



*An investigation into contemporary online anti-feminist
movements*

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Angela Nagle

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Supervisor: Dr. Debbie Ging

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Summary of Contents

In the early years of the popular internet, in the spirit of Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), many theorists then called "cyberfeminists" were optimistic about its potential for women's liberation (Plant 1998, Spender 1995). This came as part of a broader wave of optimism about the information age and its democratic and economic potential (Wellman 1988, Castells 1996, Negroponte 1995, Kelly 1998). While a significant body of critical literature emerged in response to what was seen as a utopian narrative in general (Van Zoonen 2001, Henwood 2003, Barbrook and Cameron 1995), much of this early utopian and cyberfeminist fervour has seen a re-emergence in popular political and cultural discussion again in recent years, with the Arab Spring, framed as a series of social media revolutions, the emergence of the internet-centric Occupy movement, "hacktivism" and the explosion of online feminism (Penny 2013, Mason 2011).

However, along with this renewed feminist optimism, there had also been a less discussed growth of anti-feminist online cultures. Expressions of misogyny previously unthinkable in the public sphere now appear anonymously on popular social media platforms, such as Twitter. Interestingly, this new transgressive antifeminism identifies as countercultural more than conservative and pro-family or men's rights based as it has done in the past, and its locus, an infamous taboo-busting forum called 4chan/b/, is also the point of origin of the hackers known as Anonymous and of the symbolism of the egalitarian Occupy movement. With reference to existing analyses on online misogyny and anti-feminism (Shaw 2014, Jane 2014, Penny 2014) on the relevant geek and hacker online spaces (Coleman 2014, Phillips 2012) and drawing on a wealth of literature about historical cultural parallels (Reynolds and Press 1995) this study aims to investigate this transgressive countercultural-identifying antifeminism, to locate it, understand its origins and to unpack its cultural politics.

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Introduction

Anita Sarkeesian, a Canadian online feminist activist, was scheduled to give a talk at Utah State University in October of 2014 but had to cancel due to a security threat. An anonymous warning had been sent via email that promised to enact “the deadliest school shooting in American history” if she spoke and claimed to have access to a “semi-automatic rifle, multiple pistols, and a collection of pipe bombs” (Tassi 2014). The author of the warning blamed “the toxic influence of feminism on Western masculinity” for creating “a nation of emasculated cowards too scared to challenge the vile, misandrist harpies who seek to destroy them” (Tassi 2014). One month previously, Sarkeesian had been scheduled to speak at the Game Developers Choice Awards when a bomb threat was emailed to the event organisers (Totilo 2014). These events followed a three-year online harassment campaign by much larger numbers of online participants, including multiple death and elaborate rape threats, the creation of a video game in which Sarkeesian’s face could be bloodied and bruised by its players, violent threats to her family, her home address and phone number being made public, hundreds of abusive tweets and emails and to Sarkeesian having to flee her home for security (Campbell 2014). The cause of all of this ire was a series of short video blogs in which Sarkeesian gave an accessible and often light hearted introduction to feminist media studies, applied to video games and movies, exploring common sexist tropes in both. Sadly, many of Sarkeesian’s experiences have been shared by other online feminist activists, including bloggers, journalists and campaigners, who also report receiving regular death and rape threats and in some cases have dropped out of public life as a result of the harassment (Sandoval 2013).

In 2007, tech writer, programming educator and blogger Kathy Sierra had been the keynote speaker at South by Southwest Interactive and a kind of mainstream tech guru when the personal backlash against her among anonymous commenters was so extreme that she had to close down her blog, withdraw from speaking engagements and public life (Sandoval 2013). Personal details about her family and home address

were posted among highly sexualised and threatening comments on various blogs and forums. Some of the posts included photoshopped images of her with a noose beside her head, a shooting target pointed at her face and of her being suffocated with lingerie. When she explained in her blog why she had to step back from public life, writing, that she was terrified that her stalkers might go through with their threats, it sparked a whole new wave of hate online, with commenters saying she had taken the rough and tumble of online debate too personally and was making a fool of herself by overreacting (Walsh, 2007).

Feminist writer Laurie Penny has also written about the abuse she receives:

“You come to expect it, as a woman writer, particularly if you're political. You come to expect the vitriol, the insults, the death threats. After a while, the emails and tweets and comments containing graphic fantasies of how and where and with what kitchen implements certain pseudonymous people would like to rape you cease to be shocking, and become merely a daily or weekly annoyance, something to phone your girlfriends about, seeking safety in hollow laughter. [...] Most mornings, when I go to check my email, Twitter and Facebook accounts, I have to sift through threats of violence, public speculations about my sexual preference and the odour and capacity of my genitals, and attempts to write off challenging ideas with the declaration that, since I and my friends are so very unattractive, anything we have to say must be irrelevant. [...] Efforts were made to track down and harass my family, including my two school-age sisters. After one particular round of rape threats, including the suggestion that, for criticising neoliberal economic policymaking, I should be made to fellate a row of bankers at knifepoint, I was informed that people were searching for my home address. I could go on” (Penny, 2011).

Feminist comedian Kate Smurthwaite wrote, about the online abuse she receives, “The vast majority of the abuse is gender-related. There is a clear link to internet pornography. Much of the language used could have come straight from pornographic sites. For example, from this week: “IF THIS TRASH TALKING K*NT HAD HER F*CKNG, TONGUE RIPPED OUT OF HER SUCK-HOLE” (quoted in Lewis, 2011). Feminist blogger and activist Cath Elliot wrote:

“If I'd been trying to keep a tally I would have lost count by now of the number of abusive comments I've received since I first started writing online back in 2007. And by abusive I don't mean comments that disagree with whatever I've written - I came up through the trade union movement don't forget, and I've worked in a men's prison, so I'm not some delicate flower who can't handle a bit of banter or heated debate - no, I'm talking about personal, usually sexualised abuse, the sort that on more than one occasion now has made me stop and wonder if what I'm doing is actually worth it. [...] I read about how I'm apparently too ugly for any man to want to rape, or I read graphic descriptions detailing precisely how certain implements should be shoved into one or more of my various orifices” (quoted in Lewis, 2011).

Feminist blogger Dawn Foster wrote:

“The worst instance of online abuse I've encountered happened when I blogged about the Julian Assange extradition case. [...] Initially it was shocking: in the space of a week, I received a rabid email that included my home address, phone number and workplace address, included as a kind of threat. Then, after tweeting that I'd been waiting for a night bus for ages, someone replied that they hoped I'd get raped at the bus stop” (quoted in Lewis, 2011).

Feminist sex writer Petra Davis later wrote:

“When I started getting letters at my flat, I reported them to the police, but they advised me to stop writing provocative material. Eventually, I was sent an email directing me to a website advertising my services as a sex worker, with my address on the front page under the legend ‘fuck her till she screams, filth whore, rape me all night cut me open’, and some images of sexually mutilated women. It was very strange, sitting quietly in front of my screen looking at those images, knowing that the violence done to these other women was intended as a lesson . . . Of course, it didn't take long to take the site down, but by then I was thoroughly sick of the idea and more or less stopped writing about sex from any perspective” (quoted in Lewis, 2011).

Recent antifeminist attacks to gain mainstream exposure include those of Caroline Criado Perez, Anita Sarkeesian and Adria Richards. Perez was attacked online for her campaign to have Jane Austen represented on an English banknote. She claims to have received hundreds of malicious messages, many of which contained similar rape fantasies and threats to those quoted above (Hattenstone 2013). Adria Richards was a computer programmer who tweeted a picture of men making what she perceived to be sexist jokes during a talk about female participation in IT. The men were fired and an online campaign was then organised against her. Death threats and rape fantasies were sent to her and hackers harassed her employer's customers until eventually her company had to fire her (Cutler 2013). In the Sarkeesian case and the Richards case, 4chan/b/.org, who regularly organise attacks against women, were involved in the orchestrated attacks (Cutler 2013, Lewis 2012) and in all cases, the style, language and methods of the attackers, as I will explore later, was inflected with the argot of geek and hacker subcultures.

Early theoretical work on this new frontier in which selves could be deconstructed, reconstructed and disembodied often tended to be quite utopian and this was particularly true of feminist interventions that made up part of the genre of "cyberfeminism". The wider events of the period in which I embarked upon this research have necessitated a revived public discussion about utopian visions of the internet. Many writers and journalists, most notably BBC journalist Paul Mason (2012) attributed the Arab Spring, the wave of public square mass protests across the Middle East between 2010 and 2011, and the Occupy movement, a style of public occupation that began in Zucotti Park, New York, in 2011, largely to the role of social media in providing both a platform for disintermediated communication and a new model for networked organisation. After years of what Faludi (1990) described as a period of anti-feminist backlash, others celebrated a new wave of digital native feminism, which utilised hashtags for viral campaigns and gave a platform to a greater range of feminist voices (Penny 2011). Simultaneously, however, various forms of hateful abuse came to dominate online discourse to an extent that early

theorists of the internet had not envisioned and of all these forms of hateful discourse, misogyny became extraordinarily virulent with some analysts calling this phenomenon “the new misogyny” (Penny 2014, Marcotte 2014). After more than three decades since Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* set out a hopeful futuristic imaginary for feminism in the digital age, what kind of gendered online cultures and discourses have emerged and to what extent has the virtual world proven to be a liberating space for women? To what extent has anti-feminism grown or diminished, changed or hybridised with the emergence of the popular internet? This theoretic lineage will form part of the background of a research project that will investigate emerging anti-feminist and extreme misogynist online cultures in terms of political activism, cultural politics, discourse, exclusion and the regulation of virtual space. Chapter 1 will explore literature on Cyberfeminism (Plant 1998, Wajcman 2004) and critics of utopian feminist perspectives (Squires 2000, Balka 1999) and more recent literature on the rise of online misogynist discourse (Jane 2014, Shaw 2014, Manivannan 2013).

Some of the sites of organised anti-feminist attack have employed the label “men’s rights activists” but generally the antifeminism that has emerged online during this period is quite distinct from previous anti-feminisms, as I will explore. It typically identifies as “geeky” in the sense of belonging to online gaming, hacker and other geek subcultures. It does not identify as socially conservative but, on the contrary, performs its identity through intended countercultural gestures and allusions, with a style closer to the masculinist anti-consumerism of the novel and 1999 film *Fight Club* than to the past anti-feminisms of campaigner Phyllis Schlafly or men’s movement author Robert Bly (1990).

One of the most complex aspects of this topic is the as yet unexplored, and seemingly contradictory, link between two waves of online political activity: the utopian egalitarianism of the Occupy movement on the one hand and the explosion of online anti-feminism expressed in the most extreme misogynist terms on the other. The “hashtag revolutions” of this period were said to have eschewed old left-right

political symbolism (Mason 2012) but the closest thing to a symbol or an icon that emerged from this style of “networked” protest throughout the world in 2010-2011 was the Guy Fawkes mask. Although it originated from the film adaptation of the comic book series *V for Vendetta*, this mask became an expression of the anonymous, anti-leader, anti-authority, pro-“internet freedom”, networked politics of the site from which it emerged, a forum called 4chan/b/. This forum is also perhaps the most misogynist online space on the English-speaking internet and has been at the centre of many anti-feminist hacks and attacks, including against Anita Sarkeesian, which I will document in this study. This seemingly contradictory phenomenon, in which the same online culture is playing a major role in defining anti-feminist discourse and that of a putative egalitarian protest movement has also left academic, feminist and left wing critics unable to theorise it, I will argue. Despite the hacker and trickster-troll¹ sensibility of so much of contemporary online anti-feminism, including examples of large orchestrated harassment campaigns, the analysis that exists to date has either ignored these connections, instead simply characterising all anti-feminism as a form of conservatism, or has regarded online cultures such as 4chan/b/ as “counter-hegemonic” (Phillips 2012) and their anti-feminism and extreme misogyny as misunderstood mechanisms to “inoculate the subculture [...] against massification” (Auerbach 2012). Chapter 2 will explore what Morozov (2011) has called “cyberutopian” literature and several decades of crypto-anarchist and radical horizontalist literature (Bey 1991, Barlow 1996) as well as the more recent literature on trolling, hacker culture and the most significant site of the new online anti-feminism and misogyny, 4chan/b/ (Coleman 2011, Phillips 2012, Halpin 2012), which shares a common sensibility with those earlier crypto-anarchist and radical horizontalist writers and as a consequence, I will argue, has received more sympathetic analyses from scholars who share this theoretical and political background. I will also look at more politically centrist and mainstream

¹ The term troll has been broadened in its use more recently to mean someone who engages in any form of malicious or even mischievous communication online but, as Coleman suggests, its original meaning was much more rooted in the particular style and sensibility of cultures such as 4chan/b/.

manifestations of this kind of upbeat theorisation of networked culture, such as Manuel Castells (1996).

Hacker culture and feminism have clashed in many ways during the period of this research. For example, the accusation of rape against Julian Assange, founder of Wikileaks, became a source of many “flamewars”² online between feminists and those loyal to Assange. The Electronic Frontier Foundation, the digital rights organisation founded by important figures in early hacker and cyberculture that defends privacy, free speech and personal liberties online, opposed a feminist-proposed amendment to the Violence Against Women Act in US law to criminalise online stalking, harassment and threatening communication (Hess 2014). There has also been an on-going public disagreement between Mark Zuckerberg, the creator of Facebook, a social media network that has tried to some extent to curb hate speech, extreme content and anonymity, and the creator of 4chan, Chris Poole, who opposes any restrictions on free expression. Anarchic anonymous spaces such as 4chan tend to also oppose the marketization and perceived domestication, feminisation and mainstreaming of internet culture, as I will show, and for them, this is what the big, commercial social media giants like Facebook represent. In a period of such an extreme culture of anonymous misogynist speech online, these debates about free speech rights and internet freedom inevitably contain a gendered dimension.

If the new online anti-feminism does not resemble past conservative anti-feminisms but instead identifies as transgressive and anti-conservative in many ways, how should it be theorised? This study traces styles that accommodate sexual transgression, anti-conservatism, countercultural gestures, misogyny and anti-feminism, using Reynolds and Press’ (1995) definition of “rebel misogynies” and feminist critiques of subcultures (McRobbie 1980). Through this cultural history, the study will hopefully produce an analysis that brings to light these complex elements, avoiding the tendency of feminist analysis of the new online anti-feminism thus far

² Flamewar is a term used to describe aggressive and often long running arguments online, typically in forums and comment threads.

to force the data to conform to a familiar political spectrum, which imagines only “progressive” cultural politics, and thus implicitly pro-feminist, on one end, and conservative cultural politics on the other. While Chapter 3 lays out the cultural history of the literature of this sensibility, Chapter 5 explores the findings and analysis that relate to the gendered role of methods of policing subcultural purity from outside or mainstream influence.

Using a mixed methods approach, with quantitative and qualitative aspects, this study will be primarily a qualitative analysis of discourse and thematic elements. The data will include a close study based on samples of the website of primary importance to online anti-feminism during the period of my research, 4chan/b/, and a broader documentation of anti-feminist attacks and hacks against individuals, groups and feminist publications that have taken place throughout the entire period of my research. As part of my methodology, Chapter 5, I will also record activity on forums and sites as well as memes, hashtags and blogs. Although it will not be a study of the other side of this online culture war, feminism itself, it will inevitably include data about the interactions between feminists and anti-feminists in the process of this documentation.

Chapter Six will explore any discursive themes emerging from the research to examine, through findings and analysis, what kind of masculinities are being constructed in the data. I will compare and contrast these to other theorised masculinities and anti-feminist cultures, such as conservative anti-feminism, lad culture and the masculinity of the men’s movement of the 1990s. Connell (1995) includes the insults “nerd” and “geek” as part of the vocabulary of abuse used against masculinities subordinated by hegemonic masculinity, along with various combinations typically meaning feminine, gay or weak. Has the “rise of the geeks”, meaning the elevated prestige and cultural capital often said to have developed around geeky identities as well as the economic rise of young social media entrepreneurs as celebrity figures in recent years changed this dynamic? In these online cultures, expressions of marginality to hegemonic and traditional

masculinities appear alongside expressions of male chauvinism and the expressed belief in the genetic superiority of men, while members of these cultures often identify self-mockingly as “beta males”. This complex mix of identifications will be explored.

One of the defining stylistic features of the new online anti-feminism is transgression. In Chapter 7, I will explore the role of extreme pornography and transgressive sexualities and humour as part of the aesthetic value system of these online spaces and subcultures. This chapter will closely reference the original data set and use as its theoretical frame exponents of transgression from the Marquis de Sade (2007) to Bataille (1985) and more recent critics such as Jenks (2003) and Cashell (2009).

The existing work on the various spaces and styles that make up the landscape of online anti-feminism, I argue, need to be challenged, within feminism as well as in scholarly work. For examples, Laurie Penny’s account of online misogyny, *Cybersexism* (2014), is one example of the inability of feminists as well as scholars who are sympathetic to, or wish to be part of, these transgressive hacker and geek subcultures to theorise online misogyny. Penny has praised DDoS³ hacking as a form of digital sit-in and although she admits that spaces like 4chan/b/ are engaged in online misogynist and anti-feminist culture, she then goes on to repeatedly characterise the problem essentially as a conservative remnant of the pre-internet past, which the radicalizing power of the internet and participatory social media has yet to correct: “We have a brave new world which looks far too much like the cruel old world” that “recreates offline prejudices” [...] “Although the technology is new, the language of shame and sin around women’s use of the Internet is very, very old,” [...] “The gender revolution and the digital revolution are happening together, and they scare the same people for the right reasons” (Ibid: 32).

³ Distributed denial of service hacking involved a group of internet users burdening a website with page reloads until the site crashes.

This research attempts to document this passing moment in internet culture and to understand what new cultures and manifestations of anti-feminist politics have been created or to what extent they draw on the past. It will not be an attempt to understand the personal or psychological motivations behind why those who express their antifeminism through extreme misogynist speech and harassment do so, but instead will analyse the broader cultural phenomenon as a discourse. Because of the ephemeral nature of so much online communication and the sheer vastness of the data produced, the role of scholars in documenting and interpreting online phenomena as it happens is significant in shaping how passing online movements and moments are remembered. To date, the existing analysis of the current wave of online anti-feminism is minimal and what exists does not take into account some of the observations and problems I have raised above. For these reasons, this research should constitute a necessary corrective to the existing literature to date and an important piece of documentation in its own right, on an ever more topical and heated subject.

Chapter One: From cyberfeminism to “the new misogyny”

Many cyberfeminists were optimistic about the potential that the virtual and new communications technologies held for women and about this changed relationship with the body in this new disembodied medium. Sadie Plant (1997) thought that women would adapt well to a virtual world in which gender boundaries were blurred and Judy Wajcman (2001) wrote, “In cyberspace, all physical, bodily cues are removed from communication. As a result, our interactions are fundamentally different, because they are not subject to judgements based on sex, age, race, voice, accent or appearance but are based only on textual exchanges” (Ibid: 66). In cyberpunk fiction, cyberspace was sometimes imagined as “a disembodied zone wilder than the wild west, racier than the space race, sexier than sex, even better than walking on the moon” (Plant, 1997). In William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984), the natural human body was referred to in derogatory terms as merely “meat”. So the utopian cyberfeminist perspective viewed the internet as a technology of liberation for women because text-based computer-mediated communication, with its lack of physical bodily cues, would make the gender of online communicators irrelevant or invisible, allowing women and men to participate equally, in contrast with traditional patterns of male dominance observed in face-to-face conversations (Danet, 1998; Graddol and Swann, 1989). They thought that as a network connecting remote users, the Internet would empower women to find community and organize politically in pursuit of their own interests. Some also argued that the web would allow women to self-publish and engage in profitable entrepreneurial activity on a par with men (Rickert and Sacharow, 2000). Dale Spender (1995) claimed that the internet would be empowering for subordinate groups, including women and ethnic minorities. Sherry Turkle (1995) claimed that women are particularly suited to the community ethic of consensus and communication that is needed for the success of online community.

And yet, one of the more unexpected results of this online freedom and the space for unlimited and often anonymous speech it provides has been the vicious and offensive nature of public debate (Levmore and Nussbaum 2010) and in particular the explosion of online anti-feminism and misogyny, culminating in elaborate orchestrated anti-feminist attacks against individuals and websites, stalking, the use of the language of sexualised violence, death and rape threats. This chapter looks at cyberfeminism and the landscape of contemporary online feminism and anti-feminism, with reference to academic scholarship as well as the writings of feminist technology and gaming journalists who have brought the problem to public attention through their first-hand experience. I will then introduce some of the theoretical blindspots of contemporary digital native feminism and what I argue is its inability to theorise an emerging anti-feminism that shares many of the values of the new networked protest sensibility online, such as transgression, internet freedom, leaderlessness and the overthrow of the old media order by the new. These themes will be explored throughout all of the following chapters.

A creature in a post-gender world?

Originally published in *Socialist Review* in 1985, and emerging from the era of Reagan's Star Wars militarism, Donna Haraway's *The Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*, later republished in her book *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (1991) offered a critique of the gendered language of science and nature present in both technology discourse and second wave feminism, particularly eco-feminist strands which offered "innocent" or natural metaphors for femininity and did little, she argued, to subvert the origin myths of femininity or to tell us about technologically sophisticated post-modern woman. Haraway wrote that she would rather be a cyborg than a goddess. She saw potential for liberation in the postmodern rejection of essential truths. The cyborg was an ironic metaphor, appropriating the imagery of technological militarism during the Cold War period. It was supposed to blur boundaries between man and animal, organism and machine, material and immaterial, and it was an attempt to

come up with a new language for the postmaterial world of nanotechnology. Haraway's ideas had a huge impact on feminist thought and in Critical Cyberculture Studies, particularly among some of the more optimistic feminist thinkers mentioned above. This utopian style became so widespread in writing on gender and digital culture with the advent of the popular internet that it prompted feminist technology critic Ellen Balka (1999) to ask, "Where have all the feminist technology critics gone?"

In 2002 Liesbet van Zoonen wrote, "although there are few systematic analyses of the representation and construction of gender on the Internet, there is enough evidence about child pornography, right wing extremism, sexual harassment, flaming and other unpleasantness to disclaim any utopian vision of the internet as an unproblematic feminine environment. It is telling that an important women's movement on the net, that of webgrrrls had to name itself "grrrls" instead of "girls" because searching on the net for "girls" mainly produces sex sites and very little relevant material for women" (Ibid: 11). She went on to argue that a new approach to internet studies is required to fill the void. The internet, she claimed, reconstructs the common gendered distinction found between consumption and production, with numbers of women working and studying in the ICT sector declining (Nua 1998) since the optimistic heyday of the Cyberfeminists and she argued that online femininity is largely being constructed as consumerist, with women as buyers and men as producers, except in the case of pornography. Judith Squires (2002), criticised the "sea of techno-euphoric cyberdroll" unleashed by the cyborg and argued that "whilst cyborg imagery could potentially aid us in our exploration of the body viewed as a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, we should not be too optimistic that it will necessarily do so" (Ibid: 363). Similarly, Ann Balsamo (2000) argued that the bio-politics of virtual reality reproduce traditional narratives about the gendered, race-marked body in high tech guise.

The late 1980s and 90s period was described by Susan Faludi (1991) as a period of anti-feminist backlash followed by a period of what has been described as post-feminism (McRobbie 2004). The widespread belief that the second wave of feminism of the 1960 and 70s had served and completed its purpose, expressed itself in terms of an attack on feminism according to Faludi, and of a new kind of marketised or co-opted feminism. According to McRobbie, this period marked a selectively defined feminism being always “taken into account” in order to “emphasize that it is no longer needed” (2007: 254). Postfeminist culture made the affluent elite its focus, as in *Sex and the City*, emphasising individualism and consumerism, extolling what Thomas Frank called market populism. “The new female subject” wrote McRobbie, “is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique, to count as a modern sophisticated girl, or indeed this withholding of critique is a condition of her freedom.” (2007: 260) Feminism was theorised not as having gone away by these thinkers, but rather that its popular form was resigned to its having performed its task.

But in recent years, many have claimed, we have witnessed a return of feminism among young women, which explicitly rejects this kind of postfeminism and which uses the internet as a form of communication and expression. In the US Jessica Valenti became a major public figure for the new wave of young feminists, moving from her blog *Feministing.com* to featuring in the *New York Times* and *The Nation*. Bidisha declared a time of “Women’s mass awakening” (Bidisha 2010) had come in the *Guardian*; the *Huffington Post* ran the headline: *The Return of Student Feminism* (Graham 2011) and the *New York Times* even heralded a “fourth wave of feminism” (Solomon 2009). Laurie Penny wrote, “The gender revolution and the digital revolution are happening together, and they scare the same people for the right reasons” (2013: 40). Books by Natasha Walter (2010), Kat Banyard (2010), Nina Power (2010) and Jessica Valenti (2009) and websites like *Jezebel.com* and *Bitch.com* caught the attention of young women and the mainstream press in the English-speaking world. Sold out UK *Feminista* conferences attracted popular audiences in the UK and young feminists began blogging, contributing to

mainstream debate and declaring, “Feminism is back and we want to finish the revolution” (Guardian 2011).

Some of the new online feminism has taken the form of politically radical blogs while other expressions have followed a more neoliberal feminist mould. For example, Silicon Valley CEO Sherryl Sandberg’s dotcom feminist self-help bestseller *Lean In* (2013) focussed on teaching women how to lead in business. In a TED video called *Social Media and the end of gender* (2012) Johanna Blakely told an international web audience that “the social media applications that we all know and love or love to hate are actually going to free us from some of the absurd assumptions that we have as a society about gender. I think that social media is actually going to help us dismantle some of the silly and demeaning stereotypes that we see in media and advertising about gender. If you hadn’t noticed, the mainstream media generally provides a much distorted mirror of our lives and of our gender and I think that’s going to change” (TED 2012). She told the audience how this change would help us to “escape some of our demographic boxes” set by the old media and that “using old school demographics, they come up with these very restrictive labels to define us” (TED 2012). Strangelove (2010) asserted that, through participatory and social media platforms such as YouTube and Twitter, young women have become increasingly visible. “It is time to put to rest the question asked [...] about whether the Internet gives voice to women and women’s issues. It does” (Ibid: 99). Curran (2012) points to Iran, Korea, Japan and China for examples of the ways in which the internet has enabled the advance of women in society and culture. Popular feminist Iranian bloggers are reported to be using blogging and social media to draw attention to divorce, stoning, banning female participation in sporting events and other discriminatory laws (Shirazi 2011). Kim’s (2010) study of Asian women downloading *Sex and the City* on their laptops away from the family television and thus any paternal surveillance, suggested this inspired young Asian women to greater independence and sexual freedom. In this sense, cyberfeminism’s influence can still be seen today although the term has fallen out of fashion.

But women and feminists have also written in less utopian terms, pointing out the difficulties in being a woman, and in particular a feminist, online. This culture of antifeminism and a broader misogyny, particularly among those who identify as geeks and in online hacker culture, has been written about, albeit rarely, since the mid 1990s. Writing about early hacker culture, Netta Gilboa claimed, “Not that many women frequent the [hacker] underground... At times the men get in a mood and kick all the women off the channel supposedly so they can talk about technicalities of hacking, which they feel the women aren’t truly interested in... Most of the women have been stalked on and off-line by at least one hacker” (1997: 99). In the early 90s, internet culture magazine *Fringwear Review*’s edition on *chicks in psyberspace* gave internet savvy women, then a more niche audience than today, the chance to describe their experiences of online life. What some described is remarkably similar to more mainstream online culture today, with the same behaviours carrying over from geeky hacker subcultures to, almost two decades later, mainstream newspaper comment threads and global internet giants like Youtube. In a section called *How to pick up chicks on the internet* their ironically delivered advice reads:

“If all else fails and she continues to bypass your brilliant email, rip her to shreds in public. Don’t neglect to let your virtual friends know that she is one of the following: a dyke, a slut, virtually frigid or, better yet, that she’s really a 14-year-old boy in Toronto. Send hate mail – women love to take abuse from men after all” (Whiteway and Brown 1994, p.28).

In the late 1980s around 40% of the World ‘Lectronic Link community was female and the female users were drawn largely from the same pool of the networked cultural elite professions (Turner, 2010: 152). When Susan Herring circulated a paper arguing that men and women used different styles of communication online and that these styles tended to put women at a disadvantage, the paper sparked a two-year debate on the WELL, which resulted in the publishing of *Wired Women: Gender and New Realities in Cyberspace* (1996). Others responded by arguing that the aggressive verbal style ascribed to male users were a problem for everyone, and

that the WELL already had a mechanism for filtering incoming messages. Despite drawing attention to these problems, the women who dealt with the prevalence of such behaviour in the volume all remained ideologically consistent with the male users of the WELL, that is, pro-free speech online, utopian about internet technology's empowering promise and so on. One contributor, Stephanie Brail, who underwent a harassment campaign for her statements in support of the riot grrrl genre, described Usenet misogynist culture and harassment, but defended the libertarian values held by those who made up the WELL milieu, "I would rather put up with harassment than have Uncle Sam reading all my emails" (1996: 141). While critical of sexism in these cultures, the book's editors were also pro-hacker, pro-gamer and anti-censorship (Cherny and Weiss 1996).

But this treatment may not be specific to public feminists and women in technology. A study by the University of Maryland's School of Engineering showed that chatroom participants using female names were 25 times more likely to receive threatening and/or sexually explicit private messages than those with male or gender-neutral names (Meyer and Cukier 2006). Female tech writer Maha Rafi Atal observed this trend and suggested that:

"The web is geared towards constructing subcultures and for many years operated as a subculture. [...] There is a real truth to the idea that men – and at the time it was mostly men – who first built the web were at the margins of social power in a traditional high school cafeteria sense – and because a lot of them were young, the symbol of the social belonging they didn't have was their inability to connect with women. [...] The culture still operated on the basis of woman as the inscrutable enemy" (quoted in Penny, 2013: 28).

Fillipovic (2007) argued that online misogyny parallels "real-world" harassment and compared her experience as a female lawyer being the subject of an anonymous college forum that rated the appearance of female students at NYU to the centuries old tradition of banishing women from the public square. The publicly accessible

compliments, for which she was described by bloggers about the incident as ungrateful, included “She would be a good hate fuck” under a section called “Jill sightings” in which her personal contact details and photographs from her social media were posted. She argued that these tactics were not new or specific to the internet but instead were “long-standing tools used to discredit and cut down women who transgress traditional gender roles and challenge male authority.” (Ibid: 302) She argued that, as in real life, men are not necessarily subjected to more violence than women but it is of a different nature: “Men are generally attacked for their ideas or their behaviour; when internet aggressors go after women they go straight between the legs” (Ibid: 303).

Returning again to more academic scholarship on the subject, Nussbaum (2010) explored the objectification of women and online misogyny in the case of AutoAdmit, a network of websites for prospective and current college, graduate, law students, and lawyers most notorious for its largely unmoderated message board. This time the examples she took were from Yale: “Extremely common on the AutoAdmit site – the objectification takes the form of rape-fantasy, where pleasure is derived from violent autonomy violation” (Ibid: 74). Her analysis of this objectification was largely psychoanalytic, characterising the phenomenon as a product of “primitive shame” and “infantile omnipotence”, the lingering resentment felt towards the mother during the long childhood period of vulnerability and powerlessness. Nakamura (2013) argued that too much of current analysis treats the prevalence of hateful communication online as a product of the network rather than a product of already-existing cultural privilege. She argues that tech culture itself is imbued with structures of economic and cultural privilege found elsewhere in society. Shaw (2014) agrees, stating that “Misogyny, racism, homophobia, etc. were not invented by the Internet, but they are enabled by technology and the cultural norms on Internet communication in which this behaviour is supported, defended and even valued” (Ibid: 275). She also asserts that good feminist analysis should not “assume tools are inherently bad or good, and always examines technologies in the context of their production and consumption” and that “those with access to the

means of cultural production define culture” (Ibid: 247). In Hasinoff’s (2013) work on women and sexting, she argues that observers often do not consider girls who produce sexual images of themselves as media authors or participants, because the white middle-class girls at the centre of many narratives about sexting are expected to be sexually innocent rather than agentic.

Jane’s (2014) work on “e-bile” suggests that the lack of scholarly work that accurately represents the extremity and severity of misogynist dialogue used in anti-feminist discourse is due to the subject matter being too “heavily laced with expletives, profanity and explicit references to sexual violence: it is calculated to offend, it is often difficult and disturbing to read, and it fall well outside the norms of what is considered civil academic discourse” (Ibid: 558). I also suspect this is true and hope to address this absence in this research. She claims large numbers of women are receiving “hostile communication involving ad hominem invective (especially caustic judgements about their appearances and sexual appeal) and/or threats of or fantasies about rape (especially anal rape) and other types of violence” (Ibid: 559). Using several examples involving famous Australian cases of bullying, stalking and abuse aimed at women, she characterises it as a response to perceived feminist gains in online platforms and describes the tone of it as “a combination of desire and disgust, a sort of lascivious contempt” (Ibid: 560).

Warren, Stoerger and Kelley’s (2011) longitudinal and quantitative research has found gender bias in online communities, concluding, “many age-old forms of discrimination appear to have been preserved” (Ibid: 13). Turton-Turner (2013) analysed “recent online hate campaigns mobilized against females” which, she argues, are “symptomatic of a broader normalization of old-style sexism” (Ibid: 1). What she calls “strategic trolling” is, she claims, used to silence feminist criticism of this phenomenon through claiming the right to freedom of speech. “A liberal fundamentalist assertion is that verbal and visual vitriol directed at females online, should, in the interests of free speech, be either accepted by its victims or simply overlooked” (Ibid: 2).

In most of these analyses, there is a whole or partial rejection of an effects-theory model and instead a view that online anti-feminism is an expression of a pre-existing “real world” anti-feminism and that the same applies to online misogyny. Almost all the scholarly analysis, as I have shown above, and the majority of non-academic feminist writing on the subject, seems defensive in its view that the current problems faced by women online are a hangover from a pre-Internet patriarchal world and in this sense their analyses do not directly confront or contradict the kind of cyberutopian fervour that I argue has characterised political discourse, in particular on the political left, in the period of the Occupy movement. But I will unpack this point further in the next chapter.

4chan/b/ and anti-feminism

Some exploration of the various strands of men’s movements, anti-feminism and masculinist politics is needed here to better define the terms used. Masculinities scholars Chris Haywood and Mairtin Mac an Ghaill (2003) have identified three forms of masculinity politics in the UK: male liberationists, “Men Against Sexism” and the New Men’s Movement. In the U.S., Clatterbaugh (1990) has identified six tendencies in the Men’s Movement as conservative, pro-feminist, men’s rights, spiritual, socialist and group specific, Christian men’s groups like the Promise Keepers, the mythopoetic movement of Robert Bly. The more pro-feminist movements within the men’s movement such as Men Against Sexism spearheaded by Victor Seidler, were concerned with male complicity in the oppression of women and homosexual men and tried to reconstruct their masculine selves in pro-feminist and progressive ways. The more overtly anti-feminist tendencies include the National Coalition of Free Men. These movements were interested in discrimination against men and took influence from books like Warren Farrell’s *The Myth of Male Power* (1993) and Neil Lyndon’s *No More Sex War: The Failures of Feminism* (1992). The anti-feminist tendency within the men’s movement disputed many of

feminism's claims about male power and focussed on issues such as father's rights and violence against men. Antifeminism is defined by Kimmel (1995) as a countermovement or set of attitudes opposed to "women's entry into the public sphere, the re-organization of the private sphere, women's control of their bodies, and women's rights generally." This, he says, is justified by antifeminists through "recourse to religious and cultural norms, and sometimes [...] in the name of 'saving' masculinity from pollution and invasion." He argues that antifeminists consider the "traditional gender division of labour as natural and inevitable, perhaps also divinely sanctioned" (2005: 35). McRobbie (2011) defines a newer "sophisticated anti-feminism", which "upholds the principles of gender equality while denigrating the figure of the feminist" and through these ironic techniques, smuggles anti-feminism in through a post-feminist style (Ibid: 179).

There are many online men's movement communities and forums, such as a Voice 4 Men, and the Men's Rights subreddit, a subforum of the popular platform Reddit. 4chan/b/, the web forum which has been a prolific producer of popular memes and has produced hacker collectives like Lulzsec and Anonymous, also has a misogynist culture and has been at the root of many antifeminist DDoS (distributed denial of service hacks involving an orchestrated attempt to disable a website) attacks, hate campaigns and hacks (Friedman 2009, Merlan 2014). To what extent the new online misogyny and online anti-feminism conforms to the definitions described above will be a central question in my analysis. For now, a brief introduction to the literature on the misogynist styles and anti-feminist politics of 4chan/b/ is needed, because it is the most central site of online anti-feminism in the period of my research.

Unlike the anti-feminist tendency in organised men's movements of the 1990s, the anti-feminist online counterculture today does not identify with pro-market or conservative ideologies regarding women and at least on an aesthetic level, appears closer to libertarian left wing tendencies. It is not typically interested in political struggles around rights or equality, but primarily around culture. It is more a style of cultural politics than a political movement and many of its battles are not linked to

demands or articulated political goals. In this sense, one could argue it is the mirror image of post-feminism's retreat into culture. Based on an out-dated ideological map, feminist critics of the new online antifeminism discussed in this chapter have incorrectly assumed that there is a necessary alliance between it and conservative values or the political right when in fact, as I will explore throughout this study, the new online antifeminism and misogynist culture identifies with the values also celebrated by feminist online activists like Penny (2013) namely internet freedom, sexual transgression and subversion of mainstream, marketised culture.

4chan is an image-based English language messaging board set up in October 2003 initially as an anime fan site by a young Chris Poole, whose online pseudonym was moot. It has grown to around 750 million page views a month and 18 million unique site visitors (Tsotsis, 2011). Users post images and comments across 49 themed boards. There is no registration or login required so the vast majority of posts are under the user name Anonymous. This culture of anonymity is encouraged as those who use any kind of identifier are typically met with hostility and are rare. The various themed boards are dedicated to different fan themes such as comic books, anime and some more mainstream pursuits like photography and literature but the board called /b/ which is simply themed "random" is the one which came to define 4chan, although it makes up only 30% of 4chan's traffic (Dibell, 2010; Grigoriadis, 2011). Users of the other boards on 4chan refer to /b/ users mockingly as /b/tards. There is minimal regulation of 4chan/b/ and it regularly features in-jokes, nerdish argot, gory images, racism, misogyny and hardcore pornography. Poole has called 4chan a "meme factory" with a great many of the memes which have now made their way into mainstream internet culture, the most famous of which is probably LOLcats. The comical, purposely misspelled captions on cat pictures were popularised and monetised by the site icanhazcheesburger.com, which is now a multi-million dollar business with a book series (Walker, 2010). As in the case of LOLcats, the commercialisation or popularisation of a 4chan meme tends to lead to its decline in usage on the site.

The messaging board began with users sharing Manga, a subgenre of Japanese animation, which is often pornographic in nature. The anime sharing site 2chan was visited by English speaking fans but was difficult to navigate without being able to understand Japanese. A teenager, known then only as moot, translated the website into English using Google translate, and set up his own web server, which he named 4chan.org. Poole's original inspiration for creating /b/ was also as a content overflow site for a Something Awful (SA) sub-forum known as the "Anime Death Tentacle Rape Whorehouse." Poole was a regular contributor to ADTRW, and wanted to archive contributions by other SA users. Following Japanese internet convention of having a strict moral separation between one's personal identity and internet activity, Phillips (2010) submits, it copied 2chan's feature of allowing users to post pictures and comments anonymously. Enabling and making anonymity a convention on 4chan, Chris Poole created the conditions for the cultural phenomenon that would follow.

4chan/b/ is known for producing images that "cannot be unseen" in 4chan parlance, offensive imagery and sometimes cute, kitsch imagery with subtitles. New users tend to be called n00bs and newfags, while older users call themselves or are called oldfags. When users are fully integrated into 4chan/b/ culture they identify with the language and anonymous culture of /b/. One self-identifying 4chan/b/ users described it on urban dictionary as:

"a public bulletin board, built of both brilliance and barbarity by bastards with boners. This bastion, no mere bulwark of boredom, is a brutal barrage of blistering bullshit, barely benevolent... but behind the bigotry and boobs, beyond the bitter broadcasts of bragging buffoons: here be the body politic. A brotherhood of blasphemy, blessed with more balls than brains, battling the bland, the bogus, the benign" (Speedie 2007).

The obscure argot of 4chan, usually based on corruptions of words from video games and pop culture, is documented on urban dictionary and Encyclopaedia Dramatica, a similarly transgressive source of data. "Lulz" are a primary motif of 4chan, a corruption of lol (laugh out loud), suggesting a kind of mischievous

prankster and trolling sensibility. 4chan became known for prolifically produced humorous viral content that made its way into popular internet culture, ranging from LOLcats to rick-rolling, the use of a link to seemingly serious content that sends its user to a kitsch 1980s video of Rick Astley dancing. Memes such as nyan-cat, a video of a cat flying through the air to an auto-tuned song made up of the high pitched feline sound “nyan” on repeat has exceeded 70 million views on Youtube, making it a rival for many of the biggest pop stars in the world and some of the most watched speeches of world leaders, as Phillips (2010) has pointed out (Ibid: 22).

The users of 4chan/b/ started to act collectively on activities such as making Chris Poole person of the year in Time’s online poll in 2008, or the collective cyber bullying of 11-year-old Jessie Slaughter, in 2010, when 4chan/b/ got hold of her name and address and encouraged her to commit suicide, after she made a video of herself speaking in “gangsta-rap” style. When her father posted a video in defence of his upset daughter and threatened to call the “cyberpolice”, it provoked a new wave of “lulz” and attacks. They also acted collectively on what they called Operation Birthday Boy, when an elderly man posted an online ad for “people wanted for birthday party”. Touched by the lonely old man’s appeal, they found his name address and phone number, and sent him hundreds of birthday cards and orders of cake and strippers (Phillips, 2010). These examples should give some sense of the sensibility that characterises the site, where acts of random kindness and cute memes are produced alongside cruelty and bullying using the same aesthetics and tactics. This will be a theme throughout this study as it characterises their anti-feminist and misogynist attacks also. The mass noun Anonymous was used to refer to groups of 4chan/b/ users raiding social networking sites aimed at teens (Knuttila, 2010). Anonymous have singled out Justin Bieber fans, white supremacists, child pornographers, epileptics, feminists and cybersecurity specialists for attacks (Jenkins 2007).

Mattathias Schwartz (2008) described 4chan thus:

“The anonymous denizens of 4chan’s other boards — devoted to travel, fitness and several genres of pornography — refer to the /b/-dwellers as “/b/tards.” Measured in terms of depravity, insularity and traffic-driven turnover, the culture of /b/ has little precedent. /b/ reads like the inside of a high-school bathroom stall, or an obscene telephone party line, or a blog with no posts and all comments filled with slang that you are too old to understand.”

Halpin’s (2012) sympathetic if not celebratory analysis of 4chan/b/ characterises it as the “libidinal collective unconscious of the internet” (Ibid: 2). Phillips (2010) documented how when Chelsea King, an American teenager, was raped and murdered, the Facebook pages devoted to finding her gave way to memorial pages. Trolling of the pages began and prank pages such as “I bet this Pickle can get more fans than Chelsea King” were set up. Thus began a whole genre of trolling, generally referred to as RIP trolling. This style and practice has also been part of 4chan/b/’s culture. Many of the pre-existing forms of trickster-trolling culture and mechanisms designed to inoculate or police the boundaries of the subculture from mainstream infiltration have taken on a more extreme misogynist style on 4chan/b/ than on its predecessors like Usenet. The practice of “crapflooding” has tended to most commonly take the form of posting extreme pornographic images involving faeces, mutilation and vomiting (Manivannan 2013).

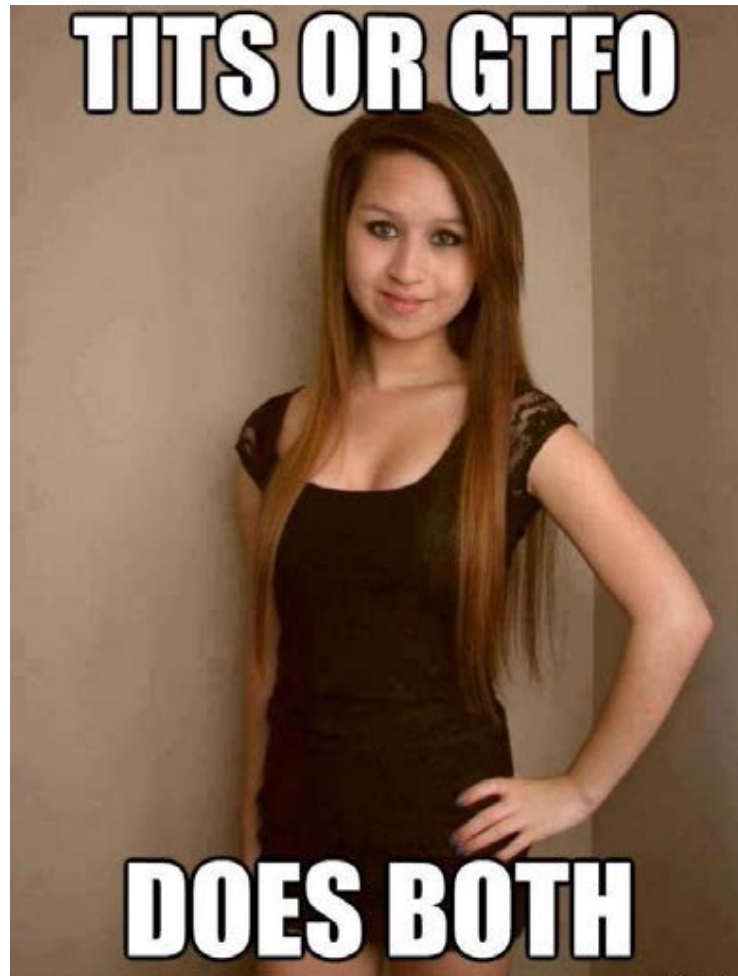


Fig. 1: Amanda Todd meme (funkyjunk.com 2012, fig. 1)

The above image refers to the case of Amanda Todd, a teenager who committed suicide in 2012 after an image of her flashing her breasts went viral. Phillips (2012) documented her case as part of a wider phenomenon of RIP trolling, which often expressed itself in misogynist terms. According to Phillips' research, she had been asked in private on an online forum to show her breasts and the images were captured and spread without her consent. What followed was a long period of bullying online, in which 4chan/b/ played a considerable role in orchestrating attacks against her and then against her Facebook memorial pages after she died (Ibid: 2012). These examples, explored in the scholarly cited above, hopefully give an introductory sense of the tones and styles at work in the spaces where the online

anti-feminism under discussion comes from and the various elements it ties together stylistically, such as trolling, prankster humour, hacker culture, geeky identifications, subversion, misogyny, anti-feminism and perhaps a broader opposition to perceived political correctness.

