
'Noobs' and 'chicks' on Animation Portal: power and status in a community of practice

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Abstract: Researchers interested in knowledge communication within communities of practice tend to focus on tasks, skills, or the shared interests of the group, while relegating other aspects of interaction and communication to the 'cultural context'. But from a participant perspective, knowledge communication includes knowledge about group culture and identity. Attention to participant perspectives and motivations provides a better understanding of what counts as knowledge and how knowledge communication is accomplished. This paper analyses communication within a voluntary community of practice oriented towards a hobby activity. Animation is a subgenre of amateur animated online videos. Participants in the animation subculture are primarily US-based young men who interact on a variety of websites that offer video hosting and bulletin board services. In this paper, I analyse discussion posts to the website animationportal.com. In addition to the specific cultural context of the animation subculture, participants' identities and understandings of other social contexts (such as the culture of online video production in general) influence their interaction and knowledge communication. While issues of belonging and culture are likely more explicit in voluntary, leisure-oriented communities of practice such as the animation subculture, these aspects of community participation are important to consider in all communities of practice.

Keywords: Animation; video; web communities; knowledge communication; culture; communities of practice; gender.

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1 Introduction

In 'Communities of practice: legitimacy not choice', Davies (2005) criticises the concept of Communities of Practice (CoPs) in the analysis of linguistic communities. She suggests that the theory of CoP does not adequately consider issues of power

and hierarchy in such groups, and that the theory could be strengthened by borrowing concepts from social network theory. In their response to Davies (2005), Eckert and Wenger (2005) argue that the theory does account for power issues. They suggest that Davies' conception of hierarchy is limited and assumes a particular type of power structure within CoPs, something which ought to be discovered through empirical investigation.

This debate on the issue of power in CoPs highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of the model. The concept of CoPs, as discussed in Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) is appealing because of its attention to connections between learning, meaning, and identity. But Davies correctly identifies its weakness in addressing issues of power, hierarchy, and hegemony. Responses to Davies' critique, both from Eckert and Wenger (2005) and later from Moore (2006), have tended to focus on the issue of power structures and struggles *within* the CoP. These leave aside a second part of Davies' critique concerning the relationship between a CoP and its members to individuals, groups, and communities outside of the CoP. As she says, "with the current exegesis of this theory, it is not clear how relationships between local and global concerns can be articulated" (p.564). In his review of "four seminal works" concerning CoPs, Cox (2005) similarly notes that "the relationship between communities or between communities and other entities as a source of change and conflict is not considered, a critical failing" (p.529).

In this article, I focus on two sources of power relations: those within a CoP, and those that derive meaning from outside of the CoP. Using an analysis of a CoP formed around a hobby activity, I examine interconnections between power, identity, and knowledge communication within the CoP. I demonstrate that issues of power emerge in internal jockeying for position and communication of group norms, but also draw on power relations originating outside of the CoP.

2 Methodology

The analysis for this article is based primarily on content analysis of postings to a website known as the Animation Portal. This site provides resources for people interested in a particular type of video animation. My sample consists of the first year's worth of posts to the Animation Help forum within the Animation Portal (totalling approximately 600 posts).

I use the actual online names of participants in what follows for several reasons. First, Animation Portal is a publically available forum, with membership required only to post, not to read posts. Second, because of this, and because the site does not restrict search engines, all of the text I quote is easily locatable through online searches. Changing the names of the participants would not provide protection for their identities. Third, most members view themselves as artists, and use their online names in connection with their original artistic productions. Their participation on the forum comprises part of their identity as artists online. I have also left typos intact in all posts. Many 'misspellings' and typos are deliberate, and even when accidental, can provide insight into group practice and expectations. As such, typos and other communication 'errors' in website posts are important in my analysis.

I analysed posts from some of the other Animutation Portal forums when these were necessary to understand the context of communication in the Animutation Help posts. (Since participants post to many different forums on a day-to-day basis depending on topic, conversations sometimes overlap with others and extend into other forums.) I selected Animutation Help in order to focus on posts that pertained most directly to the group enterprise, the creation of animutation videos. Two other popular forums – General Chat and Animutation Talk – pertain more to identity and the formation and maintenance of relationships between participants. Animutation Help is the expected location for knowledge communication and mutual assistance. My aim is to demonstrate how, even in the most technically oriented section of the site, knowledge communication is importantly tied to issues of identity, power, and hierarchy.

