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Positioning and Face Work on 4chan's /r9k/

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ABSTRACT:

This thesis uses theories of positioning and politeness to analyze a collection of anonymous discussion board posts gathered from 4chan's ROBOT-9001 message board. I provide an overview of 4chan's history and review recent literature focused on the website. I then examine how users direct gender-based insults at other users within a set of excerpts taken from the larger collection of posts, finding that users who express opposition to misogyny or sexism are identified by others as feminine through the usage of derogatory and misogynistic insults. Next, I examine a second set of excerpts, demonstrating how a user establishes and maintains her identity across multiple anonymous posts in order to respond to insults directed at her by other users. Finally, I conclude with considerations for further research for research interested in 4chan and anonymous text-based computer mediated communication.

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by

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Chapter 1 - Introduction: "it's anonymous, and it has no memory"

Despite moving from one physical place to another every few years in my childhood, during the 1990s and early 2000s, the internet provided a stable place-the forums, chat rooms, online games, e-mail accounts, and blogs were always there in the digital world, regardless of where I happened to be in the physical world. Growing up online, the internet was a place I could make and maintain friendships and community in ways I could not in the physical world. More than this, though, the internet felt like a place I had a more deliberate role in making and remaking myself. With each new online space or community I came to inhabit, I could take on new usernames, avatars, and ways of presenting myself. Writing in the early days of the internet, Turkle (1995) claimed that in "computer-mediated worlds, the self is multiple, fluid, and constituted in interaction with machine connections; it is made and transformed by language" (p. 15). The internet, Turkle hoped, would create an environment in which users view identities as malleable, constructed masks, rather than as a unified self bound to a body.

Nakamura (2002), however, points out that race and gender in cyberspace is not nearly as fluid as Turkle might have hoped, and is instead something constrained, marked, or obscured by community practices and interface designs themselves. One's racial and gender identities in the physical and embodied world, in other words, cannot be wholly avoided online. Similarly, Kendall (2002) criticizes Turkle for confusing "limited gender *exchangeability* (the ability to *represent* oneself, with variable success, as a different gender identity from one's offline identity) with gender *malleability* (an understanding of gender as constructed, fluid, and changeable)" (p. 222). Although offline and embodied identity characteristics like gender and race may take different forms online, they still matter.

With this in mind, this thesis turns its attention to the online message board 4chan. 4chan, which came online in 2003, is a discussion board website which allows users to post anonymously. It does not require visitors to register an account before posting on the site and provides no publicly accessible means of tracking the behavior of others on the site. 4chan lurked in the

peripheral of my online life but was never a place I called home. As my and

many of my online friends' interests included anime, video games, and tabletop

roleplaying games, 4chan and its many boards were the sort of thing that

came up in discussions from time to time. Although I was familiar with the

notoriety of its community, it was not until around 2008 that I had friends-both

online and offline-who frequented the site and, in turn, brought jokes, habits,

and discussion topics picked up on 4chan into our everyday interactions. Over

time, I became interested in how users on the website ascribe identities, or at

least something like it, to themselves and others in the course of discussions,

despite the apparent anonymity of the site, especially as numerous

controversies highlighted below involving the website and the ROBOT-9001

board in particular began to surface in the news. 4chan's creator and former

owner, Christopher "moot" Poole, has presented the site in an optimistic air,

stating:

> what's unique about the site is that it's anonymous, and it has no
>
> memory. There's no archive, there are no barriers, there's no registration.

These things that we're used to with forums don't exist on 4chan. And

that's led to this discussion that's completely raw, completely unfiltered.

(Poole 2010)

According to Poole, the anonymity and lack of "barriers" creates, at the best of

times, an environment where users are free to have "completely raw,

completely unfiltered" discussion. The site's anonymity and lack of a "memory"

or comprehensive archive produces an experience of what Knuttila (2011) refers

to as contingency and alterity. Contingency refers to an experiential state in

which there is an uncertainty as to what could happen next, as if anything is

possible. In experiencing this feeling of contingency on 4chan, then, one can

never be certain what they are going to find on the site or if they will ever see

certain kinds of content again. While contingency concerns *what* one interacts

with on 4chan, alterity refers to *who* one interacts with. Due to the site's

anonymity, one is always a stranger among strangers on 4chan, encountering

"groups of strangers, who can appear and disappear without a trace, an

audience neither detected, nor known and a discourse of images and text

beyond the individual user and out of the individual user's control" (Knuttila

2011). As a site of contingency and alterity, then, 4chan creates an

environment where one never knows exactly who or what they are going to

find or interact with in each new post or thread.

   While Knuttila and Poole may celebrate anonymity, contingency, and

alterity as a source of creativity and free discussion, this culture is neither

inclusive nor accessible to all. Instead, as studies of the website's popular

Random - /b/ board have found, user behavior on the site tends towards

hostile, exclusionary behaviors. Between 2008 and 2011, Phillips (2015) found

users on /b/ behaved in ways which indicated a handful of likely demographic

categories for the average /b/ user. These categories, however, are indicators

of *possible* demographic categories derived from behaviors rather than the

actual demographic categories the users belong to in the offline world. There

is, in other words "no way to empirically verify exactly who is posting exactly

what" on 4chan (Phillips 2015, 53). With this in mind, due to the prevalence of

discussion in American English focused on American popular culture from the

late 80s to early 2000s, the amount of time needed to gain fluency with the

board's cultural norms, along with the personal privacy and technical expertise

likely required to participate in discussion on the site, user's behavior on /b/

during this time period suggested the average user was likely an economically

privileged, white, American male between the ages of eighteen and thirty

(Phillips 2015, 53-54).

In addition to this, the frequency of transphobic, misogynistic, racist

behavior on /b/ has been found to create an environment largely inhospitable to

anyone other than white cis-genderd men. Examining misogynistic discourse on

/b/, Manivannan (2013) argues that misogynistic discourse is a boundary

policing strategy for disciplining and controlling new users who disregard cultural

expectations on /b/ by disclosing elements of their offline identity, such as

sharing pictures of themselves or revealing their gender identity. Although

misogynistic discourse on /b/ may be "less a reflection of [an] asymmetrical

power structure than of the desire for subcultural preservation" (Manivannan

2013, 125), Milner (2013) points out that whatever its intention or desired

effects may be, misogynistic discourse on 4chan nevertheless "reifies the board

as a male space" (p. 81), producing a male-centric environment in which

masculinity is able to operate unmarked–that is, one is assumed to be

masculine until evidence to the contrary is provided–and unchecked. Being

anonymous on 4chan, then, is "to be discursively male" (Milner 2013, 82).

Similarly, the prevalence of racism on the board establishes a white centrality,

in which whiteness remained masked while discussions of blackness were

marked through racialized, derogatory, and racist language. Discourses of

racism on /b/, whether circulated in earnest or through jokes, "helped establish

a participation structure premised on repression of diverse voice" (Milner 2013,

75), creating an environment hostile to non-white identities and ways of being.

In spite of the site's anonymity, identity matters on /b/. The circulation of racist

and misogynistic discourses creates an environment in which behaviors linked

to whiteness and masculinity can circulate freely with little challenge while other

forms of behavior are marginalized and excluded.

Examining transphobic discourse on /b/, Sparby (2017) argues that

behavior itself is the sort of thing which can be memetic. Users on /b/ may

enact "uncritical recapitulations of previous behaviors or of the way users

believe they are 'supposed' to behave" (Sparby 2017, 85) in order to perform

belonging with the larger community. Sparby (2017) refers to these behaviors

as memetic behaviors, using meme in a way which "distinguishes content from

behavior" (p. 86). The memes Sparby (2017) refers to "are cultural units that

spread any idea from person to person. They influence behavior, not only on

an individual level but also on a group, or collective, level" (p. 86). Memes,

Shifman (2014) tells us, "shape the mindsets, forms of behavior, and actions of

social groups" (p. 18). Put another way, behavior is contagious and behaviors

(including transphobic, racist, and misogynistic behaviors) on 4chan are subject

to imitation by users who hope to fit in or act as if they belong on the site.

This thesis examines behaviors related to misogyny and gender on

4chan. I examine how users fit in and stand out in two threads taken from the

site's ROBOT-9001 or /r9k/ board. When users stand out by marking

themselves as feminine or by voicing dissenting opinions opposing misogyny, they become the target of hostile and often misogynistic responses from others within the thread. The studies cited above pertain to the website's /b/ board, and on the one hand do not say anything directly about the cultures of /r9k/ and, on the other hand, provide contextualization of the ecology in which /r9k/ exists. Users on 4chan are free to travel from one board to the next, participating in as many different communities as they desire–a user who posts on /b/, in other words, could just as easily post on /r9k/. Things do change from board to board, such as specific rules and discussion topics, but the features of the site–anonymity and the lack of comprehensive archives–which produce the experience of alterity and contingency identified by Knuttila (2011), remain across boards. Furthermore, as users move from board to board, they potentially carry with them memetic behaviors (Sparby 2017) contracted from their time within a particular board or thread. /r9k/ no doubt has its own unique contagious behaviors, communities, and collective practices, yet, its borders are porous, and users from within and without 4chan can pass through it, bringing

with them memetic behaviors from elsewhere, and potentially taking with them memetic behaviors common to /r9k/. The remainder of this chapter provides an overview of 4chan in recent years, the two primary theoretical apparatuses used in my analysis, a discussion of my data collection and methodological practices, and an overview of the following three chapters.

4chan in recent years

In 2015, after twelve years as the site's sole administrator, Poole announced he would be retiring and transferring ownership of 4chan to Hiroyuki Nishimura. Nishimura, the founder of Japanese website 2channel, which 4chan was based on, remains 4chan's administrator and owner to this day. Poole would later indicate his reasons for retirement stemmed largely from the stress of dealing with one controversy after another on 4chan, and, in particular, as a result of the backlash he received from the 4chan community after banning discussion of GamerGate, a harassment campaign which grew out of a series of baseless accusations targeting video game developers and journalists, on the website in late 2014 (Kushner 2015).

Phillips (2018a, 23) characterizes GamerGate as a turning point in the

political tendencies of 4chan's userbase. In the past, users on the site had a

tendency towards right wing ideologies and behaviors. GamerGate, however,

solidified a shift towards far-right politics. Voicing support for GamerGate and

demonstrating fluency with 4chan's memes and references allowed those

aligned with far-right politics to make themselves known to supporters of

GamerGate, allowing them to join ranks among the 4chan crowd (Biddle 2014).

In addition to this, Phillips (2018a, 23) further highlights that *The Daily Stormer*,

a white supremacist website, began actively recruiting members from 4chan's

userbase by 2015. At this time, as well, the website's /pol/ board, known once

simply as "politics," but now titled "politically incorrect," had surpassed /b/ in

terms of popularity. Unlike /b/, discussion on /pol/ is expected to focus on

politics and has been described as:

> a "containment" board, allowing users to discuss generally distasteful
>
> content (even by 4chan standards) without disturbing the operations of
>
> other boards. Even though /pol/'s contents do revolve around politically

incorrectness, a simple visual scan of discussions at any given time makes it clear that the majority of posters subscribe to the "alt-right" movement, exhibiting characteristics of xenophobia, social conservatism, racism, and, generally speaking, hate (Hine et al. 2017, 2).

The rising popularity of /pol/ and 4chan's post-GamerGate shift to the right lead to the website's userbase participating in a series of initiatives supporting Republican candidate Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign in addition to fostering an environment hospitable to hostile, right wing discussion. Users on 4chan actively fanned the flames of a conspiracy theory known as Pizzagate by circulating information and discussion about the event on 4chan and other online platforms. Those supporting Pizzagate claimed the opposing Democratic presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton, Clinton's campaign staff, and other high-ranking politicians in the Democratic National Committee were running a child sex trafficking ring and Satanic cult in a Washington, DC based pizza restaurant (Silverman 2016). Online discussion of this eventually led to a wave of harassment directed at the shop's owner and those connected with the

restaurant (Kang 2016), including one man who decided to "self-investigate"

Pizzagate and firing a stray rifle shot in the restaurant (Lipton 2017).

By 2017, those on 4chan had moved on from Pizzagate, fixing their

attention on a new conspiracy theory known as QAnon, described as:

a kind of interactive fan fiction for the far right in which Trump is a

heroic figure arrayed against Hillary Clinton, [former U.S. president]

Barack Obama, and the "deep state", which includes all the recent past

presidents, who are said to have hatched a criminal plot to start wars

and traffic drugs and humans for money (McCarthy 2018).

Like GamerGate and Pizzagate, discussion of QAnon is not limited to

4chan, and spreads across the internet, prominently on Reddit and 8chan.

Phillips (2018b) points out that QAnon seems tailor made to grab news media

attention and eke out a platform for far-right voices on mainstream media

outlets.

Although /r9k/ is a separate board from /pol/, /r9k/ nevertheless exists in close proximity to both /b/ and /pol/. Just as users can and do travel from and inhabit /b/ and /r9k/, it would certainly not be a surprise if discourses, trends, and users from /pol/ found their way on /r9k/ and vice-versa.

In addition to this possibility, /r9k/ has also found itself wound up in actions off-site form 4chan and offline. In 2016, two self-identified white supremacists claimed in an interview with *The Daily* Beast (Nuzzi 2016) to have orchestrated a plot to transform Pepe the Frog-an anthropomorphic cartoon frog who quickly rose to popularity as a regular character in many memes and images shared on 4chan, Reddit, Tumblr, and elsewhere-into a symbol of white nationalism. Shortly after *The Daily Beast* interview was published, a pro-Trump meme featuring Pepe the Frog was shared by members of the Trump campaign (Firozi 2016). In turn, the Clinton campaign responded, referring to Pepe the Frog as a white nationalist symbol (Chan 2016), and a news cycle fixated on the far-right's new mascot, Pepe the Frog, was quick to follow.

