

## **ABSTRACT**

**RESEARCH PAPER:** WGAF: Swearing, Social Structure and Solidarity in an Online Community

**STUDENT:** James William Hammons

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Swearing has been shown to be one linguistic strategy deployed to affirm or enforce in-group solidarity within face-to-face communities of practice or subcultures. This study examines in detail the uses and functions of swearing in an online community, a rock music and popular culture oriented discussion board. Using a sample of 4,558 discussion board posts from 142 discussion threads, along with social network analysis (SNA) techniques to analyze the structure of cliques within the online community, three main hypotheses were tested:

1. Swearing occurs more frequently among members of the same clique.
2. Recognized leaders of the community will swear at a significantly different rate than others.
3. Male participants swear at a higher rate than female participants.

It was found that clique membership – the indicator of solidarity used in this study – had no significant relationship to the frequency of swearing. The relationship between leadership status and swearing is tentatively supported, however, and a male-female difference in swearing is strongly supported.