis in the message itself, that elipsis looks like this: ...

One of the great advantages of working with computer mediated data is that the messages are already in written form and can be transferred electronically, thus eliminating the potential errors of transcribing and retyping material. Each message also contains a heading in which is recorded who the message is from, what the subject is and the time and date it was sent. Pednet has archived all its messages from the beginning of the list at its website, so it was also possible for me to check messages there.

### Data Analysis

#### The Log

Before I began a serious analysis of the content of the messages, I felt the need to take a broader look at what I had collected. I therefore went through the messages one at

a time and recorded the date, who the message was from, what subject was filled in on the subject line, and a summary of what was said. When I had completed this laborious process, I began to quantify the data: how many messages each day, each week, each month; how many messages from each individual. I gained some superficial information from this exercise. I learned how many list members were actually posting (recorded above) and who posted most often. I learned the average number of posts per day, which ranged from 3.4 at the beginning to 9.8 in the highest month. I learned there were more posts on weekdays, suggesting that participants were accessing the list at work. I also learned that the subject lines were relatively meaningless, in that people might talk about the same subject as someone else but use a different subject label.

### The Framework

Metacommunication: After collecting the quantifiable information, I turned to a close analysis of content, using Philipsen's (1992) framework as my guide. I decided to begin with metacommunication, because it seemed to me to be the most obvious thing to find. When people pull out of the subject matter discussion to discuss the talk itself, that is very noticeable. I therefore called up the large file of all the messages and simply went through them one by one, looking for metacommunication. When I found it, I did a copy and paste to a separate file, labeling the copied portion by the name of the author. Since the files were in chronological order, I did not date each entry. When this process was complete, I had a long file of metacommunicative messages. From this, I separated out the rhetorical invocation of metacommunication--in other words, the messages that alluded to earlier metacommunication.

I printed out these two files, and read all the messages several times. I asked myself what rules or norms these messages suggested. Metacommunicative messages are most often in an evaluative mode. They praise or blame another participant, or they contain apologies for the writer's own behavior. Praising, blaming and apologizing all

indicate that the writer is orienting to some standard he or she perceives exists. What were those standards, was the question I asked myself.

**Patterns:** Patterns presented a more difficult problem, because patterns can be anything. But by the time I addressed this question, I had already read through all the messages comprising my data set several times. There were some things I had noticed in these multiple readings that I resolved to check out more systematically. This was accomplished by using the computer's search function. For example, I noticed that the use of names seemed to be fairly uniform on Pednet. Using my log of the names of participants, I was able to search for each name in turn and to determine how that person had been referred to or addressed. As with the metacommunication, I used copy and paste to create separate files for person reference and direct address.

The discovery of the anti-traditional bias was a bit more indirect. I had a hunch that introductory posts might be important, and while I searched for names, I also looked for introductions people made of themselves and recorded these in a separate file. I noticed how--in the introductions--professionals played down their professional status or claimed to be mavericks in their fields. This led me to a message by message search for attitudes toward professionals and toward the mainstream in general in the total conversation.

Work on the other patterns proceeded in a similar fashion. Something I noticed while reading messages would lead me to a question, which I would then use the search function to check out. Not all of these attempts resulted in the finding of a pattern, but some did. I was grateful for the searchability made possible by the computer, which made my job easier.

**Culture-Specific Forms:** I discovered the pedestrian revenge fantasy almost by accident. Thinking that "threads"--or, series of messages about one topic--might be important, I had gathered all the messages in several threads together and printed them

out. As I read through all the messages in one thread, I was immediately reminded of the fantasy theme work done by Bormann (1975, 1978, 1985). It seemed clear that pedestrian revenge was a fantasy theme that was emerging over the series of posts in the thread. It seemed to fit all of Bormann's criteria for fantasy theme, and it also qualified as what Hymes (1972) called a "genre." I thought it was a culture-specific form as specified in Philipsen's (1992) framework too, although not one of the three forms he discusses.

Code: Looking for the code involved turning from the primary data to the elements of the framework that I had already located. In other words, I looked at the patterns, metacommunication and culture-specific forms that I had discovered and asked myself what rules and attitudes these revealed. If, for example, there is an anti-traditional bias in the speaking of Pednet participants, what did that reveal about their more general attitudes. More specifically, how did that bias relate to the basic questions, "What is a person?" "What is society?" and "How are persons linked to society through communication?" I went through these questions for each of the elements of the framework I had located, and in this way constructed a code for Pednet.

### Beyond the Framework

My study can be described as both a case study and an ethnography. A case study is defined by Mitchell (1983) as "a detailed examination of an event (or series of events) which the analyst believes exhibits (or exhibit) the operation of some identified general theoretical principle" (p. 192). Thus, I examined in great detail the discourse (a series of speech events) of one group in order to see if it exhibited the characteristics of the theoretical construct "speech code," which would in turn point to the presence of a speech community.

In general, the case study approach is the way that the ethnography of communication has proceeded. Each ethnographer has taken it as his or her task to "record in detail aspects of a single phenomenon, whether that phenomenon is a small

group of humans or the operation of some social process" (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982, p. 44). Once a sufficient number of these cases have been accumulated, ethnographers have had the opportunity to compare one case with another, at which point larger principles have been postulated. Philipsen (1982) describes the process this way:

An example of an empirically-derived descriptive framework is that developed in, and in part constitutive of, the ethnography of communication. It is the goal of that enterprise, at least in part, to construct a descriptive framework which is also a theory about the nature of the class of phenomena described, the relationship between language and social life. Each ethnography of communication produced--each case--uses the extant framework as a heuristic tool for description, and each study is to be examined for its potential contribution to the development of the framework (p. 18).

By taking the ethnographic case study approach, I have sacrificed the obvious advantages offered by comparison groups. By definition, such groups allow one to compare what one has found in a given group to another, similar group. Thus, if I had studied two listservs instead of one, I might have found their discourse similar enough to conclude that the speech code I had discovered was one applicable to all listservs rather than one unique to the group I studied. However, an ethnographic approach in which one attempts to study all aspects of the discourse precludes the study of more than one group because of the time consuming process required when one permits the language data to suggest the units of analysis, rather than approaching the data with ready-made units of analysis. I could have studied two or more groups using a survey/interview method, but this is not my area of interest or expertise.

I did attempt to introduce some comparison into my study by turning to the only other ethnographic studies of online groups that I know of--those done by Baym (1993, 1994, 1995, 1996). In Chapter IV I describe the framework that Baym constructed "through which to view this process of creating community through CMC" (Baym, 1995, p. 139). and compare my findings to this framework.

Because I have studied only one group, I make no claim that what I have found here can be generalized to other groups--either to other listservs or to other online groups in general. I trust that other ethnographers will become interested in the online environment and that other case studies of online groups will follow mine. When a sufficient number have been accumulated, ethnographers will no doubt begin to make comparisons and generalizations and so extend the theory of the ethnography of communication from the face-to-face to the online world.

#### Validity and Reliability

As stated above, I was fortunate to have unlimited access to the phenomenon that I chose to study. I was already a member of Pednet when I began the study, and was receiving all the messages posted on it every day. Although my membership might have biased me, it also made me someone that other members trusted, and so no objections were raised when I announced my intent to study the list. Although I limited my study period to six months, I remained on the list after it was over and could continue my observations on a more informal level. Also, limiting the time period allowed me to have a corpus of materials that I felt I had some mastery of. I could actually read through all of them in one sitting and could get an overall sense of what was being discussed when.

Although my study was somewhat unusual for the field of the ethnography of communication because the discourse in question was written rather than spoken, I have argued elsewhere (see Chapter I) that online discourse is considered by many to be somewhere between written and spoken. The fact that the discourse was both written and on line also gave me a tremendous advantage with regard to validity. The typical ethnography of communication researcher must either tape record and transcribe messages or take notes on them. This introduces the possibility of errors and bias creeping in. In the case of taping, words are not always clear on tape recordings; pauses, emphases and the like are difficult to convey in a transcription; and the presence of the tape recorder may

have an effect on the speakers. In the case of note taking, the observer cannot help picking and choosing what to write down. Since my discourse was written, it appeared in my corpus of materials exactly the way the author posted it. By using the computer to transfer the messages directly, no human error could be introduced. As for computer error, the listserv maintained an archive that could be checked if questions arose.

Where errors could most easily have been introduced was in my noticing of the patterns, metacommunication and culturally specific forms and the separation of these messages into separate files. It is true that I could have seen a pattern where none existed, but I tried to guard against this by returning frequently to the raw discourse, which existed together in a single file. After I had discovered the anti-traditional bias, for example, I went back to the discourse and looked for counter-examples there. Of course I found them, as I did with the other phenomena as well. But in each case the counter examples were few, thus leading me to a reconfirmation of the pattern.

To further check my conclusions, especially to test for reliability, I also submitted pieces of my data to a colleague to examine. For each element of the framework, I gave her the raw data I had collected into files and asked her what she saw in it. For example, I gave the colleague the file I had compiled of all the metacommunication in the messages, asking her to look for any rules to which she saw the participants orienting themselves. Her responses in all cases were very similar to my own. Though of course she did not use exactly the same words to describe the phenomena, in no case did her conclusions conflict with my own.

The further move that I describe in Chapter IV of comparing my results to those of Baym (1993, 1994, 1995, 1996) is another check of reliability. Though working with a different group, Baym's study methods and interests were similar to my own, so the fact that my data largely fit within her framework makes my case more convincing.

**CHAPTER III**  
**RESEARCH FINDINGS**  
**Introduction and Criteria**

In the previous two chapters, I spelled out the research questions of this study and the method by which I intended to answer these questions. As noted, I approached my data using a framework developed by Philipsen (1992). Specifically, I looked for patterns in discourse, metacommunication and rhetorical invocation of metacommunication and culturally specific forms. However, the presence of any of these elements of the framework does not, by itself, prove that a speech community exists. Rather, it is the degree to which any of these elements (1) points to the definition of speech community which I have spelled out and (2) shows the group treating itself as distinct in relation to others that determine its importance as evidence. Therefore, I have developed three criteria against which each element of the framework will be measured. Each criterion is stated below in the form of a question.

**1. Does the framework element show a shared knowledge of the rules for the use and interpretation of speech and attitudes toward it?**

A speech community, according to my definition stated in Chapter I, does share such rules and attitudes. Sometimes these rules show themselves when someone states them; sometimes they show up in the things people choose to talk about (or not talk about) or the attitudes expressed toward particular subjects. This is the classic mark of a speech community. The key word is "shared." When a rule emerges that is truly that of a speech community, one can see a shared orientation to it, such that interlocutors are likely to challenge one another when the rule is violated and to apologize when they themselves violate it. The more such violations are noticed and reacted to, the stronger is the rule. Attitudes often lurk behind the rules and are derived from them. If the community enforces a rule, the researcher must ask herself, to what attitude does the rule point?

Of course, speech communities are made up of individuals and individuals never completely conform to a rule. Hymes' (1974) remark that a speech community is an organization of diversity refers to the fact that even in a community bound together by a common code, not everyone feels the same way about everything. There will be differences in opinion, but as these differences are grappled with, some guiding principles will emerge. So it is that as a researcher looks at diverging opinions, the discussion of the divergence allows him or her to see some underlying unity. Thus, as I examined disagreements on Pednet, I looked for this organization of diversity.

**2. Does the framework element show the group constituting itself in the speaking even as it creates a history to ground future speaking?**

Speech communities do not spring into being full blown. They are created by people speaking together. When, for example, one member of a group chooses to accentuate a portion of his/her identity when speaking to others, this act may encourage others to do the same. Over time, it becomes known among this group that it is appropriate to accentuate that portion of one's identity rather than another. It becomes a rule, in other words, as referred to in question one above. However, with each speaking situation, there is the opportunity to either reaffirm, adjust or outright change that rule. Thus, new groups constitute themselves in the speaking and old groups reconstitute themselves each time they speak. In new groups, such as the one I studied, one should be able to see rules and attitudes in-the-making. Each encounter creates a base for succeeding encounters. In contrast to the first question, which refers to the content of discourse, this question looks to the processual aspect; that is, what one person says leads to a response from another which leads to a similar comment by another and so on.

**3. Does the framework element contribute in some way to a collective identity such that the group treats itself as distinct from other groups?**

A group may agree upon a rule and reaffirm it over multiple speaking situations, but that does not necessarily make the group a speech community. My work group has a loosely-agreed upon rule to greet each other when coming in in the morning, but then, so do most work groups, and there is nothing distinctive about our greetings. Thus, in considering the possible existence of a speech community, one must also ask whether the evidence contributes to some collective identity that makes the group treat themselves as distinct from other groups around them. In other words, as the group constitutes itself, do group members begin to think of themselves--as a group--in a particular way? Do they place themselves in opposition to some other group or groups, with whom they contrast themselves? If the first question is about content and the second about process, this question is a comparative one. It asks the researcher to compare this group with others in its environment and to question where the borders are between these groups. What makes this group distinctive?

In this chapter I will present two patterns that I found in the discourse of Pednet, along with two rules derived from its metacommunication and one culturally distinctive form. In the case of each, I will first present evidence for the existence of the element, then ask the questions listed above and show how the element described is evidence for the existence of a speech community. No one element is likely to generate an unqualified "yes" answer to all the questions. One must judge the amount of evidence in each case and come to a conclusion.

**RQ1A: Patterns in Discourse**

A pattern in discourse is any regularity that is noticed in the speech of a group of people. In Chapter I, I gave several examples of patterns found in other studies: the Teamstervillers' injection of something about place into everything they said (Philipsen,

1976), the Apaches' tendency not to talk to certain groups (Basso, 1970) and the Warm Springs Indians' tendency not to speak in school classes (Phillips, 1970). As I considered the discourse of Pednet participants, I looked for patterns, and specifically for patterns that met the criteria listed above. In the sections that follow, I will both demonstrate the existence of the patterns in the discourse and show how they do or do not meet the three criteria.

### The Anti-Traditional Bias

There are several patterns in the Pednet discourse that together add up to a larger pattern which I am calling the anti-traditional bias. All of these patterns have to do with the identity of the interlocutors. When people talk, they make certain portions of their identities salient according to what they think is appropriate to the situation and the other people present. The portions of the identity emphasized are related to the values of the speech community in which they find themselves. In the case of Pednet, identities are projected largely in the messages, because no nonverbal cues are available.

#### Walkers are Mavericks

The first pattern I noticed is that Pednet participants tend to emphasize in their speech the fact that they are different from most people. Sometimes the comments are simply included as part of a message, as in the following (underlinings throughout are mine):

**Paul:** . . . Now, suddenly on the historic timescale, walking is marginalized. Suddenly, people who walk are people who are maybe a little weird.  
And this I find strange.

**Linda:** I have been a walker for about six years, since my old car broke down and I refused (actually I couldn't afford) to buy a new one. I have been a happy walker since and have no intention of owning a car although in this community it makes me a little strange. . . .

Sometimes the pattern occurs as a conversation, in which one person talks about her difference, then others chime in with "me too" remarks, as in the following :

**Valerie:** I've noticed that a number of people seem surprised if I mention that I've walked, say, from Times Square down to Greenwich Village (about 2 miles/3 kilometers) . . . These aren't people who drive everywhere--they'll walk several blocks to a bus or train, or within a neighborhood, but there seems to be an assumption that to get from one activity to another, people get on a bus or train if they aren't driving. The odd thing is that far fewer people think it odd if I say I went for a similar-length walk just to walk: it's as if walking is considered recreation rather than transportation. Have other people gotten this reaction?

**Nancy:** . . . Yes, I get that response all the time. I walk to work every morning--a little over 3 miles. People are astounded to think I do that, and usually ask in an incredulous voice how long it takes. The answer: one hour. . .

I think the reason people react differently to "taking a walk" is that then it falls into the category of "exercise" rather than "transportation." Our culture has become so used to getting in some kind of vehicle to go somewhere that that becomes the norm. Walking as transportation is weird. Walking for exercise, on the other hand, is acceptable. It's sort of jogging for old folks.

**Valerie:** I think you're right that there's a perceived dichotomy between exercise and transportation. I also suspect that some of these people don't realize how much there is to see even in an ordinary city neighborhood. (For example, someone two blocks from my office has a grapevine growing up the side of a building, which astonished me the first time I saw it.)

**Sean:** I agree with Nancy. My wife is very aware of the walking I do for transportation, but she looked at me funny last night when I suggested we walk to the store instead of take the truck. It didn't take much convincing, though, since she is pregnant and really worried about not getting enough exercise. So we leashed up the mutt and headed out to get vitamins and shampoo. I also stopped at the post office, and we had the chance to stop at the Broomfield rec center and check out the "Bay" - a bunch of pools and water slides. Then we decided to go down a path we had never been before that took us through another part of our neighborhood. She is warming up to the idea that we live in a great place to raise kids (even if it is waaay suburbia). . .

**Jason:** YES again... I often get an astonished reaction from people when they find out I've chosen to walk 2-3 miles instead of riding on something.

However, I'm not sure it's just the issue of walking for 'transportation' vs. 'exercise'. Just for fun I frequently take walks on forest trails that cover 5-8 miles

and many hours. When friends and work colleagues hear about this I often get astonished responses and questions like... 'why?'

There seems to be a large segment of the American population that just can't conceive of walking long distances for pleasure. The 'why walk when you can ride?' attitude seems to be widespread and accepted but the 'why ride when you can have the pleasure of walking?' attitude gets you labeled as weird. . . .

This idea that being a walker makes one different from most people is consistently expressed in the discourse. It appeared in 38 messages during the six months I monitored the list, and the opposite idea--that walking is a common activity practiced by most people--is completely absent in the messages.