More relevant to the study at hand, my data set includes hundreds of mentions and discussions of incels. Incel, short for "involuntary celibate," has been taken up by the manosphere–a loosely connected network of blogs, videos, websites, public figures, and social media pages focused on discussing masculinity and opposing progressive challenges to cishetero-patriarchy–and is used primarily to refer to cis-gendered heterosexual men who are unable to have desirable sexual relationships. Marwick and Lewis (2017) point out discussions of incels, along with discourse on the so-called "manosphere" in general, positions men as "the victims of feminism's social changes," while blaming feminism for "creating an unbalanced 'sexual marketplace'" which is harmful to society due to creating an environment in which only certain men are able to have sex (17).

Beyond discussion online, multiple mass murderers have identified themselves as incels. Elliot Rodger, who killed six and injured fourteen in Isla Vista, California in 2014, was the first mass killer to identify himself as an incel (Dewey 2014). Since Elliot Rodger, there have been multiple other killings

perpetrated by self-identified incels in North America (Dewey 2015, Chokshi

2018).

Regardless of whether these killers did or did not post on 4chan or /r9k/

directly, /r9k/ is nevertheless a site hospitable to incel discourse. Unlike moot's

original ban on discussion of GamerGate, no such ban has been put in place

on the site for discussion of incel-related topics or other discourses of

misogyny. Within my data set of 3479 threads, roughly 10% of the threads

contained a post with at least one direct mention of the term incel. Beyond

mere mention, the term is also used at times as something users directly

identify with or identify others as. Not only does /r9k/ serve as a platform for

discussions of incels, then, but it is also frequented by self-identified incels, as

well.

The case studies in chapter two and three focus specifically on text

circulated on /r9k/. However, the examples provided should not at all be

understood as outliers or abnormalities within 4chan's online environment.

Rather, they grow out of what we have seen is an already hostile habitat,

steeped in misogyny, racism, and other forms of violent bigotry for years that

has, at times, boiled over and out of the borders of 4chan onto other websites

and into the offline world itself–often, with violent consequences.

Positioning Theory

In a context like 4chan, where messages occur independent of bodies,

usernames, or other mechanisms that provide an anchor for statements to

cohere together across time as belonging to a particular speaker, positioning

provides a means to make sense of the way users on 4chan construct and

understand their own identities and the identities of others on the site.

Originally developed by Davies and Harré (1990) in the field of social

psychology, positioning theory has also has been applied to work in linguistics,

discourse analysis, communication studies, and elsewhere. Positioning theory

examines how participants come to participate in or occupy various social

categories (e.g. teacher/student, employee/customer) by way of positioning.

Positioning refers to "the discursive process whereby selves are located in

conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly

produced story lines" (Davies and Harré 1990, 48). Put another way, positioning

is the process by which participants in interactions come to make themselves

and others understandable in the context of that interaction. One's positions are

not static or prior to interactions but are, rather "immanent, reproduced moment

by moment in conversational action and carried through time" (Davies and

Harré 1990, 55). A single participant can, furthermore, come to occupy multiple

positions in the course of an interaction. Positions, then, manifest through

interactions and persist through time by repeated acts of positioning. Although

Davies and Harré suggest identity may be an expression of one's conscious

and subconscious psychological life, I use positioning theory in order to

examine how members of a conversation relate various categories and qualities

to one another, I intend to examine how it is users talk about one another and

themselves and the consequences that has for how users are seen or

portrayed online, rather than the constructed or internal identities expressed

through their online actions.

Acts of positioning occurs within "jointly produced story lines" (Davies and

Harré 1990, 48). Davies and Harré (1990) describe story lines as:

"the metaphor of an unfolding narrative, in which we are constituted in

one position or another within the course of one story, or even come to

stand in one position or another within the course of one story, or even

come to stand in multiple or contradictory positions, or to negotiate a

new position by 'refusing' the position that the opening rounds of a

conversation have made available to us" (53).

A story line, then, is a metaphor for the way in which participants come to take

on and potentially refuse positions. However, although a given story line carries

with it a certain set of positions that the participants are placed into or can

take on, each interaction creates "a braided development of several story lines.

. .organized through conversation and around various poles, such as events,

characters and moral dilemmas" (Davies and Harré 1990, 50). Thus, not only is

it possible for there to be multiple positions within a given interaction, so too is

it possible that multiple story lines are being constructed and interpreted within

the interaction as well. While participants in an interaction take on positions which, in turn, allow themselves and others to be intelligible in certain ways, the story lines play a role in determining which positions are available to participants, the conditions for occupying a position, the expectations attached to each position, and the ways in which positions relate to events and one another. The same position could appear within multiple story lines, however, those story lines might apply different expectations or qualities to that same position or, as Davies and Harré (1990) write: "cultural stereotypes such as nurse/patient. . .may be called on as a resource" within a story, but "these cultural resources may be understood differently by different people" (p. 50). Similarly, individuals in an interaction can each understand the interaction through different story lines, potentially leading to different positions being understood and different sorts of behaviors expected by each participant. In short, in an interaction, participants create one or more story lines which, in turn, include various positions and the various qualities attached to them and which, through the course of the interaction, participants may come to occupy,

reject, or attribute to others. As we see in chapter 2, multiple story lines are used which present certain positions with specific qualities attached to them available to users in the thread, which are taken up by users, attributed to others, or resisted through the course of the thread.

Importantly, story lines are not the sole determining factor in making positions meaningful. Rather, interpreting positions also relies on reference to prior experience, which thereby make those positioned in particular ways intelligible. Davies and Harré (1990) describe this process as "a person scanning their past experience for a concrete occasion on which to build an interpretation of the position they have been assigned" (p. 51). For example, someone positioned as a teacher would make sense of this position by reference to prior knowledge of what teachers are, how they act, etc. Similarly, we would expect someone to make sense of someone else's position through a similar mechanism, such as understanding someone else positioned as a student through reference to prior knowledge and experiences relating to students.

Van Langenhove and Harré (1999) have further classified various interrelated modes of positioning which can occur in interactions. The analysis in chapter 2 relies heavily on their conceptions of other-positioning, while chapter 3 relies on self-positioning. Other-positioning refers to the methods by which an interactant is positioned by someone or something other than themselves.

Van Langenhove and Harré (1999) also differentiate between three orders of positioning, demonstrating that positionings can come into question and are subject to dispute. First order positioning occurs in the first instance someone is positioned. This initial instance can be subjected to disagreement or negotiation, as a second order positioning can call it into question. Finally, a third order positioning is one in which an initial act of positioning is called into question in the absence of the target of that first order positioning. Although the distinction between first, second, and third order positioning does not factor heavily in my analysis, it is important to note that positions can be disputed and resisted within the course of an interaction.

In chapter 2, I do attend to the difference between acts of performative

positioning and accountive positioning. Performative positioning occurs in cases

of first order positioning and creates a metaphorical gap between the

positioning statement and the actions of the person being positioned.

Performative positionings "have immediate perlocutionary effect" (Van

Langenhove and Harré 1999, 21), meaning someone targeted by a performative

positioning must respond to it, either by accepting the position and carrying out

the actions associated with it or by attempting to reject it by calling it into

question or acting in ways contrary to the expectations associated with the

position. Instances of second and third order positioning, however, are acts of

accountive positioning, as they "involve talk about talk" by questioning a first

order positioning in some way (Van Langenhove and Harré 1999, 21). Put

another way, a *performative* positioning results in a *performance* of some kind-

the target of the positioning either performs in accordance with the position or

in opposition to it-while an *accountive* positioning, which questions why

someone self-positioned in some way or questioning a position one has been

other-positioned as, results in someone giving an *account* of a prior act of

positioning.

Self-positioning and other-positioning can both occur as acts of

performative positioning and as acts of accountive positioning and are further

broken down as acts of deliberate or forced positioning. Performative acts of

self and other-positioning are referred to as deliberate positioning. Deliberate

positioning occurs when interactants make statements about their own position

or the positions of others. A deliberate self-positioning occurs when a speaker

makes a claim about themselves or their identity. A deliberate other-positioning

occurs when a statement is made about the position or identity of someone

other than the speaker, who may or may not be present in the interaction.

Acts of accountive positioning, on the other hand, occur as forced

positionings. A forced self-positioning is one in which someone is made to

report some sort of information about themselves, such as someone being

asked "how have you been lately?" (Van Langenhove and Harré 1999, 26). The

person being asked this question is forced to position themselves and give an

account of how they are. Alternatively, they could ignore the question or attempt to change the subject but in doing so would nevertheless position themselves in response to the question. Similarly, forced positioning of others occurs when a position is applied to someone-whether present in the interaction or not-directly. For example, "consider three persons: Smith, his wife Jones, and their son. When the mother is blaming her son for coming home late, she can turn to her husband for support: for example, 'You tell him what kind of behavior this is…'" (Van Langenhove and Harré 1999, 27). In this case, Smith is forced into a position of needing to discipline his son. As with the case of forced self-positioning, Smith could play along with this position or attempt to resist it, but in either event, Smith is positioned in the first instance by Jones' statement. In chapter 2, I highlight acts of both deliberate and forced positioning, with the majority of other-positionings occurring as forced positionings. In chapter 3, I do not consider this distinction as closely in self-positioning.

Finally, acts self-positioning and other-positioning implicate one another. In positioning themself, a speaker also implicitly positions those they are speaking with. Conversely, in positioning someone else, the one doing the positioning implicitly positions themself, as well. If, for example, I say to someone "you got a good grade on this assignment," I position the person I am speaking to as someone who has a good grade and in doing so implicitly position myself as someone capable of giving grades or judging assignments. On the other hand, if I were to say "I hope I get a good grade on this assignment," I position myself as someone who receives grades and does assignments and implicate some other person in the position of a grade giver.

Positioning theory, then, provides a robust way to discuss the relationships constructed between people in discourse. In occupying and making sense of one's position in a particular interaction one also makes sense of others, both those within the particular interaction and those who might be outside of it. Similarly, in positioning and making sense of others, one's own positions are implied and made intelligible.

Face

In addition to positioning theory, I rely on Brown and Levinson's (1987)

work on politeness theory. Politeness theory, unlike common uses of the term

politeness, considers how participants maintain social images or reputations

among one another in conversation. Specifically, I utilize their concept of face

and face threatening acts in order to describe interactions observed in the

analysis. Building upon Goffman (1967), Brown and Levinson's (1987) work on

face provides a means of analyzing politeness in interaction. Face refers to "the

public self-image" that interactants have or attempt to achieve and is,

furthermore, "something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost,

maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction"

(Brown and Levinson 1987, 61). West and Trester (2012) show how face can

also be used to analyze online interactions. However, both Brown and Levinson

(1987) and West and Trester (2012) analyze cases in which participants are

clearly defined and identifiable across the course of an interaction or series of

interactions. On 4chan, interactants are not as easily identified across time, as

the site's anonymity makes it hard for viewers to determine for certain whether

multiple posts were made by the same individual user or not. Despite this, I

argue, we can address this challenge by attending to continuous positions and

the way in which they produce the effect of a unified, identifiable speaker

across multiple posts or interaction which, in turn, allows for examining the face

portrayed by the continuously maintained position.

Brown and Levinson (1987) specify two types of face a given speaker

may have–positive face and negative face. Face is further broken down into two

related types. The first, negative face, refers to "the want of every competent

adult member that [their] actions be unimpeded by others," while positive face

refers to "the want of every member that [their] wants be desirable to at least

some others," (Brown and Levinson 1987, 62) or, alternatively: "the positive

consistent self-image or 'personality'. . .claimed by interactants" (p. 61).

Any act which attempts to *reduce* the value of an interactant's positive or

negative face could be described as a face threatening act or FTA, using

Brown and Levinson's terminology. A negative FTA, then, is an act which

attempts to impede or halt the action or potential actions of another. Brown

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and Levinson (1989, 67-68) classify a whole host of negative FTAs, including:

making orders, requests, suggestions, threats, dares, offers, and promises

directed at others. These all, in one form or another, attempt to direct

someone's course of action towards a particular end, reducing the likelihood

that some courses of action will occur and increasing the likelihood that other

courses of action will occur. In the cases examined in this thesis I primarily

consider direct threats and comments regarding behavior as negative FTAs.

Next, a positive FTA is any act which indicates "that the speaker does not care

about the addressee's feelings, wants, etc" (Brown and Levinson 1989, 66).

The majority positive FTA's I observed came through the form of insults and

ridicule. While these insults may likely have been the result of the speaker not

caring about the addressee's feelings, I, again, consider these as attempts to

reduce the target's positive face-to, in other words, make others view the target

as *less* likable. As a corollary to FTAs, saving face refers to any attempt by

the target of an FTA to dismiss the FTA or positively impact their negative or

positive face.

In chapter 3, I primarily consider FTAs made baldly, without redress (Brown and Levinson 1989, 68-70). An FTA made baldly, without redress is one which occurs "in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible" (Brown and Levinson 1989, 69) and contrasts with FTAs made with regressive action, which attempt to mitigate or soften the damage done to the recipient's face. Put another way: the FTAs I consider are primarily direct, unambiguous insults and threats.

