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*/pol/itically Incorrect*

Ideologies of Race, Anti-Semitism, Gender and Sexuality in the Everyday Linguistic

Co-production of Transgression

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in Anthropology

by

Wesley Troy Wilson

2019

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

/pol/itically Incorrect

Ideologies of Race, Anti-Semitism, Gender and Sexuality in the Everyday Linguistic

Co-production of Transgression

by

Wesley Troy Wilson

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Norma Mendoza-Denton, Chair

Narratives of Internet transparency, coupled with the resurgence of White Supremacism and Nationalism in public discourses have highlighted the role that technological affordances play in co-constituting particular ways of being online. Based on online fieldwork conducted over ten months, this thesis explores the various ideological processes that inform highly explicit and transgressive language on “Politically Incorrect” – /pol/ – a politics-centered discussion board on infamous website 4chan.org. The three most central dimensions evoked by anonymous users (“Anons”) in everyday interaction and performance – that of race, anti-Semitism, and gender and sexuality – are identified herein to better understand 1) the various oppositional alignments taken against discursively-produced “others”, 2) how Anons evoke and legitimize a dominant language ideology of transgression more broadly, and 3) the interplay of media

ideologies in these co-productive processes. I lastly conclude by proposing the concept of *hegemonic counterpublics* to more accurately frame how these alignments are evoked at strategic moments.

The thesis of Wesley Troy Wilson is approved.

Erin Katherine Debenport

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University of California, Los Angeles

2019

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## ONE: INTRODUCTION

The advent of the “information age” has marked an increased scholarly attention to the role that digital technologies play in constituting specific forms of experience, and with it a growing interest in exploring how social practices play out in mediated, online spaces. In his discussion of the emergent subdiscipline of digital anthropology, Boellstorff (2012:52) details the meaningful, ontological distinction between the “virtual” and the “physical”, a distinction that, he argues, constitute differing social realities:

The spatially and temporally specific realities are no longer limited to the physical world; the processes of moving through space and establishing common grounds can now take place online as well as offline. Confronted with multiple embodiments, and thus with indexical *fields of reference* that are multiple in a new way, we thereby face the virtual as an emergent set of social realities that cannot be straightforwardly extrapolated from the physical.

The “gap” proposed here between the social indexicalities of the “virtual” and the “physical” is, of course, not to say that the two are not deeply connected, but it does note that there is an increased necessity to explore the various “inter-indexical relationships” that traverse between the two in everyday life: to address the “myriad forms of social practice, including meaning-making, that move within virtual contexts but also across the gap between virtual and actual,” and to what extent that digital technologies play in that movement (52). I wish to frame this latter point more in an ideological capacity: that is, the ways in which the very distinction made here between virtual and actual (or online and offline) domains *inform* particular ways of taking up, interpreting, and acting in particular technologically-mediated contexts, and how they are deeply intertwined with ideological regimes of social differentiation manifest in “actual” space. I argue

that the perceived difference of “being online”, as opposed to not, have significant implications in this process of meaning-making both in, and out, of these digitally-mediated spaces.

This project takes up these latter statements with an emphasis on language, in that I explore how linguistic practices of conflict, contention, and transgression are routinely performed in opposition to “others” on “Politically Incorrect” – simply, /pol/ – an infamously-circulated board dedicated to the discussion of political topics and current news on bulletin/image board 4chan (4chan.org). I will look more specifically at the ways in which the structurally anonymous and ephemeral qualities of the website, what’s known as it’s communicative *affordances*, are influential in how language ideologies inform and legitimate explicit and provocative discourses by which users (“Anons”) employ regularly as a form of stance-taking in intense opposition to hyper-racialized and emasculated “others”. I argue that these discourses, informed by ideologies of language and media simultaneously, are manifestations of a dominant language ideology (See Kroskrity 1998) of *transgression*, in that these pervasive, conflict-provoking and racializing practices have become rationalized as not only the accepted, but culturally-valorized norm in this space. It has attained a status of hegemony in its sheer dominance, expressed discursively and often recognized metadiscursively.

As such, this project will build upon existing approaches in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, most notably language ideologies (See Kroskrity 2015), Raciolinguistics (See Alim et al. 2016), and various literature in language and identity (See Bucholtz and Hall 2004), such as stance-taking and stylization (Goodwin and Alim 2010; Irvine 2001; Rampton 1999), performance (Bauman and Briggs 1990), and conflict talk/disorderly discourse (Briggs 1996; Grimshaw 1990). These approaches are crucial for effectively framing 1) how transgression and conflict is “partial, contestable, and interest-laden” (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994:58) – that is

situated in the political-economic and social interests of its users, regularly contested in a multifarious, heterogenous ideological space, and partial in user's own awareness to these frameworks – 2) how they actively evoke and (co-)legitimate mutually-constituted and intersectional ideologies of race, gender, sexuality, and other “historically situated local ideolog(ies) of human distinctiveness” (Chun and Lo 2015:20), and 3) how they utilize various semiotic and linguistic resources in performances of intense opposition. The importance of conceptualizing language in its “non-neutral” capacity (Duranti 2008) is an overarching theme imperative to these approaches of language study.

In addition, I am also applying the more recent conceptual framework of *media ideologies*, offered in its current form by Gershon (2010a) in her work on breakups over New Media, that aims to bridge language ideological approaches with current work in both Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Media Studies that stress how “the structure of a technology helps to shape the participant structure brought into being through its use, simultaneously enabling and limiting how communication can take place through that medium, how the communication circulates, and who can participate” (Gershon 2010b:285). This understanding, known as the “*affordances* of a communicative technology” (See Hutchby 2001; Gibson 1977), is useful for framing how transgressive practices are informed by the dynamic relationship between digital media and language ideological processes.

Based on this, I surmise that anonymous users (“Anons”) strategically authenticate themselves as subjects starkly disaligned from dominant public discourses through performances of intense opposition vis-à-vis “Others”. In doing so, “Anons” actively embody particular identities that are hyper-racializing, anti-Semitic and (hyper-)masculine, expressed by and through the highly-routinized usage of slurs and epithets – often in conjunction with an array of

other semiotic resources available. This may serve as an example of what Babcock (1978) refers to as *symbolic inversion*, denoting “any act of expressi[ve] behavior which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion present[s] an alternative to commonly held cultural, values and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, social [or] political” (14). These kinds of performances continuously operate in an indexical field of opposition, contrast, and juxtaposition, in that culturally-valued stances are evaluated primarily by their active and transgressive orientation to the perceivably mainstream and “politically correct” discourses situationally linked to this discursive “Other”. These practices are shown to be deeply intertwined within ideological frameworks that rationalize the degrading socio-economic conditions of society as a direct result of the presence/practices of racialized (non-white) individuals and of the coordinated actions of a Jewish elite. This “Other” is understood to be perpetuating these disparaging circumstances through circulating discourses of multiculturalism and racial/gender equality in mainstream publics, and by being perceivably submissive or unaware to what’s “really” happening in society for the sake of political correctness. Oppositional alignments therefore serve, in part, to discursively frame “Anons” as belonging to a marginalized “counterpublic” (or “anti-society”; See Halliday 1976), in which “their members are understood to be not merely a subset of the public, but constituted through a conflictual relation to the dominant public” (Warner 2002:84-85). Transgressive language practices, which can also be conceptualized as an “anti-language” (See Halliday 1976), have a perceivably transformative potential in revealing the “truthful” conditions of the world to those who are willing to accept it. These practices are inevitably linked to White Supremacist raciolinguistic ideologies – characteristic of discourses in current White Nationalist and/or “Alt-Right” political

movements – that utilize resources from ideological frameworks both overtly and covertly operating in “hyperracial(izing)” societies (See Alim 2016a).

I also find that the communicative affordances of 4chan’s interface are crucial to the manifestation and legitimation of these discourses: the unique structural elements of user anonymity and ephemerality include, among others, the absence of official membership, easily accessible public content, the lack of any permanent (website) archives, and space limitations for content that leads to relatively short life-spans. As such “Anons” must frequently navigate a range of different kinds of semiotic resources present to authenticate their status of hyper-Whiteness and to align with/against others in highly-conflictual ways.

In doing this project, I hope to expand upon existing research by exploring three central ideas: 1) looking at the ways in which language ideological processes operate in digital space – necessary because the increasing saliency of the Internet (e.g., the impact of Social Media platforms) in everyday life has only recently begun to be examined in great detail by these approaches; 2) looking specifically at how the unique properties of these digitally-mediated spaces (and users folk understandings of such) directly play into such – crucial due to the fact that the structural conditions of sites vary (often substantially) (e.g., anonymity v. transparency; Social Media v. Web Forums); and 3) how these interwoven ideological frameworks of language and media inform, reinforce and/or problematize existing ideologies of social differentiation, such as race, gender, generation, sexuality, etc. and how they may legitimize them in said spaces.

As such, this project will be presented in the following format: first, I briefly explore the literary traditions that frame the scope of this work (**TWO: RESEARCH TRADITIONS**). Second, I outline the methodological dimensions, offering a brief overview of the fieldsite in question (/pol/ on 4chan.org) and the project itself (**THREE: ABOUT THE PROJECT**). Third,

I present three ideological regimes – manifested in discourse – that constitute the dominant language ideology of transgression, including a return to an earlier discussion topic in light of the information presented in a fourth subsection (**FOUR: IDEOLOGIES OF SOCIAL DISTINCTION AND DOMINANT LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES**). And lastly, findings and discussion are wrapped up with concluding remarks (**FIVE: CONCLUSION**).

## **TWO: RESEARCH TRADITIONS**

### **2.1 Language Ideologies**

Language ideologies (also “linguistic ideologies”) are “the beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use, which often index the political economic interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation states” (Kroskrity 2010:192). They are characterized as folk models, or “scaffoldings” (See Hill 2008) by which language (in and of itself) and ideas *about* language structure and use in everyday life are informed, rationalized, and to some degree, expressed. In his evaluation of the approach, Kroskrity (2015) emphasizes three main themes, or “planks” of the approach: that being *positionality*, *multiplicity*, and *awareness*.

*Positionality* highlights the inevitably non-neutral properties of language, in that “language ideologies represent the perception of language and discourse that is constructed in the interest, or from the perspective, of an economically positioned social or cultural group” (98). It refers to how ideological frameworks are deeply entangled in the particular socio-political conditions, and agendas, of particular groups. As such, ideological regimes are often rationalized and employed by the interested positions of dominant elites to legitimate their own positions of power and authority (See Kroskrity 1998; Irvine and Gal 2000). An example of such lies in the

ideology of a “standard” language, discussed by Lippi-Green (1997:64) as a perceivably neutral, “abstracted, idealized, [and] homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the speech of the upper, middle class”. In this case, although the ideology of the standard is circulated under the guise of neutrality and mutuality, it can hardly be abstracted from its initial regionalized, raced, and classed contexts. The ideology of the *monoglot standard* (See Silverstein 1998; Milroy 1998) is deeply historicized in European philosophical traditions highlighting the relationship between one common, mutual language, the idea of a bounded and unified nation-state, and a racial or ethnically homogenous community of people (Bauman and Briggs 2003:163-196; See Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). These ideological regimes continue to be interwoven in ideologies of nationalist and institutional discourses (See Errington 2001; Schmidt 2007; Philips 2000) which are deeply linked to ideologies of race, gender, class, etc. in both an influential and reproductive capacity (Hill 2008:33).

