

# ***Only The Grin Remained: Bodying Acts in an Adolescent Chat Space***

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## **Introduction**

Human bodies are communicative actors. Their performances contain and relay meaning, adding to, or removing from the words we use in interpersonal communication. McNally (2001) suggests that we:

Watch a child gesticulate as it struggles to form a word, observe someone gesturing while talking on the telephone, attend to the amazing range of physical motions that occur when someone speaks. Do all this and you become aware of a cascading movement of tongue, hands, larynx, facial muscles, eyes, jaws, and more (p. 76).

When we communicate verbally our bodies are never still, never totally separated from the words they form and to which they lend voice.

Previous Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) research has attempted to separate the body from the online communicative experience. In her influential book Sherry Turkle (1995) presents CMC environments - such as chat spaces - as disembodied places where participants are decoupled from the apparent one-to-one association of body and identity. Lupton (2000) alludes to escaping the human body through CMC interaction, creating a Cartesian-like dualism between the physical world and the disembodied online environment.

While the actual spaces may be decoupled from human bodies, due to the limitation of textual communication, the participants never lose actual contact with their corporeal bodies. In the physical world, bodies are required to give touch, movement, sight, and/or sound in the creation and interpretation of the text that flows between participants via the computer screens. Hanks (1990) locates the body as, "This anchoring is the establishment of spatial coordinates according to the phenomenologist, the means by which an actor takes up a position in the world (p. 132)." Participants accustomed to the use of a consciousness contained within the flesh: attempt to recreate the anchored body in online communication through simulation. The creation of bodies online is a constant recreation of the body references, as the physicality must again be recreated each time it is required to facilitate textual interaction. Or as Baym (1998) presents, the online and offline worlds are connected in complex ways.

This ethnographic study looks at how adolescent chat space participants carry their sense of a body into their online interactions by recreating bodies within the limitation of a text based chat environment. The adolescent chat space used for this study is part of a chat site consisting of 181 chatrooms, 24 of which are designated for General Chat and populated by adolescents.

Each room has a capacity of 30 participants. The total General Chat participation regularly exceeds 200 participants.

The chat site utilized is a synchronous HTML based community; the HTML functionality supports text, graphics, sound, and film and creates the potential for multi-modal communication sequences. Messages are presented as one-way communication and are posted in their entirety. Individual messages may be addressed one-to-one (private chat), one-to-many, or many-to-many. Only messages posted publicly are analyzed in this study. The site is not archived and therefore is transient. As with most of the World Wide Web, English is the lingua franca in this site although other languages are used – such as Spanish, French, and Danish – primarily for dyadic communication.

Figure 1, illustrates the use of some of these multi-modal communication features e.g., Ladies Man is utilizing an avatar, centered text, white for the nickname text, and red for the message text. (Table 1 reproduces the 5 messages from Figure 1 for easier reading.) JB23/m and Stillborn Slug are probably using the computer software defaults of a randomly selected nickname color, left alignment, and white message text.



Figure 1

Text of Figure 1		
Time of Posting	Chatroom Nickname of the Person Posting the Message and Message Addressing	Message
(05:14:50)	Ladies Man	<i>leans over and PRIVATELY whispers to ALL: im horny!</i>
(05:14:58)	-Andrew-	Good mornin' everyone. *S*
(05:15:04)	JB23/m	any one want to chat w/ a 19 male from az?
(05:15:15)	.....Sean:....	: -fades away-
(05:15:38)	Stillborn Slug	Scrotal Implosion...Webbed Catalyst in a Dogmatic Revelation. foo says to Ladies Man: Get fucked man...I didn't know

	Implosion...Webbed Catatlyst in a Dogmatic Revelation..foo says to Ladies Man	people still came around looking for that idiocy...you are obviously not what your name states
<b>Note:</b> Misspellings and grammatical errors are present in the original.		

Table 1

One General Chatroom was selected for this study based on the consistent use of public messages, and the presence of 10 or more participants around the clock. The sample was taken from September 1 - 2, 2001 with a total of 10:22:05 hours collected. The data corpus consists of 5232 messages.