Brown and Levinson (1989) examine the face of a *specific interactant*, which requires being able to identify that *same* interactant across time throughout the duration of the interactions observed. Names, bodies, usernames, avatars, audible voice, and so on all provide mechanisms for identifying a specific interactant's behavior across time. However, when we make the shift to anonymous and disembodied online environments, we lose these tracking mechanisms-we cannot easily nor reliably track a specific interactant across time. Indeed, on 4chan, we can observe *one* post made by *one* user and we have no guarantee any additional posts were made by that

same user. What we *can* observe in this context, as I show in chapter 3, are continuous positions.

Methodology

The two threads I analyze in the following chapters were taken from a collection of 3479 discussion threads gathered from /r9k/'s archive in early September 2018. Many boards on 4chan now store an archive of recently deleted posts which can be viewed by the public. /r9k/'s archive stores three days' worth of recently archived posts. These archived threads can no longer be commented on, and after spending 72 hours in the archive, they are removed from public view. Of course, not everything ends up in this archive–threads and posts deleted by moderators for violating site rules, for example, are not accessible on the public archive. Similarly, moderators could opt to remove a thread from the archive after the fact. Although not comprehensive, 4chan's archives do provide a large collection of recent posts which provide a sample of activity from the past few days on a given board.

I then generated a count of different words appearing repeatedly across these threads. Terms repeated as part of the site's interface (e.g. "Anonymous" usernames, links and page titles, etc.) were disregarded in the overall word count, in order to focus on the content of posts made by users on the board. While it is possible users used the terms repeated by the interface which were disregarded in posts, these terms by and large did not appear to directly relate to facework or positioning.

With these interface-related terms bracketed, attention was turned to terms used to refer to individual and group identities. For this, common, everyday terms were considered–e.g. "woman," "communists," "bros," etc.-along with derogatory terms and slurs used to refer to identities. From here, individual terms were grouped under larger conceptual headings: terms relating to femininity, masculinity, whiteness, blackness, nationality, and sexuality. This was done in order to identify which kinds of identities were referenced the most in discussion. From this, terms relating to femininity were found to appear in the dataset overwhelmingly more than terms relating to masculinity, sexuality, race,

or nationality. 1173 terms were coded as relating to femininity, which was roughly 3000 more terms than the next largest category, terms relating to masculinity, which contained 9895 coded terms. As a result, threads containing discussion of femininity were considered for analysis.

Terms were considered relating to femininity according to three different criteria. Common English terms relating to feminine identities ("woman," "girl," "girlfriend," "wife," "lady," etc.) were coded first, followed by common English-language slurs and derogatory terms rooted in sexism and misogyny. After this, sub-cultural terms for discussing feminine identities were identified through reading threads within the collection.

The three subcultural terms considered were "fembot," "roastie," and "femanon." Milner (2013, 82) points out that the term "femanon"-as in "female anonymous"-is used to refer to women who browse 4chan and was found to occur on /r9k/ as well. A similar term, "fembot" appeared as well, as the feminine counterpart to the term "robot," which is used as a means of identifying regular users of the board. Therefore, fembot functions as the

gendered, feminine counterpart of robot. "Roastie," on the other hand is used

as a derogatory term for referring to sexually active women and does not

appear to have a masculine or gender-neutral counterpart on /r9k/, similar to

more commonmplace derogatory terms "whore" and "slut."

After identifying these terms, the contexts in which coded terms appeared

were considered. This involved reading the particular post and thread the term

appeared in, along with an additional coding of each term as being used in an

instance of self-positioning or other-positioning. Finally, in cases which other-

positioning was directed at another user or post within a thread, the post being

other-positioned was considered and coded as an instance where another user

was other-positioned as a feminine identity.

Threads were then organized by the amount of terms relating to

femininity they contained. From this, I selected the thread which contained the

highest count of terms relating to femininity-248 in total-for the analysis found in

chapter 2. Next, the first thread within this ordering which began with a user

explicitly identifying as a feminine term-in this case, a fembot-was chosen.

Although this thread had the sixth highest frequency of feminine-related terms,

for a total of 109, the fact that it began with a user self-identifying as a

femanon presented an interesting case when considered alongside

Manivannan's (2013) study on /b/, in which she found women who self-

disclosed their gender were met with misogyny and harassment. In the case

study presented in chapter 3, I find that the user is met with similar

harassment. However, unlike the cases examined by Manivannan, this user

appears to remain active within the thread and is not immediately deterred by

harassment.

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I provided an overview of studies and history of 4chan,

along with outlining the theoretical backing for my analysis. 4chan's /b/ board

has been identified as a site of racist, misogynistic, and transphobic behaviors

and discourse. As a result, /b/ provides an environment where discourses of

whiteness, masculinity, and cisnormativity can circulate unchecked and in ways

which mask the central presence of these categories on the board. Although

/r9k/, the subject of my analysis, is a separate board than /b/ and studies of

/b/ do not necessarily predict behaviors on /r9k/, Sparby (2017) argues that

popular behaviors on 4chan are capable of being contagious or memetic. Users

repeat, recapitulate, and remix common behavioral patterns on /b/ in order to

signal or perform belonging. Individuals carry these memetic behaviors with

them in their online and offline movements and /b/ is but one board among

many on 4chan, with users free to move from one board to another, all of

which share similar affordances of anonymity and small, temporary archives. If

/b/ is host to these behaviors, then, it stands to reason that such contagious,

memetic behavior has diffused out from /b/ into other boards, such as /r9k/.

I also provided an overview of positioning theory, which I use in my

analytical chapters in order to analyze a series of excerpts from a larger thread

on /r9k/. Positioning theory provides a toolset for analyzing how participants in

interaction make themselves and others intelligible through the ascription of

implicit or explicit identities and attributes, which carry with them moral

judgements, behavioral expectations, and relations to other positions and

objects. In chapter 2, I examine a thread in which users who direct dissent at

narratives of misogyny and hostility towards women are explicitly marked by

others in the thread with derogatory, misogynistic terms. I describe these

discursive markings as gendered positionings. The terms applied to those

expressing dissent position their targets and ascribe gender to them, attempting

to make the targets intelligible-in this case-as feminine to others in the thread

in the absence of other disclosures or markers of gender. From this, I conclude

that it is the expression of dissent itself which functions as a marker of gender

within this thread-opposing misogyny, in other words, makes one appear as

feminine to others within the thread and marks one as a target for further

misogynistic harassment.

From here, chapter 3 moves on to examine a user self-positioning herself

in a gendered manner, identifying herself as feminine. I combine face with

positioning theory in order to examine how this user's face modulates across

posts. In the thread, a user or multiple users are able to self-position in such a

way that produces the effect of a continuous speaker across multiple posts

despite the site's anonymity-in other words, anonymous user(s) are able to maintain the same identity across multiple posts. I refer to this effect to as continuity of position, referring to the reiteration or reintroduction of the same position across multiple posts. In this instance, continuity of position allows those participating in the continuous position to attempt face saving acts in response to face threatening acts directed at the continuous position throughout the thread. The face threatening acts examined in this chapter primarily occur in the form of misogynistic insults and threats of violence at the user. In this way, they function as boundary policing strategies which serve as attempts to either alter the targeted user's behavior or to drive her off of the board entirely.

Finally, chapter 4 provides implications and directions for further research. The main insights from this thesis, gendered positioning and continuity of positioning in an anonymous online forum, suggest the possibility of further research into identity construction and attribution in anonymous, computer mediated contexts. Positioning theory and face work are applicable to 4chan discourse, and although it might require large sums of data to accomplish,

painting a larger picture of the operative identities, their relationships, and their

associated qualities is a possibility. Doing so would provide a more

comprehensive and nuanced map of how the dominant culture on 4chan's

boards interact with various identity groupings and subgroupings, attending to

the ways in which a given board is hospitable to some forms and

performances of gender, sexuality, and race and hostile towards others.

Similarly, these analytics should be applicable to other online contexts in which

users use pseudonyms, avatars, or legal names. Knowing someone's username

or seeing an avatar does not mean gendered positioning stops or continuity of

positioning no longer needs to be maintained. Finally, the possibility of

contagious, memetic behavior within the digital and embodied ecologies of

online and offline spaces, along with the implications of the operations of

positioning and face demonstrated in this analysis, suggests we must strive to

better understand the ways in which behaviors travel with users and bodies as

they move from space to space, whether digital or physical.

Overall, by demonstrating the applicability of positioning and face in understanding identity and interaction on 4chan, this thesis provides means for identifying and potentially resisting misogyny in online spaces. Positioning, gendered positioning, and continuity of position all provide means of understanding a user's identity as something more than their username, offline identity, or other self-disclosed elements of themselves. Understanding what attributes and behaviors communities relate to certain positions can bring to light the kinds of identities which are privileged or marginalized within that community. Furthermore, continuity of position, as observed in chapter 3, provides a strategy for which users can attempt to resist misogynistic face threatening acts in online spaces while also maintaining and asserting their gendered identity.

Chapter 2 - "You're not an alpha male": Gendered other-positioning on /r9k/"

In this chapter, I apply positioning theory (Davies and Harré 1990) to a thread taken from the larger collection of /r9k/ posts assembled for this project. In particular, I apply positioning theory to a thread in which users are other-positioned (Van Langenhove and Harré 1999) as various derogatory, feminine identities. Developed by Davies and Harré (1990), positioning theory considers the ways in which speakers make sense of themselves and others in discourse, through relations to others both within and outside a particular interaction. Other-positioning (Van Langenhove and Harré 1999) refers to a process whereby a speaker attributes a particular identity or set of qualities, judgements, or duties to another individual, either within the current interaction or elsewhere. Through this analysis, I find that posts which challenge dominant trends of misogyny within the thread are other-positioned through derogatory and misogynistic terms which also gender the person other-positioned as feminine. Overall, I argue that this other-positioning occurs specifically in

response to expressions of dissent, marking feminine positions on /r9k/

simultaneously as the position from which one can voice dissent and as a

position which marks one as uncredible or dismissible.

The thread analyzed here focuses on discussions of female joggers

experiencing catcalling and other forms of sexual harassment, with the majority

of posts expressing misogynistic views. This thread was selected due to

featuring the highest frequency of terms relating to femininity appearing

throughout the thread. Specifically, I examine posts within the thread that other-

position users within the thread through the use of misogynistic, derogatory

terms relating to femininity, analyzing the posts initiating the other-positioning

and the posts being other-positioned.

From this analysis, I conclude that users are other-positioned as

derogatory terms relating to femininity in the thread in response to expressions

of disapproval directed at the dominant trends of misogyny appearing in other

posts. In other words, misogynistic posts in the thread makes the dissenter

intelligible to others as a feminine-related identity position. In addition to this, I

find that these acts of other-positioning serve as attempts to delegitimize or

challenge points raised by the user in their original post.

Analysis

In the following analysis, I consider instances in which users participating

in the thread are other-positioned as feminine by others. I examine both the

post which is other-positioned and any posts participating in the other-

positioning. As demonstrated below, posts from the thread other-positioned as

some sort of feminine identity bear no direct mention of the user's offline

identity or gender. Thus, the other-positioning along gendered lines occurs not

by reference to a user's body or disclosure of information concerning their

identity. Rather, as I will demonstrate, this other-positioning is applied to users

who speak out against the misogynistic behaviors of others within the thread or

on /r9k/ as a whole.

I refer to these acts of positioning as forced gendered positioning.

Beyond being acts of other-positioning in general, an act of gendered

positioning also attributes a gender to the target of the positioning. As a result,

gendered positionings attribute both a position and a gender to the target. For example, if I refer to someone as my sister, I position that person as bearing a certain familial relationship to me and also gender them as feminine. As Milner (2013), Manivannan (2013), and Phillips (2015) observe, behavioral practices on 4chan's Random - /b/ board operate in a way that renders masculinity as the default gender users are expected to conform to and allows masculinity to operate unmarked in discussion-that is, users do not necessarily need to self-ascribe masculine gender, as it is already assumed by others. Although /b/ is a separate board than /r9k/, the thread examined within this chapter demonstrates a similar, unmarked masculine centrality. As a result, an act of gendered positioning on 4chan also makes explicit an identity trait-gender-that is kept obscured by the anonymity afforded to users and by the practices of the community at large which tend towards avoiding explicit self-ascription of gender. In being gendered as feminine, furthermore, a user is made to stand outside the masculine centrality functional within a thread or board.

The thread I have selected for analysis focuses on discussion of female

joggers, catcalling, and sexual harassment. The excerpts taken from this thread

are largely hostile, containing racist, misogynistic, and homophobic comments,

along with discussions of sexual harassment that may be triggering to some

readers. In reproducing those excerpts here, those same messages are

recirculated in a new context. However, in doing so, my intent is neither to

endorse nor celebrate them. Instead, I hope to provide an analysis of how

such hostile discourse is used in an online environment as a means of

excluding others and inoculating the community from criticism.

The opening post of the thread provides a link to a BBC article titled

"From catcalls to murder: What female joggers face on every run" (Passad

2018). This article discusses various forms of harassment faced by women

while jogging, along with the death of Mollie Tibbetts, a woman who was

murdered by a man stalking her while on a run. The majority of the posts in

the thread contain messages which challenge whether catcalling is a form of

sexual harassment, mock women for jogging in the first place, and which

participate in misogynistic discussion more broadly.

A portion of posts within the thread do attempt to speak out against the

misogynistic trends of other posters or attempt to challenge other posters' views

of women. However, many of these instances of dissension are responded to

negatively by other posts, with mockery, harassment, and other attempts at

dismissing the dissenting position. Most notably, all instances in which users

are other-positioned as feminine in this thread are directed at posts which

feature dissenting opinions. For this analysis, I examine these exchanges in

which users are other-positioned as feminine, highlighting how such other-

positioning occurs in response to the expression of dissent rather than through

reference to the other's embodied identity, self-disclosure of identity, or other

behavioral traits.