*Multiplicity* refers to how ideologies always operate in a heterogeneity, due primarily to its groundedness in social experiences composed of a “plurality of meaningful social divisions (class, gender, clan, elites, generations, and so on) within sociocultural groups that can produce divergent perspectives expressed as indices of group membership” (Kroskrity 2015:99). As such, even pervasive and dominant ideological frameworks (See Kroskrity 1998) are never operating in a homogenous vacuum, but within a complex entanglement of emergent, contesting meanings (See Hill 1998). This is not unlike Williams (1977) understanding of “hegemony” – forces or modes of cultural domination tied with socio-economic and political interests, often institutionalized – in addition to the concept of “counter-hegemonies” – continuously emergent meanings that react to and contest dominant cultural practices in time and space. In the case of

language ideologies, ideological regimes are always contested and incomplete. An example of this has been examined in the social media platform of Twitter (Twitter.com), in which Bonilla and Rosa (2015) examined how pervasive ideologies of blackness in the United States, serving to legitimize the marginalization of African-Americans and the policing of their bodies, behaviors, and actions, are taken up, (re-)negotiated and (re-)constituted through emergent meanings via the Twitter hashtag system (i.e., #Ferguson, #Iftheygunnedmedown). Even though pervasive ideologies of black criminality are circulated in public discourse (and most notably here through mass media), these meanings are always subject to contention, and are (re-)imagined in various spaces.

Lastly, *Awareness* notes the inevitable partiality of speakers in being aware of their own language ideologies, “displaying varying degrees of awareness” of local frameworks often via meta-discursive practice (Kroskirty 2015:101). Since language ideologies are often internalized and rationalized as “common sensical” (See Rumsey 1990), work that examines the contrast between speaker’s ideologies in meta-discursive statements, and what they actually do in practice is particularly fruitful for this theme (Bucholtz 2012:282). An example is demonstrated in Kroskirty’s (1998:110) examination of dominant ideological processes of the Arizona Tewa community, in which speakers of the language regularly employ indigenous puristic and strict compartmentalizing ideologies in practice, which results in an increased awareness of the lexical items (words) being used in everyday speech, but being less so when it comes to gradual grammatical and structural changes: “But there is also clear evidence that folk attention is selective...Arizona Tewa linguists, unlike our own, are primarily if not exclusively lexicographers. Abundant evidence suggests that several grammatical structures in Arizona Tewa are the result of linguistic convergence.” Through comparison Kroskirty demonstrates how



certain forms of a language can be situated meta-discursively (i.e., “discursive consciousness”), but often can fall under the horizon of awareness and taken for granted (i.e., practical consciousness). A similar sentiment is evoked about the researcher’s own ideological awareness in Kroskrity’s (2000) exploration of anthropologist Edward Dozier’s “misrecognition of [his subjects] multiethnic adaptation(s)” (330).

Important research to consider within the approach focus on the processes responsible for producing these ideological frameworks, and how they are legitimated in a wide variety of contexts. The seminal work of Irvine and Gal (2000:37-38) details the interplay of ideological processes of linguistic differentiation in the production, and rationalization, of discourses informed by the positionalities of speakers and groups. The first of these, *iconization*, denotes the process by which an indexical or symbolic sign relationship becomes taken up and framed as an iconic one, which inevitably links to particular languages and their speakers as an iconically indistinguishable and inherent facet of their identity. The second, *fractal recursivity*, refers to the process when oppositional binaries situated in unequal relations of power and marginalization becomes reproduced, or replicated (hence “recursion”), among larger and smaller oppositional scales (and reproducing these unequal relations in the process). The last, *erasure*, is when prevailing forms of differentiation often downplay or “erase” elements that don’t reinforce or legitimate the ideological structure. These processes have been extremely useful in formulating how ideologies can become widespread and highly naturalized (See Kroskrity 1998; Kroskrity 2015). Furthermore, research on how culturally-valued speech practices are “produced, (de)valorized, circulated, maintained, and eventually transformed across time and space” is detailed by Agha (2003), in which “speech chains” act as micro-discursive “vehicles” for transmitting and (re)circulating local values linked with particular registers/language varieties.

These processes occur both locally and society-wide, often creating complex inter-linking “webs” of circulation that can reinforce, or contest, one another (e.g., typifications/stereotypes) (See Reyes 2007; Agha 2011).

## 2.2 Raciolinguistics

The disciplinary movement of Raciolinguistics conceptualizes (ideologies of) *race* and *language* as interwoven, mutually constituted, and intersectional processes in the everyday (co-)production and (de-)construction of social identities. It builds upon and privileges an analysis of how socio-historically situated racial formations (See Omi and Winant 1994) are legitimated and/or problematized in everyday, (raciolinguistic) performance and interaction. Doing so requires an understanding of *race* not as an innate or *natural* system of distinction but as an active ideological *process* informing how the embodied practices and experiences of living people are *interpreted* and *framed* through a racial lens; becoming linked, in this case, to particular ethnoracial identities, and the semiotic frameworks that inform them.

In so emphasizing this analytic process of “racing” language and “linguaging” race (See Alim 2016a), the movement of Raciolinguistics conceptualizes the emergent process of *racialization*, that details how actions, behaviors, practices and individuals (e.g., bodies) *become racial* (Chun and Lo 2015). This process is especially important because it frames how language, as being inextricably linked to broader semiotic undercurrents of identity, power, culture, citizenship, and other macro (social) categories of social distinction (e.g., gender, class, sexuality, etc.) becomes interwoven and employed (often covertly) in public discourses about race; such dialogue, or lack thereof, is of crucial importance to the discipline, and one that necessitates an approach that most effectively understands, and can therefore problematize, the

interplay of racist ideologies underpinning macro-level orders and hierarchies of social difference and distinction (See Alim 2016a; Alim 2016b).

Literary work in Raciolinguistics build upon a critical evaluation of *Whiteness* – as a racial category situated in hegemony – and in doing so aims to expose its ostensibly neutral positionality serving to legitimate White supremacist ideologies of racialized “otherness”, as reflected *by* and *through* interaction in everyday life. For instance, Hill (1998b:682) takes on the concept of *White Public Space*, defined as crucial sites in which Whiteness, and things linked to White hegemonies (e.g., language practices, behaviors, bodies), become internalized and reified as the invisible, unmarked norm by which marked, racial subjects are regularly juxtaposed and compared. Racialized individuals are routinely monitored and evaluated by their *perceived* alignment to (+) or distance from (-) these semiotic assemblages; the manifestation of a “non-White marginality” does exemplify how the linguistic practices of individuals of Color become iconized with elements of (un)assimilative disorder (See Urciuoli 1996; Schmidt 2007; Lo 2016), deviancy or educational deficit (Perez et al. 2016; Alim 2005; Pollack 2005), perpetual markedness/foreignness, and/or insidious or self-interested intentionality (Lo 2016), to present a few examples (See also Reyes 2007; Lo 2016; Flores and Rosa 2015). In this case, while racialized bodies are put on display in White Public Space, (unmarked) White bodies are often viewed in orderly or prestigious ways. Rosa (2016:116), for example, demonstrates this point by reevaluating how practices of Spanish-English bilingualism were perceived in accordance with who was doing the performing: while bilingualism was often framed as “backwards problems to be overcome” with Latina/os, the very same practices were indexically recognized as culturally-prestigious assets for native White subjects.

This demonstrates primarily how language and the body (e.g., phenotype) are crucial and inseparable aspects of the racialization process. The adopting the racialization approach, the discipline also highlights the relationship between the “speaking” and “listening subject” (See Inoue 2006; Chun and Lo 2015; Flores and Rosa 2015) in theorizing how ideologies can inform the perceptive capacity of listeners in framing speakers into racialized categories; the *perceived* language practices and phenotype of speakers can often have substantial consequences for individuals in their day-to-day lives (See Alim 2016b; Bailey 2000). For instance, Flores and Rosa (2015) details how the ideological pedestal of the “White listening subject” acts to implicitly frame racialized English-speaking individuals as being “linguistically deficient”, regardless of whether those same individuals align with indexically-White Mainstream English practices. This echoes sentiments by Lippi-Green (1997), where the perceived racial identity of a speaker (via an image presented of an phenotypically Asian woman) would implicitly predispose students to racialize what’s heard as sounding “foreign” or “difficult to understand”, even scoring notable lower on tests of subject matter, even though the audio was recorded by a White woman using the recognized standard variety. Though these ideologies have serious consequences for its speakers, the discipline does emphasize that this relationship can often be (re-)negotiated and (re-)imagined depending on the context for both the racialized and the racializing (See Roth-Gordon 2016; Bailey 2000; Alim 2016b; Bonilla and Rosa 2015; Alim and Smitherman 2012). The potential usage of linguistic forms in (re-)negotiating racialized bodies in space is not, however, so clear cut, and while ideologies in one degree are problematized through language, another can be legitimated, as demonstrated by the freestyle rap battles of Hip-Hop emcees in Alim et al. (2018).

Related to this latter point, the theme of racialization is also explored in its performative dimensions. An analysis of how Native American language practices are fictionalized and represented in media by Meek (2006) shows how linkages between imagined speech patterns (co-produced by White listening subjects) and people's identity are iconically recognized and reified. The resulting representation – referred to as “linguistic images” – are situated in the author's “imagined realities, reflective of ideological assumptions, and not on everyday interaction” (120). These fictionalized representations of racial “others” are similarly discussed at length in discussion of *mock varieties*, more specifically Mock Asian (See Chun 2004). Reyes (2007) subsequently notes how Asian-American speakers in a video-making group use linguistic resources to evoke “contrastive social personae” in efforts to performatively align against “Asian Newcomer” stereotypes, an “othering” process that occurs to varying degrees in the usage of other mock varieties (See Hill 1998; Barrett 2006; Ronkin and Karn 1999; Chun 2004).

The larger undercurrent of these projects in the discipline exposes and problematizes the often *covert* forms of racist practice situated in the more contemporary depiction of what Alim and Smitherman (2012:33) refer to as “Racism 2.0”, “or enlightened exceptionalism...a form of racism that allows for and even celebrates the achievements of individual persons of color, but only because those individuals generally are seen as different from a less appealing, even pathological black or brown rule” (from Wise 2009:8-11). This is not to say, however, that *overt racist practices* have become excluded from study: Hill (2008:40-41) discusses how more explicitly recognized overt forms (e.g., slurs, epithets) comparatively evoke the *enactive* (Woolard 1985; see also Silverstein 1985) and *performative* dimensions of language ideologies that's oriented less about the *referential* or truth-bearing dimension (See Silverstein 1985) (though I argue that this could certainly become interwoven as well) but about evoking specific

feelings; the idea that words have an assaultive ability is, in contrast to comparatively more *covert discourses*, crucial for how these explicit forms are employed and circulated in public discourse (See also Ronkin and Karn 1999). An understanding of how both *covert* and *overt* processes work in a totality will facilitate a broader and more fruitful stepping point in which these processes can be deconstructed, delegitimized, and transgressed (See Alim 2016b). This latter theme is a binding one for the discipline and is crucial for framing this project.