3 Animutation

The increasing availability of resources for online content production (greater bandwidth, new hosting services, increasingly easy-to-use software, *etc.*) enables the creation of new genres of multimedia production, and facilitates the creation of new subcultures devoted to the consumption and production of these new genres. One such subculture surrounds a particular type of animated video called ‘animutation’.

The term animutation was coined by Neil Cicierega, a then 14-year-old boy in the USA, who in 2001 created several videos using Flash software (created by Macromedia and now owned by Adobe). The popularity of his particular style of video sparked several imitators, who originally termed their videos ‘fanimations’ in homage to Cicierega. Creators of animutations now comprise a fairly well-bounded and active online group. While several of them participate on, and post videos to, various video hosting sites such as albinoblacksheep.com and newgrounds.com, over the past two years they have created their own website devoted to the creation and appreciation of animutations, www.animutationportal.com.

Animutations have emerged as a particularly well-defined genre of animated video. In a long-standing forum thread, Animutation Portal participants frequently discuss what constitutes an animutation. One participant even created a scale, frequently cited by other participants, with which to rank how closely a video adheres to the animutation style. Animutations take the form of a music video, usually playing one song all the way through, accompanied by images and text. Most animutationers are from English-speaking countries. (The largest groups appear to be from the USA and Canada, but one particularly well-known member is from New Zealand.) However, the songs are usually in a language other than English. An important animutation practice consists of creating sound-alike English ‘fake lyrics’ (also sometimes called by the group ‘mondegreens’, although mondegreen has a slightly different meaning elsewhere) which are then displayed on screen in time to the music.

Other important elements of animutations include crude cut-and-paste style animation created from existing images gleaned from online sources. Many of these images are of semi-famous figures in popular culture, or of characters from children’s television programmes. Several such figures are considered *de rigeur* inclusions, with their absence

decreasing the likelihood that the group will consider the resulting video an animutation. The most important of these is images of Colin Mochrie, a Canadian comedian best known for his appearances on the US comedy improv show ‘Whose Line is it Anyway?’ and, more recently, in advertisements as the Nabisco ‘snack fairy’. Nearly every animutation includes at least one image of Colin Mochrie, and several of the most well-known and best-liked animutation examples focus primarily on Colin Mochrie as a character.

4 The Animutation portal community of practice

The group of participants on Animutation Portal constitute a CoP as defined by Wenger (1998), as demonstrated by their mutual engagement in a shared enterprise (the production, dissemination, and appreciation of animutation videos), and by their embodiment of most of the ‘indicators’ listed by Wenger in *Communities of Practice* (pp.125–126). These include “sustained mutual relationships,” “shared ways of engaging in doing things together,” “rapid flow of information and propagation of information,” “mutually defining identities,” “local lore”, *etc.* (Wenger, 1998, p.125).

The Animutation Portal includes several sections. It provides a hosting service for videos, which participants can also then rank and comment on. There is also an image bank that participants use for video creation. Participants also contribute to a wiki, styled after Wikipedia, with informational entries about videos, video creators, popular culture references contained in videos, *etc.* Finally, the Animutation Portal includes a set of bulletin-board-style forums for participant interaction. There are six topically divided forums: General Chat, Images, Animutation Talk, Animutation Help, Contest Forum, and Suggestion/Complaint Box. Each forum is subdivided into topics or threads. The General Chat and Animutation Talk sections are the most active, with 4836 and 3439 posts respectively (from the site’s inception in mid-2005 through May 2007).

Animutation Help has a relatively low number of posts, at 1239 total. When combined with Images, the other forum most closely devoted to video production activities, these two forums (total of 3638 posts) are greatly outnumbered by the two forums devoted to chat: General Chat and Animutation Talk (total of 8275 posts). This demonstrates that much of what occurs on the site has less to do with producing videos than it does with maintaining the community itself. This is likely more true of leisure-oriented CoPs than it is of work-based CoPs. However, it is worth noting that even in work-based settings, potential CoP members might find membership itself, with the concomitant identity change, knowledge access, and social capital that membership potentially affords, more important than the joint enterprise for which the CoP purportedly exists. For the individual participant, then, community cultural knowledge may be as important, or even more important and meaningful than technical or project-related knowledge.