The conversation quoted above beginning with the post by Valerie illustrates how the Pednet discourse meets two of the criteria for a speech community. First, it is an instance of the community constituting itself in the speaking. Valerie tells of an experience in which she has proven to be a maverick and asks others on the list if they have shared the experience. Several come forward to say they have. In doing so, the group is encouraging others on the list to see themselves similarly and to highlight those aspects of themselves in their discourse. Second, it contributes to a group identity, a way the group can see itself as being distinct from other groups around it. "Other people think we're weird," they say, "but we are non-conformists, marching (in this case literally) to our own drummer."

#### Professional People are often Portrayed Unfavorably

A second pattern found on Pednet also involves a sense of difference, but in this case it is difference from a specific group. Pednet participants want to separate themselves from the official world related to their concerns--especially from traffic engineers. In the six months I monitored the list, 26 negative statements and no positive statements were made about traffic engineers. Here are some examples:

**Ray:** Our road builders and intersection design commissars operate under a mobility-first mandate, and frequently work against the city's policies for urban forest preservation, community health, or a more nourishing pedestrian environment.

**Mark:** (a copy of a letter sent to his local city council, headed "Traffic engineers discriminate against peds") I am very much interested in hearing your traffic engineering philosophy. Measures that discriminate against pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users (e.g. synchronizing traffic signals, such as on San Pablo Avenue) and promote high-volume, high-speed auto travel create a very unpleasant environment and increase interpersonal alienation. For that reason, this probably contributes greatly to your high crime rate and the flight of middle- and upper-class residents to other cities.

**Charles:** I often do the same, but I can hear the voice of the unnamed traffic engineer in my mind telling me that I will probably cause an accident because altruistic behaviour is aberrant and unpredictable.

Ray calls traffic engineers "commissars," a word suggestive of Eastern European totalitarian regimes. He says their policies go against urban forestation and community health. Charles says traffic engineers think altruistic behavior is "aberrant and unpredictable." Mark states flatly that traffic engineers discriminate against pedestrians. If Pednet participants see themselves as different from ordinary people, enduring criticism and sometimes derision from others, they see themselves as having to fight for their lives against traffic engineers. This consistent opposition to traffic engineers leads to a reinforcement of the group identity and distinctiveness discussed above. One group from which Pednetters want to distinguish themselves is traffic engineers.

However, the picture is not quite as uniform as it first appears. List participants include some traffic engineers, at least one of whom was willing to post his traditional views to the list. But the response to him was uniformly negative. The exchange came in a discussion of "traffic calming," a planning technique whereby roads and intersections are designed to force drivers to slow down. Ron, the traffic engineer, spoke against the idea:

**Ron:** Ken has finally adding a sane commentary. This discussion is not the first to arise on pednet related to an idea that "vehicles need to be slow down for pedestrians." Short of eliminating vehicle travel entirely (and it certainly makes sense in isolated instances), mixing vehicle and pedestrians is dangerous to pedestrians and can be emotionally damaging to the driver who has not been able to avoid striking the oblivious (or too often "IQ=0") actions of pedestrians. Anyone who has an understanding of elementary physics knows that when one places two disproportionate masses in conflict, the object with the lower mass **MUST** yield to that of the higher, regardless of velocity. In other words, a pedestrian will **ALWAYS** become a hood ornament when that person meets a car unless the speed of the vehicle is zero. No speed limits, enforcement, governors, etc. etc. are going to change that law of physics.

Automobiles are here to stay. To suggest otherwise is to dig a deep hole for one's head. Instead of efforts directed toward governors or traffic "calming" on arterial roadways, the common sense approach must remain to provide separated paths for the vehicles and pedestrians.

**Dylan:** That is also the old approach that has gotten us where we are...an urban form not entirely misbegotten but with serious flaws. . . .

. . . The methods you seem to propose e.g. grade-separated walkways for pedestrians ---I'm not clear what you mean on the ground so I won't project too much :) --- create cities the exact opposite of what is meant by a 'pedestrian-friendly city.'

And, btw, why NOT traffic-calm arterials? It's a fine idea to examine very closely and implement as practical. It also requires a shared definition of 'traffic calming' before we seriously debate this critically important issue i.e. should traffic-calming extend to arterials? (BTW, I took for granted that of course it should...but then I got some dubious responses on transp-l to my position...so much for leadership from the experts!)

**Paula:** I don't want to prolong this argument any longer than need be, but .....

it seems basic that if a car is going slower, the driver and the pedestrian will have a better chance of acting to prevent collision. The driver has a better chance of seeing and stopping, and the pedestrian has more time to get out of the way. Slower speeds add predictability? . . . .

Don't know what the answer is, nor what the advisability of speed governors are. Not being a transportation or urban planner, fortunately, I don't need to know, but i do think it's advisable to do a little visualizing of assorted possible futures. I'd hate to completely throw in my lot with "the car is here to stay, let the pedestrian beware" mentality. We have the luxury now of imagining alternatives, if only to enhance our more practical approach in the end.

**Charles:** It is sad to see a safety expert evoking the laws of physics as a guide for our public byways. Interestingly, in physics there are no yielding laws, only collisions in which the smaller and slower object (mass is weight and relative speed) "loses". However, the larger, faster object also suffers. Only when the "bodies" can anticipate a collision and when the bodies have some ability to change their course, can "yielding" occur. And only when yielding occur can one party intimidate another into acting differently. Remember the adage: Power is not reliant on the use of force, but on the threat of the use of force. . .

The discussion was summed up by Karen, who said, simply, "Ron is misguided because he is a traffic engineer":

**Karen:** I agree that the comment of the person who defined "Reality" was hurtful. I think it offended some people. I would like to add that it is not at all surprising that professional transportation engineers speak this way, especially one who appears to work at a regional transportation research center. It seems to me that specialized and technical ways of understanding the road and concepts of mobility, speed, and roadway capacity are grounded in laws of physics and the application of those laws as flow-quality relationships. Could we all agree that this person was offering a traditional approach to road capacity v. constraint evaluations? Would most of his recommendations assume an auto-dependent environment designed to enhance speed and timing of existing intersections and facilities? What he said is a good example of why some think transportation engineering instruction and curriculum should be reevaluated and changed. . . . That person was speaking for his profession.

As Pednet participants criticize the transportation engineer, we see them place themselves in a different and opposing group through the use of oppositional terms. Dylan calls Ron's approach "old"; Karen says it is the "traditional" one. Paula gives his ideas a negative label: the "let the pedestrian beware mentality." Also in these excerpts, the notion of expertise or professionalism is criticized. Dylan says "So much for the leadership of experts." Charles says "It is sad to see a safety expert evoking the laws of physics as a guide for our public byways." Karen speaks of "specialized and technical ways of understanding" that lead her to believe the curriculum for traffic engineers should change.

This exchange reinforces the maverick group identity already established and adds to the distinctiveness of the group. And the process of reacting to a traffic engineer shows the group constituting itself in the speaking; the negative comments discourage support for traditional traffic engineer views. This exchange, however, is also an illustration of the first criterion of speech communities: it illustrates the group reacting to the violation of an unspoken rule. The rule is difficult to state simply, but it has to do with always highlighting the non-traditional aspects of identity and not speaking favorably about the traditional ways of doing things. The traffic engineer has violated this rule, and the group reacts strongly. His opinion shows that the group is diverse, but the underlying unity does not allow him to belong if he espouses these views.

#### The Best Professional People are Mavericks in their Fields

A third pattern in the Pednet discourse is the tendency to highlight non-traditional aspects of a professional identity. Participants who hold professional positions in related fields either identify themselves as working in non-traditional areas of these fields or, if they work in traditional areas, find a way to justify this by saying they themselves are non-traditional. Non-traditional areas of the fields involve pedestrian programs--new programs mandated by national legislation and opposed by many in traditional transportation professions. Three members of Pednet lucky enough to be working in these fields chose to tell the list about their professional roles:

**Elaine:** One thing I'm working on for the Pedestrian Master Plan is a walkers' hotline, so you would just have one number in the City of Portland to call for any sidewalk or crosswalk complaint, whether it was delivery vehicles, snow not shoveled, repairs needed, signal too short, etc.

**Karen:** I am Karen S, a recent graduate of UT-Austin's Community and Regional Planning graduate program. I specialized in alternative transportation and my thesis is a study of pedestrian travel characteristics (frequency, distance and duration, etc.), attitude and behavior, and lifestyle characteristics in four Austin

Texas neighborhoods--two are post-war subdivisions, two are traditional pre-auto neighborhoods....I am working with Walk Austin, and will probably become an executive director or co-executive director in the next several months.

**Theresa:** I am also relatively new to the list. . . Now in Champaign-Urbana, IL -- moving to greater Chicagoland next week. Work as a planning consultant who focuses on bicycling and walking needs in Midwest communities. Formerly did similar work in North Carolina.

There are, however, at least 28 people in professional roles in related fields on the list (see Chapter II). The others, operating in more traditional settings, often described themselves as the exception to the rule in their professions. Here are two examples:

**Charles:** I work as a community relations specialist in regional planning. My exposure to the literature of planning and to people's concerns that relate to planning really caused me to rebel in a way by stressing the small scale aspects of city life, whereas regional planners tend to look at things on a regional scale. Coupled with this was a personal lifestyle decision to spend less time and hassle getting places: primarily work and evening meeting, both of which tended to be downtown. In 1981, I convinced my wife to move to an older neighbourhood downtown, with the intention of cycling most of the year and using transit in the winter. For evening meetings, I would still drive, but the time involved would be greatly reduced.

According to Charles, most planners see things one way (the regional way) while he sees things another way (the local way). He goes on to connect his professional "rebellion" (as he calls it) with his interest in alternative transportation, which he says was a personal lifestyle decision made at the same time. Though he does not state this, it is evident he believes the "personal lifestyle decision" would not have been a decision recommended by a professional person.

Jack, another participant holding a professional role in the field, also presents himself as one swimming against the tide in his profession:

**Jack:** Here in LA we have had a TDM (traffic demand management) program of around \$15 million annually, and the lion's share has gone to provide still more motorized mobility to those who already have the lion's share.

With an eye toward the growing inequity of the current practice, in which people in the most transit/pedestrian oriented parts of the urbanized areas suffer from provisions for the "mobility needs" of the people from auto-oriented suburbs, I wrote a paper called "Democratizing Transportation with a VMT Market". . . .

When I presented the paper in 1993 -- in Holland, one of the most progressive countries on earth in terms of transportation policy -- one of the local participants said the resistance to such a scheme would take 25 years to overcome.

Here, Jack portrays himself meeting with resistance that shows him to be perhaps 25 years ahead of his time in his field. Although he never mentions exactly what his profession is, the fact that he has written a paper about transportation planning and presented it in Holland points to a role in transportation engineering or urban planning. He must either be an academic or a practitioner in the field, one who is working for a change in the status quo.

Personal introductions or explanations of one's position were not a requirement on Pednet; people could and did participate in the discussion without giving much self-description. But those working in related fields who introduced themselves did highlight the non-traditional work they did, or state that they were non-traditionals in a traditional field. The only exception to this was when the traffic engineer Ron stated his traditional views, as quoted above, and received an immediate and universal negative response. In this pattern the speech community was constituted in the speaking because the statements people made about being non-traditional encouraged others to emphasize their non-traditional work or attitudes and the criticism of the traditional engineer discouraged them from expressing traditional views. In the process, the group's identity as mavericks was reinforced.

### **Professional and Non-Professional People are Equal**

A fourth pattern on Pednet is the tendency for those in professional roles to treat those who are not as equal in the discourse. This pattern is evident first in a conspicuous absence. A close look at every post included in the six-month study period did not produce a single instance of one person challenging another on his or her background, as in "How do you know that? What are your qualifications?" Nor were there any posts in which the writer justified his or her argument by citing professional qualifications. No one ever said, in other words, "I have been a planner for 20 years and I know what I am talking about." This non-flaunting of one's knowledge or position (and non-challenging of those without the knowledge or position) appears to have been a rule that Pednetters oriented themselves to, although it was never challenged and so was not made salient in reactions to a violation.

However, it did become salient when one non-professional person directly stated her concern about being qualified to speak:

**Paula:** Hey! That was just me being defensive about being uneducated about architecture and some of the other stuff we've been discussing lately. I'm the one feeling a need for courage as I tax the patience of those folks out there. (What I'm saying is, I'm not a "professional"... so I get nervous when I talk about these things; so, bear with me.)

Paula was responded to by Betsy, who is in a professional role:

**Betsy:** . . . As for Paula's concern about not being a professional in the field, as a sensitive pedestrian you are automatically qualified for any critique or discussion - so don't worry about it!

Wes, another non-professional person, clipped this statement of Betsy's for his own message, to which he added, "Amen! Hear hear!" indicating he agreed with Betsy's attitude.

The exchange above is another example of the group constituting itself in the speaking. Up to the point of Paula's message, no one had flaunted professional knowledge or challenged another on his or her lack of knowledge, but Paula still felt insecure about her lack of qualifications. When she expressed this, she was reassured she had the right to speak, which would presumably encourage others not in professional roles to speak. This would add to the collective identity as a group of mavericks, not impressed by official qualifications, and one in which the contributions of all are valued equally.

#### Summary

Here, in summary, are the four patterns I have identified:

- Pednet participants identify themselves in their messages as being different from most people.
- Pednet participants speak critically of professional people in related fields, particularly traffic engineers.
- Pednet participants highlight the non-traditional aspects of their professional identities.
- Pednet participants treat professional and non-professional contributors equally.

These patterns, taken together, add up to a broader pattern which produces a group identity for Pednet. I call this pattern the anti-traditional bias because it places group members in opposition to, first, the mainstream of society and, second, professional people in related fields, particularly traffic engineers (who in some ways represent society). If they are in professional roles themselves, Pednet participants must justify this by either working in a non-traditional area or by being a non-traditional in a traditional area. And they must not look down on non-professional people in their discourse. The

overall impression, or group identity, is of a bunch of mavericks ready to fight against traditional ideas.

With the group identity achieved, Pednet has met one of the criteria for a speech community. Clearly, members consider themselves distinct from the world in general and particularly from misguided people in traditional professional roles. I have shown in the argument and examples above that it also meets the other two criteria. The group identity is achieved in the discourse; that is, the group is constituted in the speaking. Mavericks respond to other mavericks and criticize the more traditional. And the group shares knowledge of at least two rules for the use and interpretation of speech: (1) Highlight those aspects of identity that are non-traditional and (2) Treat professional and non-professional people equally.

### The Use of We

#### Ideas about We and Pednet

The second pattern I noted on Pednet involved the use of the pronoun "we" to help constitute the group. The pattern manifested itself in conversations or exchanges rather than in single posts. One person would use the word "we" to refer to members of Pednet, making an assumption about who those people were. Others would respond to the poster by either using "we" in the same way or using it in a different way. One usage would ultimately prevail over the other as the group defined itself as including one group but not another. This usage is parallel to what other researchers have found. Varenne (1984), for example, says that pronominal use is "constitutive even when it appears normal" (p. 236). In other words, using a particular pronoun invites the interlocutor to interpret a situation in a particular way. This has long been studied in the case of the so-called T/V pronouns in languages that have them. Whether one addresses another with the T or V form helps to constitute the relationship between interlocutors. The "we"

pronoun, on the other hand, helps to constitute a group. In other words, who is included in the "we" and who is not helps define who the group is.

Linguists have long recognized two usages of the word "we":

... a distinction is made between 'inclusive we,' where we includes the hearer (= 'you and I'), and 'exclusive we,' where it excludes the hearer:

Let's go to the dance tonight, shall we? (inclusive)

We've enjoyed meeting you. (exclusive) (Muhlhausler and Harre, 1990, p. 169)

However, in practice, the use of we is more complex. As Pennycook (1994) says:

'We' is always simultaneously inclusive and exclusive, a pronoun of solidarity and of rejection, of inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand it defines a 'we,' and on the other it defines a 'you' or a 'they' : we Americans, we British, we Republicans, we academics, we who care about the planet, we humans, we men, and so on.

Although this may often be an explicit naming of the 'we,' it is also frequently a covert assumption about shared communality. (p. 175-176).

Thus, when Pednetters use an inclusive "we," they are defining who belongs, but also--sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly--who does not. The pattern I noticed was that participants used "we" to define who counts in their world--who is one of them.

Being a walker, did not, by itself, confer membership in this in group, nor--it turns out--did not being a walker necessarily exclude a person from membership. Significantly, when pronoun use conflicted with the content of the message, pronoun use seemed to be more powerful in constituting the group.

### Recreational Walkers are Out

Here are three posts that are illustrative of the pattern I have just described on Pednet (underlinings throughout are mine):

**Barney:** Perhaps I am wrong, but these last several postings from (the representative of a walking organization) have just about convinced me that Pednet is not for me. My major interest is in walking for exercise, fun, and weight control. It appears that while there are occasional postings related to those issues, the majority of the postings, certainly the last several postings, show a much

stronger interest of the group towards more activist political issues involving urban development, traffic management, etc. . .

**Elaine:** . . . As PedNet continues to evolve, my hope is for the continuum. I think there is room for PedNet to be multi-dimensional. Barney asks other recreational walkers to speak up, and I hope you will. For me, steeped in pedestrian advocacy as I have been, it is good to hear from people who walk just because it is good for bodies to walk. And, Barney, I do think it's good for you and others who walk for fun to reflect a little on the politics of walking. We are all constantly shifting on the continuum, and the day may come when the sidewalk ends, when you encounter that one rude driver too many, when you experience that "click!" in your brain that puts you over the edge. You, too, may become a RADICAL PEDESTRIAN.