Theories of online anti-feminism: challenges and shortcomings

There is a wealth of analysis suggesting that even the more mainstream manifestations of the culture of computer technology production contains behaviours and patterns that make women increasingly inactive in an already male dominated field (Gill and Grint, 1995; Green and Adam, 2001; Lie, 2003; Sorensen, 2002; Turkle, 1986, Turkle and Papert, 1990; Wajcman, 2000). Dawn Nafus' (2011) feminist analysis of open source or F/OSS cultures, for example, has pointed out that the open software community identifies as open and democratic, modelled on the gift economy, and yet is more male dominated and culturally homogenous than other forms of software production. Nafus describes the way in which the idea of openness in practice de-legitimizes the kinds of social ties necessary to build mechanisms for women's inclusion. Many of her interviewees, who were open source software developers, expressed the idea that they were engaging in a Universalist post-political culture in which everyone had moved beyond old-fashioned prejudices such as sexism, while they simultaneously practiced these prejudices in their language and expressed attitudes. Linn (2006) argued that inclusion in F/OSS required a knowledge of obsolete technologies which made it difficult for new entrants, building on a pre-existing feminist analysis of socio-technical construction where the cultural barriers around programming result in the shaken confidence of female programmers and wariness of seeming "unfeminine" because of their relationship to technology but also too self-consciously feminine in relation to unwanted male attention online and in the workplace.

And yet, there seems to be a resistance, as I have already indicated, to admitting that the new online anti-feminism comes from online spaces that are not conservative or connected to the political right but instead it seems to be emerging most from spaces that embody the values most dearly held by cyberutopians, including cyberfeminists, such as internet freedom, meaning opposition to any censorship, state control or monetisation of internet culture. Those who have shown the darker side of online life to the utopian cyberfeminist view have typically been otherwise optimistic about the social role of the internet and have viewed its problems not as specific to the internet but more as old problems which the internet has not yet solved. Yet, often by their own admission, the most significant hotbed of misogynist online culture and antifeminist attacks are on geek and hacker sites like 4chan/b/, an anarchic forum that opposes commercialisation. Laurie Penny has been the most vocal feminist on the issue of online misogyny and has written the only book to date exclusively on that topic. She argues something very particular, that in the net “we have a brave new world which looks far too much like the cruel old world” and that it “recreates offline prejudices”. In other words, there is a certain ideological investment in her writing in the cyberutopian imaginary, where the only remaining problems the internet has yet to liberate women from are something like an afterglow of the conservative pre-internet order. She goes on to assert that, “although the technology is new, the language of shame and sin around women’s use of the Internet is very, very old.” By contrast, she describes tabloid readers, still languishing in the world of print, as “skimming lazily over whatever propaganda the red tops are peddling that day in the guise of news” (Ibid: 37) and claims, despite the increasing feminisation of the tabloid press, that the trend of tabloid misogyny is “only becoming more pronounced as the internet undercuts its bottom line. Tabloids are now relying more and more on lazy sexism to sell papers and the news economy of misogyny is more pernicious than ever as it is experienced in real time online. The woman hatred of the popular press is in no way separable from the sexism of amateur blogs and web forums: plenty of sexist trolls have regular gigs as print columnists and the commentariat still behaves like a frat club. Meanwhile tabloid misogyny such as the

Daily Mail, as bad as anything you'll find on Reddit, legitimises the danker, more covert troughs of gynophobia online" (Ibid: 38).

While sexism undoubtedly exists in the tabloid press, I hope that my research will demonstrate that the sexism found there is positively quaint when compared to the unparalleled cruelty and darkness of the misogyny found in the anti-feminism emerging from sites who otherwise share Penny's pro-hacker, pro-internet freedom, countercultural political leanings. She concludes that the problems of online misogyny would improve if there were a truly free internet with less influence from "terrifying companies with large terrifying legal teams" (Ibid: 21) "conservative" censorship of pornography and "governments like the United States clamping down on free Internet usage" (Ibid: 23). While geek culture may be at the centre of online misogynist culture, she concludes, "Geeks aren't just the problem. Geeks are also the solution" (Penny, 2013: 40). Here, Penny shares the cultural politics of sites like 4chan/b/ except for their overt expressions of misogyny and mischaracterises an online phenomenon produced by these transgressive, geeky, pro-internet freedom spaces as "conservative". I have used Penny to illustrate this point but, as I will hopefully show in the chapters that follow, this is a common trait of contemporary feminist analysis of the phenomenon of online misogyny.

So why is contemporary feminist writing and scholarship on the subject repeatedly reproducing these theoretical blind spots? At this particular moment the second wave of feminism is now perceived as prudish and anti-sex, trans-exclusionary and sex worker-exclusionary by the new wave of digital native feminists who have in recent years been locked in battle with figures like Germaine Greer, in many cases protesting and "no-platforming" second wave feminists. These battles online have become so intense that it does look to me like a power grab is taking place, as the old order is removed, at a pace anti-feminists would envy, to make way for the new. But the new carries its own strange melange of prejudices, sensibilities and tastes because of the political landscape from which it has emerged. This landscape includes the closing down of political contestation of competing grand narratives at

the end of the Cold War, which cuts contemporary digital feminism loose from a formal political anchor, which would typically in the past have been a liberal or socialist one. In the new digital native feminism, the values of transgression meet with a networked political sensibility, which mistrusts formal politics and is most at home in what it regards as the non-hierarchical networks of social media. The problem it then runs into is essentially that the emerging online anti-feminism of the moment draws from precisely the same things: transgression, the digital revolution and the network. These themes will be explored in the following chapters.

Chapter Two: Cyberutopia and the offensive internet

The prevalence of online misogyny began to be widely discussed around 2011, as I outlined in the previous chapter, and the battles between feminists and anti-feminists have not abated since. But around this time, the imagination of the political left was also gripped by a resurgent cyberutopian imaginary, with the beginning of the Occupy movement, hacker movements such as Anonymous and Wikileaks and the revolutions across the Middle East, which were being attributed to the rise of social media. BBC journalist Paul Mason wrote *Why it's Kicking Off Everywhere* (2011) documenting the revolutionaries in Tahrir Square, the Iranian “Twitter revolution” and the Occupy Wall Street “graduate whose future got cancelled”. The book’s thesis suggested these movements were primarily the result of the growth of social media: “Facebook has put on six sevenths of its user base since the collapse of Lehmann brothers” (Ibid: 135). He describes how the growth of new internet-mediated radicalism and new social organising “has felt like a handbrake turn for humanity” (Ibid: 22). When Iranian street protests began in 2009 Clay Shirky cheered, “This is it. The big one. This is the first revolution that has been catapulted onto the global stage and transmitted by social media” (Anderson 2009). In Heather Brooke’s paean to hacktivism, internet freedom and digital revolution, *The Revolution Will be Digitised* (2011), she claims: ‘Technology is breaking down traditional social barriers of status, class, power, wealth and geography, replacing them with an ethos of collaboration and transparency’ (Ibid: ix).

It was amid this wave of cyberutopian fervour and protest facilitated, according to some, by online communication that revelations started to emerge about the prevalence of online misogyny and levels of abusive and hateful speech previously unthinkable in public debate began to emerge. But those who were in a position to critique the new online misogyny, typically feminists on the left who were engaged in online activism, were often already the most invested in the cyberutopian narrative dominant at the time and this, I argue, had an impact on the type of analysis and commentary produced on the subject of online misogyny. This chapter

looks at the history of the cyberutopian narratives that came to shape this period and hopefully will delineate some of the context that influenced the complex and often contradictory response to the explosion of online misogyny and anti-feminism, in which the most misogynist online spaces and styles were often, for other reasons, the most exalted by those sympathetic to a pro-hacker libertarian politics and others in this period who might identify as progressive or with some form of post-Marxist leftism. Here I will introduce the relevant aspects to emerging online feminisms and anti-feminisms of the cultural politics of “networked protest”, “the digital revolution” or “the social media revolution”, as it has been variously named, and I will explore how the dominance of this narrative has shaped aspects of what has been called the offensives internet, such as trolling and the growth of anonymous hateful online speech. This chapter will also attempt to trace some of the genealogy of the cultural politics of what has become known as a leaderless revolution or digital revolution.

Trolls and A-culture

In contrast to the hopeful language of the early days of the web, described in terms of netiquette and the virtual community, the rise of online misogyny has been concomitant with the rise of an exceptionally nasty, hateful, sometimes racist and homophobic style of hyperbolic online discourse in general, often involving trolling and aggressive online discussions sparked over the most innocuous of topics (Levmore and Nussbaum 2010). The extreme nature of anonymous online abuse, stalking, death threats, doxxing⁴ and communication that would conform to the legal definition of hate speech, has led to discussion about “the internet’s anonymity problem” (Levmore 2010). The extreme turn in the tone of internet discourse has led to analysis of the threat to online privacy on social networks (Rodriguez 2010), the pervasiveness of the problem of false rumours online (Sunstein 2010) and youthful indiscretion in an online world full of potential for humiliation and bullying

⁴ Finding out and publicly revealing the personal information, such as contact details and address, of a pseudonymous person online as a method of intimidation

(Chander 2010). While the big social media corporations such as Google and Facebook have made many attempts to de-anonymise the internet, motivated by greater market control and profit but often using the extreme nature of online speech and bullying as a reason, 4chan/b/ and hacker groups like Anonymous have positioned themselves as the champions of free speech and online anonymity (McHugh 2011). I want to briefly explain here the connection between 4chan/b/ and Anonymous and some other online phenomena and to explore how and why misogyny and anti-feminist cultural politics are sometimes excused or overlooked in this context.

According to Coleman (2014) 4chan/b/'s first manifestation as Anonymous happened in 2008 when the Church of Scientology tried to remove a video, which had been a source of amusement on 4chan, of Tom Cruise explaining some of his more implausible beliefs about Scientology. The Church of Scientology had gained a reputation of being litigious when it came to unflattering online portrayals and, after it tried to suppress a critical video, Anonymous launched Project Chanology, an organised hacker campaign against Scientology, which was more sophisticated than earlier childish pranks (Cook, 2008). DDoS attacks, which became the hallmark of Anonymous, and even "real life" protests followed. Under the banner of Project Chanology 4chan organised its first orchestrated attack in online and street protests against the Scientologists. 2008 was also the first time that a group of hackers from 4chan referred to themselves as Anonymous, sending a terrorist-style message to the church, letting them know about 4chan's plans to attack them. "Anonymous has therefor decided that your organisation should be destroyed. [...] We shall expel you from the Internet and systematically dismantle the Church of Scientology" (YouTube, 2008). In describing themselves they stated their now famous slogan "Knowledge is free. We are Anonymous. We are Legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Expect Us." (YouTube 2008). The Church soon found its site taken down by DDoS attacks, its secret documents revealed, and street protests at many of their churches. The question of what Anonymous should look like was discussed on 4chan/b/, resulting in the suggestion to copy the final scene from the movie *V for*

Vendetta, in which masks of Guy Fawkes were simultaneously put on by a large crowd. The mask has remained the iconic image of Anonymous ever since. 2008 thus marked a key shift for 4chan/b/ and the constantly reconfiguring group of users employing the Anonymous moniker. The hive mind of Anonymous means there are no specific members or concrete agenda, bringing to life what Wired editor and internet theorist Kevin Kelly (1999) called “the swarm”, which he argued would mean the primary type of collective networked movement that would define the digital world. The influence of this tendency could be seen several years later in the Occupy movement where the Anonymous symbolic mask from the movie *V for Vendetta* became the primary symbol. The most prominent artists produced by the movement, Moly Crabapple, used images of bees, Guy Fawkes masks and laptops in her representations of the protests. Spain’s indignados beamed the collective signature Guy Fawkes mask onto a building in the Puerta del Sol and Anons disseminated some of the first calls to Occupy Wall Street and led a DDoS campaign called “Operation Avenge Assange” (Coleman 2014).

Coleman (2011) has charted the history of the Anonymous hacker movement beginning with pranks on 4chan/b/ and moving on to issues of free speech, internet freedom and resisting state policing of content online. Anonymous were catapulted onto the global stage when they launched a campaign in defence of Julian Assange and Wikileaks. Many Anonymous hacker formations now communicate entirely outside of 4chan/b/ and have distinct media networks, so it is no longer accurate to conflate 4chan/b/ and Anonymous or Lulzsec. Anonymous undertook a series of campaigns, moving increasingly away from the nihilistic lulz culture of 4chan and developing their own online spaces, such as AnonOps and YourAnonymousNews on Twitter, with greater independence from 4chan, including Operation Payback in 2010, which used direct action and DDoS attacks to defend file-sharing and illegal downloading. Later that year, Operation Avenge Assange saw the hacker collective attack Visa, Amazon and PayPal when they stopped processing donations to Wikileaks. Anonymous then began to spread beyond the English speaking world, with a Mexican Anonymous collective and direct actions in what came to be dubbed

the Arab Spring. However, they also continue to share many features with 4chan/b/ and their origins on that forum are still expressed in much of their cultural politics, aesthetics and focus on anonymous, leaderless, swarm-like formations. For this reason, their origins on 4chan/b/ are significant.

Halpin (2012) argues that Anonymous were central to making the Occupy movement go global – spreading live streamed and viral media which he claims would have gone ignored by mainstream media – and that the horizontalist, anti-leadership, decentralized network politics and style of Occupy was profoundly influenced by Anonymous and the Anon culture which came from spaces like 4chan. In 2012, as he documents, Anonymous targeted attempts to introduce greater intellectual property and internet surveillance legislation online. Other hacker groups like Lulzsec emerged from 4chan/b/ with less serious political demands, primarily pranking and hacking the websites of major organisations to point out their poor cyber security. There were a series of arrests in 2012 in the US and UK of hackers, Halpin writes, with ages ranging from 16 to 42, including a hacker called Topiary, a 20-year-old who was a major figure in Anonymous and Lulzsec during the preceding years, and who directed his operations from his house in the Shetland Islands.

Coleman (2011) has argued that free and open source programmers and hackers, who predate and influenced many aspects of early internet culture including today's 4chan/b/, Anonymous and Lulzsec, provide a "liberal critique within liberalism", advancing many liberal principles such as meritocracy, free speech and limiting state power but also subverting a neoliberal drive to privatise and make profit from the internet and software. Computer break-ins, sometimes called cracking, can be as much about transgression, she explained, as they are about learning and exploring. She describes hackers as engaging in "citizen-led reordering", "direct action", from the anarchist tradition, and engaging in efforts to increase participation in media production. Describing geek and hacker cultures Coleman (2011) writes: "Computer hackers tend to be skilled programmers, security researchers, hardware builders, and

system administrators, and they often self-identify as such. They are generally motivated by some version of information freedom and participate in “hacker” events and institutions like the Computer Chaos Club, ShmooCon, and free software projects. Computer geeks, in contrast, may not be as technically skilled, but they are literate in digital media and have skills, for example, in video editing and design and enough technical know-how to be able to use tools such as Internet Relay Chat, where many geeks and hackers congregate. Crucially, they also identify with digital cultural currents, and some also hold ethical sympathies, such as commitments to freedom of information, that attract them to phenomena like Anonymous, among many other sites of geeky production, culture, and action” (Ibid: 512).

Steven Levy’s (1984) *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution* was, as one can guess from the subheading, somewhat more overt in its pro-hacker perspective than the rest of the literature on the subject. He traces the origins of hacking back to the campuses of MIT in the 1940s. Hacking referred to a style of work, “a project was undertaken or a product built not solely to fulfill some constructive goal, but with some wild pleasure taken in mere involvement” (Levy, 1984: 9). For the hardware hackers of the 1970s, Levy argues, hacking was a form of political rebellion. This generation of hackers included Apple founders Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. For them, computers had been the preserve of institutionalised experts and were central to the organisation of the Vietnam War but they wanted to put them to new uses. The next generation, the “young game hackers” of the 1980s had grown up working with minicomputers and sought to use computers for fun, going on to influence gaming and research developed along fluid, collaborative and non-hierarchical lines. Levy described the hacker ethic, as defined by a set of values: people should have access to computers, information should be free, a mistrust of authority, a belief in meritocracy, appreciating computers as art and a belief in the life-improving qualities of computers.

If hackers were bred by boards, Coleman (2011) argues, trolls were bred by the descendants of boards, image forums like 4chan/b/. Coleman sees trolls as being a

particular but linked tendency to other subcultures including hackers, phreakers and the F/OSS (Open source software) movement, inheriting their “rich aesthetic tradition of spectacle and transgression” (Ibid: 101). Residing in a similar social universe, trolling was common on Usenet and others. These movements were, in the 1970’s, linked to the Yippies, who were also known for pranks and promoting political and sexual anarchy. Whitney Phillips (2013: i) describes 4chan as “a—if not *the*—pillar of online trolling activity”. An early description of trolling from Donath (1999) describes the activity in stricter terms than would be typical today. “The troll attempts to pass as a legitimate participant, sharing the group’s common interests and concerns. [...] A troll can disrupt the discussion on a newsgroup, disseminate bad advice and damage the feeling of trust in a newsgroup community” (Ibid: 30). Dahlberg (2001) adds, “after developing their false identity and becoming accepted within the group, the troll sets about disrupting proceedings while trying to maintain his or her cover” (Ibid: 4).

On the central role in trolling culture played by 4chan/b/, Phillips writes:

“Populated by tens of thousands of self-identifying trolls, users who revel in transgression and disruptiveness, /b/ is widely regarded as an epicentre (arguably the Epicentre) of online trolling activity, and consistently pumps out some of the Internet’s most recognizable, not to mention offensive, viral content.” (Ibid: 5)

Phillips concedes, however, that it is not possible to confirm precisely the identities of 4chan/b/’s users but through ethnographic study has reached some approximations. For example, the users communicate through English and engage primarily with American and sometimes Japanese pop culture, with many users openly identifying as white suburban middle class males in their speech and storytelling. From the proliferation of early 90s nostalgia and memories of particular toys, TV shows and other references to a particular period she estimates the users are approximately 18 to 30, white, American and European and predominantly male. Trolling behaviours on 4chan/b/ are strongly indicative of whiteness, she argues,

“Most obviously, trolling humour is frequently directed at people of colour, particularly African Americans. Even when engaging in racially neutral humour, anons take their own whiteness, and the whiteness of their audience, for granted; on the rare occasion that an anon comes forward as non-white, he or she must self-identify, that is, flag him or herself as racially Other” (Phillips 2010: 7). She continues:

“Although it is not possible to prove definitively that all /b/tards are biologically male, the ethos of /b/ is unquestionably androcentric. In addition to revelling in sexist tropes (“get back in the kitchen and make me a sammich”) and deriding posters who come forward as female (the standard response being “tits or gtfo⁵”) /b/ is home to a seemingly endless supply of pornographic material, all of which is filtered through an explicitly male gaze. But not necessarily a heterosexual male gaze; a large percentage of porn on /b/ is gay, and trolls devote a great deal of energy to ostensibly homosocial (if not outright homosexual) behaviour, including frequent “rate my cawk” threads, in which anons post and rate pictures of each other’s penises.” (Phillips 2010: 7)

Anonymity, she claims, also has a behavioural role in the culture of /b/, which is based on one-upmanship of offensiveness, with racist, sexist and homophobic posts having no negative consequences, and arguably rewards, in the culture (Phillips, 2010).

The unifying characteristics of many of these different phenomena (4chan/b/ Anonymous, trolling culture, Lulzsec) include, according to Auerbach (2012) who used the umbrella term “A-culture” to describe these subcultural traits, *Otaku* which was “originally applied, with negative connotations, to people whose obsessive, fanlike interests in geeky things like video games, anime and manga, computers,

⁵ “tits or gtfo” is an expression that began on 4chan/b/ meaning that the female commenter has to post an image of her bare breasts or leave the thread. This began in response to the regularity with which men would pretend to be women on 4chan/b/.

comic books, science fiction—but really in *anything*, including sports, cars, bodybuilding, guns—are such that they become a distraction from ‘real life’. The term is associated with shut-ins, the unemployed, and, generally, losers” (Auerbach 2012, 4).

All of the sites Auerbach defines as being part of A-culture were closely focused on *interests* rather than the personalities of users, which distinguishes it from mainstream social networks like Facebook in which users are encouraged to use personal photographs, personal information and identity. “A-culture participants sublimate their social selves to transient groups based on their interests,” (Ibid: 5) he argues, in opposition to how internet culture is defined by the big social media platforms and mainstream corporate internet culture. According to Auerbach, the sites of A-culture include Usenet, 4chan, Something Awful, Internet Relay Chat (including EFNet and Anonymous), massively multiplayer online role-playing games (World of Warcraft in particular), GaiaOnline, LiveJournal, Encyclopædia Dramatica and Urban Dictionary. Auerbach also listed some features of A-culture as speed (discussion proceeds at an ever changing and fast pace), irony (A-culture holds nothing sacred and constantly ironizes to a point where little can be taken literally), self-documentation (metatextuality self-mythologising meme creation and self-reference) and elitism (the constant hazing of n00bs). The linking features among these online cultures are significant because, as I will show, these features connect current online anti-feminism to these cultures stylistically.

Internet Hate Machine or counter-hegemonic space?

Despite being the central site of trolling culture, misogyny and anti-feminist attacks on the English speaking internet, academic reflections on 4chan/b/ have tended to be celebratory (Coleman, 2011; Halpin, 2011) emphasising its influence on more progressive political manifestations such as the Occupy movement. The misogynist culture of 4chan/b/ has received relatively little critical scholarly attention and when

it has, the analyses have tended to excuse the misogyny or to portray it as merely a misunderstood strategy to keep a subcultural, counter-hegemonic space pure of mainstream influence (Manivannan 2013, Phillips 2013).

In 2007, when Fox News called Anon culture – Anonymous, Lulzsec, trolling culture and 4chan/b/ - an “Internet Hate Machine” Anonymous responded via a YouTube video read by an automated voice: “Dear Fox News. The name and nature of Anonymous have been ravaged, as if it were a whore in a back alley, and then placed on display for the public eye to behold. Allow me to say quite simply: you completely missed the point of who and what we are... We are everyone and we are no one... We are the face of chaos and the harbingers of justice. We laugh at the face of tragedy. We mock those in pain. We ruin the lives of other simply because we can” (YouTube 2007). Coleman claims this video was “parodic” of Fox News’ style of reporting and dismisses a literal interpretation as one that could be considered “only, of course, to those not in on the joke” (Coleman 2014: 2).

Whitney Phillips (2010) described the 4chan/b/ style of trolling and pranking in graphic terms: “They post movie stills from films like Dumb and Dumber captioned with the phrase LOL YOUR DEAD, photo shopped images of babies in meat grinders and images of anally impaled corpses” (Ibid: 3). And yet, while Phillips recognises the very real impact of their actions on their victims, she characterises them in surprisingly generous terms, apportioning some of the blame for this phenomenon to Facebook policies and described them as “revel[ing] in counter-hegemony” and “undermining established media narratives”, namely the cheap “mindless histrionics of the modern 24 hour news cycle” (Ibid: 3). In another essay she went on to characterise a Fox News reporter’s less flattering description of trolls as an attempt to “maximize audience antipathy” and went on to say that “mainstream media outlets aim to neutralise a particularly counter-hegemonic cultural space” (Phillips 2013: 2) “Memorial page trolling pushes back against a corporate media environment that fetishizes, sensationalizes and commoditizes tragedy” (Ibid: 3). Similarly, Coleman (2009) has defined trolls warmly as tricksters and remarked

“Not all tricksters are sanitised and safe as Disney has led us to believe” (Ibid: 115). Criticism of trolling has also been conceived as a method of shutting down debate and punishing those who transgress norms and community rules on some sites like Reddit, in which users who criticise trolls can be voted down (Bergstrom 2011).

Vyshali Manivannan (2013), for example, has written in positive terms about the lulz culture of 4chan/b/, its joker ethos and its transgressiveness despite having also specifically explored the misogyny of the website (2013). Misogyny on 4chan, she argues, acts as a strategic regenerative way to maintain the exclusivity of the subculture. Understanding this function “is necessary as /b/ occupies an extreme point on the genealogical continuum bridging the transgressive cultures of bulletin-board systems, shock sites, and hacker culture” (Ibid: 3). New users unbalance 4chan/b/’s anti-normative, anti-celebrity, anti-leader culture by not understanding the nature of the subculture and this is done primarily by women. These n00bs are then trolled based on their identity aspects. These feminine behaviours that unbalance the culture of 4chan/b/ include, for example, posting vain photographs of yourself on a site where anonymity is central to its ethos. Auerbach (2012) defined A-culture against the culture of mainstream social media platforms, who I would add have greater female participation: “as opposed to the culture of Facebook, Twitter, and other mainstream social-networking sites, is the intentional disconnect between one’s real life and one’s online persona.” He argued A-culture grew in response to the mainstreaming of the internet and adds that it “serves to reify a *shared* and *progressive* sense of culture and belonging that trumps differences among individuals” and that the “social-libertarian ethos and the surplus of obscenity are partly products of the *medium*, not just of the participants” (Ibid: 8). Offensive discourse is not to be taken literally, he suggests, but to be understood as operating within the “economies of offense, suspicion and unreality” (Ibid: 7) through which the style of A-culture operates.

Manivannan (2013) quotes examples from 4chan/b/ users that express a rejection of normative values, including ones around gender: “The fact that you introduce

yourself as “femanon” proves that you are an attention whore. True anon has no gender” (Ibid: 3). She characterises 4chan as a temporary autonomous zone, what Hakim Bey (1991) qualifies as a non-hierarchical system of relationships existing outside of formal governance and procedures of control, “invisible in its lack of identity and history, spontaneous and prodigious in its creativity, outrageous in its refusal to treat anyone or anything as authoritative or sacrosanct” (Ibid: 39). She applies Bourdeiu’s 1984 concept of habitus and cultural capital and compares them to the political pranks of the Situationist International: “/b/’s pervasive bigotry indicates not widespread prejudice but anxiety over the disintegration of zero-identity anonymity and subcultural dissolution” (Manivannan 2013: 4).

It is hard to imagine the same intellectual effort being exerted to partially excuse or at times even deny the extreme misogyny embedded in these online cultures and sites, being applied to mainstream sexist cultures with less subcultural capital. In these analyses it is as though claims to aesthetic subversion, transgression and other “anti-normative” features is presumed to be sufficiently aesthetically valuable and progressive to compensate for the prevalence of their less progressive anti-feminism and extreme misogyny. In this way, I would argue, many unspoken biases and presuppositions are revealed implicitly in these analyses. In the chapters that follow, I will revisit this issue but for now I will look to the kind of crypto-anarchist cyberutopian literature that will hopefully give some context to why the values of 4chan/b/ and A-culture more broadly are so exalted by the theorists above.

Cyberutopia, horizontalism

Hakim Bey’s (1985) idea of the temporary autonomous zone was a major influence on this approach. According to Bey, the temporary autonomous zone should create a temporary space in the present for eluding formal structures of control, such as the state, taboos and restrictions of mainstream culture, social norms and the economy. He took inspiration from what he called “pirate utopias” and argued that attempts to

form a permanent culture or politics inevitably deteriorates into a structured system that stifles individual creativity. His language and ideas influenced online cultures that advocated illegal downloading, anonymous hacker collectives, swarming and subcultures that knowingly subvert mainstream social and moral norms.

Echoes of John Perry Barlow's (1996) manifesto *A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace* can be seen in contemporary internet subcultures like 4chan/b/ and Anonymous and in analyses that reflect this radical horizontalist politics (Coleman 2014, Auerbach 2012, Halpin 2013). Barlow was one of the founders of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, anarchist hackers and defenders of an internet free of state intervention and capitalist control and monopolising of the online world. In a similar style to the rhetoric of 4chan/b/ and Anonymous ("we are legion"/"welcome to the internet") it warned "Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the home of Mind. On behalf of the future I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather" (Barlow 1996, 28).

This anarchist cyberutopianism makes a clear break from traditional Marxist politics of the left, which has favoured the industrial working class and broadly speaking focused on the productive economy. Despite this, the meritocratic libertarian hacker cultures seem to be generally considered part of the political left today.

Gabrielle Coleman (2011: 511) has described the hacker culture that exists around Anonymous, Lulzsec, 4chan and Wikileaks as "rhizomatic" and "premised on a robust antileader, anticelebrity ethic". She praises Anonymous, the infamous leaderless hacker collective who came from the anarchic image board 4chan, where attacks have been launched on all kinds of groups from the international women's day website to government and corporate websites of those who have opposed or impeded Julian Assange and the wikileaks digital whistle-blowing project. Coleman describes its radical-individualist, meritocratic and essentially liberal politics as based on defending freedom of speech and individual liberty. One Anonymous

hacker she quotes wrote: “anonymity is a shield from the tyranny of the majority”. According to Coleman (Ibid: 514), hacker politics “far exceed traditional liberal articulations” that their actions are “fundamentally grounded in action through building” and “expressing dissent technologically” (Ibid: 514). To give a sense of Coleman’s personal attitude toward these cultures, if it were not already clear, she dedicated her last book, which was praised by libertarian journalist and internet freedom activist Glenn Greenwald and Occupy wall street artist Molly Crabapple and published by radical left wing publishing house Verso, to “the legions behind Anonymous – those who have donned the mask in the past, those who still dare to take a stand today, and those who will surely rise again in the future” (Coleman 2014: i)

Coleman’s largely flattering analysis of hacker and geek cultures, in which she celebrates their “novel modes for collaborating, organizing and protesting” has unsurprisingly been welcomed by those subcultures and as a result Coleman regularly speaks at hacker conferences and even features in videos produced by Anonymous. In her essay *Hacker Politics and Publics* (2011), she argues that their protest and interventions act as a corrective to the undemocratic and overweening force of the market and the state on the internet. She writes in optimistic tones about the “citizen-led reordering” that hackers are involved in. She views hackers as a kind of vanguard yet aligns their interests with those of the general public, while casting the powerful market and the state against those interests: “Governments and corporations have more power and resources to take technology down a certain path than initiatives brought by citizens have. Attempts, for instance, to create alternatives to corporate media applications may ultimately fail” (Ibid: 515).

Heather Brooke’s (2011) *The Revolution Will Be Digitised*, which I’ve already mentioned, takes a similarly optimistic view of the liberating potential of the horizontalism of the internet, with political hackers and Wikileaks to the forefront of that project. What Brooke refers to as the “information war” describes the much discussed transition from a more structured print and broadcast media to online

media, understood by internet boosters as a transition from an elite to a democratic media or to amateurisation. It also refers to the on-going battles to shape new media, from legislative copyright restrictions in the West to state control of online media in authoritarian regimes, data mining, hacking and privacy issues. She follows Julian Assange and the Wikileaks project and visits hackerspaces in Berlin and California, commenting, “It is no surprise that as we have shifted from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy, those who build the infrastructure and products of this economy have made their fortunes and found their values moving into the mainstream” (Ibid: 42). Here she echoes the post-industrial thinking of the network society theorists like Barlow (1996) but is, like Coleman, more interested in the vanguard role of radical groups like hackers, rather than the popular movements of people through mainstream social media platforms. Brooke focuses on the post-material and libertarian ideals within hacker culture, emphasising the power of ideas over other historical and material conditions: “Hacker spaces are the digital equivalent of Enlightenment coffee houses” (2011: 23). She argues “Technology is breaking down traditional social barriers of status, class, power, wealth and geography, replacing them with an ethos of collaboration and transparency” (Ibid: 145). Radical horizontalists influenced by the Zapatista movement and Hardt and Negri’s theory of the multitude, consisting of singularities acting in common, have put forward ideas like electronic civil disobedience (Critical Art Ensemble 2004), the electronic fabric of struggle (Cleverly 1998) and internet as globalization-from-below (Kahn and Kellner, 2004). In particular, the autonomist focus on “immaterial labour” is relevant in what network society theorists and the radical horizontalists regard as a post-industrial age and a post-material culture.

Wired magazine writer Clay Shirky’s *Here Comes Everybody* (2009) espoused the liberating potential of the new internet-centric popular organising along leaderless, collaborative and competitive market lines. Shirky states the magnitude of the liberating power of the Internet in grand terms. On the amateurisation of new media he writes “The transfer of these capabilities from various professional classes to the general public is epochal” (2009: 17). Like other popular polemics of its time such

as Peter Miller's *Smart Swarm* (2010) and Carne Ross' *The Leaderless Revolution* (2011), the book is a celebration of the liberating power and potential of leaderless, complex social networks. Shirky admires the work of pioneering managerialists of the past and maps out different communication patterns in complex graph form. He writes: "For the last hundred years the big organizational question has been whether any given task was best taken on by the state, directing the effort in a planned way, or by business competing in a market. This debate was based on the universal and unspoken supposition that people couldn't simply self-assemble; the choice between markets and managed effort assumed that there was no third alternative. Now there is" (2009: 47). Shirky's cyberutopianism is more pro-market and more mainstream in its expression than Barlow (1996), Anonymous or 4chan/b/ but all of these thinkers share in a tradition of imagining the internet as a site of radical horizontalism, leaderlessness and networks of virtual disembodied communicators.

In his cyberutopian polemic, Paul Mason (2011) quotes Castells' influential study of Catalan internet users in his counterargument: "The more an individual has a project of autonomy (personal, professional, socio-political, communicative), the more she uses the Internet. And in a time sequence, the more he/she uses the Internet, the more autonomous she becomes vis-à-vis societal rules and institutions" (Castells 2007: 12).

Adbusters, the Canadian anti-consumerist magazine published an article by Manuel Castells called *The Disgust Becomes a Network* when Spanish anti-austerity encampments began in 2011. He wrote:

"So those who minimize the wkiacampadas still do not understand how profound they are. They may leave the squares, to return to them periodically, but they will not leave the social networks and the minds of those who participate. They are no longer alone. And they have lost their fear... because they discovered new forms of organization, participation and mobilization that burst the traditional channels belonging to those whom a large section of society, and the majority of young people, distrust.

Parties and institutions will have to learn to live with this emerging civil society” (Castells, 2011).

One of the techniques used by anti-feminist attackers, particularly those from this hacker tradition, has been DDoS attack. This type of action has also been widely praised as a promising form of digital sit-in. Sauter’s (2014) defence of DDoS attacks, *The Coming Swarm*, a book praised by Gabriella Coleman and other prestigious voices in the pro-hacker tech world including Cory Doctorow editor of Boing Boing and Electronic Frontier Foundation fellow, Ethan Zuckerman and Jonathan Zittrain, presented DDoS as a valid form of direct action protest: “Today’s DDoS actions are part of a history of denial of service actions. Actions such as strikes, work slowdowns, blockades, occupations, and sit-ins all serve as ideological and theoretical antecedents to the digitally based DDoS action” (Sauter 2014: 7). Laurie Penny has also called DDoS the “digital equivalent of a sit-in” (Penny 2011).

The alleged “counter-hegemonic” spaces and practices that have produced both an extreme form of anti-feminism and a much celebrated radical leaderlessness in style have clear roots in earlier internet cultures and thinkers such as Bey (1991) and Barlow (1996). The more mainstream manifestations of cyberutopian discourse associated with Silicon Valley and Wires magazine also share many of the same ideas of “the swarm” and have undoubtedly influenced contemporary thought on the internet. Fred Turner’s (2010) history of the roots of Wired magazine and its ideological underpinnings *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* provides evidence that the roots of contemporary cyberculture lie in the 60s counterculture. This is relevant here because contemporary online anti-feminism identifies and draws upon a countercultural aesthetic.

Turner references a 1995 edition of Time magazine entitled *Welcome to cyberspace*, which ran an article called *We owe it all to the hippies* arguing that the real legacy of the hippy counterculture was the computer revolution (Brand 1995). The author, Stewart Brand – a radical horizontalist who went on to influence both the radical

horizontalist underground hackers and more mainstream sensibilities of Silicon Valley today - is the central figure of Turner's study. The collaborative flexible approach to research that went on to define hacker culture, new economy thinking, horizontalism and open source internet projects, he documents, started in the military research culture that grew up around WW2 and developed throughout the cold war with Norbert Wiener's cybernetics. During this time technocentric visions shifted from the automaton to the self-regulating system. A contact language for biologists, physicists, psychologists and computer scientists in military research facilities was established as cybernetics sought to bring many of these fields together. He traces the shifting politics of the computational metaphor through individuals and institutions from this period right up through hackers, Wired magazine and the New Economy thinkers of the 1990s.

The free speech movement and the back-to-the-land hippy counterculture of the 1960's had a significant influence on Stewart Brand, who would, according to Turner, become the most significant networker in tying together so many diverse people and ideas with one coherent contact language. His most significant vehicle for this was The Whole Earth Catalog, which Steve Jobs would go on to quote in his famous Stanford Commencement Speech and was read by all of the key figures of the cyberutopian movement of the 90s, from free market libertarians to hacker subcultures. The Catalog used the language and the ideas of Wiener's cybernetics to bring together the back-to-the-land Communalists and the language of technology. In 1967 for example it published Richard Brautigan's poem *All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace*, which BBC's Adam Curtis would later take as the title for a documentary series on the subject, in which he wrote in a Romantic style of "cybernetic meadows" where "we are free of our labours and joined back to nature" (Brautigan, 1967) Brand became involved with the experimental San Francisco art scene in the 60s, which fused new technologies, LSD and communal living, through which he encountered many of the thinkers that would go on to form the politics of the Whole Earth Catalog: Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller and Norbert Wiener. Rejecting the explicit class politics of the New Left, Turner claims,

experimentation and systems-oriented theories formed the ideological basis of the New Communalist movement. While these communes were a return to the land, they often employed cybernetic ideas, such as Fuller's geodesic domes, and experimented with networked non-hierarchical organisational models. Inspired by the New Communalists, Brand would go on to become involved in free education projects, which formed a meeting ground for technologists, counterculturalists and academics (Brand 1995: 70). In the Whole Earth Catalog, Turner argues we can glimpse the first intimations of "cyberspace" in Buckminster Fuller's "outlaw area" and Esther Dyson's social Darwinist vision of space (Brand 1995: 82). The transparency ethic of the Whole Earth Catalog and its organization-as-organism approach to production, which Brand called "transcendental planning", appealed to the Communalists and, increasingly to technologists. This would in turn go on to form the basis of Wired's Kevin Kelly employing the notion of *swarming* as a form of leaderless online behaviour, a notion which remains deeply embedded in the language and ideas of both countercultural hackers and tech start-ups today.

Turner's analysis of the countercultural lineage of cyberculture continues with the computer hobbyists and counterculturalists who formed The Homebrew Computer Club and the People's Computer Company around the Bay Area in the 1970s, based on an ethos of information sharing and peer-to-peer collaboration which were hugely influential on figures like Steve Jobs but whose influence can still be seen in hacker spaces around the world. With Brand's next publication *coEvolution Quarterly*, economic stagflation, the rise of green politics and the personal computer gave a new touch to the old Whole Earth Catalog mix of communalism and technology. In 1985 the Whole Earth Catalog became a model for the Whole Earth Lectronic Link, mentioned in the previous chapter, which became one of the most formative early web forums and which hosted former counterculturalists, hackers and journalists who went on to be a highly influential network of people in computing, academia, the press. "Ultimately, thanks to the work of the many journalists on the system, and particularly the writing of John Perry Barlow, *virtual community* and *electronic*

frontier became key frames through which Americans would seek to understand the nature of the emerging public internet” (Turner 1995: 142).

Members of the forum collaborated and shared information, and they had taken influence from a counterculture that had rejected the market, so notions like the gift economy were hugely appealing to the users of WELL. Their embrace of notions of disembodied intimacy, heterarchy and networked forms of working also arrived at a time in which business was changing. As Manuel Castells (2011: 381) has pointed out, the hubs of the electronics industry, like the San Francisco Bay area, were among the businesses most dependant on networked patterns of organization, The key figures in this scene went on to become editors and contributors to *Wired* magazine and became prolific writers, internet experts and new economy advocates, whose influence in shaping language, frames and ideas about the internet and its economic and political liberating potential is, according to Turner’s study, hugely influential. They became network society thinkers but their origins were rooted in the radical horizontalism of Stewart Brand and his fellow counterculturalists. These antecedents to contemporary internet culture are significant to any study of contemporary hacker culture and in particular in making sense of the anti-feminist spaces that identify as countercultural, pro-hacker and pro-“internet freedom”. They also hopefully illuminate the cultural politics that may influence the sympathetic analyses of these spaces and online cultures.

The network society

During the period of this research, as I have noted, “networked” leaderless forms of protest in Spain, Egypt and America have drawn upon images from Anonymous and 4chan/b/. Perhaps because of this, there is greater sympathy in contemporary left political thought for these “swarm”-like formations and, as a result, the connection of these putative egalitarian movements’ to a misogynist site like 4chan/b/ is ignored or viewed unusually sympathetically. The idea of the network society that these protests and online spaces, or at least those who write about them, are drawing upon

go back to Bell (1973), Wellman (1988) and Castells (1996). Wellman (1988) theorised a new kind of social organisation, which allowed for individualism and collective action simultaneously. Bell (1973) theorised a profound break in society from an industrialised, statist, Fordist society to one based around information exchange, post-material modes of production within capitalism and less rigid class politics.

Manuel Castells has been a central theorist of what he called the network society (1996), making the since then widely disputed claim that the network society constitutes a new and profoundly changed society (Castells, 2000). Castells' theory holds that the relationships of production and power "are increasingly organized around networks" that "constitute the new social morphology of our societies" (Castells, 2000b: 500). The networked individual exists at the centre of this approach. Today's thinkers, who employ this network society approach are influenced by Bell, Wellman and Castells.

In *Communication Power* (2009), Castells deals with the question of where power lies in a networked society. He tries to show that communication is the central power in contemporary society and argues that global social networks are the fundamental source of power and counter-power. The relation between power and counter-power is analysed in respect to the contradictions between multinational corporate media networks and the creative audience, framing and counter-framing. Castells defines power as "the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favour the empowered actor's will, interests, and values" (2009: 10). Castells theorizes mass self-communication based on Umberto Eco's semiotic model of communication as the emergence of "the creative audience" (2009: 127-135) that engages in the "interactive production of meaning" (2009: 132). Mass-self communication for Castells allows subjects to "watch the powerful" (2009: 413).

"The interactive capacity of the new communication system ushers in a new form of communication, mass self-communication, which multiplies and diversifies the entry points in the communication process. This gives

rise to unprecedented autonomy for communicative subjects to communicate at large” (Castells 2009: 136).

His analysis also shares some of the opposition to the marketization of the internet expressed by contemporary hacker culture and A-culture. On the one hand, he argues, web 2.0 business strategies result in “the commodification of freedom”, the “enclosing of the commons of free communication and selling people access to global communication networks in exchange for surrendering their privacy and becoming advertising targets” (2009: 421). On the other hand, “once in cyberspace, people may have all kinds of ideas, including challenging corporate power, dismantling government authority, and changing the cultural foundations of our aging/aching civilization” (Castells 2009: 420).

This kind of utopian discourse and all of the literature that preceded it, outlined in this chapter, articulated a post-industrial, post-material, networked society vision of flattened hierarchies. It was in this context, after a resurgence in these ideas in a moment of global social media-centric protest, that the question of online misogyny became impossible to ignore and yet, difficult to theorise or at least seemingly difficult to accept for some, politically. The current anti-feminism’s features, found on 4chan/b/ (anonymity, free speech, swarm-like actions like DDoS, hacker politics and countercultural aesthetics) are also the defining features of the current waves of protest. This cultural history, from Bell (1976) to the communes of the 1960s (Turner 1995) should give some context to the unusually sympathetic theorisations of these cultures that we see today in the current scholarly work on 4chan/b/ and online misogyny. The genealogy of this style was important to explore here because it demonstrates how this countercultural gesturing and pro “internet freedom” cultural politics can be as easily absorbed by corporate culture as it can by hacker culture, and as easily by feminism as it can be by anti-feminism. Again, I would argue, the broader historical context of the post Cold War decline in contestation of any grand competing political projects must be kept in mind. It should come as no surprise then that it can be increasingly hard to tell corporate culture and counterculture apart. While countercultural gestures become increasingly

transgressive, pushing the boundaries of pornography and of sexual morality, they also become increasingly emptied of any political content. This theme will be explored further in terms of sexual politics in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Digital Sit-in or Rebel Misogynies?

The links and continuities between the network society and various manifestations of counterculture traced in the previous chapter reveal a somewhat counter-intuitive co-existence of back-to-the-land and pro-technology tendencies, and countercultural and entrepreneurial pro-business tendencies. The relationship between feminism and counterculture is yet more complex and contradictory. It may be reasonable to assume that an online culture that constructs its identity through transgressive, countercultural and anti-hierarchical gestures should also challenge gendered hierarchies, but as I will trace here, anti-feminism and misogyny have been accommodated by many different manifestations of counterculture in the past. Because so much of contemporary online anti-feminism seems to be emerging from virtual spaces that express and construct their identities in this way, rejecting traditional conservative anti-feminist politics, an exploration of the literature on past parallels is needed here. This chapter reviews the literature on the history of counterculture since the post war period, with a view to exploring and understanding how contemporary countercultural styles in the world of internet culture have evolved in relation to gender and feminism. The previous chapter looked at the “digital sit-in” view of online cultures such as 4chan/b/. This chapter will use Reynolds and Press’ (1995) account of “rebel misogynies”, among others, as a theoretical framework to examine the dynamics of contemporary online anti-feminism.