### **2.3 Approaches in Language and Identity, and Conflict Talk**

Bucholtz and Hall (2004:382) define “identity” as “an outcome of cultural semiotics that is accomplished through the production of contextually relevant sociopolitical relations of similarity and difference, authenticity and inauthenticity, and legitimacy”. Identity work is framed not as a set of objective, static categories, but as an emergent, interactional process tied to the positionality of the interactants. The importance of language in realizing these productive capacities is highlighted in their *tactics of intersubjectivity*, presenting the ways in which identity formations are manifested (and/or authenticated) through interaction. The first set of processes are *adequation* and *distinction*, describing the ways in which interlocutors will highlight or underscore either *sameness* or *difference* vis-à-vis others; perceived similarities and sameness are highlighted, for example, at the expense of one’s perceived differences (i.e., a process of erasure), and vice versa. The second, *authentication* and *denaturalization*, describe the ways in which identities are highlighted and perceived as being “genuine” (i.e., real) or “artificial” (i.e., fake). Bucholtz and Hall notes the wide variety of semiotic and linguistic resources available for this process, in which speakers can index various kinds of “stances” (next section) through their choice of resources (385-86). The last, *authorization* and *illegitimation*, refers to the larger-scale

process of being identified as legitimate (or being denied as such) institutionally or through other forms of authority or “structural power” (386). These processes demonstrate the wide range of resources used in the production of identity, and also can highlight how they are produced locally and on larger scales in conflicting ways.

Another theme touched upon in language and identity approaches is the idea of “Otherness”. It can be argued that “Others” are sorts of identity formations – shifting between particular practices, people, groups, communities, nationalities, publics, etc. – “who can be positioned,” argues Bucholtz and Hall (2004), “against those socially constituted as the same” (371). There are a number of frameworks used to elaborate on this process, but I focus on three: the idea of stance and stance-taking (Goodwin and Alim 2010), stylization (Podesva et al. 2001; Goodwin and Alim 2010; Irvine 2001), and performance (Bauman 1977; Bauman and Briggs 1990; Bucholtz and Hall 2004). While “stance” marks an alignment towards a particular identity formation, “stance-taking” denotes the process of that alignment through which “forms of variation that have established social indexicalities [are] used to signal positionality” (Jaffe 2009:10; Goodwin and Alim 2010:182). The concept of “style”, in this case, is conceptualized as a form of stance-taking, in that individuals will *stylize*, or take on particular subject positions through the use of indexical resources within broader systems of distinction, “[where] style[s] contrast with other possible styles, and the social meaning signified by the style contrasts with other social meanings” (Irvine 2001:77; Podesva et al. 2001). This indicates that stylization and stance-taking can be used to situate self and others within local “interactional identities” that inevitably play upon, reinforce, reproduce, or problematize larger pervasive social categories (Goodwin and Alim 2010:180; Jaffe 2009). “Others”, in this case, are deeply tied to these processes of positionality, as interlocutors may evoke blanket oppositional (identity) categories

in during these moments as a process of distinction: “establishing a dichotomy between social identities constructed as oppositional or contrastive. It thus has a tendency to reduce complex social variability to a single dimension: us versus them” (Bucholtz and Hall 2004:384; Rampton 1999).

Following in this vein, research on conflict (See Grimshaw 1990; Briggs 1996) have discussed at length the potential importance that such processes can play in identity formations: straying from paradigms of conflict that frame it as a kind of “pathological state” that disrupts “social order”, Briggs (1996:5) notes how emergent meanings and forms can into play through conflict: “social theorists similarly have come to view social and cultural forms as historically contingent products that emerge through conflict, and the process of *differentiating* an Other from a Self is often deemed to be more crucial to the creation of both identities and communities than the presence of a shared cognitive stratum.” Likewise, work on “conflict talk” in Grimshaw (1990) makes a similar observation, where “superordinate ends (sometimes manifest, sometimes latent) as socialization, play, identity-making, establishment and/or reaffirmation of social structure, claims of solidarity, and resolution of one’s own ideological priorities may be more important than ‘winning’ (282). That is, conflict is conceptualized as a social-interactional process that plays an important role in identity formations, potentially destabilizing, or (re)legitimizing, socially distinct categories during moments of engagement. These themes are crucial to this project.

## **2.4 Media Ideologies**

Lastly, work on media ideologies (See Gershon 2010a; 2010b) define it as “people’s beliefs, attitudes and strategies about the media they use...involv[ing] the assumptions that



people hold about how a medium accomplishes communicative tasks” (Gershon 2010a:391). Media ideologies, much like language ideologies, examine interpretive folk models of how particular media forms index how messages are taken up and viewed with them; they act in a heterogeneity of contesting ideological frameworks, and are situated in the positional interests of its individuals. Gershon (2010a) approaches this topic with the phenomena of “media switching”, the process by which interlocutors would engage with a plurality of different media forms/outlets when engaging with others at particular moments. The speech genre of the “breakup” and its uptake among college-aged students plays out differently depending on the medium (or media) used. The concept of “affordances” is crucial to this approach, highlighting the role that “the limitations and possibilities embedded in the very structure of a communicative technology” plays in human interaction (Hutchby 2001:32). Hutchby notes that particular media forms promote, and inevitably constraint, how these interactions can play out in time and space, though is not determinative in doing so (32). This idea of affordances comes in handy when looking at how students will reflexively interpret these affordances: “their choice of media can be read as formal or informal, enabling intonation or devoid of intonation, allowing for conversational turn-taking or preventing it, public or private, and so on” (Gershon 2010a:402). Initiating a breakup frame can be taken differently, in this case, when it is initiated face-to-face, over a Facebook status update, during a Skype call, or via a handwritten letter sent in the mail. The “materiality of media”, and ideologies of such, therefore play a significant role in how utterances are framed, interpreted, and responded to, and have definite implications for individuals in their everyday lives (See Gershon 2010b; Agha 2011).

## THREE: ABOUT THE PROJECT

### 3.1 A Brief (Technical) Overview of 4chan (the general fieldsite)

4chan.org is an American-hosted website that has, since its conception in late 2003, hosted a massive influx of Internet traffic, with over 27.7 million unique users per month, up to 1 million unique “posts” (i.e., user-submitted utterances) each day and with over 2.7 billion “posts” in its 14-year history (as of December 2017) (4chan.org). It has had and continues to have an influential role in the production of discourses characteristic of “popular Internet culture”. Reminiscent of a web forum (*See Figure 3.1*), the website is composed of numerous “boards” that act as dedicated spaces for particular topics of interest. Boards are distinguished by a particular series of letter situated between forward slashes, with some of the examples being /a/ - Anime and Manga, /b/ - Random, /lit/ - literature, /v/ - video games, and so on and so forth. Furthermore, each board is composed of user-made subtopics (threads), that are each individually created by an opening post(er) (OP). Each thread consists of individual user-utterances (i.e., replies, or posts) made by (anonymous) users (“Anons”). While each board distinguishes themselves from one another based on general discussion topics, board-specific threads narrow these topics further and channel discussions around specialized sub-topics, given that it pertains to the general theme of the board (e.g., literature, politics, comics, etc.). Threads allow users to observe and/or participate in discussions centered around topics of their own choosing, which can facilitate the ways in which experiences, ideas, arguments, etc. are performed within a co-productive frame.

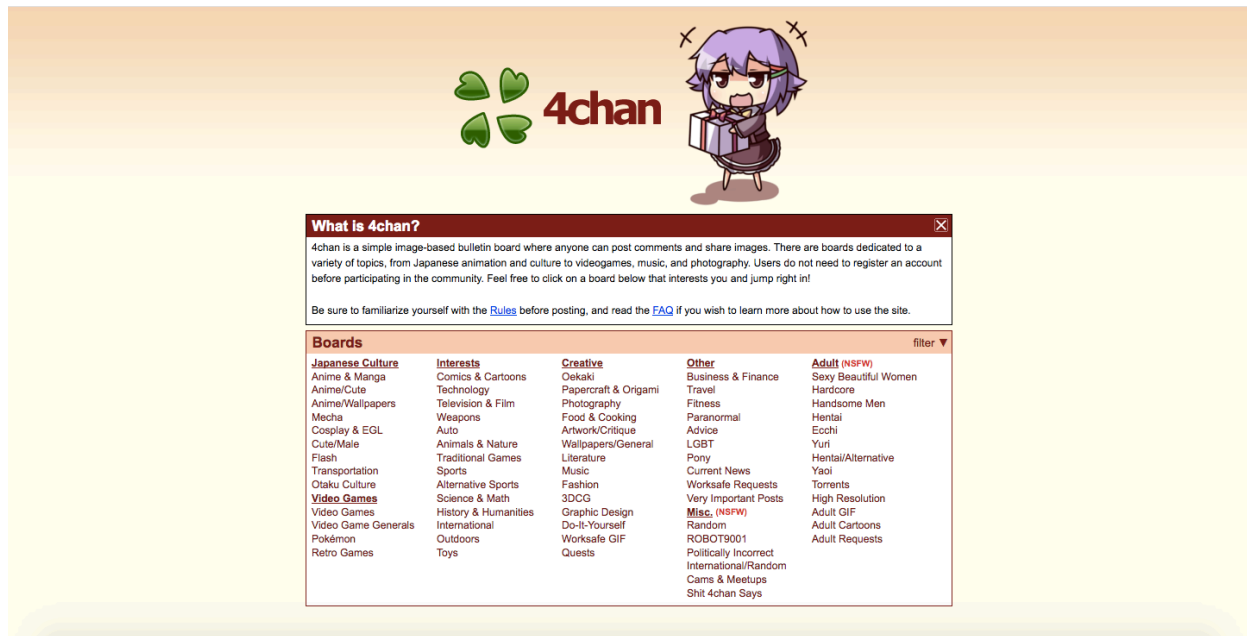


Figure 3.1 – 4chan.org’s front page, with a list of its boards; December 2017.

The website itself is commonly juxtaposed to a growing trend of Internet transparency and of greater degrees of accountability taking place on popular social networking sites, a trend that Knuttila (2011) states is a larger “conflat[ion] of one’s virtual self and real world self...[where] Facebook wants to know how you are, Twitter wants to know what you are doing, and Foursquare wants to know where you are...[that] social media relies on an articulation of a lived social self”. The seeming contrast is due in no small part to 4chan’s structural barriers, or lack thereof: an analysis by Bernstein et al. (2011) demonstrates how the website is centralized around structural *anonymity* and *ephemerality* for its users. By *anonymity* I refer to how the website has no personal identifiers, as users are not required to register any account to observe and/or to actively participate in discussions; and by *ephemerality* I refer to how the website lacks any permanent archiving capabilities, so any user-made discussion threads will only exist as long as it is actively being circulated and managed. For example, Bernstein et al.’s analysis of 4chan’s “random” board – known as /b/ – revealed that the average thread lasted only around five

minutes before its eventual expiration (1). Although this does not necessarily reflect the average lifespan of a thread on all boards, since /b/ was at the time the most frequented, it does exemplify the notably finite limitations of space prevalent throughout the website.



Figure 3.2 – 4chan’s interface (taken on /pol/).

Figure 3.2 briefly demonstrates how 4chan’s user-interface works in practice (as well as the type of content that routinely gets posted). The website is popularly categorized as an “imageboard,” which operates as kind of web forum, but with a greater range of textual, visual, and audio resources available for its users. In the example above, the “OP” (referring to either the “opening poster” or the “opening post” depending on context) is required to post an image that accompanies the text (i.e., the drinks). Further down, an “Anon” replies to a particular post (the latter of which is not shown in the example) using only a visual representation of their “reaction” (i.e., Robin Hood’s expression). Knuttila (2011) refers to this latter representation as a “shared or acknowledged affectual state”, demonstrating that although text still remains the

most prevalent form of communication on the website, the sheer range of other semiotic resources available by its users – and the various combinations of which – allow for complex semiotic assemblages that cannot be overemphasized, nor represented adequately in this paper (for any number of reasons).