**Paula:** You wouldn't know this, but approximately half this list is made up of people who expressed an interest in health walking when they first signed up. Most of these people responded to the article about PedNet published in Walking Magazine. PedNet is now about 75 strong. So half of that is quite a sizeable number, about 35 or so. (I went through my files this morning.)

Although we've had some interesting contributions from several of these folks, for the most part, they aren't talking yet. And that may be the style they continue to choose while they're here. But I wanted you to know that the audience (when you do send something out) is quite diverse.

A note to those not wanting to talk about the political aspects of walking, I'm glad you're being vocal. Now, instead of confining yourself to a report on why you're unsubscribing, go ahead and fill the screen with what it is you'd like us to talk about. Just start talking.

There are so many health walkers in the audience, you'd have a receptive group (in part). And you will undoubtedly turn some of the other folks onto your interests too. And when people complain, hey! that's what happens when the conversation is truly interesting. (not that i'm this brave, myself, but i think it gets easier.) . . .

In the first post, Barney brings a concern to the list. He is a recreational walker, and he sees that the list does not seem to be talking about topics he is interested in. He asks others if the list means to exclude recreational topics, and concludes by saying that he will remain subscribed for a while, but if things do not change, he will leave. Elaine begins her post (this part is not included in the quote above) by explaining to Barney that she sees a continuum of walking, with recreational at one end and political at the other. She says

that any one person may be at any place on the continuum at any given time, and that the list might represent one end of the continuum or the other, or both. She then suggests that he speak up about his interests and stay tuned in. Paula, the list administrator, then reinforces Elaine's message by saying that there are many recreational walkers like Barney on the list, and she hopes they will speak up.

This is what is going on in these posts when they are read for content. However, when the usage of pronouns is considered, a different picture emerges. Barney refers to the list in the third person--first as Pednet and then as the group, as if he had already disowned it. Elaine then tells Barney he and other recreational walkers are welcome, but she consistently refers to both him and recreational walkers in general as "you" and contrasts their position with her own (represented by first person pronouns). Paula goes further, referring to recreational walkers as "they," "these people," and "these folks," and contrasts them with "we" and "us."

What has happened here is one step in the production of a speech community through the speech. With the content of their messages, Paula and Elaine were inviting the recreational walkers to be part of the list, but with their usage of pronouns they were excluding them, setting up an opposition. Eight other messages followed in which "we" excluded recreational walkers. The recreational walkers got the message. By the end of the second month of the list's existence, recreational walking had disappeared as a topic. The "we" messages had created a group identity that excluded recreational walkers, that made political/transportational walkers distinct from recreational walkers. The messages also created a rule that recreational walking was not a suitable topic of conversation on this list.

Sometime after the conversation quoted above, a recreational walker posted his views to the list, and was answered by another member:

**Jordan:** I've been reading the various messages concerning the interaction of walkers and cars. As background, I'm the leader of a walking club whose walk area covers over 500 square miles in Los Angeles. We have about 300 different routes and therefore are very familiar with every conceivable (almost) type of terrain. I submit the following: 1) It is better to approach walking as a pleasure rather than to start with an antagonistic attitude towards drivers. We need to share the available space with everyone. . .

**Jay:** Jordan, you posted some good insites re: walking. Thanks

But the following (a quote from Jordan's post) leads me to believe that you and your group are primarily walking for recreation and fitness - great. Some of us are walking for purposeful transportation. Why must walking take the \*back routes\*?

Jordan says "we" need to share the space with everyone, meaning walkers should share the space. However, Jay replies by saying "you" and "your" group are walking for recreation and fitness . . . Some of "us" are walking for purposeful transportation. Here, Jay reminds Jordan that recreational walkers are members of an out group. This exchange is an example of someone violating the rule that was set up earlier--that recreational walking is not a suitable topic of conversation on the list. When Jordan does this, Jay immediately lets him know that some of "us" are walking for transportation, so what Jordan has to say is irrelevant to the topic at hand. He has reinforced the split that took place earlier in response to Barney.

### Bicyclists are In

The posts above are examples of "we" being successfully used to define an in group that does not include recreational walkers. However, a member's idea of "we" is not always accepted by the group. In the following series of messages, one participant uses "we" to define an in group and an out group, but his definition is disputed by others:

**Mark:** That's what car drivers want, not what I want. I want to be SAFE, which is why I ride so as to attract attention, and use the sidewalk anytime it is safer or I want to avoid a delay. Why shouldn't bicyclists take advantage of the benefits of a bike???

**Kirk:** As for riding on sidewalks---shame on you, Mark, for endangering pedestrians needlessly. If you'd learn how to ride your bike like an adult, you wouldn't have to endanger us pedestrians by riding on our sidewalks.

**Don:** I would argue that sidewalks are pedestrian speed zones, and should not be banned to bicycles. The conflict with bicycles on sidewalks is about speed. Laws should be simple, so we can remember them. Sidewalks are walking speed zones period. If we try to ban bikes from sidewalks, then we exclude a perfectly functional facility, which are fairly universal, certainly more than bike lanes, wide curb lanes and separated paths. Banning bikes from sidewalks only leads to more driving. Kids count on sidewalks to get to schools, parks and everywhere else, many adult riders use sidewalks out of fear of busy streets.

**Elaine:** The notion Charles put forward of "the more you yield the more you yield" of course applies to bikes as well as drivers. Riders who use the sidewalk should do so sparingly and with respect for walkers. However, I believe it is a mistake to let the rudeness of a few bad riders drive a wedge between the "soft traffic" factions of pedestrians and bicyclists; we have more in common than we have differences.

**Jay:** Then, finally, we should all work to get adequate space/facilities for non-motorized transportation use! Motoring is squeezing us off the planet!

**Grant:** Motoring is and always will be in conflict with all 3 other modes of transport. This is because cars cause traffic jams, cause delays at give way lines and generally delay buses and bikes. They also make crossing roads difficult, ie. conflict with pedestrians. There is no way around these issues without reducing car use.

**Roger:** don't fall prey to the machinations of the road engineers. They love it when we fight!

**Paula:** I do agree with both Randall and Charles in some ways, that we're making a mistake to argue with each other, when we should be working together to confront a bigger problem. . . .

The split that Kirk is trying to create is between bicyclists and pedestrians. Notice how he tells Mark, "you" are endangering "us" pedestrians. However, other members are unwilling to go along with this split, persistently including both pedestrians and bicyclists under the same umbrella "we." Elaine says "we have more in common than we have

differences." Roger says "they" (meaning the proponents of driving) love it when "we" (meaning pedestrians and bicyclists) fight. In all these messages, the "they," either stated or implied, is cars, drivers and those who look out for their best interests. Although bicycling is not walking, walkers on Pednet are inclined to include bicyclists as part of their "we," if only because they are a lesser evil than cars.

The exchange above is another example of the speech community being constituted in the speaking. One participant proposes through his usage of "we" that bicyclists are enemies to pedestrians, just as cars are. But other members do not go along with this. By their own usage of "we," they include bicyclists with pedestrians in the fight against cars. The diversity of the list is brought into unity in its opposition to cars, and in the process the group sees itself as distinct. The rule that seems to be formulated with this exchange is to treat bicyclists as fellow soldiers in the struggle against the forces of the automobile.

### Summary

The pronoun "we" is used on Pednet as a tool for defining who is a member of the in group, or the group who counts. It is typically deployed by one person as a kind of proposal. That is, the person uses "we" with the implicit assumption that he or she knows who is included in the in group. Other participants then react, either by using "we" in the same way, or by using it in a different way. The usage that prevails ultimately determines the members of the in group, thus constituting the speech community in the speaking. The two examples cited led to two rules for the use and interpretation of speech: (1) recreational walking is not a suitable topic of conversation, and (2) treat bicyclists as members of the in group, even though, strictly speaking, they are not walkers. They also helped to create a group identity that included bicyclists but did not include recreational walkers. Members of the group saw themselves as distinct, in other words, from recreational walkers but not from bicyclists.

## RQ 1B and 1C: Metacommunication and Rhetorical Invocation of Metacommunication

### Introduction

I define metacommunication as "talk about talk." In other words, when the participants on Pednet stop talking about walking and talk instead about what others have said and how they have said it, that is metacommunication. Metacommunication is often evaluative—complaining about another's tone or choice of language, for example. As a result, metacommunication very often implies a rule or attitude assumed in the group. Apologies are a key form of metacommunication, because they show members of the group orienting to a rule or norm. If a person feels compelled to apologize for a message, chances are he or she thinks that the norm exists and is legitimate. Rhetorical invocation of metacommunication occurs when someone refers specifically to a metacommunicative rule, thus showing he or she believes it exists.

### The Length Rule

The metacommunication on Pednet points to several rules or norms in the group. The first has to do with length. Messages are supposed to be short, and if they are not, recipients may complain about them. The rule on length was established early in the group's history when the leader of a pedestrian action group posted to the list several "position papers" his group had produced. Each position paper was between one and two pages when printed out, and there were 21 of them, plus an introductory post. There were immediate complaints about sending out such a volume of messages, and suggestions for how to handle them. This one was typical:

**Craig:** I'd suggest for the future that large documents not be sent over the list, but announcements be made as to where they can be picked up if desired.

After nine such complaints, the pedestrian group leader, Charles, apologized for posting the papers:

**Charles:** I appreciate the feedback, positive and negative, on my 22 postings re:position papers. I was not aware of the costs computserve users experience, and I apologize I did suggest the PPs go onto a gopher location. If the subject of the listserv were more general, I would not have done it, but I thought that pedestrians would find our thinking quite relevant, even if you might store the PPs away for later reference.

This episode is an illustration of the group constituting itself in the speaking. The posting of the position papers was done in the first month of the list's existence. It was done without first consulting anyone; they simply appeared as postings on the list (Charles' statement that he asked about a gopher location must have referred to private e-mail with the list administrator). There was an immediate negative response followed by the apology. The negative response could be considered the first statement of the length rule; the fact that the perpetrator apologized indicates he accepted the rule.

Part of the concern being expressed here was economic. For those signed up with private e-mail providers, long messages are more expensive because they take more time to read or download. Therefore, out of concern for subscribers with such services, shorter messages make sense. Beyond the economic issue, however, I believe the length rule illustrates that norms of negative politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987) are strong among Pednetters. By keeping their postings short, members seem to be saying "I know you are busy, so I will not impose on you by writing a lot." This attitude is seen in the frequent apologies for length of messages:

**Paula:** As you may have noticed, nothing I write is very short, but I'll really try! . . . So, uh, my not so short shoe story. (actually, I cut it down quite a bit)

**Arlene:** I'll stop before I offend for being too wordy

**Elaine:** (I'm going to go into more detail below but give you "one-screener" the option to buzz off at this point if you're not glued to your tube in anticipation.) . . . This may be more than anyone ever wanted to know about pedestrian visibility at night. Hope not

**Wes:** Paula suggested that I might post something about the CityWalk development in Hollywood. I admit the following is probably too long, please forgive me if it is, but I really think it's on-topic for this listserv.

It is also seen in periodic suggestions by participants regarding length:

**Jared:** May I suggest that we begin by limiting the size of our messages to, say, one screen at a time, in order to avoid boring each other? The submissions of the (group name) position papers would violate this rule, along with a number of recent travelogs.

**Marty:** This appears to be one of the more vexing questions--how much of what do people want to read? It seems to me that if people subscribe to a walking listserv, they want to read about walking ... but not every thought that any member ever had on the subject.

My suggestion: Post globally but selectively. If your message is long, edit it until it's short, or prepare a synopsis version for general distribution. If it's tantalizing enough, we'll all beg for the longer version :-> If it tantalizes only a few--well, at least we all had our chance.

As might be expected, direct suggestions on length, such as those posted above, were mainly seen during the early days of the list. But the apologies continued throughout the study period, indicating that members oriented to the rule and felt it necessary to apologize when they broke it.

The length rule is a clear example of a group having shared knowledge of the rules for the use and interpretation of speech and attitudes toward it. In this case, the rule is spelled out quite clearly and members react to all violations, including their own. As noted above, the rule points to an attitude of respect for others' time, a desire not to waste anyone's time with overlong messages.

The question of distinctiveness and the length rule is an interesting one. I do not think the rule contributes a great deal to Pednet's group identity, partly because brevity is supposed to be the norm on the Internet. If one looks at statements of netiquette, (e.g. Derr, 1994; Rinaldi, 1996; Krol, 1992) they usually talk about keeping messages brief, so

Pednetters may well think they are following a rule already set down for them. Yet, listservs are different from each other on this and other dimensions. I personally belong to another listserv in which posts are commonly quite long. Thus, although Pednet's length rule may not be distinctive in netiquette terms, it is a rule that is strongly oriented to and claimed by this group as it is not similarly adopted by other groups.

#### The Politeness Rule

If the length rule indicates an orientation to negative politeness, the rule about tone shows an equal orientation to positive politeness. Despite suggestions that mailing list participants are less polite to each other than those in face-to-face situations (e.g. Thompsen and Ahn, 1992; Kiesler, Zubrow, Moses and Geller, 1985), that does not seem to be the case on Pednet. The rule on Pednet is that participants should be polite to each other, even when they disagree. When they veer over the line into less polite ways of speaking, they are called on it and they apologize. Here is an example of how it worked. In this case, one participant said she would like to find a way to get motorists to stop for her at crosswalks. She was answered by this post:

**Mark:** I find that the best tool is scaring them, by acting as if I am not going to stop. Most drivers will stop. A few will try to go around you. Of course, you don't continue, if they don't stop. On my bike, I "wobble" a bit like I am out of control, then pull to the right when the car gets close. This scares them, and makes them slow down nicely, and also has the advantage of making them more AWARE of bikes.

This seemingly innocent post drew howls of protest from other bicyclists on the list, and led, over time, to increasingly nasty replies. Here is a sampling of how it evolved (the > symbol indicates someone quoting another's post):

**Ken:** Please don't [wobble]. You're giving a bad image to all cyclists. You're promoting the motorists' image of cyclists as clumsy wheeled pedestrians.  
Bikes are vehicles, and should follow the same traffic patterns as all the other vehicles on the road. They should never be on sidewalks or crosswalks,

except when crossing them in the same way as any other vehicle crosses them, after yielding to pedestrians.

> ... and also has the advantage of making them more AWARE of bikes.

It does not. They only react to you if they're already aware of you. A major problem with motorists is autophotia -- the inability to see anything that isn't a car. "Wobbling" won't help. Bright lights, bright colors, and loud noises might.

**Mark:** I said "acting", not actually stepping in their path. That's all it takes to scare them, and most of them stop. For the others, I wait.

>Please don't. You're giving a bad image to all cyclists. You're -  
>promoting the motorists' image of cyclists as clumsy wheeled-pedestrians.

I'm giving a REALISTIC image. Nobody but a robot can ride in a perfectly straight line, and if you did, you would be less noticeable from a car. The eye responds to sideways motion, more than motion away from it.

>Bikes are vehicles, and should follow the same traffic patterns as all -the  
>other vehicles on the road. They should never be on sidewalks or -crosswalks,  
>except when crossing them in the same way as any other -vehicle crosses them,  
>after yielding to pedestrians.

That's what car drivers want, not what I want. I want to be SAFE, which is why I ride so as to attract attention, and use the sidewalk anytime it is safer or I want to avoid a delay. Why shouldn't bicyclists take advantage of the benefits of a bike???

>It does not. They only react to you if they're already aware of you. -A  
>major problem with motorists is autophotia -- the inability to see -anything that  
>isn't a car. "Wobbling" won't help. Bright lights, -bright colors, and loud noises  
>might.

Bone up on your Psychology 1A. The eye (brain) can see an object moving across its field of vision easier than one moving away or toward it. Besides, I KNOW it works, because I do it and I see the cars slow way down!

**Kirk:** I'm sure drivers slow down when they see V (last name), so do cyclists pedestrians and anyone else who is afraid of someone who looks drunk (why else would he be wobbling all over the road "like I am out of control"?).

As for riding on sidewalks---shame on you, Mark, for endangering pedestrians needlessly. If you'd learn how to ride your bike like an adult, you wouldn't have to endanger us pedestrians by riding on our sidewalks.

**Derek:** Someone, please take V's (last name) bicycle away from him. With his irresponsible behavior he is a menace to pedestrians and bicyclists.

**Mark:** This kind of bullying and snobbery is why a lot of people prefer not to ride, rather than subject themselves to such abuse. But people like me, who think for themselves, just laugh at you.

**OF COURSE** I don't endanger pedestrians when I ride on the sidewalk. I ride slowly and give them the right of way. That's just simple manners (but seems beyond a lot of "macho" bicyclists).

At this point in the dialogue, someone became upset and intervened:

**Elaine:** I'd like to make a couple of comments about the recent exchanges. . . . perhaps it was bound to happen that some tempers would be raised when so many of us are so passionate about issues. Just remember the old English proverb, "A fool's bolt is soon shot." Maybe we can elevate the level of civility a pinch?

This post brought an apology from one of the participants in the argument, and the argument itself ceased:

**Kirk:** Mark,

I apologize---I've not seen you riding on the sidewalk, so I can't say whether you really endanger pedestrians or not. I have seen a lot of bicyclists riding on sidewalks, and almost all of them were endangering both themselves and the pedestrians--I applied that experience to you.

This exchange, like the one on brevity, meets two of the criteria for a speech community in action. Someone was impolite, causing someone to complain, and the guilty party apologized. Thus the group constituted itself in the speaking as a group that applauds politeness and oriented itself to a rule for the use and interpretation of speech--a rule that one should be polite. Violations to that rule were subsequently reacted to. It was several months before a similar problem erupted, which brought this reaction:

**Brian:** I was really enjoying Pednet until Marty and Ted started getting testy with each other. Too bad since they both have had some points worth discussing and elaborating.