Excerpt 1

Excerpt 1.1 shows the thread's opening post and includes a link to a

BBC article on harassment faced by female joggers along with the text ">Being

a male is harde-." On 4chan, a single "**>**" before text formats the text with a

green color and is typically used as a means of quoting text from other posts,

telling stories, or creating hypothetical speakers. In the excerpt below, the "**>**" is

used to voice an imagined speaker voicing a viewpoint opposed by the post's

author.

Excerpt 1.1:

Anonymous 08/30/18(Thu)10:10:58 No.47831617

>Being a male is harde-

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-45337810

Excerpt 1.2 responds to the opening post by directing derogatory and

misogynistic remarks at the user who made the post in excerpt 1.1. Taken

together, these posts demonstrate how forced, gendered other-positioning can

occur on /r9k/.

Excerpt 1.2:

Anonymous 08/30/18(Thu)13:18:48 No.47834071

>>47831617

buy a treadmill you stupid whore oh w8 u secretly like to show off your

whore body i forgot

Excerpt 1.1 and 1.2 can be taken as part of a story line within the

thread. In this particular case, excerpt 1.2 receives no direct replies and can be

considered the end of the story line. However, it is worth noting that the post

in excerpt 1.1 is referenced as part of multiple story lines within the thread. It

receives multiple direct and implicit replies from other posts in the thread, being

used as a resource in multiple different kinds of conversations and comments.

At the moment, however, I consider only this short story line.

The story line begins through the introduction of an imagined speaker

who claims that being a male is harder than, presumably, being a woman. The

text ">Being a male is harde-" makes available a position in the story line for

those to occupy who agree that being a male is harder than being a woman or

any other potential group but does not directly position a specific person or

user. In this way, this statement enacts a first-order, intentional, and deliberate

other-positioning in which the person being positioned is not only absent from

the situation, but entirely indeterminate. In doing so, the positioning creates

both a hypothetical speaker–there is some imaginary person or character in the

story line saying these words–and creates a position that *can* come to be

occupied by others in the thread depending on their own behavior and self-

positionings. Because of this, it can be considered a performative kind of other-

positioning. Whether or not someone comes to occupy the position depends on

their performance and response to it, rather than the positioning act

immediately imposing the position on a target.

In addition to this other-positioning, providing a link to the BBC article

functions as an attempt to undercut the misogynistic position introduced in the

post's opening lines, responding to the hypothetical speaker as if interrupting

them, presenting the article as evidence to the contrary. Although not explicitly

stated, this suggests that the poster's opinion on the matter is that men do not,

in fact, have it harder than women. In this way, the user enacts a first-order,

performative, tacit self-positioning as someone opposed to the idea that men

have a harder time than women. Furthermore, the two positions presented in this opening post-the misogynist who believes men have harder lives and the other opposed to that position-introduce the thread's story line as one of antagonism between the two positions. Users responding to the thread and remaining within this story line, at the moment, have available one of two opposed positions.

Through their behavior, excerpt 1.2 takes up the misogynistic position in a tacit way. The story line at play here, again, presents a position which views men as having harder lives than other groups. Excerpt 1.2, in responding to the latter position and its refutation, tells the user to "buy a treadmill," responding to the content of the article and the issues faced by female joggers by presenting treadmills as an alternative. The derogatory and misogynistic language used in the comment along with the following line, "oh w8 [wait] u [you] secretly like to show off your whore body i forgot," further clarify that excerpt 1.2's message is in opposition to the position taken up by excerpt 1.1. Not only does the user present a treadmill as a solution to catcalling and other

forms of harassment, but they also demonstrate a misogynistic perspective and direct misogynistic and derogatory remarks at the user who began the thread through the usages of "you," "u" and "your body" to refer to the OP and their body. In this way, excerpt 1.2 enacts a tacit but deliberate self-positioning as the position introduced by the hypothetical speaker in excerpt 1.1.

Excerpt 1.2, furthermore, directs an act of intentional and forced gendered other-positioning at the user who made the post from excerpt 1.1. Until this point, the positionings observed have not necessarily been gendered. It is possible that anyone of any gender could occupy the position of the hypothetical speaker saying men have it harder, just as it is possible anyone of any gender could occupy the opposing position. However, given the storyline, excerpt 1.2 enacts an intentional, forced gendered other-positioning targeted at the user who made the post in excerpt 1.1. This is achieved primarily through the initial statement, "buy a treadmill you stupid whore." On the one hand, this responds to the content of the article shared by excerpt 1.1. Women face harassment while jogging in public spaces and in response excerpt 1.2

proposes that the user purchases a treadmill which would allow them to jog in

a private space rather than a public space, thus avoiding harassment. As a

result, this positions the user as a woman who experiences harassment on jogs

and, because of that, also genders the user as feminine. Further enforcing this

gendering are the repeated, derogatory uses of "whore" directed at the user

carries with it an association of femininity and aids in the gendered positioning

of the user who made the post in excerpt 1.1 as feminine.

Excerpt 1.1 bears no explicit mention of the user's gender or other

elements of their offline identity, nor is there any mention as to whether or not

they user is interested in jogging at all. Furthermore, as this interaction is

occurring in an anonymous, computer mediated context, there are neither

embodied characteristics nor traits such as an avatar or name attached to the

user making the initial post, meaning there is little one could base an

assumption of the user's gender. The gendered other-positioning from excerpt

1.2 happens, then, in the absence of both self-disclosures of identity from the

user who made the first post and in the absence of traits one might use to

base an assumption on. What is present in excerpt 1.1, however, is an

expression of opposition towards a misogynistic viewpoint. As a result, this

suggests that this expression of dissent is the behavior which marks the user

as feminine in the eyes of the user who made the post in excerpt 1.2. As we

will see in the following excerpts, this trend continues throughout the thread,

with users associating a disapproval of misogynistic behaviors with a feminine

identity, demonstrated through recurrent instances of gendered other-positioning.

Excerpt 2

Excerpt 2.1 occurs prior to excerpt 1.2 in the thread but responds to OP

in a different manner than 1.2, creating a separate line of discussion. Excerpt

2.1 is the first in the thread to discuss the BBC article shared in the thread's

opening post in a somewhat positive manner. In response, excerpts 2.2 and

2.3 reply negatively to the post in excerpt 2.1, gendering the user as feminine.

This gendered occurs in the absence of any explicit disclosure of the user's

offline identity in excerpt 2.1. Rather, it appears to occur as a result of the

expression of dissent directed at /r9k/'s general culture in excerpt 2.1.

Excerpt 2.1:

Anonymous 08/30/18(Thu)11:12:05 No.47832390

Tbf, imagine being a female and trying to exercise, and the type of

people who post on r9k cat call and leer at you. Scary.

MUH WOMEN

christ you incels are pathetic gb2 reddit already

In excerpt 2.1, the user points out that it would likely be scary for

women to be catcalled by the sort of people who post on /r9k/, followed by

insulting other posters in the thread by accusing them of being pathetic incels

and telling them to go back to Reddit. The post begins: "tbf [to be fair],

imagine being a female and trying to exercise, and the type of people who

post on r9k cat call and leer at you. Scary." This statement, on the one hand,

agrees with the thread's opening post by acknowledging that catcalling is an

issue and also goes on to insult users of /r9k/, pointing out that being cat

called or leered at specifically by "the type of people who post on r9k" would

be "scary." In so doing, "the type of people who post on r9k" are positioned as the sort of people who catcall and leer at women trying to exercise.

Furthermore, the post states "christ you incels are pathetic gb2 [go back to] reddit already," further insulting users in the thread by positioning them as both incels and users of Reddit, a news aggregate and discussion board website. In this way, excerpt 2.1 affirms that catcalling and harassment directed at women is a concern and, simultaneously, positions others in the thread as scary cat callers, pathetic incels, and users who need to leave /r9k/ for a different website altogether.

While this post received many responses, all of which disagreed with the poster's point in some fashion or another, the following two responses in excerpt 2.2 and 2.3 enact forced gendered positionings directed at the user who made excerpt 2.1. Furthermore, each post attempts to dismiss excerpt 2.1's claims about catcalling.

Excerpt 2.2:

Anonymous 08/30/18(Thu)11:35:55 No.47832705

>>47832390

Silly roastie, even the biggest chads don't mind attention from truly gross

females when there's no actual hassle It's literally a reminder that the

person is still attractive

Excerpt 2.2 directs a gendered positioning at the user from excerpt 2.1

and attempts to dispute their claims. Excerpt 2.2 refers to the user as a "silly

roastie." Similar to how "whore" is used in excerpt 1.2, "roastie" is used on

/r9k/ as a derogatory way of referring to sexually promiscuous women. As

such, this reference positions the user as a "roastie" and genders them as

feminine. In addition to this, the post responds to excerpt 2.1's claim that being

cat called by the people who use /r9k/ would be scary by stating that "even

the biggest chads don't mind attention from truly gross females when there's no

actual hassle" because this attention, even if it is catcalling, is "literally a

reminder that the person is still attractive." Furthermore, these "Chads"–a term

used to refer to attractive, heterosexual, socially and romantically successful

men–do not mind such attention because "it's literally a reminder that the

person is still attractive," and, as a result, such attention is portrayed as a

good thing, regardless of whether it is catcalling or leering.

Excerpt 2.3:

Anonymous 08/30/18(Thu)17:10:00 No.47838291

>>47832390

Nice try woman, but I see through your tricks

Excerpt 2.3, as well, responds in a way which directs a gendered

positioning at the user from excerpt 2.1. This gendered positioning is enacted

through stating "nice try woman," which directly refers to the user who made

excerpt 2.1 as a woman and, as a result, genders them as feminine. This post

goes on to state "I see through your tricks," which, on the one hand, positions

the content of excerpt 2.1 as nothing more than tricks or lies and, on the

other, positions the user who made the post in excerpt 2.3 as someone able to

see through such tricks and lies. This assertion that excerpt 2.1 was somehow

part of a trick alongside the gendered positioning of the user also serves to

merge the position of woman and trickster. The user who made the post in excerpt 2.1, in other words, is marked as both a woman and a trickster.

The majority of other responses to the initial post also attempt to disregard the poster's point or insult the poster directly, however, these two examples stand out due to their enactment of forced gendered positioning directed at the user who made the post in excerpt 2.1. The initial post bears no explicit or implicit mention of the user's gender, yet despite this, the above responses position the poster as feminine.

Excerpt 3

Later in the thread, a discussion occurs across several posts in which users attempt to compare and contrast the harm caused to women by sexual harassment and the supposed harm caused to men whose sexual advances are rejected. At the following point in the discussion, excerpt 3.2 and 3.3 present a challenge to the misogynistic, biological essentialism raised in excerpt 3.1. In response to these challenges, excerpt 3.4 replies with misogynistic

insults directed at the two posts, despite the absence of any disclosure of the users' genders.

More-so than before, the posts excerpted below contain significantly more hostile language, including discussion of rape, violence towards women, racial slurs, and ableist language. While I present a closer analysis of the positioning acts within these posts across the following paragraphs which includes quotations from the excerpts, I follow this discussion with a brief summary of the analysis done here in which I avoid direct quotation or direct repetition of the hostile phrasings and terms used here.

Excerpt 3.1:

Anonymous 08/30/18(Thu)13:25:21 No.47834193

>>47834082

>but getting denied sex is worse than rape!! It actually is though. Men are not biologically and psychologically designed to accept rejection,

whereas women are biologically and psychologically designed to enjoy being raped lmao.

As part of a longer series of replies to the thread, excerpt 3.1 participates in a storyline which compares the harm caused to women by sexual assault with the harm caused to men who are denied sex. Until this point, the positions available to and utilized by posters remained tacit and, like the thread's opening post analyzed above, were one of two antagonistic options. Users fell on one side or the other, claiming either women or men experienced more harm than the other.

Excerpt 3.1 tacitly self-positions as the latter, positioning the user as believing that men are somehow in the worse of the two situations. This occurs through the affirmation of the quoted text, ">but getting denied sex is worse than rape!!" through responding "It actually is though." In this way, the user makes their position on the issue clear, and tacitly self-positions themselves as a misogynist. Continuing the post, however, additional information is added to that position, clarifying the user's view. Rather than affirm the misogynistic

position, excerpt 3.1 goes on to further introduce elements of biological

essentialism into the storyline, stating "men are not biologically and

psychologically designed to accept rejection, whereas women are biologically

and psychologically designed to enjoy being raped." Whereas before the

discussion hinged on which was worse or more harmful, this statement shifts

the discussion to biological and psychological traits. As a result, the tacit

position taken on by the user is further clarified and specified-they are not just

a misogynist but are instead a misogynist for biological essentialist reasons.

Excerpt 3.2:

Anonymous 08/30/18(Thu)13:29:05 No.47834264

>>47834193

>It actually is though.

Men are not biologically and psychologically designed to accept rejection,

whereas women are biologically and psychologically designed to enjoy

being raped lmao. Holy shit you are a legitimate retard. Women are

more likely to get pregnant when raped because rapists don't use

condoms and women can't plan for it by taking birth control. Also, men

go into a rage and kill or hurt women for rejecting them all the time.

Excerpt 3.2 is the first to call excerpt 3.1 into question and initiates a

second-order positioning, whereby both excerpt 3.2's self-positioning and the

post's characterizations of men and women are called into question and

disputed. The post begins by quoting excerpt 3.1, ">It actually is though. Men

are not biologically and psychologically designed to accept rejection, whereas

women are biologically and psychologically designed to enjoy being raped

lmao," specifying which elements of the post are being responded to.