In essence, the structure of the website affords a particular kind of vision – or “implied narrative” (See Akrich 1992; Gershon 2010b) by which the founder and former administrator, Christopher Poole (“moot”) emphasizes as a necessarily valuable, and liberatory element:

And so, what I think is really intriguing about a community like 4chan is just that it’s this open place. As I said, it’s raw, it’s unfiltered. And sites like it are kind of going the way of the dinosaur right now. They’re endangered because we’re moving towards social networking. We’re moving towards persistent identity. We’re moving towards, you know, a lack of privacy, really. We’re sacrificing a lot of that, and I think in doing so, moving towards those things, we’re losing something valuable (TED).

In a separate interview on Forbes, Poole privileges the creative capacity of these elements, highlighting the sense of “authenticity” in how content is produced, distributed, and (re)circulated; since users are not tied to any personal attributes, “it allows you to share in a completely unvarnished, unfiltered, raw way” (Forbes). As previously noted by Gershon (2010), ideologies of media and media usage, as presented here, can have significant implications for how particular communicative affordances are even set up (i.e., with particular interests in mind), and how shared engagements between users can play out. This latter point is especially important in framing just how users have taken up this vision in the production of their rather explicit and notorious content.

### 3.2 A Brief (Personal) Overview of 4chan

I was first drawn to 4chan nearly ten years ago, back during my years as an (admittedly) Internet-obsessed high-school student (~2008). During that time, I had become deeply immersed in board behaviors, being a regular visitor on /b/ - the “random” board (dedicated to an “anything goes” approach), /v/ - the “video games” board, and /a/ - “Anime and Manga”, among a few others. Although I continued to visit on and off in the years following, it wasn’t until the end of my undergraduate years (~2015) that I had returned with any semi-regular frequency, due to (unpublished) fieldwork that I had conducted on /v/. The central fieldsite for this project, /pol/, was generally unknown to me until late 2015/early 2016, just before the time of the Presidential Primaries (next subsection). The “insider status” that I have attained, as a result, makes me, the anthropologist in this study, an “insider ethnographer”, though I would argue a partial one. The “give and take” relationship of particular degrees of “insider status” have provided some useful contextual background in which to interpret particular utterances – given my general awareness of the frameworks operating site-wide – though perhaps not to the degree as the implied lexical distinction between “insider” and “outsider” in ethnographic research may imply. In this case, my status must be critically evaluated on the basis of “insider-ness” rather than by an uncomplicated binary. The status of “insider” is a complicated one, and not necessarily a better or more accurate one. The complexities of these ideas are taken up and addressed more potently in other academic research, such as Kroskrity’s (2000) account of Edward P. Dozier’s “insider status” in academia, and the ideological biases that informed his research.

The reason I was drawn to 4chan is initially due to a very salient status of notoriety that the website had attained in the media at that time; a notoriety that eventually inspired this project. Part of 4chan’s contribution to “popular Internet culture” addressed earlier is not only its

interface and as a creativity-emphasized “meme factory”, but the sheer absurdity and explicitness of the kinds of content regularly observed:

It is a discordant bricolage of humour, geek cultures, fierce debates, pornography, in-jokes, hyperbolic opinions and general offensiveness...given its contemporaneous tensions, it is little surprise that media outlets have labeled 4chan and Anonymous everything from ‘cyber-vigilantes’ who are ‘at once brilliant, ridiculous and alarming’ to the ‘lawless Wild West of the Web, a place of uninhibited bawdiness and verbal violence” (Knuttila 2011)

This last theme, that of “verbal violence”, is similarly discussed at length by Coleman (2014) in her study of Anonymous – an Internet “hacktivist” group once residing on /b/: “...no one on 4chan is in the least bit disturbed by the uncivil speech that ricochets across the board every second of the day. In many respects, the board [/b/] is explicitly conceived of as a say-anything zone: the grosser and more offensive, damn it, the better” (41). The markedly explicit forms of language used so routinely by Anons became entangled in its identity, iconically fastened to the emergent, populist understanding of “Internet trolling”, which denotes the phenomena of “start(ing) quarrels or upset(ing) people on the Internet to distract and sow discord by posting inflammatory and digressive, extraneous, or off-topic messages...with the intent of provoking readers into displaying emotional responses and normalizing tangential discussion, whether at the troll’s amusement or a specific gain” (Wikipedia). Though this definition varies, and has certainly changed over time with its exposure to various publics (See Coleman 2014 for a different understanding), it does highlight the ways in which language became a primary index of group identity on 4chan; a group identity wrapped within veils of secrecy, ambiguity, and overt chaos: “4chan remains the phantom, amorphous, non-individual and non-personalized

cloud. On 4chan, you are both part of and outside anonymous flow; you can create a meme but never own it; you can state a discussion but never control it; you can perform or create a spectacle like a jester but you are also observing it” (Knuttila 2011). The deliberate transgressive spectacle being (co-)produced between Anons, for one, and the publics situated in media discourses and word of mouth is how I was first exposed to, and eventually drawn into it.

Much of the existing research on 4chan (See Coleman 2014; Bernstein et al. 2011; Knuttila 2011) have primarily examined /b/, the aforementioned “random” board, due to its long history in (co-)producing these chaotic and notorious representations of the collective as the acclaimed “Internet Hate Machine”, as well as its disproportionate amount of Internet traffic (nearly a third of user-traffic in 2010). Although an interview with Christopher Poole (*nicovideo.jp*) indicated /b/’s continued reign over the website’s total traffic in 2011, it has likely since been replaced by another, more topic-specific board with its own transgressive practices: /pol/ - the central fieldsite for this project. The findings highlighted above will be used to provide a general, though admittedly imperfect, contextual background for exploring this particular fieldsite.

### **3.3 A Brief Overview of /pol/ - “Politically Incorrect” (the specific fieldsite)**

/pol/ is 4chan’s board dedicated to “the discussion of news, world events, political issues, and other related topics,” and where fieldwork was entirely conducted (4chan.org). Data was collected from November 2017 to September 2018, a span of nearly ten months with occasional hiatuses in between. Active periods of fieldwork would generally take place during the morning, or late evening, with usually at least a few hours for any given session. Although not exclusive to these times (especially in light of particular events or day-by-day schedules), I would routinely



visit /pol/ in this way to maintain some level of consistency, both due to the diversity of time zones (since Anons log in from an array of countries) and due to it having perceivably manageable rates of user-traffic. Routine visits to /pol/ comprised of primarily observation of user-to-user engagement, manually saving each thread that I stumbled upon for further reference. Since all threads – even the newest ones – would find themselves on the front page at some point, I limited my search to such for the sake of accessibility. I did not, therefore, use any specialized programs to “scrape” board content in any large-scale capacity; any misrepresentations due to my highly qualitative approach is a fault of my own. I must stress that I did not recirculate and use the yet-to-be-seen language practices so evident on the website; such is also a decision of my own in order to potentially avoid any ethical or problematic issues – that is, with reinforcing existing systems of marginalization by employing the very language forms used to legitimize them, even for the sake of “participant-observation” practices so prevalently presented as a core facet of the ethnographic research process. I am, as such, aware that I must address this kind of hesitation, and the ideological biases that may underlie it, in order to provide a fuller picture of the research process that went into this project. Any unforeseen biases are also a fault of my own.

/pol/ was rebranded in 2011 after the website’s original news board – known as /new/ – was shut down by Poole after massive volumes of racist posts: “as for /new/, anybody who used it knows exactly why it was removed. When I re-added the board last year, I made a note that if it devolved into /stormfront/, I’d remove it. It did – ages ago. Now it’s gone, as promised” (webcitation.org; from 4chan.org). In this, “/stormfront/” is pointing out a parallel between the board and Stormfront(.org), one of the first major and notorious white supremacist/nationalist websites known for both its overtly racist and anti-Semitic content as well as its founder, Don

Black. Since its (re)conception, /pol/ has amplified these trends, continuing to be a hegemonic producer of discourses (notably memes) centered around White Nationalist/Supremacist (and/or “alt-right”) movements online (though not necessarily exclusive to such), most notably during the 2016 Presidential Election (knowyourmeme.com) (*see Figure 3.3*). Although the latter events will not be discussed at length in this project, it does provide a basic backdrop for how this board has some underlying parallels to existing characterizations of 4chan – mostly /b/ – in various publics, since such racist discourses have been observed on other various boards, though it is channeled on /pol/ to a much higher, and (I believe) more significant degree. For example, Angela Nagle’s account of the emergence of the Internet “alt-right” does note the employment of a “transgressive anti-moral style” (39), which is certainly evident on /pol/. As such, I make the argument that such practices observed herein are informed by dominant ideological frameworks of transgression. Though debatably linked to these larger movements, the narrow scope of this project remains exclusive to the board itself. Unlike a number of boards on 4chan, /pol/ has a few structural additions, most notably ID tags – solely for tracking which Anon posts *what* in particular interaction chains, though still completely anonymous – and a flag “identifying” which nation the Anon is perceivably posting from (e.g., the US, Brazil, Finland). But, even this latter “identifier” is unreliable by any serious means, as they are routinely manipulated by users to show “other” identifiers, ranging from the flag of Nazi Germany to the LGBT pride flag. These practices are often interwoven within complex semiotic assemblages during engagements with other Anons.



*Figure 3.3 – An (unofficial) emblem of /pol/ (top left), a “Pepe the Frog” meme variant popularly associated with /pol/ (bottom left), and “Pepe’s” presence in a retweet by Donald Trump. “Pepe” has since been classified as a hate symbol by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL).*

For example, utterances may be framed in accordance with perceived identifiers: Anons may be reduced to hyper-characterizations of that identifier (e.g., “Hans” or “Kraut” for German posters, “Pajeet” for Indian posters, or “Cletus” / “Tyronne” for American posters) and reacted to accordingly.

### 3.4 Notes about the Presentation of Data

Lastly, it is necessary to conclude this section by addressing how the following data will be formatted, since the limitations of text presented in essay format is something that must be

addressed: posts are often situated in long and complicated “chains of communication” (Agha 2011; Agha 2003) that belie a simplified, linear presentation of data that an essay like this can afford. The examples following will inevitably be simplified and reformatted when necessary. Examples presented will be limited to short one to three responses in the chain, even if they can extend near indefinitely – as long as the thread were to survive. Nonetheless, the data presented here will not be censored of content in any way, shape, or form, *with one exception*: that any personal photos circulated on the website of potentially unaware, and/or unconsenting parties are to be omitted for the purposes of privacy – in order to ensure that such parties are not personally identified. Excluding this *single exception*, to impose this standard of censorship would likely pull away from the very real social realities in which these users evoke and actively reinforce, whether or not they consider their own discussion topics a serious one or not. I will also state that the data presented here will possess extremely disturbing content that may make the reader uncomfortable. Therefore, it is required of the reader to exercise the appropriate levels of discretion necessary for themselves. To impose censorship is, I feel, to impose unjust agency upon the reader, even if such discourses can potentially (re)circulate in ways unbeneficial, and/or potentially harmful. Such implications are, once again, a fault of my own, and a limitation for this project.