This was followed by a message from one of the list administrators, invoking the earlier metacommunication that civility should be the norm on Pednet:

**Paula:** Can we up the level of civility just a notch? . . . We've often been told that PedNet's usual level of civility is unique as far as mailing lists go. We've had a few flare-ups (I've indulged myself), but never managed to break into outright flame wars. We've had the distinction of remaining pretty polite to each other. . . . As

one of the stewards of this list, I'd like to suggest we keep it this way. It was a nice tradition that we were beginning to develop. (So, you guys, could you please cool it?!)

Her post again brought an apology from one of the guilty parties:

**Marty:** Paula's points are well taken, and I apologize for any contribution I've made to lowering the level of civility. In my defense I would just note that most people on PedNet seem to be capable of distinguishing between honest argumentation and name calling. I'll confess to using heavy doses of sarcasm in my messages. But I believe it's safe to say that I attack the argument--not the person. That's a distinction that some folks seem incapable of making. Now I'll just crawl back under my rock and drool for a while.

Paula's comments show that the politeness rule contributed somewhat to the distinctiveness of Pednet, in members' eyes. Paula says she has been told that Pednet's level of civility is "unique" among mailing lists. She wants to preserve that reputation. Online groups, as noted above, have a reputation for flaming, and other impolite behavior, but Pednet considers itself an exception to this rule. Its group identity includes an image of civility. The exchanges quoted above in which participants made what might be interpreted as rude comments to each other are the only such exchanges in the six months during which I monitored the list. That by itself speaks to the notion that a politeness rule was in place. Of course, the fact that people were occasionally rude speaks to the diversity of the list; it is in expressions of disagreement that this rule comes out. That there is underlying unity is shown by the fact that when someone raised an objection to these exchanges, the guilty parties immediately apologized and the unpleasant talk ended.

#### **RQ 1D: Culturally Distinctive Forms**

Culturally distinctive forms are communicative events in which one can recognize important themes among a particular group of people. I described in Chapter I three types of culturally distinctive forms articulated by Philipsen (1992): social dramas, cultural myths and totemizing rituals. I did not find any of those forms in the Pednet discourse.

However, I did find another culturally distinctive form, a fantasy theme (Bormann, 1975, 1978, 1985). Below I describe the fantasy theme and how it evolved on Pednet.

### The Pedestrian Revenge Fantasy

#### Genre, Thread and Speech Event

One of the ways in which Hymes (1972) suggests analyzing the talk of a supposed speech community is by taking some speech event and considering how it can be described using a framework he devised. The framework consists of seven elements, the first letters of each forming the word "speaking." I would like to focus on the seventh of these elements, the one Hymes calls "genre." A genre is a type of event recognized by the group by the way the talk is organized. Genres include things such as greetings, joke telling and rituals. Katriel and Philipsen (1981), for example, identified a genre they called the "communication ritual" in the speech of some middle class Americans. The use of genre classifies the speech event as being of a certain type. Further, if a group's speech contains a particular genre, performed in a particular way, that helps to identify the group as a speech community. In other words, to use an example, part of what identifies interlocutors as American is their performance of the communication ritual.

The most obvious candidate for a speech event on a listserv is something called a "thread." Thread is the term used by online conversants to designate a series of messages centered around a common theme--a conversation of sorts. A thread may or may not belong to a particular genre, and that genre may be a generic one or one that is particular to the group. Below I analyze a particular thread on Pednet, showing how it belongs to a broad genre with its own specific application, just as the communication ritual is a particular type of the broad genre, ritual.

#### The Fantasy Theme

The broad genre that I will contend this thread belongs to is "fantasy theme." The fantasy theme is a type of talk identified by Bormann (1975, 1978, 1985) while studying

zero-history groups formed in his classes at the University of Minnesota. Bormann was studying group process using a coding scheme developed by Bales (1970). The coding scheme included a category called "dramatizing communication," that is, a message containing a pun or other wordplay, a double entendre, a figure of speech, an analogy, an anecdote, allegory, fable or narrative. When a member of a group uses a dramatizing message, Bormann says, he or she is introducing a fantasy theme. Bormann defines fantasy this way: "the creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfills a psychological or rhetorical need" (1985, p. 5). In one of his groups, for example, there was a male-female struggle over leadership, and two themes developed: the black widow and the mafia. The black widow theme allowed the women to triumph in fantasy, while the mafia theme did the same for the men. Eventually, the group moved on to a theme of ambivalent sexuality. Thus, they used the fantasy theme to resolve problems they were facing.

A fantasy theme, once introduced, may or may not be accepted by the group. If another member follows up, building on what the first member has said, Bormann calls this process "chaining." The theme then becomes a group theme that may come up again and again in the life of the group--an inside joke that may or may not be funny (like the themes about sexuality mentioned above). Bormann extends his theory from this small instance in a group to a much more pervasive thing. He says that fantasy themes can become, over time, fantasy types--a stock scenario so familiar that members need not tell the whole tale, but only mention the theme for others to understand. And, he goes on to say, "When people share fantasy types, they may integrate them into a coherent rhetorical vision of some aspect of their social reality. A rhetorical vision is a unified putting-together of the various scripts which gives the participants a broader view of things . . . When a rhetorical vision emerges, the participants in the vision (those who have shared the fantasies in an appropriate way) come to form a rhetorical community" (1985, p. 7-8).

### Rhetorical Communities and Speech Communities

Bormann's idea of rhetorical community may or may not be the same as what Hymes had in mind when he talked about speech community. In his 1983 work, he said: "Members of a rhetorical community share a common consciousness and can appreciate inside jokes. They share a common symbolic ground and can be counted on to respond to messages in ways that are in tune with their rhetorical vision" (p. 115). But later (1985), he applied the term to groups that not only have a vision, but also want to convince others that their vision is right. Here, the fantasies serve as a "new story" to be accepted by the potential convert. Bormann calls this process "pouring the truth in." Nonetheless, his idea that fantasy themes are key to the formation of group identity seems congruous with the idea of a group becoming a speech community with its own "rules for the use and interpretation of speech" (Hymes, 1968). A group that "chains out" fantasies may or may not be a speech community, but a group that consistently chains out the same type of fantasy probably is.

### Pednet and Fantasy Themes

Pednet members did weave group fantasies, beginning early in the group's life. The thread I would like to analyze is one in which the messages built on one another and out of which developed a fantasy theme. The entry that started it all asked participants' advice on nighttime walking:

**Brandon:** All (but mostly you urbanites),

After almost being run over twice last night on my short (twenty block) walk home, I feel like I have to take a bit of action. So, I'm asking your advice: What do you do to keep yourself visible to passing, stopping, turning, etc. motorists so they don't make you pavement pancakes? This problem is especially acute at night (at least for me, since my jacket is brown - hardly high visibility).

I have a flashlight, but rarely think of using it, at least not until I almost get squashed. So, what works for you? Reflective vests? Neon signs? Flashing LEDs? Rocket packs (not really a visibility help, but adds a whole new dimension to your escape route)?

Notice that although this is a realistic request, Brandon adds some fantastic elements, like the idea that the walker should carry a neon sign or a rocket pack. No doubt these are thrown in for a little comic relief, I shall come back to the humor element shortly.

Brandon received a few responses to his request, one mildly critical:

**Kirk:** My wife and I frequently walk at night, and have not found a need for special clothing. We generally walk on the sidewalk, where few cars are. When crossing busy streets, we wait for the light to turn, or wait for a sufficient gap in traffic before crossing. The few streets we walk on that don't have sidewalks are generally not busy at night . . .

Significant fact: we live in California, where pedestrians have the right-of-way in any marked or unmarked crosswalk. Further significant fact: we live in Santa Cruz, where a lot of people walk and bicycle, and drivers are used to yielding to pedestrians.

Kirk implies that perhaps Brandon's problem is that he is not walking on the sidewalk or not waiting for the light to cross the street. However, he also suggests that perhaps Brandon's area of the country is not as pedestrian-friendly as his own. Another reply to Brandon gave him specific advice:

**Elaine:** There are some pedestrian advocates who think it's too bad if motorists can't see us at night, the burden should be on the motorist. I wish the burden were on the motorist, but don't trust my life to them. The statistics are you're about six times more likely to be hit in the dark than in the day.

A couple of years ago the WPC [a walking group] had a presentation from a woman . . . who has gone into the business of providing retro-reflective materials for pedestrians, mainly aimed at school kids. . .

Elaine then provided a description of the various goods available, but hinted that she was not particularly comfortable with them:

. . . I tested the dangle tags, which made me feel kinda silly. (On the other hand, I felt silly the first time I wore a bike helmet twenty years ago, too.) . . .

One of our WPC Board members is big on white umbrellas. She says there is nothing better for attracting the attention of a bus driver on a dark morning, and

that they also work well for brandishing at recalcitrant auto drivers. There is actually a possibility of getting some reasonably inexpensive white umbrellas with a logo on them (WPC, PedNet, "Think Globally, Walk Locally"?) if there were a demand for them. Also, there is an umbrella with a clear acrylic shaft that lights up, but it takes three C batteries and I think this would be kind of heavy. Also, what do you do when it isn't raining?

This prompted another participant to complain about how the pedestrian must take the brunt of the burden in the situation:

**Paula:** I'm one of those people Elaine mentioned in her response to Brandon's request ....I want to find a way to place the burden of street safety on the driver (and thus, not have to wear clothes that make me look and feel like I'm involved in some sort of obscure behavior.) However, my sense of indignation could be bad for my health. . .

But something I've always wanted to pursue was how to get cars to stop at crosswalks any time of the day. I have this great idea....A large, light-weight fan that you can fold up when not in use. And when crossing, just whip it out and unfold to expose large neon letters saying, "STOP." Such a simple message, so obvious, but such a surprise to some motorists. I think communication and education are the thing. Because people really don't seem to know they're supposed to stop. Or that pedestrians are more fragile than cars. And how could you miss a statement like that one....a neon fan? A consciousness raiser, as well as a safety device.

Here is the first hint of a fantasy. Paula sees herself unfolding a large fan and impressing drivers, who immediately stop to let her cross the street. She has opened a line of thinking that will become more fantastic as it goes along.

At this point the original poster looks at the responses to his message and decides he had better clarify his situation:

**Brandon:** Hmm, I guess I wasn't terribly clear on this. I normally walk along the business section of Portland's SE Woodstock Blvd (yeah, that probably doesn't help you, but it might clue in some out there). The street has ample sidewalks, so when does this occur? Well, when I'm crossing a non-busy cross street and a car does a turn off Woodstock (either right or left) into my path. Or, my personal favorite, when I'm once again crossing a cross street in front of a car that is waiting to turn onto Woodstock. When I am right in front of the car, the driver will start

to pull out and make his turn. This is often solved with a rap on the hood, but people can be awfully touchy about their precious steel cages.... So, that is why it seems that I need more visibility. . . .

A hint of contempt toward drivers is seen in Brandon's remark about "their precious steel cages." The next participant responds with a related, though slightly different situation of her own:

**Nancy:** I can really relate to what our friend Brandon is saying, and it happens in the daytime too. My pet peeve is the "right turn on red thing." Here's the driver in the intersection; I am on his right. He wants to turn right, so where is his head? It's turned left, of course, watching for a break in oncoming traffic. Well, what if I step off the curb at the same instant that break comes? I'm roadkill.

I've often thought that the answer may not be entirely in being visible (though I think we certainly should be visible at night) but in being audible. One could get a small horn of the type used on bicycles and toot it when one steps off the curb, just enough to let the driver know you're there. He'd turn his head reflexively when he heard the noise. Of course, as others point out with reflective gadgets, this is a conspicuous act and makes one feel conspicuous. But then, maybe it's better to be conspicuous than to get hit by a car. Just a thought.

Like Paula, Nancy has a fantasy of getting drivers to do what she wants. Rather than a fan, she conjures up a horn that will wake motorists up and get them to pay attention. The first reply to her post is a practical one:

**Derek:** As a bicyclist and pedestrian, I find the easiest \*horn\* to use is a sharp, loud yell from my lungs \*\*\*\*HEY\*\*\*\*. This will get the attention of motorists turning right against pedestrians crossing streets or motorists turning out of driveways against bicyclists.

The next begins with the practical, but then moves to the fantastic:

**Charles:** In that case, I watch the driver's eyes. If he/she is distracted, I get my hand ready to slap the hood. I've had to resort to the slap many times, always with the response of complete surprise-with-awe, and always a timely foot on the brake pedal (although I may once get a driver who, in a panic, confuses the pedals, so I am ready to jump on the hood; but after all, the driver is starting from a stop).

The overall problem is that drivers 1) forget that sidewalks are two-way and 2) that they have to look out for not just objects that can do them harm, but objects that they can do harm to. The latter problem can be attributed to what the Safety Establishment preach: defensive driving, in which the road user focuses all his/her attention to being defensive. A pedestrian simply is not a threat. We need to preach offensive as well as defensive safety.

In the last ON [a walking newsletter] I reported on a mythical pedestrian campaign called PR, or pedestrians with rocks. Try walking with a two-pounder in one hand. Whether or not it is visible to the motorists, it sure makes a difference to the your assertiveness.

Quickly, we have moved from fans to horns to rocks. The next poster is horrified by the idea of a rock, but proposes an alternative more in the realm of fantasy:

**Brett:** To the recent advice that "We need to preach offensive as well as defensive safety." and " Try walking with a two-pounder (i.e. stone) in one hand. Whether or not it is visible to the motorists, it sure makes a difference to the your assertiveness." I feel bound to reply.

The confusion here is a crossing of the line from assertion to aggression. Stepping into the path of a distracted motorist, even a well-meaning one, will eventually result in the walker "losing" the round. Statistics. But far, far worse is the fact that in too many places motorists may be possessed of hostilities that a confrontation like this will instantly evoke. And in some parts of the universe, unfortunately, people are armed, and not just with rocks.

I propose a modest alternative. Carry a suction-cup dart gun. Each dart carries a flag with a well-worded epithet or warning or educational slogan printed on it. On the occasion of a blindside move in well-meaning stupidity (yes, I share in the frustration and the fantasy revenge, too) by a motorist, a well-aimed shot plants one of these little jewels on the sheet metal, or better yet the windshield. For the very bold, a spot of epoxy on the suction cup might add just that touch of permanence. And who knows, maybe some authority could take on the task of notifying cars sporting a forest of such darts with some stronger persuasion...

Both the rock and the suction cup dart gun provoked a flurry of responses:

**Brandon:** > The confusion here is a crossing of the >line from assertion to aggression.

[snip]

I disagree. The advice of rock carrying was not (I believe) meant to say that we throw rocks at cars. (Although it is tempting at times...) Instead, wasn't it to make the pedestrian feel a bit more empowered? The car driver is wrapped up in

1.5 tons of Detroit Steel while the pedestrian has about 3 pounds of clothing. Adding the rock (which I've never tried) makes the pedestrian feel heavier and more protected. Thus the pedestrian is less apt to be passive and more inclined to defend her rights.

**Mark:** To the recent advice that "We need to preach offensive as well-as defensive safety." and " Try walking with a two-pounder (i.e. stone) in-one hand. Whether or not it is visible to the motorists, it sure makes a-difference to the your assertiveness." I feel bound to reply.

Too inconvenient. Why inconvenience the walker? We want to inconvenience the DRIVER.

>I propose a modest alternative. Carry a suction-cup dart gun.

Completely impractical. If you carry anything, maybe it should be a squirt gun, which leaves them wondering if it is a real gun, or whether it contains something besides water.

**Brian:** . . . By the way, I doubt the suction cup dart gun idea has been tried by it's proponent, or suction cups have been redesigned for oblique hits since I was a kid. Besides, I wouldn't suggest that anyone use anything that bore any resemblance to a "real" weapon, whether it shoots suction cups, water, paint thinner or whatever.

**Jerry:** >I propose a modest alternative. Carry a suction-cup dart gun.

Where can I get one? I would use it immediately, because I face the left-looking, right-turning, on-the-brink-of-killing-me motorists every day.

**Paula:** I would imagine others are thinking this, but I'll go ahead and say it:

A rock? In the hands of a sometimes angry pedestrian?

A rock might improve the balance (in spirit) between the car and the pedestrian, giving the walker a personal sense of presence and strength, (reminding them they have a right to cross the street), but really, a rock? . . . .

Perhaps it's not such a good idea to give weapons to indignant peds, either (even if for reassurance and inspiration). The thing is, cars make us all crazy. We need to soften, not escalate, the damage they can do.

So, that takes me back to my fan idea! (So, what's wrong with my fan idea?) How empowering, to unfold a large, dramatic half-moon of a shape with the words "STOP" on it. You would definitely get the driver's attention and perhaps shame (or confuse) them into thinking about their responsibility to peds.

The responses show that some participants are reacting to the messages on a realistic level, some on the fantastic level, while some seem to be a combination. Those who respond on a realistic level worry about carrying weapons, even ones as harmless as squirt

guns, or point out practical difficulties, such as the fact that suction cup dart guns cannot score oblique hits. But those who respond in the spirit of fantasy enjoy the idea of triumphing over insensitive drivers. The next poster went back to Nancy's idea of making noise:

**Ken:** >Well, what if I step off the curb at the same instant that break comes?

A couple times that has happened to me, I've jumped up on their hood, and made as much noise as possible when doing so. It really puts a scare into them. Maybe they'll \*think\*, next time.

> I've often thought that the answer may not be entirely in being visible >(though I think we certainly should be visible at night) but in being audible.  
>One could get a small horn of the type used on bicycles ...

Few motorists would hear that, unless their sound system is off, and they're in a convertible with the top down. There is a reason why emergency vehicles make noises that can be heard from miles away. It's the only way to get the attention of motorists who are not watching for traffic from that direction.