## Demarcation of Bodying Acts

Hine (2000), in her look at virtual ethnography, notes “The Internet can be seen as textual twice over: as a discursively performed culture and as a cultural artifact, the technology text (p. 39).” In her comparative work on both email and memoranda, Cho (2002) found that email messages, as asynchronous communication, are a written form that exhibited characteristics of oral communication including: abbreviations, contractions, and the omission of punctuation and grammatical function words. This comparison can be carried to synchronous environments where messages are also composed on the fly at a keyboard, creating a text that is often based on oral communication conventions rather than the rigid formality of written artifacts such as academic papers. In applying this knowledge to ethnographic work in online communities, facets of both the ethnography of speaking (Bauman & Sherzer, 1974) and the ethnography of writing (Basso, 1974) are applied, and in that vane though all communication between participants is presented in writing the communicators will be referred to as “speakers” and “receiver” to acknowledge the informal style of communication.

Online communities are heterogeneous speech communities presenting locally devised and regulated speech conventions where textual discourse is the focus of the “language-culture-society-individual relationship” (Sherzer, 1992, p. 79). The creation of bodying acts in CMC, foregrounds actions that are backgrounded in face-to-face (f2f) discourse. Unlike f2f where bodies are always present, the use of bodying acts is represented in 18.1% of the data. Though present in only a limited number of the messages, the use and/or creation of bodying acts is a highly marked performative act. The adolescent participants in this group display a consistency in keying (Goffman, 1974) their bodying acts by demarcating them from regular communication by:

1. Utilization of pre-established pulldown menu actions,
2. Offsetting with an irregular punctuation mark,
3. Utilization of abbreviations/acronyms,
4. Utilizations of emoticons,
5. Placement of laughter and smiles within the message structure.

### ***Utilization of pre-established pulldown menu actions***

The software interface used for this chat space allows the participant to select between two message delivery sequences as well as pre-established bodying actions from a single

pull-down menu. The messages can be delivered to a single participant privately, and are therefore not available for analysis. One exception is the use of the private message selection but addressing to all the participants thereby creating a dual private and public message delivery at the same time, e.g.

(22:13:29) \*,VULCANHIPPIY,\*.with a cup of tea & an mp3. leans over and PRIVATELY whispers to ALL his mom used to, yes.

Messages can also be delivered publicly, with or without bodying acts. Messages delivered publicly without a bodying act statement use the default, “says to” addressing, as seen in Figure 1/Table 1.

The selection of bodying acts from a pre-established pull-down menu makes this class of actions the easiest to use, as there is no required creative act by the participant. The speaker selects their menu choice with a click of the mouse and then types the message to the recipient. However the use of the pull-down menu does increase cognitive load requiring the participant to remember what possible selections are available and move to the mouse to make a selection over the continuation of standard typing activities that interrupts the stream of consciousness flow of words exhibited by most chatroom participants. Therefore this performance is limited to 15.6% of those using actions. Examples of pull-down menu use are [misspellings and grammatical errors are present in the original]:

(22:36:58) \*Tashi\* kisses ice on the lips. hey hun

(01:26:58) \*\*Baby Angel\*\* pulls ROBBY close and gives them a hug oh my gosh are you ok

(02:21:50) \*~\*MIZ\_666\*~\* hands a friendship rose to ALL so long to you all

### ***Offsetting with an irregular punctuation mark***

The use of textual bodying acts within the message structure is often demarcated by the use of irregular punctuation marks, irregular in the sense that use in standard written communication is unusual. This keying alerts the reader that something different and out of the ordinary is encased within the symmetrical enclosure. Most commonly asterisks are used, e.g. [Translation of abbreviation and emoticons is enclosed in brackets at the end of the message]

(19:55:31) chaerbear \* nods to sleep \*

(20:55:05) \*,VULCANHIPPIY,\*.with a cup of tea & an mp3. says to chaerbear I'll have to go undercover and find out \*S\* [smile]

(23:18:48) ..riley.. \*sings\* just the good ol boys

Dashes are also used, most often for solo performances and self-referents e.g.