First, some terms must be defined. The terminology used in the study of subcultures is now so contested and the debate so heavily subscribed with suggestions for various nouns to account for new complexities (subcultures, post-subcultures, scenes, genres, tribes, neo-tribes, virtual communities etc.) that before weighing in or even being able to refer to the phenomenon under discussion, one has to embark upon an increasingly hefty review of literature. Following Hesmondhalgh’s (2005) “none of the above” thesis, for the purposes of this research I take the view that the imperfect term ‘subculture’ retains a certain utility and is perhaps the least problematic in

terms of describing a phenomenon such as 4chan/b/ because of the relative internal coherence of its style, its persistence over time and because it is possible to broadly define its boundaries, namely the contents of the forum 4chan/b/. As with all online culture, it spills over into other platforms, influences and takes influence from other online spaces but, I argue, it is reasonable for the purposes of being able to refer to the phenomenon at all, to use the imperfect term subculture. To take account of the wider culture of online anti-feminism, seen across many platforms, I will refer to this broader phenomenon as a style. This term takes into account a relatively coherent genre of discourse and visual culture shared across several different websites and platforms, which mixes anti-feminism, misogyny, otaku, transgressive countercultural styles as well as trolling and prankster cultural styles from the hacker tradition (Coleman 2011). I use the term style in my future discussion of the broader phenomenon of this geeky and transgressive online anti-feminism, not applying Dick Hebdige's use of the term but rather Richard Hofstadter's in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (1964), defined as a set of linguistic and rhetorical styles, which developed in American politics and public life.

Hofstadter described American political life as “an arena for uncommonly angry minds”, which is an apt description of a great deal of online antifeminist discourse, and the paranoid style as “a style of mind, not always right wing in its affiliations”, which is also a particularly apt description of the post-ideological politics of the style under discussion. Hofstadter described the paranoid style's qualities of “heated exaggeration, suspiciousness and conspiratorial fantasy” and of “systematised delusions of persecution of one's own greatness... overheated, oversuspicious, overexaggerated grandiose and apocalyptic in expression” (Ibid: 4). Most importantly, for my purposes, Hofstadter describes this as a style because it has a meme-like operation in the American imagination and is copied and modified by each speaker who uses it, without having to form an entirely coherent ideology. Style, he argues, has to do with the way ideas are expressed and believed, not the truth or falsity of their content. The rebel misogynist style I will outline in this chapter has influenced the style of the new online anti-feminism. A more detailed

discussion of these questions of terminology will continue at the end of this chapter but for now the term ‘subculture’ will be used to describe 4chan/b/, ‘style’ will be used to refer to the otaku genre of transgressive speech and visual culture used in online anti-feminism more broadly and the term countercultural will be used to refer to an intended nod or gesture to 60s countercultural sensibilities but should not be interpreted as implying any value judgement. For now, I am interested in examples of cultures that *identify* as countercultural, transgressive and counter-hegemonic and that accommodate misogyny and anti-feminism, not in the authenticity or validity of their countercultural gestures. That is, my use of these terms do not imply any judgements about the death of “classical subcultures” as described by Clark (2003) or of the working class subcultures vs. middle class counterculture dichotomy critiqued in Muggleton and Weinzierl’s (2003) work on post-subcultures. Although these are contested terms, for now I am using relatively broad definitions because I have yet to reach the findings and analysis stage that will allow for greater clarity on the subject. Whether they “represent symbolic challenges to a symbolic order” (Hebdige, 92) or not, I would certainly be sceptical of the value of a symbolic challenge to a symbolic order and of the political value of counterculture itself. This chapter will deal with the ways in which counterculture has always been able to accommodate or incorporate misogyny, which is one of many ways in which counterculture has always accommodated a range of politically questionable elements, such as glamourising a retreat from politics into culture and often aestheticising nihilistic and misanthropic cultural politics.

Rebel misogynies

In *Sex Revolts* Reynolds and Press (1995) identify a coherent tendency within rock, hip-hop and countercultural music, which identifies itself in opposition to pop and the feminine. Jack Kerouac, Timothy Leary and John Osbourne were among the precursors and prototypes of a contemporary masculine anti-pop identity. Reynolds and Press (Ibid) argue that “In the rebel imagination, women figure as both victims

and agents of castrating conformity. Women represent everything the rebel is not (passivity, inhibition) and everything that threatens to shackle him (domesticity, social norms)” (Ibid: 3).

This tendency is particularly evident in the concept of momism, coined by Philip Wylie in 1942, in *Generation of Vipers*, a polemic on the degeneration of American society, engulfed by materialism and shallow popular culture due to the influence of the “destroying mother”. Wylie described feminised mass culture as “matriarchal sentimentality, goo slop, hidden cruelty” seeing it as “the foreshadowing of national death”. Similarly, Dwight MacDonald’s 1953 essay *Theory of Mass Culture* warned of “the spreading ooze of mass culture”. Such perspectives warned against popular culture in all its forms but later, Reynolds and Press (1995) argue the same gender-infused metaphors and prejudices would enter popular culture as the Rock vs. Pop distinction. They suggest that:

“In post-war America, fear of mom-ism linked up with anxieties about Communism and the democratisation of culture. Like the cod-Freudianism from which it was ultimately derived, anti-mom-ism filtered down into popular culture itself: it became a way of attributing blame for the bland conformism of 50s America” (Ibid: 48).

John Osbourne’s *Look Back in Anger*, like *Rebel without a Cause*, was a similarly gendered attack on the mediocrity of the post-war social order, whereby the absence of strong patriarchal figures in a world of all-pervading feminine mediocrity was perceived to loom large. “The rebel discourse of the 50s is haunted by the figure of the matriarch as the chief organiser of conformism” (Ibid: 7). Reynolds and Press identify Ken Kesey, author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, as an early rebel misogynist. “We are victims of the matriarchy here my friends”, says Harding, the psychiatric inmate in the 1962 novel. Kesey is perhaps the first figure to link the rebel misogynist style with that of hacker and computer culture, because in Fred Turner’s (2008) history of the origins of contemporary internet culture, Kesey and his “Merry Pranksters”, a psychedelic drug-taking and communal-living group who

formed around the author, were hugely influential in the movements that led to Wired magazine and hacker culture. Today, one of the primary identifying features of 4chan, trolling culture and hacker groups like Lulzsec and Anonymous is its rejection of social norms through its prankster humour. On the gendered distributions of power, Turner wrote: “By 1967 within the New Left at least, women had begun to claim power by reasserting their rights in the politics sphere. On the communes of the New Communalist movement, by contrast, women often pursued authority by asserting a neotraditionalist femininity in the domestic sphere... Under the guise of social experimentation, for example, many rural communes in particular witnessed the comparative disenfranchisement of women and children. Like the men of the suburbs whose lives they had rejected, the men of many communes left the cooking and cleaning and the care of children to the women” (Ibid: 256).

Ken Kesey’s anti-consumerist frontier fantasy was thus a major part of the countercultural mythology of the 1960s. Reynolds and Press (1995) wrote, “Post war, demobilised soldiers who couldn’t face settling down to peace time mediocrity often became truckers or bikers. Both were a sort of lumpen version of the beatnik: ‘travelling but never arriving’, popping pep pills to keep going, leaving women behind” (Ibid: 55). In a significant number of iconic 1960s pop cultural texts, from social realist films such as *A Kind of Loving* (1962) and *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* (1960) to songs like The Who’s *A Legal Matter* (1965), the trap of marriage and domesticity was posited as the enemy, and women regularly played the roles of the counter-revolutionary enforcers of suburban mediocrity. Distancing himself from what Robert Bly later called the *force field of women*, the 60s male rebel appears in the archetypal *Rolling Stones* anthem (*I Can’t Get No*) *Satisfaction* (1965), a protest against a society which denied young men an untamed virile existence.

In Ellen Willis’s (1969) *New York Times* review of *Easy Rider* (1969), she depicted the counterculture in much the same ways that Reynolds and Press would subsequently:

One of the major flaws of the counter-culture is that for all of its concern with the dispossessed, it is as oppressive as the surrounding society toward the female half of the race. It treats women as “chicks”—nubile decorations—or mothers or goddesses or bitches, rarely as human beings. Some heroes of the cultural revolution—recently jailed Michigan activist John Sinclair is a classic example—equate rebellion with assertion of their maleness, become obnoxiously aggressive, arrogant, and violent, and espouse a version of Utopia in which women are reduced to faceless instruments of their sexual fantasies” (Willis, 1969: 32).

The frontier imaginary clearly influences the counterculture but it also became one of the defining metaphors of early hacker culture, cyberpunk fiction and cyber culture. In the now canonical essay *Across the Electronic Frontier*, Kapor and Barlow (1990) described the Net in the following terms:

“In its present condition, cyberspace is a frontier region, populated by the few hardy technologists who can tolerate the austerity of its savage computer interfaces, incompatible communication protocols, proprietary barricades, cultural and legal ambiguities, and general lack of useful maps or metaphors.” (Ibid: 2)

In William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, a new frontier emerges, one whose currency rests less in geographic space and more in digital information. In subsequent decades, the hyper masculine frontier metaphor gained increasing currency in cyber cultural discourses. Rheingold (1993) observed: “The pioneers are still out there exploring the frontier, the borders of the domain have yet to be determined, or even the shape of it, or the best way to find one’s way in it” (Ibid: 58). Rushkoff (1994) noted, “Nowhere has the American pioneer spirit been more revitalized than on the electronic frontier” (Ibid: 235). Whittle (1997) says, of the future of the internet:

“The pioneers, settlers, and squatters of the virgin territories of cyberspace have divided some of that land into plots of social order and

ploughed it into furrows of discipline - for the simple reason that is natural resources can only be found in the mind and have great value if shared” (Ibid: 420).

The frontier metaphor is of course heavily gendered. Gerstner (2006) theorized the frontier metaphor in early American cinema, as a means of consolidating a masculine ideal under American capitalism. Ging (2004) extends this analysis into contemporary cinema, in which the frontier project described by Gerstner is a point “at which dominant images of masculinity are being negotiated and (re)constituted” and argues it “is one that demarcates a manhood in danger of feminization – not by colonialism but by equal rights, the corporate world and “political correctness” – from one that is primal, stable and somehow unreconstructed” (Ibid. 212).

Mass Culture as Woman

What much of the critical literature on both the counterculture and on mass culture indicates is that a hatred of the masses is intimately linked with the hatred of women in a substantial number of countercultural groupings. The negative association of femininity and mass culture has a long history. Andreas Huyssen (1986) traces it back to *Madame Bovary*, written at a time in which the fathers of Modernism expressed “an aesthetic based on the uncompromising repudiation of what Emma Bovary loved to read” (Ibid: 45), the novel presented an unflattering portrait of a woman addled by Romantic fiction. Huyssen saw the *Other* of this period as woman. In the era of the first major women’s movement, he argued, the enemies at the gate of a male-dominated elite were female:

“It is indeed striking to observe how the political, psychological, and aesthetic discourse around the turn of the century consistently and obsessively genders mass culture and the masses as feminine, while high culture, whether traditional or modern, clearly remains the privileged realm of male activities” (Ibid: 3).

The most influential representative of the overtly misogynist current within the trajectory of modernism, he claims, is Nietzsche. One can hear echoes of Nietzsche in some of the flattering portrayals of 4chan trolls and their attacks on increasingly feminised online platforms. John Carey (2012) claimed “Nietzsche’s view of the mass was shared or prefigured by most of the founders of Modern European culture.” The allegedly “counter-hegemonic” tendencies attributed to trolls can be understood in terms of a Nietzschean contempt for mass culture and the masses that “vomit their bile and call it a newspaper” (Ibid: 127). Robin James (2006) wrote that, “Nietzsche’s ascription of feminine characteristics to the masses is always tied to his aesthetic vision of the artist-philosopher-hero, the suffering loner who stands in irreconcilable opposition to modern democracy and its inauthentic culture” (Ibid: 5). Other popular texts such as Charles Mackay’s *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* and Gustave Le Bon’s *The Crowd* made up a genre of elite disdain for the hysterical and often feminised masses.

The same kind of distinction can be seen in contemporary countercultural gesturing and style, which distinguishes itself by “being different” and which has replaced the high culture/mass culture distinction with the rock/pop distinction. Potter and Heath (2007) argue that the North American countercultural styles of the last two decades have their origins in the depoliticising hippy individualism of “changing the world by changing yourself”, which resulted in a more competitive kind of consumerism and a snobbish disdain for the less individualistic consumption habits of the 50s. The countercultural sensibility they describe, although it predates 4chan, hackers and trolling culture, are strikingly similar. 90s culture jamming, as distinct from political activism, they argue, was influenced by Guy Debord and the Situationists. Disrupting the order of popular illusions was considered a higher aim than building institutions, winning rights, winning pay increases etc. The enemy in the culture jamming schema is, Potter and Heath argue, those who refuse to be awakened, namely the masses. Marcuse and the Frankfurt School, they contest, also played a large role in moving socialist thought away from practical goals into a perspective that took a dim view of mass culture. Potter and Heath go on to suggest that

contemporary countercultures are essentially Rousseauist in their belief that the rules of civilisation keep man in chains. The development of manners, outlined by Norbert Elias, they argue, are seen by counterculturalists as a repressive and unnatural force. The ideas of R D Laing, which brought Freudian ideas to the Californian countercultural scene in the 60s, outlined the countercultural view that our most sinister impulses come not from nature but from the repressions of civilised society and that the root of our problems lay in taboos, the repressive nuclear family and in social controls. Laing (1967) claimed that schizophrenics were, unlike the sane unquestioning masses, on a “journey of discovery” attempting to undo all the normalising structures imposed by society. These anti-psychiatry ideas were popular with hippies and counterculturalists, who were in turn also a profound influence on early hacker culture.

Carey (2012) explains that many of the Malthusian and other elite prejudices of the modern period – fear of the masses entering and crowding elite public spaces, hatred of mass culture, fear of overpopulation – seem to be channelled today by trolling and anonymous subcultures who adopt the style of 4chan/b/. During the nineteenth century, he explains, Europe’s population tripled and industrialisation brought more and more workers to the city and into urban cultural spaces. H G Wells despaired at the “extravagant swarm of new births” and called it “the essential disaster of the twentieth century” (Carey 2012: 1), a sentiment echoed by Weev. What Yeats called the “spread of democratic vulgarity” and mass literacy was quickly changing the nature of the divides between the elite and the industrial working classes. We can see some kind of hybrid of these sensibilities – a mix of the Nietzschean anti-mass culture sensibility and the more counterculture-tinged one – in the online spaces from which trolling styles and much of the current anti-feminism is generated. Gabriella Coleman (2011) argues that “trolling proliferated and exploded at the moment the internet became populated with non-technologically-minded people” and she goes on to say “Trolls work to remind the masses that have lapped onto the shores of the Internet that there is a class of geek who, as their name suggests, will cause internet grief, hell, misery” (Ibid: 110) One prominent hacker and misogynist

troll, responsible for several elaborate orchestrated online attacks on women, and who uses the pseudonym Weev, put it this way in an interview: “Trolling is basically internet eugenics. I want everyone off the internet. Bloggers are filth. They need to be destroyed. Blogging gives the illusion of participation of a bunch of retards... We need to put these people in the oven... We are headed for a Malthusian crisis. Plankton levels are dropping. Bees are dying. There are tortilla riots in Mexico, the highest wheat prices in 30-odd years... The question we have to answer is: How do we kill four of the world’s six billion people in the most just way possible?” (Schwartz, 2008)

The reaction of mainstream media to internet trolls has often been an unambiguously moral one. Fox News reporter Taryn Southhoff’s depiction of 4chan/b/ as an “internet hate machine” and trolls more broadly as an anti-social, foul-mouthed group of misanthropes, still living with their mothers, simultaneously mocked and heightened the moral panic about the anarchy of the online world. Other mainstream news media have focussed on cyber bullying, DDoS attacks and the trolling of Facebook memorial pages. Whitney Phillips (2013) has characterised the cultural politics of trolling in more generous terms than the mainstream press, portioning some of the blame for this phenomenon to Facebook policies and the encoded solipsism of the social network itself.

Yet, while she recognises the very real impact of their actions on their victims, Phillips has also described 4chan/b/’s trolls as “revel[ing] in counter-hegemony” and “undermining established media narratives”, namely the cheap “mindless histrionics of the modern 24 hour news cycle” (Ibid: 3). She characterises Fox News’ less flattering description of trolls as an attempt to “maximize audience antipathy” toward them and went on to say that “mainstream media outlets aim to neutralise a particularly counter-hegemonic cultural space” (Ibid: 2).

It is worth noting, however, that the “counter-hegemonic space” referred to here is one that is extremely hostile to women and that the “mindless histrionics of the 24

hour news cycle” has a highly gendered subtext, as Liesbet van Zoonen (1994) has documented, as a despised feminised media form exhibiting traditionally feminine traits of human interest, emotional investment, focus on audience needs and desires etc. According to van Zoonen, the ‘feminisation’ of journalism, in the English-speaking world broadly, resulted variously from increased female participation in production and consumption, and from attempts to capture a female audience for the purposes of advertising. While, as van Zoonen (1994) has argued, there may be plenty to criticise in the traditional styles associated with feminisation, the contempt in which they are held by “serious/hard journalism” is also worthy of critique, not least given that they were concomitant with the inclusion of women in media production and as a desired audience. She noted:

“It is not only the popularisation of news that is on trial in these debates, implicitly it is women and femininity as crucial components of this popularisation as well. In our patriarchal societies most things women do and like are not valued very highly and the contempt for market driven journalism should surely be seen as part of this general patriarchal scheme” (Ibid: 46).

In pop music hatred of the love song has been identified as another common trope of the broader attack on perceived feminisation and conventionality in popular culture. Later, in songs such as PiL’s *This Is Not A Love Song* (1983), Gang of Four’s *Love Like Anthrax* (1978) and Nirvana’s *Heart Shaped Box* (1993), rejecting love, marriage or reproduction fit into a broader rejection of a feminised, domesticated existence. Likewise, the feminisation of the internet, in terms of style and users (ref), should also be taken into account when online spaces with anti-feminist and misanthropic cultural politics, which employ countercultural styles, are unproblematically understood to be counter-hegemonic. Equally, however, their blend of misogyny, misanthropy and countercultural styles are not without precedent and analyses that wrongly assume their cultural politics must necessarily be socially conservative in origin if they are to be anti-feminist should also be challenged.

The white negro, the cult of the psychopath and transgression

One of Whitney Philip's (2013) stated reasons for concluding that trolls and 4chan/b/ misogynists are engaged in undermining established media narratives was that the trolls she spoke to pointed out the hypocrisy of the media's focus on "cute dead white girls", while ignoring the death of those who belong to less media-friendly ethnic and social strata. One of the trolls she interviewed "would often insist the utter reverence grief tourists have for cute white girls ("they just love them") perfectly captures the absurdity of expressing grief via wall post" (Ibid: 7). On a Facebook page called *I bet this pickle can get more fans than Chelsea King*, set up to troll those who expressed condolences for the recently deceased white female teen, one commenter reminded mourners that with rapes, murders and disasters happening in the third world, the explosion of online mourning for Chelsea was itself "inhumane". Another page entitled "Chelsea King fans: why aren't you helping to find Jessica Reynolds?" referred to a black student who had gone missing the same week as Chelsea but didn't receive the same attention online.

This channelling of radical blackness in opposition to feminised mass culture echoes Norman Mailer's *The White Negro* (1957), in which the ghetto black male's struggle for virile existence functioned as a shining example to whites who felt emasculated by corporate capitalism and perceived suburban patriarchy. Describing a similar phenomenon, Robin James (2010) has written about how Nietzsche and later macho rock and roll counterculture used racial non-whiteness to counter the supposed deleterious effects of white femininity, such as passivity, domestication and conformity. In order to rehabilitate the popular from white object femininity, James argues, the tendency of the classical subcultures was to cleanse pop culture of this commercialisation and pacification through channelling blackness and in particular black masculinity, albeit performed by white males. In post WW2 pop culture, she argues, racially exotic femininity is seen as more authentic and oppositional than white femininity:

“Associated with bourgeois domesticity and respectability, and thus with European High culture white femininity becomes (...) something that the white masculine subject tries to escape and rebel against in his appropriation of black masculinity” (James, 2010: 10).

In a similar strategy of “ingestion” or reappropriation of cultural tropes that are perceived to inject vigour into an allegedly emasculated culture, Norman Mailer posited the psychopath as a noble and transgressive figure. He saw the hipster as borrowing from the tradition of the noble psychopath in his disregard for social conventions and the mainstream, and perceived the psychopath as a symbol of being freed from sexual, social and moral inhibitions. This cult of the criminal as heroic individual is rooted Romanticism. The murderer, like the artist, privileges id over superego, desire over ethics. Dostoyevsky’s anti-hero in *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov, enacted his belief in his own right to transcend the morality of the lesser masses when he killed a “worthless” old woman and pursued Blanchot’s dictum that “the greatest suffering of others always counts for less than my pleasure”. From *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* to Michael Foucault’s *Madness and Civilisation* and R D Laing’s *The Politics of Experience*, madness is consistently recast as non-conformity.

This view of psychopathy, misanthropy and rejection of imposed morality appears to run through the ethos and aesthetic of 4chan/b/, trolling culture and the online countercultural antifeminism of the moment generally. In one self-description a /b/ user writes:

“/b/ is the guy who tells the cripple ahead of him in line to hurry up. /b/ is first to get to the window to see the car accident outside. /b/ is the one who wrote your number on the mall's bathroom wall. /b/ is a failing student who makes passes at his young, attractive English teacher. /b/ is the guy loitering on Park Ave. that is always trying to sell you something. /b/ is the one who handed his jizz-drenched clothes to Good Will. (...) /b/ is a hot incest dream that you'll try to forget for days. /b/ is the only one of your group of friends to be secure in his sexuality and say anything. /b/ is the guy without ED who still likes trying Viagra. /b/ is the best friend that tags

along for your first date and cock-blocks throughout the night. The decent girl you're trying to bag walks out on the date, /b/ laughs and takes you home when you're drunk, and you wake up to several hookers in your house who /b/ called for you. /b/ is a friend that constantly asks you to try mutual masturbation with him. /b/ is the guy who calls a suicide hotline to hit on the advisor /b/ is nuking the hard-drive next time someone knocks on his door. /b/ is the one who left a used condom outside the schoolyard. /b/ is the voice in your head that tells you that it doesn't matter if she's drunk. /b/ is the friend who constantly talks about your mom's rack. /b/ is the only one who understands what the hell you saying. /b/ is someone who would pay a hooker to eat his ass, and only that. /b/ is the uncle who has touched you several times. /b/ is still recovering in the hospital, after trying something he saw in a hentai. /b/ is the pleasure you feel guilty of when you tried playing with your anus during masturbation. /b/ is wonderful” (AnonymousIsWatching, 2006).

In *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, the Situationist Raoul Vaneigem (1967) celebrated the principle of the gift on the grounds that only the purity of motiveless destruction or ruinous generosity can transcend bourgeois instrumentalism. The Situationists' critique of “the poverty of every day life”, like Baudelaire's *oasis of horror in a desert of boredom* articulated a common sentiment from the Romantics through to contemporary cultural radicals, namely that ennui is a justification for extreme acts. “The Manson murders,” Reynolds and Press (1995: 145) argue, “were the logical culmination of throwing off the shackles of conscience and consciousness, the grim flowering of the id's voodoo energies”. This kind of Romantic countercultural rendering of murder continues to run through alternative music today, they argue, and can be heard from the Sex Pistols to Nick Cave's *Murder Ballads*.

On the death of classical subcultures, Clark (2003) wrote: “People gradually became acclimated to such subcultural transgressions to the point that, in many places, they have come to be expected as part of the social landscape” (Ibid: 223). The need to shock is inevitably bound up with the economy's relentless desire and ability to marketise it. In *Apocalypse Culture* Adam Panfrey (1990) argues that the shock of the sublime is needed in an age when countercultural gestures are quickly absorbed

by mainstream or commercial culture and so we must look to outsiders and extreme transgressive acts.

Aliester Crowley, an occultist and drug addict who had a major influence on counterculture expressed a Nietzschean disdain for slave-like conservative religion and preached about becoming your own God. Crowley's religion for "kingly men" can be traced back to the millenarian cults of the Middle Ages. Historian Norman Cohn wrote about the Cult of the Free Spirit, which "cultivated a self-exaltation that often amounted to self-deification" based on a "total emancipation of the individual from society". The preconditions described by Cohn for the Free Spirit Cult of the 12th century have some similarities with the preconditions of the 1960s counterculture. It was a period of unprecedented prosperity, which prompted a new class of the voluntary poor who rejected material possessions in favour of spiritualism. Cohn describes them as a "mobile, restless intelligentsia" who drifted and travelled preaching contempt for worldly things.

One of the features of the rebel misogynist style, which Reynolds and Press explored largely as a post-war pop culture phenomenon, was that it lent a radical edge to sexism and misogyny through the idea of transgression as liberation. However, this use of transgression as a form of liberation politics has much earlier origins, descending from the Marquis de Sade through to the Parisian avant-garde of the 19th century and beyond. Many of the traits of this stylistic tradition can be found on forums such as 4chan/b/ where the eroticising of cruelty and horror are presented as rebellious gestures against social convention.

Camille Paglia (1991) argued that Sade's depiction of human evil as innate was a form of satire directed against the Rousseauist tradition from which contemporary feminism springs. Sade's work famously features sexual violence as well as abhorrence for family and procreation, instead creating a violent rapacious sexuality based on the values of libertinism and sovereignty. In *Juliette* (2007) one statute of the Sodality of the Friends of Crime is, "True libertinage abhors progeniture". Paglia

argued that Sade's devaluing of the female body and his extensive writings about heterosexual and homosexual sodomy were not merely the product of a homosexual impulse, as argued by Simone de Beauvoir (1953), but a "protest against relentlessly overabundant procreative nature" (Ibid: 246) Susan Suleiman (1990) wrote that "the founding desire behind Sadeian fantasy is the active negation of the mother. The Sadeian hero's anti-naturalism – his repeated violation of natural laws (incest, infanticide etc.) goes hand in hand with his hatred of mothers, identified as the natural source of life' and thus death."

Perhaps the most significant theorist of transgression, George Bataille (1985), inherited his notion of sovereignty from Sade, stressing the primacy of self-determination over obedience. His aesthetics of the "extreme seductiveness of the boundary of horror" (Ibid: 17) resembles Baudelaire's oasis of horror in a desert of boredom and is influenced by Sade's pornographic writings. Bataille revered transgression in and of itself, valuing generosity, extravagance, non-procreative sex and conspicuous acquisition as expressions of the irrational of the sovereign. "Expenditure without reserve" features in his eroticism and for him excessive behaviour without purpose is paradigmatically transgressive because it constitutes a pure primordial irrationality, rejecting instrumental rationality. In his reworking of Mauss' understanding of the gift as part of a rational system, Bataille advocated the gift as purposive waste, an intentional squandering of resources and a negation of utility. Nietzsche (2002) argued for transgression of the pacifying moral order and instead for a celebration of life as the will to power while Freud's antagonism between the demands of instinct and the restrictions of civilisation and Ellias' (1978) civilising process shared a characterisation of transgression as an anti-civilizational impulse.

While this style influenced many cultural movements that are admired today, such as Dadaism and Surrealism (Hughes 1991) I am interested in the elements that specifically influence the style of rebel misogyny, in particular those I see at work in contemporary online anti-feminism and misogyny. Very much in the spirit of

4chan/b/, Artaud (2001) described his concept of the theatre of cruelty: “there can be no spectacle without an element of cruelty as the basis of every show” (Ibid: 77). The Surrealists, who took great influence from Sade in their aversion to inhibition or self-denial, argued that the creative destruction of desire orients action and demystifies bourgeois manners and consciousness. But Jenks (2003) notes, “there is no doubt that the misogynistic and homophobic boys club that the Surrealists grew into certainly celebrated the release of hetero-erotic fantasy into the public domain – and treated that as political tool” (Ibid: 158) Before Ken Kesey or R.D. Laing and the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s, in which Thomas Szasz (1961) employed his mantra “madness is a sane response to an insane society”, the Surrealists thought of insanity as a creative source and a political act. The surreal was the pre-rational, pre-bourgeois mode of expression.

Daniel Fuchs’ (2011) critique of literary transgression and sexual violence in the works of Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Bret Easton Ellis argues that they convey a loathing of bourgeois morality and often of society itself, through an aggressive misogynist sexuality. He argues that Sade is the precursor of this literature, which idealizes the self and violates taboos and laws in the search for erotic transcendence. These writers, he argued, contributed to a broader cultural assault on Freudian humanism in favour of transgression as liberating violence.

Commentators on transgression in art, like Viennese Actionist Hermann Nitsch, have defended transgression as a value arguing that it allows the viewer to experience the extremes of subconscious regression vicariously through the artist. Jake Chapman (2006) argued that transgressive art is a post-holocaust form whereby confrontation with the source of trauma is assumed to result in a beneficial catharsis. While my focus here is on the relationship between transgression and misogyny as a feature of the rebel misogynist style, transgression is more often presumed to have positive connotations in the post-60s era, used as it is in bell hooks’ *Teaching to Transgress* (1994). So elevated has the virtue of transgression become in criticism of art, argued Kieran Cashell (2009), that contemporary art critics have been faced with

a challenge, “either support transgression unconditionally or condemn the tendency and risk obsolescence amid suspicions of critical conservatism” (Ibid: 1). But, Cashell wrote, on the value placed upon transgression in contemporary art: “In the pursuit of the irrational art has become negative, nasty and nihilistic” (Ibid: 7). Anthony Julius (2001) has diagnosed the resulting “unreflective contemporary endorsement of the transgressive” (Ibid: 177).

Stalybrass and White (1986) considered the carnivalesque to be a form of radical transgression against hierarchy and hegemony, “In the world of the carnival the awareness of the people’s immortality is combined with the realisation that established authority and truth are relative” (Ibid: 6). “The grotesque tends to operate as a critique of a dominant ideology which has already set the terms designating what is high and what is low.” (Ibid: 43) The carnivalesque, which is a more generous reading of the value of transgression as a cultural style than some of what I have outlined above, was theorised by Bakhtin (1984) and may be relevant to an analysis of trolling culture: “Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival’s participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent; it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding” (Ibid: 11). Terry Eagleton (1981) questioned the radical efficacy of the carnivalesque, casting doubt on whether it really had any potential to turn mere spectacle and transgressive performance into a more coherent political force, describing it instead as a highly circumscribed “permissible rupture of hegemony” (Ibid: 148).

Subculture, counterculture, post-subculture or style?

Howard Rheingold (1993) coined the term *virtual community* to characterise early small online formations. Community has tended to suggest a close-knit or more permanent social formation, often but not always aligned to a neighbourhood of

which family or kinship is a constituent part. Groups defined as *subcultures* have tended to be more transient and studied apart from their families, theorised as deviating from the mainstream or the parent culture and by some as having an innately oppositional, disordering or counter-hegemonic element. Subcultures have often been theorised as street, rather than domestic, cultures and youth-led. (Gelder and Thornton, 1997: 2) Subcultures have typically been theorised as unofficial, oppositional and subterranean, distinct from *mass society*, as theorised by Frankfurt school thinkers such as Adorno (2001). According to Gelder and Thornton, the Chicago School and the Frankfurt School are fused in the studies of subcultures found in the Birmingham School of the 1970s, who were interested in the oppositional relationship of subcultures to mass society and mass culture - *resistance through rituals* - often estimating their success or failure in terms of their oppositional political articulations. Dick Hebdige (1979), writing about what he called *spectacular subcultures* such as punk rock, described them as “not only a metaphor for potential anarchy ‘out there’ but as an actual mechanism of semantic disorder: a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation” (Ibid: 90) and he set this radical potential against the desire of media and mass culture to incorporate subcultural resistance. While the Birmingham School focused primarily on class, Hebdige also understood subcultures such as mods and skins as influenced by black music and the experience of black youth, with punk later drawing from the preceding subcultures with a more distinctly white homology.

Online cultures such as 4chan are unlike street-based British working class subcultures described by the Birmingham school in their post-industrial class component and their anonymous, virtual presence, but they may share subculture’s traits of “bricolage” and “homology”. Bricolage is taken from anthropological studies of the primitive ordering of meaning through the minutiae of the physical world, as punks and others used style and spectacular transformations of commodities to reorder meaning and subvert orthodox cultural formations. Paul Willis (1978) applied the notion of homology to subculture in his study of hippies and bikers. The internal logic of subcultures, he argued, is characterised not by

lawlessness and chaos but supreme orderliness. As Hebdige put it, “each part is organically related to other parts and it is through the fit between them that the subcultural member makes sense of the world” (Ibid: 113). In *Resistance Through Rituals* Clarke et al. (1976) used the concepts of bricolage and homology to systematically explain why a particular subcultural style appeals to a particular groups of people and what the subcultural style signifies about its members. Alternative value systems like “turn on, tune in, drop out” made their subculture cohere. In the case of online anti-feminist sites, they cohere to a greater and lesser degree from case to case but certainly in the case of 4chan/b/ the complex etiquette and argot are rigidly adhered to as markers of subcultural belonging.

McRobbie’s (1980) feminist challenge to Hebdige and the *Resistance Through Rituals* (Clarke et al, 2004) approach is useful here. McRobbie’s challenge was more broadly to a gender-blind analysis of subcultures such as Paul Willis’s (1981) *Learning to Labour*, which, like the existing analysis of antifeminist online subcultures like 4chan/b/ today, often ignores misogyny and antifeminist sexual politics and instead celebrates only their perceived radical, politically progressive or oppositional aspects. McRobbie argues that studies of subcultures focussed on distinctly male experiences – hard drinking and drugging male street gangs – and exhibited a lack of awareness of the gendered nature of this while they did so. One of her criticisms is that there is a silence within this kind of writing about male dominated subcultures whereby the author tries to conceal their own voice and personal attraction to the subculture:

“...the silence is particularly grating in the literature on hippy and drug countercultures where it seems to have been stage managed only through suspiciously exaggerated amount of methodological justification” (McRobbie, 1980: 3). No academic analysis on the hippies dealt, McRobbie claims, “with the countercultural division of labour, let alone the hypocrisies of ‘free love’; few writers cared about what happened when a mod went home after a weekend on speed” (Ibid 1980: 5).

At the birth of the counterculture and before the women's movement in the 1970s, McRobbie argues, the notion of escaping the bourgeois family and the sphere of family consumption was hugely influential on left politics, which many of the radical sociologists who wrote about subculture were recruited from. Sheila Rowbotham (1973) has also described how women were seen in some left-wing circles as temptation provided by capital to divert workers and militants alike from the real business of revolution. Willis' (1981) argues the ways in which young men kick against the oppressive structures they inhabit is often expressed through the degradation of women, both real and expressed in the language they use. *Resistance Through Rituals* (1976), like some of the flattering accounts of 4chan/b/'s trolling culture, applies Gramsci's concept of hegemony and counter-hegemony. The style of a subculture is depicted, although not acknowledged, as defined by the style choices of its male members. McRobbie (1980) did see liberating potential in subcultures for women but was critical of their sexism and called for a greater recognition of this. Her criticisms were aimed at enhancing and broadening the scope of their analysis.

A further significant challenge to subcultural studies with a gendered dimension was that made subsequently by Sarah Thornton (1995). In her study of club cultures, Thornton argues that the Birmingham school orthodoxy in subcultural studies "have been insufficiently critical of subcultural ideologies, first, because they were diverted by the task of puncturing and contesting dominant ideologies and second because their biases have tended to agree with the anti-mass society discourses of the youth cultures they study" (Thornton, 1995: 67). Thornton applies Bourdieu's concept of *cultural capital* in her theory of *subcultural capital* as the central motivating factor at work in the club cultures of the 90s. Hipness, she argued, is a form of cultural capital, through which members of the culture gain entry. Bourdieu, from whom her term was adapted, argued that "the deep seated intention of slang vocabulary is above all the assertion of an aristocratic distinction" (Bourdieu 1991; 94). While cultural capital is earned through being urbane and well mannered, subcultural capital is earned, Thornton argues, through being "in the know", using current slang, performing the right dance moves and using the particularities of the

subculture to differentiate yourself from mainstream culture and mass society. Thornton argues that the media plays a key role in the system through which the subculture gives meaning to what is in or out of fashion, high or low in subcultural capital. Like many online cultures, club culture, she argues, polices the boundaries of its subcultures through constant reclassification of hipness.

As well as being ordered less along class lines but in opposition to the parent culture, Thornton understands club cultures to be ordered along gendered lines:

“If girls opt out of the game of hipness they will often defend their tastes with expression like ‘it’s crap but I like it’. In doing so they acknowledge the subcultural hierarchy and accept their lowly position within it. If, on the other hand they refuse this defeatism female clubbers and ravers are usually careful to distance themselves from the degraded pop culture of ‘Sharon and Tracey’; they emphatically reject and denigrate a feminized mainstream” (Thornton, 1996: 204).

In McRobbie and Thornton, the feminised nature of this denigration of the popular and the mainstream has made it harder to sustain a critique of subcultures which characterises resistance to the mainstream as inherently progressive or counter-hegemonic. In spite of this, however, these distinctions continue to inflect current critiques of online antifeminist spaces.

Thornton’s critique influenced *post-subcultural studies*, which broke from the perceived rigidity of Marxism and class-based politics of subcultural studies. Turning away from the rhetoric of the subcultures of the Birmingham school, thinkers like Maffessoli (1995) established a postmodern framework for youth analysis that focuses on fluidity, ambiguity and variety in nebulous tribal formations. Post-subcultural theorists (Humphries, 1997; Wheaton, 2000) have shown that despite how subcultures were theorised as rebelliously political by virtue of their ritualistic resistance to capitalist incorporation, commodity-oriented subcultures such as bikers, snowboarders and windsurfers had been living out consumerist ambitions since their beginnings. Post-subcultural studies were interested in networked and

nebulous formations like neo-tribes, rave, anti-globalisation “carnivals of protest”, race, hybridity, diaspora and, eventually, internet subcultures. Although thinkers like Thornton influenced the move away from subcultures to post-subcultures, post-subcultural studies soon turned away from Thornton and Maffessoli’s rendering of subcultures as hierarchies of taste and systems of subcultural capital and instead toward what often appears to be an equally ideological approach, perhaps swapping Marx for Hardt and Negri, characterising the anti-globalisation formations, and in particular their proliferation as online cultures, as “the only promising political project of the left” (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2004: 9).

In Gilbert and Pearson’s (2002) reworking of club cultures they argued that Thornton’s analysis robs youth cultures of any macro-political dimension, recommending a return to a model of the social formation that is more attuned to the complexity of hegemony theory and of a post-modern context, recognising a multiplicity of points of power. Andy Bennett (1999) has argued that “neo-tribalism” provides a much more adequate framework for the study of the cultural relationship between youth, music and style than does the concept of subculture (Ibid: 614). He argues that the Birmingham school notions that “subcultures are subsets of society, or cultures within cultures”, overestimates the coherence and fixity of youth groups (Ibid: 605). The main way in which Bennett wants to move beyond these perceived limitations is to find a term that will capture the “unstable and shifting cultural affiliations which characterise late modern consumer-based identities” (Ibid: 605). For Bennett, fixity and rigidity are associated with Marxism, and its concern with class, whereas the concept of tribes offers a recognition of instability and the temporary nature of group affiliation. Bennett offers what he describes as a related concept, lifestyle, to take account of these limitations.

Post-subcultural readings of early internet cultures now look just as celebratory and ideologically hidebound as they accused the Birmingham school of being about classic subcultures, celebrating the gift economy and theorising many activities and online utterances as forms of resistance to corporate marketization of the internet:

“While the internet can and has been used to promote capitalist globalisation, the current configuration of online subcultures are interested in the number of ways in which the global network can be diverted and used in the struggle against it.” (Kahn and Kellner 2003: 304). This theoretical lineage gives some background to the political biases within contemporary flattering theorisations of online hacker cultures including anti-feminist ones, in which their fluidity, horizontalism and perceived counter-hegemony are celebrated while their misogyny and anti-feminist cultural politics are largely ignored or excused. This is why I use the imperfect term subculture rather than post-subculture. The ideological weight now attached to the term to me suggests an implicit bias in favour of networked horizontalist formations and I regard this prevalent bias in academic and left analysis of anti-feminist hacker subcultures like 4chan/b/, explored in chapters two and three, as highly problematic.

Making the case that significant changes in age-based patterns of cultural consumption have taken place in recent decades, Hesmondhalgh’s (2005) ‘none of the above’ thesis outlines shortcomings of contested terms such as subcultures and post-subcultures but also with alternative terms such as tribes and scenes. Hesmondhalgh (2005) states that none of the above theories are capable of explaining musical collectivities in the twenty-first century. Whereas subcultural theory focused for the most part on the young white working class male and failed to adequately account for the individual’s potential for agency, post-subcultural theory emphasised agency and failed to acknowledge the influence of structural categories such as class, gender, race and age. Hesmondhalgh’s thesis relates quite specifically to youth culture and popular music so his criticisms don’t transfer directly to an online anonymous culture such as 4chan/b/ where music plays little or no role, so for example the issues he raises around age – how youth is no longer central to music subcultures and visa versa – don’t apply, as no equivalent change has occurred in these online cultures. While I broadly agree with his view and in this thesis am implicitly suggesting a greater emphasis on “structural categories” through a focus on gender, I also agree that the term subculture retains a certain utility.

My aim for this review of literature was to provide a theoretical framework without adopting one neat but unsatisfactory approach, like applying the work of one thinker or school of thought directly to the subject matter where I didn't feel that would be valuable. There is no single theoretical framework that I found to perfectly illuminate these phenomena so instead I constructed a literature that is a mixture of an alternative cultural genealogy of the politics of the online "leaderless revolution" and of countercultural misogyny with a broad range of frameworks, from the study of subcultures, mass culture, feminism, technology and Masculinities. Instead of taking the moral and aesthetic virtue of counterculture as a presupposition, as is too often the case, I have explored how counterculture and earlier forms of challenges to mass culture or to dominant moral codes have always been able to incorporate misogyny, misanthropy and nihilism. My own perspective on counterculture more broadly is influenced by the idea, explored by Heath and Potter (2004), that is counterculture once had some value, today it represents merely a reflection of the status quo, after many years of the political retreat into culture and the absence of a meaningful competition of ideas as the market accommodates transgressive gestures once the preserve of the avant garde. All of the ideas explored in this review of literature will be used in my analysis later on but centrally, McRobbie (1980) and Thornton's (1995) contribution to subcultures, Reynolds and Press' (1995) rebel misogynies, Andreas Huyssen's (1986) mass culture as woman and various theorisations of transgression will form the basis for my analysis of contemporary online antifeminism and countercultural style in this study.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This project aims to identify and analyse a style of anti-feminist discourse that has become so prevalent in online culture that commentators have begun calling it “the new misogyny” (Futrelle 2014; Marcotte 2014), and to explore and interpret its cultural politics, which fuse misogyny and anti-feminism with transgressive, countercultural, hacker and geek styles. There are two parts to the research design used. The first is a thematic content analysis, which takes its data set from 4chan/b/ alone, using a random sample of 100 threads and a purposive sample from a two-week period, while the second is an exclusively qualitative methodology and takes its data set from a broader range of online sources, such as articles and blogs about the most significant cases of online anti-feminist attacks and hacks, documented over the entire 4 years of research, as well as memes, slang, tweets and other anti-feminist sites. These will be interpreted to place the first data set, the content analysis of 4chan/b/, in its broader context and to give a richer sense of the multi-platform discursive style under scrutiny in this research. Critical discourse analysis was used to interpret the data, with a particular focus on ideology, meaning-making and identity construction. The project also borrowed from open coding and grounded theory, in which the thematic coding and research are used as “building blocks” to raise “theory generating questions” (Bohm, 2004: 271).

Introduction

The central research question emerging from the literature review, and underpinning this empirical analysis is: Does 4chan/b/ constitute a digital sit-in or a site of rebel misogyny? This question asks to what extent 4chan/b/ and the wider online anti-feminist culture from which it emerged and which it has, in turn, partly engendered, constitutes a space characterized by counter-hegemony, transgression and protest, or by a reactionary misogyny and anti-feminism expressed through an empty transgressive aesthetic? The study also asks whether this culture can accommodate

these seemingly opposing perspectives - and various permutations in between - or whether a politics of gender based on misogyny and anti-feminism discredits or contradicts 4chan/b/'s countercultural self-styling.

The central research question, “4chan/b/ and the online countercultural anti-feminist style: digital sit-in or rebel misogyny?” encapsulates the core debates emerging from the available literature on this topic, as outlined in the previous chapter. It also implicitly suggests a methodological approach. Firstly, in that the subject matter is defined as “4chan/b/ and the online countercultural anti-feminist style”, which draws a relatively clear line around a manageable data set at the centre of which 4chan/b/ is situated. Secondly, it accommodates on its peripheries a broader online style that is influenced by the culture of 4chan/b/, but exists beyond it, sharing many of its styles, argot, humour and text genres. This requires the inclusion of a more diffuse database surrounding 4chan/b/, such as other forums and websites, memes and expressions, which will also require a more qualitative and impressionistic methodology than that which is applied to the analysis of the 4chan/b/ threads.

The central research question also refers to two perspectives mentioned in the literature review. As outlined in Chapter 2, “digital sit-in” is a term paraphrasing Laurie Penny’s (2011) characterisation of DDoS attacks favoured by 4chan/b/ and hacker groups emerging from 4chan/b/ such as Anonymous and Lulzsec as “the digital equivalent of a sit-in” and more broadly, encapsulates various flattering interpretations, also outlined in Chapter 1 and 2, of 4chan/b/'s culture and the related hacker and trolling cultures that share its style and its values of transgression and anonymity. The term suggests that this culture has historical parallels with a form of direct action used in the civil rights movement in the US throughout the mid 20th century and subsequently in anti-war movements, continued today in protests such as the Occupy movement. The other concept encapsulated in the question, that of “rebel misogyny”, refers to Reynolds and Press’ (1996) characterisation of a style within countercultural and subcultural music that identifies itself in opposition to pop and the feminine. The phrase also points to similar feminist critiques of radical

and transgressive subcultures and countercultures outlined in Chapter 3, such as those of McRobbie (1980) and Thornton (1995).