You might try a really loud whistle. But I think anything loud enough to be sure to be noticed would be loud enough to damage your own hearing . . .

Then, a few posters went back to the idea of the "stop" fan and eye contact:

**Wilma:** I love the STOP fan idea. Lightweight. Transportable. Visible. Effective. Non-threatening.

Too many wackos out there who could count rocks and dart guns as reasons to use deadly force in retaliation.

I also find eye contact to be the best way to assert my pedestrian rights. I make sure to get eye contact with the guy who wants to do a right-turn-on-red, then he is unlikely to run me down.

**Paula:** Yes, eye contact, a must. It's strange how one can do so much with the eyes at such a distance. It's so powerful, makes me think there is hope for this species yet....if we acknowledge such a simple gesture as eye contact in spite of the machinery and commotion around us.

**Carl:** My solution for right turning motorists is eye contact. If they see me, and appear to be able to stop, I walk. If they don't see me, or can't stop, I wait. I had a friend from Chile who always said "its better to lose a minute in your life, than your life in a minute." Sure, insensitivity and stupidity on the part of motorists bugs me, but I'm used to dealing with it. At least I do most of my walking in Portland's CBD and older neighborhoods, where pedestrians are plentiful. I have

walked in the 1950s-1980s suburbs, and I empathize with you PedNetters who do so daily. . . .

Then the conversation went back to noise, opening the way for another fantasy suggestion:

**Mark:** Loudness isn't the only way to be noticed. An unusual sound that is loud can be just as effective. I find the a loud yell ("HEY!") will get their attention instantly, and doesn't require carrying any special equipment and can be deployed instantly, unlike a whistle.

**Derek:** I agree with Mark, a loud yell if very effective both as a pedestrian and as a bicyclist to get the attention of motorists.

**Elaine:** A loud yell (okay, a piercing scream) once saved my life as a bicyclist when a careless woman in a big van thought a bicycle couldn't possible have the right of way (she had a stop sign, I didn't). This was one instance where eye contact didn't do the job.

**Kyle:** While on the subject of loud yells, I once knew a bicyclist who carried a portable air horn used for a boat. He said the effect on motorists was "They knew they were about to be hit by a very large truck, and they had no idea where the truck was."

The final message in the series made one more fantasy suggestion:

**Jay:** The use of anything that appears to be a weapon by a ped attempting to \*remind\* a motorist to yield may be asking for trouble - true. But, what satisfaction there would be in being able to \*fight\* back.

How about carrying a cane, maybe like those used by the visually impaired. A peds' cane could extend ones reach for tapping the occasional car hood....Then if the cane had a hard metal (weighted) end with maybe a suitable slogan in raised lettering for \*printing\* onto the sheet metal.... well pretty soon the motorist who regularly endangers peds would be pretty easy to spot!

Just a peds fantasy.

There are 25 messages in this thread, authored by 17 different people. Seven different fantasy implements have been suggested to solve the problem of drivers who do not want to yield to pedestrians. The thread is an example of the speech community

constituting itself in the speaking, with each poster adding to an ongoing story that has clear heroes and villains. By the time the thread has come to a conclusion, a group identity has emerged--an identity that pits walkers against drivers in a world where the drivers will win in reality, but the walkers can win in fantasy. Clearly, the idea of having a way to even the playing field between automobiles and pedestrians is an appealing one for this group, one which helps them form a group identity. It is also a theme that stays with the group, even after this particular thread has ended. The following message appeared almost three weeks after the last message above, during a conversation about delivery trucks parked on the sidewalks of a downtown area:

**Derek:** There are three things that pedestrians can do:

1. Place a note under the wiper stating the inconvenience and danger to pedestrians caused by their action.
2. Get the license plate # and write/call the firm that owns the vehicle to complain.
3. If you feel aggressive carry some nails in your pocket and place them under the tire so when they back up/go forward they will get a flat.

Suggestion three is clearly a fantasy of what a pedestrian might like to do when this happens, but probably will not actually do. It falls clearly in the pedestrian revenge category of the messages in the earlier thread. That it is a theme with staying power is shown by the following message, posted three months after the final message of the thread:

**Jacob:** Ken argues against installing speed governors on motor vehicles because it will punish the innocent along with the guilty.

Humm... the only way we can punish the guilty is to install a device that will punish those who drive dangerously. To satisfy Ken, we need a device that will make motorists want to drive sanely.

Eureka!!

A 6-inch stainless steel spike in the middle of the steering wheel.

That would certainly end drunk driving, aggressive driving, and other anti-social behavior.

You know, the more I think about it, the more I like it.

This thread and its successors fall into the genre "pedestrian's revenge fantasy" that becomes an ongoing theme of the Pednet dialogue. The pedestrian's revenge fantasy proceeds like this: One person brings up a real situation in which a driver or drivers have behaved badly. Another person replies with a suggestion of some violent, or at least aggressive, response to the driver. Other people either embroider the first suggestion or create their own. These responses need not be practical or even possible, but they must result in the defeat of the driver and the triumph of the pedestrian.

Of course, being a diverse group, not all Pednetters agree wholeheartedly with the fantasy suggestions. Some criticize them for being impractical or dangerous, but significantly, they often do not disagree with their spirit. For example, in the message above in which the person responds to the rock throwing suggestion, he says he understands the rocks are not to be actually thrown, but adds in parentheses "although it is tempting at times." The poster who follows says the rock is impractical, but his reason is that it would inconvenience the walker. "We want to inconvenience the driver," he says. Thus, there is an underlying unity in the diversity.

The pedestrian revenge fantasy fits in with the anti-traditional ethos of Pednet that has already been discussed. If the participants are not professional people, or professional people swimming against the tide, that makes them people without a lot of power, fighting against a group that has power. They recognize that, as walkers, they are unlikely to win many battles against the powerful proponents of cars and driving, so they take the political battles of reality, convert them to the physical battles of fantasy and arrange to win there. Thus, the pedestrian revenge fantasy fits Bormann's definition in that it fulfills a psychological need for this group.

### The Fantasy Theme and Humor

The pedestrian revenge fantasy is also invariably funny in that it makes the opposing group look foolish. In other words, the admittedly malicious humor derives from picturing the car sporting a forest of darts on the hood, or watching the illegally parked truck driver having to repair a flat tire caused by the handful of nails the walker put on the ground. Sharing humor, as Baym (1994a) notes, is an important way to build solidarity in a group. Her group also is an online one, a group that discusses soap operas, and she says their humor "arises from the juxtaposition of close and distant readings of the soap opera, which place the participants in close relationships to one another, and distance them from the soap opera's writers and producers" (p. 1). On Pednet, the humor arises from telling about situations in which they usually are at the mercy of cars, but turning those situations around to make themselves the winners. In doing so, the Pednetters place themselves in close relationships to one another and distance themselves from drivers. As noted above, this contributes to their group identity. They treat themselves as a distinct group, fighting against overwhelming odds.

Baym goes on to say that "group solidarity is also created as participants draw extensively on previous messages to ground their own humor" (p. 1). The thread above shows how Pednetters do the same thing, in both specific and general ways. An example of a specific reference is the post by Elaine saying she felt "kinda funny" wearing a dangle tag, which Paula followed up by saying she did not want to have to "wear clothes that make me look and feel like I'm involved in some sort of obscure behavior." In a more general way, each post in the "weapons" thread builds on its predecessors. The fan or horn would make drivers more aware; the boat horn would really get their attention. The dart gun would plant messages on the car; the "branding cane" would do the same in a more permanent way. Again, this shows the group constituting itself in the speaking, building group identity in the process.

Although the pedestrian revenge fantasy clearly shows Pednet constituting itself in the speaking, creating a group identity that renders it distinct from other groups, the matter of rules for the use and interpretation of speech is less easily stated. What is the rule here? Perhaps it is only, "Treat cars and drivers as objects of fun," or "Create stories in which walkers can triumph over drivers," or more generally, "That which cannot be changed can be laughed about." Pednetters seem to be in accord that cars and drivers are their enemies, although they disagree in the level of aggression that is appropriate in facing these enemies. The rule cannot be illustrated through violations because there are none. However, the messages below do show Pednetters apologizing for seeming to approve of driving:

**Jacob:** I do remember driving (okay, okay, I sinned) through Portland and seeing a full size billboard read "For Kid's Sake, Slow Down." Wow, that's a pedestrian safety campaign we could all enjoy.

**Bonnie:** I will be driving (gasp) from San Francisco and will have approximately 1 week to reach Seattle, from where we'll be flying home to Boston . . .

### Summary

If Bormann is right and the appearance of fantasy themes signals the formation of group identity, then Pednetters succeeded in forming a group identity early in the life of the group. The thread identified above appeared within a month of the group's formation and lasted for several weeks. Similar pedestrian revenge fantasies continued to appear on the list throughout the six month study period. It is clear to me from this evidence that list members oriented to fantasizing as a general genre and to this particular fantasy as a group genre. That the genre was a humorous one added to the feeling of solidarity that the fantasizing created, especially since the humor was at the expense of another, off-list group. The fantasy theme meets all three criteria I set out

for speech communities, although the rule it invokes is a difficult one to state. As the theme builds, one can see the group constituting itself in the speaking, creating a group identity that renders it distinct from other groups.

#### RQ 1E: The Speech Code

In the sections just completed, I have argued that there are patterns in the discourse on Pednet, that in their metacommunication and invocation of same its participants orient to particular rules or norms of interaction and that the group shares at least one unique genre that appears repeatedly in the discourse. For each of these pieces of evidence, I have shown how it does or does not meet the criteria for a speech community. The next step in my investigation, then, is to ask if all these separate items add up to a common code for participants. In particular, do these items, taken together, provide answers to the questions, (1) What is a person? (2) What is society? and (3) How are persons linked to society through communication?

#### Lessons from the Discourse

In the earlier sections on patterns, metacommunication and culturally specific forms, I tried to spell out how these elements did or did not contribute to the idea of Pednet as a speech community. I will now return to these elements to show what they point to with regard to Pednetters' answer to the question, "What is a person?"

The first thing that Pednetters believe about persons is that each one is a unique individual with thoughts and opinions to share. There is evidence for this belief in several of the elements already discussed. First, in the anti-traditional bias, participants choose to highlight the portions of their identities that show them to be mavericks, different in some way from their fellow professional people or from society in general. Second, in the metacommunicative rule on politeness, people are assumed to have worthy things to say and are to be allowed to say them.

Another thing that Pednetters believe about persons is that they are worthy of respect. Again, there is evidence for this belief in the discourse. First, in the anti-traditional bias, participants assert that everyone should get respect, regardless of professional credentials. Those in professional roles are enjoined not to base arguments on their qualifications or to challenge others on theirs. Second, in the metacommunicative length rule, persons are to respect the time of others by not writing long, boring messages. Third, in the metacommunicative politeness rule, persons are to be treated politely--that is, with respect, even if one does not agree with their opinions. And fourth, the pedestrian revenge fantasy shows walkers as heroes who should be respected by drivers.

A third characteristic of persons according to Pednetters is that they have rights. This is seen in the discourse in several ways. First, in the use of "we," persons are enjoined to assert their rights against an oppressive society. Political walkers are favored over merely recreational ones; pedestrians and bicyclists should unite to fight automobile interests. Second, in the metacommunicative rule on length, persons are assumed to have a right to be left alone, not to be bothered by too many or too long messages. Third, in the metacommunicative politeness rule, persons have a right to be treated with respect. And fourth, in the pedestrian revenge fantasy, a pedestrian has a right to be treated fairly and has the right to retaliate if he is not.

#### Frequent Posters

Another way of addressing the question, "what is a person" on a listserv might be to consider its frequent posters and what they represent. Like most listservs, Pednet has a few people who speak more than others (see Ogan, 1993; Baym, 1995), and these people might logically be assumed to wield more influence than others (although without interviewing list members one cannot be sure of this). Given the fact that their words are seen more often than anyone else's, however, it seems worthwhile to consider them as possible role models for personhood on this list.

There are four Pednet participants who post more often than others. At the top of this list is--not surprisingly--Paula, the list administrator, who posted 130 times in the six-month study period. She was followed by three other posters, two of whom--Charles and Ken--posted 108 and 73 messages respectively. The fourth of the frequent posters, Wes, had only 40 posts, but he joined the list late and reached that number in only three months. Thus, these heavy posters averaged 21, 18, 12 and 13 messages per month, compared to only five per month for the next closest poster after the top group. Frequent posters, in other words, post three to five times weekly.

There are some interesting things to note about these heavy posters. First, three of them are male; the lone female is the list administrator. This is not surprising, considering that list participants as a whole are about 80-20 male to female. Second, although only one of the heavy posters has an official position with the list, two of the others came to serve in unofficial capacities. Each volunteered to compile information for the list's FTP site, and one was called upon to "look after" the list when the administrator went on vacation. The other became the list administrator when the first one retired--after the study period had ended. Third, Charles is the only one of the four who works in a related field and can thus be considered a professional person. The frequent posters, then, are males not in professional roles (or mavericks in professional roles) who are very involved with the list, which might imply that Pednet's idea of a person is a male maverick who speaks up for himself. However, the fact that the only female is the list administrator and wields considerable influence moderates this view, pointing to a more egalitarian view, at least as far as the genders are concerned. This view of a maverick who speaks up is very much in synch with the evidence garnered from the discourse cited above. These frequent posters are unique persons who assert their rights and respect other list members.

However, if the frequent posters are to be considered representatives of the list, then Ken must be seen as the exception to the rule. He does not volunteer for any duties,

official or unofficial. In addition, he expresses opinions that are frequently opposite to those of most list members. For example, he is opposed to zoning, thinks property owners should be able to do what they want with their property (regardless of how that affects pedestrians) and is opposed to separate bike paths. He seems to be tolerated as the ultimate maverick--a piece of evidence that list members are accepting of and respect unique individuals (who after all have rights), even when they do not agree with them.

### What is Society?

#### Lessons from the Discourse

Once again I will use the elements of the framework that I described to look for evidence of Pednetters' beliefs about what society is. The evidence here points to two different views of society--a view of what society is, and a view of what it should be.

Regarding what society should be, Pednetters seem to favor a society that is entered into voluntarily and left when one wants to. Evidence for this view is seen in several ways. First, in the anti-traditional bias, it is implied that one should not have to participate in society in the same way that others do. One can go one's own way and be accepted. Second, in the metacommunicative length rule, participants are enjoined not to bore others, not to talk too much or too long. People have the right not to be imposed upon.

A second characteristic of the ideal society is that it treats all people equally. Again, this view is evident in several ways. First, in the anti-traditional bias, the views of both professional and non-professional people are sought and are supposed to be considered equally. Second, in the use of we, as well as in the pedestrian revenge fantasy, bicyclists and pedestrians are supposed to be treated equally with cars. And third, in the metacommunicative politeness rule, all participants are to be treated politely, regardless of their opinion.

Pednetters also have distinct opinions about society as it is that are expressed in the discourse. One characteristic of society as they see it is that it is oppressive. This view is seen in a number of ways. First, in the anti-traditional bias, the traditional professional view about pedestrian issues has led to poor conditions for pedestrians, conditions they have little power to change. Second, in the use of we, society is seen as something that must be opposed militantly. And third, in the pedestrian revenge fantasy, society is again seen as a powerful force that is crushing pedestrians' rights.

Society is also seen as misguided, doing the wrong thing. Evidence for this is seen in several places in the discourse. First, in the anti-traditional bias, the mainstream professional leadership is making destructive mistakes. Second, in the use of we, pedestrians and bicycles are being squeezed out of their share of the roadway. And third, in the pedestrian revenge fantasy, society has created poor conditions that make it necessary for pedestrians to rebel.

Pednetters have other views about society, views that are tied up in their use of the word "society" itself, along with another word, "community." The use of these two words may tie in with the views expressed above regarding the ideal and the actual society. To introduce this idea, I must bring in some new evidence from the discourse not previously discussed, as well as some background research on the two words.

#### Origins of Community and Society

Raymond Williams includes both "community" and "society" among his "Keywords" (1983), and he traces their usage from when they entered the language in the 14th Century. Although society began as a word meaning companionship or fellowship, Williams notes, it became more abstract and generalized over the years to become "our most general term for the body of institutions and relationships within which a relatively large group of people live" (p. 291). Community originally had several meanings, including the common people, a state or organized society, the people of a district, the

quality of holding something in common and a sense of common identity and characteristics. All but the first of these meanings are still current, but Williams says that over time, community "was felt to be more immediate than society" (p. 75).

### Communitas and Societas

Community and society are the words Turner (1969, 1980) uses to describe two modes of social life. Using the Latin forms *societas* and *communitas*, Turner (1969) says that *societas* is a "structured, differentiated and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions . . . separating men in terms of 'more' or 'less.' " *Communitas*, on the other hand, is an "unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated group of equal individuals . . ." (p. 96). Although Turner does not argue that the actual words "society" and "community" are used by the groups organizing themselves in this way, he no doubt chose the words based on their connotations for those who would be reading his theories.

Katriel (1986) argues that "*communitas*" is one of the cultural meanings of the Dugri speech about which she writes. In other words, in speaking Dugri, Israeli Sabras aspire to the kind of spirit Turner (1969, 1980) wrote about. For them, that style of speaking helps to create a "state of existence outside social time and place, characterized by the suspension of roles and rules that hold in the realm of *societas*, and involving the creation of egalitarian, undifferentiated, individuating, person-to-person relationships" (Katriel, 1986, pp. 29-30).