(21:56:11) ..social outkast.. -walks in-

(23:26:34) ..riley.. -dances around-

(05:15:15) ..:::Sean:::.. -fades away- (as seen in Figure 1 & Table 1)

Less frequently tildes are used, e.g.

(20:19:37) \*,VULCANHIPPIY,\*.with a cup of tea & an mp3. ~ducks & catches~

(01:03:24) ...prelude... thats because it costs money ~rolls eyes~ thats so lame

(03:35:12) secretly hushed ~F~ [frown]

Bodying acts are infrequently presented without demarcation, usually for text messages that are exclusively dedicated to the use of standard chat abbreviation or emoticons, e.g.

(20:20:45) - forgotten sacrifice - :oP [open mouth with tongue hanging out on the left side]

(20:46:43) -satans lil helper- lol [laughs out loud]

(22:49:32) Marina sighs

It should be noted that many of these same punctuational demarcations are utilized in the representation of emotional states, such as the bold statement *\*is bored\**, which are outside the purview of this study.

### ***Utilization of abbreviations/acronyms***

One of the earliest observations about the style of online communication was the extensive use of abbreviation and emoticons - Abbreviation are shortened forms of standard actions, or phrases, while emoticons are textual representations of facial features and actions (Danet, 2001). These forms are both somewhat standardized across social interaction on the Internet. Many webpages are devoted to listing all of the possible permutations while several attempt to catalogue the most commonly used variation, including those posted by www.ker95.com in their Chat 101 series (www.ker95.com, 2000).

Abbreviations range from standard to unusual with variations on laughter and smiles being the most common; several common examples are listed in Table 2. In this data corpus 30.0% of those using bodying acts utilized abbreviations/acronyms.

<b>Abbreviation/Acronym</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
F	Frown
L	Laugh
LMAO	Laughing my ass off
LOL	Laugh out loud
ROTFLMA	Rolling on the floor laughing my ass off
S	Smile

W	Wink
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Table 2

### ***Utilizations of emoticons***

The use of emoticons has often been suggested as a way to mitigate the lack of visual feedback found in text only communication (Witmer & Katzman, 1998). They are the only bodying act in this study that attempt to recreate a visual representation of the body using textual elements. Thereby renewing that “age-old tension between ‘showing’ and ‘telling,’ between pictures and words” (Danet, 2001, p. 62). In the creation of bodying acts emoticons are the ‘showing’ of the action.

<b>Emoticon</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
:) or :-)	Smile
:( or :-(	Frown
; ) or ;-)	Wink
:P or :P with other variants	Sticking tongue out

Table 3

In this data 11.1% of those using bodying acts used emoticons in their performance. This figure is consistent with Witmer and Katzman’s (1998) finding that emoticons were used in 13.2% of the IRC (Internet Relay Chat) messages they reviewed for their statistical study of graphical accents (emoticons and articons).

### ***Placement of laughter and smiles within the message structure***

Abbreviations/acronyms and full-form presentation of laughter and smiles are usually presented in either the beginning or the end of the message statement. In both locations the act underlines or mitigates the stark seriousness of the text only message, e.g.

(20:55:05) \*,VULCANHIPPY,\*.with a cup of tea & an mp3. says to chaerbear I'll have to go undercover and find out \*S\*

(00:59:53) ...prelude... hmm ok lol [laugh out loud]

(04:18:35) .angel.scabbed.wings. \*lol\* bar ave [laugh out loud]

Sometimes laughter is embedded within the message structure allowing a flow much more similar to f2f communication, e.g.

(22:28:07) ..social outkast.. really, hmmm, tommarow you can have him, heh, thats if he comes backbut he has toooo

(00:12:53) \_ChAoS\_cAnDy\*punkaholik\* says to ~Twilight~ Manitoba...i been from east coast to west....i wasnt born here but i live here for some reason unkown to me \*l\* i got a good job and some good friends here thou [laugh]

(04:48:02) .angel.scabbed..wings. oh that pic \*lol\* if i can find it i will [laugh out loud]

Less often smiles are embedded within the message structure, e.g.