In disputing the characterization of men and women in excerpt 3.1,

excerpt 3.2 attempts to challenge the other user's claims and, in so doing,

provides additional adjustments to the position of men and women within the

discussion, challenging the characterizations in excerpt 3.1. This post positions

men as *unable* to accept rejection and as having a tendency towards violence

directed at women who reject them. In this way, excerpt 3.2 initiates a second

order positioning of men and women in response to the positionings carried out

in excerpt 3.1, and in so doing, voice their opposition to the misogyny and biological essentialism in the former post.

By disputing elements of excerpt 3.1 the user making the post in excerpt 3.2 positions themselves as opposed to the sort of misogyny and biological essentialism espoused in the prior post. This positioning functions as a tacit, self-positioning whereby the user brings themselves into an antagonistic relationship with both the user who made excerpt 3.1 and the general position available and utilized by other misogynists in the thread. Although this positioning is tacit-the user is not explicitly coming out and identifying as, for example, a feminist or something similar-they nevertheless mark themselves as opposing narratives of misogyny which, as excerpt 3.4 demonstrates, is taken as a mark of femininity.

Excerpt 3.3

Anonymous 08/30/18(Thu)13:32:32 No.47834333

>>47834193

>Men are not biologically designed to accept rejection

Females rejecting male advances is the cornerstone of all mammalian

reproduction. This ensures better offspring and furthers the species. Don't

justify mental illness and toddler/nigger-tier "gibs me" attitude by saying

"muh biology" when you turn around and deride women for enjoying sex

because of their biology.

You're either for or against the natural order of things, but you don't get

to pick and choose and then whine about it, brainlet hypocrite. The

"natural order" and "muh biology" line of reasoning doesn't even benefit

you at all because you're not an alpha male, why would you think that

was a good direction to go with this?

Excerpt 3.3 similarly opposes the biological essentialism from excerpt 3.1,

and in so doing initiates second-order positioning. The post begins by quoting

excerpt 3.1, ">Men are not biologically designed to accept rejection," beginning

to call the post's positioning of men as subject to dispute. This questioning

continues as post excerpt 3.3 presents an alternative story concerning biology

and sex, disputing excerpt 3.1's initial positioning of men as being biologically incapable of accepting rejection.

Excerpt 3.3 further questions why the user in excerpt 3.1 would even attempt to rely on biological essentialism in the first place. The final lines of the post attributes rhetorical incompetence to the user in excerpt 3.1 for choosing an argument that "doesn't even benefit" the user at all, asking why the user "would think that was a good direction to go with this" post. The post also points out the user who made the post from excerpt 3.1 is "not an alpha male," marking the user's gender as not an alpha male. Excerpt 3.1 does not make an explicit mention of the user's gender, nor does the statement that they are "not an alpha male" necessarily attribute a masculine gender to the user. However, it *does* enact a forced, gendered other-positioning in a certain sense—the user is, at the very least positioned and gendered as *not* an alpha male, and in this way, have their masculinity and gender called into question.

This series of posts ends with excerpt 3.4, which responds directly to excerpts 3.2 and 3.3. The post concludes the discussion by characterizing the

users from excerpts 3.2 and 3.3 as "a pair of toastie roasties," thereby

explicitly gendering them as feminine.

Excerpt 3.4:

Anonymous 08/30/18(Thu)13:36:49 No.47834406

>>47834333

>>47834264

And here we have a pair of toastie roasties, angry over the fact that

they'd probably involuntarily cum multiple times while being raped by

some nasty NEET dick.

Excerpt 3.4 replies to the two previous posts and forcefully gender

positions the users who made them as feminine through the use of derogatory

remarks and violent language pertaining to rape. Referring to excerpt 3.3 and

excerpt 3.2, the post begins "and here we have a pair of toastie roasties,"

explicitly referring to the users as "roasties." As mentioned above, roastie is a

derogatory term used on the board to refer to women who frequently have sex.

Due to this, the attribution of this term to the two other targets them with a forceful gendered other-positioning, marking them as feminine by virtue of their being "roasties." This positioning, of course, carries with it additional qualities, such as sexual promiscuity and a negative moral evaluation in the eyes of the user making the post but, in addition to these qualities, also attributes femininity to the others. This attribution of femininity, however, occurs in the absence of other markers or disclosures of gender on the part of those being other-positioned. Instead, what seems to occur is that the second-order positioning directed at the misogynistic positions, namely the biological essentialism, raised throughout the posts, is taken as the basis for positioning those users as feminine. Put another way: the expressions of dissent are taken as markers of femininity by others on the board.

Conclusion

As was shown in the three excerpts examined here, all instances in which posters were other-positioned as feminine positions occurred in response to expressions of dissent. Those expressing disapproval of misogynistic trends

within the thread or challenging dominant ideas about women and gender were responded to with attempts to dismiss the poster's remarks and, most notably, instances of other-positioning as various undesirable feminine identities. Beyond the excerpts here, throughout the thread all instances in which posters were other-positioned and gendered as feminine identities occurred in response to expressions of dissent. As in the cases examined here, the majority of terms used to direct gendering at others were derogatory and misogynistic terms.

Given the computer-mediated and anonymous nature of 4chan, those performing the other-positioning had no access to the other user's offline identity, appearance, or other elements of their embodiment. Put another way: this other-positioning occurred purely on the basis of what was posted by the other user, with the oppositional positions taken up by those users taken as indicative of femininity. Furthermore, the lack of usernames or user accounts makes tracking an individual's activity across a given thread or site impossible. Not only did this positioning occur as a result of the textual content of

someone's posts, it occurred on the basis of a single post, rather than a collection of the user's activity on the site as a whole.

All this together suggests that the other-positioning occurred on the basis of the expression of dissenting opinions. In other words, opposing the dominant trends of misogyny on /r9k/ marked one as feminine in the eyes of others. Of course, it is entirely possible that the dissenters were not women, but this point never seems to be acknowledged by users other-positioning dissenters as feminine. From the perspective of those doing the other-positioning, then, it is as if it is unthinkable for a man to oppose the kind of misogyny presented within the thread. Furthermore, this positioning occurred alongside attempts to dismiss, challenge, or delegitimize the criticisms raised in the dissenting post, suggesting that not only is dissent read as a mark of femininity on /r9k/ but that being feminine is read as grounds for dismissing another user entirely.

Chapter 3 - "Fembot here": Gendered Self-Positioning, Face, and Continuity of Position

As we saw in the last chapter, gendered other-positioning can occur on /r9k/ threads. Building upon Van Langenhove and Harre's (1999) notion of other-positioning, gendered other-positioning refers to instances of other-positioning which ascribe gender or gendered characteristics to someone else. This act of gendering, furthermore, makes that person intelligible to others as the gendered identity ascribed to them. As we saw, gendered other-positioning can occur in conditions where the target of the positioning makes no claims to their own identity. Especially in the context of /r9k/, in which users are often anonymous, gendered other-positioning functions as a way of ascribing explicit identities to others in spite of that very anonymity. Crucially, however, gendered other-positioning *can* occur without consideration for the target's actual identity. In this chapter, I turn my attention to acts of gendered self-positioning, examining multiple instances where a user-or, possibly, groups of users-repeatedly self-position as the gendered position of "fembot" -as in "feminine

robot"-a term used on /r9k/ to refer to feminine users who regularly browse

/r9k/. Gendered self-positioning involves a user ascribing a gender to

themselves, specifically making themselves intelligible to others as the gendered

identity they position themselves as. In the posts observed below, I examine a

user who enacts this self-gendering by positioning herself as a fembot. Fembot

is an explicitly feminine identity, whereby one being positioned as a fembot is

also, necessarily, positioned as feminine.

Additionally, I argue that these repeated acts of positioning accomplish

what I refer to as continuity of position, in which the same position is

repeatedly introduced and taken up in multiple posts, creating the effect of the

same individual making multiple posts despite the site's anonymity and

regardless of whether or not the same person is, in fact, making each post.

Continuity of position describes the iteration of a specific position across

multiple interactions, enabling someone to be intelligible as that position across

time and, similarly, enabling that position to be intelligible as applying to

multiple others across time. By way of example, we might imagine a teacher

standing before a class each day as the way in which an individual maintains

a continuous position across time: every class, that person occupies the

teacher position, which is the *same* teacher position they occupied the class

before and the day before that, and so on. In doing so, the person is also

intelligible as the teacher to the students, day after day. In this chapter, I show

how continuity of position is used on /r9k/ in order to respond to face

threatening acts (FTAs) (Brown and Levinson 1987) and attempt to save face

within the thread.

In the analysis that follows, I present a case study in which I examine

how a user enacts a gendered self-positioning and how continuity is established

with that position across multiple posts. The continuity of position creates the

effect of a singular, continuous speaker across multiple posts, as if the same

user is making multiple posts and carrying on a discussion and, furthermore,

enables other users to interpret the users occupying the continuous position as

that singular speaker. Due to the anonymous nature of the site, however, it is

entirely possible that those participating in the continuous position are multiple

people just as it is entirely possible (and more probable) that only one user is

participating in the continuous position. What is important to note here is that

the explicit maintenance of a continuous position enables *others* to understand

a series of posts as belonging to the same individual *despite* the site's

anonymity. Put another way, establishing a continuous position creates a way

in which users can maintain an identity across multiple interactions in an

anonymous space.

The continuity of position established in the thread examined in this

chapter enable the user(s) participating in the continuous position to enact face

work in response to face threatening acts. This analysis demonstrates that

positioning, continuity of position, and face are concepts applicable to the

analysis of /r9k/ and CMC interactions more broadly. Furthermore, the

maintenance of a continuous position and the enactment of both face

threatening acts and facework highlight ways in which /r9k/ users understand

and enact identity work on the platform. Saving face only makes sense in an

anonymous environment if one is aware that something like continuity of

position is possible and, on the flip side, *threatening* another's face only makes

sense if the one doing the threatening is aware that others are capable of

maintaining continuous positions, as well.

Analysis

As was the case in chapter 2, many of the excerpts here feature hostile

language. This includes derogatory and misogynistic phrases, threats of

violence, discussion of suicide, as well as racism and ableism at various points.

The intent of reproducing these excerpts here is not to valorize this language,

but to, instead, subject it to analysis in order to determine how such language

attempts to create exclusionary spaces online and to examine how users

respond to and navigate this attempted exclusion.

The following posts are excerpted from a thread begun by a poster who

self-identifies as a fembot. By opening the thread with "Fembot here," the user

self-positions as a fembot and, by extension, genders herself as feminine.

Since fembots are frequent participants on /r9k/ and belong to the community

in a certain sense, by positioning herself as a fembot, the user also

characterizes herself as a member of the /r9k/ community.

In the opening post, the user poses questions to "Stacey/normies." A

Stacey, or Stacy, refers to a woman who is attractive to men and is able to

have successful sexual and romantic relationships. A normie, on the other

hand, refers to a normal person who might not use /r9k/ frequently. Unlike

"Stacey," normie is not an explicitly gendered term. Furthermore, unlike the

relation between robot and fembot, the term normie does not seem to have a

feminine-gendered counterpart and does not seem to directly attribute a gender

to those positioned as normie.

Excerpt 4.1:

Fembot with questions for Stacey/normies Anonymous

08/31/18(Fri)16:18:43 No.47856166

Fembot here. I don't understand other girls my age. I know 4 girls who

got impregnated by a poor neet black manlet type of man. I'm very

confused as to why they would do such a thing. I can't ask them

because that would probably offend them. One of them has found a

husband regardless. The other 3 are now single mothers. Why do they

do this? Is it because they don't care about their selves? Is it a fetish?

Do they have no sense? Need someone to enlighten me.

The questions the user who made the thread's opening post, or OP,

asks of Stacey/normies pertain to pregnancy and relationships. In this post, the

words "neet" and "manlet" are used. Neet (typically formatted as "NEET") is an

acronym for "not in education, employment, or training," and refers to those

who are unemployed and not in school. Manlet refers to a shorter than

average man. Of the four girls OP claims to know, three are single mothers.

The posts end by asking why women would "do this," i.e. become single

mothers, and directs the question to other women–specifically, those who fit into

the category of Stacey–or normies on /r9k/.

This post achieves two self-positionings which are taken up by responses

excerpted here. First, the user intentionally self-positions as a fembot. In

addition to laying claim to a particular position–a fembot–this positioning also

genders herself as feminine. As we saw in the last chapter, expressions of

dissent were viewed as a mark of femininity by others and received hostile,

misogynistic responses. In this case, though, the user directly marks herself as

feminine. Many of the responses excerpted in this analysis still direct hostility

and misogyny at the feminine-marked user, but primarily respond to the ways

in which the user differentiates herself from other women. The OP's self-

positioning as fembot accomplishes this differentiation by marking a difference

between fembots, Staceys, and normies. Furthermore, the OP explicitly states "I

don't understand other girls my age," further self-positioning the user as

different from "other girls [her] age" by virtue of not understanding their

behavior. As we will see in later excerpts, this difference is taken up by other

users in face threatening acts in hostile responses to OP. It is worth noting

that, although these statements do serve to differentiate the user from "other

girls," they in no way justify or excuse the hostile responses directed at OP.

Beyond calling the user's positioning into question or attempting to

reposition the user, the hostile responses to OP question her qualification as a

fembot while directing harassment and insults at her, in an attempt to derail the

conversation or drive the user of fof /r9k/. In this way, hostility is used as a

means to police group boundaries by attempting to either control this user's

behavior or drive her from the board entirely.

An early response to the opening post responds to OP, asking whether

she is a KHV, or "kissless, handholdless, virgin," that is, a virgin who has

neither kissed someone nor held their hand:

Excerpt 4.2:

Anonymous 08/31/18(Fri)16:20:49 No.47856201

>Fembot here.