The mixed methods approach of this methodology employs quantitative coding and then goes on to use the thematic coding findings to guide a broader and more qualitative analysis. Marshall and Rossman (2006) divide qualitative research questions into four types: exploratory (e.g., to investigate little understood phenomena), explanatory (e.g., to explain patterns related to a phenomenon), descriptive (e.g., to describe a phenomenon) and emancipatory (e.g., to engage in social action about the phenomenon). This study may contain elements of all four but will be primarily exploratory and descriptive. Rather than trying solely to prove or disprove scientific claims about the topic, this study sets out to investigate and explore an online phenomenon, by describing its characteristics and discursive style through discourse analysis and by applying both existing theory and original analysis to it.

In order to expand on what might seem a simple either/or central research question, and to draw out the complexities and potential problems inherent in it, subquestions should also be posed (Stake 1995; Creswell 2012). Because my methodology is quantitative and qualitative, these questions begin with the quantifiable but then attempt to facilitate a discursive and thematic exploration of the topic. These subquestions functioned as a guide but remained open to revision throughout the study as part of an emergent design:

1. What are the main themes that emerge from a systematic snapshot analysis of randomly selected posts on 4chan/b/?
2. Of these, which are most relevant to a study of countercultural identification and anti-feminism?

2. Where else can expressions of 4chan/b/'s style, outlook and gender politics be found online?
3. How do these discursively construct masculinity, femininity and gender relations?
4. Where can the countercultural anti-feminist discursive style be situated ideologically and politically, in terms of pre-existing political frameworks, such as the feminist movement, post-feminism, the men's movement, countercultures and liberation movements?

I have taken a text based approach partly out of necessity and partly because these questions address issues that are lacking in the available research on the topic. It is out of necessity in the sense that the world I am researching is heavily anonymised. Contributors to 4chan/b/ post anonymously and those engaging in anti-feminist attacks typically do likewise. In most cases, those engaged in this kind of online activity come from a hacker culture in which they know how to easily hide their IP addresses and anything else that might reveal their identities. Ideally, it would be possible to do both a study of the individuals involved offline and online as understanding how trolls and anti-feminist hackers behave "in real life" would be fascinating. However, it would require massive resources to track down a representative sample of anonymised, tech-savvy individuals and, given that they would be extremely hostile to feminist academic analysis, the likelihood of the research placing me in danger of email hacks, online threats and stalking or at the very least elaborate hoaxes, would be quite high.

For this reason and also reasons relating to ethics, which are outlined later in this chapter, it seemed fruitless to embark upon a study of the individuals involved in an attempt to discover their "real life" personalities, attitudes and motivations. Instead, I wanted to interpret the whole discursive style as a multiplatform text, of which several online subcultures and sites, centrally 4chan/b/, make up part of the whole. Other studies have noted a link between trolling, hacker culture, geek or otaku

culture and anti-feminism (Manivannan 2013, Penny 2013), but they have tended to approach the hacker and geeky countercultural expressions sympathetically and have therefor failed to identify a coherent discursive style at work that can explain why online misogyny and anti-feminism are so consistently linked to these geek subcultures and transgressive hacker styles. The gradual and emergent design of this methodology has thus been a mixture of necessity and creativity, negotiating limitations placed by research ethics, resources and scale to create a hybrid analysis of quantitative and qualitative, encapsulating the style through both a close analysis and in its broadest expression. Denzin (2004) described how online researchers must create “a complex quilt like bricolage, a hypertext, a reflexive collage or montage; a set of fluid, inter-connected images and representations... connecting parts of the whole” (Ibid, 3). This methodology sets out to capture that diffuse, chaotic complexity without losing rigour.

Data capture

Data capture in this project takes a systematic, corpus-based approach to 4chan/b/ and then builds on the themes that emerge from it to guide a more purposive sampling of a wider multi-platform online culture of this transgressive, anti-feminist discursive style. The first part of the research deals exclusively with 4chan/b/. The reason for this is that over several years of research, I had observed how frequently 4chan/b/ was involved in attacks against women and feminists and that much of the discursive style at work in anti-feminist attacks was recognizably originating from 4chan/b/, especially in the form of slang. It also seemed to me to constitute an interesting break from the social conservative cultural politics traditionally associated with anti-feminism.

The first problem encountered in designing the data capture methodology was the sheer volume of text on 4chan/b/. At an estimated 35,000 threads and 400,000 posts and comments per day (et al 2011), it is difficult to obtain a sample that is both

representative and manageable for the purposes of close analysis. I did not want the analysis to be based on findings that would be too broad to allow a detailed study of discourse, as is the case with findings produced by sentiment analysis computer software. Instead, I wanted rich examples that capture the culture of 4chan/b/ but I also needed them to be representative and demonstrable. 4chan/b/'s system also erases all new text several times a day. This meant that whatever data I gathered had to be captured quickly enough before it disappeared. The median lifespan of a thread is 3.9 minutes (Bernstein et al 2011: p53).

The most obvious strategy would be to use a data capture program or original code to do this. I even worked closely with a coding expert in DCU to devise such a method of data capture. However, as I will discuss later in the ethics section of this chapter, because of the extreme nature of some of the site's content, the Research Ethics Committee did not want me to accidentally capture illegal material such as child pornography. The rules of the site, which are entirely flouted by users but which nevertheless are made available on 4chan's homepage and have to be followed according to the REC's guidelines, state that "crawlers" and "bots" (meaning programs or code that automatically capture data, typically used to sift through large amounts of text), are not permitted. It was necessary, therefore, to arrive at an alternative data collection method. I assured the REC that all data would be manually collected, avoiding any accidental collection of illegal material, and that it would be collected after the posts had been up for a reasonable amount of time (approximately one minute), giving moderators enough time to take down illegal material such as child pornography.

Threads typically vary in length from zero to three hundred comments, so reading carefully through threads can be time consuming. I collected a sample over a period of four weeks, five days a week, from 14/10/2013 to 10/11/2013. This involved reading through 10 threads a day, appearing in chronological order and manually collecting only the relevant ones. The criteria for relevancy here was that the thread involved discussions of feminism, misogyny or gender mixed with countercultural

themes such as hacker culture or transgressive views. This amounted to 77 captured threads out of 200 read. The threads were manually captured as images via screen shots and saved as pdf files, then indexed according to date and time. While this gave me many useful and interesting examples, there were some problems with the sample. Its content could not be proven to be representative of the site as a whole and the criteria for relevancy were too reliant upon an intuitive response and not on predetermined strict definitions. I didn't want to discard the sample because it had brought up such a rich range of data, but I had to subject 4chan/b/ to a more rigorous method in order to prove the existence of characteristics that may seem intuitively obvious to those already acquainted with the culture of the site and to safeguard against the appearance of bias interfering with the data capture.

I then worked out a design for another sample, which would require chronologically capturing all data (not just that which was deemed relevant) within a given time frame, and then organizing the data into categories of relevance to the study and then into themes. I manually captured 100 threads Word documents, thus allowing greater potential for text searching within the data set and making it more manageable for later analysis. While my original plan was to capture the entire set in one chronological sequence, the process proved more intense and exhausting to do manually than I had predicted so I decided to break up the 100 threads into 5 capturing sessions, from the 27/07/2014 to 29/07/2014. Each was taken at a different time of day to ensure that the sample was more representative and not distorted by, for example, the time of day that some nationalities and professions are more likely to be online, as Bernstein et al. (2011) have documented. Using this coding scheme, all 100 threads were thematically coded and then ordered according to their level of relevance to the study into three categories, A, B and C. The A category was for the strictly relevant themes, such as anti-feminism and misogyny, the B category was for themes relating to anti-feminism, such as anti-political correctness and hatred of the mainstream, the feminine and 'pop', and the C category was for the least relevant threads about computer coding, drugs or hobbies where no explicit mention of anti-feminism or misogyny is present.

After the open coding established the basic themes, the axial coding then established whether the open coding contained themes relevant to the study, e.g. countercultural anti-feminism, transgressive misogyny, gendered hacker/geek identifications, radical politics or gendered policing of the subculture and sorts them according to relevance. The purpose of organizing the data in this way was to get a representative sample and then to show the contents of the sample thematically.

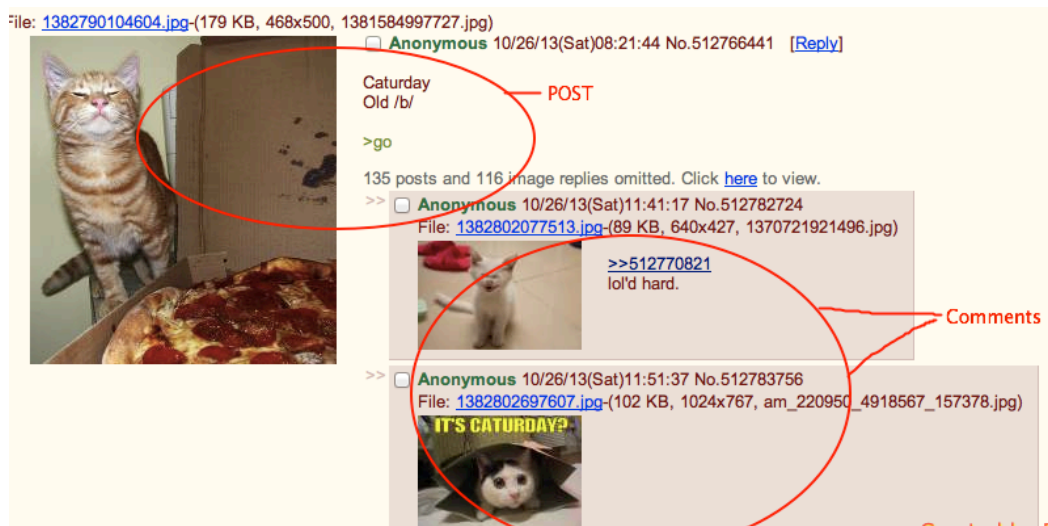
Below is a sample:

Date: 23/07/14	Time: 15:30	Post: #1	Comments: 7
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Race, Human survival. Question: "Which race contributes least to the survival of man?"		B: Anti-political correctness sentiment, biological determinist and social Darwinist argumentation.	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
No new topics. 6/7 Anti-Semitic and other racist responses, 1 challenge.		As above	

I have included all of the coding tables for sample A in the Appendix, recorded as above. Because these have to be manually filled out, there is typically a few minutes time laps between when each one was recorded, allowing for manual coding

followed by manual capture, in lieu of an approved method of automatic sample capture, by the REC.

For clarity, below are some terms and conventions that will help the reader to follow the layout of 4chan/b/. 'OP' refers to the original poster, the person who posts an image and text upon which a thread is then based. As can be seen below, contributors are called Anonymous. As used in this study, 'post' always refers to the original post on which a thread is based, while 'comment' always refers to the comments below a post. The entire site is user generated in this way.



As expected, these samples proved to be thematically quite repetitive. Nevertheless, the three rough measures of relevance used allowed for a greater focus on the more important material but also included the ostensibly less relevant material as a contextualizing background to the study, showing the other interests and cultural associations that form the coherent culture of the site. The first category, A, made up 48 out of 100 original posts. Its themes included the following:

Revenge fantasies against women, anti-feminism, resentment at rejection by women, cyberstalking women and attempts to orchestrate attacks against women online, women's vanity and attention-seeking, disgust at women's vaginal odour, exclusion of gamer/geek girls and pointing out their inability to understand subcultural conventions, requests for rating "OP's girlfriend" or photos taken from women's social media accounts, murderous fantasies about women and overt expressions of hatred of women and degrading or cruel (to women) pornography.

Category B made up 44 out of 100 posts. Because this study is concerned not just with misogyny as it might appear elsewhere in life and online but with the particular countercultural geeky discursive style of misogyny found on 4chan/b/, this category primarily focuses on geeky identifications, cultural politics, transgression and masculinity. These included:

Homophobia and transphobia, gay and transgender pornography, suicidal fantasies, highly niche pornography, drugs, animal cruelty, penis size, national chauvinism, engaging in political issues of the day (eg. Middle East conflict) through racist and anti-political correctness commentary, advice requests, self-aware "beta male" masculinity, paedophilia, transgressive masculinity in film: *Fight Club*/*American Psycho*, misanthropic and/or genocidal fantasies.

The final and least relevant category, C, was by far the most rare. Only 8 threads were not relevant enough to the study to meet the criteria of categories A and B. This does not mean that they will be discounted from the study. Rather, they give a sense of the other interests of its users. These included discussions about:

Video games, music, mathematics, computer coding, cigarettes, drugs, technology, pets, funny memes and gifs.

The next task of the data capture methodology was to capture the bigger picture that 4chan/b/ may be central to but is still only a constituent part of. Since 2007, when

technology journalist Kathy Sierra came under attack from hackers who identified with libertarian and trolling culture and employed a transgressive countercultural style, there have been dozens of similar attacks, primarily against feminists and women who become prominent in male dominated geek subcultures, such as gaming, technology, comics and sceptic or “new atheist” online communities. A study of the discursive style that brings together geeky subcultures, transgressive countercultural self-styling, misogyny and anti-feminism must take account of this bigger picture, in which the slang and aesthetic of 4chan/b/ can be seen spreading to other forums and when boards like “men’s rights” subreddits and 4chan/b/ start to collaborate on anti-feminist attacks and influence each other. To subject this broad multi-platform discursive style to the kind of methodological design used in the short 100-thread sample of 4chan/b/, would require an unmanageably vast data set, in which nuance and room for close analysis would be lost. Instead I have created a database for all the articles, blogs and other data such as memes and tweets that I have been capturing over a four-year period as I closely paid attention to any on-going anti-feminist attacks in the media. This involved regularly checking feminist publications such as Jezebel.com and feminist-allied publications such as Salon.com, tech publications such as Hacker News, Wired and Tech Crunch and more mainstream publications such as The Guardian, Business Insider, the New York Times etc, throughout the entire period of my research. Because some of this data is coming from blogs and other web sources that may be taken down or altered, I also used NirSoft’s SiteShoter 1.42 application, which enables the capture of a single web page. This section of the data set amounts to 291 sources:

Newspaper articles	82
Blogs	25
Social media (eg. tumblr, Twitter)	26
Memes (“advice animal” style)	20
Screenshots archived by others	28

These were indexed for date, time and subject for ease of reference and the majority of the sources were newspaper articles about events surrounding orchestrated attacks against feminists. In this sense, all of them correlate to the data from the category A in the 4chan/b/ coding.

Data analysis

The data capture outlined above was designed to enable the type of data analysis required for this study. The first stage of the data analysis began with a quantitative content analysis, in which a sample of 4chan/b/ threads was coded according to relevance and theme. Coding “may be described as the deciphering or interpretation of data” (Bohm 2004: 270) and an analytic procedure in which indicators of the phenomenon being studied are sought in the data (Ibid; 271). At the interpretive stage, the resulting data from the coding procedure was used to calculate the frequency of certain themes appearing, giving a sense of the typical content of the site. The thematic coding outcomes were then analysed qualitatively, using the major themes and sub themes as a guide to structure the study and to break the data down into smaller sections allowing for an analysis of the discourse. The themes also guided a study of the stylistic correlation between the everyday culture of 4chan/b/ and the online transgressive anti-feminism found on the related platforms.

This allowed me to then use the themes to bring together all of the data and analyse it in thematic chapters, combining discourse analysis with grounded theory. While the coding and content analysis provided me with the methodology needed to demonstrate the most prevalent themes at work in the 4chan/b/ sample, this method has certain limits because of its “neglect of latent meaning structures” (Mayring 2004: 266) and has been criticized “for its quantitative nature, for its fragmentation of textual wholes, for its positivist notion of objectivity” (Hansen et al: 91). These limits, along with Mendoza’s (2011) claim that 4chan’s “unique policy, its origin,

ownership and ethos, and its substantial and highly engaged community make 4chan the internet's most prolific semiotic laboratory" (Ibid: 4) suggested a discourse analysis would be the most appropriate method of analysis. Phillips and Hardy (2002) claim that "social reality is produced and made real through discourses. (...) As discourse analysts, then, our task is to explore the relationship between discourse and reality". However "discourse analysis views discourse as constitutive of the social world – not a route to it – and assumes that the world cannot be known separately from discourse" (Ibid: 6). This approach allowed me to view the entire data set, mostly made up of language but including images and other data, as a text, and to analyse this text in terms of how discourse constructs, engenders, encodes and reveals motivations, associations and knowledge systems behind the text (Parker 2004). Subcultures like 4chan/b/ are prolific and influential creators of online slang, so this function must be analysed in terms of semiosis or meaning-making and the creation and maintenance of the discourse community or discourse genre through rapid innovation, reactive posting and interdiscursivity with and across different sites.

In dealing with the textual and discursive characteristics of new media text genres, many new modes continue to be created to best capture an online text -based corpus, such as computer mediated discourse analysis (Herring 2004) and internet linguistics (Crystal 2006). Runkehl et al. (1998) conclude that new media are characterized by linguistic elements and fragments from different discourse worlds, which are put together to form a "style-mix" (209). Similarly, Georgakopoulou (2003) suggests that new media "encourage hybridity, diverse voices and ideologies and expression of difference" (26), while Androutsopoulos (2011) argues code-switching, variation and linguistic heteroglossia are the most useful concepts in discourse analysis to apply to social media, instant relay chat (IRC) and forums. (2011). Van Dijk (2007), however, argues that the core of discourse analysis as a discipline remains the same, namely "the systematic and explicit analysis of the various structures and strategies of different levels of text and talk", even when it is applied to radical new online forms. My approach to discourse analysis applies these concepts to exploring the cultural politics of the meaning-making at work in the discursive style under analysis

and its component subcultures, online communities and sites. My interpretation will primarily be influenced by feminist discourse analysis, as I will examine how text is used to construct and perform gender identities, in particular feminist work on gendered insults and swear words (Gibbon 1999), and by social semioticians (Hodge and Kress, 1988; Fairclough 1989), who focus on the role of ideology in discourse.

While the first two subquestions set out at the beginning of the research, “What are the main themes that emerge from a systematic snapshot analysis of randomly selected posts on 4chan/b/?” and, “Of these, which are most relevant to a study of countercultural identification and anti-feminism?” can be dealt with using the content analysis methods applied to 4chan/b/ alone, the other two require a qualitative analysis of discourse: “How do these discursively construct masculinity, femininity and gender relations?” and, “Where can the countercultural anti-feminist discursive style be situated ideologically and politically, in terms of pre-existing political frameworks, such as the feminist movement, post-feminism, the men’s movement, countercultures and liberation movements?”

However, a study that can capture the themes as they relate to bigger theoretical questions introduced in the literature review and encapsulated in my central research question, “Does 4chan/b/ and the countercultural anti-feminist style constitute a digital sit-in or a site of rebel misogyny?” will also require borrowing some principles from grounded theory. Bohm (2004) argues that approaches like coding of data are designed to be used as “building blocks” to raise “theory generating questions” (271). When it comes to something as complex as the discursive style I am trying to describe, a great deal of observation over a long period of time, in my case over four years, is also a requirement for getting to know the origin of memes, slang and other features. This non-participatory observation, called ‘lurking’ in internet culture parlance, brings a certain ethnomethodological element to the analysis also. Finally, when conducting the qualitative discourse analysis of the data, I was conscious of the need for a consistent and methodically rigorous approach. Care was taken to avoid emphasizing “vivid” rather than “pallid” data (Miles and

Huberman 1984 p230-231) and to ensure that posts selected were representative of the comments on threads or, where appropriate, identified as exceptional or atypical.

Ethical issues

The most basic principles of ethical treatment of persons are codified in a number of widely accepted documents such as the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the Nuremberg Code, the Declaration of Helsinki and the Belmont Report. In my research, I had to also conform to EU Data Protection legislation and, because of the extreme nature of some of the pornographic and other material primarily on 4chan/b/, to Irish legislation on computer crime (Keane 2007). The Association of Internet Researchers' ethical guidelines (AoIR 2013) also helped to frame my approach to ethics. Throughout this study, from the earliest stages, I have worked with the Research Ethics Committee within DCU on how best to ethically and legally study this sensitive subject. This was a long process that took place over approximately two years of dialogue and discussion and resulted in major restrictions and changes to my methodology. The legal ethical guidelines currently available originate from a science and biomedical context and often don't best apply to the needs of internet researchers (AoIR 2013; 6). As a result, the rigorous process resulted in some restrictions to my original proposal. Below are some of the key issues that presented ethical dilemmas and how they were resolved.

Protecting human subjects from harm is perhaps the most fundamental ethical consideration. One of the REC's concerns was that in the non-participant observation methodology I had proposed, there would not be informed consent. At first, they suggested I try to acquire informed consent but this would not be possible in the anarchic, anonymous and anti-authority online spaces in question. These spaces are extremely hostile to any attempts to de-anonymise their subcultures and an attempt to intrude with a polite academic request would have been met with disdain and would have made the researcher vulnerable to being hacked by

contributors to the site. Practical considerations aside, I also felt non-participant observation was vital to the quality of the research, to get a representative sample and not one that would be affected by my intrusion into these tightly-policed subcultures.

Nissenbaum's (2003) ethical framework of "contextual integrity" provides a useful approach to online methodology that can be applied in such circumstances. This takes into account how the context defines the subject's reasonable expectation of privacy. That is, it takes the context of the conventions of the sites into account. 4chan/b/ is publicly accessible with no login, name or details required to view posts. The website states that the content is public and it is quoted by academics and journalists with some regularity, so there are no grounds for *reasonable expectation of privacy*. EU Directive 95/46 of the Data Protection legislation is concerned with issues of data protection as this relates to, in particular, the processing and transfer of so-called "Personal Data" and "Sensitive Personal Data." Directive 95/46/EC defines Personal Data as:

"any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'); an identifiable person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identification number or to one or more factors specific to his physical, physiological, mental, economic, cultural or social identity."

This definition encompasses both objective and subjective data, and encompasses both "structured" (i.e. a defined "fact") and "unstructured" statements (e.g. a statement of opinion about a person or a reference to a person in, for example, an online comment). However the information must be related to an individual, either through a content, purpose, or result factor. My gathered material, which will not be published in its raw form, but rather quoted selectively, will be entirely Anonymous and untraceable to any individual.

The contributors to 4chan are not merely pseudonymous, as with most websites where contributors use a potentially traceable “handle”, but entirely anonymous. All contributors are simply called “Anonymous” and it would be impossible to identify the contributors from my research. 4chan is run according to a libertarian ethos and therefore, unlike Facebook for example, it is not privately owned by an organisation or private company, so the material that is posted does not belong to 4chan or to any individual.

Although I have to record the information in such a way as to demonstrate that my findings are representative, the information has not and will not be published in its original bulk form, nor will any metadata be handed over to any other source. Relevant quotes were selected from the anonymous contributors and only those appear in print in the body of this thesis. Information that could identify individuals has not and will not be stored or disseminated and, where handles were used on other sites, they were blurred out and only taken from contexts in which there was not a reasonable expectation of privacy.

The REC had reservations about the recording and storage of information, because of the sometimes pornographic nature of the content. 4chan/b/s guidelines also prohibit “crawlers” and “bots”, meaning automatic computerised recording of material on the site. This would have been the most obvious way to collect a full and representative data set but to do so would not be in keeping with the few rules of the website and would have entailed the risk of recording extreme pornography, including potentially child pornography. My supervisor and I were unable to get Garda clearance to record data with this risk present, although the legislation specifies intent to “knowingly produce, distribute, print or publish, import, export, sell, show or possess and item of child pornography” (Child Trafficking and Pornography Act 1998). Because of these restrictions, my data was copied manually and then analysed using manual coding and no potentially illegal material was copied, stored or disseminated.

The other formats included in the data set (articles, memes, etc.) presented fewer ethical concerns in terms of extreme content. Moreover, all of the online data sources were anonymously or pseudonymously contributed, thus eliminating any possibility of identifying individual posters. Where a pseudonym or any identifiable avatar was used, the greatest caution was taken to fully anonymise contributors to meme-generating sites, comment threads, forums etc, so that identities were fully protected.

The findings and analysis chapters which follow incorporate all of the methods outlined above (content analysis, thematic coding, discourse analysis and grounded theory) and thematically thread the findings together to explore the three major themes I have observed consistently throughout the data, also framing them in the context of the theories explored in the literature review:

- The use of complex slang and discursive codes to inoculate the subcultures, which make up the sites of this discursive style, against perceived feminization and appropriation.
- Misanthropy, misogyny, anti-consumerism, anti-authority and the countercultural as a coherent aesthetic within the cultural politics constructed by this style and its component subcultures.
- Transgression as an aesthetic and moral virtue within the values encoded into the discursive style and how these themes are gendered in the use of extreme pornographic images and discourse used.

Chapter Five: Inoculating the subculture

Overview of Findings

As noted in the previous chapter, 48 threads out of 100 in the random sample (sample A) covered the most relevant thematic categories to this study, which included:

Revenge fantasies against women, anti-feminism, resentment at rejection by women, attempts to orchestrate attacks against women online, women's vanity and attention-seeking, disgust at women's vaginal odour, exclusion of gamer or geek-identifying girls and mocking their inability to understand subcultural conventions, requests for rating the "OP's girlfriend" or photos taken from women's social media accounts, murderous fantasies about women and overt expressions of hatred of women in general and degrading or cruel (to women) pornography.

First, a brief synopsis of the findings:

Out of these, 4 threads were devoted entirely or primarily to the opposition to feminist politics. This does not include sentiments that happen to be at odds with feminism, which made up a much larger portion of the sample, but only explicitly stated anti-feminist politics. These included two references to Anita Sarkeesian and shared screengrabs of social media accounts of young women who had expressed feminist opinions, including discussions about proposed methods of swarming, pranking and attacking them, as I will explore. These threads typically depicted feminism as a form of political correctness gone mad, as an irrational and emotional politics or as an unwanted intrusion into geek subcultures. There is one link to a Men's Rights website, posted approvingly, but also one criticism of that online subculture for being too victim-centred, thus making them more like feminist culture, according to their 4chan/b/ critic. There were also separate pro-abortion rights sentiments expressed, in one thread from sample A and one from sample B (the

month-long observation of 4chan/b/), but these were expressed as anti-family views, using cruel and misogynist language, as I will demonstrate.

Using the strictest criteria for the definition of the term, there were 18 examples of threads primarily devoted to misogyny. This definition includes only overt expressions of hatred of women in general, not all of the sentiments that could be subjectively deemed misogynistic. These threads involved revenge fantasies, feelings of having sex withheld by women, belief that women are only sexually interested in macho men who are unlike them and references to Elliot Rodger, the multiple murderer who cited women's withholding of sex as one of his main motivations. *Fight Club* is also referenced twice. Another common theme in threads about misogyny was that women who try to participate in subcultures such as gaming or the new atheist online community were perceived as vain and attention seeking and lacking genuine interest in or knowledge of the subculture.

22 threads were primarily devoted to pornography and other explicit sexual material. These involved some users asking questions about what sex is like, expressing their niche taboo sexual fetishes and others about how to get their girlfriends to try anal sex. They included many questions about transgenderism and gay male pornography featuring effeminate looking boys, which seemed to feature as either an expression of sexual curiosity or as homophobic mockery, and sometimes both. Some of the Japanese cartoon pornography posted involved extreme material such as amputees and torture. A dislike of vaginal odour also featured in both samples. There was significantly more gay and transgender pornography in sample A than in sample B, most of it posted semi-mockingly. This may have been coincidence or it may be that the online feminist worlds most under discussion on 4chan/b/ at the time of sample A, tumblr-based intersectional feminism, have taken up transgender rights issues to a greater extent than many other feminisms.

Despite its harsh mocking tone, 4chan/b/ is a forum that attracts a lot of confessional posts. In sample A, 5 original posts were of male-identifying users confessing their

imminent desire to commit suicide, often asking advice on the specifics of how to go about it. 2 posts in the sample were equally detailed descriptions of the desire to commit murder, in one case mass murder, while a generalized misanthropy and a preoccupation with masculinity, and an awareness of their low ranking position as “betamales”, ran through the discussions. These themes ran throughout sample B also and have featured as part of the culture of 4chan/b/ throughout the period of this research.

From the least relevant categories B and C, issues of race, nationality, politics and other interests made up the remaining threads in the sample. Extreme hate-filled racist slurs appear with about as much regularity as misogynist ones do, which is interesting to note because black masculinity or blackness is then also drawn upon in the anti-feminist threads as a defence against the privileged position of white feminism, although those engaging in this are themselves identifying as, and presume their audience to be, white. The most common features of racist discourse were hatred of black, Jewish and Muslim people, in that order. Hacker politics, atheism, video games and computer coding were all common topics, as well as humorous videos, memes and images. There was also some more playful mocking taking place between Americans and Europeans.

In the purposive sample B, all of the 77 threads captured out of 200 read were directly relevant, featuring anti-feminism, misogyny and some libertarian free-speech hacker politics. Within these themes, many of the same features came up in terms of the subculture’s perceptions of feminism, taboo-breaking pornography, anger toward women for withholding sex, a perception of femininity as too vain and mainstream in its tastes to join the subculture and a preoccupation with masculinity. References to *Fight Club* also came up. Some of the most notable differences between the two samples included more references to Jewish and Muslim people in sample A, most likely because Israel was regularly in the news at the time, and a slightly waning identification with politicised hacker groups such as Anonymous, which is also unsurprising as this is a general tendency observed over the four year

period of this research, as 4chan/b/ remains primarily nihilistic and the Anonymous hacker brand becomes more overtly political.

However, these two samples cover only one site, 4chan/b/. The findings that will be discussed in more detail and analysed in this and the following chapters, will also include events followed closely over the four year period of the research, such as anti-feminist attacks launched from other online spaces and elaborate online flame wars, often with the “-gate” suffix, involving feminist and anti-feminist online cultures. These will be discussed with citations to factual documentation of these events, such as news reports and text screengrabbed live either by me or by a second party, such as a blogger or a victim of the attacks. Relevant memes and slang that have been used to attack women and feminists throughout the period of the research on 4chan/b/ and other related sites will also be used.

The three thematic findings and analysis chapters emerge from the findings based on these three data sets. The first is that multiple semantic strategies were used in the samples of 4chan/b/ and across related geek subcultural sites throughout the period of research to exclude women and the feminine from influencing these subcultures. An obsessive preoccupation with inoculation of the subculture against the perceived feminine influence and against the gendered “mass” is the theme of this chapter. Using examples from the above sources, including quotations from the samples, memes, slang and events, this theme is discussed using primarily the theoretical frame of subcultures introduced in Chapter 3, and comparing and contrasting my analysis to that of others who have written about online misogyny and 4chan/b/. This addresses how misogyny and a masculine hierarchy of taste have been repeatedly used to distinguish between those who belong in the subculture and those who do not.

Another common feature emerging from the samples was a preoccupation with masculinity and the discursive attempts to construct a type of masculinity, using transgressive, countercultural and radical sensibilities, references and aesthetics,

mixed with a knowing, geeky, “beta” masculinity. I found this to be distinct from other anti-feminist masculinities elsewhere theorized (Kimmel 2004, Messner 2000, Connell 1995). The next chapter therefor, addresses the theme of geek masculinity and countercultural sensibilities. It explores how masculinity is constructed and understood in these anti-feminist subcultures, using examples of quotations from the samples, and using memes, slang and major online events involving anti-feminist subcultures over the last 4 years. It will unpack and theoretically frame the cultural politics of these subculture’s use of *Fight Club* as a primary cinematic reference, gendered countercultural and anti-consumerist language, the complex use of the “beta-male” label and the evocation of black rebel masculinity in memes as a counterforce to a white conformist femininity.

The final findings and analysis section, Chapter 7, focuses on the theme of transgression and sexuality. This theme emerges from a key finding particularly around pornography and sexuality in the data, that the often seemingly contradictory discourse - the use of both homophobic language and gay and trans pornography, the use of terms like “Christfag” seemingly simultaneously mocking and expressing conservative social values on homosexuality – can be understood as deceptively coherent when understood as forms of transgression. The discourse of 4chan/b/ and related anti-feminist sites uses transgression as a weapon against feminism’s perceived “political correctness” and femininity’s perceived tendency to dilute, domesticate and pacify these defensively subcultural sites and to restrain the sexual libertinism of these spaces through perceived feminine sexual prudishness. This final chapter examines the extreme and transgressive sexuality in these anti-feminist subcultures, in which misogyny is expressed through sexual taboo breaking and hardcore pornography is used in methods of hacks and attacks against feminists. Again, the findings are discussed using close quotation of the samples as well as memes, slang and major online anti-feminist attacks and events taking place over the 4-year period of the research, analysed using the theoretical frame of transgression.

To understand how the offensive style of discourse of 4chan/b/ emerged I also

looked at the form of the site itself. The medium effects (i.e. the way in which the medium form influences the content) analysed in Computer Mediated Discourse (CMD) often include face management and identity markers in forms of communication that involve some kind of link to the user's personal identity. However, it emerged that the anonymity of the medium of 4chan/b/ influences the discourse in different ways. Technical characteristics of 4chan/b/ encourage anonymous posting, as there is no obligatory registration process. Anonymity forms the basis of 4chan/b/'s culture, celebrated by some commentators as a form of "radical opacity" (Dibbell 2010), as distinct from the overwhelmingly de-anonymising practices of larger social network corporations such as Facebook. This radical opacity encourages disinhibition in speech acts in which racist or misogynist speech and otherwise taboo behaviour goes unpunished. In this way, 4chan/b/'s extreme and offensive discourse functions as a marker of social belonging in the subculture. One of the rules listed on the main site 4chan.org provides an example of the medium effects on the discourse and culture of 4chan/b/: "Do not post the following outside of /b/: Trolls, flames, racism, off-topic replies, uncalled for catchphrases, macro image replies, indecipherable text (example: lol u tk him 2da bar[?]) anthropomorphic (furry), grotesque (guro), or loli/shota pornography". Implied here is that all of these features *are* tolerated in the absolutist free speech space of 4chan/b/, if not on the other 4chan boards. Interlocutors are encouraged to post anonymously and without consequence. Users are allowed to flame, impersonate others, lie and fake the identity of others and to write in an incomprehensible way to outsiders.

Thread-initiating posts must start with an image. The site features don't allow text-only original posts. This medium feature has made 4chan/b/ a prolific generator of memes. As the rapid sharing culture of 4chan/b/ facilitates transmission and adaptation, these often spread rapidly. Threads are fast paced and asynchronous. When a new comment is made on a thread, that thread is "bumped" up to the top of the page. While 4chan/b/ doesn't have other means of displaying approval within the community, such as "likes" on Facebook or "upvotes" on Reddit, users can bump the

thread to keep it in rotation for longer, while uncontroversial threads will be quickly pushed out of the finite page content. Thus, users will often write, “bump” as a comment. This results in the top ranked threads being most visible on the first page. Threads not receiving attention quickly die out and are soon removed by the system.

The short lifespan of threads is crucial for understanding the medium effects on 4chan/b/’s discourse because users compete with one another to post the most outrageous and controversial material. Performing the action of contributing to a thread in order to keep it visible is called “saging”. 4chan/b/ users speak on a many-to-many basis on a publicly visible site so there is an increased tendency towards performativity. Speed and levels of offensiveness are often used competitively, with belonging to the subculture as the competitive aim. A popular concept includes the “-fag” suffix. One example is “betafag”. This indicates an unmasculine and weak male and is used abusively but is also used as a self-deprecating descriptor of belonging to the subculture, as members bond over anonymously admitting to their failure to live up to ideals of masculinity, being geeky and anti-social, or other normative expectations.

Inoculating the subculture

Because 4chan/b/’s text is riddled with spelling errors, one might at first assume that language plays a somewhat arbitrary role in this forum. On the contrary, however, I have found linguistic specificity to be of utmost importance in signalling one’s belonging to the subculture. Any deviation from subcultural linguistic norms that might indicate a failure to conform results in some variation of the accusation of being a n00b, and frequently provokes a swarm of ridicule from other users. These cohesive devices bind the subculture together stylistically. I found many examples of this throughout the samples. The derogatory term “newfag” or “newfaggot” to describe those who have shown their lack of subcultural knowledge usually through some minor mistake in slang or tone, was used 13 times in the random sample A. For example, one thread (A.47) began with a commenter writing “/b/ is still allowing

reddit to have a sub where they post 4chan screens. /b/ has gone soft. The /b/ from 2009-2010 would've shut that shit down.” This refers to Reddit users posting screengrabs from 4chan/b/ on a subforum and to the creeping “massification” of its culture. Although Reddit itself contains a lot of misogyny and anti-feminism in particular forums, 4chan users regard it as insufficiently subversive, earning it the title “4chan with a condom on”. A commenter responds, “welcome to the new /b/ newfriend” to which another replies, “only newfaggots say newfriend”, suggesting the slang is not native to 4chan/b/. Language is constantly monitored in this way for subcultural purity throughout the sample. Slang and memes also change and go out of fashion quickly but key tropes remain the same and they often perform the same role of securing subcultural purity. So “n00b”, still used at the beginning of my research, was eventually replaced with “newfag”. The former did not appear in the random sample A, while the latter appeared multiple times. When use of a slang term breaks into mainstream internet culture and thus becomes used by the people it was initially trying to ward off, another term expressing the same idea appears to replace it

As I noted previously, Auerbach (2012) has argued that one of the defining features of what he calls A-culture, which mixes otaku and anonymous online culture, is that “the constant hazing of n00bs through argot and complex conventions and elite technical knowledge polices the boundaries of the subculture to inoculate it from massification” (Ibid: 3). His analysis implies that there is a virtue in such an inoculation. Similarly, Manivannan (2013) argued that on 4chan/b/ this function, even when it takes on the form of misogyny is, “necessary as /b/ occupies an extreme point on the genealogical continuum bridging the transgressive cultures of bulletin-board systems, shock sites, and hacker culture” and that “/b/’s pervasive bigotry indicates not widespread prejudice but anxiety over the disintegration of zero-identity anonymity and subcultural dissolution” (Ibid: 4). In both analyses, the regular appearance of what would typically be considered sexist language is interpreted as a misunderstood subcultural practice to ward off dilution from the ever-threatening influence of mass culture. Similarly, Phillips (2011) argues that the

cruel and often gendered trolling culture epitomized by sites like 4chan/b/ constitutes a “counter-hegemonic cultural space”, making much the same argument as the others but in Gramscian rather than Frankfurt School terminology. Coleman (2011) contends that the elitism, complex language and dislike of newcomers that shaped the trolling culture of 4chan/b/ has long been part of hacker underground subcultures but that “trolling proliferated and exploded at the moment the internet became populated with non-technologically-minded people” (Ibid: 110). These critiques apply an often gender-neutral analysis to a highly gendered online culture and echo the Birmingham School’s writing on the corrosive influence of mainstream commercial cultural appropriation of subcultural style, based on the presupposition that resistance to mainstreaming influence is necessarily virtuous or aesthetically valuable.

However, one of the key findings across all of the data has been that this dynamic of subcultural purity is expressed through gendered discourse, in which women are perceived to be unable to acquire the knowledge and etiquette necessary to take part in the subculture and that when they attempt to do so, they are often attacked. Women are presumed either to be men pretending to be women or otherwise to be untrustworthy, and a culture of hazing takes place in which women have to prove that they are women in humiliating ways. The expression “tits or GTFO” was used 5 times in the random sample, A. As I noted in Chapter 2, this has been a long-running expression on the site and it is perhaps the most overt expression of the site’s gendered culture of exclusion. To give an example of how the term is used, in one thread (A.70) a young female posts a selfie⁶ and writes, “A lot of kids at school are making fun of me saying I look like a boy (I’m a girl!). My friends say it’s because of my hair but I like my hair short. What should I do? All the teasing is getting to me.” A commenter responds, “fuckin summerfags. If girl follow the rules tits or gtfo”. The term summerfag means a young newcomer to 4chan/b/ during the school summer holidays who doesn’t understand the complex argot and subcultural etiquette. The following explanatory image was posted in the same thread:

⁶ A self-portrait photograph, typically posted on social media

4chan Guide for /b/itches

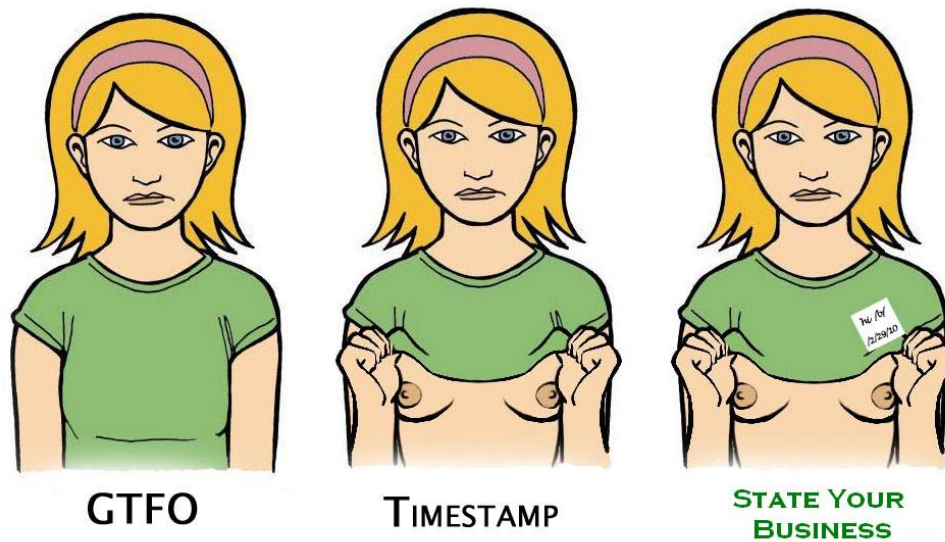


Fig 2: Cartoon depicting the rule “Tits or GTFO” (4chan.org, 2014, fig.2)

Over the 4-year research period, almost all of the major attacks, those that resulted in viral hashtags, hacks and extreme threats and stalking, were aimed at women attempting to enter geeky or subcultural spaces that were male-dominated or had a gendered hierarchy of taste similar to that found on 4chan/b/. These included gamer culture, tech journalism, comic conventions, online hacker and “new atheist” communities. There were exceptions, such as the attack on journalist and feminist activist Caroline Criado Perez, who had no interest in or affiliation with geek subcultures but which nevertheless resulted in arrests after stalking, death threats and rape threats (Best 2013). However, because of the prevalence of the phenomenon in subcultural geek spaces, this chapter explores the major cases of attacks against women involving those cultures as part of the exclusionary subcultural features also found in the 4chan/b/ sample. In addition to 4chan/b/’s own gendered hierarchy, references were made in samples A and B to all of these other geek communities,

displaying varying levels of affinity and intertextuality with them and a shared hatred toward the women and feminists who have critiqued their sexism, such as Anita Sarkeesian.

A consistent Othering of women was evident in the discourse of 4chan/b/ and related anti-feminist sites, where women are typically discussed as absent or when they are a present minority, they are intimidated and referred to as being outside the subculture because of their sex. This Othering is analysed with reference to the regular occurrence of overt misogyny in the samples cited. As is demonstrated below, the desire to cleanse these subcultures of the feminine mainstreaming influence expresses itself as an obsessive preoccupation in both samples A and B, and in the broader collection of memes, slang and anti-feminist attacks that have taken place throughout the period of my research.

Women as Other on 4chan/b/

The expression “there are no girls on the internet” has fallen out of fashion on 4chan/b/ and did not appear in the samples A and B, taken in 2013 and 2014, but remains associated with the site because of its centrality on the list of its infamous “rules of the internet”, which also includes “tits of gtfo”. This is intended to be read not literally but as an assertion that the areas of the internet in which there are few or no women constitutes “the internet”, meaning the authentic internet. The idea of the authentic internet as a male dominated zone by definition runs throughout all the samples in different forms. In the 4chan/b/ samples, women were discussed in a way that presumed them to be absent, and users seemed to treat the anonymous space of 4chan/b/ as a place where grievances could be aired against women to a sympathetic (male) audience, as I will show.

Fantasies of murderous or rapacious revenge against women featured strongly in the threads about misogyny and anti-feminism in the random sample, A. In one thread

(A.69), the OP discusses his wife's death, "I hit the jackpot. My 4/10 wife and her stupid (but wealthy) parents died in a car crash a couple weeks ago. Apparently God does exist". In another thread on misogyny (A.32), a commenter writes, "I swear to god OP, these fucking cunts that act like 'they just need a decent man' when the only dicks they suck are that of fucking awful (but good looking) men. Back in the day I used to think I was the only beta to think like you OP. But now, after seeing so many like the 'perfect gentleman' I know now that we are on the rise OP. Eventually we'll rape em all in front of their fratboy boyfriends, and laugh and cum and laugh and cum and laugh and cum". The "perfect gentleman" here refers again to Elliot Rodger, the young man who perpetrated a killing spree in May of 2014, listing rejection by women as one of his main motivations, and called himself "the perfect gentleman" in his final video blog. As in Rodger's manifesto, "fratboy" jocks, here deemed popular and successful with women, are also despised and placed outside of the subculture.

Belief in Social Darwinism and the genetic inferiority of women is expressed both implicitly and explicitly in the samples. In a thread (B.51) that began about anti-feminism, a commenter writes:

"Women aren't as intelligent as we are. They're not as strong or as tall as we are. They're not as good at quick decision making, and some studies show men are better able to perceive time and speed and can more easily rotate 3-D figures in their brains, which makes us better at every sport and pretty much every physical activity all the way down to simple shit like driving a car. So who gives a fuck? They're inferior, let them feel that way every once in a while. I'm so tired of this politically correct bullshit where we pay attention to women like they have something meaningful or interesting to say when in reality they for the most part don't. TL;DR ignore it women are stupid."