5 Animutation cultural norms

One form of cultural knowledge consists of the norms of the group. Animutationers demonstrate and negotiate numerous cultural norms through their site postings. One particularly important norm is that of helpfulness to other members, especially to newbies. This runs counter to many other similar groups online, as well as to expectations

based on the demographics of the group, most of whom are young males. Other similar online groups often engage in hazing or harassment of newcomers (Kendall, 2002). Animationers tolerate fairly preemptory requests, even when received from people unknown to the group, and even when the questions require some work to answer. However, patterns of request responses, and language use in both requests and responses, indicate that Animation Portal participants recognise differences in status among them, and that high-status participants have control over others' participation and status.

For instance, in a post on 20 November 2005, a relative newcomer asks for technical information. In a subject heading (which becomes the thread title), warioman asks, "can an mp3 be ripped from web site," and adds in the body of the post "if so rip mp3 from <http://tmndamacy.ytmnsfw.com/>". There are several reasons that a more experienced animationer might decline to answer such a question. First, it concerns a very basic set of skills. Many people, especially young people, know how to capture video files from a website. Second, the question is phrased more as a command than a request. Third, warioman is not requesting instructions for doing it himself. He wants someone else to do it for him. This violates self-proficiency norms common in the do-it-yourself world of online content creation, which in turn borrows much of its ideology from the old hacker ethic (Raymond, 1991; see esp. the entry on 'RTFM', p.307).

Yet the response warioman gets from alex_cameron is a simple "Yes, I have it hosted right here on my site!" and then a link supplying the file to warioman. Another participant, MrSeiko, provides instructions for how to do the download. Several other participants then discuss other methods for downloading songs from websites. None take offense at the request or the form it takes.

In a similar thread, AstroSteve solicits advice on creating fake lyrics:

"... no matter how much I listen to this, I can't quite 'hear' any of those English lyrics everyone else seems to be able to come up with easily. I was wondering if a few people out here would like to take a listen to it and maybe help me out with finding some lyrics?"

In response, AstroSteve receives both moral support and information about group norms from archmage:

"really, idon't think anyone comes up with mondegreens easily ... also, mondegreens aren't mandatory or anything, they're completely optional..."

Another participant also provides an extensive essay on the topic of fake lyrics, including both aesthetic commentary and advice on how to proceed. After several other animationers express opinions on whether or not fake lyrics are important in the genre, and how they ought to be integrated, dpbjinc posts his own version of fake lyrics for the entire song, running to approximately 20 stanzas, representing a considerable amount of work. This demonstrates that while most videos are individual creations (although several group collaborations also exist), the animationers view the furtherance of the genre as a group enterprise.

Participants will also take the time to elicit further information when someone does not supply enough to clarify the question. For instance, in an ongoing thread about filesize, heartless_mushroom says:

“My animation is 1:48 minutes and it is like 8 megs (WTF?)
i changed the quality of the bitmaps and it only got bigger (?!?)
I see it big for being a small animation
what else can i do?”

papaSKROBE replies: “The final, compiled .SWF is that large? Or the project file, the .FLA?” and Mudi asks several questions to determine the answer to the dilemma:

“What sound compression are you using?
How many large images do you have? How many animated GIFs do you have?
Have you tried various settings with the bitmap settings?”

The conversation continues in this way through back and forth posts among several participants who supply numerous suggestions for reducing file size.

Only newbie questions that violate group norms get sanctioned. For instance, when lcas posts “any way to get flash free? not a trial i mean,” responses are joking and sarcastic. Animubob responds “I could tell you, but then I would have to fishpoke you.” papaSKROBE posts:

“Well yeah.
First, you get some sort of illegal downloading programme, such as KaZaA.
Then, after a few simple clicks, you wait for a few hours for the FBI to show up, and get hauled off to jail.
Before you go to jail, you put about 50 bucks in a high-yield mutual fund account. By the time you get out of prison, you’ll have plenty of money for overpriced Adobe programs.”

After a side conversation emerges, lcas comes back with a post ‘this got off topic’ and then a third post ‘anyway to get flash free AND legally?’ Despite the continued norm violations (including the two posts in a row for no demonstrably good reason), this yields actual useful tips from users who suggest buying older versions available used, or finding cheaper similar programmes.