In his study of discourse on the Donahue TV program, Carbaugh (1988) found that although "community" was not a prominent word, "society" was, and that it was often played off against the individual, expressed in the word "self." "Society," echoing Turner's (1969, 1980) notion of "*societas*," represented a hierarchical system of roles, and as such it threatened to take away a person's individuality. "Social roles" were to be avoided at all costs because they would take the place of "authentic" identity.

In these researchers, there is a progression of views. Williams recognizes that society lacks the immediacy of community, but sees society as an essentially neutral term. Turner sees *communitas* and *societas* as two poles between which people oscillate, each necessary to the other. The warm person-to-person connections of *communitas* are possible only outside *societas*, but eventually, the order and stability of *societas* is needed. Katriel describes a world in which *societas* is seen as inferior to *communitas*, one in which a particular kind of speech is used in an effort to maintain *communitas*. In the world of Donahue that Carbaugh analyzes, society has become a kind of stifling force, out to actively destroy individual identity.

#### Pednet and Community/Society

In the Pednet discourse, the opposition between the two words is strong. When "community" is used it is always either neutral or positive; when "society" is used it is always either neutral or negative. There are no exceptions to this. Moreover, whereas Carbaugh (1988) saw "self" and "society" pitted against one another in an agonistic pattern in the Donahue discourse, Pednetters sometimes pit "community" and "society" against one another. When this is done, of course, "community" is the positive term and "society" the negative one. I will turn now to the Pednet discourse to show how these meanings are played out.

#### Society is Negative

One of the ways in which society becomes a negative term among Pednet participants is in being modified by negative adjectives. For example:

**Paula:** In consideration of a walking culture (as opposed to a car society) . . .

**Stephen:** There are some more dangerous situations though, and especially in a gun-infested society, . . . .

**Warren:** I am concerned with the decline in quality-of-living that has been caused by our automobile-driven society . . .

Remember that among Pednetters, anything to do with the automobile is considered negative, so to say that society is a "car society" or an "automobile-driven society" is to say something negative about it. That it would be gun "infested" compares it to a home swarming with harmful insects, hardly a complimentary description.

In other cases, "society" becomes a more active agent that has somehow caused negative things to happen:

**Charles:** Somewhere along the line, society, in its rush to provide a "hospitable" environment for cars, has imposed on the victim or the victim's guardian the blame for traffic deaths and injuries.

**Alice:** Restoring the balance and providing choices of transportation modes may be difficult in a society that equates owning an automobile with having a child.

**Ted:** If our society chooses to locate food megastores 10 miles out of town on the freeway, I will "need" a car to transport my food.

These uses of "society" are even more negative than those discussed by Carbaugh (1988), in that the evils caused by society are greater than just the stifling of individuality. Here, society is guilty of not protecting the victims of collisions with cars (threatening lives), of valuing cars equally with children (threatening the future), of planning cities in such a way as to force people to buy cars (threatening individual freedom).

### Community is Positive

While "society" is frequently evil in the Pednet discourse, "community" has several positive uses. Two very prominent ones are "community building" and "sense of community," both of which seem to have to do with a positive sense of belonging. For example:

**Paula:** WPC members started pulling this list together in the hopes of building community and discussion around issues of interest to walkers.

**Charles:** Therein lies the reference to the "local hero," the person who enjoys the local scale, has affection for his/her particular surroundings, and commits time and resources to doing something to improve it by working with and through others to

improve the conditions for a sense of community: economic, social and cultural commerce.

**Elaine:** In Portland, despite there being conflicts between bicyclists and walkers where we are forced to share inadequate facilities, we are all working to build a community of green modes.

Turner (1969) characterizes *communitas* as spontaneous and immediate, and says that for this reason it cannot be maintained for very long. He says, therefore, that it will evolve from existential *communitas* (that which exists naturally) to normative *communitas*, a situation in which people try to create a structure for *communitas*; in other words, to give it the structure that will survive over time as *societas* does, without turning it into *societas*. Needless to say, this is difficult to do, but it seems to me to be what Pednetters are talking about when they talk of "building community." If existential *communitas* is there spontaneously, then a "sense of community" describes existential *communitas*. But when it is not there, people can try to build it through erecting a structure for a normative *communitas*.

### The Community-Society Opposition

The most interesting usage of community and society in the Pednet dialogue, however, is when the two are placed in opposition to one another, which happens several times. Here is one instance:

**Paula:** In some ways, I think of walking as a subculture; we are a marginal community, trying to find our own voice and way of expressing things. But the dominant culture is always pulling us back. Of course, the dangers of the car are very intrusive. That's a reality. But I do think we cheat ourselves if, in our conversation and our imagining, we only worry about the limitations defined by a car society.

Here we see David and Goliath. Walkers are the noble David, a marginal (read powerless) community trying to find a voice so that they can be heard, up against the powerful but soulless car society that creates limitations. Turner (1969) claims that *communitas* is often

allied with the powerless or lower classes: "normative and ideological *communitas* are symbolized by structurally inferior categories, groups, types, or individuals . . . For example, today's hippies assume the attributes of the structurally inferior in order to achieve *communitas*" (p. 133). This may explain the strong anti-traditional bias seen in the Pednet discourse, as participants ally themselves with those of lower status in order to achieve a kind of *communitas*.

Another example:

**Warren:** BTW, I loved the post from Charles of the interview with David Engwicht. His hope to recapture the "neighborliness" of cities is wonderful. I think people would be more likely to use pub. trans. and walk more if we had the community feeling that so many places seem to have lost. Our mobile society has created an entire generation of people who feel at home nowhere.

Here, community is an adjective rather than a noun, but it is clearly meant to be a positive trait. People would be more likely to walk or use public transportation--two causes supported by the list--if there were more community feeling (existential *communitas*). But people do not do those things because society has created a generation of people who feel at home nowhere--that is, they have no community feeling.

In the work of Carbaugh (1988/89) and others (Philipsen, 1986, 1992), a case has been made for the self/society agonistic as a basic one in discourse. In the Pednet discourse, that split is seen, with self being the favored term (society as it is, is oppressive and misguided). But there also seems to be a second agonistic having to do with how people are best organized into collectives. If the group "builds community" or "creates a sense of community" or finds "community-based solutions" to issues, it will flourish. If not, it is likely to wind up a "gun-infested society" or a "society driven by cars," or a "society of people who feel at home nowhere." For Pednetters, it is much better to be part of a community than a society. Certainly, Pednetters seem to aspire to *communitas* in the building of the list itself. Their quashing of any sort of authority represented by the anti-

traditional bias, their insistence on politeness in messages points to a desire to create, as Katriel put it, "egalitarian, undifferentiated, individuating, person-to-person relationships."

It may be, in fact, that *communitas* is what online groups in general tend to seek. Because communicating on line is a new way of forming a group, participants may have an idealistic view that they can build and maintain the kind of spirit that Turner speaks of as "*communitas*" in much the same way the Israeli Sabras, as founders of a new nation, thought they could and should maintain this spirit with each other. The Sabras, interestingly, used their way of speaking as a vehicle for maintaining *communitas*. The online groups often have little else but their speaking to use if they would do the same. This is only a speculation, of course. Pednetters' consistent use of "community" and "society" and what it implies about their group does not necessarily generalize to any other online groups. As study of these group proceeds, however, it would be interesting to pursue this question.

### How Are Persons and Society Linked Through Communication?

#### Lessons from the Discourse

If persons are unique individuals, worthy of respect and in possession of rights, who in an ideal world enter into society voluntarily and in a spirit of *communitas*, knowing they will be treated equally, then communication must function in some way to help them do that. It follows that in such an ideal world, communication functions as a means by which people reveal their unique selves to each other, knowing they will receive respect and their rights will be honored. If we go back to the elements of the discourse, we can see these beliefs about communication in action.

First, in the anti-traditional bias, participants are encouraged to highlight those portions of their identities that are unique or different from the mainstream. Professional credentials are irrelevant; what counts is what one believes and experiences. Second, in the metacommunicative politeness rule, participants are enjoined to treat each other with

respect, even when they disagree. Participants then need not fear expressing their opinions, knowing they will not be insulted for them. Third, in the pedestrian revenge fantasy, participants are encouraged to use their imaginations to embroider on a scenario in which the individual, in all his or her quirkiness, is celebrated.

However, Pednet participants are aware that the world as it is is not the same as the world as it should be. In the world as it is, society is oppressive and misguided. In the world as it is, individuals cannot always expect that their rights will be protected or their unique individuality respected. Therefore, communication on Pednet also functions to assert individual rights against oppressive society. It functions to link likeminded people together so that they can fight for these rights together. Again, we can see these beliefs in action in the discourse.

First, in the anti-traditional bias, the world of officialdom, especially that presided over by the traffic engineer, is seen as seriously misguided. Participants are encouraged to talk about working against the mainstream. Second, in the use of we, people who are merely recreational walkers, not alive to the political ramifications of being pedestrians, are excluded. And third, in the pedestrian revenge fantasy, participants do in fantasy what they cannot do in real life to defeat cars and drivers.

#### The Codes of Honor and Dignity

This information might acquire more meaning by relating it to Philipsen's (1986, 1992) notion of two overarching codes--a code of dignity and a code of honor. Briefly, the code of honor states that society came before the individual and is greater than he or she is. Each person has a role to play in the grand scheme of society, and he or she had better play it. Communication in such a system functions to coordinate activities, to allocate people to their proper roles and to reinforce a social hierarchy. The code of dignity, in contrast, emphasizes the dignity and worth of the individual, stripped of social roles. It also emphasizes the uniqueness of each person. Communication in this system is

the mechanism through which people come to know each other and to forge understandings based on each one's unique contributions.

From what has been said above, it should be clear that Pednet's is a code of dignity. In believing that all people are unique, deserve respect and have rights, the code clearly emphasizes the dignity and worth of the individual, stripped of social roles. Unlike the code of honor, which acts to allocate people to their proper roles in a social hierarchy, Pednet's code idealizes a society that is entered into voluntarily, in a spirit of *communitas*, with all persons treated equally. When society becomes oppressive, it is because it does not recognize the uniqueness of each person. In that circumstance it should be rebelled against.

It is not surprising that Pednet would have a code of dignity. The code was first identified in connection with the so-called *Nacirema*--that is, middle class, mostly white, Americans. And those with access to e-mail listservs are overwhelmingly white and middle class. However, to identify Pednet's code as the one common among white, middle class people is not to deny it its own distinctiveness. The distinctiveness is found at the level of the discourse elements, not at the more abstract level of the code.

#### Pednet as a Speech Community

In reflecting on the elements I have presented as evidence of Pednet as a speech community--the patterns, the metacommunication and the culturally distinctive form--it can be seen that not every piece of evidence is equally strong. Some evidence meets all the criteria I have set up and some does not. Nonetheless, each piece is cumulative, and contributes to a strong case overall. Moreover, the fact that the elements, when taken together, add up to a coherent code, is an additional piece of evidence in favor of a speech community. I therefore believe that, although there are places where it falls short, Pednet is indeed a speech community.

## RQ 2: The Virtual Community

Having established how Pednet measures up to Philipsen's (1992) framework and to the three criteria for speech community that I set up, I will now move on to the second research question: If Pednet is a speech community, in what way does this knowledge contribute to the notion of virtual communities? To answer this question, it seems wise to first note how Pednet measures up to the characteristics of community implied by online researchers and cited in Chapter I.

### Openness and Diversity

Many online researchers and commentators (e.g. Barlow, 1995; Kadi, 1995; Stuart, 1995) have implied that a community is open to all who want to participate and is therefore diverse, including people of all ages, both genders, all races, etc. This is really two issues. A community may be theoretically open to all but end up excluding some because of the cost of participation, its location, or some other factor that puts it out of some people's reach. Let us consider the first issue first: Is Pednet open to all?

Pednet is a listserv, which means that in order to be part of it people must subscribe. However, subscription is as simple as sending a subscribe message to the list administrator. The potential subscriber need do nothing to qualify. He or she may begin posting messages as soon as the subscription comes through. Several practices and norms on Pednet reinforce this initial openness, starting with the fact that new subscribers need not introduce themselves in order to participate in the discussion. In the six month study period, there were only 32 clearly identifiable introductory posts. Of course, every message sent to the list includes the name of the sender in the "from" line and many include some personal information. What I mean by introductory post is a message in which the sender says, in effect, "I am new, so let me tell you about myself." Only two of these posts were solely introductory. More typically, senders would say a few things about themselves, then either respond to some ongoing discussion topic or start a new

topic. In five of the posts, participants actually jumped in and made a comment or asked a question, then added their introductory material afterward, almost as if it were an afterthought. Second, there is an obvious anti-traditional bias on Pednet, so that those without credentials in related fields may feel equally qualified to speak out as those who are in professional roles. In fact, this bias is strong enough that those who are in professional roles feel obligated to identify themselves as maverick professional people. And finally, Pednetters are enjoined to be polite to each other, even when they disagree. Flaming is frowned upon. Thus, one need not worry about receiving a negative response when posting for the first time.

As noted earlier, however, there are some limitations to this openness. Pednet does not welcome the contributions of traffic engineers with traditional opinions. Although theoretically such a person will be tolerated on the list, in practice his or her opinions will be roundly criticized to such a degree that the person may prefer not to continue participating. To a lesser degree, recreational walkers may feel unwelcome on the list. There is nothing to stop their continued participation; no one is ever drummed off the list. But if they are not responded to, they may feel unwelcome and choose to unsubscribe. However, the presence of Ken, who holds opinions opposite to most other participants, proves that those who disagree are sometimes tolerated and manage to stick it out.

Is Pednet diverse? Because I did not do a survey recording demographics, this is somewhat difficult to determine. I know that the list has an approximately 80-20 male-to-female ratio, and that at least four subscribers are disabled. About a quarter of the members are affiliated in some way with educational institutions. I do not know the ages or races represented. Of course, as some critics have pointed out, online groups are automatically restricted to those in middle and upper income brackets, because only those people have access to a computer and an Internet connection. No doubt this is true for

Pednet. My blindness to the ages and races of my fellow participants, however, points up the advantage of most online groups in this regard. It is fairly impossible to be an ageist or a racist in most of the online world because we do not know the age or race of our interlocutors unless they tell us. The same is true for disability. Four people on Pednet identified themselves as disabled when the discussion turned to issues in which disability makes a difference, but there could have been others who chose not to reveal their disabled status.

In summary, I would say that Pednet is open to all who have access to it, which certainly excludes some, but not through some machination of the list and its members. Not all those who subscribe will necessarily feel welcome, but no one is likely to be asked or forced to leave. The range of subscriber types is potentially broad but probably in fact fairly narrow, because of the issues of access mentioned above.

#### Fostering Participation

Some online theorists and commentators (e.g. McLaughlin, Osborne and Smith, 1995; MacKinnon, 1995; Baym, 1993; Heim, 1992) have claimed that not only is a community open to all, but also that it fosters participation by all. Does Pednet do this? Again, some of its practices and norms show a tendency in this direction. This is most evident in the metacommunication. When a non-professional person apologized for her non-professional status, for example, she received replies which told her her contributions were welcome, thus presumably fostering her future participation. When rude posters were chided for their behavior, others were put on notice that they need not fear harsh criticism when they posted. The fact that introductions were not necessary could conceivably foster participation from shy list members who did not want to talk about themselves. Considering my one-time count of list participants, only 33 of 157 members at the time of the count had never posted to the list. Thus, although there were four

people who posted most often, more than three-quarters of all participants posted at least once. This implies an atmosphere which fosters participation.

#### Rules or Social Norms

Online theorists and commentators often mention that communities have rules or social norms. Because I have dealt with the rules and norms of Pednet at some length above, I will not repeat myself here. Clearly, Pednet does have rules and social norms.

#### Mutual Supportiveness

Mutual supportiveness is a characteristic of community mentioned by some theorists and commentators. Brennan, Moore and Smythe (1992), for example, found messages of supportiveness in an online group for Alzheimer's caregivers. Heim (1992) said what communities have that might be missing on line is "long-term warmth and loyalty" and a "sense of obligation" to others. Based on these and other comments, I think that what the online commentators mean by mutual supportiveness is something close to the research tradition of the "communication of social support," with which I am only casually acquainted.

Because I did not poll Pednet members about their attitudes or feelings, I can argue for mutual supportiveness only on the basis of what is said on line, and I do find some anecdotal evidence for it. In a message I quoted earlier, for example, a non-professional member worried that her contributions might not be worthwhile, and another participant told her she was qualified for the discussion. In another case that I have not previously quoted, a participant brought up a scary experience she had had on a trail, when a young man tried to attack her. Several other members expressed their dismay at the incident and tried to say reassuring things to the woman who had mentioned it. In a more general way, the rule about politeness indicates a desire to support others rather than criticize or ridicule.

Some commentators (e.g. Barlow, 1995; Sanders, 1995), seemingly looking at mutual support in a more concrete way--bringing someone a hot meal rather than holding her hand verbally--claim that supportiveness is brought out by shared adversity. For example, if someone's house burns down and the community rallies around to provide shelter, new clothes, etc., this would be mutual support. On Pednet, the physical separation makes this sort of support less likely, but the group does seem to rally around each other discursively because of their shared adversity as a minority group. This is seen most clearly in the pedestrian revenge fantasy. Walkers, as a group, feel besieged by motorists and band together to help each other defeat the more powerful opponent, at least in fantasy.

#### Group Identity

Finally, online theorists and commentators have spoken of community as having or creating a sense of group identity. Ogan (1993) said that members of the group she studied acknowledged the importance of group identity and a feeling of belonging. And Hiltz and Turoff (1993) and Baym (1994, 1994a) talk about group cohesion.