(20:12:52) Gummy bear says to Magic Knight There delicious %100 fat free \*S\*.. And contains lots of energy

(21:40:31) ricka i just like this ip thing :) fun seeing all the people trying to get in my comp

(05:16:55) starbrightsal says to BiDude4BiLadyTraveler Oh...\*S\* I don't have one of those....

More rarely mixed forms (emoticons, etc.) are shown with laughter being both embedded and beginning/ending a message often creating an emotional echo or a gradient of increasing emotion, e.g.

(21:52:10) ××-[T].[C].[S].[C]-×× ×CybeptedSoul Collector× -laffs-Anyways im gonna fuck off now.....knew they'd come here!-lol- peace n luv

(04:16:28) .angel.scabbed..wings. actually jordan \*lol\* its the yukon thats most known for the drunks \*lol\*

(06:07:21) Riff Raff says to Smooth Criminal Exactly. And if I was going to drink American, I'd go get some Kool Aid. LoL, tastes the same! LMAO!!!

## Embodied Performance

Online Embodied performance calls upon the receiver's knowledge of their own and others physical actions in conversation. Created performances can be quite elaborate though often the creations are made, as discussed above, through a single word or abbreviation/acronym creating a commonly experienced physical movement.

Bodying acts draw upon the audience's experience with three types of physical performance:

1. Affect/Emotional Expression
2. Gesture
3. Stage Direction/Stage Business

### Affect/Emotional Expression

In f2f communication affect/emotional expressions are normally involuntary signals (Tomkins, 1962). Ekman (1999) says:

It is reasonable to call these signals "expressions" because they are part of an emotion: They are a sign that an emotion is occurring. I have maintained that a

hallmark of an emotion is that it has a signal, in face and/or voice and/or bodily movement (p. 50).

In cyberspace this otherwise involuntary signal becomes wholly voluntary, as the conscious decision to type the words that reflect the affect must be made by the participant. It is not uncommon to see the acronym LOL [laugh out loud] followed by a notation that the participant is laughing “real time” in their physical form. The marking of real time laughter within the chat space as different than purely performative textual laughter indicates that the affect and emotional expression used in a chat space can be considered referential expression - in normal textual conversation the participant is referring to an emotion that may not actually be felt (Ekman, 1999).

Often the body created through the performance is one that feigns disinterest or ennui textually while soliciting additional contact from other participants to relieve the embodied person’s boredom, e.g.

(19:55:31) chaerbear \*nods to sleep\*

(21:41:03) ×-×-[T].[C].[S].[C]-×-× ×CybeptedSoul Collector× -yawns-fuck man i cant beleive no one paged me yet holy shit...and its a saturday too

(22:51:33) ricka -yawns-

(22:53:46) welchkin -spits-

Tomkins (1962) discusses that the face and head are the primary sites of the performance of affect. The following chart was adapted from (Nuttall, 2001) who codified Tomkins (1962; 1963) in developing this short taxonomy of facial affect.

<b>Tomkins Affect Theory</b>	
<b>Positive Affects</b>	<b>Facial Expression</b>
Interest - Excitement	Eyebrows down, look, listen
Enjoyment - Joy	Smile, grin, laughter
<b>Neutral Affect</b>	
Surprise - Startle	Eyebrows up, eyes blink
<b>Negative Affect</b>	
Distress - Anguish	Cry, rhythmic sobbing, arched eyebrows
Fear - Terror	Frozen stare, face pale, cold, sweaty, hair erect
Anger - Rage	Frown, clenched jaw, red face
Shame - Humiliation	Eyes down, head down and averted, blush
Disgust	Lower lip raised and protruded, head forward and down, rolling eyes

**Table 4**

Expressions of Positive Affects found in this data set have been enumerated previously in examples of smiles and laughter.

Neutral Affects, e.g.

(22:08:47) genie c y b e r k i n g z -blinx-

Negative Affects are far more commonly presented and more varied than those shown in the previous categories, e.g.