With their very matter-of-fact responses, Animation Portal participants demonstrate group norms formed in distinction to those with which they would be familiar elsewhere. First there is the norm of helping newbies, regardless of how clueless or preemptory they appear. Second, several norms regarding the ethics and aesthetics of animation receive extended discussion in these exchanges. Particularly interesting are the norms regarding intellectual property. Animationers display no qualms about ‘ripping’ music and images from the web. (While their use of images might pass muster as ‘fair use’, their creation of videos using entire songs certainly would not.) Yet, several threads on Animation Help demonstrate their scorn for people who attempt to obtain free software, despite several comments to the effect that Adobe’s Flash program is, as papaSKROBE notes above ‘overpriced’.

While demonstrating helpfulness, participants also display and note each others’ relative status in the group. The ability to provide technical information itself demonstrates knowledge, one source of status. However, Animation Portal participants also measure status by number of posts, and by the greater degree of power deriving from moderator status on the forum. Number of posts are tracked, displayed with

the poster name, and result in status-denoting phrases also attached to participant names. One participant has a repeated 'signature' that keeps track of everyone with over 1000 postings.

In forum posts, participants have also noticed when their status raises a notch based on their number of posts. For instance, in a post thanking another participant for help with a technical problem, Hibiscus Kazeneko commented with great enthusiasm on her change in status to 'Old Blue Scot' (the phrases attached to different levels of status are taken from well-known animation videos):

"OMFG, I'm an Old Blue Scot now? YATANE!!! THIS CALLS FOR EXCESS ATTACHED FILES!"

In the above conversations, the people supplying most of the answers – alex_cameron, MrSeiko, papaSKROBE, and Mudi – are higher status users than the questioners such as warioman and lcas. In addition, MrSeiko and Mudi are site moderators, and papaSKROBE became a site moderator sometime later. Moderators' words on the site carry more weight, and serve to educate newcomers into group norms. In contrast to some other online forums, the moderators on the Animation Portal are fairly heavy-handed in exercising their authority. Mudi often edits other people's posts to remove material deemed offensive, and also summarily ends threads when he determines they have become counterproductive. This gives him considerable power over others' contributions to the site, power that others can acquire only through the existing moderators (as occurred when they gave papaSKROBE moderator status). This supports Davies' discussion of the gate-keeping role of higher status members of CoPs (2005, pp.571–572).

6 Language use as status markers

Despite the norm of helping newbies and others with questions, those asking the questions usually adhere to particular question-asking practices that are directly connected to differences in status. Questioners often identify themselves as newbies, are deferential or complimenting to higher status participants, and sometimes even demonstrate their debased status by deforming their language. In contrast to more experienced users, newbies often use 'leet speak' and other distorted forms of language to indicate their lower status.

For instance, Potato_Killer posts the following request for information:

"hum i'm currently trying to make an animation and, although i started using flash like a week ago, it goes quite well, except one thing: backgrounds. It seems like i'm unable to use an image as a background and i dunno why... it always gets in front of my sprites!

Help a noob and feel great. You may be rewarded with some crappy 1st-time animation!!!"

The opening 'hum' textualises a verbal hesitation, indicating the 'speaker's' knowledge that he is imposing on others. Also, while the lower case i's could be read as simple typos, in my analysis of posts on this site, newbies and people asking questions were much more likely to use lower case i's and other ungrammatical word usage than higher status people providing answers, thus literally belittling themselves. Potato_Killer also

specifically identifies himself as a ‘noob’ and indicates that his first animation will be ‘crappy’. On the other hand, he takes pains to indicate that he’s not a completely clueless newbie. He does this both through asking a very specific question, indicating he’s done some work on his own, and by asserting that his work ‘goes quite well’ despite only having used flash for a week.

A more extreme case of debased language from a newbie questioner appears in the subject line (and thread title) of SeniorDuck: “Hoow u mayk dem move???” who goes on to explain in the body of the message:

“How do you make the pictures move, like Badget’s Spinnin for example (In the images section)???”

I analyse this type of deliberately idiotic language use as a form of abasement. When Mudi, a moderator, requests clarification in very grammatical terms:

“Animated GIFs? Are you asking how to make animated gifs or how to import them into your Flash?”