#### **FOUR: IDEOLOGIES OF SOCIAL DISTINCTION AND DOMINANT LANGUAGE**

##### **IDEOLOGIES**

I will now present the case that salient features of (anti-)social engagement on /pol/ are informed by a dominant ideological framework of transgression, operating in local models of culturally-valued etiquette that rationalize a highly-*evocative* and *provocative* transgressive and

conflictual style used in stark, oppositional alignments vis-à-vis “Others”. Such practices are often valorized and occasionally recognized as such. These practices are often viewed as an integral part of “board culture”, though privy to contestation and disruption. Such practices emerge within the scope of ideological frameworks of social distinction and differentiation (e.g., race, gender) that are entangled further within White, hegemonic projects. The kinds of interactional alignments that take place are primarily expressed through highly-racialized, anti-Semitic and hyper-masculine forms; these are, of course, not the only ideologies forces at play, but throughout my fieldwork the most saliently used. Usage of any number of these discursive forms indexes a kind of intersubjectivity to others – a sort of mutual understanding, or acknowledgement, of the space and its vehement opposition to public and mainstream discourses. Anons will routinely – and performatively – use these forms in the process of “Otherizing” particular publics and/or other Anons in pejorative ways. Though determining any Anon’s intentionality to any degree of certainty is a practically impossible task due to the structure and layout of the website, I stress a point made by Goodwin and Alim (2010:180) in that “moment-to-moment interactional identities are linked to the production of more lasting social categories”, which are influential in shaping and reinforcing local (as well as broader, more pervasive) ideologies of race, gender, class, sexuality, and other such meaningful categories – regardless, in this case, of one’s intention. These forms are, either way, deeply informed by existing relations of power and marginalization that are historically formed, socially realized, and institutionally legitimized.

I also emphasize the interwoven relationship between dominant ideological regimes of language, in this case, and that of media ideologies (See Gershon 2010b). The “implied users and implied causal narratives” situated in the affordances of a particular website or other

communicative medium (See Akrich 1992:220-21) have a role to play in this (co-)productive process. Christopher Poole's own reasoning in privileging structural anonymity, ephemerality and experimentation in the case of 4chan – and of /pol/ – is here framed within the growing trend of “Internet transparency” so situated in public discourses about issues of user-privacy and the controversial distribution of user data to third-parties (e.g., Facebook). The question of user anonymity on the Internet and its salient role in guiding user engagement has been taken up in other scholarly work on White racist projects (See Hill 2008; Ronkin and Karn 1999) and “hacktivism” (See Coleman 2014). For example, Hill (2008:50) considers the Internet to be “perhaps the single most important medium available to racists...where the most scurrilous racist invective is posted with impunity.” The question of responsibility for what's posted, or lack thereof, is similarly echoed by Coleman's (2014) time on 4chan specifically, where website layout facilitates “the near complete absolution of individual responsibility in lieu of collective responsibility/memory” (46). Like Hill and Coleman's work, Ronkin and Karn (1999:374) seems to highlight a theme of distinction between *public* and *private* discourses, which I argue has serious implications for how Anons may orient themselves discursively vis-à-vis perceived “outgroups” as a kind of marginalized space that privileges free and uncontrolled discussion. This orientation, realized in intense opposition to “others”, is evoked using explicit forms deeply entangled in ideologies of social distinction and differentiation that will be discussed below. /pol/ in this case acts as a potentially transformative space for this perceivably “marginal” or *hegemonic* kind of counterpublic (Warner 2002; see Bucholtz 2001). This is a stance frequently taken by Anons during my time on 4chan as a whole. Media, and ideologies of media, matter for all parties involved.

The discussion following will thus be presented in four sections, with a preface examining relevant literature on the topic of slurs, performance, and ideology (*4.1\_Preface to the Topic of ideologies*). The reasoning behind this is that it is useful to analytically distinguish just what kinds of ideological dimensions are most pervasively involved and evoked in this dominant ideology of transgression, and how they are expressed in the kinds of explicit and overt “anti-moral” practices on /pol/. The first three sections are the most prominent dimensions expressed in such, and the fourth connects these practices to a broader alignment, I argue, with an idealized oppositional stance characteristic of a kind of counterpublic – or anti-society – of a *hegemonic* variety:

- a) Ideologies of Race and Racism
- b) Ideologies of Jewishness and Anti-Semitism
- c) Ideologies of Gender, Sexuality and (hyper-)Masculinity
- d) Ideologies of Media and Hegemonic Counterpublics

These dimensions are not mutually exclusive – nor an exhaustive list – by any means but are separated for simplicity. In addition, explicit and overt linguistic practices are, in my experience, one of a number of significant cultural features/elements that are informative of the dominant language ideology presented, though the narrow scope of this project will only emphasize these; this is due in no small part to the sheer size of the project presented at length henceforth. The scope is an acknowledged limitation of this project.

#### **4.1 Preface to the Topic of Ideologies**

In her discussion of the “social life of slurs”, Hill (2008:49) emphasizes how *performative ideologies* inform a particular understanding of language as potentially harmful; the

idea that words can “enact” or “cause” actions against others. The metaphorically-salient and assaultive power of slurs, in being viewed as able to “cut” or “wound”, is observed during her experiences on an Internet message board, that which is primarily oriented around whether or not to rename a landmark labeled with a recognized slur. The sheer usage of vulgarities on this board, from both sides of the aisle, highlighted a kind of pleasurable feedback loop that comes with employing overtly-recognized forms:

...but the claim makes clear that Allen, at the same time that he condemns slurs and epithets, takes pleasure in them as a sign of the richness of ‘American’ imagination. This pleasure in slurs is one of their most important characteristics: at the same time that they are censured, they are indispensable in certain kinds of joking and humorous talk and text, and many people enjoy the poetics of a skillful string of slurs (50).

This indispensability of slur and slur usage is embedded in the performative: being able to manifest a “skillful string of slurs” is a crucial part of the performance. Hill also highlights how repetition in this context serve to reinforce meanings and power situated in this function. The poetic element of language becomes foregrounded in framing how explicit forms are perceived and used in situational moments.

This performative dynamic is mentioned as well in Woolard’s (1990) discussion of *enactive ideologies* – the idea of language as social action. Looking at what words *do* or *accomplish* as opposed to privileging its truth value – what is known as *referentialist ideologies* – can highlight why overt forms are chosen in particular contexts. In highlighting performance as “an aesthetic [display] that is available for evaluation by an audience” (See Bauman 1977), Bucholtz and Hall (2004:380-81) notion that the highly conscious and intentioned “social display” of performance has highly enactive and transformative qualities: that it “...does not



merely *refer* to the social world but actually *brings it into being*” (*italics added*). Such qualities are particularly salient in performances that act in opposition to dominant ideologies and aim to challenge or subvert them. Such understandings will aid in framing how Anons on /pol/ will enact particular oppositional stances using overtly-recognized forms that both simultaneously elevate themselves as counter-hegemonic, hyper-White, and hyper-masculine subjects, and explicitly framing those who oppose or perceivably disalign with these values as racialized, emasculated “Others” reliant on, and submissive towards the interests of larger (Jewish) powers.

Overt and explicitly-recognized forms are understood on /pol/ as being as highly evocative as they are indispensable as a resource in routine and everyday interaction. The sheer prevalence and widespread usage of these forms, and their many variants, is so significant that I, during my fieldwork, found very few instances where they were *not* employed; these particular events of “non-usage” were marked as out of the ordinary, and worthy to mention in their own right (though not particularly for this project). Its performative presence makes it almost feel mundane. Though hardly a comprehensive list, below is a sampling of a few very brief snippets – all extracted from various threads. I wanted to start with this in order to contextualize the reader to the flagrant qualities of these forms, which will set the stage for more detailed analyses. First, I have noticed that they are most evident during moments of disagreement, or in targeted insults:

“Don’t call me ever (((Alt-right))) again nigger”

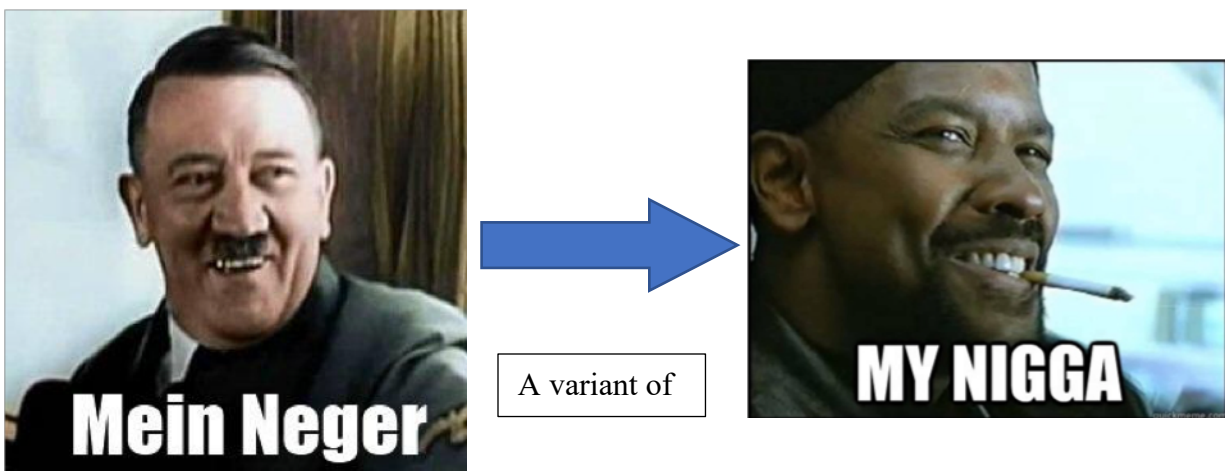
“you sound like an absolute retard anon, never breed”

“NO ONE HAS ANY MONEY EXCEPT THE RICHEST 100 PEOPLE IN THE USA  
YOU DUMB FUCKING NIGGER JEW CUNT.”

Overt forms are also often expressed for deriding or mocking “others” (1), characterizing particular outgroups (2), and/or expressing wishes about others (3 and 4):

- 1) “Whites, by and large, are resistant to plague...Negroes...Yeah. They are gonna die. HAHHAHAHAHAHAHA! The ultimate White privilege.”
- 2) “You think all internet access should be of equal speeds for free? Why? Because you say so? Well too bad nigger, get a McJob”
- 3) “I’ve read and loved the books as a kid. That said, J.K. Rowling should be gangraped, then quartered on live broadcast”
- 4) “i don’t approve of cannibalism but i would like to see hear [her] eaten in the streets alive by a pack of hungry niggers”

Common usages I’ve observed also include forms of endearment and camaraderie (*see Figure 4.1*) and collective forms of address. In the case of the latter, the metaphorical image of an anonymous “hivemind” is frequently used to address entire boards as a single collective body, or to mark its users as embodying particular personality traits. For example, Anons on /pol/ may be



*Figure 4.1 – Meme Variant (left) Used in Moments of Agreement. The Original Meme (right) was a Screenshot from the Movie Training Day (2001).*

referred to as “/pol/acks”, indexing a widely known slur used to describe those of Polish descent. In previous experiences, I had also seen terms like “/b/-tard” or “/v/irgins”, as well as the widely circulated binary between “oldfags” and “newfags” – the use of “old” or “new” with the

identifier-as-suffix “-fag” indexes one’s own or another’s legitimate (or illegitimate) status to participate in board activities due to the amount of “insider knowledge” they seemingly possess.

This latter point does lend support to a claim made by Coleman (2014:42), in that such explicit forms are used to performatively separate oneself from outsiders: “generally speaking, though, much of the material is *designed* to be shocking to outsiders, a discursively constructed border fence meant to keep the uninitiated – aka ‘n00bs’ or ‘newfags’ – far, far away...for insiders, it is the normal state of affairs, and one of the board’s defining and appealing qualities” (*italics added*). This may be explained as a process of “distinction”, one that Bucholtz and Hall (2004:384) note often operates to highlight difference by using single-dimension, “us” versus “them” binaries.

The examples following will demonstrate how routinized usages/performances of explicit forms operate to highlight the contrast between “us”, esteemed Whiteness, and “them”, hyper-racialized “otherness”. The three primary ideological dimensions below are situationally evoked most often in such overt practices: that of *race*, *anti-Semitism*, and *gender/sexuality*.