In a thread primarily about rejection by women (A.32), the OP posts an image of a beautiful blonde teenager in a bikini. Alongside it, the OP writes, "Dear women. I may not have been blessed with a perfect face, I may not be a /fit/ fag, I may not be the most charming man on the planet or have much money.. but just remember this. I

can still fucking rape you, stupid God damn superficial stuck up cunts.” As with most threads on 4chan/b/, some of the commenters mock the OP. One commenter posts an image of Elliot Rodger and writes “angry vigin is angry nyuk nyuk nyuk,” but the original OP continues:

“I’m fascinated with having sex with women against their will and emotionally crippling them. I love to choke them and physically hurt women but what I love are the emotional scars. I want women to suffer... I don’t really care if society thinks i’m pathetic... I’ve never judged anyone by their face. Women are shitty fucking people and they deserve to be emotionally crippled. All of them. They act all cute, innocent and sweet but in reality, they’re all nothing but fucking stuck up and heartless whores.”

Another thread (A.32) opens with a drawing of an imagined ‘anon’, meaning an anonymous regular user of 4chan/b/ and other sites that share its transgressive trolling culture. This is a standard cartoon that appears regularly on 4chan/b/ of a despondent, malnourished and pale man with no hair, but here the typically male character is crudely drawn dressed as a female.



Fig 3: Sample of an image used to depict a “femanon” (4chan.org 2014, fig. 3)

The OP writes, “sup femanons”, meaning women on 4chan/b/, “how does it feel to know that you wont ever have to experience loneliness and ever feel short of attention from the other sex, just because you were born with a vagoo. you have literally no problems in society because if you ever have a spaghetti spillage moment then people will still find you attractive/cute whatever”. Here, women are addressed but still identified as Other. Two commenters identifying as female respond, amid 101 comments by male or non-gender-identified users. These comments both suggest it is also difficult to be female, that women also experience loneliness. One of these commenters gives Buffy the Vampire Slayer and other similar shows as a reference to illustrate the point, signalling identification with geek culture. But otherwise in the thread, the same tone continues: “Landwhales get laid more than we

do”, “And you can be damn sure fucking chumps who fit their criteria are actually responding to/validating these mentally ill cows. Even if it's just ultimately to get laid, they're still humouring these fucking deluded hamplanets”, “I kno that feel /b/ro...”. The responses also include intermittent mockery of the OP and of any similarly serious-in-tone contributors, with comments like, “ITT: Beta faggots”, meaning in this thread there are unmanly, effeminate or ineffectual men. “That feel” comes from a 4chan/b/ meme that mocks earnest expressions of feelings online and, based on my observations of the subculture over several years and of how the term is used, I would interpret “/b/ro” as a ironic expression of American jock culture by those knowingly existing outside of hegemonic masculinity in a culture that is full of “beta faggots”. However, like so much of 4chan/b/'s culture, the layers of irony, which make the vocabulary difficult to interpret for outsiders, is mocking the chauvinism of jock culture but is also itself expressing a culture of male bonding to the exclusion of women.

Sample B also provided examples of this Othering, the assumption that women are not present and that this is a space free of any feminine restraining influence. An OP (B.22) requested, “Dump all your gifs and links to videos of women being raped whether its Hollywood or real. The more realistic, the better.” Several contributions follow with gifs, links and comments like, “This one got my dick hard” and “This one’s good. The rest are really boring and they don’t struggle that much.” Another commenter asks, “Do you mean proper rape or woke up with a hangover, felt regret, ruined some guy’s life rape?” There was no discussion of the ethical problems of this post and no commenters identified as female. There is a sense here that in this space, kept free of censorship or moral norms, the elsewhere unsayable becomes sayable. Here, taboo sexual fantasies and anti-feminism are both presented as a kind of rebellion against the constraints of the outside world, including the de-anonymised, mainstreamed, feminised, outside virtual world.

A common trope in this Othering, which appeared consistently in samples A and B, was that of the vain, attention-seeking woman. In the random sample A, the term

“attention whore” is used twice and “attention whoring” and “attention seeking whore” are each used once. For example, one thread (A.26) opens with an image of two attractive women involved in an iron stomach competition and the OP claims they are drinking donkey semen. Beside the image the OP has written, “shit attention whores do for the fame”. In another thread (A.26) devoted to a pretty young teenage girl called Katya who looks like an anime character, a girl who 4chan/b/ users have created fan pages in honour of, one commenter says “Katya is an attention seeking whore just like any other pretty girls”.

Another thread (B.67) starts with a screen grab from Facebook in which a man is asking a woman on a date and she turns him down. Screen grabs of the woman posing for selfies, in which she is dressed up to go out, are also posted in the thread. The OP writes “god damn it /b/ that’s it. I’m sick of shitty ass cunts treating everyone like shit just because they think they’re 10/10 when in reality their an alchohol and a complete whore.” The OP then gives the url address of her Facebook account and continues, “Just look at this bitch. And I mean really look at her. Peruse her page. She is borderline retarded, sick about 5 different dicks a week, is a dumpser slut and still thinks she’s a princess.” When the OP later comments again, posting a selfie of her in a short black dress he writes, “Good job, you’re really contributing to your community. You must be so proud of yourself. While licking your men’s hairy arseholes with kitchen utensils in your anus.” There is no evidence here that the woman in question has engaged in any such practices but what the OP imagines is revealing. Her flattering self-taken photographs, her posing and her awareness of her sexual allure sets off an enraged response, in which all kinds of fantasies about her imagined sexual life are used to express both a frustration with her choice to reject the advances of one man and a disgust at her imagined active sexual life.

In a thread from the random sample (A.5), an OP reports that a teenage girl who was using Younow.com, a live broadcasting and chat site, is claiming to have been blackmailed by a 4chan/b/ user, who is threatening to send naked pictures she took

to her father. One commenter responds that younow.com is “a shitty camwhore site where all the presenters are underage girls who just try to get their viewer counts up”, while another accuses her of “attention whoring”. Another describes her as someone who “sits on cams and whores around on the internet instead of going out and getting a fucking hobby. If anything we're doing her a favor. Look at her little cunt friend that can't get off of her phone for 1 fucking min. lol this is gold”. The term “camwhore” has been part of the lexicon of 4chan/b/ since about 2009 and is used to describe young women who take amateur photos of themselves in lingerie, semi-nude or just in a sexual pose and post it online. It is used twice in the random sample, A.

“Cumdumpster” is another slang term used on 4chan/b/ and although it only appeared once in the random sample, A, it has its roots in attacks against women perceived to be attention seeking and vain. The common usage of the term originates in 2008 (Manivannan 2013) in an infamous incident in which a 4chan user identifying as a “femanon” posted an erotic photo of herself and requested advice on a recent breakup, asking whether she could easily commit marital infidelity. Her behaviour was in such breach of subcultural conventions that moderators began editing the post, turning it into a self-assassination, expressing her interest in excrement and exchanged the word femanon for cumdumpster. The thread was temporarily fixed to the front page of 4chan/b/ and one user deemed it the equivalent to ‘a human head on a pike’. Do you have this image anywhere? This functioned as a clear statement of inclusion and exclusion, with the “human head on a pike” referencing their use at city gates throughout history to send out a warning of who is not advised to enter.

Despite being porn-obsessed, the findings demonstrate, therefor, that this subculture is extremely hostile to women who display overt sexuality, particularly in a way that suggests vanity or awareness of their sexual allure. These women, variously called attention(-seeking) whores, camwhores and cumdumpspters, are often guilty of transgressing the subcultural convention of radical opacity by posting images of themselves and therefor displaying perceived vanity, which is so violently rejected

on 4chan/b/ because it is regarded as a the defining feature of so much of mainstream social media and online culture, in which networks such as Instagram and Facebook are based around personal identity and photographs. It is against these massified and feminised networks that subcultures such as 4chan/b/ seek to aggressively defend their borders.

Idiot Nerd Girls

Just as “Sharon and Tracy” became the avatar of all things unhip and worthless in terms of subcultural capital in Thornton’s (1995) study of club cultures, the hatred of the shallow, vain, clueless girl with mainstream tastes trying to infiltrate geek subculture has become central to geek cultures both within and beyond 4chan/b/. A common trope employed on 4chan/b/ but also across a variety of geek subcultures, is that of the girl who is trying to belong to geek subcultures but who fails to use the correct markers of belonging, such as correct slang and depth of knowledge of the subculture. I found this reoccurring theme in both 4chan/b/ samples but also in comic convention culture, gamer culture, atheist or sceptic online communities and tech journalism, over the course of the entire period of research. Below are examples from each of these subcultures within and beyond 4chan/b/.

The “Idiot Nerd Girl” meme, which appeared around May 2010, features a photo of a teenage girl wearing thick-rimmed glasses with the word “NERD” written on the palm of her hand. The upper caption contains references to “geek culture” while the bottom caption demonstrates a lack of knowledge or expertise on the subject and a lack of understanding of subcultural capital.



Fig 4: Example of idiot nerd girl meme (KnowYourMeme.com 2014, fig. 4)

This time the source of the image was outside of 4chan/b/, on other boards and forums such as Gaia Online Forums and then began to appear as a topic on tumblr with the caption “Self-proclaimed title of ‘Nerd’/What is World of Warcraft?” Another, posted on FunkyJunk.com, used the caption, “I love back to the future!/What the hell is a gigawatt?” Then the Canvas Blog published the top ten images from the thread in a post titled “/nerdcore.” The viral content site BuzzFeed featured a compilation of notable examples in a post titled “The Best of the Idiot Nerd Girl Meme.” Web culture blog UpRox.com posted an article titled “Meme Watch: Idiot Nerd Girl Is Less Nerd Than Idiot, But 100% Annoying,” which compared the series to a video called “Hot Women Pandering to Nerds”, featuring interviews with actresses and models saying they are fans of comic books, video games and Star Wars (Know Your Meme 2010). This style of image is called an image macro, with a character in the middle where each individual can apply their own text, and although it did not create this one, 4chan is regarded as the most

significant site in making image macros a now mainstream viral phenomenon and the very first site that created image macros was Something Awful, which Chris Pool, aka Moot, was a regular user of and based his idea for 4chan on (Phillips 2012).

Below are some examples of events that occurred and were analysed throughout the period of the research, found in a range of geek subcultures, in which this gendered method of subcultural exclusion can be seen. In each case, women who try to join or influence the subculture are despised or harassed and women who express feminist views in this context even more so.

i. Cosplay

In sample A, a post (A.44) began with an image of a woman dressed up as Leeloo, the orange-haired character from the sci-fi film *The Fifth Element*, played by Milla Jovovich. She appears to be at a “cosplay” convention and is holding a handwritten sign that reads “Cosplay ≠ Consent”. Cosplay is short for costume play. It typically involves fan subcultures dressing as characters from video games, sci-fi and anime at fan conventions. The “X ≠ Consent” formula used on her sign is also an adaptation of a meme started by the “Slutwalk” movement and took the form of handwritten signs at the walks and then later as part of social media campaigns. The OP writes, "I'm standing here with my tits and pussy hanging out to tell you that it is not okay for you to notice my tits and pussy. how dare you give me the attention I want so badly!" imitating the voice of the imagined vain female fake geek.

In another image posted (A.34), an attractive blonde large-breasted woman posing for the camera in a skimpy video game character outfit is accompanied by the OP's comment, “COSPLAY”, with the inverted comments inserted by the OP, implying a judgment on the authenticity of her subcultural identity. A commenter responds, mimicking the original comment by using inverted commas also, “Attention seeking whores”. Another commenter responds “hehe omg look at me I'm so cute in my outfit! It's ok to show off as much as skin as possible and no one will judge me for it

because it's for a video game character! Women who go out to clubs dressed in skimpy outfits are so trashy like ugh!” Another commenter writes “The only reason women go to these conventions and dress up is probably because the possibility of being raped by a poster on /v/ [the video games section of 4chan] is really low. The possibility of being hit on at these conventions is probably non-existent as well. Women just love the attention they get from these guys because they know they're not a sexual threat to them and they won't fuck any of them”. “Imagine the emotional scarring a female has to live with after they witness an undesirable male who showing the slightest interest and attraction towards them”, writes another commenter, sarcastically. “No one wants to fuck her. She only saying that to seem like someone wants her. Ugly bitch” writes another. And in a similar spirit another writes, “If she got hit on by a rich 10/10 she would fuck him that night. These people pretend they have morals but they are human like everyone else.”

These 4chan/b/ threads are an example of the wider phenomenon that I observed over the period of the research of women cosplayers and comic fans being judged as insufficiently subcultural or as faking the level of knowledge required to join the subculture. Sexual harassment of women cosplayers and a brimming resentment toward these women as fakes or infiltrating posers had been brewing for many years but in July of 2014, “Geeks for CONsent”, founded by three women from Philadelphia, started an online petition supporting a formal anti-harassment policy at Comic-Con. Attendees claimed they were being groped, followed and unwillingly photographed during the festival. The issue also received attention when Tony Harris, the artist behind some of the most critically acclaimed comics in the last 20 years, notably Starman with James Robinson for DC and Ex Machina with Brian K. Vaughan for Wildstorm, blogged:

“I am so sick and tired of the whole COSPLAY-Chiks... We are LEGION. And here it is, THE REASON WHY ALL THAT, sickens us: BECAUSE YOU DONT KNOW SHIT ABOUT COMICS, BEYOND WHATEVER GOOGLE IMAGE SEARCH YOU DID TO GET REF ON THE MOST MAINSTREAM CHARACTER WITH THE MOST REVEALING

COSTUME EVER. And also, if ANY of these guys that you hang on tried to talk to you out of that Con? You wouldnt give them the fucking time of day. Shut up you damned liar, no you would not. Lying, Liar Face. Yer not Comics. Your just the thing that all the Comic Book, AND mainstream press flock to at Cons” (Dickens 2012).

In these on-going battles over the male dominated space of comic conventions and subculture, the women contributing to the debate complain of being sexually harassed, while the men contributing to the debate in the strongest terms seem to suggest that it is the women who intrude upon this space and flaunt their sexuality, unbidden. The factors that seem to be inspiring such rage in those who hate these female cosplayers are a mixture of their perceived arrogant awareness in their own sexual allure, their lack of expertise in the expert knowledge of the subculture, their mainstream tastes and their unwillingness to be sexually available to the men at the convention despite apparently seeking sexual attention. There are echoes of Wylie’s (1942) “hidden cruelty” in the feminization of culture here and again, the rules to what Thornton (ibid.) called “subcultural capital” are made more niche and inaccessible, denigrating female members who seem to never conform enough to the conventions of these spaces to be accepted.

ii. #gamergate

Gamer subcultures also displayed these methods of gendered exclusion and inoculation from feminised mass culture influences.

2014 saw a period of fierce online fighting, alleged to have been the culmination of a building resentment of gamers toward video game journalists and critics over several years, involving accusations of corruption and commercial interests (Newstatesman 2014). However, it was primarily female games journalists who came under attack, despite being a male dominated field. Anita Sarkeesian became embroiled in this fight when gamers alleged that she had used a journalist ex-boyfriend for career

advancement (Stuart 2014). Then games journalist, Zoë Quinn, became the recipient of similar attacks from gamers. Her 2013 choose-your-own-adventure-style game *Depression Quest* received a lot of criticism when it was released. The backlash became so extreme that she had to change her phone number after it was doxxed (Edge 2014).

All of this animosity toward her in the games world returned when Quinn's ex-boyfriend, Eron Gjoni, wrote a series of blog posts claiming that she'd engaged in a series of affairs over the course of their relationship. One of those people happened to be a Kotaku reporter, Nathan Grayson, who'd mentioned Quinn in some coverage for the site. Many detractors took this to be a proof that she'd slept with him in order to get positive press for *Depression Quest*. But Grayson never wrote a review for *Depression Quest*, and Gjoni later amended his statements to reflect that none of Grayson's coverage of Quinn coincided with any sexual relationship he might have had with her (Keith, 2014). The resulting online storm, which spread to Twitter and other platforms, was called #gamergate.

Many defend the attacks against Quinn and Sarkeesian, arguing it isn't about the women; it's a protest against corruption and nepotism in the video game world. The accusations against Sarkeesian and Quinn and less severe attacks against several male games journalists, were so strong that games producers Kotaku and Polygon changed their policies to disallow reporters from giving money to independent developers through Patreon and similar crowdfunding systems without full disclosure of their personal connections (Maiberg 2014). At the time of writing, the #gamergate story has now become hugely complicated by conflicting arguments and intricate details of the gaming industry and games journalism, so it will not be possible to represent the many perspectives written on the issue. While it seems reasonable to suggest there are ethical issues in games journalism worth addressing in general, in terms of the alleged cosy relationships between reviewers and creators, there is a level of misogyny and overwhelmingly targeting women that undermines this claim.

For example, Quinn found and recorded some of the conversations that took place on a 4chan IRC called “burgersandfries”, in which 4chan users conspired to destroy her career using the most extreme misogynist language and motivations. In this captured document (date, is it available anywhere?), they express their hatred and disgust towards her, their glee at the thought of ruining her career and fantasized about her being raped and killed. They wondered if all the harassment will drive her to suicide, and only the thought of 4chan getting bad publicity convinced some of them that this isn’t something they should hope for. They distributed falsified nude pictures of her, posting links to online archives of them and emailing them directly to Quinn’s supporters. They were attempting to dig up information about her family and to track down anyone with links to her. One found a picture of Quinn at age 13 and posted a link to it. In this discussion, which was publicly being defended as being about gaming ethics they discuss Quinn’s vagina as “wide,” large enough to “fit 12 dicks at once” and “a festering cheese-filled vagina” that leaves “a trail of cunt slime” wherever she goes and then speculated about its smell (Futrelle 2014).

There are several other cases of female games journalists that have reached a level of harassment to warrant media attention throughout the period of this study. Jenn Frank, an award-winning freelance games journalist, wrote an article entitled “How to attack a woman who works in video gaming” for The Guardian that looked at ongoing harassment and addressed #GamerGate’s concerns over ethics in game journalism. Frank outlined the ways in which trolls are harming women who work in the traditionally male-dominated field, and admitted: “...someone recently and bafflingly tried to hack into my email and phone contacts. This is all very frightening to write, and so I must disclose that I *am* biased, insofar as I am terrified. I have worked in this industry for most of the last nine – not always perfect – years and I have never professed to be a perfect person. However, my values, my belief that abuse must not, cannot become “normal”, “acceptable” or “expected” is at odds with *oh, God, please, why are they doing this, what’s the point, don’t let it be me,*

don't let it be me. My unabashed love for video games, my colleagues and my work have a conflict of interest with my own terror" (Quoted in: Futrelle 2014).

Before #gamergate, games writer Jennifer Hepler also came under attack from gamers in which she claims to have been sent hundreds of abusive messages on Twitter calling her an "obese cunt" and threatening her (Polo 2012). Games writer Felicia Day was publicly dismissed as a "booth babe" by a male games journalist (Pinchefsky 2012). Games designer Patricia Hernandez once drew the attention of 4chan/b/ when she called it a "cathedral of misogyny". She became another one of the female games journalists to be heavily criticized online over #gamergate. Encyclopedia Dramatica, the transgressive alternative to Wikipedia and Encyclopedia Britannica, that shares much of its rhetorical style, slang and culture of 4chan/b/, has a permanent entry for the memes 4chan/b/ created inspired by her comment, where she is described as "a fat, wetback 'game journalist' with sausage fingers and a chin like Jay Leno who works for Kotaku, a gaming gossip site infamous for allowing game designers to sleep with its columnists for good reviews and publicity. Patricia is a noted lesbian and feminazi who follows in Kotaku's proud tradition of writing countless articles about how various games either promote rape or literally rape their female players. Another staple of Kotaku "journalism" she takes part in is nepotism, which explains why every other article to come from her chubby hands is about her live-in girlfriend" (Encyclopedia Dramatica, 2014).

As outlined in Chapter 1, Sarkeesian's harassment involved death threats, rape threats, bomb threats and a video game in which players could beat her up. Samples A and B were taken before #gamergate so it doesn't emerge in the data but games were discussed 6 times in the random sample, A, and Sarkeesian appeared twice. In the first (A.29) an image of Sarkeesian with a caption that reads: "I bet the patriarchy did this" is posted with the comment "What is it with women thinking everyone wants to fuck them?" In the second example (A.52) the OP posts an image of an old university building with /b/ as its crest, written across the front entrance.

Alongside the image the OP has written, “Welcome to 4chan university. Here is our staff...”



Fig 5: Illustration from 4chan/b/ of “4chan university” (4chan.org 2014, fig. 5)

In the style of 4chan/b/, the post is a challenge of wits and an open invitation to start a thread based on that opening line. In quick succession, 112 comments flood in suggesting irreverent, anti-politically correct candidates, such as Andres Brevjik as “Assistant Professor in Multicultural Education and swimming club leader on the side”, as well as Hitler, Eric Cartman from the cartoon South Park, Ted Bundy and, as English Literature professor, Angela Corey, who was a young black woman mocked for her inarticulacy in court during the Trayvon Martin shooting case. As “Professor of Men’s Studies” they use an image of Sarkeesian.

iii. #elevatorgate and the “new atheist” online community

Male public intellectuals such as Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins, once ironically calling themselves “the four horsemen”, have become figureheads of a new wave of atheism which has brought a certain swaggering, irreverent “muscular liberal” style to a movement that primarily criticizes conservative Christianity at home and Islam abroad (Gribbin 2011).

While there were no serious discussions about the existence of god or secularism in the random sample, A, there were several examples within the threads of a kind of irreverent style associated with “new atheist” movement. One such thread (A.86) begins with an image of a cat dressed as a mullah with an AK47 and a comment “Hey bros. I am not trolling. I don't know anything what is more evil than Islam. Even the mafia is nicer than islam... Why dont the people see that's islam pure evil?” “i hate islam don't get me wrong... but why shouldn't i hate any other religion?do you know about the christian inquisition? religions are shit in general”, to which a commenter responds “but the crusades where hundreds of years ago. We have evolved. Islam is still a fucking dark age religion and needs to be destroyed”. At the time the sample was taken, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was making headlines, so this is likely to be the reason the subject came up several times. One thread (A.43) began with a post of an Israeli flag and the comment “So tell me /b/ Do you stand with Israel?” Responses included, “Ameritard here. War is retarded. Slaying children is even more retarded. Both sides are super retarded. Religion is really really retarded”. Another thread (A.65) begins with a post of an image of Jesus nailed to a swastika-shaped wooden cross above the caption, “Post something you really like”. In response, images of women in stockings and other images of heterosexual pornography are posted in the thread. These examples give a sense of the intentional crudeness of the discussion on 4chan/b/ and the casual racism employed, but also the identification with a kind of militant strain of what Christopher Hitchens called anti-theism that flourishes in many of these male dominated geek spaces.

Like some of the other online cultures under analysis, feminists within the online atheist and sceptics communities have raised the issue of misogynist behaviour and anti-feminist views within a forum that they argue has been historically associated with pro-feminist politics on issues such as sexual morality and contraception. In all of the similar and sometimes overlapping cultures under analysis here, there is the common feature of anti-feminism and misogyny within a seemingly progressive, and often militantly anti-conservative culture, coupled with a tendency in each to exclude women from the subculture, often by dismissing them as a force for conservatism, shallowness, commercialism, hysteria and unreason and as a taming, mainstreaming influence. Closer analysis of this atheist subculture reveals that the inoculation of the subculture is built particularly around the construction of the virtues of reason, rationality and scepticism as masculine and antithetical to the feminine. This particular sensibility, as it is performed on internet forums, is geek-identifying, often libertarian and styled on “new atheist” figures such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. Yet another event that earned the suffix “-gate” because of the heated and long-running debate it produced, is examined below as an example of the tensions between feminist and anti-feminist tendencies within this subculture.

Rebecca Watson is the founder of the Skepchick blog and also co-hosts The Skeptics' Guide to the Universe podcast. Watson became the object of a wave of abuse similar in scale to that of Sarkeesian, this time in the online atheist and sceptics community. She became the centre of the online storm now known as #elevatorgate when she wrote a blog on the subject titled “Reddit makes me hate atheists” about incidents of young women in the atheist community being ridiculed for trying to engage in discussion in the largely male community. In June of 2011, she was speaking on a panel with Richard Dawkins. According to her account of the event that led to #elevatorgate:

“I used my time to talk about what it’s like for me to communicate atheism online, and how being a woman might affect the response I receive, as in rape threats and other sexual comments. The audience was receptive, and afterward I spent many hours in the hotel bar discussing issues of gender, objectification, and misogyny with other thoughtful atheists. At around 4 a.m., I excused myself, announcing that I was exhausted and heading to bed in preparation for another day of talks. As I got to the elevator, a man who I had not yet spoken with directly broke away from the group and joined me. As the doors closed, he said to me, “Don’t take this the wrong way, but I find you very interesting. Would you like to come back to my hotel room for coffee?” I politely declined and got off the elevator when it hit my floor.” (Watson 2011)

She referred to this incident in a vlog afterwards. As a result, the comment sections on her Youtube videos were flooded with abuse and threats, her Wikipedia page was vandalised and, she writes, “A few individuals sent me hundreds of messages, promising to never leave me alone” (Watson 2012). The hate mail was further intensified after Richard Dawkins himself weighed in, mocking western feminists for complaining about such trivial things as being propositioned in an elevator when much greater suffering on the part of women was taking place in the Muslim world (Dickson 2011). Twitter accounts were made in her name and used to tweet incriminating things to celebrities and her friends. Entire blogs were created about her, cataloging past mistakes and attempting to dig up anything incriminating in her past. Just a week after Dawkins weighing in, she was scheduled to speak at The Amazing Meeting (TAM), a sceptics’ conference in Las Vegas that in years past she had fundraised to send women to. In the weeks leading up to TAM, a man tweeted Watson that he was attending and that if he ran into her in an elevator, he’d assault her (Watson 2014).

Other women and feminists in the atheist community have encountered similar behaviour. Watson’s co-blogger, Amy Davis Roth, had to move home after her address was posted on a forum dedicated to hating feminist sceptics, called Slime Pit. These had been posted by the same man who had written a scathing post about her on the virulently anti-feminist Men’s Rights website AVoiceForMen.com (Roth

2012). Feminist sceptic blogger Greta Christina wrote that, “when I open my mouth to talk about anything more controversial than Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster recipes or Six More Atheists Who Are Totally Awesome, I can expect a barrage of hatred, abuse, humiliation, death threats, rape threats, and more” (quoted in Watson 2011). Similarly, sceptic Jen McCreight stopped blogging and accepting speaking engagements altogether, writing “I wake up every morning to abusive comments, tweets, and emails about how I’m a slut, prude, ugly, fat, feminazi, retard, bitch, and cunt (just to name a few)... I just can’t take it anymore” (quoted in Watson 2011).

In a 4chan/b/ thread (A.11) devoted primarily to anger resulting from sexual rejection by women, a commenter posted this image.

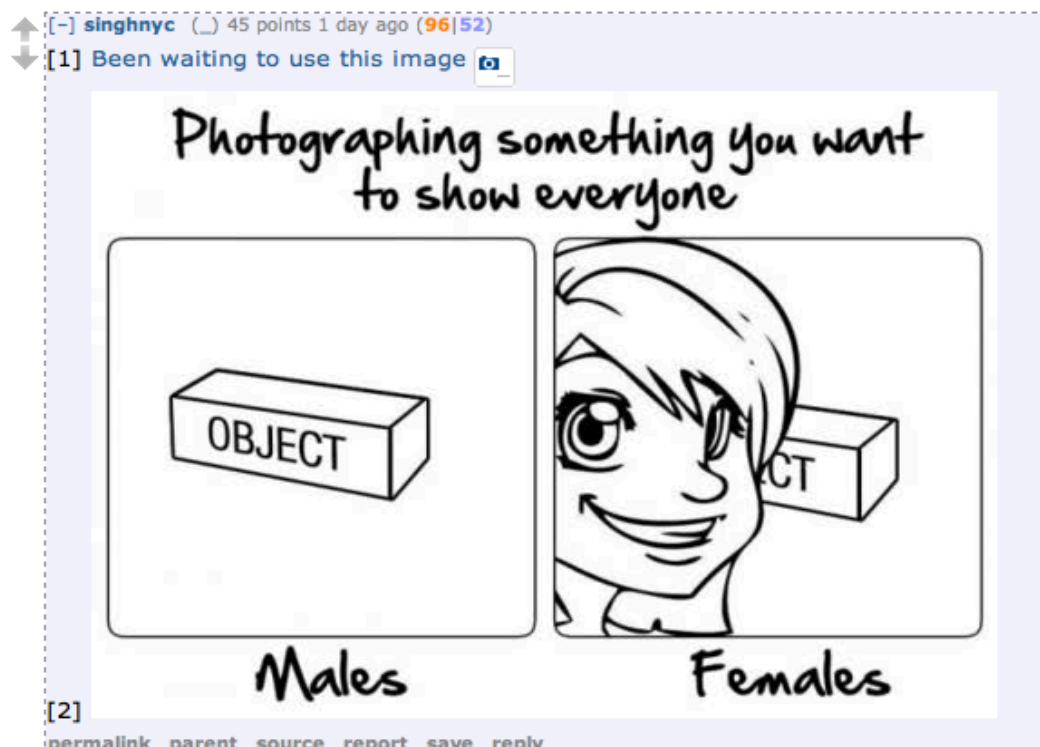


Fig 6: Cartoon illustration female vanity (4chan.org 2014, fig. 6)

The image originates from Reddit, in the atheist forum r/atheism, to show how women use photo-based social media to indulge their vanity while men do not. In this image the female is more interested in taking a photo of herself under the

pretence of displaying an interest in the object under discussion, while the male simply displays the object. This image also featured in the atheist Reddit forum r/atheism, when a 15-year old girl under the pseudonym Lunam, posted a thread called “What My Super Religious Mother Got Me For Christmas“, in which she linked to a photo of herself holding Carl Sagan’s Demon-haunted World. The first comment on the image read, “Brace yourself, the compliments are coming”, suggesting the inevitability of the flattery she would knowingly receive. What followed was a long discussion in which commenters discussed her age and joked about abducting and anally raping her. “Relax your anus, it hurts less that way” wrote one commenter, “Blood is mother nature’s lubricant” joked another. When Lunam eventually responded to these comments, she wrote “Dat feel when you know you’ll never be taken seriously in the atheist/scientific/whatever community because you’re a girl : (” and the first critical response returned “well if you say things like ‘dat feel’...” In fact, Lunam was using an expression that originated on 4chan/b/. Using it should indicate, in this subculture, a sympathy for geeky subcultural style. This second attempt to enter the subculture through indicating this “in the know” authenticity, as Thornton (Ibid) called it, using an expression from an elite male dominated subculture such as 4chan/b/, is here again received with a hostile response.

Examples such as these are perhaps r/atheism’s equivalent of 4chan/b/’s “human head on a pike”. This discourse punishes women seeking to be part of the subculture and seeking to engage in the intellectual culture of the new atheist movement for their perceived vanity and inability to understand subcultural conventions and markers of authenticity and belonging. These cultures also weaponise transgressive sexuality in their attacks against women, a notably commonality in discourse across all of them.

iv. #dongelgate and the tech industry

In the world of information technology engineering and development, similar cases of clashes between feminism and geeks have persisted. In a clash that became known as #dongelgate, Aria Richards, a female developer, overheard two male developers making what she thought were sexist jokes during a talk at a tech conference about the gender gap in technology. She tweeted a photo of the two to shame them publicly, writing that, “jokes about forking repo’s in a sexual way and big ‘dongles’ are not cool.” One of the men was wearing a visible nametag in the photo. Richards’ tweet was quickly spotted by an organizer for the tech conference, who then pulled the two men aside to confront them about the comments. According to a post on the conference’s website, the men agreed the comments were in poor taste and apologised. Richards wrote a blog post about the encounter (Zandt, 2013).

Meanwhile, one of the male developers revealed that he had been fired from his job as a result of the public shaming. Arguments about the incident moved to blogs, the message forum Hacker News, Twitter, and Facebook, as well as the social media pages of the male developers’ employer, a gaming company called PlayHaven, and Richards’ employer, an email delivery company called SendGrid (Kutler, 2013). The resulting online storm was discussed on Twitter using the hashtag #dongelgate. Many people were apparently enraged that Richards would shame the men via social media rather than talking to them in person, and accused her of oversensitivity in reacting to their comments. Others saw the incident as another example of the hostile environment for women in technology. After news that the PlayHaven employee had lost his job, 4chan/b/ led an orchestrated swarm of abuse directed at Richards, harassing her and sending her threats, and they then went after her employer, subjecting the SendGrid site and servers to a distributed denial of service attack (Holt 2013). The DDoS attack had the company up through the night trying to restore service for its customers. The following morning it announced it was resolving the issue in another way, by posting to Twitter, Facebook and the company blog that it was firing Adria Richards (Hill 2013).

Such cases in the tech and hacker world predate my research and in some cases those incidents are still playing out in the public eye as the victims and perpetrators continue to draw attention. In 2007, the earliest major case of this kind of harassment to get attention, Kathy Sierra was considered one of the most visible women in tech and she taught the Java programming language at Sun Microsystems in her books on software design, which were top sellers on Amazon. Her blog was on Technorati's top 100 and her writing focused on design and coding included very little that could be considered controversial (Sandoval 2013). The backlash against her was sparked when she supported a call to moderate reader comments, which is common practice now but at the time went against the libertarian hacker ethic of absolute free speech. Hundreds of commenters on her blog began harassing and threatening her, some making rape and death threats. "I hope someone slits your throat," wrote one. People posted photoshopped images of her with lingerie choking her in one and a noose beside her head in another (Nakashima 2013). Those images still appear using a simple Google image search of Kathy Sierra. Andrew "weev" Auernheimer, a then well-known hacker and troll, circulated Sierra's home address and Social Security number online. He also made false allegations about her being a battered wife and a former prostitute. She then went offline in any public capacity for several years, giving up book deals and speaking engagements, and even fled her home. Despite everything, Sierra has said, "What happened to me pales in comparison to what's happening to women online today... I thought things would get better. Mostly, it's just gotten worse" (Sandoval 2013).

Even before publicizing Sierra's home address and Social Security number, Auernheimer (aka Weev) was a hero to many in the hacking community. He made a name for himself through the clever methods he used to punish enemies and for wreaking havoc. In 2009, he claimed to have hacked into Amazon's system and reclassified books about homosexuality as porn. That same year, he posted several anti-Semitic rants on YouTube. In one, he blames Jews for porn and accuses them of dominating the country's banking system. "The Jews are winning," Auernheimer says at one point in the video. "I think we should hold the people producing it

responsible... We take all these vile pornographers, and all these fucking bankers that fund pornography, we line them up in the street and we crucify them, just like they crucified Christ. And that would be a change I could fucking believe in ... blood in the streets" (Quoted in: Sandoval 2013). Weev was also the president of a trolling and hacking initiative called the "Gay Nigger Association of America", which was dedicated to opposing popular blogging through hacking and trolling methods, viewing blogging as a mainstreaming force in internet culture, commenting "trolling is basically internet eugenics... bloggers are filth" (quoted in: Schwartz 2008).

Auernheimer was later sentenced to spend 41 months in prison for releasing the email addresses of 114,000 AT&T customers. According to him, he was doing society a favour for exposing a security flaw that forced the company to secure its systems. However, the FBI called it "identity fraud and conspiracy to access a computer without authorization." There was a call in the tech sector to rally around Auernheimer. Tech pundits predicted that his prosecution would prevent security analysts from exposing vulnerabilities. Lawyers from the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the group that advocates for internet users and tech companies and has opposed legislation to protect women against online stalking and harassment on the grounds that it impinged upon their principles of internet freedom (Hess 2014) helped with Auernheimer's defense (Sandoval 2013). The Free Weev campaign, which became popular among hackers and in countercultural geek circles, has been publicly supported by some of those already mentioned, including Anonymous, Gabriella Coleman and Laurie Penny (Popescu 2013).

Medium effects and meaning-making

In the cases explored in this study, the discourse features of the insults conform to a set of common characteristics. As we have seen with both "Idiot Nerd Girl" and other examples, which included terms like cumdumpster and camwhore, pejorative

slang plays an important role in vigilantly policing the boundaries of the subculture, making it increasingly difficult to gain entry, especially for women. Although the prolific production of slang in online geek culture has been praised by some commentators such as Auerbach (2012) and Coleman (2011), applying Thornton and Bourdieu's analysis of the meaning of slang provides an alternative perspective on the elitism of its function. Bourdieu (1992) argued "the deep seated intention of slang vocabulary is above all the assertion of an aristocratic distinction" (Ibid: 94). Thornton applies this analysis to contemporary subcultures as a method of exclusion and argues that this "hipness" is based in part on a rejection of the feminised mainstream.

In her application of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to the club cultures of the 1990s, hipness, Thornton (ibid.) argued, is a form of cultural capital, through which members of the subculture gain entry. In this economy of "subcultural capital" the capital is earned through knowing the subcultural conventions, using argot and using the particularities of the subculture to differentiate yourself from mainstream culture and mass society. The constant "reclassification of hipness" within such subcultures, she argued, was one of the ways in which the subculture policed its boundaries from mainstream dilution.

Schultz (1975) argued that the "semantic derogation of women" (Ibid: 134) in curse words and insults was the product of a process of the historical male domination of naming and of meaning-making power in the culture and that even many neutral terms become pejorated with feminised meaning over time. Manivannan (year) claims that here the subculture is defending itself from becoming like these mainstream social media networks but that it is also rejecting "normative values", citing as evidence comments like, "The fact that you introduce yourself as "femanon" proves that you are an attention whore. True anon has no gender". 4chan/b/ contributors may claim they are motivated by an enlightened gender-blindness and it is true that on relatively rare occasions a male contributor who transgresses the rules of the subculture by posting a photo of himself is attacked using this highly

feminised language but the reoccurring theme of the “camwhore” and the “attention seeking whore” work to feminize everything that is to be excluded from the subculture. In this subculture, those who are anonymous, who troll most cruelly, and who have the hacker know-how to stalk and doxx those who rank lowest in the subculture’s pecking order, gain the greatest subcultural capital. Coleman (2012) has argued that the primary currency in hacker culture is subcultural kudos. This principle was strongly evident in the geeky anti-feminist online cultures analysed in this study and described in this chapter, but with a highly gendered value hierarchy.

Thornton’s analysis bears some striking similarities to what I have observed in geeky, transgressive, anti-feminist online spaces such as 4chan/b/ and some differences also. Thornton’s term “subcultural capital”, adapted from Bourdieu’s cultural capital, worked on two levels, first as entry to the subculture, in which capital refers to the cultural economy of the subculture, but also as capital in a more literal sense because of the entrepreneurial aspect of the club cultures of the 1990s that she outlined. While the conventions and style of sites like 4chan/b/ would never allow for the earnestness required to adopt any kind of utopian anti-capitalist stance, preferring a more nihilistic worldview and a removed, cynical irony, the subculture is inherently hostile to commodification and monetisation, typically regarding it as an attack on the idealised internet, which in hacker parlance should be both, “free as in beer” and “free as in speech”. I use Thornton’s term subcultural capital, therefore, only in the sense that she applied it to the economy of cultural exclusion and inclusion, value and worthlessness, within a subculture. Thornton’s gender analysis of subcultures is also useful here because she viewed subcultural capital as being heavily gendered. She argued that young women in 90s club culture acknowledged the subcultural hierarchy and accepted their lowly position within it, in which that which is feminine and popular has least value, a reality they acknowledged when they described their own tastes as “crap but I like it”. Other female clubbers and ravers were “usually careful to distance themselves from the degraded pop culture of ‘Sharon and Tracey’; they emphatically reject and denigrate a feminized mainstream” (Ibid: 204). In the case of 4chan/b/ and the related geek sites above, the mainstream

and its perceived taming, shallow, commercial culture that threatens to dilute the subculture is consistently, almost obsessively, feminised.

Manivannan (2013) concedes that many of the pre-existing forms of trickster-trolling culture and mechanisms designed to inoculate or police the boundaries of the subculture from massification have taken on a more extreme misogynist style on 4chan/b/ than on its predecessors like Usenet. She argues that “crapflooding”, the term given to posting extreme pornographic images involving faeces, mutilation and vomiting, act as such a policing measure. On this point, my analysis is similar to Manivannan’s, in that misogyny *is* tied up in methods of policing the boundaries of the subculture, or to use Aeurbach’s (2011) terms, to “inoculate” it against “massification”. However, it is the value judgments implied in her conclusion that require a more critical reappraisal. She writes “The decentralised, anonymous imageboard 4chan is decried for its discursive construction of gender, particularly on its Random /b/ board. However, /b/’s misogyny demonstrably results from an internal moral panic about cultural exclusivity. [...] Viewing misogynistic discourse as a strategic, regenerative practice onsite is necessary as /b/ occupies an extreme point on the genealogical continuum bridging the transgressive cultures of bulletin-board systems, shock sites, and hacker culture” (Ibid: 13).

Manivannan thus acknowledges that /b/ is decried for its misogyny (referring presumably to mainstream discourse as such criticism is largely absent from academic analysis) yet she argues that the misogyny is an expression of a subculture-cleansing practice. Here, she implies there is a necessary moral or aesthetic virtue in these attempts to cleanse a subculture of outside mainstream influence, and that this somehow outweighs or cancels out the less virtuous misogyny. Contrary to Manivannan, my analysis demonstrates that there is no contradiction or mutual exclusivity between misogyny and contempt for the feminised mainstream, embodied in the characters consistently depicted in the data, the idiot nerd girl, the fake geek girl and all those failing to meet subcultural criteria. From Philip Wylie’s (1942) “matriarchal sentimentality, goo slop, hidden cruelty” as “the foreshadowing

of national death” in the 1940s to Thornton’s (1996) analysis of the denigration of the popular embodied in “Sharon and Treacy” in the club cultures of the 1990s, misogyny and purification from the influence of the popular are not in necessary contradiction but rather have a substantial history of going hand-in-hand. Indeed, as the findings discussed here illustrate, this cultural dynamic is central to the growth of online anti-feminism in subcultural spaces that jealously guard their boundaries and membership.

The description of Zoe Quinn’s vagina as a horrifying thing oozing with slime again brings to mind Wylie’s “hidden cruelty, goo, slop”. Women appear in much of western philosophy as Sartrean holes and slime (Collins and Pierce 1976) or Deleuzian bodies without organs (Guattari and Deleuze 1983), while the mind remains masculine. Paglia (1990) explored the recurring theme of slime and femininity in western thought through a Freudian lens, rendering what she describes as the primordial swamp of the unknown, female interior as antithetical to the masculine, to reason and to the mind in the Cartesian dichotomy at the centre of western Enlightenment thought. Brodribb (1996) observed “Plato answered the question of Being by awarding true reality to the realm of ideas; the sensible world possesses only the appearance of reality. Postmodernism is no less metaphysical. Here too the idea absorbs and denies all presence in the world” (Ibid: 298). In these subcultures, the female is discursively rendered as bodily and irrational in opposition to the masculine in online subcultures that becomes, as in William Gibson’s (1984) influential vision of cyberspace, pure mind by rejecting all connections to one’s own physical appearance through this radical opacity. This is especially evident in the atheist community that excludes female members for showing their physical bodies in discussion threads and in the bodily terms used in insulting slang in 4chan/b/. Like the “camwhores” on 4chan/b/ and the “attention seeking” cosplay women, Lunam, who was abused using language of blood and anal rape, transgressed a set of unspoken norms shared by these spaces, which are regulated by what Coleman understood to be a virtuous anti-celebrity ethic but which can also be understood in terms of the gendered mind-body Cartesian dichotomy of the Enlightenment, which

is so central to the values of the new atheists and which is here weaponised through discourse and meaning-making to exclude and denigrate the feminine.

In early writing on cyberfeminism, the belief that being disembodied by the nature of online communication was a source of optimism for women's ability to communicate on equal terms (Haraway, Plant 1997). On the contrary, however, the findings of this analysis demonstrate that the discourse of online geek culture has in fact sought to reassert the female body in its attempts to exclude women from the most otherwise anonymous and disembodied of online communication. Here, a woman showing her face or body in a photograph is taken as a measure of her inability to understand subcultural conventions and to show a woman's image against her will or without her consent is used to exert control over her subcultural belonging / exclusion.

Chapter Six: Masculinities

One of the key themes that emerged from analysis of the comment threads and other data captured was a preoccupation among posters about their identity as male as well as a number of important consistencies regarding their attitudes towards gender relations, gender politics, feminism and anti-feminism. This chapter explores these discursive themes around the relationship between masculinity and anti-feminism, examining what kind of masculinities are being constructed, what kind of anti-feminism is at work and how both of these compare and contrast with past theorised formulations. The reference points for contrast and comparison will include conservative anti-feminism, lad culture and the masculinist tendency within the men's movement. Using data from the 4chan/b/ samples and from examples of anti-feminist attacks and forums, these discursive themes include: male geek and hacker identities, the appropriation of black masculinity as resistance to the perceived emasculating conformity of white femininity, and the "friendzone" along with other forms of slang for involuntary male celibacy, using examples from the Elliot Rodger case and others.

Masculinity is typically an overt preoccupation, by definition, of men's rights forums but on 4chan/b/, which is ostensibly more thematically "random" by name, it emerged as a similarly common preoccupation, albeit expressed in a more subtextual or implicit way. Despite the harsh, mocking tone of the forum, both data samples revealed important examples of a confessional style in which users felt they could confide their fears, their suicidal fantasies and their sense of a failed masculinity in the context of absolute anonymity in an unsentimental forum that also allowed them to be ironic and mocking. Paradoxically, expressions of hatred and envy of hegemonic masculinity appeared alongside expressions of male chauvinism, while the expressed belief in the genetic superiority of men appeared alongside an awareness of their own geeky "beta" masculinity. Envy toward "jocks" was expressed with an awareness of their own weak, sexually frustrated, marginal male

status. The threads indicated a general hostility toward conservative family values, which have been central to past anti-feminist movements, and an aesthetic style borrowed from countercultural movements.

Although 4chan/b/ is filled with racist abuse, particularly aimed at black males, the samples also contained depictions of black men as possessing a virile masculinity, a straight-talking style and a certain subaltern claim to authenticity that 4chan/b/ users applied as an antidote to a white feminism perceived as prim, politically-correct and potentially emasculating. These subcultures are thus constructing new variants of masculinity and a new cultural politics composed of multiple hybrid – and often ideologically contradictory - influences from past and present. In 4chan/b/ for example, this manifested itself as a mixture of elements of previously theorised masculinities with a countercultural style and a geeky “beta” identity, expressing both arrogance in their superior coding and hacking abilities and a humiliated beta masculinity, in which they must suffer unattainable, teasing women “friendzoning” them. The case of Elliot Rodger is used to explore this because he has become a common reference point on 4chan/b/ and in men’s rights forums, and because he drew much of his slang from these subcultures and left a trail of evidence of his online activities on several forums in which masculinity and misogyny were common themes.