Are you a KHV? If not, you're just another Stacy.

Excerpt 4.2 questions the speaker's positioning as a fembot through a

threat to her positive face. By quoting the user's self-positioning statement

"Fembot here," the poster addresses their comments to the user's position as

fembot. The post asks the self-positioned fembot whether she is "a KHV," short

for "kissless, handholdless virgin, which is presented as a necessary condition for being a fembot by the comment "If not, you're just another Stacy." By positioning KHV as a necessary quality for one to be a fembot, this user presents a threat to the OP's positive face as a fembot. According to this post, if she is a KHV, she maintains her positive face and position as a fembot. However, if she is not, then her position as a fembot is called into question.

Excerpt 4.2 receives a response, excerpted below, in which the user identifies as a "khv" and admits she wants a "bf" (a boyfriend), but says they are not accepting "orbiters/offers from here," or, in other words, that they are not trying to find a boyfriend on /r9k/.

Excerpt 4.3:

Anonymous 08/31/18(Fri)16:25:33 No.47856492

>>47856201

I am a khv. I kind of want a bf but idk where to look. Not taking orbiters/offers from here that's for sure.

In excerpt 4.3, the user self-positions as the same person from the thread's opening post and responds to the face threatening act. The user begins the post by claiming "I am a khv," simultaneously achieving a self-positioning as the same person from the thread's opening post and responding to the challenge of her positive face. This statement achieves self-positioning by responding to excerpt 4.2's question, which itself was directed at the user who made the post in excerpt 4.1. Put another way, excerpt 4.2 directed a question at the user who made the post in excerpt 4.1 which, when answered using first person pronouns positions the answerer as the same person who made the post in excerpt 4.1. Furthermore, by confirming that she is a khv, the user responds to the face threatening act presented by excerpt 4.2 and retains her position as fembot.

The excerpt below represents OP's comments ironically in order to mock and insult her characterization of herself:

Excerpt 4.4:

Anonymous 08/31/18(Fri)16:26:25 No.47856513

>>47856166

i am not liek other gurls silly bois xd hehe dont hit on me

Interpreted as an ironic reinterpretation of OP, excerpt 4.4 presents OP's

self-positioned difference from other girls as a negative, mock worthy

characteristic. Furthermore, the ironic usage of "silly bois xd hehe dont hit on

me" suggests excerpt 4.4 is accusing OP of seeking attention despite her

stated purpose of asking questions about other girls her age. As a result,

excerpt 4.4 threatens OP's positive face by mocking her post and other-

positioning her as seeking attention from men on /r9k/.

Two additional responses to OP focus on her positioning as fembot and

her differentiation between herself and others her age. Both responses take this

differentiation as negative and direct responses at OP which include

misogynistic language and direct threats of violence.

Excerpt 4.5:

Anonymous 08/31/18(Fri)16:33:02 No.47856608

>47856166

>i'm not like like those other grils

kys

Excerpt 4.5, ">i'm not like those other grils" (i.e. girls), uses the site's

quoting function to represent OP's post as a claim that she is different from

other girls before telling responding "kys," short for "kill yourself." Excerpt 4.6

responds to OP similarly:

Excerpt 4.6:

Anonymous 08/31/18(Fri)16:34:41 No.47856630

kys stupid ass whore. stop trying to be special by posting shit like this to

make yourself look better. hurr durr im not like other girls

die

Excerpt 4.6 tells OP to "stop trying to be special by posting shit like this

to make yourself look better. hurr durr im not like other girls." Like excerpt 4.5,

this posts also tells op to kill herself in addition to other forms of harassment.

By representing OP's post as an attempt to stand out among other girls her age and as an attempt at getting attention from men on /r9k/, OP's positive face is threatened. Excerpt 4.5 repeats the charge that OP is "not like those other grils," which taken alongside "kys," stands out as a negative quality. The OP's claim that she is not like other girls, then, is presented as unacceptable behavoirbehavior. While it may be acceptable to the community if she was, in all actuality, not like other girls, the fact that she draws attention to it is frowned upon. Next, excerpt 4.6 presents several threats to OP's positive face by calling her a "stupid ass whore," telling her to "stop trying to be special," accusing her of "posting shit," and attempting to make herself look better. Again, this post repeats the charge that OP's claim to be "not like other girls" is somehow negative or ridiculous.

These posts also present threats to OP's negative face in the form of harassment and death threats. The misogynistic harassment demands of "kys," and the direct threat of "die" all threaten OP's negative face more directly by creating a hostile environment and directly threatening her life. Beyond being

an environment in which OP is subjected to insults and negative responses

which reduce the user's positive face, this harassment functions more directly

as a threat to negative face insofar as it creates an environment where the

user is unlikely to continue participating or, at the very least, unable to

participate in a way that coincides with her stated goals (i.e. getting her

questions answered) from the thread's opening post.

Excerpts 4.7, 4.8. and 4.9 reply to excerpts 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6. In each of

these responses, the user challenges the insults previously directed at OP with

their own aggressive remarks.

Excerpt 4.7:

Anonymous 08/31/18(Fri)16:30:04 No.47856570

>>47856513

I am not saying all girls are doing this. Just wondering about the ones

who choose this way of life. Can you answer in a serious manner

without memes as a crutch for a personality? That would make you

useful! c:

Excerpt 4.8:

Anonymous 08/31/18(Fri)16:35:19 No.47856640

>>47856608

You first. If you live stream it I swear I'll kms after. Useless freak…

Excerpt 4.9:

Anonymous 08/31/18(Fri)16:36:38 No.47856663

>>47856630

You need to die first. Do you even contribute to society? Nothing I said indicated I wasn't like other girls. I literally an just curious about their choices.

As in excerpt 4.3 above, excerpts 4.7, 4.8, and 4.9 all involve acts of self-positioning, primarily through responding to questions directed at OP with response that use the first-person pronoun "I." These responses position the posters as OP by implying the users are one and the same person. The comments in excerpts 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 are directed at OP specifically, creating

a space in which anyone responding to the post in the first-person would

position themselves as the same user who made the thread's original post. In

excerpt 4.4, OP is mocked for implying she is not like other girls. Excerpt 4.7

responds with "I am not saying all girls are doing this. Just wondering about

the ones who choose this way of life!" responding to the mockery directed at

OP with first-person statements and a reiteration of the question raised in the

thread's original post, as if excerpt 4.7 was made by the same person as OP.

Excerpt 4.5 tells OP directly to kill herself and to die, and excerpt 4.8 responds

to the post by telling the user "You first. If you live stream it I swear I'll kms

after," effectively establishing continuity between the original post and this reply.

Finally, excerpt 4.9 achieves this self-positioning through responding to excerpt

4.6 by telling the user that "Nothing I said indicated I wasn't like other girls. I

literally an just curious about their choices." This responds to the recurrent

charge that OP is not like other girls present in excerpt 4.6, "hurr durr im not

like other girls," as well as excerpt 4.4, "i am not liek other gurls silly bois xd,"

and excerpt 4.5, ">i'm not like those other grils," as well. The response given

in excerpt 4.9 enacts self-positioning, bringing the user into the same position

as the user who made the thread's opening post, by responding to questions

directed at the OP in the first-person and through establishing continuity

between the opening post and excerpt 4.9. The user claims that nothing she

said, presumably in the opening post, indicated she was not like other girls.

Furthermore, she reiterates in excerpt 4.9 that she is "just curious about their

choices." In addition to self-positioning, these statements also respond to the

face threatening statements that OP is not like other girls presented in excerpts

4.4, 4.5, and 4.9.

Excerpt 4.9 also responds to excerpt 4.6's hostility and negative face

threatening act with similar hostility. Whereas excerpt 4.6 told OP to "kys" and

"die," excerpt 4.9 responds by telling this user "you need to die first. Do you

even contribute to society?" Unlike excerpt 4.3, in which a user is similarly self-

positioned as the OP, the response here is actively hostile to the other user in

addition to responding to attempts to threaten the user's face and positioning. A

similar hostility occurs in excerpt 4.8 by way of the response "You first."

Whereas excerpt 4.5 told OP to kill themselves, the response of "You first" in

excerpt 4.8 has the effect of turning the initial hostile death threat back onto

the user from excerpt 4.5 much like excerpt 4.9's response to excerpt 4.6

telling them they "need to die first." Through these hostile responses, the users

positioned as OP in excerpts 4.8 and 4.9 respond to threats to negative face

by redirecting those same threats back to the original speaker.

These three responses, taken together, respond to attempts to

delegitimize OP's position and threaten OP's face in ways that maintain

continuity of positioning between the original post and the responses. In each

case, the three excerpts, 4.6, 4.7, and 4.8, enact self-positioning whereby the

user behind each post positions themselves as the same position–and person–as

OP. Despite the anonymity of these posts, this self-positioning achieves a

continuity of identity across multiple posts–the thread's original post and each of

these three responses can be made as if they were made by the same

person, regardless of whether or not this is the case in reality. Similarly, in

responding to threats to OP's face and position, these posts can be read as

attempts from OP to maintain her own positive and negative face within the

thread. Doing so enables her to refute threats to her access to the thread and

maintain a positive face among other users. In short, through the use of first-

person pronouns and responses to posts directed at OP, these three responses

demonstrate strategies for performing a continuity of self across multiple,

anonymous posts on /r9k/.

Following these three responses, excerpt 4.8 receives a response

enacting a threat to positive face directed at the user and, by extension, OP.

Excerpt 4.10:

Anonymous 08/31/18(Fri)16:40:52 No.47856744

>>47856640

>toasty roastie who can't handle bantz why am i not surprised?

Excerpt 4.10 accuses the other user of being a "toasty roastie who can't

handle bantz." "Roastie," as mentioned previously, is a misogynistic slur akin to

"slut." "Bantz" here likely refers to "banter," and suggests the user from the

post in excerpt 4.10 views the content of excerpt 4.5 as playful or well-meaning

banter rather than a hostile threat to OP's life. By accusing the user from

excerpt 4.8 of being unable to "handle bantz," coupled with the misogynistic

slur, functions as a positive face threatening act, by way of implying that the

user who made the post in excerpt 4.8 is unable to properly interpret and react

to interactions on /r9k/ that others might "properly" interpret and respond to as

banter. In threatening the user's face this way, the post also attempts to

reposition the user as a "toasty roastie" and a user inexperienced with cultural

practice on /r9k/.

Excerpt 4.11 responds to the face threatening statements raised in

excerpt 4.10:

Excerpt 4.11:

Anonymous 08/31/18(Fri)16:43:40 No.47856800

>>47856744

How was it supposed to handle the Bantz in this case? Should I have

insulted you more? Less? See, anything I would have done is wrong to

you ppl. Will you execute yourself please?

In stating that excerpt 4.8 was made by someone who "can't handle

bantz," excerpt 4.10 opens up a position in which one could occupy-the person

unable to "handle bantz"-which overlaps with the position of the user from post

excerpt 4.8. In other words, the person who cannot "handle bantz" is the same

person who made excerpt 4.8. Excerpt 4.11 self-positions the user as both of

these positions, responding "How was it supposed to handle Bantz in this

case? Should I have insulted you more? Less?" The "it" in "how was it

supposed to handle Bantz," here is likely a typographical error intended to be

"I." As evidenced by the following sentence "Should I have insulted you more?"

we can safely conclude excerpt 4.11 is responding to the charge that someone

cannot handle bantz. Given that the first-person pronoun is used, the user

making the post in excerpt 4.11 positions themself as the same user from

excerpt 4.8, thus responding to excerpt 4.10 as if they are one in the same

person. Furthermore, due to excerpt 4.8's self-positioning as OP, the continuity

of self continues here to excerpt 4.11. In other words, the usage of first-person

pronouns in this case achieves the effect of continuity of position and self

across three posts-the original post, excerpt 4.8, and excerpt 4.11-positioning

the three individuals who made each post as one and the same person,

regardless of whether these posts were made by separate individuals or not.

Excerpt 4.12 responds to excerpt 4.11 and provides evidence for the

continuity of position across the thread's original post, excerpt 4.8, and excerpt

4.11:

Excerpt 4.12:

Anonymous 08/31/18(Fri)16:45:55 No.47856889

>>47856800

just shut up and display your mammaries beotch

In this response, the post tells the other user to "just shut up and

display your mammaries," echoing the common misogynistic request on /b/ that

posters identifying themselves as women expose themselves in order to legitimate their identity observed by Manivannan (2013). Excerpt 4.11, however, bears no explicit marker of the user's offline identity nor makes any claims to whether she is a cis woman. What is present, however, is the continuity of position between the post and the original post in which OP very explicitly identities as a fembot. Excerpt 4.12's interpreting the user from excerpt 4.11's identity as feminine appears as the result of excerpt 4.12 acknowledging this continuity of position between OP and excerpt 4.11. Put another way, excerpt 4.12 provides evidence that the continuity of position observed within the posts of those positioned as OP has, in fact, occurred successfully.

Later in the thread, excerpt 4.13 repeats the accusation that OP is trying to differentiate herself from other girls for attention and in doing so, enacts a threat to OP's positive face.

Excerpt 4.13:

Anonymous 08/31/18(Fri)16:53:50 No.47857054

>"Ummm…I'm not like other girls. Teehee!": The Post

Nothing more unattractive than a girl who shits on her gender for male attention. Especially if that attention's from /r9k/ types. I also dunno what being black's got to do with this fictional guy you know implicitly being a bad person. This ain't your diary.