SeniorDuck replies with an even more exaggerated idiotic stance in ‘leet speak’:

“HOW 2 MAYK LOLOLOLOLOLOLOLOLOL!!!!!!1 3Y3 4M T3H
NOOB!!!!!!!!!!!!111”

(The last phrase translates as ‘Eye (I) am the noob’.) SeniorDuck’s non-informational response may indicate that he does not even understand the question. It certainly demonstrates his recognition that he is a complete newbie. This garners him a helpful response from Mudi:

“Erm, well, you can export animated gifs from Flash, and there are other programs but I usually use Flash... I don’t know how else to respond to that...”

Mudi clearly does not know quite what SeniorDuck is asking. Also, his textualised hesitation (‘Erm, well’,) indicates that the tone of the question still bothers him. However, he responds with what help he can, and SeniorDuck then relaxes into somewhat more grammatical text:

“Thanx man, now I can put my bad flash skillz to good use.”

The willingness of Animationers to respond seriously and helpfully to blunt and awkward newbie questions may indicate that they also read the bizarre speech patterns as a form of abasement. They and the newbies both derive this understanding from the larger online context and practices in other online forums. Several pieces of information about power and status come from this larger context. These include understanding of meanings attached to newbies (and the term ‘newbie’ or ‘noob’ itself), and the meaning of leet speak as a joke against people who wrongly position themselves as ‘elite hackers’. While the recognition of leet speak does indicate insider knowledge, it is always used ironically. Speakers of leet deflect charges that they are immodest and making false status claims by using leet speak to simultaneously raise the possibility of, and also make fun of, their potential claim to hacker status, leaving open the possibility that they really are elite hackers.

7 Cultural influences from outside the community of practice

As demonstrated by language conventions, status within the Animation Portal does not derive solely from practice within the group. Power and status relations from outside the group also affect internal relationships. Animationers recognise their group as a subset of online animation video creators. In particular, many of them have contributed videos and forum postings to the video hosting site Newgrounds. Newgrounds has a distinct culture with several subgroups, some of which have antagonistic relationships with each other. In both creative contributions and forum postings, Animation Portal participants often position themselves and their group identity in distinction to Newgrounds. Newgrounds is a much larger and better known site. Animation Portal participants recognise it as a more powerful group, and as a route to wider distribution and recognition for their videos. Thus their status on Newgrounds affects their status within the CoP on Animation Portal.

One type of group identity marker used on the Animation Portal is a video 'preloader'. Preloaders are opening screens that show the viewer that the video is loading and include a 'Play' button to click once the video has loaded. (This ensures that the video will not stop in mid-play, and differs from the way videos usually play on hosting sites such as YouTube.) Mudi created an Animation Portal-specific preloader and made it available for others to use. The imagery on the preloader specifically parodies imagery from the Newgrounds site, but replaces some of the icons from that site with the animation-specific images of Colin Mochrie and Jay Jay the Jet Plane (a character from a US children's television programme commonly appearing in animations).

Discussions of this preloader recognised the references to Newgrounds (one of which was a specific text denial of affiliation with Newgrounds that one participant deemed 'lame'). Other participants also wanted to know how to change the preloader to delete references to the Animation Portal. These discussions demonstrate that preloaders are not trivial to create, and also that animationers participate and post videos in other forums, and thus seek opening images for their videos that are not necessarily tied to this one site. The Animation Portal supplies them with support and knowledge concerning the animation subculture, but those interested in a wider audience, and the potential for fame that entails, seek greater exposure for their videos on other hosting sites. As flashbastard put it:

"To me, Newgrounds is the ocean all the fish want to eventually get to. Even though, once we are there we are insignificant. I think it's the satisfaction of surviving where you are helpless.

Here, it's a small pond and we are all big fish because we all like each other's artwork. It makes Newgrounds a test to ourselves."

The recognition of Newgrounds as a more powerful cultural influence online, as well as competition on Newgrounds with other subcultures, leads to some discomfort with the site. dpbjinc says:

"Newgrounds is a necessary evil at times. Also, I sometimes go to EbaumsWorld, which doesn't have the porn. Anything is better than Newgrounds."

And Thetwodud says:

“Sometimes when I visit NG, I literally feel as if it’s me against every other NGer.....Its not the site itself I hate (though pop-ups are always annoying), it’s the fools who make the accounts.”