Masculinity and “the first rule of /b/...”

Family values have formed one of the pillars of anti-feminist politics throughout the first and second waves of feminism and during what was described as a late 20th century period of backlash against the women’s movement (Faludi 1991). These values typically included opposition to abortion, divorce, single motherhood and promiscuous sexuality. The findings of this analysis reveal that the anti-feminism found on 4chan/b/ and other similar anti-feminist geek subcultures is almost as fiercely opposed to these family values as it is to feminism itself. In sample B, for

example, there were three discussions about abortion that articulated a pro-choice position without any feminist motivations.

A gruesome image of an aborted foetus was posted, lying on a doctor's table beside instruments and blood (B.2). The image is disturbing and would be typical of those used by anti-abortion campaigns. The text posted beside it reads, "I am undecided about abortion. On the one hand I support it because it is killing children. On the other, it gives women a choice." Another thread (B.61), which had no comments underneath at the time of capture, began with an image of a mother holding a severely handicapped baby with the accompanying mocking text "Thanks for not aborting me".

In a third example (B.32) a link to a TV documentary is posted about a child born with only a brain stem. The OP writes, "My question is, do you think this should be allowed?" Commenters responded, "I think parents who keep these children alive are a fucking disgrace and a waste of medical insurance" to which other commenters responded "Well, if he has no brain but the brainstem, he's not really suffering in the sense that we think of, is he? Oh noes, he has seizures. Fuck it, he has all the awareness of a houseplant. Who gives a shit if he has seizures?" and "Sodomy non sapiens, man; bugged if I know. But these parents do, and apparently society won't get behind the wholesale extermination of people I consider useless." Other commenters continue, "kill the fucking thing, and kill the parents too. that kind of worthless shit is such a waste of money. im sure they got all kinds of government handouts to keep 'it' alive. lets be real. that kind of thing is nothing but a huge burden on society", "I personally believe any child with a disability should be euthanized. They will never contribute to society in any way. I obviously don't mean children born without a limb because they can still grow up to be a functioning member of society, I'm talking about legit down syndrome or autism retards that can't go five minutes without shitting themselves", "This is literally a sack of cells with a heart beat, it is not a human being. This is just Christfags being Christfags".

Trying to unpack the meaning and the cultural politics of slang terms like “Christfags” can be confusing to those unfamiliar with the site’s culture, although this is arguably its intention. The sensibility of 4chan/b/ is not conducive to earnestly expressed political perspectives. Instead, its spirit is postmodern in its cynicism about political projects and it uses irony and absurdity to constantly undermine new comments, allowing meaning to be subverted before any outsiders can interpret it, thus evading the possibility of easy or outside interpretation. The “-fags” suffix is common on 4chan/b/ and here, coupled with Christ evokes a comical caricature of homophobic evangelical Southern US “white trash”. On the other hand, however, it also appears to be engaging in the homophobia it mocks. Close analysis of the threads indicates that Christfag is used primarily as a term of mockery, depicting those with conservative views on abortion and family as homophobic, religious and Southern and the active homophobic aspect is secondary but by no means to be explained away. The “fags” here functions as an ironic method of making the term defy political categorisation but also as a general term of derision inflected with an awareness of their own emasculated “beta” outsider status in relation to hegemonic masculinity. The term is not so successful at evading scrutability, however, that it can’t be interpreted. Its use on the threads under analysis indicates that it functions as a method of defining itself against both the conservative right and the perceived politically-correct left, both of whom are seen as seek to police the absolute principles of internet freedom advocated by the hacker politics that 4chan/b/ is embedded in. The term is designed to offend both, as it uses homophobic language and simultaneously mocks the homophobic tendencies of the religious right. This dynamic is also at work in the subculture’s expressed position on abortion, where its adherents seek to simultaneously offend feminism and equally the anti-feminist religious right.

Extreme pornography, discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, with an emphasis on taboo and group sex, non-reproductive practices such as anal sex and ejaculation on the face, and niche fetishes, feature heavily on 4chan/b/. This, along with the above attitude to abortion, distinguishes it from the cultural politics of most previous anti-

feminisms, which have been politically conservative in nature. Moreover, the paternal patriarchal masculinity typically associated with the anti-feminist strands of the American men's movement are not present here. Instead, it exhibits strong elements of what Ehrenreich (1995) has described as the decline of paternal patriarchy in the form of a rejection of the male authority at the centre of the traditional nuclear family and a retreat into the arrested development of unrestrained boyish rebellion, crystallised in Lad Culture (Whelehan, 2000; Attwood, 2005). The anti-feminism present on 4chan/b/ and in the geek-identifying online spaces introduced in the previous chapter is one of revulsion toward reproduction and the maternal and a rejection of authority, traditional family values and expectations of adult male roles of responsibility.

Chapter 5 addresses the idea of the anti-feminist discursive style under analysis deriving its aesthetic sensibility from countercultural styles as part of a strategy of subcultural elitism. Whereas the focus there was on how this operates to construct femininity, the emphasis of this chapter is on the construction of masculinity. In the random sample A, 2 threads were about the movie *Fight Club* (1999). The film adaptation of Chuck Palahniuk's (1995) novel of the same name dealt with many of the men's rights and masculinity-in-crisis themes that were hotly debated in the 1990's (Beynon 2002), mixed with an aesthetic that drew from the anti-consumerist culture-jamming counterculture of the 1990s.

One of these threads (A.45) begins with a painting of Tyler Durden, the lead character from the movie, who embodies the reassertion of rebel masculinity against the emasculating conformity of consumer culture and post-industrial office life. He is represented in the painting coolly smoking a cigarette with sunglasses on. The OP writes, "let's start a fight club/project mayhem. Northwest England. St Helens' (near Liverpool/Manchester) Who's in?" Some commenters seem interested and discuss where they live while others respond with quotes and references to the movie, e.g. "What's the first rule?" The thread also includes one comment mocking the OP: "I can see it now. Pale neckbeards trying to skip out of buying coffee. Oh woe to that

lone femanon that turns up. Haha.” When I first began observing 4chan/b/ in 2010, *Fight Club* seemed to be the most common film reference. The film’s centrality to the subculture suggests it is worth some analysis here as a pop cultural reference that the subculture’s members still use, some 15 years after its release, to construct their own identity and to represent something that is evidently deemed significant to their cultural politics.

Another post (A.31) features an image of Brad Pitt with his arm around Edward Norton as the two leading roles in *Fight Club*; the latter is the conformist, emasculated, consumerist male, accompanied by the knowing mock-question, “What’s the name of that film where Edward Norton and Brad Pitt start a fight club?” The thread below consists mainly of attempts to come up with funny answers. Comment responses include, “guys you’re not supposed to talk about this”, “Back Door Sluts 9” and “It was called Pink Soap. Hope this helps.” Here, the absurdity of the opening question is understood by members of the subculture because the film has been enormously influential on the style and cultural politics of 4chan/b/, even appearing as the header image once at the top of the site in sample B, posted by the site’s moderators. Pink Soap refers, as all members of the subculture will know, to the soap sold by the rebel character Tyler Durden, made from the reconstituted fat of women who had undergone liposuction and then had their fat “sold back to them”. Here, the semiosis emerging from the discourse fuses rebellion against vanity and consumerism with a disdain for the feminine and constructs rebel masculinity as its anti-conformist antidote.

4chan/b/’s set of 50 “Rules of the Internet”, discussed in the previous chapter, which listed “tits or GTFO” and “there are no girls on the internet”, also lists the first two rules as “You do not talk about /b/” and “You do NOT talk about /b/”, mimicking the first two rules of *Fight Club*: “You do not talk about *Fight Club*”.

Rules of the internet.

1. Do not talk about /b/
2. Do NOT talk about /b/
3. We are Anonymous
4. Anonymous is legion
5. Anonymous never forgives
6. Anonymous can be a horrible, senseless, uncaring monster
7. Anonymous is still able to deliver
8. There are no real rules about posting
9. There are no real rules about moderation either - enjoy your ban
10. If you enjoy any rival sites - DON'T
11. All your carefully picked arguments can easily be ignored
12. Anything you say can and will be used against you
13. Anything you say can be turned into something else - fixed
14. Do not argue with trolls - it means that they win
15. The harder you try the harder you will fail
16. If you fail in epic proportions, it may just become a winning failure
17. Every win fails eventually
18. Everything that can be labeled can be hated
19. The more you hate it the stronger it gets
20. Nothing is to be taken seriously
21. Original content is original only for a few seconds before getting old
22. Copypasta is made to ruin every last bit of originality
23. Copypasta is made to ruin every last bit of originality
24. Every repost is always a repost of a repost
25. Relation to the original topic decreases with every single post
26. Any topic can be easily turned into something totally unrelated
27. Always question a person's sexual preferences without any real reason
28. Always question a person's gender - just in case it's really a man
29. In the internet all girls are men and all kids are undercover FBI agents
30. There are no girls on the internet
31. TITS or GTFO - the choice is yours
32. You must have pictures to prove your statements
33. Lurk more - it's never enough
34. There is porn of it, no exceptions
35. If no porn is found at the moment, it will be made
36. There will always be even more fucked up shit than what you just saw
37. You can not divide by zero (just because the calculator says so)
38. No real limits of any kind apply here - not even the sky
39. CAPSLOCK IS CRUISE CONTROL FOR COOL
40. EVEN WITH CRUISE CONTROL YOU STILL HAVE TO STEER
41. Desu isn't funny. Seriously guys. It's worse than Chuck Norris jokes.
42. Nothing is Sacred
43. The more beautiful and pure a thing is - the more satisfying it is to corrupt it
44. Even one positive comment about Japanese things can make you a weeaboo
45. When one sees a lion, one must get into the car.
46. There is always furry porn of it.
47. The pool is always closed.

Fig 7: Rules of the internet (meme.wikia.com 2013, fig 7)

The hacker group Anonymous, which emerged from 4chan/b/, named one of their attacks after Project Mayhem in *Fight Club*. In the film, Project Mayhem was a direct action underground organization that began using forms of culture-jamming associated with the 1990s anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters*, later codified by its editor Lasn (2000). They then went on to employ increasingly violent methods,

closer in style to that of the Red Army Faction and the Weather Underground, ultimately blowing up the tall corporate office building of credit card and insurance companies.

Anonymous' Project Mayhem called on office workers to leak information from the companies they work for and to expose security failings in the computer systems of corporations and governments. Major credit card companies have been among those targeted (Stevenson 2011). Their YouTube call to action implored, "Imagine you purchase a USB drive. Imagine you take it to your work place. Imagine you collect evidence of illegality and corruption. Imagine together we expose all lies. Imagine we leak it all" (RT 2012). The rhetoric here mimics some of Tyler Durden's anti-conformist, anarchic rhetoric in the movie, in which he attempted to wake the conformist drones from their consumerist slumber. Echoing the post-war male angst of John Osborne, and the rebel masculinism of Norman Mailer and Ken Kesey, Durden says:

"...slaves with white collars. Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don't need. We're the middle children of history, man. No purpose or place. We have no Great War. No Great Depression. Our Great War's a spiritual war... our Great Depression is our lives. We've all been raised on television to believe that one day we'd all be millionaires, and movie gods, and rock stars. But we won't. And we're slowly learning that fact. And we're very, very pissed off" (Fight Club 1999)

In the film, the narrator Jack tells us "like so many others I had become a slave to the IKEA nesting instinct" as he sits on the toilet looking at what we assume is pornography but is pointedly revealed to be an IKEA catalogue, and Tyler Durden later asks him, "Why do guys like you and I know what a duvet is?" Like 4chan/b/, it incorporates many aspects of the masculinist and anti-feminist tendencies within the men's movement, as well as rebel angst and a rejection of the domesticating, feminine influence of women. In the discursive style of 4chan/b/'s transgressive anti-feminism, typified by the above response to abortion and motherhood, nesting is

also associated with pacification while transgression, pornography and depictions of violence are employed as its counterforce in their anti-feminist attacks.

While openly discussed hacker plots like Project Mayhem have largely now moved off 4chan/b/, because it has become too public as a space due to mainstream media and police attention, there are still overt articulations of hacker culture. Anonymous and direct action mobilisations such as Project Mayhem are still important to any understanding of the subculture. In sample A, for example, there were 3 threads about hacker politics. The first (A.14) was an image from the Anonymous campaign against the Syrian Electronic Army, pro-Assad Syrian hackers. Another thread (A.62) on hacking begins with a coding tip: “Alright /b/ros I'm feeling generous. Microsoft fired me recently so I'm sharing some of their secrets. They make millions off of System 32 each year. but follow the instructions in this pic and not only will you show them that you will not be played, but it also greatly increases your computers performance.” Several other posts were about computer coding, gaming and related interests, typically sharing secrets and asking advice.

In another thread (B.51) the OP comments, “Return of Anonymous? Probably not how we'd all hope, I mean we'll never be as public as we once were after the mass incarceration of anons and the betrayal of sabu. But I'd like to see a comeback. Anonymous isn't dead, it's just less showy. Sad, but not tragic.” The “sabu” detail refers to an informer within the ranks of Anonymous who was outed (McCoy 2014). In another (B.71), drawing upon libertarian hacker politics, an image of a flyer was posted for a demonstration against government spying in Washington DC. It reads “Stop watching us. Rally against mass spying... Defend your digital privacy”. This is the kind of libertarian hacker politics that led to the creation of groups like Anonymous and Lulzsec on 4chan/b/, which takes its influence from hacker politics and thinkers like John Perry Barlow, co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, who have campaigned for internet freedoms and on behalf of hackers including Weev. They have also fought against feminist anti-harassment measures on the grounds that they could threaten privacy and anonymity online (Hess 2014),

indicating that the interests of women and feminists and the interests of libertarian hacker culture often conflict.

The Project Mayhem-inspired methods and styles of online direct action such as ddos attacks have been likened to the sit-ins of the 1960s (Penny 2011). *Fight Club*'s "Operation Chaos" was also mimicked by Anonymous. Aiplex Software, an Indian software company sought to restrict the activities of websites providing pirated content, such as The Pirate Bay, an illegal downloading site of great importance to the hacker ethic of "information wants to be free". Coordinating through instant relay chat (IRC), Anonymous hackers launched a ddos attack in September 2010 that shut down Aiplex's website for a day. The group then targeted the Recording Industry Association of America and the Motion Picture Association of America, successfully bringing down both sites using ddos attacks. Anonymous members hacked the website of Copyright Alliance, an anti-piracy group, and posted the name of the action "Operation: Payback Is A Bitch". Anons issued a press release, stating:

"Anonymous is tired of corporate interests controlling the internet and silencing the people's rights to spread information, but more importantly, the right to SHARE with one another. The RIAA and the MPAA feign to aid the artists and their cause; yet they do no such thing. In their eyes is not hope, only dollar signs. Anonymous will not stand this any longer" (Norton 2011).

The values and the methods at work here descend from radical horizontalist thinkers outlined in Chapter 3, such as Hakim Bey, John Perry Barlow and Nicholas Negroponte. However, this celebrated style of online direct action has not always been in the interests of furthering causes that progressives would endorse. As outlined in Chapter 2, ddos attacks have been used by 4chan/b/ to harass pre-teen girls, feminist websites and individual feminists such as Anita Sarkeesian. Hacker methods, pranks and hoaxes modelled on the direct action, culture-jamming styles present in *Fight Club* continue to be used to attack feminism.

In August 2014, a provocative hashtag, #EndFathersDay, appeared on Twitter. The hashtag was taken up at first by some feminists and rejected by others, and then by those identifying as men's rights activists who thought it was an outrage. The hashtag #WhiteWomenCantBeRaped was used on Twitter, too. Both, it turned out, were hoaxes. Under the code name "Operation Lollipop", 4chan/b/ trolls pretended to be feminist activists tweeting their radical and jargon-filled opinions. Over time, the 4chan/b/ hoaxers created false Twitter identities with stereotypical profiles, like NayNay Thompson, a self-described intersectional feminist, and started tweeting from these parody accounts. Other similar hoax campaigns carried out by 4chan/b/ users include #CutForBieber, in which users tried to get young female Justin Bieber fans to cut themselves as a display of their adoration for him, and the fake teen girl they invented who threatened to kill her dog over the threatened split of the band One Direction (Motherboard 2013). In January 2014, the hashtag #BikiniBridges also began to spread. This was created by 4chan/b/ users and refers to the "bridge" created by bikini bottoms across the right to the left hipbone if the female wearer is extremely thin. They created it to see how quickly it would become accepted as a trend among vain and easily led women and how quickly it would lead to outrage among feminists. Like #CutForBieber and *Fight Club*'s darkly ironic human soap, 4chan/b/ uses culturejamming and hacker methods to expose the shallow consumerism and mindless conformity of the beauty and commercial pop music industries, albeit with a misogynist undercurrent.



Fig. 8: Thread on 4chan about “bikini bridges” (4chan.org 2014, fig. 8)

In December 2013, similar methods of pranking were used, this time primarily by users of Reddit’s r/Men’sRights forum. Jim Tranquada, director of communications for Occidental college in Los Angeles, reported to the media that the university’s anonymous online rape reporting forum had been flooded with around 400 reports in a 36-hour period and that most of these reports were “suspicious”. Shortly before, commenters on Reddit’s r/MensRights subreddit, referencing a thread that had appeared on 4chan/b/, began discussing plans to spam the college’s reporting system with fake accusations. Submissions included the bogus rape accusations “I was assaulted by Occidental College, I was assaulted by feminists, I was assaulted by Fatty McFatfat” (Weinstein 2013).

The subreddit on which the attack was primarily orchestrated describes itself as being for “those who wish to discuss men’s rights and the ways said rights are infringed upon.” In a post on the day of the attack on the Occidental site, a user called ShitlordDon linked to a “sexual violence reporting form” that the university made available to students as an anonymous way of tracking assault complaints.

“You just fill out a form and the person is called into the office on a rape charge,” he wrote, “The ‘victim’ never has to prove anything or reveal their identity.” Several Redditors responded by encouraging each other to fill out the form with numerous false allegations. The fact that the orchestration of the attack was inspired by a thread on 4chan/b/, linked on the Reddit forum, indicates that while 4chan/b/ may regard Reddit as “4chan with a condom on,” Reddit’s men’s rights forums certainly take influence from 4chan/b/.

Below are two excerpts from the reddit conversations that took place before the prank occurred:

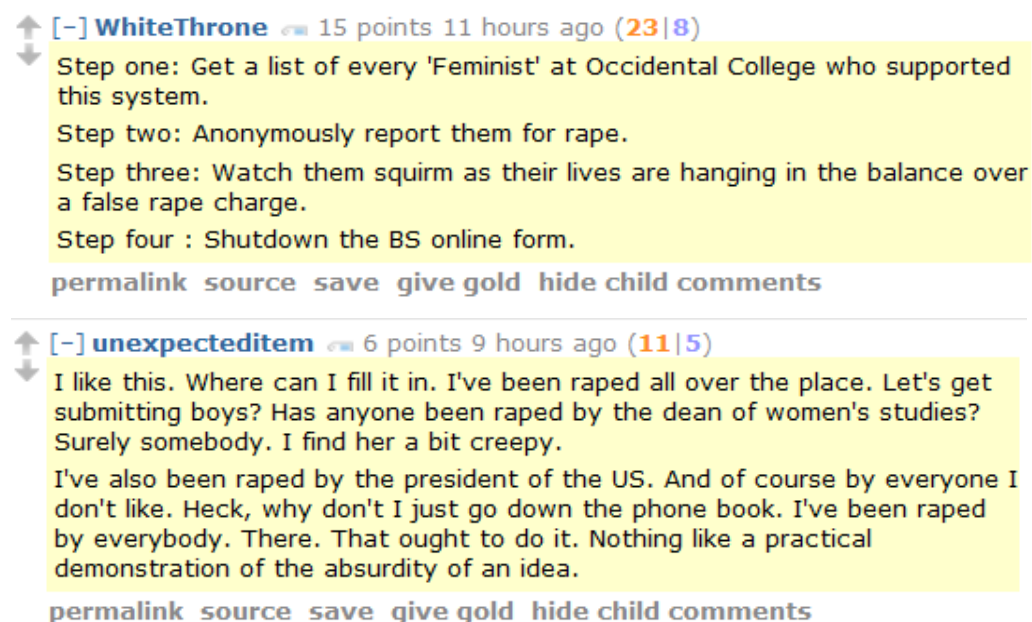


Fig 9: Reddit forum on Occidental prank (Reddit.com 2014, fig. 9)

What is different about this prank, when compared to the 4chan/b/ “operations” that nodded to *Fight Club*, is that it more closely resembles elements of American Lad Culture (Kimmel 2009). The frat house pranking style doesn’t have the same countercultural style that 4chan/b/’s anti-feminist pranks tend to have, other than its use of a hacker method. As a kind of anti-feminist masculinity, lad culture has also tended to be distinct from conservative anti-feminism in its boyish disrespect for such values but also, like this reddit prank, was more focussed on cultural gestures

than the overtly political approach of the men's movement. This distinguishes these new so-called men's rights forums from the political men's rights movement of the 1990s.

There is, however, some ambivalent interaction between 4chan/b/, reddit's men's rights forums and some of the more political and less anonymous men's rights websites in which article authors are named. For example, in sample B, an image of an unconscious woman lying on her front was posted (B.31) beside a link to an article from AVoice4Men.com, the explicitly anti-feminist men's rights website. The OP wrote, "There's plenty of studies that have been published that prove that a large percentage of women who have been raped get aroused during forced intercourse... most women enjoy being raped. Discuss." An article entitled 'The Case Against Female Self Esteem' by anti-feminist men's rights advocate Matt Forley is linked. "Anyone read this when it was posted yesterday?"

However there are also key differences between these men's rights sites, the more anonymised and less political men's rights forums on reddit and 4chan/b/ as subcultures. As an illustration, in one thread (B.69), a commenter criticises and compares feminists *and* men's rights advocates, "This bitch is trolling so hard and everyone is falling for it. If there's anything dumber than bullshit faux-outrage first world "feminism" it's uber-sensitive "men's rights" faggotry...", and another commenter writes, "Men's rights is just as dumb as feminism. It's the same 'oh woe is me life is so mean to meeee' bullshit except with a different set of genitals."

In sample A, there was some discussion of "raids" on young women with feminist social media profiles. Raiding is a general term used for a variety of methods such as doxxing, many users swarming one account with comments and activity, posting extreme pornography or animal cruelty or in some cases committing "raep", meaning ddos hacking the page. Focussing on one woman's tumblr and Twitter account, they share screengrabs and quotes from it (A.59). One of the commenters suggests, "print out her profile pic. cum on it. reupload and make sure she sees it."

Another writes, “would some glorious anon track her down and cut her fucking tit off pls?” One commenter suggests:

“Step one
Just do like we did on the previous raid
Post gore and porn and anti feminist shit on popular tags
Step 2: Find some sjw profiles and if they have a selfie photoshop their face to porn or cum on it
Step 3 find out where they live send hookers and pizza
Step 4: ???
Step 5: Sit back. Get a beer and some snacks and enjoy the show... If we all do it at once. It will be utter chaos”

The suggestion to “send hookers and pizza” contains some of the style of Lad Culture, while again the methods come from the hacker style produced by 4chan/b/ such as Anonymous and lulzsec and in that sense have more radical or countercultural origins. Coleman (2011) has traced the methods and styles of hacking and pranking used by 4chan/b/ back through the hacker movement, whose methods she characterises as progressive, but here we see the very same methods of ddos, trolling and pranking being used for anti-feminist and misogynist ends. Again, the vanity of the selfie is subverted and punished using transgressive sexuality and pornography as a weapon. In this example, the masculinity at the centre of this variant of anti-feminism encapsulates elements of laddish pranking but also the more marginal, geeky masculinity and countercultural sensibility of hacker culture.

These findings indicate that although geek culture frequently mobilises the rhetoric of masculinity politics, its engagement with this form of gender politics is fragmented and seemingly contradictory.

Black rebel masculinity

Racism, particularly aimed at black males, was common on 4chan/b/, with 31 uses of the word “nigger” occurring in the random sample, A. These came from examples in which the commenter was not self-identifying with the ironic or appropriated use

of the term but was instead referring in a derogatory way to black people as outsiders to the conversation. While it is impossible to know for certain the ethnic background of those posting, the prevalence of racism toward non-white people and the presumption of whiteness among the users in the discourse certainly suggests it is extremely likely the users are, as they themselves suggest, white. Terms like “shitskin” were used to describe people from mixed backgrounds and “mudslimes” to describe Muslims. Racist opinion was common, and the following OP was typical of the tone and tenor of comments posted in relation to discussions about race (A.35): “I have had it with black people... During the Treyvon Martin case there were TONS of black people killing white people, but when a white person kills a black person every black person in the country loses their shit” to which a commenter responds “nigs gonna nog”. Another thread (A.86) demonstrates the kind of attitude to Islam that is prevalent on the site: “They like Islam because it appeals to their degenerate minds. They are shit-tier lifeforms along with africans. At least with animals, they are incapable of understanding what they do for the most part. But with mudslimes, they are capable of some understanding. So, based on that reasoning, I rank them below all animals and plant species. They disgust me.” Another thread (A.71) begins with an imagined town in a video game in which you can create your own community. The OP writes, “Welcome to the picturesque city of Niggerton, run by Mayor Spaghetti.” “Build cotton plantations ! for the niggers in the trailer parks to work. Also, you must get the missile base, army base, toxic waste dump and casino to balance your finances.” “Build space centers so negros can conquer space”.

Interestingly, black males tend to be hypersexualised on 4chan/b/. One thread (A.4) begins with a post, “FACT: pretty much all guys fantasize about having their wife/sister/gf gangfucked by niggers. pic related, I'd love to watch my sister getting bred by black guys”, posted along with an image of a white woman and a black man having sex, with the white woman in a subordinate pose and the man’s face turned away. One commenter adds “I thought I was the only one before I discovered /b/”. A thread from sample B begins (B.22) with an amateur photo of a penis and the OP

writes, “Ask a straight guy that had two nigger dicks in his ass and one in his mouth while wearing a dress anything”. The first response reads, “Does you wife know you have aids?” Another (A.29) begins, “100 niggers are about to corner and ass rape you. You have the last weapon you used in a videogame. How fucked are you?” This preoccupation with black male sexuality was strongly present in both samples. In these depictions, the black male is simultaneously hated and admired for his imagined virile masculine sexuality, at times the object of fantasy, in a dynamic not unlike *Fight Club*'s polarisation of the Jack and Tyler characters, in which the emasculated, office-bound information worker fantasises about the unconstrained and sexually virile male rebel.


A long thread (B.8) begins with the OP's screengrab of a Facebook conversation involving a feminist peer to whom he is connected. He also posts her profile picture, a link to her profile and a link to her blog. The OP writes, “Guys, this shit just popped up on my newsfeed. I can't help but rage so I thought you may appreciate this”. Comments include, “Yet if I said this about niggers it would be racist”, “oh, no wonder shes a feminist, she is hideous”, “Dude, just rape her and kill her”. A commenter posts a painting of a black boy in rags with the caption, “getting real tired of this shit”. On the subject of equality, a commenter writes “Because that's the kind of thing that niggers and feminists claim to want but actually don't. If they did allow that, niggers couldn't suddenly play the race card when they're arrested and feminists couldn't play the duhhhh i want equality when they get punched in the fucking mouth. They don't want to be equal they want to be superior. They have all the characteristics of running a dictatorship should any of them ever come into power.”

Black masculinity and white feminism were often pitted against one another in this way in the samples. In one thread (A.59) the meme “I need feminism because...” is mocked with the comment “I need feminism because someone promoted a nigger over me”. In a thread (A.86) dedicated to hating a particular white feminist social media activist, as well as feminism in general (e.g. “I hope these feminists get raped

so hard their anuses prolapse and they die in a horrible fire afterward”) a user comments, “Women are more racist, and white women are the most racist.”

Also evident in the samples was a kind of swaggering representation of the black male, often employed in attacks against white feminists to undermine their claims to oppressed status, which was typically done by male-identifying and white-identifying users. For example, a black and white image of three small black boys wearing reflective shades and looking precociously cool dressed in the 1970s styles of the day and striking poses is posted (B.7) beside seemingly unrelated text, “So much feminist crazy”, accompanied by a link to an urban dictionary definition of the word patriarchy. A commenter writes, “If chicks didn’t want to be raped how come every weekend they go to parties full of strange horny men and get so drunk and stoned they pass out? It’s so they can have an excuse. If you’re a guy and straight would you get black out drunk at a gay frat house known for all the kinky sex they have? I sure wouldn’t. Checkmate feminists.” The seeming irrelevancy of the attached image is not uncommon on 4chan/b/ as it is part of the “random” humour of the site but this kind of image often comes up where representations of black males, depicted with a certain cool, unapologetic, swaggering masculinity, are used beside negative depictions of white feminists.

For example, in sample A there is a discussion about a Twitter profile of someone called Jamal BlackBoyClub (A.96). His profile describes him as “Just chilling in the hood. I hate feminists and liberals” and in the thread, commenters link to and screengrab his anti-feminist tweets. One commenter has uploaded an image of one of his tweets and named the file “Jamal is love”, and has written alongside it “Jamal’s twitter is a goldmine holy shit”. Others respond “MORE JAMAL Bros”, “moar jamal” and “I’ve become a bit gay for Jamal”.

 **Jamal BlackBoyClub** @JamalsBBCLife · Jun 5
Most of these bitches tweeting #YesAllWomen are white trash. Cum is also white. This means that #YesAllWomen are cum dumpsters.

← ↻ 7 ★ 7 ...



AliasAlice @AliasAlice · 4m

If you kill someone for being gay, black, Jewish, etc., that's a hate crime, but not when you kill her because she's a woman? #YesAllWomen

Details

← Reply ↻ Retweet ★ Favorite ... More



Jamal BlackBoyClub

@JamalsBBCLife

@AliasAlice Ya'll saying that females are PEOPLE, but now ya'll wanna degrade her down to a "woman" when a crime is involved. I don't get it

← Reply 🗑 Delete ★ Favorite ... More

9:49 AM - 1 Jun 2014

Fig. 10: Jamal tweets posted on 4chan (4chan.org 2014, fig. 10)

Several details indicate this was another prank by 4chan/b/ and possibly by someone on the thread itself. Most of his activity happened within a two-day period and there are no tweets for months afterwards. His language style fluctuates from a stereotypically ghetto register to a style of language more typically geeky, often referencing 4chan/b/ slang. Some commenters mocked others on the thread for believing Jamal was real, "Somehow I'm pretty sure that's just some /b/tard in disguise. Are you two fucking retarded? Do you really think niggers give two fucks

about tumblr? In fact , nobody but feminists and neck earss give a shit”⁷. Another writes, “No shit sherlock, all the previous Jamal and Valentina screencaps are done by themselves and posted on /b/ if you hadn't been observating”. This refers to the fact that the screengrabs posted in the thread seem to have been captured by the person operating the Jamal Twitter account. The evidence suggesting this is the appearance of a delete function below the tweet, which only appears when the operator of the profile is logged in. In his short period of tweeting, Jamal typically responded to people using the #yesallwomen hashtag, which feminists began using in response to Elliot Rodger’s shootings. The hashtag, as I will explore in the next section, was in turn a response to a #notallmen hashtag used on Twitter to make the point that not all men should be blamed for the misogyny of Elliot Rodger, suggesting instead that “yes all women” are hurt by misogyny. The commenters in the 4chan/b/ thread were amused to see what they perceived to be sensitive, easily offended, white feminists being undermined by an unapologetic black male. Jamal, cheered on and loved by the commenters, was applauded for his ghetto slang and stereotypical character when employed against these feminists, yet the same characteristics are a source of contempt directed toward black males elsewhere in the subculture. The uses of subaltern identities and, in particular, black masculinity are clearly explained by one 4chan/b/ commenter (B.60): “One thing I have learned when debating feminists is to call them racist by saying they are promoting white western feminism on non-European women. Make them seem as the oppressor of another group of people. I also side with anti-liberal feminists like the Muslim women who are against sexism, but aren't total bitches about it”.

These findings echo what Robin James (2006) wrote about how macho rock and roll counterculture uses racial non-whiteness to counter the supposed deleterious effects of white femininity, such as passivity, domestication and conformity. In order to rehabilitate the popular from white abject femininity, she argued, the tendency of the classical subcultures has been to cleanse pop culture of this commercialisation and

⁷ This “neck earss” is likely to be a spelling error intended to be “neckbeards”, a term used to describe geeky men with poor personal grooming habits.

passification through channelling blackness and in particular black masculinity, albeit performed by white males. In post WW2 pop culture, James also argued, the racially exotic is seen as more authentic and oppositional than white femininity:

Associated with bourgeois domesticity and respectability [...] white femininity becomes [...] something that the white masculine subject tries to escape and rebel against in his appropriation of black masculinity (Ibid: 10).

Likewise, in *The White Negro* (1957) Norman Mailer saw emulating black masculinity as a means of escaping the crushing conformity and domestication of 1950s American culture and social values. A similar set of countercultural values are therefor reflected in white-identifying, male-dominated, anti-feminist, and highly racist, subcultures such as 4chan/b/. In the typical style of using irony and absurdism to evade interpretation by others, members of the subculture deploy this as a method of attack but also express racist and contemptuous views about black males, in both cases using any means necessary to offend an imagined censorious and politically-correct enemy, which represents a threat to their ethos of absolute internet freedom.

Elliot Rodger, "the friendzone" and the Nice Guys of OK Cupid

In May 2014, 22-year-old Elliot Rodger went on a killing spree in Isla Vista, California, near the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara. Rodger killed six people and injured thirteen others before committing suicide. The spree began when Rodger stabbed to death three men in his apartment. Leaving the scene in his car, he drove to a sorority house, where he shot four people outside when he was not able to enter. He drove to a nearby delicatessen and shot to death a male student who was inside. He then sped through Isla Vista, shooting at pedestrians and wounding several of them, and striking four others with his car. Rodger exchanged gunfire with police during the killing spree, receiving a non-fatal gunshot to the hip.

The rampage ended when his car crashed into a parked vehicle and came to a stop. Police found him dead in the car, with a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

Before driving to the sorority house, Rodger uploaded a final video to YouTube, one of many, titled “Elliot Rodger's Retribution”, in which he outlined details of his upcoming attack and the motivations behind his killing spree. He described his desire to punish women for rejecting him and also a desire to punish sexually-active men for being able to attract women. He complained of being rejected by women in the video, saying:

“Well, this is my last video, it all has to come to this. Tomorrow is the day of retribution, the day in which I will have my revenge against humanity, against all of you. For the last eight years of my life, ever since I hit puberty, I've been forced to endure an existence of loneliness, rejection and unfulfilled desires all because girls have never been attracted to me. Girls gave their affection and sex and love to other men but never to me. I'm 22 years old and I'm still a virgin. I've never even kissed a girl. I've been through college for two and a half years, more than that actually, and I'm still a virgin. It has been very torturous. College is the time when everyone experiences those things such as sex and fun and pleasure. Within those years, I've had to rot in loneliness. It's not fair. You girls have never been attracted to me. I don't know why you girls aren't attracted to me, but I will punish you all for it. It's an injustice, a crime, because... I don't know what you don't see in me. I'm the perfect guy and yet you throw yourselves at these obnoxious men instead of me, the supreme gentleman.” (Youtube 2014)

After he uploaded the video, Rodger e-mailed a lengthy autobiographical manuscript to acquaintances and family members. The document, which he titled “My Twisted World”, became widely known as his manifesto. In it, he describes his childhood, family conflicts, his frustration over not being able to find a girlfriend, his hatred of women, his contempt for racial minorities and interracial couples, and his plans for the killing spree. The manifesto specifically mentions a “war on women” as the second phase of his plan for “starving him of sex”, in which he describes: “The Second Phase will take place on the Day of Retribution itself, just before the

climactic massacre. ... My War on Women. ... I will attack the very girls who represent everything I hate in the female gender: The hottest sorority of UCSB.” In Rodger’s self-described ideal world, he imagined that he would “quarantine all [women] in concentration camps. At these camps, the vast majority of the female population will be deliberately starved to death. That would be an efficient and fitting way to kill them all off... I would have an enormous tower built just for myself... and gleefully watch them all die” (Rodger 2014)

In the immediate aftermath of the massacre, there was a lot of discussion about its significance in terms of misogyny and in particular misogynist online cultures. Some took issue with the media labelling Rodger as the “virgin killer”, claiming that it reinforces gender roles with a “not so subtle insinuation ... that one possible cause of male aggression is a lack of female sexual acquiescence” (Williams 2014). Others argued that, even though Rodger killed more men than women, his motivations were still misogynistic and that even his reason for hating the men he attacked was that he thought they stole the women who he felt entitled to (Hess 2014). Another countered that that “seems like a good example of stretching the concept into meaninglessness—or turning it into unfalsifiable quasi-religious dogma” (Young 2014). In Time magazine, a journalist (Ferguson 2014) argued that laying the blame on misogynistic culture glosses over how Elliot Rodger was one particular mentally disturbed man. This line of thinking then led to some using the #NotAllMen hashtag, mentioned previously, to express that not all men were misogynists and not all men commit murder. This was then responded to by the Twitter hashtag #YesAllWomen through which women shared their experiences with everyday misogyny and sexism.

Rodger expressed bewilderment at his inability to attract women despite his BMW, \$300 sunglasses and expensive clothing. He had expressed similar sentiments on forums for bodybuilders and anti-pick up artist forums. The latter is part of a backlash within men’s rights subcultures, in this case called “PUA hate” from men who regard pick-up artists as a scam or as trying too hard to impress women. Rodgers had subscribed to three different YouTube channels that gave advice on

how to pick up women and be an “alpha male.” He was, and referred to himself as, what online men's rights movement forums call an “Incel”, a term sometimes used on 4chan/b/, which is short for involuntary celibacy. On bodybuilding.com's “misc” section, a space that often contains flamewars and trolling, Rodger himself had posted comments like “Men shouldn't have to look and act like big, animalistic beasts to get women. The fact that women still prioritize brute strength just shows that their minds haven't fully evolved” and “Women are not drawn to indicators of evolutionary fitness. If they were, they'd be all over me” and “Never insult the style of Elliot Rodger. I'm the most stylish person in the world. Just look at my profile pic. That's just one of my fabulous outfits. The sweater I'm wearing in the picture is \$500 from Neiman Marcus.”

A subreddit called Seduction exists for Pick-up artists (PUAs) whose style was chronicled in Neil Strauss's *The Game* (2005) and those who follow them. On other sites like pick-up-artist-forum.com, users exchange tips on how to build their confidence and seduce women. The politics of the men's rights Red Pill subreddit rejects PUAs and others who devote too much energy to impressing women. The name refers to the cult film *The Matrix*, in which the main character is asked to choose between taking a red pill and waking up to the truth and taking a blue pill that will leave him ignorant. Its constitution states “women are irrational and inconsistent” and “machiavellian in nature”. Another subreddit, ForeverAlone is for “incels” to hang out. PUAhate.com, which Elliot Rodger frequented, has close links with Red Pill and is similar in its ethos of rejecting elaborate methods of impressing women. Instead it satirises and discredits pick-up artists, and is devoted to incels venting their sexual frustrations and sharing determinist theories about women's biological nature.

On [PUAhate](http://PUAhate.com), Rodgers wrote in his sprawling manifesto, that he had discovered “a forum full of men who are starved of sex, just like me”. What he read, he continued, “confirmed many of the theories I had about how wicked and degenerate women really are”. Rodger's manifesto, and the videos he posted to YouTube, employed

terms and slang from this online world of Incels, PUA hate and Red Pill. “There is something mentally wrong with the way [women’s] brains are wired,” he wrote, echoing the Red Pill constitution, “They are incapable of reason or thinking rationally.” To put people down, he described them as “betas”. He wrote that he discovered PUAhate in the Spring of 2013 and that many people there “shared [his] hatred of women [but] would be too cowardly to act on it”. When Elliot Rodger’s links to these online subcultures were reported by the Guardian (Wolff 2013) it was reported that one PUAhate user who had more than a thousand posts on the site contacted the Guardian to say that the way such online communities were being portrayed by the press was unfair and that the ire directed at women on the site was more light-hearted. His user name has been changed, since the killings occurred, to ElliotRodgerisaGod.

On the day news of the shooting broke, a thread appeared on RedPill called “Omega man kills 6 and commits suicide”. Although most of its members have denied accusations of sharing a culture and a worldview with Rodgers, their comments indicate that they often miss the point made by their critics:

“If you read his manifesto, you also learn that he pedestaled pussy to an extreme degree basically his entire life since puberty. It turned into hating of women and sex in the *very end*, but it was twenty years of making vagina the Holy Grail of his existence that really fucked up his head. [...] feminists and religious zealots strive to take all sexual outlets away from men, be it prostitution, sex travel, or mere pornography for masturbation. Thus these politicians bear partial responsibility for increasing sex crimes against women and children, and probably for the mayhem created by Elliot Rodger. [...] He was incel. Lonliness and extreme sexual deprivation can have extremely serious psychological effects on some people... this kind of shit breaks a young man's spirit” (Redpill 2014)

On 4chan/b/, the day the story broke, one contributor posted a selfie of Rodger from his Facebook profile and wrote (C.8) “Elliot Rodger, the supreme gentleman, was part of /b/. Discuss.” Responses included “That dude was fairly good looking, he must've just been the beta to end all betas if he never got laid” and another wrote, “Faggot was a virgin on wizardchan. He wasn't a /b/tard, a /b/tard would have mentioned it in their suicide note for immortality” to which another responded, “how do you even learn about wizardchan before 4chan?” Another wrote “he would have left way better clues but its true a true gentleman would never break 1and 2”, referring to rules 1 and 2 of /b/, that you do not talk about /b/. “Manifesto had "I do not forget, I do not forgive" and "kissless virgin", etc., he was a /b/tard...”. This first slogan was also used by Anonymous. “I like how he was trying so hard to pick up chick's and yet he hated pick up artists. Total newfag”.

While Elliot Rodger is an extreme case, his language and attitudes were strikingly similar to those observed on the online subcultures and forums under analysis here. Although there is no evidence available, it is likely that he frequented 4chan/b/, and there is evidence he visited other sites with similar recurring themes and cultural politics. Although, contrary to the style of 4chan/b/, Rodger bragged about expensive consumer goods and took many posed selfies, which remained publicly visible on his Facebook page for several days after his death, there are many more similarities. 4chan/b/ is a forum that attracts a lot of confessional posts. In sample A, 3 threads featured users confessing their imminent desire to commit suicide, typically asking advice on the specifics of how to go about it. 2 posts in the sample were equally detailed descriptions of the desire to commit murder, in one case mass murder, while a generalized misanthropy and a burning envy toward men who are successful with women was also common. In the 4chan/b/ sample, an OP claiming, somewhat unconvincingly, to be a pickup artist posted (A.79) “MAN LESSONS TIME /b/. I am a male relationship adviser/pickup artist. post up questions and I will answer. single or in a relationship doesn't matter, I can improve you either way. for now first tip: talking to a woman and using body language. first and foremost, when you approach a woman, never face her directly with your upper body. this displays

neediness. keep your shoulders and chest facing away completely or very slightly turned toward hr.” The response was unwelcoming, including one comment saying “EAT SHIT” and another, “Ever found a still-breathing animal inside someones body?” 4chan/b/ is here adopting the same attitude to PUAs that Elliot Rodger did.

The Incel identity is also part of the culture of 4chan/b/, although they use different expressions for it. The term itself is native to the PUA and related forums already mentioned. In sample A, the word virgin is used 12 times and beta is used 15 times. For example (A.32), “this is the kind of girl who will hunt down a pathetic beta boy, convince him to have sex with her, then tell the police he raped her and the poor guy will rot in prison while this bitch is going to be the poor victim : (Stay away from ugly girls. Stay away from feminists”. Beside an image of a cold female face in military uniform, one original post (A.87) reads “What does Love feel like?” The first response is “It feels like being eaten away from the inside by a wierd anger feeling because you care more about her than she cares about you, and that you can't do anything about it because you would look like a pussy”. Others respond, “love is for women. man the fuck up”. Another commenter answers, “Like ejaculating” and another writes, “It's that sinking feeling of your money being extracted from your wallet, and your self esteem being stored up in your unattended testicles ready for her to deliver a swift kick”, “Men may play games to get their dicks wet but at least they care in relationships. Women are cold and heartless. They could care less what you do or what happens to you once they leave you. Unlike the movies, nothing you say or nothing you do brings her back. Once she's gone.. it's over man. No heartfelt speech, no nostalgia, nothing and I mean nothing will convince her to come back. That's just how it goes. Women are completely fucking cold in that respect.”

Sample B contained similar themes echoed in Elliot Rodger's manifesto. An image of Patrick Bateman from the movie American Psycho is posted (B.17) beside a request for advice. “/b/ you have to help me. I can't talk to women. I get fuckin nervous and choke. Jesus, if I haven't had at least a few drinks I start to shake. I'm talking about really beautiful adult women by the way. I am a good looking and well

dressed guy and feel hard pressed to approach women of a similar caliber... I've been going out like every night and I just end up getting retarded drunk and lose my friends and making a fucking fool of myself and I know it's hurting me and making me look like an idiot but I keep doing it because I love being able to talk to anyone and not feel the constant fucking anxiety." The response is generally supportive, not unlike an advice column or a support group, but with tongue-in-cheek frat house terms such as b/ro. Another similar thread (B.34) begins with a post of a young Asian woman's picture, which looks like an amateur selfie. The text reads "there's this girl that caught my eye in computer science but I'm too much of a betafag to approach her and say hi. What can I do to spark off a conversation without looking like a creep. Pic related it's a pic of her I found off facebook". What is striking here is that, like Rodger, these commenters seem desperate for female sexual contact but show an abnormal lack of awareness of how their comments give very obvious clues as to why they may be so unsuccessful. Rodger openly expressed misogynist invective, and likewise the first commenter here begins with an image of the central character from *American Psycho*, a film that portrays the rape and torture of multiple women, to represent himself, while the second takes a picture of a girl he is trying to impress from her Facebook account without her consent and posts it on perhaps the most notoriously misogynist hacker space online.