(21:27:10) chaerbear OUCH! Tha hurt...now kiss it better! \*sniff\*

(22:12:07) welchkin -rolls eyes-

(22:23:48) ..social outkast.. Erica he told me he wanted to go home and thats why he dropped me off...the stupid fucker isnt even there :( gosh dammit!! -crys loudly-

(22:50:22) Marina no, really sigh. watch. Sighs again. See?

(23:10:43) Revelations raWr, download taking too long...\*frowns\*

(23:21:03) ..riley.. says to Revelations \*gasp\*

(23:59:06) Minty I need to go back to italy \*whines\*

## **Gesture**

Gestures are neuromuscular bodily activities that can function in semiotic, spontaneous to conventional gestures, and linguistic, fully conventionalized signs and vocal articulations and communication roles (Armstrong, Stokoe, & Wilcox, 1995). Kendon (1992) states that the use of “(g)estures such as lifting the arms as a request to be picked up or pointing as a way of referring to objects develop before speech, but gesture become more complex as speech develops” (p. 187). Gestures elicit some expected response from the communication partner – the child lifts it’s arms and the mother picks it up (Feyereisen, 1999). Krauss & Hadar (1999) surmise that one reason that gestures are so often ascribed communicative functions may be that it is not obvious what other functions they might serve.

Ekman (1999) outlines three types of gestures:

1. Emblems are used with speech to add a second communicative layer or to make the conversation more interesting.
2. Illustrators are movements that illustrate the accompanying speech. “They are intimately related to the speaker’s speech on a moment-to-moment basis, usually augmenting what is said, but sometimes contradicting it” (p. 47).
3. Manipulators are movements of one part of the speaker’s body or face such as “stroking, pressing, scratching, licking, biting, sucking, etc another part of the body or face” (p. 49).

By their nature as conscious communicative acts, all textual gestures in chat spaces are emblems under the Ekman typology. For those that perform bodying acts, the actions themselves add to their conversation making a more varied and interesting message structure. Illustrators are the most common form of gesture found within the data, e.g.

(20:27:26) ricka says to Magic Knight -shrugs-

(21:16:05) ( D A Z E D ) Oh, looks like we have a winner. -points to Grace Kelly-

(21:22:48) \*,VULCANHIPPIY,\*.with a cup of tea & an mp3. says to chaerbear \*high-five\*

(22:16:03) This is for life:I mean how are you hunny.. I already now who you are.....  
Girlfriend -nudges-

(23:21:26) Revelations says to ..riley.. \*flick you off\*

(00:07:47) Jay says to Minty only the first time \*nods\*

(00:10:44) ×shimmer girl× says to Terra -hugs- night weirdo.. love ya!

As chat space communication is usually dyadic at the minimum and potentially large group, the performance of bodying acts requires conscious manipulation of the data entry equipment to produce the typed text. The deliberate act of typing thereby lifts the unconscious stimulation or response to non-verbal stimulation that appears consistent with these types of acts therefore the use of manipulators is rare. In this data set no examples of manipulators were found.

### **Stage Direction/Stage Business**

The final class of bodying acts addressed here is that of stage direction/stage business. This class of bodying act performance is the most creative and requires the most attentiveness from both the performer and the audience. Stage direction/stage business bodying acts are the textual execution of an action or group of actions that add to and underline the messages within the performance. As with a theatrical play performance the elaboration of business and the byplay are outgrowths of the action. Stage directions/stage business (Clurman, 1972)

...clarifies, intensifies, and gives body to what is sometimes referred to as the plays subtext. It gives texture and vivacity to the play as spectacle. It is often hyperbolic and fanciful. As with everything else, business may be overdone, become too profuse (pp. 121 –122).

In performing this type of bodying act the participant and the audience collaborate in the maintenance of the speakers created personae. Speaker and receiver routinely exchange roles as they continue the performance establishing a tacit protective collaboration among the participants (Goffman, 1982). In fact this class of action requires “the presentational rendition of those works before an audience” (Bauman, 1992, p. 41).