## **4.2 Ideologies of Race and Racism**

Ideologies of racialized “otherness”, most notably of blackness, are arguably the single most pervasively evoked ideological frame on the website, iconically recognized as the most salient means of highlighting juxtaposition to extreme Whiteness. Though it may come as little surprise to others, it was initially staggering to witness the sheer range of usages of how non-Whiteness was appropriated and interactionally weaponized, both against other Anons and against “outgroups”. I originally noted how fast I had become acclimatized to it, seeing it in each and every session, virtually every thread, and in countless posts. This is certainly nothing new to

me to some degree, due to my experiences on the website, though its magnified presence here made it seem explicitly marked, and yet mundane; performative, yet routine.

*Figure 4.2* offers an example of how language evokes multimodal caricatures of blackness as a means of opposition. The image – posted in a “/pol/ humor thread” – depicts witness Rachel Jeantel surrounded by a series of visually salient misspellings of particular words and phrases. Jeantel was at the time considered a “star witness” during the court proceedings of George Zimmerman, the man accused of fatally shooting then seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin in 2012. The greater-than arrow (“>”) next to each word is a common structural marker on imageboard formats (like 4chan) used to turn text green – indicating a switch in interpretive frame. This is known as “>greentext”, or sometimes more ironically referred to as “meme arrows” (knowyourmeme.com). “>” is often used as a quotative format, precontextualizing the utterances following as being imbued with a particular evaluative frame, or *voicing*. This acts in parallel to Jones and Schieffelin’s (2008) examination of college-aged students’ texting practices and their usage of *be + like* as contextualization cues – by which interlocutors would then interpret utterances as either a factual account, or as a more “morally and affectively charged ‘voicing’ of particular events (78). The students’ use of a “polyphonic” (i.e., “multivoiced”) style is similarly witnessed here in this Anon’s explicit representation of Jeantel’s use of Black Language (BL) (See Alim 2005). The words are meant to be interpreted as iconic manifestations of the sounds of black language as heard by the implied positionality of a White “listening subject” (See Flores and Rosa 2015). The visually-salient phonetic characterization works in conjunction with the image of Jeantel at the center, performatively stylizing her *perceived* language variety – in conjunction with her racialized body – to visually highlight the juxtaposition being made between this characterization of BL and the unmarked, properly

spelled “standard” language – evidenced briefly by the Anon’s otherwise “proper” spelling in their use of a slur at the bottom:

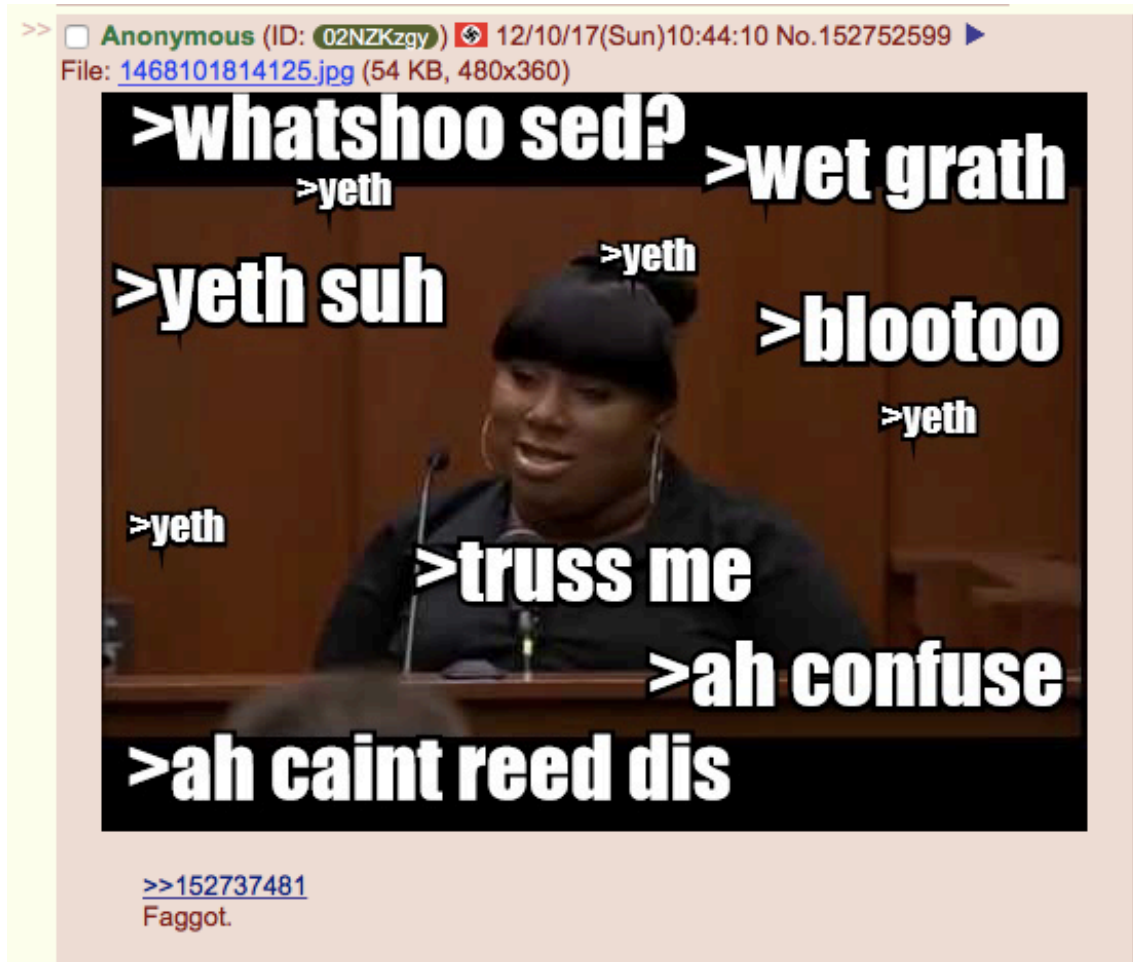


Figure 4.2 – Rachel Jeantel and (Mis)Spelling Ideology

As is the case here, the ways in which language is (mis)spelled have significant ideological implications. In his discussion of representing ‘accent’ in literature, Agha (2003) denotes this process as an “implicit metapragmatic commentary on the norms of speech...For, armed with the folk-view that every word has a correct spelling and a correct pronunciation, the reader can only construe defective spelling as an implicit comment on *defects of pronunciation*” (italics added; 237). The spelling is situated as an incorrect variant to an otherwise correct and proper speech pattern; a marked ‘accent’ in opposition to an unmarked point of reference. Though Agha does

refer to this process as implicit because the judgments expressed are not explicitly realized in his case, I argue that this operates very explicitly in the context of /pol/ through performance: employing otherwise *covert, implicit* processes in an *overt* manner culturally-recognized as the both the norm (on the board itself) and explicitly marked (*vis-à-vis* other publics). Lending support to this claim is existing work on “spelling ideologies” (Olivo 2001; Morgan 2001; Alim 2004), in which spelling conventions situated in the relational power structure of Whiteness are taken up and exploited by Black Hip Hop communities, underscoring what Olivo (2001:67) recognizes as “calling [explicit] attention to the arbitrariness of dominant spelling conventions...[and] function(ing) to create and sustain hip-hop culture as an ‘anti society.’” The explicit recognition and subversion of orthographic conventions – informed by an ideology of the “standard” (See Lippi-Green 1997) – is a conscious and emergent performance framed in purposeful juxtaposition to White projects (See Morgan 2001; Alim 2004). Spelling conventions are therefore iconically recognized as a salient means of representing and reinforcing local language practices *in opposition to* perceivably dominant ones. This “challenge to linguistic hegemony” denotes a phenomenon known as an “anti-language” (Halliday 1976; Olivo 2001:68-69). “Anti-languages” are alternative linguistic forms that consciously highlight *contrasts* between dominant societies – indexed by the “standard” – and those who use it – indexed by its opposition to the “standard”. These discourses are transformative in that they evoke *counter-realities* for those who use it; the speech community of which Halliday refers to as “anti-societies”. Anti-societies, though always under pressure from dominant frameworks, maintain alternative realities through these contrastive language practices, since there is always a contiguous and marked relationship between the opposition and the opposed. Warner’s (2002) discussion of *publics* parallels a similar sentiment, in that publics harness poetic-expressive

dimensions to “characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate, projecting for that world a concrete and livable shape, and attempting to realize that world through address” (81). The “world-making properties” of publics are most explicitly recognized by those in perceivably marginalized and subordinate statuses (i.e., *counterpublics*). Like Halliday’s discussion of “anti-societies” through “anti-languages”, discourses in *counterpublics* “...[are] not merely different or alternative idiom[s], but that in other contexts would be regarded with hostility or with a sense of indecorousness...*friction against the dominant public forces the poetic-expressive character of counterpublic discourse[s] to become salient to consciousness*” (*italics added*; 86). In that, the ways in which this Anon uses the image – of whom has the flag of Nazi Germany as their identity marker – indexes a form of “humor” that is perceivably compatible with idealized images of /pol/. This image is recognized as overt because a “/pol/ humor thread” must index some degree of awareness by its participants of what “humor” on /pol/ would look like: perceivably extreme, explicit, and “politically incorrect” (as the name of the board suggests). It is recognizing how *warped* and *exaggerated* misspellings (once again emphasizing the performative/enactive over referential “truth-value” of BL grammaticality, as per “I confuse”) mark heightened degrees of the user’s awareness in visually iconizing blackness and black language varieties as diametrically opposed to White mainstream norms. It legitimizes ideologies linking BL and its speakers to deficiency, unintelligibility, and incomprehensibility. The choice to represent Jeantel’s words as “yeth suh” instead of “yes sir”, or “truss me” instead of “trust me”, and “ah caint read this” instead of “I can’t read this” continually highlights the perceived inability for Jeantel to perform on the stage (e.g., being unable to read) – considered humorous here due to it being attributed here to her black identity. The use of Black language iconically links blackness here with inability (a lack of literacy), being juxtaposed to standards and norms

enveloped in hegemonic White projects in order to mock and deride at her expense. Doing so in this way requires some degree of awareness for these racist frameworks to operate on the level of “humor” on /pol/.

An additional way to frame this example is through literary work on *mock ebonics*, a system that Ronkin and Karn (1999) describe as “graphemic-phonetic, grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic strategies for representing an outgroup’s belief in the imperfection and inferiority of Ebonics and its users” (360). Ronkin and Karn’s analysis lends support to how raciolinguistic ideologies – beliefs, values and dispositions about racialized speakers and their language (Flores and Rosa 2015; Roth-Gordon 2016) – inform particular iconic manifestations of “outgroup” language varieties as a means of foregrounding processes of distinction. Ronkin and Karn most notably examine the emergence of Internet parody pages that aimed, in part, to translate various literary works through Black Language. Such pages were mostly developed in the wake of the “Oakland Ebonics Controversy” that made national headlines in late 1996. In this, they parallel existing research on *mock varieties* (Hill 2008; Barrett 2006; Chun 2004; Reyes 2007) that highlights the undercurrents of *covert racism* in how BL was presented. They note how these various strategies, such as hyper-salient phonetic segments, the often incorrect/hyper-usage of *be*, and the overuse of recognized vulgarities, each contributed to an extreme exaggeration of “the hierarchical ordering of two language systems so that the nonstandard one grossly deviates from and is radically subordinate to the standard” (361). They argue that these are further manifestations of an *oppositional language ideology* that reinforce perceived iconic relationships between hyper-salient representations of BL and the essentialized characterizations of its speakers (i.e., African-Americans).