I have discussed group identity at some length in its relationship to the discourse elements I have spelled out. However, I would like to add a little extra information here relating to Pednet's frequent posters. Bormann (1983) says that in successful groups there is a small group who remind the others of their "groupness," their collective identity: "These were the people who kept mentioning, reminding, and dramatizing the social entity of the organization and the commonality of being part of it" (p. 121). Three of the four most frequent posters on Pednet are not in professional roles and the other identifies himself as a maverick in a professional role; thus the personal identities of the four represent the anti-traditional stance of the group as a whole. And three of the four, in their postings, wrote frequently about the group and what they had in common.

Interestingly, the characteristic of group identity conflicts somewhat with the characteristic of being open to all. As the group develops an identity and is mutually supportive in the face of shared adversity, it seems to me that it decides who its enemies are, and these enemies may not be welcome in the community. Thus, on the one hand, online theorists say a group must have an identity and support members in the face of shared adversity in order to be a community, and on the other they say it must be open to all in order to be a community. It may not be possible to do both simultaneously. As some theorists have noted (e.g. Spears and Lea, 1992), online groups may foster polarization, so that the formation of group identity may amount to setting up an "us" and "them" that cannot be surmounted in the name of openness.

#### Summary

Considering the ways in which Pednet does or does not meet the criteria for community set forth by online theorists and commentators, in what way does this knowledge contribute to the notion of virtual community? I think it shows that the main barriers to community on the Internet are barriers of access and not qualities of the medium itself. I have shown above that Pednet appears to have many of the characteristics cited by those who would criticize online groups. It is true that it is not open to all or very diverse, but these are barriers created by expense and not intrinsic to the medium. In short, given equal access to the Internet, I see no reason why online groups could not meet all the criteria for community set forth by theorists and commentators.

On the other hand, I think it is worth noting that those who would say online groups are not communities have a rather idealistic vision of community. Are real life communities truly open to all? Are they truly diverse? I think that is true only if we use the broadest possible geographic definition of community. Yes, the city of Seattle is diverse and open to all who want to live there. But how many people of color does one

**find in Wedgwood? How many young couples can afford to live in Windermere? How many gay couples live anywhere but Capitol Hill? It may be that the Internet is no more narrowly populated than any real community, sad though it may be to realize this.**

## CHAPTER IV DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

### Introduction

At the beginning of this dissertation I set forth two basic research questions: (1) Is the computer-mediated group Pednet a speech community? and (2) If Pednet is a speech community, in what way does this knowledge contribute to the notion of virtual communities? I will now return to these questions and provide the answers I think are warranted by my findings.

#### Research Question 1: Is Pednet a Speech Community?

In addressing the first question, I used the following definition of speech community: A speech community is an organization of diversity, a group that shares knowledge of the rules for the use and interpretation of speech and attitudes toward it, and that constitutes itself in the speaking even as it creates a history to ground future speaking. I operated under the assumption that the evidence for a speech community can be found in the discourse itself, and used Philipsen's (1992) framework to generate subordinate research questions:

1A: Does Pednet evidence distinct patterns in discourse? I found two such patterns--the anti-traditional bias and the use of "we." The first had to do with the way identities were displayed by the group. Participants chose to emphasize the non-traditional aspects of their identities, to minimize professional qualifications and refrain from using them to bolster arguments or challenge those of others, and to insist that non-professional people be given an equal hearing with professionals. The second involved the creation of a group identity by using "we" to include some people and exclude others--specifically, recreational walkers were excluded and bicyclists included.

1B: Does Pednet's metacommunication reveal rules or norms for communicating? I found two rules talked about and oriented to by participants. One was to be brief in

posting to the list and the other was to be polite. Both rules were stated directly, and participants apologized when they broke them.

1C: Do members of Pednet invoke earlier metacommunication in order to justify arguments or call others to account? Pednet's politeness rule was very clearly invoked when someone was rude and the list administrator said she thought the list had a reputation for being uncommonly civil and she wanted to keep it that way.

1D: Is there evidence of culturally distinctive forms in the Pednet discourse? Although none of the three forms mentioned by Philipsen in his (1992) framework--social dramas, cultural myths and totemizing rituals--are present, Pednet did have another culturally distinctive form--a fantasy theme (Bormann, 1975, 1978, 1985). I call this fantasy theme the pedestrian revenge fantasy because it involves scenes of pedestrians winning out in fantasy over the car-driving bullies they cannot defeat in real life. The theme appeared early in the life of the list and persisted through the six-month study period.

1E: When the patterns in discourse, metacommunication and rhetorical invocation of metacommunication, and culturally distinctive forms are considered together, do they add up to a speech code? These phenomena did add up to a speech code that answered the questions, "what is a person?" "what is society?" and "how are persons linked to society through communication?". Basically, the code says that each person is a unique individual with thoughts and feelings to share, that persons are worthy of respect and that they have rights. Society, in the Pednet code, should be something that is entered into voluntarily and is left when one wants to, and it should treat all people equally. However, Pednetters believe society is actually oppressive and misguided. Their ideal of society appears to be something akin to Turner's (1969, 1980) *communitas*, and is represented in their expressions "sense of community" and "building community." Pednetters believe that

communication functions as a way for people to reveal their unique selves to each other and as a way to assert their rights in an oppressive society.

Since the Pednet discourse contained all the elements of the framework, I then compared each element to three criteria derived from my definition of speech community: (1) Does it show a shared knowledge of the rules for the use and interpretation of speech and attitudes toward it? (2) Does it show the group constituting itself in the speaking even as it creates a history to ground future speaking? (3) Does it contribute in some way to a collective identity such that the group treats itself as distinct from other groups? In the table on page 107, I have summarized the answers to these questions.

Because a speech community is not a physical object, like a piece of granite or a particular species of butterfly, frameworks such as the one I have used can only point to evidence--not prove conclusively--that a speech community exists. However, given the fact that the Pednet discourse did contain all the elements of the Philipsen (1992) framework and that these elements did meet the criteria in the speech community definition, I feel justified in concluding that Pednet can be considered a speech community. Although the evidence in each area is not equally strong, I argue that it is cumulative. In other words, for example, although the existence of the metacommunicative length rule did not contribute much to Pednet's distinctiveness, other elements of the discourse did. Thus, the total weight of the combined evidence is convincing.

However, the evidence should also be compared to that cited in published studies of speech communities. This is somewhat problematic because most studies of speech communities up to now have been conducted on face-to-face groups. Online communication is a relatively new phenomenon, and many who have studied it have been more interested in its efficiency as a medium of discussion or decision making than in whether a group becomes a speech community while using it. However, there is one scholar whose work is particularly relevant to my own. I will now turn to a description of

a framework developed by that scholar, followed by a comparison of my own results to that framework.

**Table III, Summary of the Findings**

	<b>Shared rules &amp; attitudes</b>	<b>Constitutes itself in the speaking</b>	<b>Treats itself as distinct</b>
<b>Anti-traditional bias</b>	Treat the contributions of those who are not in professional roles equally with the contributions of those who are; do not flaunt credentials; display the non-traditional aspects of identity.	As participants accentuate non-traditional aspects of identity and criticize traditional types, others are encouraged to do so.	Group is distinct from the mainstream; also distinct from those holding professional roles, especially traffic engineers.
<b>The use of we</b>	Recreational walking is not a suitable topic of discussion; treat bicyclists as part of the group.	we/they is used to argue for the inclusion or exclusion of others; not everyone belongs in a group.	Group is distinct from recreational walkers, but not from bicyclists.
<b>The length rule</b>	Be brief; do not waste others' time.	When length is criticized, guilty parties apologize.	Not very distinct.
<b>The politeness rule</b>	Be polite; treat others with respect, even when you disagree.	When rudeness is criticized, guilty parties apologize.	Groups sees itself as distinct from net in general.
<b>The pedestrian revenge fantasy</b>	Make fun of cars and drivers; what cannot be conquered can be laughed at.	Fantasy theme develops over time in a thread.	Group sees itself as distinct from cars and drivers.

### Baym's Framework

Baym (1993, 1994, 1994a, 1995, 1996) has studied the Usenet group *rec.arts.tv.soaps (r.a.t.s.)*, made up of soap opera enthusiasts who chat about their favorite programs on line, over a series of studies, including her dissertation. She says:

I have suggested that computer-mediated groups share enough common factors--a communication network and communicative contact--to grant them status as potential cultures. However, participants in computer-mediated groups have unusually limited resources available to create distinct communities. Unlike in traditional speech communities, there are few if any shared spaces, face-to-face encounters, or physical artifacts to provide cultural foundations. As a consequence, the discourse, shaped by multiple forces . . . carries inordinate weight in creating a group's distinct environment. These (CMC) communities are, of necessity, grounded in linguistic interaction (Baym, 1994, p. 49).

In other words, Baym believes that the community emerges in the discourse, and like me, uses the approach of considering the discourse itself to find evidence of community among her group. Over the course of her studies, she has developed a framework for the formation of community--four discourse elements that she says are evidence for community. Given Baym's extensive work on this subject, it seems a logical step for me to compare my own findings to what she has done. In other words, do the four elements she cites appear in the discourse of Pednet? I will first present the four elements of the framework, then show how the Pednet discourse does or does not contain them.

#### Forms of Expression

First, Baym says, her group becomes a community through its forms of expression. Here she lists new forms of social cues, group-specific vocabulary, unique forms of jokes and new categories of talk. The new forms of social cues include emoticons (punctuation marks used to make smiling, frowning or winking faces), asterisks or all capital letters used for emphasis and verbal descriptions of behavior: All of these new forms are used

throughout the online world; their use by r.a.t.s. members does not indicate to me that the group is a speech community. This would be like saying that a real world group is a speech community because they all smile and gesture. Unless there is a distinctive use of these new social cues, they do not mean a speech community has formed.

Baym's other arguments under forms of expression are more compelling. The group-specific vocabulary includes words apparently invented by the group--for example, the word "aptonym," used by the group to mean nicknames they give soap opera characters, nicknames that are based on the character's personality: Ditzie for Dixie, Demento for Dmitri, etc. Unique forms of jokes include "soap opera laws," such as "If you have sex once, you will certainly get pregnant." And most compelling of all are Baym's new categories of talk. There is a whole body of work in ethnography under terms for talk, (see Abrahams and Bauman, 1971; Katriel, 1986, Carbaugh, 1988), and the categories listed by Baym certainly fit in. In the case of r.a.t.s., the terms for talk are used in the headers of online messages to alert the readers to their content. They include "spoilers," "tangents," and "sightings." I must add a caveat here, however. At least one of these terms--the word "spoiler"--is used net-wide and is often mentioned in descriptions of netiquette (e.g. Dern, 1994) as a warning to readers when some secret is to be divulged. In the case of r.a.t.s, spoilers are posts that reveal a soap's future plot, but in other contexts they may be such things as the answers to a puzzle or trivia question.

### Identities

The second item in Baym's framework has to do with the way identities are treated by her group. Unlike some online groups, which encourage anonymity and sometimes role playing, Baym's group actively discouraged anonymity by asking participants for a name if none was provided. Some people use "handles" rather than their real names on the net, and these handles appear at the top of their messages. In Baym's group, however, such a person would be asked his/her name by another participant. Baym further says that quotes

of other participants' messages are often used in posts--with their names still attached--as a means of making copy more understandable and keeping ideas linked to their authors,

Another way in which r.a.t.s. discourages anonymity is through introductory posts. New participants post a message telling a little bit about themselves to make themselves known to others in the group. MacKinnon (1995) makes the point that a person interacting on line creates a persona for others to relate to, and that, on line, one must be responded to to really exist. In other words, if you post a message and no one responds, you are, in effect, invisible. By doing introductory posts, then, members announce their presence and begin the creation of their personae. On r.a.t.s., such introductory posts have become a behavioral norm.

As another indication of identity on her list, Baym speaks of roles held by some members. These were fairly specific roles. Some of her group members, for example, take on the job of providing updates of soap opera plots so that those who cannot watch the program will be able to keep up with the story. These updaters not only perform a service, but come to be known for their artful or humorous ways of doing their jobs. In a survey of group members, Baym learned that participants valued the updaters for demonstrating humor, insight and a distinctive personality. She also claims that people who post the most often--which includes updaters--wield more influence among list members.

Identity can become a negative thing, however. McLaughlin, Osborne and Smith (1995) say that in some groups, participation does not make one a member; certain individuals are sometimes deliberately excluded. Baym speaks of this when she talks about "kill files," a means by which members can set up their computers so that messages from certain individuals or about certain subjects can be automatically killed.

### Relationships

The third item cited by Baym is relationships among the parties on line. Here she notes that some participants know one another off line, but that it is possible to develop a relationship even though the parties know one another only on line. Some participants, she notes, seem to be adept at nurturing online relationships. This is seen particularly in the discourse of the heavy posters, who are more likely to use people's names when they respond to their messages and to explicitly acknowledge others' perspectives. Baym also notes that people who meet on line often agree to subsequently meet face to face, as when members of her group who are in the same town agree to gather and watch a few episodes of their favorite soap together.

Although it is generally seen as negative, Baym also believes that flaming can be seen as a form of relationship on line. Quoting Myers (1987), who called it a kind of competitive play, she says it can be rather like a sporting event. For this reason, she feels, it is a gendered activity, indulged in more often by men. Since women predominate in Baym's group, it is unsurprising that flaming is "discouraged far more vehemently than any other form of talk on r.a.t.s" (Baym, 1995, p. 158).

### Behavioral Norms

This leads nicely into Baym's final category--behavioral norms. As noted above, her group has a rule that members should be polite, which makes flaming forbidden. She believes this is at least in part due to the fact that r.a.t.s. is female-dominated. Baym says that some norms are borrowed from CMC-wide rules commonly known as netiquette. McLaughlin et al. (1995) have summarized some of these rules under categories, and say that two elements of CMC encourage flaming: (1) On line, one can reply easily (no need to print, put in an envelope, address, etc.), so one might make a flip response without thinking much about it and (2) slow feedback to any particular message promotes misunderstanding. Thus, it seems to me that when an online group is able to agree on an

anti-flaming rule--as r.a.t.s. has--it has shown cohesiveness in overcoming forces that would push it in another direction.

### **Pednet and Baym's Framework**

In some ways Pednet meets the criteria set forth in Baym's framework and in some ways it does not. I will compare my data to the framework, one item at a time.

#### **Forms of Expression**

Like the members of r.a.t.s. and most other online groups, members of Pednet do use the new forms of social cues. Their messages include emoticons, verbal descriptions of behavior and such things as asterisks or all caps for emphasis (all of these may be seen in data cited in Chapter III), but as I have said, I do not consider this strong evidence of a speech community. To my knowledge, the group has created no group-specific vocabulary, although they do borrow from the vocabulary of related professions. Terms such as "traffic calming" and "traffic demand management" are part of their lexicon, for example. Some of these terms required explanation at the beginning of the group's life, but have since been incorporated into its talk on a regular basis. There have also been instances of a group member introducing a new term. For example, one member brought forward the term "haptics" to mean a "felt sense of a place," which was then discussed at length by the group and later became part of its everyday talk. The member did not invent this word; rather, he took an obscure word, defined it and brought it into the everyday code of Pednet.

Pednet does have a form of joking that could be called unique in its particular manifestation. Just as r.a.t.s. borrowed the idea of a humorous "law" (like Murphy's law) and adapted it to their own purposes, so Pednet borrowed Bormann's (1975, 1978, 1985) idea of a fantasy theme (not consciously, I am sure) and created the pedestrian revenge fantasy. In doing so, they set up cars and drivers as the enemy, and soon they were referring to driving as "the d word." In her 1994 study, Baym claimed that humor was a

way of building solidarity among r.a.t.s. participants as they used it to put distance between themselves and the soap opera's writers and producers. In the same way, Pednetters use the pedestrian revenge fantasy to put distance between themselves and thoughtless drivers, thus building solidarity among list members.

I have not found any new terms for talk among Pednet participants. Although they use headers on their messages as does r.a.t.s. (and other online groups), no standard headers have emerged. In fact, Pednet participants seemed more or less to ignore headers, as evidenced by the fact that when responding to particular messages, participants did not always use the same header as in the original message.

#### Identities

Members on Pednet also discourage anonymity, but not by asking for names, as Baym notes is common on r.a.t.s. Handles are not used by anyone on Pednet, so names appear at the top of all posts. However, the way names are used on Pednet indicates a preference for each person emerging as a unique personality. Members of Pednet tend to refer to one another by FN only, even when they do not use a quote of the referred-to person's message. During the six-month research period, there were 90 FLN references, compared to 108 FN references (including only first references within messages). Of the FN references, 71 included no quotes that would have identified the person being referred to. Furthermore, 11 participants who were mentioned only once during the six months were mentioned by FN only. In other words, participants are expected to know who is being referred to, even in the absence of a quote that would identify him or her by full name. While Baym says quotes are frequently used on r.a.t.s. and help keep a person's ideas attached to him or her, quotes are not used on Pednet about as often as they are. This may be simply a function of size--Pednet is much smaller than the group studied by Baym--but it seems to me to be rather strong evidence of a speech community that participants feel free to use a name--especially FN only--without a quote.

Unlike r.a.t.s., where introductory posts are a behavioral norm, Pednet does not require participants to introduce themselves. Early in the life of the list it was suggested that people do so, but it is not always done. And when an introductory post is not given, others do not ask for one. On Pednet, members seem to take to heart the idea that if they do not participate they do not exist. Often, a member will sign on with a few sentences of introduction, followed by a post responding to the ongoing discussion. Thus it seems that the best introduction is to participate in the discussion. In other words, introductions seem to be more casual on Pednet; identities can be established in the middle of discussion.

As far as I know, the kill files Baym talked about were not used on Pednet. If they were, they were not talked about. Certainly some individuals received more response to their posts than did others, but there also seemed to be an acceptance of everyone who wanted to participate (although criticism of their views did drive some away).