Chatroom stage directions/stage business shares elements with mime as a performance medium in that both evoke the everyday world by using extraordinary means (Royce, 1992) and both are dependent on unspoken action to convey their meanings. Whereas traditional stage direction/stage business can be performed during or apart from spoken dialogue, mime and chatroom stage directions/stage business are always performed silently and separately from any spoken word. Also like mime the writer imagines the actions of the writer/director/actor and imagines the reactions of the address to the action all the while imagining the reactions of the audience to the performance.

Following is a sequence of chatroom messages from the data set that typify the use of stage directions/stage business in the performance within the chatroom, with a discussion of the sequence. All misspellings, grammatical errors, etc have been maintained from the original.

<b>Time of Posting</b>	<b>Chatroom Nickname of the Person Posting the Message and Message Addressing</b>	<b>Message</b>
(23:39:03 )	LayDeeBugg	*plops down onto couch*
(23:39:40 )	§SmilingSunshine§	AH! You plopped down on my foot! *LOL*
(23:40:01 )	LayDeeBugg	Oops..sorry...LOL
(23:40:59 )	§SmilingSunshine§ says to LayDeeBugg	I don't think you are.. *LOL* I think you meant it...
(23:41:03 )	LayDeeBugg	*starts to nod off*
(23:41:39 )	§SmilingSunshine§ says to LayDeeBugg	*nudges ya with my poor little foot* no sleeping in this lively exciting room... *L*
(23:42:09 )	LayDeeBugg	Lively? *looks around* Are we in the same room? LOL
(23:44:52 )	LayDeeBugg	*throws some water balloons around the room and watches to see who they hit*
(23:45:16 )	§SmilingSunshine§	ACK!!! Water ballons on one side and lameness on the other *LOL*
(23:45:44 )	LayDeeBugg	LOL @ SmilingSunshine
(23:45:57 )	§SmilingSunshine§	he he he.. *S*
(23:48:49 )	LayDeeBugg	*blows some bubbles and watches them float around the room*
(23:49:05 )	Monkey Flavoured Sauce Pan	WOO bubbles!!!
(23:49:28 )	§SmilingSunshine§	AAHHHHHHH!!!!!!! BUBBLES!!!!!!! *running around like a psycho trying to pop them all*
(23:49:47 )	§SmilingSunshine§	*chanting to myself* Can't let them hit the floor
(23:49:59 )	Monkey Flavoured Sauce Pan	*screams in a mad fit* NO! Leave the bubbles.....
(23:50:07 )	LayDeeBugg	*scowls at SmilingSunshine* I'll teach you to pop my bubbles.....*chases after her*
(23:50:44 )	§SmilingSunshine§	AHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!! *screaming and trying to pop and run at the same time*

(23:51:02 )	LayDeeBugg	*catches up with SmilingSunshine and bops her on head with pillow*
(23:51:52 )	§SmilingSunshine§	NO! I'm falling.. falling... into the deep abyss of the shag carpet.....
(23:53:01 )	LayDeeBugg	*loses sight of SmilingSunshine* Oh my gosh...call out the search party... *searches through the thick carpet* *calling out* Sunshine!!! Where are you?
(23:54:02 )	§SmilingSunshine§	*gurgling sounds coming from the center of the carpet* (on a side note, you know you've reached popularity when you're the one making gurgling sounds as you're trapped in shag carpet)....
(23:54:53 )	LayDeeBugg	*hears gurgling and runs over to find a hand sticking up outta the carpet* *grabs hand and pulls* Sunshine! There you are....
(23:56:02 )	§SmilingSunshine§	Oh girl you got me just in time.... *picking something out of my hair and calling out*... Anyone lose their keys?
(00:01:20 )	§SmilingSunshine§	Well all... Farewell.. the bubble popping fanatic that got lost briefly in the shag carpet is now taking leave.....

Table 5

## Discussion

LayDeeBugg, a female, enters the chatroom and plops down on the couch. This action creates a sense of relaxation and familiarity with the space and the people. SmilingSunshine, also a female, complains that LayDeeBugg plopped in her foot. LayDeeBugg apologizes. SmilingSunshine refuses the apology saying, “I think you meant it.”