As these discussions of Newgrounds indicate, part of the identity of Animation Portal participants derives from their recognition of the relationship between their group and the outside world, not just from their relationships and practices within the group. Furthermore, power within the group can come from recognition by outsiders. When an animationer’s video gains high ratings on Newgrounds, they gain recognition and status on Animation Portal. They have been ‘tested’, in flashbastard’s words, out in the larger world.

8 Gender and power

Newgrounds may constitute the big ocean to the Animation Portal’s small pond, but an even bigger influence on power and status within the animation community derives from more general cultural understandings. The identity bound up in practice within the community connects to and draws on meanings that surround and pre-exist that community, as animationers recognise in their rare discussions of gender. Animationers’ understandings of gender-based power differences in the larger world influence their relationships with each other, and their interpretations of the success or failure of different members’ videos.

Animationers are almost entirely young men. One of the few women to create animations, Hibiscus Kazeneko, notes this in a post to a thread inviting participants to introduce themselves:

“Hey y’all, wassup? This is the first time I’ve ever discussed anything in a forum. You may call me Hibiscus Kazeneko. I’m probably the only girl so far to post anything in the portal.”

papaSKROBE responds with a claim that she is actually the fourth ‘chick’ (although I have only been able to confirm one other woman participating on the Animation Portal). Perhaps because of her outsider status, Hibiscus Kazeneko adopts a very assertive and confrontational style on the Portal. A mere five months later, in the same forum thread, she posts:

“I’ve pretty much become the alpha mater around here; I know almost everything there is to know about animation.”

Such a strong claim to expertise is extremely rare within the group. Hibiscus Kazeneko’s posts also tended to be more critical of others (both on and off Animation Portal) than those of other participants. Her non-normative behaviour (attacking and criticising others as well as attempting to get others’ videos removed from Newgrounds) got her temporarily banned from the group. Discussions following her banning specifically addressed the issue of gender within the group. In a thread titled ‘Treat Her Fairly’, Indogutsu posts:

“It appears Hibiscus is somewhat of a magnet for bad luck and controversy, and a definite victim of gender stereotyping. Because she has strong feelings about certain matters, and isn’t afraid to express them, the (predominantly male) Animation Portal folks unjustly brand her as a bitch with PMS.”

Indogutsu references broader cultural understandings about the nature of sexism ('a bitch with PMS'), and identifies this as salient in the context of a dispute between two community members. But Pandatronic suggests that Indogutsu's concern is itself evidence of differential treatment based on gender:

"The ironic thing about Indogutsu's charges of sexism is that I severely doubt he'd be so defensive towards HK if she wasn't a girl."

Indogutsu responds that:

"because of my asexuality, which most men my age would never admit to having, I would have nothing to gain from defending Hibiscus just because she is a girl."

Indogutsu's rather self-contradictory analysis suggests that sexism originates in heterosexuality. He has 'nothing to gain' in treating Hibiscus differently, because he has no interest in sexual contact with her. By naturalising difference, and tying gender to sexuality, Indogutsu emphasises Hibiscus' gender in a way that does limit the interpretation of her behaviour on the Animation Portal, although perhaps not quite in the way that Pandatronic suggests. He positions Hibiscus as less powerful by definition, because of her gender.

But far more important than the question of who in the group is being sexist is the fact that the issue of Hibiscus' gender came up at all. The members of the group are quite conscious of their own gender imbalance, of the meaning that is likely to have to the outside world, and of the debates about gender and power in that world. Their status as young men provides an important background to their relationships with each other, and with the very few women participants. Their discussion of Hibiscus Kazeneko demonstrates that they are quite aware of the potential impact this has on the community with regard to power and status.

9 Conclusion

As Davies suggests, the CoP theory itself provides no tools for the analysis of power within the community, especially as that power relates to meanings derived from relationships to external cultures and groups. Not all of the meanings created in practice within the community originate solely within the community. Nor do the identities of community members derive solely from their participation within the group. It is not just that individuals are members of many different CoPs, but the communities themselves recognise their relationship to other groups and draw on knowledge of those other groups in their internal meaning-making. Some members are also able to draw on power derived from status unavailable to all members of the community, and thus have a greater influence on the norms and membership of the community. Given the ubiquity of at least one of the sources of power I analyse herein, gender, it is unlikely that the power differences and recognition of status I identify are unusual. These aspects of group relations – both internal and external – need to be taken into account in order to better understand the key concepts of meaning, identity, learning, and practice within communities of practice.

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