Pednet offers no roles comparable to the updaters on r.a.t.s, but as a listserv it does have a list administrator; in fact, it has two, but one of these is a technical person and posts rarely. The other posts more often than any other member. I have taken up the role of frequent posters, including the list administrator, at some length elsewhere, so I will not repeat myself here. It is my belief that an online group depends on its frequent posters to help create and maintain it as a speech community, and that particular roles--whether official ones like list administrators or unofficial like soap opera updaters--facilitate this. In other words, holding a particular role makes one feel responsibility for the group as a whole and promotes group cohesiveness.

### Relationships

Several members of Pednet know each other off line because they have been pedestrian activists for years and move in some of the same circles. Those who live in the same town often belong to the same pedestrian group, while those in different cities have sometimes met at conferences and the like. Although I know of no specific instances in

which people met through Pednet and later got together in person, I think that might well occur. As noted above, there are some people--particularly frequent posters, who seem to nurture relationships on line. As noted by Baym, these posters use names more frequently and state other people's perspectives.

Returning to the matter of name references mentioned above, it seems to me that when one uses FN only in a group such as Pednet, it implies a certain relationship among the participants. Using FN only implies that everyone knows everyone else, and will recognize someone just by the first name without a quote of what the other person has said. That this practice occurs in a group in which many people have never met face to face gives it extra weight.

Flaming does occur on Pednet, but not very often, despite the fact that Pednet has about an 80-20 male to female ratio. It is true that in the two instances of it that I recorded, it was male participants who were involved. However, Pednet has a prohibition against flaming that is generally respected. If it is true, as Baym asserts, that flaming is a gendered activity, it may also be true that even on a list dominated by men, flaming can be banished if there are assertive women to stop it. In the case of Pednet, the list administrator was a woman and used her influence against flaming.

#### Behavioral Norms

I have already demonstrated in Chapter III that Pednet did indeed have behavioral norms or rules. The obvious rules, found in the metacommunication, were (1) be brief and (2) be polite. In discussing norms, Baym says that some are borrowed from CMC-wide rules commonly known as netiquette. McLaughlin et al. (1995) have summarized some of these rules under categories, and one of these categories is "bandwidth waste." In short, McLaughlin et al. say, postings that waste other people's time and mailbox space are frowned upon on the net. Thus, one could say Pednet's rule about brevity derives from the network-wide rule against wasting bandwidth. As for being polite, this is the rule

against flaming and, as noted by Baym, is present in some groups and not in others. As I mentioned during my discussion of Baym's comments on this issue, I believe that when an online group is able to agree on an anti-flaming rule, it has shown cohesiveness in overcoming the CMC forces that would push it in another direction.

Pednet also has other, more distinctive norms that I discussed in Chapter III. One was to emphasize those parts of one's identity that show one to be non-traditional; another was to treat people who hold no professional position equally with those who do. Pednetters also developed norms that excluded talk about recreational walking but included bicyclists and that made cars and drivers the object of fun.

#### Summary

In holding up Pednet to the standards of Baym's arguments, I would say that although my case may not be as strong as hers, it does, in general, fit into her framework. Pednet does have its own forms of expression, it encourages identities and relationships on line and it has behavioral norms. What r.a.t.s. has that Pednet lacks is new words and terms for talk invented by the group. Both of these indicate that this is a group with a strong sense of its own identity. It may have these things that Pednet lacks because it is larger and has a longer history as a group.

#### **Research Question 2: Pednet and Virtual Communities**

My second research question attempted to address the controversy over whether online groups can be communities in the larger sense. The problem with this controversy is that the definition of community is not always spelled out by those who argue for or against the possibility of virtual community. I therefore derived several elements of community implied in these essays (e.g. Barlow, 1995; Kadi, 1995; Stuart, 1995; McLaughlin et al., 1995; MacKinnon, 1995; Heim, 1992; Sanders, 1995), and again compared the Pednet discourse to a framework as follows:

### Openness and Diversity

Communities are supposed to be open to all and diverse in terms of age, gender, race and so forth. As a listserv, Pednet is open to anyone who wants to subscribe. Because introductory posts are not required, people feel free to join in the discussion immediately, and some practices of the group emphasize openness. However, because subscription requires access to a computer and Internet server, Pednet is in fact open only to those who can afford these luxuries. This in turn probably limits the diversity of the list in terms of ages, races and so forth. Openness is also mitigated by the use of "we" that excluded some people--e.g. recreational walkers--from the in-group.

### Fostering Participation

Beyond being open to everyone, communities are also supposed to foster participation by everyone. Most practices on Pednet--its rule on politeness and its equal treatment of those who hold professional roles and those who do not, for example--imply that participation by everyone is encouraged. However, it does discourage participation by some groups--e.g. recreational walkers and traffic engineers with traditional views. Nonetheless, more than three-quarters of those subscribed to the list did post at least once.

### Rules or Social Norms

Communities are supposed to have rules or social norms. These Pednet clearly has. There are rules about what portions of identity to emphasize, what topics are not acceptable to talk about, and how long one's messages should be, for example.

### Mutual Supportiveness

Communities are supposed to exhibit mutual supportiveness among their members. This was a characteristic I could measure only indirectly because I did not ask participants about their feelings. However, there were instances in the discourse when participants reached out to reassure others about problems. There also was an implied mutual

supportiveness in the pedestrian revenge fantasy--indicating as it did a group facing common adversity together.

### Group Identity

Communities are supposed to have a group identity--something that Pednet definitely has. Members see themselves as mavericks, as different from the mainstream of people, particularly those who hold professional roles. They also see themselves in league with bicyclists but not with recreational walkers, and united against the evil forces of cars and driving.

### Summary

Pednet meets many of the standards stated above, and where it does not meet them, the primary reason is found in the circumstances, such as the price of Internet access, rather than in anything intrinsic to the medium or the people who participate. I therefore believe that Pednet could be a community. However, I also believe that the characteristics given for community are highly idealistic, and may be beyond what exists in any real life group. People of all sorts may live in the same geographic area, if one defines that area broadly enough, but they do tend to seek out people more like them than not. This is true in terms of where they live, where they work and where they socialize. Why, then, should things be any different on the Internet? People will look for and find others who are like them in interests and value systems, and this is true whether they are doing the looking in physical or virtual space. The Internet does have the disadvantage of being relatively expensive, thus eliminating participation by the poor, but it has the advantage--at least in most online settings--of rendering people blind to the physical characteristics of those with whom they converse. Thus, if universal access to the net could be assured, we might expect more, not less, diversity in groups communicating with each other.

Perhaps the greatest barrier to community on line is the transience of the groups. People come and go frequently, and I believe that Pednet's attitude--that one should be

able to enter community voluntarily and leave when one wants to--is prevalent on the net. However, real life communities are increasingly transient too. It is not as easy to move to a new town as it is to unsubscribe from a mailing list, but it is much easier than it was 50 years ago. Again, perhaps this transience on line only reflects the growing transience in the real world.

In short, I believe that there is nothing intrinsic to online groups that would prevent them from becoming communities in the sense that the critics I have read seem to mean. Indeed, as I understand the longing of Pednet participants for "communitas," I believe that at least some people come to the net looking for community that is missing in their offline lives, or perhaps to learn how to create more of it in their offline lives. And maybe they are as idealistic about what community is as are those who claim it cannot exist on line

#### Implications of the Study

Having answered my two research questions and compared my results to those of another scholar working in a similar vein, I would now like to return to the findings I set forth and detail what I see to be the implications of these findings for future research. I will first take each of the findings individually, then comment on the study as a whole.

#### Patterns in Discourse

##### The Anti-Traditional Bias

Some of the researchers who have explored CMC in task or decision making groups (e.g. Walther, 1992, Siegel, Dubrovsky, Kiesler and McGuire, 1986) have claimed that it promotes more equal participation among all those involved in a discussion because people are less intimidated by those who hold titles or even by those with dominant personalities when they are not in the same room with them. One could see Pednet's anti-traditional bias as a manifestation of this phenomenon, because it insists that all participants are equal, whether they hold professional positions in related fields or not.

Thus, theoretically, all members of the list should feel empowered to speak, regardless of their credentials or what titles they hold or do not hold in the real world.

However, something that argues against this idea of CMC-as-leveler is the fact that on most e-mail lists, a few people dominate. Baym (1993) reported that 187 people on r.a.t.s. posted just once a month, producing 9 percent of the discourse, while 45 people posted more than 10 times, producing 44 percent. Ogan (1993) found that eight people out of about 150 dominated an e-mail list during the Persian Gulf War. Likewise, on Pednet, four people out of an average 150 were the most frequent posters. However, three of Pednet's four most frequent posters held no professional role in their off-list lives. It might then be said that the anti-traditional bias had produced a situation where those usually without power were the powerful ones.

But is this really true? The single most frequent poster on Pednet, though holding no professional role in real life, was the administrator of the list, a position which should have accorded her a certain amount of intrinsic power among participants. Two of the other frequent posters--including the lone professional man--took on leadership roles on the list by agreeing to compile lists of resources. The fourth frequent poster was a true maverick, the personification of anti-professionalism.

What are we to make of this conflicting information? Because heavy posters tended to maintain their position over time, Baym (1993) concluded that they played powerful roles in shaping group tradition. This brings up a number of questions which future researchers might explore. First, are the people who dominate an e-mail list the same ones who would dominate an offline group? We have seen how, on Pednet, some of the people who dominate possess no offline credentials that would confer influence on them. One is cantankerous and disagrees with most people about most things. How would these people do in an offline discussion? Is there a difference, in other words, between influence on line and influence off line? Second, the anti-traditional bias might

be called an egalitarian ethos. Those who participate in Pednet, in other words, claim that all are equal in the discussion and may speak at any time, regardless of what their expertise on the topic is. However, a few people in fact dominate the discussion. I suspect that the same is true on other e-mail lists. It would be interesting to center a research study around this seeming paradox. Fox (1983) claimed that what he called the "folklore" of online groups would tend to be anti-authoritarian. Is this true, and if so, does their practice align with their ideology?

#### The Use of We

The personal pronoun "we" is a tip-off to how groups see themselves, as a group, and who they see as being on the outside. The usage of this pronoun has been probed repeatedly by researchers in a variety of fields (e.g. Goddard, 1995, Eoyang, 1990, Pennycook, 1994), but it has never, to my knowledge, been scrutinized in the discourse of an online group. Sherblom (1990) did study pronoun use in computer mediated communication, but confined his investigation to electronic mail within a company. Since members of online groups typically do not know each other in the real world, it seems to me that their usage of the collective pronoun would be particularly important. I have shown how, on Pednet, the use of "we" helped the group decide that they were activist walkers as opposed to recreational ones, and that they generally saw bicyclists as in their camp. This seems to me to be a fruitful avenue for further research on line. It is also true that the use of "we" implies a we/they dichotomy that may be particularly important on line. Some researchers (e.g. Spears and Lea, 1992) have suggested that the online environment promotes polarization. If that is true, the polarization process might be tracked through the group's use of "we."

#### Metacommunication

One of the most useful aspects of metacommunication for ethnographers has always been terms for talk. Researchers such as Abrahams and Baumann (1971), St.

George (1985), and Katriel (1986) have shown how these terms are key to cultural values. Carbaugh summarized the importance of terms for talk in his 1989 survey. In the online environment, terms for talk are often in the headers found at the top of each message--in other words, the title that is filled in on the "subject" line. In Baym's work, headers provided a description of the contents of messages that guided participants in their reading. "Updates," for example, were descriptions of the show's plot; "spoilers" told what would happen in future segments, and "sightings" talked about where particular soap opera stars had been seen. These headers became terms for talk unique to the r.a.t.s. group and therefore key to their culture. However, headers do not always contain terms for talk, nor do they even necessarily play an important role in a group's life. On Pednet, there were no standard headers as on r.a.t.s., and therefore no terms for talk that consistently appeared there. On Pednet, terms for talk were embedded in the messages themselves (though none of these was distinctive).

These two opposite experiences suggest that future researchers consider both headers and terms for talk as subjects of inquiry. Terms for talk may be found in headers, but they may be embedded in messages. Either way, they are likely to play a key role in identifying cultural values for that particular group. And headers may be of interest even if they do not contain terms for talk. On Pednet, headers tended to change even within a single thread. Something that started out being labeled as "road hazards" might wind up being called "pedestrian rights" five messages down the line. It might be interesting to trace these changes in headers as a thread progresses to see what, if anything, the change signifies in the conversation.

#### Culturally Specific Forms

The pedestrian revenge fantasy that I discovered in the Pednet discourse is a phenomenon that can only be seen if one looks at the thread rather than the individual post. A thread is a group of posts on a particular subject, and is roughly equivalent to a

conversation in real life. I believe that it can also be the online world's equivalent to Hymes' speech event. Yet, in Baym's work, and that of many other online researchers, individual posts are most often used as evidence of various phenomena. It seems to me that the thread often makes a better unit of analysis. It is really only at the thread level that one can see the pedestrian revenge fantasy as it is created, only at the thread level that flame wars, if they exist, develop, smolder and die.

Of course, threads can be problematic, in that they are not well defined units. Like a conversation, a thread begins when someone brings up a topic, but the talk can branch off into a different, though related topic, then return to the original topic. Is it all part of the thread? The researcher ends up being somewhat arbitrary in deciding. How threads are constructed, and how they do or do not fit into Hymes' scheme, would make an interesting research study.

#### The Data Overall

Looking at the data overall, I believe that personality and the displaying of personality on line is important, and that this is particularly true for frequent posters and those holding particular roles on the list, especially list administrator. This is a far cry from early studies of online discourse (e.g. Connolly, Jessup and Valacich, 1990, Phillips and Santoro, 1989), which speculated that it was more likely to be task-oriented because personalities could not be easily displayed on line. Baym claims that heavy posters wield influence by recognizing the individuality of others--using names more often than others, and reflecting others' ideas. She also writes about roles that heavy posters often hold. Her participants have told her that they look to those holding roles to use humor, to be insightful and to show a distinctive personality.

Pednet's first administrator, the one who held the job during the study period, displayed a distinctive personality in her postings. Her name was used by others more than anyone else's, and I believe people really felt they knew her. Six months after the

study period ended, a new list administrator took over. He takes a much more neutral stance in his role and does not display his personality nearly as much. The result has been a less active and less interesting list. This is anecdotal evidence; I have not been downloading messages since the study period ended, but I believe a list administrator who comes across personally results in a better list. List administrators and other heavy posters and role holders set the tone for the group; they help make sure it continues. This is a topic that should be investigated more formally.

Another topic for future reference is personal address and person reference on line. These have long been topics for researchers in communication, but to my knowledge none has probed these questions in CMC. However, both personal address and person reference become somewhat problematic on line. If you are referring to a person, for example, you do so as if he or she were not there. But in fact, the person being referred to is there--electronically though not physically. By the same token, when you address someone directly on line, you are not just addressing him or her unless you are using private e-mail. On an e-mail list or bulletin board, you address the person "in the presence of" a number of others.

On Pednet, person reference seems to follow the rule set down by Sacks and Schegloff (1979) that the minimal form of a recognitional will be used to identify who is being referred to. On Pednet, that most often means FN only, even when no quote has been included to identify the person. To my knowledge no other study of online discourse has taken on the matter of person reference directly. However, Baym does write extensively about quotes, which is a related matter on line. Quotes are a conversational strategy unique to the online environment. Because interlocutors are not co-present, a person cannot assume that others know what earlier remark his or her own contribution refers to or whose remark that was. One way to solve this dilemma is to include some piece of the previous remark as a clip or quote along with one's own message (the name of

the person quoted is often included). If quotes are not used, the later writer may need to summarize some of his or her predecessor's comments in order to make the current message intelligible. Baym points to the use of quotes as being important on her list because they helped keep information connected to the person who had supplied it and were an aid in continuity. I found them to be less so. In fact, in one case on Pednet, a participant complained about quotes being confusing. Quotes also contain the potential for distortion. A participant may quote some piece of a previous message, ignoring the total meaning. In one case on Pednet, the person quoted pointed this out to the one who had quoted her and asked him if he was "trying to pick a fight."

With only the two examples of Pednet and Baym's group, r.a.t.s., it becomes clear that the importance of quotes varies from one online group to another, and because quotes involve person reference, person reference must also vary from group to group. This may be a function of size. A large group with many individuals contributing to the same discussion and several discussions going on simultaneously may need quotes (and their often embedded person reference) to help participants keep track of what a message is referring to. On a small list like Pednet, this did not seem as necessary. The role of person reference and quotes, however, would be an interesting idea for future researchers to explore. How do person reference and quotes contribute or not contribute to the maintenance of a speech community on line?

#### Limitations of the Study

The chief limitation of this study lies in the fact that the group I chose to study was small, and therefore, its output of messages was low. Baym downloaded more than 30,000 messages from her group; I had less than 1,000. In part this was by design. I did not want to be overwhelmed by my data. I wanted to have a data set that I could go through and read all at one sitting, so that I could feel I was familiar with every message and get to know everyone who participated regularly. I believe I succeeded in doing that,

and that the detailed examples in this study attest to my control of the data. However, what I sacrificed in going this route was the sheer opportunity available in a large data set. It stands to reason that the more messages you are looking at, the more chance you have to find regularities of various kinds.

Another limitation of the study was that I chose to concentrate on the discourse alone. I did not supplement this information with surveys of the participants or interviews with them. Again, this was in part by design. Most of the earlier studies of CMC have concentrated on matters external to the discourse itself. I wanted to make the discourse the focus of my study. In doing so, however, I sacrificed the insight that participants might have given me on the list. I also sacrificed knowing more about the participants themselves--their demographic characteristics and reasons for being on the list.

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## VITA

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