LayDeeBugg shows her boredom by “starting to nod off” as she lies there on the couch. SmilingSunshine nudges her awake “with my poor little foot,” implying that she was using the injured limb that LayDeeBugg fell/stepped on, saying “no sleeping in this lively room.” LayDeeBugg “looks around “ and wonders if she and SmilingSunshine are in the same room.

LayDeeBugg starts a game to change the pace and draw others into her circle. She “throws some water balloons around the room and watches to see who they hit.” This invites others to self identify as having been hit and thereby joining the game. SmilingSunshine is the only one who responds...she screams and laughs. Both LayDeeBugg and SmilingSunshine respond to the game with laughter.

LayDeeBugg then “blows some bubbles and watches them float around the room.” Again inviting others to join the game and to talk to her. This time two participants respond, Monkey Flavored Sauce Pan – a male - and SmilingSunshine. Monkey Flavored yells, “WOO” and SmilingSunshine yells and runs around like a psycho trying to pop them all” chanting to herself “Can’t let them hit the floor.” Monkey Flavored “screams in a mad fit” for SmilingSunshine to leave the bubbles alone.

LayDeeBugg “scowls at SmilingSunshine” and “chases after her’ to make her stop popping bubbles. SmilingSunshine screams and runs away from LayDeeBugg all the while still popping bubbles.

LayDeeBugg catches SmilingSunshine and “bops her on the head with a pillow.” The force of the blow drives SmilingSunshine down into “the deep abyss of the shag carpet.” LayDeeBugg loses sight of SmilingSunshine as she sinks and attempts to search through the carpeting for her and calling out for her as she searches. SmilingSunshine makes a gurgling sound, which is heard from the center of the carpet. SmilingSunshine also breaks the fourth wall with an aside to the audience about the perceived popularity of someone gurgling while trapped in shag carpeting. LayDeeBugg hears the gurgling and sees a hand sticking out of the carpeting and pulls SmilingSunshine to safety. Once back in safety SmilingSunshine pulls keys out of her hair and asks who has lost them. Finally SmilingSunshine bids farewell from “the bubble popping fanatic that got lost briefly in the shag carpeting.”

## Conclusion

When chat space participants utilize bodying acts they foreground the actions that are most often backgrounded in f2f conversations. These actions make the body a focal point separated from the text of the message by demarcation, positioned to optimize the impact of the message, and crafted to impart the meaning of the writer/director/actor.

Online social spaces allow for the decoupling of public writer/director/actor personae from the physical body via the limitations of textual messaging (Foster, 2000). However like Hanks (1990) comments, the “body space is not merely a physical place but a socially mediated field of interaction” (p. 24). The social mediation of the body continues through the participant’s interactions via CMC allowing participants to “define themselves, locate themselves, and coordinate themselves relative to a social world” (Hanks, 1990, p. 24).

Additionally the unique qualities that allow a participant to recreate a body through textual means limits their creation to their own chat space personae. One participant cannot create a textual body for another. While they may refer to the physicality of another participant the second body is not created and performed until or unless that participant acknowledges the creation, e.g.

1. Tim hands a rose to Susan
2. Susan says to Tim Thank you for the rose. \*takes the rose and puts it in water\*

This simple sequence creates and accepts/expands the creation of a second textual body in this dyadic conversation. Had Susan’s response been to deny the existence of a rose in cyberspace or to ignore Tim’s message then the second body would not have been created. Markham (1998) in an ethnographic study of heavy users of various text-based systems found:

Most people I met online perceive self to be a performance controlled by the sender of the message. This perception is no doubt strengthened by the fact that, for many users, viewing and revising their utterances and choosing facial expressions or degree of spontaneous responses – chuckle, gasp, roll[ing] on the floor laughing (ROFL) – is a newly discovered and seemingly limitless ability” (p. 125).

Finally the creation of textual bodies is a playful act in a bifurcated meaning as in “child’s play” and play as in theatrical performance. The playful use of language in these performances allows the participants to distinguish themselves, to state things in less overt terms, creating interesting and amusing social interactions (Danet, 2001).

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