Figure 4.3 demonstrates how these ideological frameworks operate during moments of stylization, in which Anons will directly voice hyper-racialized characterizations (“figures”) as a form of stance-taking – that is shifting one’s orientation with, or against, other Anons in moments of interaction. These moments of stylization evoke explicit forms to highlight the *oppositional* stances that the Anon is taking in relation to these racialized “others”, regardless of their immediate alignment towards the other Anons in question. More simply put, they effectively *weaponize* highly overt racial caricatures as a way to index their own status as being quite the opposite of such. These performances utilize hyper-salient and explicit forms as a way of clearly marking the boundary between *actual, perceived identity* and their *performed identity* (see also Barrett 2017).

The example below is taken from the very same “/pol/ humor thread” as the example before, with the image on the left – titled “nig\_halloween.jpg” – being the initial post, which was quickly responded to by another Anon with the text box on the right. The image’s “humor value”

Original post (Anon 1)

[Smack lips together]  
 So you be sayin  
 WE WUZ MONKEY N  
 SHIET?  
 [Rubs flat monkey nose while  
 laughing]

Reply to the original post (Anon 2)

Figure 4.3 – Polyphonic Voices and Performative “Others”

derives largely from its recognized link between blackness and animality, a product of outdated historical models of human evolutionary development and biologically-based explanations of racial difference. The image is considered humorous due to the controversial and transgressive nature of the image: a presumably public space (i.e., a store) where a phenotypically “black” child is used to exclusively advertise a shirt with a primate on it. The humor-value of the image, and the response on the right, may be framed in parallel to another similar controversy: when clothing retail company H&M made controversial headlines in early 2018 after advertising a sweater hoodie with the words “Coolest Monkey in the Jungle” worn by a black child model. The resulting uproar can possibly help frame how the response on the right was evoking a similar sentiment of “mock outrage” through performance. This is largely contextualized for viewers by the use of [brackets] to express embodied movements and gesture. The use of [brackets] are, in my experience, a generally uncommon variant for doing so, but still clearly indexes particular movements and actions being performed to its audience. The use of the habitual *be* and the phonetic representation of “g-dropping” (“sayin” versus “saying”) are characteristically recognized as BL, framing the utterance as a moment of styleshifting to the moment of narration from the [embodied movements] and vice versa – the display of [movement] is indexed further by the otherwise “proper” and “standard” spelling. The use of CAPITALIZATION is a common way of indicating loudness or affect in one’s words (e.g., “YELLING” as opposed to “yelling”), used here with hyper-salient phonetic characterizations of BL (“WE WUZ MONKEY N SHIET?”). Anon takes on a performative frame through [embodied movements] and takes on a style of perceived, “idealized” blackness. The explicit link made between the image and text is reinforced at the end with another [movement], a “rub” of one’s “flat monkey nose while laughing”. This performance of blackness reinforces the iconic relationship evoked by the first

Anon, in that facial features are iconically recognized as that of an animal (“flat monkey nose”), legitimizing ideologies of black inferiority due to their perceived “subhuman” traits. These markers of affect and embodied movements are freely utilized here in the performative process of opposition. Such markers in this case are common for expressing particular thoughts, feelings, dispositions, etc. with the sets of semiotic and linguistic resources available on 4chan; expressing dynamics that are relevant to the performance, but otherwise “unseen” to the average Anon.

The saliency of iconization processes in the Anon’s performance does tie in to literature that discuss how languages are perceived, differentiated, and represented in interaction through these processes. This is evidenced by Irvine and Gal (2000), in which they examine how click consonants – foreign to the sounds of colonial European languages – were framed in opposition to a civilized Whiteness. These click consonants – present in both Southern African indigenous Khoi languages and eventually Nguni languages – had no point of reference for European visitors and were recognized as iconically related to the sounds of nature, most notably the calls of animals:

Many early European observers compared them with animal noises: hens’ clucking, ducks’ quacking, owls’ hooting, magpies’ chattering, or ‘the noise of irritated turkey-cocks’. Others thought clicks were more like the sounds of inanimate objects, such as stones hitting one another. To these observers and the European readers in their reports, such iconic comparisons suggested (before our more enlightened days, at least) that the speakers of languages with clicks were in some way subhuman or degraded, to a degree corresponding to the proportion of clicks in their consonant repertoires (39-40).

The perception of these sounds was entangled within prevailing ideologies of evolutionary development, racial difference, and White (linguistic) supremacy; the documented “brutal

sounds” of these languages were interpreted as a representation of perceived racial essences – a manifestation of speakers’ natural inferiority or uncivilized nature. The languages’ perceived distance from otherwise “civilized” White, European language varieties suggests a rough parallel to the work of the *oppositional language ideology* deeply tied to racist ideologies in the case presented by Ronkin and Karn (1999).

Furthermore, the kinds of repertoires used in the example foreground iconic and indexical relationships in marking a clear boundary between perceived and performed identity practices in forms of mockery, a distinction also taken up in Barrett’s (2017) larger examination of gay male subcultures. Barrett discusses how identity practices can interactionally evoke, at specific moments, *indexical disjunctures* – a concept used to describe how “sign[s] (or set[s] of signs) index an interactional component that is not normatively associated with the context involved” (16 – 17). Simply put, it describes using particular resources in a *marked* context, moments in which resources are used to index particular identities, qualities, etc. that it doesn’t normatively point to. In context of his work on African-American Drag Queens (AADQ), Barrett highlights the ways in which drag performances utilize a multiplicity of voices (“polyphony”) that are saliently marked during moments of styleshifting. Though often valorized for their ability to look indistinguishable from a woman, AADQs will highlight the contrast between their perceived, biological identity, and the performed identity by situationally evoking voices normatively linked to White, upper-class femininities (“White woman style”) and black, working-class masculinities (use of BL) simultaneously. The salient disjuncture between the two are necessary for the performance, as AADQs remind audience members not to be interpreted as trying to *be* a woman, but as evoking an idealized, exaggerated femininity (and masculinity) at particular, strategic moments. This lends support to the interpretation of Anon’s highly-exaggerated

performance – the use of overt forms, in conjunction with the use of semiotic resources available to Anons on 4chan more specifically, saliently mark the Anon as taking up a *performed* identity that is not, in this case, reflective of their *perceived identity*. Failing to do so in an exaggerated and obvious manner may result in targeted insults by other Anons. The contrast presented here is so explicit that it intentionally foregrounds the contrastive, oppositional stance between the Anon and the hyper-racialized representation of blackness that they are evoking – linked inevitably to prevailing ideological regimes of BL and its speakers.

This strategic use of *voicing* in performances of blackness also highlights the process of *appropriation* operating for the Anons in question. Barrett (2017:17) notes that *indexical disjuncture* requires an appropriative usage of resources linked to other identity categories, especially in moments of mockery or parody. Such forms can reinforce macro-social categories situated in hegemony. This is also suggested by Goodwin and Alim (2010), whom discuss the ways in which peer-group performances freely utilize embodied and linguistic resources situated across racial and class categories in order to (dis)align with others in mockery, even resources that are merely *perceived* to be linked to those categories (as opposed to actually being something that interlocuters “do”). For example, even though particular movements and gestures are not evidenced by Angela, the working-class black girl, during interaction, Sarah, the working-class White girl, “...performs the neck roll to reduce Angela to a version of the stereotypical mass mediated ‘Ghetto Girl’, styling the black working-class Other to define herself in opposition” (189). The (co-)production of these moments of stylization and oppositional stance-taking shown here require access to macro-social categories, and as such reify them in interaction; much like, I argue, the situation with the Anons in question.

I now emphasize the ways in which the interested positions of interlocutors play into how “otherness” is produced in reduced or hyper-simplistic qualities. This is a sentiment that Bucholtz and Hall (2004:384) note as important for how processes of distinction are rationalized, and to what degree that processes of *erasure* play into downplaying, or altogether erasing, complexity of the “other” in such. *Figure 4.4* is presented to showcase this point: the posts are centered around a discussion of Texas, with the OP asking why Texas is so frequently targeted

**T E X A S** OP (Opening Poster)

>best state in the union

>majority mestizo

Why do you hate us again?

Image of some young women and men (raced as Latinx) [Omitted for privacy]

*In response to OP:* “Anon 1”

I think it’s just bants [“banter”]. /pol/ is the most racially diverse white supremacist group in the world. Sure, Mexicans are lower iq than pure whites but at least you’re not civilization destroying allahu ackbars. Just quit acting like niggers.

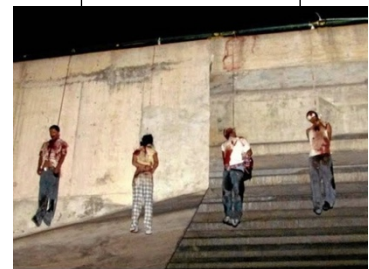
No Image used

*In response to Anon 1:* “Anon 2”

>Mexican “““civilization””””

You clearly don’t live in a place colonized by Mexicans if you think they aren’t destroying America.

“Mexico.jpg”



In response to Anon 1:

“Anon 3”

No, I honestly hate spics more than arabs or niggers.

Spics are the leading cause of America’s demographic shift.

Image of woman holding up her middle fingers to an unidentified recipient (raced as Latinx) [Omitted for privacy]

*Figure 4.4 – (Non-)Whiteness and Civilization*

on the board. OP directly uses the `>greentext` function to list a few reasons for the initial question. Like the name suggests, the quotative “>” turns the following text green, visually framing the utterance in a particular evaluative frame. The reasons posed, being “>best state in the union” and “>majority mestizo” (i.e., mixed-race of both European and Indigenous descent) are looked upon as good enough reasons to incite discussion. The use of “us” (“Why do you hate us again?”) may constitute one degree of dis-alignment towards the addressed public in question. The image posted in the OP also show five subjects [men and women] who I immediately evaluated/raced as “Latinx”. I have seen the women, in particular, posted on the board a number of times, and usually as a means to “lure” Anons to post in their threads – though I assume they [the women] are likely unaware of this fact.

The OP’s “reasoning” evokes an ideology of Whiteness as civilizing, indicating that the status of “mestizo”, presumably being “partially” White, is certainly better than the more implied statement (i.e., being completely non-White). This response is much more explicitly taken up by Anon 1, whom uses overt forms in marking a “spectrum of civilization”, with “pure whites” being the farthest ahead – indexed by their “higher iq” – then followed by “Mexicans” – indexed by their “lower iq” than “pure whites” but having attained a comparatively marked, higher status over their completely non-White, racialized counterparts. I found it peculiar that Anon 1 used the more neutral “Mexicans” as a form of address rather than its often-circulated slur variation – the

choice here perhaps indicates some degree of *authentication* of “Latinx” as having attained a “partial” civilized status, and therefore a more neutral identity as a means to contrast them vis-à-vis pure “non-Whiteness”. This is also salient when juxtaposing the use of “Mexican” by Anon 1 to the comparatively more negative evaluation by Anon 3 (“No, I honestly hate *spics*...”). The choice to use, or not to use, slurs is here situationally evident in framing perceived outgroups by their proximity to/from the implied White norm. On the one hand, you have “pure whites” and eventually “Mexicans”, and on the other, the “civilization destroying” behaviors of “Allahu Ackbars” and hyper-racial blackness. The use of “Allahu Ackbars” is particular because it acts as a sort of phonetic depiction-as-identifier for a hyper-simplified, Arab and/or Muslim identity. It is based off an Arabic expression – “Allāhu Ackbar”, or “God is [the] greatest” (Arabic: الله أكبر). This phrase, sometimes referred to as the “Takbīr” (Arabic: تَكْبِير), is commonly used to index a particular stereotypical figure of a hyper-radical/militant, Muslim caricature. For example, a meme that circulated during my previous experiences on 4chan depict the constant usage of this phrase in videos before, and after, a loud (and fake) explosion, usually from something unexpected (e.g., a stuffed animal). The humorous or mocking value that the phrase has taken on 4chan may be linked to this particular usage, at least to some degree.

