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Internet Message Board Obsession: A Look into the Culture of the Mountaineers

Similar to many other college-age couples, my boyfriend and I spend quite a bit of time at one another's houses. However, our time is not always spent watching movies and cuddling together, or, in a sense, even spent together at all. That is because of one activity I consider to be a social decay to our society: internet message board posting. But the message board my guy spends all his free time on is not just any board, it happens to be the home of some of the most die-hard West Virginia University (WVU) Mountaineer fans of all time. It is most commonly called The Mountaineer Message Board—often referred to simply as “the MMB” by most loyal members<sup>1</sup>.

After watching my boyfriend time after time sit down at his computer and bring up the message board website, I began to feel some curiosity about exactly what was going on that was so attention-stealing. I started out just asking questions. Later, I actually started looking at the website I considered evil and realized an astonishing fact. The Mountaineer Message Board has such enthralled, loyal members whom spend so much time on the board<sup>2</sup> that they have actually created another culture unknown to most.

Most of the research I collected regarding the culture of The Mountaineer Message Board was from an obvious primary source: my boyfriend, Kelly Godwin (also known as “MoTown ‘Eers). I observed him actually posting on the board and asked him many different questions. I wrote down some of what I saw and the answers to a few of

my questions. Much of the information was so redundant, however, (as you may recall, Godwin is on this board very often when I was around) that I was quite capable of memorizing it. A small part of the research, the musical selections, came from one MMB member's (EersFan) own website. I also observed behavior at a MMB organized activity: a WVU football game tailgate. A questionnaire consisting of 8 questions that I invented myself (see the Appendix) was used to gather information directly from 3 MMB members. The last bit of information I found came from a *Daily Athenaeum* (WVU's newspaper) article. Some extensive searching through the *Daily Athenaeum*'s archives was actually required for the article because I could not remember in which volume and issue it was located.

Cultures differ from one another by certain factors such as language, communication, food, activities, clothing, and music. I found all these factors and more in the MMB culture. The MMB members' language consists of many sports related terms and acronyms. The sports related terms include, "Take it to the house" (getting a touchdown) and "In the paint" (in basketball, a player is in the lane) (Godwin, Nov. 14). Some of the acronyms include LOL (Laughing Out Loud), IMO (In My Opinion), BTW (By The Way), and YMG (You've Got Mail) (EersFan, Rip\_Nasty, Vernon Nov. 16). Any one sentence could contain any and all of these acronyms, plus others, so deciphering the language can at times be difficult.

Almost all of the members forgo using their real names on the message board. They use a nickname they have invented called a "handle" or a "username" instead. Usernames usually somehow describe the person behind them. Many usernames on the MMB also contain references to the WVU Mountaineers, such as "EersFan" and

“MDEer” (Godwin, Nov. 14). Question 5 on the questionnaire asks, “What influenced your choice of username?”. Rip\_Nasty responded with this: “I’m a nasty SOB, as for Rip, well you can use your imagination” (Nov. 16). Members rarely use any other form of communication besides posting on the message board. However, at most MMB functions, such as a tailgate, the members do speak personally to each other. The food consumed may be different from a common person’s diet. Generally the diet consists of potato chips, chicken wings, nachos, vegetable trays, and the drink of choice: beer (EersFan, Rip\_Nasty, Vernon, Nov. 16).

The activities one would most likely find a MMB member enjoying are message board posting, watching any television show containing information related to any teams in The Big East Conference (the sports conference of the WVU Mountaineers), reading all sports articles involving the same information watched on television, and WVU football tailgates (Godwin, Nov. 14). Though it is safe to say that members wear very much the same clothing as a common person when they are typing behind their computer, watching the television, or reading a sports article, the clothing displayed at a football tailgate is quite different. Shirts and jackets are always elaborately colored with navy blue and bright gold—WVU’s colors. Pants usually contain some sort of navy blue and gold coloring as well. Accessories vary as long as they carry the same colors as the rest of the outfit. Some accessories include blue and gold wigs, face paint, earmuffs, and gloves. I was able to observe this myself at the football tailgate I attended.