In this post, "**>**'Umm…I'm not like other girls. Teehee!': The Post" reiterates the accusation that OP is "not like other girls" seen in previous excerpts, posing an initial threat to OP's positive face. As previous posts demonstrate, trying to make oneself seem "not like other girls" is regarded as an undesirable trait by other users within the thread. Furthermore, the post initiates a second face threatening act by stating "Nothing more unattractive than a girl who shits on her gender for male attention," further specifying the ways in which being "not like other girls" is a negative trait. Differentiating oneself from "other girls" is here portrayed as negative because it is "unattractive." Furthermore, by referring to OP as "a girl who shits on her gender for male attention," the alleged act of differentiation is presented as negative because it "shits on," or insults, the feminine gender as a whole

specifically "for male attention." In this way, excerpt 4.13 threatens OP's

positive face by way of insulting her behavior and appearance.

This post, as well, positions OP in such a way that she is made to

stand in for all women. In characterizing OP's behavior as an "shitt[ing] on her

gender," excerpt 4.13 positions OP in such a way that her actions as an

individual come to represent women as a whole, presenting a sexist trope in

which femininity is a unified, monolithic identity while masculinity remains

unacknowledged throughout this discussion. With this in mind, as well, the

repeated FTA directed at OP accusing her of being "not like other girls," gains

clarity. If OP's behaviors as an individual represent women as a whole, then

femininity is a unified, homogenous category–anyone who is a feminine gender

is part of the *same* category and represents it just as OP does. As a result,

there cannot be any difference–OP cannot *actually* be different than other girls

since, as we see here, femininity is presented as a monolithic category which

individual women represent. Thus, OP's difference from other girls is presented

here as an impossibility and something that OP could only be doing as an intentional act of deception.

Excerpt 4.13 goes on to threaten OP's negative face, as well. By telling OP "This ain't your diary," excerpt 4.13 recontextualizes OP's post as the sort of thing someone would write in their diary and implies that this sort of writing should not happen on /r9k/. This latter implication enacts a threat to OP's negative face insofar as it claims OPs post and others like it should not be posted on /r9k/ and instead kept private in a diary. Furthermore, by likening the post to writing in a diary, excerpt 4.13 also suggests that OP's post is not something others should reply to-diaries, typically kept private, are not the sort of thing others reply to. In stating "This ain't your diary," excerpt 4.13 threatens OP's negative face in two ways: first, by implying OP should not be posting this sort of content on /r9k/ and second, by suggesting others not respond to OP's post.

Excerpt 4.14 replies to excerpt 4.13 in a way that positions the poster as OP and responds to the threats directed at her face. As before, this response

answers questions raised in the previous post using first-person pronouns, answering as if they are the same person as OP. In doing so, excerpt 4.14 positions the user who wrote it as one and the same person as OP.

Excerpt 4.14:

Anonymous 08/31/18(Fri)17:00:20 No.47857202

>>47857054

I don't care what robots think is attractive. Im not shitting on my gender. I just want to understand SOME girls and their mindset. I'm trying to be not classist or anything but I wanted to mention their race and other attributes because I'm curious if they genuinely find this kind of person attractive or not.

Excerpt 4.14 responds to excerpt 4.13's comment "Nothing more unattractive than a girl who shits on her gender for male attention" by stating "I don't care what robots think is attractive. Im not shitting on my gender." The "girl" mentioned in post 4.14 refers to the thread's OP, self-positioned as feminine through stating "Fembot here." As a result, this response excerpted

from excerpt 4.14 responds to the comments in the first-person, positioning the user as the girl mentioned in excerpt 4.13 and, by extension, the same user who made the thread's opening post. In doing so, excerpt 4.14 achieves a continuity of position between these two users, positioning the user(s) as the same person in both instances.

In addition to establishing a continuity of position between the user who made the thread's opening post and the user who made this post, excerpt 4.14 also responds to the face threatening statements raised in excerpt 4.13. Excerpt 4.13 characterizes OP as an unattractive "girl who shits on her gender for male attention," especially for the attention of "/r9k/ types." As mentioned previously, these present threats to OP's positive face by characterizing her as unattractive, hostile towards other women, and in search of attention from the sort of men who use /r9k/. In response, excerpt 4.14 mentions "I don't care what robots think is attractive. Im not shitting on my gender. I just want to understand SOME girls and their mindset," clarifying points raised by OP and addressing excerpt 4.13's critiques. In doing so, excerpt 4.14 responds to the

threats directed at OP's positive face in excerpt 4.13 by way of negating the claims of the threat. Excerpt 4.14 claims to not care about "what robots think is attractive," and thus does not care if excerpt 4.13-or anyone else-finds OP's behavior unattractive. Second, the post also clarifies that they are "not shitting on my gender," refuting excerpt 4.13's assertion to the contrary. Finally, excerpt 4.14 recontextualizes OP's goal as wanting to "understand SOME girls and their mindset" in order to further save face and respond to excerpt 4.13's criticisms. Given that excerpt 4.14 establishes a continuity of position between the user who made the thread's original post and this post, these instances of saving face are, in effect, instances of OP saving face and responding to criticisms directed at her.

Responding to excerpt 4.14, excerpt 4.15 attempts to disqualify OP's question, posing a threat to OP's negative face.

Excerpt 4.15:

Anonymous 08/31/18(Fri)17:13:26 No.47857415

>>47857202

I doubt this person even exists. They're just an imaginary prop for your attention seeking post.

As excerpt 4.14 states, they "just want to understand SOME girls and their mindset," referring to the thread's original post asking "I don't understand other girls my age. I know 4 girls who got impregnated by a poor neet black manlet type of man." Excerpt 4.15 in stating "I doubt this person even exists. They're just an imaginary prop for your attention speaking post," calls into question the existence of the four girls mentioned in the opening post and the "SOME girls" mentioned in excerpt 4.14. In doing so, excerpt 4.15 calls OP's entire question into question, attempting to disqualify the grounds on which it is based-if the sort of girls OP is asking about do not exist, then OP, presumably, would be making the entire thing up or asking meaningless questions. By attempting to disqualify OP's question entirely, excerpt 4.15 presents a threat to the negative face of OP's position. If the original question is baseless, in other words, there would be no reason for others to answer it and thus, no reason for OP to receive the answers she was hoping for. Furthermore, by suggesting

that OP is lying in order to seek attention, excerpt 4.15 presents a threat to OP's positive face. Specifically, excerpt 4.15 refers to OP's post as an "attention seeking post." As in other responses, OP is positioned as seeking attention and, more specifically in this case, as lying or using a fictional person as "an imaginary prop" within the post in order to present a story. By repositioning OP's thread as an "attention seeking post" which tells a fictional story, excerpt 4.15 threatens OPs positive face in two ways. First, the post charges her with seeking attention, a trait already shown to be viewed negatively by others within the thread. According to excerpt 4.15, OP is not regarded as an equal or in a friendly manner but is, instead, portrayed as eager for attention. Furthermore, by suggesting OP's post is fictional, the thread further threatens OP's positive face by repositioning her not as someone asking a question about something in her life, but, rather, as someone lying and attempting to deceive others for her own personal gain.

Excerpt 4.16 offers a response to excerpt 4.15 in a way which maintains continuity of position between the OP, excerpt 4.14 and excerpt 4.15.

Excerpt 4.16:

Anonymous 08/31/18(Fri)17:15:08 No.47857444

>>47857415

If you don't believe me that's fine. I'm genuinely curious about this tho because this is something I've seen before.

The post responds to excerpt 4.15's attempts to disqualify the OP's questions by stating "If you don't believe me that's fine." In doing so, the post achieves a self-positioning as OP and maintains a continuity of positioning across posts, figuring the user who made the post as the same individual who made the post in excerpt 4.14 and the thread's opening post. As in previous instances in which this continuity of position was established, excerpt 4.16 achieves continuity of position by responding to comments directed at the person who made the post in excerpt 4.14-a post which also established continuity of position with the OP-using first person pronouns, responding to the comments as if they are one and the same person as the person who made the post in excerpt 4.14. As a result, this self-positioning achieved through

responding to excerpt 4.15's comments using first person pronouns achieves a

continuity of position between the three posts.

Excerpt 4.16, furthermore, responds to the face threatening acts raised in

excerpt 4.15 which, as a result of the continuity of position established in the

post, function as face saving acts on behalf of the user behind the post in

excerpt 4.14 and the OP. Excerpt 4.16 dismisses one of the threats to her

positive face–that she is lying or using an "imaginary prop" in her story–by

claiming "if you don't believe me that's fine." In this way, the user dismisses

the threat to her positive face–whether or not the other user believes her does

not matter to her, so any attempts to discredit her story as false are irrelevant

to her. Beyond responding directly to excerpt 4.15, this response further signals

to other users in the thread that OP does not care about defending the

truthfulness of her story or not and will likely not spend time to entertaining

others doubting the truthfulness of her comments. Furthermore, the user

responds to the charge that she is seeking attention by stating "I'm genuinely

curious about this tho because this is something I've seen before." In doing so,

the user refutes additional threats to her positive and negative face raised in

excerpt 4.15.

As we have seen through these excerpts, users are able to establish a

continuity of position across multiple posts. In the thread's opening post, the

user explicitly positions herself as a "fembot" and, by extension, genders herself

as feminine. In the responses to the opening post excerpted here, several

users insult OP or otherwise attempt to belittle her or her post. In turn, these

negative comments receive responses from users which address the insults,

respond to criticisms, and, at times, direct insults back at those criticizing OP.

By using first-person pronouns in responses to questions and criticisms directed

at OP, these responses position the user who made them in the same position

as OP. In other words, these responses make the user who wrote them seem

like they are the same person as OP. In doing so, these posts achieve what I

have referred to as a continuity of position. Continuity of position describes the

reiteration or reproduction of a position across time or context. In this case, the

position being iterated is that of OP's gendered identity.

Conclusion

      In this chapter, I have demonstrated how gendered self-positioning can occur in the context of 4chan. Whereas in chapter 2 we saw how gendered other-positioning could occur, whereby anonymous users were positioned as explicitly gendered terms by others regardless of the user's offline identity, in this chapter I showed how gendered self-positioning can occur when a user identifies themselves as an explicitly gendered term. In this case, the explicit position taken up by the user was the position of "fembot," a feminine-aligned term which refers to women who use /r9k/, typically suggesting the user experiences social isolation and awkwardness in face-to-face interactions offline. By enacting this gendered self-positioning, the user marked herself as the position itself—a fembot—but, furthermore, gendered herself as feminine, making her legible to other users as a woman, regardless of her offline gender identity. In many of the posts excerpted in the analysis, this gendering is mentioned, called into question, and used as material for responses. Although the responses excerpted here were all negative, misogynistic, and hostile towards the fembot-positioned user, they nevertheless engaged with her self-gendering

as feminine, suggesting that the user's act of gendered self-positioning was intelligible by other users within the thread. However, this intelligibility marked the user as a target for harassment, with the responses excerpted here directing FTAs at the user and attempting to get her to leave the board altogether.

The responses to the thread's original post examined in this analysis, in addition to confirming OP's gendered self-position, presented various face threatening acts at OP, targeted at both her positive and negative face. This suggests two points. First, threats to OP's positive and negative face predicated on her behavior-insulting her for seeking attention, accusing her of insulting women as a whole, and accusing her of using /r9k/ as a diary, for example-demonstrates an awareness among /r9k/ users of behavioral norms on /r9k/ and, more specifically, gendered behavioral norms. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the fact that users presented threats to OP's negative face insofar as comments either attempted to alter OP's behavior in the thread or drive her off of the board entirely, demonstrates that users on /r9k/-and presumably

4chan more largely–do, at times, perceive and think of other users as unified

individuals across multiple posts and threads. This point suggests that users on

/r9k/ are aware of and capable of tracking a semblance of unified identities

across multiple posts.

Whereas the threatening of negative face suggests an understanding on

the part of others that users may establish unified identities on /r9k/, the

continuity of positioning observed in this thread suggests such unity can be

strategically enacted by individuals themselves. Although 4chan's anonymity

makes it impossible for the average visitor to the site to know who a given

post was made by or if multiple posts were made by the same person, and so

on, the strategic creation of a continuous position across posts can achieve the

effect of a stable identity across multiple posts, as if one was posting under a

username or somehow claiming each of their posts as their own. This

continuity of position, as we saw, was used by in multiple posts in order to

create the continuous position of "OP" throughout the thread. While the thread's

opening post established a user who self-positioned as the feminine fembot,

these additional posts established a continuity with that same position from the opening thread. In other words, in each instance of continuous positioning, the user reiterated that self-positioning, positioning themselves as OP-and, by extension, as a fembot and feminine. This continuity was established by using first-person pronouns in responses to questions directed at OP by the posts which enacted face threatening acts-in other words, answering and responding to questions that would only make sense for OP to answer as if the one answering was, in fact, OP.

In establishing this continuous position, the user(s) positioned as OP attempted to save face across multiple instances. Whereas the enactment of face threatening acts by others suggests an awareness of others behaving as unified individuals on the board, the enactment of face saving acts suggests both the awareness that one may be legible to others as the same user in another post or thread-in other words, an awareness that one might be remembered as someone who did a particular thing in a past post-and the desire to continue interacting with others relatively unimpeded on /r9k/ and *as*

the same continuous, unified identity. It does not, after all, make sense to

ensure others like you or consider you a friend unless you plan on being the

same person for the duration of the interaction. Of course, in the real world,

we cannot transform into new people on the spot during a face-to-face

interaction, but on 4chan, a space in which users are anonymous and virtually

no way of tracking other users' behavior is available to the site's regular

visitors, someone *could* become a new person in the next post they make or

the next thread the view. There is not, in other words, anything stopping the

user(s) continuously positioned as OP from simply deciding to post as if they

are a separate person or position themselves entirely differently. In adopting a

new persona, the user(s) positioned as OP receiving threats to their face could,

effectively, sidestep many of those threats by simply posting as if they are

someone different. However, that the user continuously positioned as OP *do*

engage with these face threatening acts and attempt to save face suggests

simultaneously a desire to be seen in a positive light and continue to behave

as desired across multiple posts *and* an awareness that something like

maintaining a continuous position is even possible on /r9k/. In other words,

attempting to save face on /r9k/ demonstrates an awareness that one can,

despite the site's anonymity, maintain some semblance of a continuity of

identity across multiple posts that can be interpeted and responded to by

others.