In both samples and throughout the various anti-feminist and misogynist sites under analysis here, there is a paradoxical mixture of openly attacking women and expressing confusion and frustration that women don't respond positively in return. This style, in which the "friendzone" is often lamented, was parodied by a popular tumblr blog called the "Nice Guys of OK Cupid". The friendzone refers to the frustrations inherent in not being allowed to be "more than just friends" with a female with whom the friendzoned male wants to have a sexual relationship. Those being mocked by the blog repeatedly suggest that women are sexually rejecting them because they are too nice, the implication being that women are only sexually attracted to abusive or cruel men. The humour of the Nice Guys of OK Cupid blog (<http://okcupidsniceguys.tumblr.com>) is based on real profiles in which this type of

sentiment is often written on user's profiles alongside misogynist comments and harsh judgements about women's appearance. Below is an example from the "Nice Guys of OK Cupid" blog, in which the user identifies as a nice guy and then unwittingly contradicts his own self-description:



Fig. 11: Sample from Nice guys blog (okcupidniceguys.tumblr.com2013, fig. 11)

Finally, the findings indicate that Rodger, subcultures such as 4chan/b/ and Reddit's Red Pill are all preoccupied with ideas of genetic superiority and inferiority, expressing both an intense desire for women as well as disgust at women's physical imperfections. They use the language of social Darwinism, describing themselves and those around them in terms of genetic inferiority and superiority, often swinging wildly from arrogance to self-loathing but these cultures also have their own distinct subcultural traits too. Rodger's manifesto employed much of the discursive style that links them, expressing the sentiments described above:

“On the day of retribution I will enter the hottest sorority house of UCSB, and I will slaughter every single spoiled stuck up blonde slut I see inside there. All those girls that I've desired so much, they would have all rejected me and looked down upon me as an inferior man if I ever made a sexual advance towards them. While they throw themselves at these obnoxious brutes. I'll take great pleasure in slaughtering all of you. You will finally see that I am in truth the superior one. The true Alpha Male.”

Deborah Cameron identified “rapport talk” as more typically female form of discourse and “report talk” as more typically male. The beta males engage in rapport talk, which is about drawing protective lines of inclusion around their fragile universe. Like new formulations of male friendship – bromance - we see men ostensibly rejecting the feminine but in practice actually incorporating it and reclaiming it as masculine. For example, Nancy Lee (2010) argues that this use of language characterises the negotiation of hegemony and homosociality in HBO’s *Entourage*, in which speech acts constantly draw lines around what is acceptable among straight male friends by making endless jokes about what is not:

“In *Entourage*, questioning friends by teasing them and generally giving them a hard time creates space for heteronormativity to be reiterated. Each time a homophobic jibe is made is also an opportunity for the men of *Entourage* to reassure themselves, and each other, that they are aware of their role in the hierarchy of masculinities...Language in *Entourage* is an explicit acknowledgement of gender – it is a tool of gender performance” (Ibid: 195).

As Ging (2013) has pointed out in relation to how the bromance trope functions in contemporary film, “The feminine is not disavowed or suppressed but rather reappropriated and ingested into acceptable modes of masculinity. As such, the bromance partially resolves a major conflict within hegemonic masculinity, whereby “The female world remains both intensely desirable and repulsive. It offers pleasure, love and security, but also threatens to undermine this masculine façade” (McLean,1996:17, cited in Dowler, 2001: 62). This is not unlike the way in which the mythopoetic men’s movement, exemplified in the writing of Robert Bly,

embraced the notion of the feminine's deep connection with nature and emotion and effectively recoded it as masculine. For Rosalind Coward (1999: 125), the "masculinist reaction" of the mythopoeists was the male equivalent of womanism, while, according to Schwalbe (1996: 119), the bonding rituals performed by these groups enabled them "to reinterpret their feminine traits as 'deep masculine'". Similarly, Savran contends that Bly's positioning of woman as civilizing force and of man as instinctive and pre-cultural effectively reverses the male-culture/female-nature dichotomy of post-Enlightenment thinking, and he argues that Bly's rhetoric of warrior imagery and the focus on action and power fails to conceal a preoccupation with pain and the feminine, masochistic part of the self. Fred Pfeil also describes Bly's concept of masculinity as "defined by its perpetual oedipal oscillations between rebellion, submission, and emotional pain..." (Ibid: 174).

Similarly, although the beta masculinities analysed here do not consciously strive to create new and dominant forms of 'doing manhood' – their nihilism and lack of an overt political ideology constantly attempt to prevent this – their snarky anomie, sneering misogyny and pretensions to an unshockable anti-humanism arguably also fail "to conceal a preoccupation with pain and the feminine, masochistic part of the self" (Ibid).

These findings indicate that the dominant mode of masculinity in the anti-feminist subcultures described in this chapter and the previous one exhibit some continuities with as well as some significant differences from earlier theorisations of hegemonic masculinity and anti-feminism. Connell's (1995) analysis, for example, includes the insults "nerd" and "geek" as part of its vocabulary of abuse used against masculinities subordinated by hegemonic masculinity, along with various combinations typically meaning feminine, gay or weak. The online subjects under analysis here, however, identify as geeks, betas and incels, despite brief flights of fancy in which they imagine themselves with great sexual and violent power. Although the rise of the social media giants in recent years could be said to have given geeks a more important role in popular culture, this mode of masculinity

appears to be engaged in a sort of paradoxical conflict with the more conventional, accepted conventions of manhood that constitute hegemonic masculinity (sport, work, wealth, sexual success). The men and boys in these forums are highly aware of this and express contempt for men who were more successful with women (those who Rodger describes as “brutes”) because of their conformity to more dominant standards of masculine behaviour and norms, including interest in sports, sexual confidence and greater wealth and power.

In this sense, they eclipse some of the features of lad culture, which has been instrumental in renegotiating and reconstructing a new, hegemonic masculinity in which work is no longer a defining signifier of manhood (Monk, 1999, 2000; Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005; Ging, 2007) and in which adolescent freedoms and pleasures, lack of adult responsibility and an aversion to emotional commitment are openly celebrated. They also revel in what Feona Attwood (2005) terms Lad Culture’s ‘grotesquerie’ – a preoccupation with ‘deviant’ or ‘niche’ pornography, bodily fluids and shocking language. Unlike Lad Culture, however, the geek and nerd sensibilities analysed here reject sport and other mainstream signifiers of laddishness, revelling instead in a self-consciously non-physical beta-masculinity which often eclipses with the discourses of (white male) victimhood that underpin masculinity-crisis rhetoric. In this sense, they profess to be excluded from the dividends of hegemonic masculinity, yet they deploy pornography, misogyny and racism in order to stake a claim in that same power structure.

American masculinity theorists have been particularly adept at criticising this strategy of positing white males as the new victims of a feminised, multicultural and politically-correct culture. For Robert Hanke, the figure of the male in crisis is merely evidence of patriarchy reforming "masculinity to meet the next historical turn, to regain the pleasure of reinforcing the norm, to fit the social climate, or to articulate the new racism (Hanke 1998 p189). Similarly, David Savran claims that the new discourse of white male victimhood is a deliberate cultural strategy employed by middle-class men to recoup lost power and is thus deeply implicated in

what Robert Nye (2005) describes as a wider ‘episode of remasculinisation’ that is currently taking place in western societies. In Carroll Hamilton’s (2011) recent study of the cultural politics of heteronormative white male privilege in the United States, he argues that mobility and mutability have become the key defining characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. By redefining itself as marginalised, mainstream masculinity now attempts to recuperate power and agency through the representation of their loss.

The adherents of geek / hacker culture analysed here articulate much of this rhetoric of victimhood and disempowerment, particularly through their expressions of rage, disgust and dismay at their exclusion from the sexual dividend, which they clearly understand as a male entitlement. In this sense they might be understood as what Connell (1995) refers to as ‘protest masculinities’, whereby young unemployed men, in the absence of a gendered claim to power, develop and exhibit "spectacular masculinities centered around sexuality, violence and bohemianism" as a way of reclaiming that power. This performance of extremes of masculinity – violence, delinquency, low tolerance for delay of gratification – is marginal to the dominant masculine ideal and marginal to power. However, Connell’s protest masculinities describe working-class men reacting to their material disempowerment and, while it is possible that many the posters analysed here have been negatively affected by the neoliberal restructuring and destabilisation of the labour market, their level of cultural capital and their preoccupation with sexual – as opposed to material – disenfranchisement largely mitigates against a reading of their behaviour as genuine protest. Moreover, in Connell’s (1995) formulation, protest masculinity could be conceivably compatible with “egalitarian views about the sexes” (Ibid: 112) and was not a *necessarily* sexist or misogynist type of performed identity. By contrast, the masculinity under discussion here is tied up in the cultural politics of anti-feminism and misogyny to its core and this anti-feminism and misogyny is indispensable to understanding its countercultural misogynist style, its transgressive gestures and its anti-mainstream subcultural geeky self-identification.

Thus, while these men undoubtedly exhibit elements of the “tense, freaky façade” described by Connell (1995: 111) and perform a “frenzied and showy” sort of protest, they are more convincingly understood as performances of victimhood and showy displays of emotional masochism – albeit untheorised, poorly understood and most likely often subconscious - that serve to express rage at and simultaneously stake a claim to the power enjoyed by men (whether real or imagined) who appear to occupy higher positions in the patriarchal hierarchy.

Another key feature of this beta-masculinity is its apolitical nature, which makes it more difficult to identify ideologically than previous anti-feminisms. In this sense, it shares significant similarities with 1990s Lad Culture in that, unlike the men’s rights movement that often focussed on issues such as father’s rights, lad culture had – and continues to have - a post-political indifference to such issues and instead expresses its contempt for feminist sensibilities through cultural gestures (Benyon 2002). The beta masculinities are underpinned by a strong nihilistic quality, which is entirely negative in that it seeks to undermine feminism and other forms of identity politics but offers no coherent political project. For example, 4chan/b/ expresses contempt for those in the online men’s rights communities because of their earnest political expressions, preferring instead to prank and evade interpretation. This evasion appears to be a product of their contempt for political projects and means, in effect, allowing them to evade responsibility for their statements and actions, which are always buried under multiple layers of irony. The culture of 4chan/b/ thus shares with Lad Culture this focus on culture over politics and a rejection of conventional adult male responsibility in terms of work, long-term relationships, fatherhood and ownership of property, opting instead for an identity based on performances of adolescent rebellion and ‘larkabout’ pranking (Attwood, 2005).

4chan/b/ has produced hacker movements that have been much celebrated on the political left in spite of the fact that many of their countercultural gestures do not translate into a progressive or even coherently political set of ideas. While vehemently anti-feminist, they do not support a return to pre-feminist family values.

On the contrary, much of their rhetoric is both anti-traditional family values as well as opposed to any form of state support for women, as the following comment demonstrates (B.30):

“Why the fuck should I subsidize some woman shitting out a baby? Give me one meaningful reason that her most likely useless, most likely illegitimate, offers any benefit to me as a citizen such that we should all collectively foot the cost of her taking time off work (causing her co-workers to pick up the slack) to raise the brat? It’s bad enough having to listen to all the whining about how women don’t get paid enough...”

The strand of anti-feminism identified here, which is deeply bound up in the construction of a new, self-knowingly masochistic beta-masculinity, is similar to some elements of Lad Culture, most notably in its rejection of the signifiers of adult masculinity and its embracing of pornography, self-knowing sexism and evasion of political responsibility. It also dovetails with the masochism and preoccupation with pain, suffering and victimhood that has characterised the anti-feminist strands of the American Men’s movement and, in turn, the plethora of populist discourses which posit the white male as victim and in crisis. However, this strand of anti-feminism differs significantly from past theorisations of anti-feminism (Kimmel 2004), in that it posits no coherent political project, has no conservative pro-family aspects and is unlike the masculinism of the men’s movement in that its desire to protest or undermine feminism does not involve any project to re-valorize masculinity. It is significantly darker and more nihilistic than Lad Culture, exhibiting the kind of detached disaffection and “fucked by fate” masculinities that Jeffrey Sconce (2002) claims are present in much of recent American ‘smart cinema’. It also rails against much of the political men’s movement, perceiving any group that organises politically to gain power as counter-libertarian, despite the culture’s own proclivity for outrage, self-pity and whingeing disentitlement rhetoric. In this sense, the anti-feminism of beta masculinity, while it can be theorised and understood as responding to a particular set of social, economic and cultural contexts, is from its own perspective deliberately and self-knowingly incoherent, inconsistent and

anarchistic. Rather than consciously staking a claim to power, therefor, this anti-politics of rage against women, blacks and alpha males consciously wallows in its beta male status, its nihilism and its low standards of morality and etiquette, fatalistically embracing this outlaw troll identity.

Chapter Seven: Transgression

An important theme emerging in the literature on trolling culture generally and in my findings in particular is that of transgression. Manivannan (2013), for example, describes 4chan/b/'s joker ethos as transgressive, while Coleman (2009) argues that trolling culture inherited a "rich aesthetic tradition of spectacle and transgression" (Ibid: 101) from older hacker and open source software cultures. Similarly, Phillips (2013) describes 4chan/b/ as "populated by tens of thousands of self-identifying trolls, users who revel in transgression" (Ibid: 5). In these analyses, the term can be read either as ideologically neutral or as a positive description, implying it confers some favourable radical or counter-hegemonic authenticity upon the site. This chapter analyses more closely some of the features of 4chan/b/ and trolling culture that have already been mentioned, such as self-contradiction, irony, taboo breaking, pornography and revelling in cruelty, framed in the context of their self-aware transgressive nature. Unlike other commentators, who perceive 4chan/b/'s style as relatively unique and novel, with even the most tenuous influences stretching back only as far as the Dadaists, I argue that the origins of 4chan/b/'s style are not so new or unique but rather follow a stylistic tradition that began with the 18th century writings of the Marquis de Sade, surviving through to the 19th century Parisian avant-garde, the Surrealists, the rebel misogynies of post-war American countercultures and in 1990s "male rampage films" (Pfeil, 1995) such as *American Psycho* and *Fight Club*.

Among the puzzling features of 4chan/b/ are the constant ideological contradictions at work in the discourse it produces. For example, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the use of the term "Christfags" appears to mock gays and homophobia simultaneously. A similarly contradictory discourse is evident around the site's use of gay pornography and homophobic language. Hacker and troll Weev perfectly embodies this paradoxical and nihilistic pranking style, articulating bizarre anti-Semitic, anti-gay, anti-pornography conspiracy rhetoric one moment and a doctrine

of absolute internet freedom and sexual libertinism the next. It is difficult to determine whether his or any posters' comments are to be understood as genuine. In an interview (Pando 2014) he went on to say, "I just want to go where I can drink, fuck and kill, you know?" Like so much of the rhetoric on 4chan/b/, this can be read as part of a style that attempts to "inoculate" purely subcultural styles from mainstreaming influences or "massification" through the use of shocking and offensive speech. Several analysts, for example, interpret 4chan/b/'s offensive rhetoric merely as a technique to achieve some other aesthetic or political end. Implicit in this interpretation, however, is that their racist, misogynist and homophobic speech is exempted from direct interpretation and thus direct or literal judgment. This chapter attempts to explain 4chan/b/'s style as a deceptively internally coherent one based on the values and features of transgression found in many bohemias, art movements and countercultures, and argues that the aesthetic and political ends of that style deserve significantly more robust interrogation and critique than the descriptor "transgressive" often invites.

This chapter outlines the key characteristics of this stylistic legacy, drawing on Artaud's (2001) theatre of cruelty, Bataille's (1985) aesthetics of the extreme seductiveness of the boundary of horror and what he called excess without purpose, Baudelaire's (2008) "oasis of horror in a desert of boredom" and de Sade's (2013) sexual libertinism-as-sovereignty. In the course of the current research, 4chan/b/ has made headlines for collective acts of senseless cruelty that shocked audiences, some of which I will examine in this chapter. However it has also become famous for its adherents' love of cats and their vigilante actions against animal cruelty. They have produced racist and misogynistic memes but also impossibly cute ones. They make jokes about paedophilia but they have also taken vigilante actions against alleged paedophiles. The samples captured and analysed for this study feature gay pornography, confessions of gay fantasies and homophobia. As a subculture, they are fixated on humiliation, particularly sexual humiliation, and suicide but the space also acts as a place where suicidal young men can express their darkest thoughts without indulging in any of the sentimentality found in mainstream discussions of

the topic. The /b/ board is officially categorized under “random” on the main site of 4chan, while all of the other boards are devoted to highly specified and often niche subject interests. This random sensibility, in which the 4chan/b/ users’ shocking actions seem senseless and self-contradictory, actually taps into a long running transgressive tradition, I will argue, of subverting moral codes and instrumental rationality using excessive irrationality, or what Bataille called expenditure without reserve. This is also coherent with their political goal of internet freedom in much the same way as Bataille adapted Mauss’ concept of the gift. Their pornographic tastes follow from the tradition of de Sade, their indulgence in cruelty from Artaud and their celebration of insanity from the Surrealists and the anti-Freudian movement of the 1960s and 70s.

Sex and sovereignty

In sample A, 22 threads were about or featured pornography and other explicit sexual material. A further 12 threads were dominated by pornography, although the original post was not on the topic. The spirit in which pornography is shared, in my observation, is not simply sharing for the purposes of arousal. Pornography, after all, is abundant online. Rather, it is a performance of taboo breaking in which humiliation or laughing at the expense of the subject seems to be a greater motivation. Moreover, the extreme nature of the niche pornography that is requested and shared features gruesome images, which seem to be aimed more at stretching the boundaries of social taboos and morality than at the achievement of sexual arousal alone. These often involve self-identifying beta males exploring fantasies of rape and sexual dominance.

For example, a still image (B.17) from a movie is posted of a woman lying naked on her stomach, hands and legs tied and looking behind her in fear. The comment reads, “watched a ‘Serbian film.’ Girl gets raped and killed. I fap furiously. Feel a little weird afterwards. Is this normal?” In another thread (B.61) in a discussion about

rape, one user explains, “I want to have sex with women. There isn't a woman out there who wants to have sex with me. Therefore, rape is the only solution. It's simple supply and demand.” These sentiments and motivations are similar to those identified by Michael Kimmel (2008) in his research with white American ‘frat boys’. Kimmel observed that the boys streamed pornography continually on laptops in communal spaces, and watched it collectively not for sexual gratification but to vent rage at women who had rejected them by playing out fantasies of rape and violence against women generally. However, one important difference is that on 4chan/b/ the pornography that appears is so dark, as I will explore in this chapter, that it is not even intended as a performance of virile heterosexual masculinity among a group of males, as in Kimmel’s (Ibid) study of frat houses. Instead, the primary stylistic and social function of the pornography, I would argue, is a knowing transgression.

However, while 4chan/b/ could reasonably be called “pro-pornography” because of the sheer volume of pornography on the forum, its implied view of pornography is as dark as any articulated by anti-pornography feminists of the 1980s, such as Andrea Dworkin (1991). The implicit view of pornography that emerges from the discourse is that it is inherently humiliating to women and therefore easily used as a weapon against women and feminists who attempt to be taken seriously in the realm of public debate, as a way of mocking and undermining their desire to be listened to. For example, one thread (B.18) began with an image of a woman with a handwritten “I need feminism because...” sign, and because her cleavage is visible writes, “I need feminism because I can’t help but show off my tits”. This “I need feminism because...” meme is mocked again further down the thread with an image of a woman, likely to be a still from a pornographic video, with semen covering her face and in her mouth, posted with the caption “I need feminism because GLRPHP PLERG GORFF HRGLL DADDU HURGL PFF”, based on an imagining of the woman trying to finish the feminist phrase with semen in her mouth. Here, the subculture betrays its view of pornography and female sexuality as a form of humiliation and as incompatible with women’s contribution to the public sphere.

Pornography is mobilized, therefore, not only as a fantasy of revenge for sexual rejection, as I discussed in the last chapter, but also as a quasi-political or inadvertently political pushback against feminist contributions to public debate.

In many of the examples of attacks against women and feminists mentioned in the previous chapters, pornographic images or references to extreme sex acts were used in the attacks. This view also runs through many of the attacks against feminists which come from outside of 4chan/b/. For example pornographic images were sent to Kathy Sierra during the attacks on her and pornography and references to extreme and violent sex acts were used in attacks against Anita Sarkeesian and several others previously discussed.

Some of the pornography captured in the sample under analysis in this study arguably falls into the category of revenge porn. This genre, in the strict definition, refers to sex videos shot either without the (typically female) subject's consent or in the context of a private relationship and then released in order to publicly humiliate her as a means of seeking revenge (for rejection, betrayal, etc.). However, this genre has now expanded to commercial pornography, in which it is shot to look like revenge pornography, and sites such as 4chan/b/ have been involved in exposing privately shot nude photos of high-profile actresses. In this study, revenge porn is used, therefore, to refer to a genre that describes all pornographic images and videos that aim to humiliate the subject through publishing the image without her consent. In one thread (B.44), an image of a pretty, young, blonde-haired woman is posted and the OP writes, "okay /b/ we need to find these. This girls noodz were posted all over /b/... she left her picturetrail gallery unlocked and pictures were taken and shared. She had an awesome awesome ass. Can someone repost?"⁸ At the time of capturing this thread, the photos had not re-emerged. The last comments on the thread were "Bump for justice" and "Bump", written in order to bring the thread to the top of the page again in the hope of finding the photos.

⁸ Picturetrail refers to a social media photo-sharing site.

The images that posters are looking for through this search are unlikely to be any more raunchy than what they could find on any freely available porn site, in which women have consented to be filmed and to have that film publicly distributed. It seems, however, that the thrill of exploiting their technical security know-how over an attractive woman and finding and exposing photos, to which the woman did not consent, provides a greater thrill. Even when nudity and pornography are not available, this practice of taking photos of women without their consent is common on 4chan/b/. There are 3 threads in sample A in which /b/ is asked to rate amateur photos of woman or girl, sometimes said to be a girlfriend or crush, which appear to have been taken from Facebook or from a personal collection. In one, the OP claims it is a photo of a girl he has a crush on, who appears in a graduation dress, and he asks /b/ to rate her out of ten. In another (A.95), a photo that looks like a still from a skype conversation is posted, in which the woman is wearing very conservative casual clothes with no make up, and two subsequent photos in which she is showing her breasts, indicating it is likely to have been taken from a private conversation between a couple and not from a webcam service that provides live stripping in exchange for money. The origin of these photos could be from a vengeful boyfriend or they may be hacked and leaked photos taken by the poster of 4chan/b/ or from someone in the wider hacker community. It is certainly highly unlikely that the woman posted them herself, as the abuse that follows is standard. The responses include “Tits or GTFO”, “id love to jerk off with your hair, but we're gonna need a timestamp on those tits, or else” and “i'd love to squat over your chest and shit into your bra, really fill its empty concave cavities to the brim with shit”. It is also significant that this practice of revenge porn is so common on a site in which one of the most aggressively defended conventions of the subculture is the taboo against attractive women posting flattering images of themselves, as we saw in the earlier analysis of “camwhores”. The site’s users demonstrate a strong desire for sexual images of beautiful women taken without their consent but when they are posted by the women themselves, they are mocked, derided and even attacked for it.

Interestingly, 4chan/b/ also provides a platform for confessions of taboo sexual

tastes and sex advice. Users often post here in the hope of receiving uncensored advice that would be too taboo in other forums such as agony aunt columns. The following is a typical example: “Hey /b/tards, faggots and especially gays. I need some help. Yesterday I had sex with my dog. It was great and I came buckets as he knotted me.... After that my anus hurted a little bit and looked like a gaping hole... should I see a doctor?” The thread below this post is mostly filled by commenters amused by the post and of images of dogs with sex toys inserted into them. It is difficult to tell if they are real or photoshopped.

In another post (B.3) an OP writes, “So /b/ I want to have sex with my sister so I need advice, I’ve been fantasizing about it for 3 years, she’s about 15 months older than me and we’re already really close. We can talk about alcohol, weed and controversial things and shit like that without any awkwardness.” He goes on to describe how he went in to her room when he was drunk and said, “I want to lick your pussy.” There had been awkwardness ever since and he asks for advice on how they can become “fuckbuddies”. The advice includes some mockery but is in general non-judgemental. For example, beside an image of an attractive silver haired woman, an OP writes, “have any of you ever hooked up with an older woman? I’ve been wanting to do this forever but I’ve no idea how to go about it. Like, where do you meet them? They don’t go out to clubs/bars or anything.” The first response advises, “Not every old but I was 23 and she was 32 I think? She was my neighbor for a while and then we moved to different spots. Eventually became friends on FB and me and my roommate went to her house and doubleteamed her.” Like much of the sexual storytelling on 4chan/b/, the users are either involuntarily celibate or, if they are to be believed, having wildly active fantasy sex lives. The claim that these fantasies are likely to be fiction is impossible to prove or disprove but it is certainly in keeping with the style of the forum, in which outrageous and knowing lies and fantasies are accepted as part of the style of the subculture.

The sex advice threads more often give the impression that the posters and commenters have little sexual experience. One post (A.1) begins with an image of

ejaculation into the mouth of a young woman with girlish pigtails. The OP writes, “What does it feel like when you are getting a blowjob from a girl and she doesn't stop sucking when you cum?” In the 37 comments that follow, the topic remains the same, with a mixture of responses attempting to answer the question, “Most of them stop sucking because seeing your dick jizz is a huge turn on for them”, with some comments mocking the other contributors, “Underage virgins detected”.

There is also a strong preoccupation with anal sex on 4chan/b/ and both samples analysed in this study feature discussions about the subject in which advice is solicited. An image of a woman having anal sex is posted beside the question “how do I get my gf to do anal”. The first commenter jokes “buy her a strap on, she'll get the idea”. Other typical responses include, “ask her when she's sober. If she says no ask her when she's drunk”, “just do it you fucking pussy”, “just remember to keep going because they all say stop right away” and “roophies go in all drinks” referring to what have come to be known as date rape drugs. Others gave elaborate multiple step strategies to achieve the goal while another said, “I tried anal. Want that good. Prefer vaginal. Pulled out with a condom of a slightly different colour than before I penetrated her... pretty gross.” In de Sade, Paglia (1991) claims that anal sex is a rebellion against the natural restrictions of procreation, in which heterosexual sodomy exists to “diminish or minimize propagation” (Ibid: 246). This is also echoed in Bataille's eroticism of excess without reserve, in which pleasure that is not productive or rational in its outcome is considered to have the value of transgressive because, he claims, it rejects bourgeois morality based on the family and productivity. 4chan/b/'s loathing of procreation, discussed in the previous chapter on the issue of abortion, indicates they have inherited or appropriated this sensibility, which views these taboo practices as part of transgressive rebellion.

Some of the pornographic threads in the samples were highly disturbing. One such example (A.2) featured a genre of Japanese cartoon pornography, hentai, which typically involves young girlish female subjects with large eyes and some dark or extreme thematic element. The OP posted “lets get an Amputee hentai thread going”

with an image of a cartoon girl with large breasts, amputated arms and arrows being shot through her body. The thread continues with other similar cartoon images of cute girlish looking young Asian woman with their arms and legs amputated, one with a ball gag in her mouth and another seemingly dead or passed out, with a dangerously large object inserted into her vagina. Another is a gif, or a moving image, featuring a girl suspended in the air by a laser-operated machine. Her clothes are then stripped by the machine and her skin is peeled off. Three commenters wrote “bump” meaning they wanted to bring the thread back up to the top page of 4chan/b/ in the hope that more would contribute similar porn to it. In another post (number), an OP requests “loli”, which is cartoon hentai pornography featuring underage early teen girls: “Hey /b/ dumping loli in the hope of finding long lost porn. All I remember is she wouldn’t shut up and had to be gagged with a pillow and the forced her to squirt and made her cry.” The pornographic images are highly racialised too, with a strong fetish for young, doe-eyed, cartoonish-looking white and Japanese girls. Black women seem to rank lowest in this racialised hierarchy. For example, in sample A, the only black woman who appears in a sexual context features in an unflattering image of her face covered in semen with a watermelon squeezed over her head.

Niche fetishes often feature in threads about pornography on 4chan/b/. For example, one OP (A.39) asks if 4chan/b/ users could share any of his favourite genre, “scat porn”, meaning pornography that involves faeces, and he illustrates this with an image of an almost-naked woman whose underpants are full of diarrhoea. This request also came up once in sample B. An image (B.44) of a naked, blood-soaked woman is originally posted with a request for “Heamotolangia (blood fetish) thread?” Several commenters post links and images. (are these too awful to paste in?) Another thread (B.63) begins with an image of an Asian woman in her underwear who appears to be covered in noodles and is forcing her hand into her mouth while bent over. The OP asks “How were you introduced to 4chan /b/?” The answers that follow primarily contain niche pornography, including bukake, which involves large numbers of men ejaculating on the body and face or into the mouth of one female.

Another thread (B.72) begins with image of a half naked adult woman in a diaper with the text, “Diaper thread. Don’t post if you don’t like it, also don’t be an ass in the comments!” Several commenters respond with similar “diaper porn”.

Public debates about pornography, both inside and outside of feminism, have tended to divide into those who believe pornography and sexual expression to be harmless or even healthy to the users (McElroy 1997), while others such as conservatives and anti-pornography feminists like Andrea Dworkin (1981), have argued that its effects are dehumanizing and degrading. Despite the pro-porn culture of 4chan/b/, the findings presented here show no sense that pornography and promiscuous sexuality are perceived by 4chan/b/’s users as healthy or harmless. Instead, both are viewed in the darkest possible terms, albeit a darkness that is actively embraced, in the tradition of de Sade. In the samples analysed, there were numerous descriptions of sex and the female anatomy as dirty. One thread began with a request for 4chan/b/’s favourite porn stars. The OP suggests one called Faye Reagan, accompanied by a picture of her naked in a bath. One commenter responds, “Faye Reagan is so fucking nasty I have to take a shower every time her picture pops up on /b/. She is the definition of skank. You are a faggot OP and your porn tastes suck, much like you do.” Examples of the vagina being described as dirty and foul smelling have already been mentioned in the previous two chapters but it recurs also under the theme of transgression. For example, accompanying an image of a beautiful woman, an OP writes “I bet her pussy tastes like pistachio mint ice cream”, to which a commenter responds “it’s also possible it tastes like expired sardines”.

Significantly, the character of Patrick Bateman from the film adaptation of the novel *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis was posted once in sample A and appeared as the header banner at the top of the forum, posted by moderators, in sample B. The film tells the story of a narcissistic and amoral serial killer who watches pornography obsessively, is sexually violent to prostitutes, kills the homeless with relish and inflicts sexual torture on women in the novel so extreme it rivals de Sade. Fuchs (2011) argues that the novel was part of a literary style, following on from Henry

Miller and Norman Mailer, which used notions of transgression and sexual sovereignty from de Sade and applied them as a form of rebellion and liberation through sexual aggression and violence.



Fig 12: American Psycho page banner (4chan.org 2013, fig. 12)

This is the second most common film reference (after *Fight Club*) to appear in the data, and has remained so throughout the entire period of the current research. The above banner image is taken from a scene in which Bateman wears waterproof clothing to avoid getting blood on his expensive suits. The subheading that appears above the banner reads, “The stories and information posted are artistic works of fiction and falsehood. Only a fool would take anything posted here as fact”. It is worth noting that one of the defences made of *American Psycho* against its critics, during the debates sparked by its shocking sexual violence, was that the author had left some ambiguity at the end of the novel, suggesting that the events may have only been the fantasies of the main character. The subheading above thus knowingly employs a self-contradictory device. It says that the contents of the site are untrue and only a fool would believe them but this also suggests the subheading itself is not to be trusted. This technique again prevents any clear interpretation, which undermines any possibility of judgment. Interpretation and judgment are evaded through tricks and layers of metatextual self-awareness and irony. However, as in de Sade, the fantasy itself is conceived of as an act of transgression and an anti-social statement of rebellion against the pacifying constraints of what would later be called the superego.

Randomness, contradiction and excess without purpose

In the 4chan/b/ samples analysed, there was evidence of both homophobic abusive language - some ironic, some not – and anti-gay opinion as well as gay and trans pornography and confessions of homosexual and bisexual feelings. Again, 4chan/b/ leaves the outsider unable to interpret its cultural politics, as it operates as a space for anonymous gay confessions as well as for rampant homophobia. In sample A, there were 5 threads devoted to gay and trans pornography but also in the same, the term faggot - just one of many derogatory anti-gay terms employed - was used 49 times. Much like the use of heterosexual pornography, the gay pornography that was posted in both samples did not seem intended just for the purposes of private arousal or pleasure, not least because it too is widely available online and 4chan/b/ would not be required as a source. Instead, it appeared alongside homophobic language and confessions of homosexuality but in a slightly mocking or self-mocking context, often using unflattering and absurd images and depictions of the men as emasculated. Homophobic terms are often undoubtedly being used knowingly or ironically but it is also inaccurate to say that this irony is being employed for the purposes of an anti-homophobic politics. Rather, these words are used in an intentionally inscrutable way that is intended as an irreverent gesture against a perceived outside culture of political correctness and censorship, as well as that of conservative social values, thus simultaneously embracing these anti-normative sexualities as transgressive. It is this transgression that gives these seemingly contradictory approaches currency and coherency within the value system of the forum.

While outwardly presenting a culture of transgression, however, part of this discourse appears to be about genuinely negotiating and policing the acceptable boundaries of (beta)male sexuality. For example, one thread (A.9) starts with an image of what appears at first to be a pretty and petite girl but is actually a boy with feminine underwear pulled down to reveal a penis. An image of an unattractive woman with her vagina on display is put next to it for purposes of comparison. The

OP asks, “Are traps gay? some look more feminine then actual girls...”. Trap is slang for very feminine looking gay boys who dress as girls or identify as girls. One commenter writes, “if your sole purpose in life is to have sex with the opposite gender for the subconscious decision to reproduce children to continue the human race than you're straight. if you're having sex with anybody that just looks female than you're not straight. it's not that hard to understand faggots.” Then, alongside a photo of a large, half-naked woman, one commenter writes, “Up the ante, use some of those radfem blubberballs”. By this the commenter means compare the “trap” to the unattractive feminist woman in this photo to test the limits of your heterosexuality. Another commenter writes, “I wouldn't purposefully seek out a trap, but if I took a pretty girl home and found she had a little dick, I'd still fuck the shit out of her. I guess that makes me bisexual? But I'm not attracted to masculinity. I mean, a dick isn't what I would normally go for but it isn't a deal breaker if you're feminine enough. I'd be grossed out doing anything to the dick though. This is fucking confusing.” Other commenters express acceptance of their bisexuality, “Why can't you just tell yourself you're bi and be happy with that? When I first came here /b/ made me question my sexuality real fucking fast. Just admit you're half faggot half straight and be done with it, no shame in that.” Another commenter advises, “Just put your dick in whatever makes you happy, OP. Don't worry about what people think, whatever you do behind closed doors is your own fucking business.”

Another thread (B.19) about the mundane topic of the merits of Mondays, starts with an image of a man felating another man and the penis, taking a b shape has forward slashes inserted on either side, so that the image reads “sup /b/?” An image of a teen boy dressed as a girl is posted, “general faggotry thread... ACTIVATE! Bring all your genderqueer pictures here so we can all fap or troll, whatever you're into.” The dispassionate tone of this comment explains that that you can either “fap”, meaning masturbate to the photos of gay nudes or “troll”, meaning mock and abuse the gay commenters. Here, the forum functions as a place where young men can ask questions about taboo sexual curiosities and simultaneously reject the relatively

sensitive or perceived politically-correct style of mainstream discourse on homosexuality. It also severs any connection that a progressive political compass would typically assume between pro-gay sentiment and pro-feminist sentiment, instead embracing that which is perceived to be transgressive, while mocking feminists and expressing misogyny.

A similar thread (A.12) dominated by this theme starts off with two images, posted beside one another for comparison. One looks like a muscular man with a vagina (A) and the other is an image of what appears to be an attractive feminine looking woman with a penis (B). It is likely these are photshopped images. The OP writes, “Pick one /b?”. All of the comments that follow seem to be identifying themselves as male. “Is this even a fucking question? of course its /b/. I'd ram that bitch's ass all day and suck her/his cock.” Another commenter writes, “Any straight guy would pick b, as much as people want to disagree with me. I'm gay, and I have absolutely no attraction to B in any way what-soever. If A wore boxers, I would do stuff like rub against him, but I wouldn't touch the vagina.” Another comments, “I'm asexual, joke's on you.” A male-identifying commenter adds, “You can't say that you have to find either of them attractive. Should I find fat bitches attractive? They have female genitalia and a feminine body (arguably) So what gives? This is just a justification for faggotry. It's never just "good enough" it has to meet certain requirements to be attractive.”

Another thread starts with an image of a slender young man posing naked and the OP writes, “please give us a twink thread”. Twink is slang for a slim, slightly effeminate, typically white, gay boy. Among the images posted in the comment thread, there is a generic photo of a conservatively dressed black male at a lap top laughing and the poster has called the photo “wat”. This stock image is a meme, typically used as a reaction shot in comment threads.



Fig 13: Reaction shot (4chan.org 2014, fig. 13)

Examples like these are useful in trying to understand the dynamics of sexuality on 4chan/b/. The choice of an image of a black male as the subject, laughing at a series of images of effeminate gay white boys, is also typical of the style of 4chan/b/ in which, as was explored in the last chapter, black masculinity often appears as a counterforce to feminization, in this case the feminization, and therefore the degradation, of white masculinity. His appearance as an imagined laughing onlooker to the thread is a kind of counterforce to this effeminate or castrated white decadent culture in which the white male appears as absurd and effeminate. Gay pornography is shared but there is a simultaneous homophobia and even a self-effacement, much like the use of the term beta as it is used by the commenters to describe themselves.

In addition to this, the sample also contained a thread (A.58) that began with the OP posting an image of a rainbow flag crossed out and with the caption “Daily reminder that homosexuality is a mental illness.” Responses included “no, but transsexuality is”, and “It's more or less a birth defect. Nature isn't perfect so sometimes shit get's fucked up in the creation of life. Next thing you know, cocks in the butt”. Accompanying a photograph of an Asian porn star, another writes, “Why would one

even prefer a man's asshole". Another commenter writes, "We're all mentally ill here in the /b/". This embrace of insanity and the commenter's linking it to taboo sexuality also derives from the transgressive tradition. For de Sade, the Surrealists, and later for the 60s countercultural anti-Freudian movement most closely associated with R.D. Laing, insanity was a creative source and a political act. The surreal was a pre-rational, pre-bourgeois expression.

Although the analysis reveals that the contents of the forum are highly repetitive and, in that sense, not random at all, it is partly 4chan/b/'s randomness of style, by which I mean its use of simultaneous contradictory meanings and other confusing and senseless acts, which enable it to evade interpretation. This is evident in the confusing juxtaposition of homophobic and pro-gay sentiments expressed, both of which use the word "faggot" in different contexts. This random technique is also evident in the memes created by the forum, which are typically either sinister and amoral or childishly cute and sweet, and rarely anything in between. One thread (A.82) begins with an image of the crucifixion of a cat in Africa and a 67-comment thread follows, with a mixture of similar images of animal cruelty and other morally outraged comments such as, "You're a fucking Newfag, that is all. /b/ was always pro-cat. GTFO back to 9gag faggot." The pro-cat claim is indeed supported by systematic analysis of the data, which reveals consistent declarations of /b/'s sympathy toward cats. Here, the commenter is outraged that the poster has misunderstood the conventions of 4chan/b/, in which cruelty to humans is acceptable but cruelty toward cats is not. The forum's love of cats is likely to come from its origins as an anime fan site, a genre in which cats feature regularly. The first and most famous image macro style meme to go viral originated on 4chan/b/ and spawned a genre of humorous photos of cats with superimposed text written in a form of broken English known as lolspeak.



Fig. 14: Example of lolcats (icanhascheeseburger.com 2014, fig. 14)

LOLcats originated on 4chan sometime in 2005, when an anonymous user submitted a picture of a relaxed cat waiting for Caturday. The LOLcat meme became common on 4chan/b/ through the weekly ritual of “Caturday”. 4chan/b/ has also been involved in vigilante actions against cruelty to cats. In 2010, CCTV footage of a woman throwing a cat violently into a garbage bin went viral, leading to the story making newspaper headlines (Brooke 2010). 4chan/b/ users were so outraged by the footage that they used their hacking skills to doxx the woman. They found Bale's employer (The Bank of Coventry), the number of her boss, her address and Facebook profile and sent her death threats and other forms of anonymous harassment, and Bale was eventually forced briefly into hiding (Chen 2010). This knowing juxtaposition of a gentle, cat-loving meme against the wider amoral backdrop of the forum is yet another example of the technique of evading interpretation, a style that can be understood as a form of what Bataille called excess

without purpose. As in previous transgressive styles, it functions as an absurd aesthetic rebellion against instrumental rationality as well as against conventional morality.

The pro-cat vigilante direct action may seem sentimental or well-intentioned but the very same tactics were used against 11-year-old Jessi Slaughter in 2009. The girl had posted videos of herself and had been active on a forum called stickydrama. When some of her activities were linked to 4chan/b/, users began a relentless bullying campaign against her, involving publishing her real name, address, social media profiles and phone number. Following death threats, she was forced to go under police protection (Chen 2010). There was something about her use of ghetto slang and her pre-teen girlish tastes and behavior that made them think this elaborate prank would be amusing. When she posted a video of herself crying and asking them to stop and her father also pleaded with them to stop, she became a further obsession and source of amusement for 4chan/b/. This bullying campaign shares the same random sensibility of excess without purpose that inspired the Mary Bale action, in which a senseless campaign is launched against an unknown and seemingly randomly chosen pre-teen girl.

Other examples of 4chan/b/'s vigilante actions include their successful hacking of Time's Person of the Year award, making Kim Jong Un the winner and in 2009, they did the same, making 4chan creator Christopher Poole the winner. In an action called Operation Birthday Boy, mentioned previously, an elderly WW2 veteran posted an online ad for "people wanted for birthday party". Touched by the lonely old man's appeal, they found his name address and phone number, and sent him large numbers of birthday cards and orders of cake and strippers (Stryker 2010).

This moral ambiguity is manifested in a more explicit and knowing way through the phenomenon of Bronies. These are fans of My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic, the Canadian/American flash cartoon series. An annual "BronyCon" has been held since 2010. When the Howard Stern Show interviewed bronies at BronyCon in 2012, it

sparked a rise in more mainstream Brony fandom and attention. The response from this video was arguably the reason why Fox News and other networks started reporting on Bronies in 2012. The website that now forms the centre of Brony fan culture is Equestria Daily, a forum that hosts an often aggressive comment section because it is not mediated by Brony site administrators, and as such, people who dislike bronies or “anti-bronies” have free reign to speak their mind. One study estimated there are 50,000 Bronies, who are 85% male at an average age of 21. Analysis of Bronies to date have tended to focus on them as a fan culture (Douglas 2014, Prescott 2014) but have uniformly theorized them as a challenge to gender norms and “blur[ring] gender lines by identifying with traits that they know are not perceived as masculine” and attempting “to modify gender identities by embracing what it and the “anti-bronies” believe to be feminine traits” (Silverstein 2013). However, the term Brony was coined on 4chan and they continue to be a major feature of the /b/ and /co/ (cartoon) boards. In an example of this captured in the sample, a pornography thread (A.16) starts with an image of a cartoon fox viewed from the back with stockings, a vagina and female human curves. The OP asks “Do you like butts /b/?” Commenters post more images from this niche porn genre with captions such as “I cannot lie”, completing the reference to Sir Mixalot’s 1990’s hit “I Like Big Butts”. The thread continues for 297 posts, with dozens of these images and some of similarly eroticised My Little Pony cartoons. Indeed, this indulgence in the bizarre, the niche and the absurd is epitomised in the subculture’s fixation with “bronies”, an ironic portmanteau of bro and pony. Like lolcats, the Brony craze largely moved off of 4chan/b/ as it became more widely known.

Again the analysis to date contains an implicit assumption that to reject traditional and hegemonic masculinities is to be engaged in an inherently progressive project and that misogyny and anti-feminist cultural politics must be a product of the former, never the latter. Why then does this childish and knowingly unmasculine identification appeal to this deeply misogynist and anti-feminist space? I would argue that it is part of their broader ironic sensibility – which shows an awareness of the juxtaposition of dark subject matter with My Little Pony - and their appropriation

and use of negative stereotypes of geeks. But as the example of their appearance in the sample indicates, they are appearing in the context of niche pornography, which is often based upon a level of cruelty and humiliation of women that far exceeds more mainstream male tastes.

The same moral ambiguity and techniques of irony and evasion of interpretation are employed on the issue of paedophilia on 4chan/b/. One thread (A.57) in the random sample begins with a post of a character called Pedobear, a 4chan/b/ creation of a mischievous bear typically imposed onto innocent images of children.



Fig. 15: Example of Pedobear (4chan.org 2014, fig. 15)

The bear originated to flag paedophilic content on the site but is more often used to make jokes about paedophilia. The OP writes “ITT: 6 shows pedo bear what he wants”, meaning the 6th post should be an image of what pedobear wants, i.e. images of child pornography. Some of the responses are images of honey or honeycombs, some of children though not pornographic, others say “MODS MODS MODS”, attempting to alert moderators to the thread quickly, because child pornography is one of the only things moderators will censor on the forum, although often not very

vigilantly or quickly.