The music selection is very interesting. Anything the WVU band plays at sports events and “County Roads” are all commonly listened to by MMB members. Two of the number-one song picks are both re-makes of songs in normal American culture: “Save a

Horse, Ride a Cowboy” by Big and Rich and “The Devil Went Down to Georgia” by Charlie Daniels. The re-makes are called “Save a Couch, Burn a Hokie” and “The ‘Eers (Mountaineers) Went to New Jersey.” Both songs were re-made and sang by the MMB’s own Rip\_Nasty. Both songs as well as others can be heard at the website, but here is an example of some of the lyrics invented by Rip\_Nasty:

The Knights said, “Well my name’s Rutgers and it might be a sin,

But we'll take your bet and you're gonna regret

‘Cus we're the best we've ever been.”

Chorus

Players strap on your gear and don't let down your guard,

‘Cus hells broke loose in Jersey and Leonard's running hard.

If you win you get a shot at a BCS bowl,

But if you lose the fans will get your soul. (EersFan, “EER-dio files”).

Many of the salaries made by MMB members are spent on WVU paraphernalia and MMB member fees of \$10 a month. Question 3 on the questionnaire asks, “How do you justify the \$10 per month premium membership fee?”. EersFan responded with this: “Well when you get old there aren't as many strippers who give you attention, so mah, why not spend it on WVU info?” (Nov. 16). EersFan is not being entirely serious in his answer, but Godwin gave more meaningful insight when he stated, “Actually while being in school, the \$10 a month could be spent a lot more wisely. But being a premium member gives me something to do when I am bored, plus on the premium board a lot of the non-sense rumors and BS from the freebie board is filtered out.” (Nov. 14)

Just as American culture is sometimes made fun of by other cultures, so is the MMB culture. Brian Welch, the Associate Sports Editor of the *Daily Athenaeum*, wrote an article making fun of message board posters that definitely had some of the MMB members fired up. Welch wrote, “By the same vein, it is increasingly obvious that serial Internet sports message board posters, while representing the most enlightened breed of clueless sports fan, are the least informed consistent observers of American sports culture.” He basically intended the article to say that internet message board posters have no life (Welch, 10). I observed quite a few very angry posts on the MMB that week. However, American culture will also tease other cultures as well, as do members of the MMB culture. Members of the University of Pittsburgh message board are by far the most hated, followed closely by Virginia Tech members. (EersFan, Rip\_Nasty, Vernon Nov. 16). Godwin stated that Pitt members are very biased when it comes to WVU and like to bring up typical West Virginia stereotypes in their posts (Nov. 14).

This bickering can also be found amongst the MMB population itself. Just as in other cultures, cliques, bullies, and brown-nosers arise. Then there is always the one person that everyone makes fun of. In the case of the MMB, this person happens to be MDEer. It is very common to see several posts per day involving someone poking fun at MDEer—who “asks too many questions” according to Godwin (Nov. 14).

The MMB probably has many more aspects that went un-researched. However, until I pay the \$10 per month membership fee and post on the board for 50 hours a week, I am unlikely to know much more. However, knowing all that was researched, it is obvious that the MMB has its own culture. If I was a die-hard sports fan, it would be

likely I would enjoy being part of a culture similar to that. Now I understand a somewhat better why my boyfriend insists on including the computer in all our time spent together.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The website for The Mountaineer Message Board is <http://westvirginia.rivals.com>. However, you must be a paying member to actually access the message board that this paper speaks of. There is also a free message board, but the research I collected was from the board with paying members. Since this board is not open to just anyone in the public all the time, it is a more exclusive group.

<sup>2</sup>According to Question 1 in the questionnaire (Appendix) I invented, the lengths of time 2 common MMB posters spent posting on the message board in an average week were 45 and 70 hours (EersFan, Rip\_Nasty, Nov. 16). Godwin claims he spends about 20 hours per week on average posting (however, one might argue that amount is subjective and somewhat less than the actual amount spent) (Godwin, Nov. 14). The owner and manager of the website, Vernon, says he spends about 112 hours per week on average posting on the website (Vernon, Nov. 16).

## Appendix

### Questionnaire:

1. How much time do you spend on the message board per week?
2. Do you participate in board functions? (tailgates, etc.)
3. How do you justify the \$10 per month premium membership?
4. What type of food is common at board functions?
5. What influenced your choice of username?
6. What types of acronyms/slang do you regularly use?
7. Is there anyone on the board you regularly make fun of?
8. Is there a group on another message board you dislike? (Pitt fans, etc.)

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