Chapter 4 - Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined how acts of positioning are deployed in the context of 4chan's /r9k/ board in order to understand how users attribute identities to themselves and others. /r9k/, like all of 4chan's boards, affords users a freedom from usernames, accounts, avatars, and other methods for tracking an individual user's activity on the site across multiple posts and threads. Instead, /r9k/ allows users to post anonymously. It also allows visitors on the site to view only those threads which are currently active and have not yet been deleted, as well as an archive of the past three days' worth of deleted threads (excluding posts and threads which were manually removed from the archive by the site's moderators). This anonymity and ephemerality presents an obvious methodological problem for those hoping to analyze 4chan and sites like it: how can we approach identity construction and analyses which depend on identifying individuals on a site that does everything it can to *prevent* identifying users across multiple posts? The answer, I attempted to demonstrate in this thesis, is through positioning theory.

By design, positioning theory provides researchers of face-to-face interactions a means to categorize and describe the behaviors of those being analyzed. For example, an individual takes up a position when asking another for a favor, who is in turn positioned by the individual asking the favor. I gossip with my friends about my neighbor, and in so doing position them as friendly or noisy, and so on. Positions, in the traditional account, are the sort of things individuals occupy in order for their behavior to be intelligible. In this project, however, rather than approach positioning as something undergone by an individual to make their behavior intelligible, positioning was considered as an act which made collections of behavior intelligible as an individual or as a particular kind of individual.

This approach was considered in chapter 2. As we saw, users who spoke out against dominant narratives of misogyny and biological essentialism within a thread on /r9k/ were forcefully other-positioned as various feminine terms, the majority of which were also derogatory, misogynistic terms coupled with additional harassment. These acts of positioning occurred in the absence

of any explicit self-disclosure of gender identity on the part of the user

positioned. Furthermore, due to the site's anonymous and computer-mediated

nature, these acts of positioning also occurred in the absence of names, voice,

appearance or any other bodily marker one might base an assumption of

gender on in the offline world. Instead, each post other-positioned as feminine

featured an expression of dissent directed at the misogynistic narratives

occurring within the thread. In short, these posts all displayed similar behaviors.

In being other-positioned as various feminine terms, those behaviors and the

users enacting them were made intelligible as feminine. Rather than a position

being taken up or attributed to an individual, we can instead approach this

case as a collective of behaviors which became intelligible as belonging to a

certain kind of individual through the act of other-positioning directed at them.

Furthermore, I termed these acts of positioning which attributed gender to those

being positioned as acts of gendered positioning. Unlike a general act of

positioning, an act of gendered positioning both positions the target and

attributes a gender to that target.

In chapter 3, I turned my attention to acts of gendered self-positioning in which users positioned themselves as feminine, along with the responses those feminine-positioned users received. I specifically examined instances where feminine-positioned users received various face threatening acts in the form of mockery and threats. Furthermore, I examined the responses those face threatening acts received from users who established what I termed a continuous position. A continuous position is any position that is iterated across multiple interactions either by the same individual repeating an act of positioning or by multiple individuals occupying the same position at multiple points in time. Considering continuous positions allows us to track behaviors which can be understood as belonging to the same individual across multiple posts on /r9k/ *regardless* of whether those posts were made by the same individual in the offline world and without reference to an offline body or identity. In turn, this allowed for examining the face of the user represented by the continuous position, despite the site's anonymity.

While these analyses demonstrated the utility of analyzing identity in terms of position on /r9k/, they also hinted at ways in which users on 4chan are cognizant of and concerned with their own and others' identities on the board. The analysis of gendered other-positioning in chapter 2 suggests that users interpret the behaviors of others as indicative of particular kinds of positions or identities. In the cases examined in chapter 2, we saw how users opposing /r9k/'s cultural norms of misogyny were understood as feminine. This suggests that users attribute various demographic characteristics and subcultural identities to others based on the content of their posts, rather than relying only on explicit disclosures or claims of offline identity characteristics. In chapter 3, we saw on the one hand, how a user maintained a continuous position and responded to face threatening acts and, on the other hand, how others threatened the face of the continuous position deployed by that user. This suggests that users on /r9k/ are aware that something like continuity of position can be established on /r9k/–that, in other words, multiple posts can be written in such a way that they read as if being made by the same user–and that

users are concerned with how those continuous positions are viewed. That the

user(s) maintaining the continuous position responded to FTAs demonstrates a

concern with how that continuous position is and will be viewed throughout the

thread. Furthermore, that others directed FTAs at the continuous position

demonstrates a concern with how users behave across multiple posts and how

continuous positions are viewed.

Implications and Further Research

Has demonstrated the applicability of positioning and face to analyses of

/r9k/ in spite of the board's anonymity. Beyond the space of /r9k/, these

findings suggest avenues for further research concerned with CMC and

anonymous spaces, along with bringing several implications to bear for our

understanding of anonymity and CMC as a whole.

The first implication of this study is that anonymity is not ironclad.

Anonymity on /r9k/, in the literal sense, is the absence of a unique name

outside of the default "Anonymous" username, but my findings suggest that

anonymity might stop at that absence of a name. In spite of anonymity, one

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can establish a continuous position and appear as the same person throughout interactions. Since self-positioning and continuous positioning suggest cracks in anonymity which can be used or abused to establish a provisional identity throughout interactions, the presence of other-positioning in an anonymous space suggests that anonymity does not wholly protect a user's identity. Positioning is an act which discursively tethers a set of behaviors to an intelligible identity-that users on /r9k/ position other users means that users are actively making linkages between the behaviors demonstrated by a post and a whole host of identities. Not every user is positioned as an explicitly stated identity, to be sure, but we have observed users which are positioned explicitly along gendered lines, gendered as feminine in response to their behavior. This means that one could possibly be perceived by others as a particular identity that one does not identify as in their lives in spaces other than 4chan wholly as a result of their behavior. In short, anonymity doesn't make identity go away, it just makes it much more malleable and unrulier for better or worse.

On this note, we brush up against the first avenue for further research.

Given all that has been said about positioning and face, it stands to reason

that with a sufficiently large dataset and period of time, one could construct an

entire constellation of all the positions operative within a computer-mediated

space, the behaviors understood as belonging to those positions, the ways in

which those positions are regarded, and the various strategies deployed to

establish iteration or continuity of position. By examining how misogynists and

those positioned as feminine relate, this thesis marks a starting point such an

attempt on /r9k/, In a certain sense, this could aid researchers attempting to

link together an offline body with an online post or track an individual person

across multiple posts on an anonymous site. While such an attempt would be

greatly aided by access to server logs, the individuals IP address, and other

information usually inaccessible to the public by most websites, constructing

such a constellation would allow tracking the movements and relations of the

ways in which members of an online community understand their own identities

and the identities of other users. From this, it would become possible to place

an individual within that constellation and understand the likely ways in which they view and relate with other positions, which, in turn, would aid in predicting how the individual would interact with others in different contexts, either on the site or elsewhere. This would aid in comparing the behaviors of two or more (possibly) distinct individuals between multiple websites and possibly in online interactions in an attempt to determine the likelihood that these presumably distinct individuals are, in fact, the same individual, allowing one to link an offline identity to a Twitter account, or determine that two separate Twitter accounts are used by the same person, for example. While this could be used for increased internet surveillance, it could also be used in order to better correlate the online behavior of threatening individuals with their offline counterparts or identify users operating multiple accounts on social media in order to circumvent bans or artificially inflate the amount of users circulating particular viewpoints, such as far right social media users using multiple accounts in order to manipulate trending topics on Twitter or portray

misinformative or propagandistic news articles as more impactful than they may

actually be.

Additionally, rather than observing the identity and actions of an individual

person, we could, instead, observe the actions of the various positions

inhabited by members of online communities and the ways in which those

positions are thought about by that community. This approach, furthermore,

need not be limited to anonymous computer-mediated spaces and should very

likely be applicable to the analysis of online spaces in which users have

usernames, profiles, accounts, avatars, and so on. In doing so, this approach

might hope to establish *not* the identities of individual users, but, rather, the

play of identities at a more macro, discursive level above the individual. In

addition to expanding our understanding of how users on /r9k/ talk about

gender, we might use this approach to understand how race, sexuality, political

ideology, nationality, and more are discussed on the board or any other online

site. Such an approach would allow for determining what sort of identities are

centralized and privileged or marginalized and excluded in these online spaces.

Furthermore, it would allow for predictions of how certain kinds of users or behaviors would be reacted to by the community, with the possibility of preempting negative responses and developing strategies of resistance in the face of exclusionary or hostile communities.

This approach could be applied to /r9k/ in order to further develop our understanding of gender on /r9k/ and 4chan. In mapping out a constellation of positions, the behaviors associated with them, and the faces attributed to them across a larger archive of posts from /r9k/, we could identify trends between gendered other-positionings and the behaviors of those positioned along with producing an understanding of the dominant ways of thinking about and reacting to users explicitly gendered either through self or other-positionings. Beyond a close reading of individual threads, then, such a distant reading would allow us to determine recurrent practices regarding identity and position and ways of understanding the identities of others on /r9k/

A second potential research direction would be the expansion of this approach to other boards on 4chan. On the one hand, to make a monolithic

claim to behavior on 4chan in general would be to paint with far too broad a brush. The boards hosted on the site seem to be, on their face, their own communities, with their own practices and trends. Yet, at the same time, to claim that these various boards are wholly insulated or separated from other boards on 4chan would be similarly unsatisfactory. Just as an individual might visit multiple different websites and belong to many different online communities, so too should we expect users on 4chan to visit and participate in many of the website's various boards. Someone who uses /r9k/ might also browse the website's anime and manga board, while a frequent user of the site's video game board may post on /r9k/ every so often. Further studies of the site should look towards examining the ways the site's various boards and their users intermingle and relate to one another. What practices are common on each individual board? Which practices are common across multiple boards? Finally, how do board affiliations factor into other and self-positioning—do certain behaviors on other boards mark one as being a regular poster on /r9k/, for example? Attending to the various explicit positions taken up across boards on

4chan, the ways in which those positions are regarded, and the ways those

positions typically interact and inter-relate with one another can all aid in this

kind of research.

Expanding on this possible research direction, there is also the question

of user behaviors across social media sites more broadly. Just as users on

4chan may participate on multiple boards across the site, so too should we

expect that users of 4chan also use sites like Facebook, Twitter, Reddit and

Tumblr. Given this, we should expect users on 4chan to interpret certain

behaviors as belonging to users from these various sites-as we saw in chapter

2, for example, a user responded to another by saying "christ you incels are

pathetic. gb2 reddit already," suggesting that some behaviors are understood as

belonging on Reddit by users on /r9k/. Expanding on this, we might expect to

find certain behaviors interpreted as belonging only on Twitter, Facebook,

Tumblr, and so on, on /r9k/ and on 4chan more broadly. In addition to

mapping the ways behaviors on 4chan are positioned as belonging to other

online communities, we could further examine how these communities are

regarded more broadly. Finally, this approach could be flipped to examine the

ways other online communities relate to 4chan and associate particular

behaviors with 4chan's various boards. As Milner (2013) has observed, many

memes and popular online jokes originate on–or at least pass through–4chan

before spreading across the internet to various communities. Given this, then,

we might examine how users and positions move to and from 4chan to the

internet more broadly. 4chan, as we have seen, is home to very hostile ways

of making sense of the behavior of others and of interacting with certain kinds

of others. Tracking the flow of positions–of ways of making sense of behaviors

and the relations of identities–to and from 4chan, we might better understand

the movement of hostile worldviews online in an attempt to resist that

movement and better protect online communities.

Attending to the explicit acts of positioning within online communities,

then, can provide several insights to further analyses. First, it provides

additional information about users beyond what their pseudonyms, accounts, or

profiles may (or may not) tell us. Beyond usernames and avatars, they are also

the positions they move themselves into and the positions attributed to them on

the basis of their behavior by others. Furthermore, these positions carry with

them various traits, expectations, and perspectives not explicitly present in a

given post–a user, as we saw, directing dissent at prevailing trends of misogyny

might be explicitly positioned as feminine, and with that comes various

misogynistic implications that pattern how the user is seen and will be seen by

others. Because of this, users *can not* be purely anonymous. One's behavior

on /r9k/ necessarily moves themselves and others in and out of various

positions, while that same behavior always provides resources which others

may base a judgement of the user's identity on or use in order to explicitly and

forcefully other-position that user. Due to this, a user desiring to hide elements

of their offline, embodied identity may betray those very same elements through

their behavior. Yet, at the same time, a user's behavior may signal an identity

or position to others that they do not inhabit offline or have any desire to

inhabit. Anonymity and CMC may afford users the opportunity to mask,

manipulate, or play with their identities, yet at the same time, it also opens the

space for the (mis)attribution of identity characteristics and all the potential

good and ill that may bring with it. All of this is to say, then: on 4chan users

are never only Anonymous.

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Vita

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