In 2008, 4chan/b/ made one of its first appearances on a mainstream forum when Oprah read out a post that had been left on her show's forum. The post read:

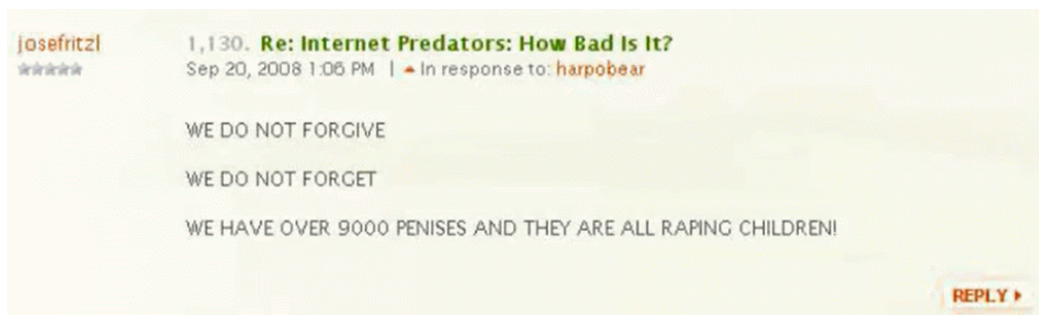


Fig 16: Oprah prank (Knowyourmeme.com 2014, fig. 16)

The reference to “over 9000” comes from the Japanese manga anime series *Dragon Ball Z*, where it is typically used as an innumerable quantifier to describe a large number of something like “several”, “lots” etc. In the 28th episode titled “Goku’s Arrival,” the main protagonist Goku returns to Earth after intense training in the Other World to square off against Saiyan warriors Vegeta and Nappa, who had killed his friend Piccolo right before his arrival. As Goku powers up in rage, Vegeta senses an explosive increase in his power level and yells: “It’s over nine thousand!” The meme’s notoriety reached its first peak in 2007, when 4chan moderators implemented a word filter that would turn any mentions of the number 7 into “over 9000”.



Fig. 17: Example of “over 9000” meme (Knowyourmeme.com 2014, fig. 17)

When Oprah believed this post to be genuine and read it out loud to her audience, 4chan created memes and several musical remixes of the clip in celebration (Knowyourmeme.com). However, despite their insensitive jokes about pedophilia, it can't be said that 4chan/b/ is a pro-paedophilia site. At times, its users even engage in anti-paedophilia vigilantism, even though this appears to run counter to the dispassionate and humorous approach observed on the site here. Anonymous, emerging from 4chan/b/, have used vigilante tactics to catch and doxx alleged paedophiles (Protalinski 2012). All of these examples indicate that the site's ideological contradictions are a conscious part of its anti-politics of transgression, and demonstrate clear continuities with previous traditions, which revel in the absurd, the grotesque and the abject with a view to rejecting dominant or mainstream sensibilities.

The theatre of cruelty

Another strategy frequently deployed here is the use of cruelty and horror as an entertainment spectacle, which Artaud (2001) described in his concept of the theatre of cruelty: “there can be no spectacle without an element of cruelty as the basis of every show” (Ibid: 77). 4chan/b/’s own self-descriptions echo much of the academic analysis on 4chan/b/ to date in terms of its flattering conclusion that “behind the bigotry and boobs” lies something countercultural and counter-hegemonic, which only the superficial reading of an outsider to the subculture would fail to understand. The description also encapsulates something significant about the spirit of the forum, which is its use of “bigotry” to battle “boredom” (Speedie 2007), reminiscent of Baudelaire’s “oasis of horror in a desert of boredom”, a sentiment often echoed throughout transgressive culture, that a moment of violence, irrationality or extremity is sublime in the context of the every day.

In a thread about orchestrating attacks against feminists on Tumblr (A.59), one commenter wrote, “how is it that we threw all our best shit at them and they just refuse to anhero. we gotta step it up next time”. This term for suicide “an hero” has been a part of 4chan/b/ slang and memes since 2006 when 4chan/b/ pranked the online mourners of a boy who had recently committed suicide.



Fig 18: Example of “an hero” meme (Knowyourmeme.com 2014, fig. 18)

When Mitchell Henderson, a seventh grade schoolboy from Minnesota, shot himself, a message left from a classmate on a MySpace memorial page read that Mitchell was “an hero to take the shot, to leave us all behind. God do we wish we could take it back.” This grammatical error amused the trolls of 4chan/b/ to such an extent that the expression is still used. There was a reference on his memorial page to his lost iPod, which they also found funny. This joke became so elaborate that Henderson’s MySpace page was hacked and the hacker gave him the face of a zombie. Another person placed an iPod on Henderson’s grave, took a picture and posted it to 4chan/b/. Henderson’s face was appended to dancing iPods, spinning iPods and hardcore porn scenes on 4chan/b/. A dramatic re-enactment of Henderson’s demise appeared on YouTube, complete with shattered iPod. Mitchell’s father reported that this even culminated in prank calls to his house lasting for a year and a half, in which callers

said “Hi, I’ve got Mitchell’s iPod” and, “Hi, I’m Mitchell’s ghost, the front door is locked. Can you come down and let me in?” (Schwartz 2011).

On November 30th, 2013, an anonymous 4chan user started a thread claiming he would be ending his own life on a live video feed.



Fig 19: Screen grab of live suicide attempt (dailymail.co.uk 2013, fig. 19)

The user subsequently joined a video chatroom on the website Chateen, which quickly filled up to 200 viewers. In front of the online audience, he swallowed several unidentified pills with vodka and set a fire in the corner of the room before crawling under his bed. At the end of the video, fire-fighters can be seen entering the room and pulling him out to safety. On December 1st, the Guelph Mercury reported that a 20-year-old man had been injured in a dorm room fire at the University of Guelph campus in Ontario, Canada. The same day, CBC News published an article about the incident, quoting the university’s vice president of student affairs, who revealed the fire had been deliberately set by the student, who was injured but not dead (Hall 2013).

The forum’s preoccupation with suicide takes the form of painful expressions of users’ desire to commit suicide and at the same time it mocks those who express sympathy with the victims. 4chan/b/ users come to the most unsympathetic forum imaginable to anonymously tell others of their suicidal fantasies. They thus reject the

perceived sentimentality of the mainstream media's suicide spectacle and instead remake it as their own dark spectacle, in which pity is replaced by cruelty. And yet, because both the act of suicide and the displays of insensitivity toward suicide victims are both perceived as forms of transgression, both find a home within the internally coherent world of 4chan/b/.

This kind of dark spectacle as entertainment on 4chan/b/ further crossed the line into reality in November 2014, when an anonymous 4chan user submitted several photos of what appeared to be a woman's corpse, along with a confession that he strangled her to death and would be attempting to taunt police into shooting him upon their arrival at his home. He wrote, "Turns out it's way harder to strangle someone to death than it looks on the movies... Her son will be home from school soon. He'll find her then call the cops. I just wanted to share the pics before they find me. I bought a bb gun that looks realistic enough. When they come, I'll pull it and it will be suicide by cop. I understand the doubts. Just check the fucking news. I have to lose my phone now" (Huffington Post 2014). The same day, the Kitsap County, Washington news site Kitsap Sun reported that police were investigating a suspected homicide involving the death of a woman in her early 30s, who was found dead by her 13-year-old son at her home in the Port Orchard area. That evening, KOMO 4 news anchor Russ Bowen tweeted a photo outside the house where the woman was found dead. The 33-year-old killer, David Michael Kalac, was arrested after a brief police chase and has since been charged with murder (Huffington Post 2014).

As Heath and Potter (2006) have argued, the aesthetics and values of the counterculture have been widely adopted by mainstream culture. That everything from pizza companies to shoe manufacturers use revolutionary branding and tropes of non-conformist rebellion against the values of mainstream society has become itself part of the values of mainstream culture. The trolls described here have taken these values and pushed them to the extreme, yet any critique of the immorality of the culture of 4chan/b/ or of, for example Weev's behaviour, in particular the cruelty directed at women and girls, can be easily dismissed as the unimaginative judgments

of bourgeois morality, of those who don't get the joke, to paraphrase Coleman (2014). The only unqualified criticism of 4chan/b/'s actions on moral grounds, without any recognition of their radical credentials, has been from sources such as the arch conservative Fox News, which was interpreted in academic writing (Phillips 2013) as an attempt to "neutralize a counterhegemonic space" (Ibid: 3), even though the action under discussion was the harassment of the families of recently deceased teenagers.

In a recent magazine interview (Battacharya 2014), a journalist spoke to some of the characters who identify as hackers and trolls, coming from the world of Anonymous, Lulzsec and 4chan/b/:

"I'm at a restaurant with Auernheimer and his friend Jaime Cochrane, who is a softly spoken transgender troll from the group Rustle League, so-called because "that's what trolling is, it's rustling people's jimmys". They're explaining to me their version of what trolls do. "It's not bullying," says Cochrane. "It's satirical performance art." Cyberbullies who drive teenagers to suicide have crossed the line. However, trolling is the more high-minded business of what Cochrane calls "aggressive rhetoric", a tradition that goes back to Socrates, Jesus and the trickster god Loki, from Norse mythology. Auernheimer likens himself to Shakespeare's Puck. Cochrane aspires to Lenny Bruce and Andy Kaufman. They talk of culture jamming, the art of disrupting the status quo to make people think. They talk of Abbie Hoffman." (Battacharya 2014)

Given this high-cultural discourse, it is little wonder that 4chan/b/ users have elevated what they do to god-like status. Disruption is the watchword of Silicon Valley and to be described by the journalist as "disrupting the *status quo*" is, ironically, now such a part of the value system of mainstream culture that it will generally be understood as a compliment. Like Coleman (2009), Manivannan (2013) and Phillips (2013), I characterize 4chan/b/ as transgressive but only in the sense that this intention is what makes it a cohesive space. Unlike these theorists, I do not agree that this form of transgression is necessarily progressive or aesthetically valuable.

On the contrary, as the findings analysed above demonstrate, this is a deeply misogynistic, nihilistic and anti-human culture. Indeed, a more in depth analysis of the cultural history of the term transgression reveals that it should not be treated as a kind of *a priori* good. That the values of de Sade could be taken up by a culture of misogyny and even spawned an online anti-feminist movement should also not be a surprise. The Blakean motto adopted by the Surrealists, “Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires” (Hughes 1981: 248), the theatre of cruelty, dominance as sexual “sovereignty” and the eroticising of horror have all descended from this tradition and it is precisely the value system that is used to excuse and rationalise the misogyny and anti-feminism of 4chan/b/ and trolling culture. Weev and the other trolls in the magazine interview quoted above know how to speak the language of these mainstreamed countercultural values, and yet the oasis of horror in a desert of boredom they have produced liberates only their conscience. Given their aversion to engaging in real questions of political power and inequality and in the light of the findings discussed in this chapter, it is tenable to argue that the boundaries of conscience are, in fact, the only thing that trolling culture’s adherents are actually transgressing.

Conclusion

How “counter” is this culture?

One of the questions that hangs over this research, and which I have attempted to answer in my findings and analysis, is of the authenticity of these anti-feminist subcultures’ claims to countercultural authenticity and counter-hegemony. Other analysts have called them transgressive and anarchic, inheritors of Dadaist and Situationist traditions (Coleman 2011, Halpin 2012, Auerbach 2012). They have also been called counter-hegemonic, which is a bolder claim.

One approach would have been to say that while they adopt the aesthetics of counterculture and transgression, their underlying cultural politics are not countercultural, less still counter-hegemonic, because we start out with the presupposition that a progressive agenda is implicit in both of those descriptions. In Giroux and Szesman’s (1999) analysis of *Fight Club*, which I referenced, they argue that despite the countercultural gestures, the film focuses “largely on middle-class white men who are suffering from a blocked hypermasculinity” and ultimately the film “functions less as a critique of capitalism than as a defence of authoritarian masculinity wedded to the immediacy of pleasure sustained through violence and abuse.” (Ibid: 102) Fuch’s (2012) analysis of sexual aggression and misanthropy in post-war American literature also characterizes its anti-bourgeois transgressive gestures as, put simply, a feeble excuse for bad sexual behaviour. The misogynist and anti-feminist geek subcultures in the research certainly appear to also be largely young, middle class, white, European and American males, in as much as I and others (Coleman 2011, Phillips 2012) who have written about them have been able to surmise from the evidence. The term “middle class” is problematic and imprecise here as it can be used to mean anything from the bourgeoisie to, typically in an American context, property owning unionised working class but the disdainful attitude to welfare recipients and the poor and the prevalence of computer programming over any form of manual labour in the discussions certainly suggests

its users are drawn roughly from the mid to lower end of the “white collar” jobs - office workers or knowledge economy workers. Giroux and Szesman’s (1999) analysis is correct to critique the reactionary subtext to the radical gestures the film makes but like so much of the analysis of contemporary online misogynist and anti-feminist geek subculture, their analysis relies upon the notion that transgression and counterculture are inherently progressive and that they are located on the left of the political spectrum. But there are many institutions and social taboos that have emerged from the feminist movement and the political left – ones which can be transgressed and subverted through culture – such as the welfare state or the taboo against racist and misogynistic speech in the public sphere. There is, I have argued instead, no such necessary link between progressive politics and transgression, subversion or countering the dominant culture. Rather, each of these must be judged on what they are subverting and what values they themselves represent instead.

Halpin (2012) depicts the users of 4chan/b/ almost as a kind of vanguard of contemporary radical politics and claims that their anti-authority politics are drawn from their belonging to the precariat class. Let’s imagine for a moment he is correct the class make-up of the subculture. Let us also, for a moment, accept the accounts of these geeky subcultures, that they are subordinate to hegemonic masculinity and that they are also influential on egalitarian protest movements. Does this tell us much about the misogyny I have documented here or its aesthetic and moral character? Does it diminish in some way the extreme nature of the misogyny expressed within these subcultures? The limitations of these approaches lies in the implicit assumption of a connection between countercultural gestures, counter-hegemonic cultural expressions and a certain set of attitudes toward women. This approach leads to either an unwillingness to recognise the misogyny at all or a claim that the transgressive politics cancels out or necessarily contradicts the misogyny or it sees such cultural trends as falling short of their countercultural aims, because it takes as a presupposition that to be countercultural, transgressive and even counter-hegemonic necessarily confers aesthetic or moral value. Instead, I would argue, the transgressive geeky spaces that are producing such extreme misogyny and anti-

feminist attacks *are* radical and perhaps even in some sense counter-hegemonic. Gramsci described hegemony as a constant battle between differing sections of society struggling for dominance. Counter-hegemony then is the attempt to critique or dismantle hegemonic power. Some of the actions of these anti-feminist spaces can be defined as counter-hegemonic in their subversion of hegemonic masculinity and their tendency to attack big social media corporations like Facebook, big media corporations like Harpo and their resistance to attempts to monetize online culture by profit-making organizations in their defence of internet freedom. But the easy coexistence of this transgressive, radical sensibility with rampant misogyny suggests these theoretical frames (conservative/progressive, hegemonic/counter-hegemonic) may be inadequate for the purposes of analyzing this subject. As I have tried to demonstrate through the cultural histories of transgression and rebel misogyny, there is a long history of radicalism and misogyny existing quite harmoniously.

One feature of the changing landscape of contemporary online feminism that I have observed makes it a less receptive environment for this kind of argument. Throughout the period of my research I have observed the orthodoxies inherited from the second wave feminist establishment receding online while the voices of a more transgressive, countercultural, pro-pornography, pro-sex work and pro-“internet freedom” cyberutopian feminism are ascendant. This sensibility could be summed up in Penny’s (2012) headline: “It’s page three, not online pornography, that is the real threat to women”, in which she claims that the use of online pornography by those with subcultural capital - fellow geeks and digital natives - is superior to the relatively quaint topless photos viewed by a tabloid readership. It is not difficult to see that cultural tastes and perhaps class distinctions, rather than a disinterested analysis, are at work here. She claims that mainstream social media platforms are “terrified not just of pornography but of sexuality in general” (Penny 2014, 12). This attempt to cast the market as a conservative force, as opposed to Marx’s famous “All that is solid melts into air” description of its devastating effects on tradition (to which I would subscribe) suggests the use of an ill-fitting theoretical framework, in which proponents of this new feminism seek to wish away the

connections that exist between their own politics and that of the anti-feminists who harass them. They view transgression and taboo-breaking as fundamental to women's liberation but this sensibility is fundamental to contemporary online misogyny also – and both arguably are inheritors of the anti-Freudian or post-Freudian intellectual tradition as well as bohemian and libertine traditions. It should come as little surprise that this ascendant variety of online feminism, with its flaws and many virtues, finds itself ill equipped to deal with an ascendant online anti-feminism, because they share a common sensibility in many respects.

Settling accounts with online subcultures

I argue that for online feminist activists like Penny and the academic theorists of these geeky subcultures to admit the extent of misogyny in geeky online subcultures, without qualifying it as a method to achieve something more progressive or dismissing it as errant conservatism creeping in to online subcultures where it doesn't belong, would require the admission of many uncomfortable truths. The cyberutopian moment of 2010/2011 that I described at the beginning of this research, the moment of a public discussion about "Twitter revolutions" followed by the social media-centric Occupy movement, has shown little sign of abating. Shortly before the submission of this thesis, Coleman's (2014) second book in praise of Anonymous, lulzsec and the broader hacker milieu including 4chan/b/ and Sauter's (2014) book "The Coming Swarm", a highly flattering analysis of DDoS, have both been met with celebrity endorsements and no apparent criticism from feminist commentators, scholars or from the left.

Some cultural commentators have also argued that this period has seen "the rise of the geeks" (Harrison 2013, Marche 2014) with the explosion of the trend of the geek shirt, a t-shirt with GEEK printed across it that became popular in 2013, films such as *The Social Network* and TV shows such as *Silicon Valley* and *Big Bang Theory*.

Those who have written about trolling, hacker and geek spaces have typically been left-leaning and even sometimes feminist and have been sympathetic to the broader politics of these anarchic, culture-jamming, transgressives. Coleman, for example, has been a champion of the hacker movement, even defending hackers in court and supporting the “Free Weev” campaign (Kaplan 2013). Auerbach (2012) has celebrated A-culture and Philips (2013) has partially defended the trolling culture of 4chan/b/, even in its most extreme forms, regarding it as counter-hegemonic. In the context of the Occupy movement and the rise of hacker collectives such as Anonymous Halpin (2012), Sauter (2014) and public figures of the feminist left such as Laurie Penny (2013) have all praised the leaderless anarchic culture of DDoS and the style of anonymous uncensored communication and swarm-like formations that 4chan/b/ is the purest expression of. To accurately represent how central a role these cultures have played in this wave of anti-feminist attacks would force these cultural commentators to reconsider the assumption that misogyny is the preserve of easy caricatures such as conservatives, jocks and lads and that sexism is reinforced by mainstream popular culture and mainstream news, instead of by anti-establishment transgressive counterculturalists. Instead, as this research demonstrates, the majority of what has been called “the new misogyny” is coming from alternative subcultures and geek-identifying online spaces in which conservative family values, mainstream culture and hegemonic masculinity are all mocked, despised or in some way marked as not belonging to the subculture.

Faced with this consideration, they would also have to consider that the protest movement that has arguably defined the current generation of digital natives and which they typically support, the Occupy movement, took its central symbol and some of its sensibility from the most shockingly misogynist and anti-feminist online space on the English-speaking internet. The most significant artist and illustrator to emerge from Occupy, Molly Crabapple, who co-authored a book with Laurie Penny and has endorsed and praised Sauter’s book on DDoS as a method of protest, depicted the spirit of Occupy as a swarm of bees with lap tops and Guy Fawkes masks, anonymous and leaderless, acting in concert. In other words, the whole style

of the subcultures that are producing these waves of misogyny and anti-feminism are shared in common with feminists and others on the left who condemn attacks against women but will not admit this uncomfortable or embarrassing connection exists. In several scholarly articles (Jane 2014, Shaw 2014, Filipovic 2007) on the topic, nothing of this dimension to the new misogyny was even mentioned and instead these writers simply concluded that the phenomenon was a case of widespread prejudices in the “real world” reproducing online. But even the harshest critic of sexism in culture more broadly would accept that the kind of discourse I have presented in this study is a much darker and more extreme manifestation than the kind of casual sexism that might be found in the newspapers, in workplace conversation or on television

In *Settling Accounts with Subcultures*, McRobbie (1980) challenged the Birmingham School orthodoxy for focusing on male experiences of male dominated subcultures and for ideologically sympathetic critics turning a blind eye to the less progressive aspects of these subcultures. Later, Sarah Thornton (1995) also argued that subcultural studies had been insufficiently critical of subcultural ideologies “because they were diverted by the task of puncturing and contesting dominant ideologies and second because their biases have tended to agree with the anti-mass society discourses of the youth cultures they study” (Ibid: 67). Exactly the same kind of analysis is needed now to address the overwhelmingly flattering academic body of analysis on these online subcultures and styles and the unwillingness of feminist critics to admit that the current wave of online misogyny and anti-feminism is coming largely from subcultures that share many of their own tastes, cultural politics and assumptions, instead of repeating the tired old caricature of what an anti-feminist should look like - a conservative old male establishment figure or a beer-chugging sports jock.

Penny (2014) admits that the expression “there are no girls on the internet” appealed to her at first, signalling a world apart from mainstream female tastes, but she soon discovered it would be unfairly applied to her too. “That idea sounded like sweet

freedom for a lot of us, but it turned out to be a threat” (Ibid: 3). This begs the question, what led her to regard such an obviously sexist sentiment positively until the implied lack of subcultural capital in it was also aimed at her? The subcultural hierarchy of taste that regards anonymous, anarchic, A-culture sites like 4chan/b/ as the radical alternative to the feminised internet is one that Penny herself is deferring to here. The same principle of “mass culture as woman” described by Huyssen (1986) applies also, I argue, to the online world.

“One of the upsetting things about the way nerd culture has been incorporated into the mainstream” Penny writes, “is the subsumption of many of the radical, egalitarian impulses of traditional nerd culture into a stereotype” (2014: 33). But “nerd culture”, as I have attempted to demonstrate through the cyberutopian literature in Chapter 2 and the literature on its countercultural origins and intersections in Chapter 3, is not as egalitarian as Penny suggests. Not only has the misogyny of online geek and hacker culture been documented by women on the receiving end of their attacks for decades (Sherney 1996) its roots lie in the back-to-the-land Californian counterculture, as Fred Turner (2010) has documented, in which women often played a highly traditional and subordinate role. It was influenced by figures like Ken Kesey, who articulated much of the counterculture’s loathing of the symbolically feminine taming influence of suburban domesticity, conformity and mass consumer culture, warning of constraints on the superego by a crushing “matriarchy” (Kesey 1962). Likewise, Manivannan’s (2013) theory of the misogyny of 4chan/b/ rests upon an unspoken presupposition that the misogyny on the one hand and transgression, subversion and counterculturalism on the other, are necessarily antithetical and that the latter is in some way virtuous enough to cancel out the former. As I hope I have shown throughout this study, misogyny, opposition to feminism and the use of sexual violence fantasies as a gesture of rejecting bourgeois morality and manners have been remarkably prevalent throughout countercultures, subcultures and bohémias from de Sade through to 4chan/b/. Any analysis that excuses or explains away this phenomenon on the grounds that these cultures have been counter-hegemonic is surely inadequate.

Early Usenet forums too vast to be recorded or retrospectively read and analysed were accessible to me in this study only through the critiques that remain from academic writing at the time. Because of how transient these cultures are, our memory of online cultures will be shaped by the commentary written about them, long after the original content has been lost or becomes too vast over a decade or so to study. If the current analysis that touches on this anti-feminist style were to be left unchallenged, future scholars would read about 4chan/b/ only as celebrated band of countercultural and counter-hegemonic pranksters with an egalitarian edge and would not know how central a role they have played in this period of anti-feminist attacks. So this documentation is a challenge to the pro-hacker libertarian school of thought and the out-dated analysis used by many feminists, as I have documented, that assumes the marginal or subordinate masculinities of geek subcultures to be feminist-friendly. If left unchallenged, the analyses I have reviewed here would bequeath an inaccurate narrative to those future scholars and cultural critics seeking to understand this online moment after much of the original sources have been erased.

The future of the research and the topic

First, what is generalizable about these findings? This is the study of a set of online subcultures with a shared or partially shared style and cultural politics. The study does not suggest that the culture of these sites is representative of any mainstream trend, in terms of a sudden growth in misogynist sentiment in general. On the contrary, the subjects here attempt to define themselves in opposition to the mainstream, rejecting hegemonic masculinity and a culture in which feminist ideas are going through a period of renewed popularity. Instead they express a geeky bisexual beta-masculinity and reject mass culture in favour of niche and stylistically exclusive subcultures. However, at the risk of making predictions, they may prove to be something of a cultural vanguard. I would agree with scholars of 4chan/b/, like

Halpin (2012), that the site has been one of the most stylistically influential forums on the English speaking internet in the last decade, producing viral memes and slang that have spread into mainstream online usage and defining the humour of trolling as a style. 4chan/b/'s influence on internet culture in general is enormous but the styles it has mainstreamed, like LOLcats and the Guy Fawkes mask of Anonymous, are not necessarily transferring with them its more sinister qualities. However, online anti-feminist "men's rights" identifying subcultures have certainly grown throughout the period of my research. These cultures are retaining many of the geeky "ForeverAlone" incel qualities as they go mainstream but have shed the anonymity and are using more mainstream platforms like Youtube, where commentators speak directly to camera challenging feminists on particular issues. Toward the end of my research I have also started to notice what may turn into a politicisation of the, until now, anti-political subcultures with the decline of the vitality of 4chan/b/ and the ascendance of more overtly political men's rights online communities. Either way, this study is useful as an examination of a moment in the development of online anti-feminism, which is always changing even as it is being described. As my literature review hopefully demonstrated I regard tracing cultural genealogies as a valuable approach in trying to analyse the development of online styles and movements because of their mercurial quality. For these reasons I hope that accounts such as this one will be vital to future analysis of online political subcultures.

Over the course of the period of my research, there have been two major changes in the broader landscape of online feminism and anti-feminism. When I began, feminism was establishing a voice online with numerous websites and blogs, as I noted in the introduction, but it was not responding directly to the attacks aimed at women and feminists from various subcultures. Since then, although the problem of analysis that I outlined above still exists, feminism has grown online and has learned to respond to these cultures in some effective ways. Although this research was exclusively about online *anti*-feminism, an exploration of the growing response would be an interesting avenue for further research, Secondly, when I began my research the term "trolling" had not entered common vocabulary and online

harassment in general was seldom discussed in mainstream media. Today, at the end of my research, this has also changed as harassment campaigns against mainstream figures including female politicians have made headlines and legislation has been enacted in several countries to respond to the problem (BBC 2014). Both of these changes present rich new areas for further enquiry. However, the issue of trolling legislation also means that researchers in this area are, whether it is their intention or not, implicated in debates about freedom of speech in ways that might influence public opinion and even the legislation itself. In the UK for example, the online harassment of high profile women has led to arrests, including in the case of the harassment of politicians such as Conservative MP Louise Mensch. In Mensch's case, the "troll" was engaging in genuine stalking and harassment and, it was reported, suffered from various psychiatric problems. However, it does set a dangerous precedent for the potential criminalisation of strong critical speech against the political class. We should ask, who gets to decide what exactly constitutes trolling? If it is something distinct from libel, stalking or threats, all of which are already legislated for, what further expansion of the criminalisation of speech should now be deemed acceptable in the name of stamping out trolling? It has led to a culture of panic about trolling; a term now used so broadly as to mean anything from online bullying to strong disagreement online.

In one case, Sky News harassed a "troll", 63-year-old Brenda Leyland, who had been tweeting *about* but not *to* the family of Madeline McCann, in a way that suggested they were involved in their daughters' death. Leyland then committed suicide after being confronted on live television by Sky's reporters (Murray 2014). This kind of story illustrates why researchers on the subject of offensive online speech have to be careful about the narratives they might influence. In Ireland, in November 2014, the Law Reform Commission pushed to increase the severity of criminal sentencing for "trolling" and to bring Ireland into line with European legislation on hate speech, applied online. The 'Issues Paper on Cyber-crime Affecting Personal Safety, Privacy and Reputation, including Cyber-bullying' is one of many attempts to legislate for online harassment. But throughout my research

there have been some worrying reports of arrests made for online speech, like those arrested during the London Riots (Carter 2011) and in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo massacre (Daniella 2015). This is an enormous topic, which would require specialist study and great legal precision to engage with in depth, but even from these observations it is clear that the broader context of how public opinion might shape legislation at this important moment must be kept in mind. One way of addressing this problem is to clarify, as I have, that this is a niche online subculture and can't be generalised across the culture, in order to avoid research like this being used to further a culture of moral panic about online speech and potentially restrictive legislation.

Research on this topic also has to be considered in terms of how it influences debates about freedom of expression, given the context of increased legislation and online surveillance (Risen 2013). Some feminists have argued that claims to freedom of speech rights used in the context of trolling should not be used in the defence of these online harassers and that the framing of the debate in those terms is merely a way to undermine women's attempts to push back against a wave of abuse: "Too often, 'free speech' is defined in terms of the language and actions with which privilege is reiterated and defended. Such swarms show us how well worn ideals of free speech do not scale. Spreadability, instantaneity, labyrinthine backchannels and nodal proliferations do not inevitably secure a pluralist conversation – they are also used to fortify privilege" (Wilson, Fuller, McCrea 2013). Some feminists have attempted to avoid feeding into increased legislation for trolling (Phillips 2015, Penny 2013) through casting the trolls as counter-hegemonic and therefore a less legitimate target than what they regards as tabloid or Fox News establishment trolls. I don't share this analysis but I do agree that the rush to legislation gives greater powers to the state and imposes greater limits on speech and that this should be challenged. Legislation already exists to deal with pre-internet forms of malicious communication, harassment and libel. These problems should be dealt with in non legislative ways, through more speech, more research and more debate.

As a result of these considerations, I will attempt to address this in my own published research on the topic and will hopefully get the chance to explore the issue in more depth.

Feminists have already found clever ways to fight back without necessitating this kind of legislation. I might have assumed, analysing the issue back in 2010 when this research project began, that the ferocity of the attacks against feminism would silence and wither feminism online. Instead the opposite has happened. Terms of abuse such as “neckbeard” and “mansplaining” have become popular to describe the men who challenge feminism online. The image of the new atheist or gamer nerd wearing a fedora hat in a kind of feeble masculinist gesture has become a figure of ridicule (Knowyourmeme.com 2014). After the Elliot Rodger killings, as I documented, feminists used the #YesAllWomen hashtag on Twitter to such great effect that it came to define the debate and opened up question in the popular press about the online cultures which Rodger belonged to and their connection to sexism and harassment in the offline world. I include these details if only to end a study filled with such dark subject matter on a hopeful note. Women and in particular feminists are still being attacked in ways that leave little to be optimistic about and the kind of men’s rights sites that are more interested in opposing feminism and anonymously attacking women than in increasing men’s rights have proliferated throughout this period. Despite all of this, there is a significant fight back from women and feminists, which has perhaps learned to become expert in rallying large numbers of women to the defence of feminists when such online attacks occur. This would also be a rich topic of further study.

The broader implications of these findings for feminism then are that anti-feminism in this period studied is using the styles of counterculture and leaderless revolution, including some of the same symbolism employed by the egalitarian occupy movement, marshalled against feminism and that there has to be a willingness on the part of feminists to reckon with this rather than continue to employ out-dated caricatures of what an anti-feminist look like. Feminism should continue to use tech-

savvy and sharp humour in their responses, because those have been more effective to date in wrenching back power from these subcultures.

Finally, if the anti-feminists are moving in a more political direction, as I've suggested, with formally political elements connected to these subcultures becoming more prominent, it should be a lesson to this new wave of social media-centric digital native feminists to do the same. While the feminism of Jezebel.com and tumblr focuses on increasingly niche areas of personal and sexual expression, the employment rights, material conditions and maternity care for women is not given the attention it deserves. Perhaps as these young feminists get older these issues will be brought into sharper focus. I hope my future writing will contribute to this movement to highlight the limits of cultural politics and the necessity for a more formalised materialist politics.

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Appendix

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 19:28	Post: 1	Comments: 37
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Sex advice, m-f oral sex		A: Starts with a pornographic image of ejaculation into the mouth of a young woman with girlish pig tail hairstyle	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		A: Several posters complaining about poor quality blow jobs, disdainful attitude toward real or imagined female sexual partners	

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 19:48	Post: 2	Comments: 7
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Request for “amputee hentai” porn		A: Disturbing Japanese hentai pornography involving amputees	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		A: As above	

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 20:00	Post: 3	Comments: 385

<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Fan photos of a pretty girl who makes youtube videos	A: gamer girl
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Topic regularly off topic, pornographic pictures of trans men's erect clitorises	A: Obsessive screenshots of young gamer girl followed by niche pornographic images

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 20:09	Post: 4	Comments: 2
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Pornography, Racist, Question	A: Racist incestuous fantasy		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
As above	A: As above		

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 20:16	Post: 5	Comments: 112
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
A young woman identified who is claiming to be blackmailed by someone who found her topless photos online	A: scandal of a young woman appearing topless online and being identified		

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above. Majority mocking her, a few defending.	A: As above. The original post is ambivalent but comments are generally mocking and cruel

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 20:23	Post: 6	Comments: 277
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Display of what the OP carries around - "Every day carry thread"		B: Display of pocket contents, hinting at violence (knife)	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Racism, mocking the OP, homophobia		A: Racism, homophobia	

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 20:31	Post: 7	Comments: 0
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Request to post 'faggots' from facebook		B: homophobia, possible attempt to start intimidation campaign and share semi private facebook info	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
none		none	

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 20:32	Post: 8	Comments: 18

<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Request to know b's state of mind	B: Implies unhealthy or drug induced mental state
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Some mocking/absurd, some as above	B: as above

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 20:38	Post: 9	Comments: 60
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Advice on trans sexuality, traps	A: desire to know if being attracted to "traps" is gay		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
As above	A: As above		

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 20:42	Post: 10	Comments: 118
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Geeky fashion advice Request for opinion on Sonic the hedgehog t-shirt	B: Geek identification and affectations		

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	B: as above

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 20:47	Post: 11	Comments: 13
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Request for “legs or hotdog thread”		A: Meme based on mocking women taking photos of their legs	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		A: as above	

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 20:51	Post: 12	Comments: 62
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Question about transexuality, pornographic		A: Transgressive sexuality	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		A: As above	

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 20:56	Post: 13	Comments: 0

<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Facebook profile, attempt to 'out' topless woman	A: Blackmail of woman in topless pic
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
none	none

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 20:58	Post: 14	Comments: 0
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Anonymous	A: Hacker identity		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
none	none		

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 21:00	Post: 15	Comments: 18
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Drugs, advice	B: Transgression, illegality, drugs		

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	B: As above

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 21:04	Post: 16	Comments: 297
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Porn, cartoon foxes with human female genitals		B: geek porn, niche	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 21:09	Post: 17	Comments: 246
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Rolling numbers, role playing game giveaway		B: gamer culture	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Majority trying to win the game, others mocking OP		C: misogyny, racism, "go kill yourself" etc	

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 21:13	Post: 18	Comments: 7

<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Coding	C: typical but not on topic
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	As above

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 21:17	Post: 19	Comments: 147
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Video game trick	C: secret trick for Mario		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Derailed with porn	A: extreme porn		

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 21:21	Post: 20	Comments: 57
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Suicidal OP, advice	B: suicide, transgression		

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	As above

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 12:44	Post: 21	Comments: 293
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Mathematical thought experiment		B: Gives a indication as to the educational backgrounds of the posters	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Jesus, schadenfreude comedy		C: Derailed with abuse	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 12:50	Post: 22	Comments: 1
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Racism, nudity OP encouraging 4chan to look up a user of an app who has posted naked images of herself.		A: Image shows a black woman with semen on her face and a watermelon being squeezed on top of her head. Invitation to exploit a woman's topless photos.	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 12:56	Post: 23	Comments: 206

<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Relationship advice, rejection from women	A: Rejection by women
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	A: Rage at being rejected by women

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 13:11	Post: 24	Comments: 13
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Underage, lenient moderation policy of 4chan	B: Mischevious, indicates age		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
As above	As above		

Date: 27/07/14	Time: 13:13	Post: 25	Comments: 1
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Pornography	B: Niche 'scat' porn		

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Making jibe at OP's mother	As above

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 13:25	Post: 26	Comments: 213
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Fans of a Russian-Japanese girl who looks like an anime character discussing her and sharing photos		A: Anti-celebrity, making a fanworld around an unknown person/obscure topic	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 13:30	Post: 27	Comments: 17
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Rolling, Star trek image, picking profile pic		B: Geeky interests	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 13:33	Post: 28	Comments: 6

<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Guess our nationality	C: Racism, sexism
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Racist responses	As above

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 13:36	Post: 29	Comments: 148
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Racism, rape, video games	A: Racism, anal rape, video games		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
As above	As above		

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 13:39	Post: 30	Comments: 14
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Genocide, purge	A: misanthropic		

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above, porn	As above

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 13:41	Post: 31	Comments: 58
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Fight Club		A: Fight club	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Racism, fight club		A: as above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 13:43	Post: 32	Comments: 101
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Rage against women who reject the OP		A: rage against women for rejecting the OP	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Mocking the OP, and as above		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 13:48	Post: 33	Comments: 8

<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Music recommendation	C: Music recommendation
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above, racism	B: Racist terms used

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 13:52	Post: 34	Comments: 170
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Misogyny, fake geek girls	A: woman in “cosplay” outfit as example of attention seeking inauthentic geek girl		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
As above	A: as above		

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 13:57	Post: 35	Comments: 0
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Image daring anyone to find the OP’s info behind 7 proxies	B: shows interests and security habits		

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	As above

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 14:00	Post: 36	Comments: 140
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Twinks		B: niche porn, transgressive	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 14:09	Post: 37	Comments: 39
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Games		C: Games	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 14:11	Post: 38	Comments: 5

<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Rape	C: lack of sympathy for rape
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	As above

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 14:16	Post: 39	Comments: 3
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Sexual fantasies about a woman in a photo posted	B: Fantasy woman		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Disgust at women's vaginal odour	C: disgust at women's vaginas		

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 14:21	Post: 40	Comments: 102
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Video game advice request	C: Video game advice		

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	As above

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 18:35	Post: 41	Comments: 32
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Penis size		B: Masculinity	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Penis size		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 18:31	Post: 42	Comments: 24
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Trashy women, drug dealing step father		B: indication of age, hatred of father figure	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 18:38	Post: 43	Comments: 12

<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Israel and Gaza conflict	B: indication of level of engagement with politics
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Anti-semitism and some minor anti-american sentiment	As above

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 18:41	Post: 44	Comments: 16
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Anti-Cosplay feminists	A: anti-feminism, misogyny		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Anti-feminist, misogynist	As above		

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 18:48	Post: 45	Comments: 137
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Racism	B		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
As above	As above		

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 18:52	Post: 46	Comments: 3
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Technical problem posting on 4chan		C: just technical problem	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 18:55	Post: 47	Comments: 4
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Favourite anime movie		C: just anime conversation	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 19:02	Post: 48	Comments: 1
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Girl on life support story		C: 'newfags'	

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Mocking her, using tern 'newfags'	As above

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 19:05	Post: 49	Comments: 112
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Smart phone technology		C: phones	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 19:07	Post: 50	Comments: 13
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Suicide, gruesome picture of mutilated penis		B: state of mind of users	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 19:34	Post: 51	Comments: 79

<u>Post Topic</u> Favourite cigarettes	<u>Relevancy</u> C: cigarettes
<u>Comment Topics</u> As above	<u>Relevancy</u> As above

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 19:36	Post: 52	Comments:
<u>Post Topic</u> If 4chan were a university	<u>Relevancy</u> A: self awareness, self-definition		
<u>Comment Topics</u> Racism, sexism etc	<u>Relevancy</u> A: anti-feminism		

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 19:41	Post: 53	Comments: 6
<u>Post Topic</u> Retro gif of an alien	<u>Relevancy</u> C		
<u>Comment Topics</u> 'lol' etc	<u>Relevancy</u> C		

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 19:44	Post: 54	Comments: 5
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Suicide, race, misanthropy, massacre		B: misanthropy, suicide	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		Racism and as above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 19:50	Post: 55	Comments: 3
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Incontinence		B: confessional masculinity	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Anal masturbation		B: questionable heterosexuality	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 19:52	Post: 56	Comments: 6
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Monday, gay male oral sex image		B: homosexuality	

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Sarcastic comments	C: sarcasm

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 19:55	Post: 57	Comments: 13
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Pedobear, request for paedophilic imagery		B: transgression	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
FBI		B: awareness of being watched	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 19:58	Post: 58	Comments:
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Anti-homosexuality		B: sexuality	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 20:10	Post: 59	Comments: 263

<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Tumblr, feminism, trigger warnings	A: anti-feminism
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	As above

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 20:24	Post: 60	Comments: 9
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Question, reasons to get off the internet	B: self aware nerd/slob identity		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
As above	As above		

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 23:17	Post: 61	Comments: 7
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Advice, suicide	B		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
As above	B		

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 23:21	Post: 62	Comments: 300
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Computer code advice, anti-corporate, hacker		B: identity	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 23:23	Post: 63	Comments: 26
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Mocking feminism on tumblr		A: anti-feminist	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above Ends in woman poster criticising feminism but then told tits or gtfo		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 23:36	Post: 64	Comments: 2
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Mocking 'transphobia'		A: attitudes to trans	

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	As above

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 23:38	Post: 65	Comments: 18
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
“things you like”, image of jesus nailed to a swastika		B: Transgression, anti-conservative values	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Images of girls in stockings		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 23:43	Post: 66	Comments: 15
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Fake request for rating of profile pic		A: masculinity	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
“kill yourself” “beta male” etc		As above	

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 23:45	Post: 67	Comments: 213

<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Boxxy thread	A: obsessing over vlog girls
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	As above

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 23:54	Post: 68	Comments: 4
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Question about crying	A: masculinity		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
As above	As above		

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 23:57	Post: 69	Comments: 212
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Wife's death fantasy	A: misogyny		

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	As above

Date: 28/07/14	Time: 23:58	Post: 70	Comments: 28
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Fake post by girl looking for advice		A: misogyny, subculture ettiquette	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Tits or gtfo		As above	

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 00:18	Post: 71	Comments: 18
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Racism, imaginary town called niggerton		B: Social Darwinism, biological determinism, racism	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 00:21	Post: 72	Comments: 1

<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
What does /b/ think of my gf?	A: sexism
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
sexist	As above

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 00:24	Post: 73	Comments: 18
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Name my bird	C		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Mixture of innocent and aggressive responses	B: subculture rules, policing		

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 00:28	Post: 74	Comments: 20
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
B has gone soft, allowing reddit to post from b	C: policing the subculture		

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	As above

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 00:29	Post: 75	Comments: 14
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Opinion on a amateur woman's naked pic		A: misogyny	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
miosgyny		As above	

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 00:31	Post: 76	Comments: 3
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Asking for opinion on woman in photo		A: misogyny	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Negative ratings		As above	

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 00:41	Post: 77	Comments: 141

<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Sharing stories of ruining chances with crushes	B: rage at being rejected
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	As above

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 00:44	Post: 78	Comments:
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
How/ when would you kill? Patrick Bateman profile image	A: AP reference, murder, misanthropy		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
As above	A: misogyny		

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 00:47	Post: 79	Comments: 100
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Anti-femanons	A: misogyny		

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	As above

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 00:48	Post: 80	Comments:
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Norway, flags		B: racism	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
racism		As above	

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 13:53	Post: 81	Comments: 19
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Atheism, self-mocking		B: Identity	

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	As above

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 13:59	Post: 82	Comments: 67
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Cruelty to cats, racism		B: policing the subculture	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above, some challenges		As above	

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 14:02	Post: 83	Comments: 7
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Sharing women's topless photos from another social medium, kik		B: being turned on by spying and potentially humiliating a woman	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 14:09	Post: 84	Comments: 9

<u>Post Topic</u> masturbating	<u>Relevancy</u> B: masculinity, self-mocking
<u>Comment Topics</u> As above	<u>Relevancy</u> As above

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 14:14	Post: 85	Comments: 215
<u>Post Topic</u> Webms, porn	<u>Relevancy</u> B: interests, masculinity		
<u>Comment Topics</u> As above	<u>Relevancy</u> As above		

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 14:17	Post: 86	Comments: 99
<u>Post Topic</u> Islam, racism	<u>Relevancy</u> B: insight into politics and worldview		
<u>Comment Topics</u> As above	<u>Relevancy</u> As above		

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 14:21	Post: 87	Comments: 37
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Relationship/love advice		B: masculinity	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Misogyny, mocking, some sincere		C: masculinity, anger at rejection	

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 14:24	Post: 88	Comments: 112
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Video games, gore		C	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 14:28	Post: 89	Comments: 5
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Big bang theory		B: nerd masculinity/identity	

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
inane	As above

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 14:30	Post: 90	Comments: 71
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Favourite actors		B: masculinity	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 14:58	Post: 91	Comments: 22
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Advice, rating girlfriend		A: rating girlfriend	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 15:00	Post: 92	Comments: 54

<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Murder threat	B: identity, fantasy
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
Racism, mockery	As above

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 15:03	Post: 93	Comments: 15
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Favourite porn stars	B: sexuality, masculinity		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
As above	As above		

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 15:04	Post: 94	Comments: 67
<u>Post Topic</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
Racism, game	B: identity, politics, worldview		
<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>		
As above	As above		

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 15:10	Post: 95	Comments: 20
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Woman's photo, tits or gtfo		A	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Topless photo, possibly revenge, no time stamp		A	

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 15:14	Post: 96	Comments: 103
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Mocking 'ameritards'		B: gives a sense of who is online, politics	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 15:19	Post: 97	Comments: 283
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Attention seeking women 'sluts' etc		A: attention seeking women	

<u>Comment Topics</u>	<u>Relevancy</u>
As above	As above

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 15:31	Post: 98	Comments: 109
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Suicide, advice		B: identity	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 15:33	Post: 99	Comments: 0
<u>Post Topic</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
Porn, orchestrating attack on woman		A: identify as 'neckbeards', misogyny	
<u>Comment Topics</u>		<u>Relevancy</u>	
As above		As above	

Date: 29/07/14	Time: 15:36	Post: 100	Comments: 51

<u>Post Topic</u> Racism, pizza boy, tipping	<u>Relevancy</u> B: identity, politics
<u>Comment Topics</u> As above	<u>Relevancy</u> As above