The iconic relationship being made here – between the expression and a particular ethnoracial positionality (see Rosa 2016) – does index how black and brown “otherness” is often reduced to a (simplified) form saliently indexed by an explicit or transgressive identity marker, the latter of which is often situated in dominant hegemonies that reinforce and legitimize marginalized groups. In other words, the use of explicit slurs here is a clear means to simultaneously impose maximum social distance from the “other” – in characterizing blackness and brownness on the side of disruptive and “civilization destroying” behaviors – and to elevate



oneself as the privileged, *authenticated* subject on the side of Civilization (i.e., Whiteness). In this context, doing so is demonstrated by the use of slurs very often employed by Whites to sustain the same White hegemonic, imperial projects being evoked by the Anons presented.

Although Anon 1 does frame “Mexicans” as closer to Civilized Whiteness than pure brownness/blackness – indexed by their more “neutral” identifier usage – Anon 2 attempts to *denaturalize* the potential experiences of Anon 1 by imposing a direct contradiction:

You *clearly* don’t live in a place *colonized* by Mexicans if you think they aren’t *destroying* America. (italics added)

Anon 2 also utilizes >greentext to preface the contradictory statement by mocking the implication of Mexicanness being linked to civilization, demonstrated with the over-usage of quotation marks (>Mexican “““civilization”””). Anon 2 immediately denaturalizes the claims made by Anon 1 by *authenticating* their own implied experiences with them (“you *clearly* don’t...”). What’s peculiar is that Anon 2 evokes a *marginalized* stance by characterizing the implied movement, and residence of Mexican individuals as a process of “colonization”, one that is “destroying (White) America”. To make a claim that calls this renegotiation of Mexicanness as “otherness” into question is here immediately considered suspect and is framed as inaccurate to the supposed “reality” of the situation. Therefore, to align *with* that claim is to *authenticate* oneself as self-aware and understanding of the situation. The Anon lastly solidifies their claim with a grotesque image of four lynched individuals, with the file name “Mexico.jpg”.

Lastly, Anon 2’s statement emphasizes how Mexican immigration (framed as “colonization”) processes are foregrounded as the cause for “destroying” the US, a statement also evoked by Anon 3: “Spics are the leading cause of America’s demographic shift.”. The use of the slur aligns Anon 3’s sentiment with Anon 2 and *against* Anon 1: that the larger

demographic shift of the US from a White majority to a non-White majority is framed in a disparaging way, and unable to be stopped. Though evoked in a more subtle fashion, there is a similar framing of White marginalization occurring due to the presence of non-Whiteness. In doing so by the various multimodalities afforded by the interface, these Anons are reducing non-Whiteness to a caricature that they simultaneously frame as uncivilized, disruptive, and destabilizing. In doing so, Whiteness is framed as civilized, and yet marginal (or increasingly marginalized) by the serious threat of non-Whiteness. To frame it as such is to rely on these hyper-simplified caricatures, foregrounding processes of *erasure* in “erasing” larger histories of residences before “White America” even arrived to begin with. Ideological regimes of race are crucial to the formation, and management, of these processes of stance-taking and opposition.

### **4.3 Ideologies of Jewishness and Anti-Semitism**

Much like its more explicit *racial* counterpart, ideologies of Jewishness and Anti-Semitic practices are highly evocative and so widely circulated on the board that it begins to fall under the routine and the mundane – nearly ubiquitous as an everyday, and practically every-thread occurrence. It is certainly inaccurate here to completely separate categories of *race* and *Jewishness*, as the two are deeply entangled in histories linked to White Supremacist/Nationalist and “alt-right” discourses. Much like our larger discussion on dominant ideologies, such are separated for analytic simplicity and clarity. Although the depth of these entangled histories will not be examined in exact detail herein, I do want to emphasize here that *race* and *Jewishness* do overlap in all of the ways presented thus far: they are widely used oppositional categories in the situational (co-)production, and maintenance of categories of “otherness” used to reinforce and legitimate a marginalized positionality of (White) self in contrastive relation to perceivably

inferior, but growing threats of racialized “others”. The examples presented in the section above overlap with how Jewish “otherness” is as well presented as a category of opposition, though with some notable differences. These differences advent particular usages that are both saliently recognized and circulated on /pol/ and are as such crucial resources in the production of a transgressive, White positionality. I will focus below on just how explicit Anti-Semitic forms draw upon historical frameworks situated in White Supremacy and the current “alt-right” movement, most notably how Jewishness becomes iconically linked to a long-term *covert*, *hegemonic* process of conspiring against Gentile (i.e., Non-Jewish) communities for their own collective interest. To overtly evoke Jewishness on /pol/ is to draw on this particular construction of the “Jewish other” as a deeply hegemonic and dominant form vis-à-vis an (increasingly) marginalized Whiteness, the process of which is perpetuated through the mainstream circulation of perceivably Jewish-led ideological regimes of “multiculturalism”, “science” and “democracy”.

The most frequent and most culturally-salient example of the “Jewish other” in my time on /pol/ is known as the “Happy Merchant”, a widely-circulated Anti-Semitic caricature and meme that was originally derived from an artwork submitted on /pol/’s spiritual precursor, /new/ (*Figure 4.5*) (*knowyourmeme*). The original artwork – on the top left – is an overtly racist and Anti-Semitic image that contains a cartoonish drawing of both a Jewish and Black “figure” that is visually equated to that of pests (i.e., rats, roaches). Since its original posting, the Jewish “figure” has since spawned countless variants, each intertextually linked by some common element appropriated from the template. The two most characteristic and common features



Figure 4.5 – “Happy Merchant” Origin (top left) and Example Variants

in the examples presented are 1) the figure’s distinctively-hooked nose, and 2) its hand position, cusped around one another in a “rubbing” motion. Such features are often explicitly present in circulated variants (such as example 2), though it is not always so overt. Oftentimes the “Happy Merchant” is only partially visible (example 3 and 8), recognizable only by some distinctive shape or silhouette (example 4, 5, 6, and 7), illustrated via a hyper-exaggeration of its features (example 9), or even combined with other meme variants such as *Pepe* (example 5). Once again, I stress that this is hardly an exhaustive list; in fact, I will make the point that the sheer number of variants present on /pol/ – or otherwise – cannot be adequately represented in this project. On *knowyourmeme* alone, there are over 840 individual variants of “Happy Merchant”, with others potentially yet-to-be-documented. Like many other Internet memes, “Happy Merchant” has

incredibly dense intertextual dimensions, able to be widely manipulated, shaped and (re-)shaped to any user's interest. An Anon's ability to recognize it is limited only by their continued exposure to it, though even some examples are so esoteric that it's practically unrecognizable to all but a select few members. Since variations each have their own unique intertextual dimensions, certain forms may foreground particular meanings over others depending on the circumstance of its usage (the when, where, and why), the salience of certain sign-features (or lack thereof) and the interpretive frame of each respective Anon. Though this variance can make perfectly accurate, detailed trajectories of meme variants incredibly difficult (even with substantial exposure to the field/site), it does suggest just how deeply rooted these memes are in the social experiences of its users. They therefore have substantial ideological implications, and such is certainly prevalent on /pol/.

To simplify this discussion, I have found *knowyourmeme*'s database entry for "Happy Merchant" to be useful for contextualizing its generalized usage on /pol/:

Common themes found in Happy Merchant comics are mostly based on anti-Semitic ideas such as: a Jewish conspiracy to control the world; greedy Jews, or blaming corporate greed on Jews; fabricating the Holocaust; and blaming the Jewish conspiracy for promoting feminism, homosexuality, "racemixing", or causing any current calamity...Posts accompanying the reaction image often take the form of sardonically roleplaying a Jew who gleefully and transparently manipulates the "good goyim" [i.e., non-Jews] who are duped by his deceptions and as a consequence buy his overpriced products or hold politically liberal views.

The usages presented highlight the ability of the “Happy Merchant” in visually reducing an ethno-religious category into a hyper-simplified “otherness”, one that iconically foregrounds characteristics of greed, deception, and extreme collective self-interest in direct opposition to the independent livelihoods of White (non-Jewish) subjects. To perceivably align (or to *be* aligned with) Jewishness is by demonstrating one’s support for “liberal view(points)” or encouraging ideologies of racial or gender equality, in part due to their association with being run by Jewish-led projects. *Figure 4.6* presents a few examples of this being demonstrated:



*Figure 4.6 – Jewish-led Projects*

The visuals depicted here foreground the theme of control and deceit: the leftmost photo highlights the distinction between REAL and FAKE news, the latter of which is promoted by the sinister intentions of the (Jewish-run) press – indexed here simply by the use of “Happy Merchant”. The idea of “fake news” is politically-salient in the discourses of the Trump administration, evoking processes of *denaturalization* – where particular identities “come to be severed from or separated from claims to ‘realness’ (Bucholtz and Hall 2004:386) – to disalign

with mainstream news outlets. Likewise, the use the *Pepe*-infused “Happy Merchant” in the center example is a transgressive and playful variation that was supposedly sent to CNN during a running news story on /pol/ itself. The four empty spaces presented are, of course, obvious to those aware of the contextual usage of the Merchant variant. The theme of control is more blanketly applied to another oppositional category: that of “liberals” (top right). Here the Merchant is operating in the mind of a sad-faced character drawing – another meme known as “Wojack”, or “Feels Guy”. “Wojack” is often used as a template for representing particular (sad) emotions or feelings of melancholy, and not exclusive to Jewishness. In the case of this example, though, there is a suggestive link being made between the “sad liberal” figure and the lack of agency or control that they have. Lastly, a silhouette of the Merchant is placed in the background of the Human Rights Campaign logo, particularly the “red” variant indexing one’s support for marriage equality during two U.S. Supreme Court hearings in March of 2013 (hrc.org). Social and political movements are here situated within the *covert* interests of the Jewish “other” – since the distinctive shape of the Merchant is its only visible quality. To understand the indexical meanings behind the image requires a heightened sense of awareness of the Merchant’s “presence” – via a pronounced knowledge of the meme – in the affairs of mainstream movements.

These themes are as well deeply situated within ideological regimes of race, which are used to delegitimize widely circulated models of human evolution and diversity brought upon in part by, interestingly enough, the field of Anthropology. *Figure 4.7* presents a discussion centered around attempting a debunk the well-versed sentiment in biological anthropology: that most human genetic variation is situated *within* racial categories rather than *between* them, directly challenging models of race as biologically-grounded, and instead emphasizing race as a

social manifestation (though one that is often rationalized as biologically-based). The OP requests a possible retort to this sentiment, receiving over 95 unique responses.

*OP (Opening Poster):*

Some guy is trying to tell me that Race does not exist because  
'95% of genetic variance is within races and 5% between races'  
What should I tell him?

Image of a man lying down on the beach  
[omitted for privacy]

*ANON 1 - In response to OP:*

>race doesn't exist  
wow lmao [laughing my ass off]



*ANON 2 - In response to Anon 1:*

this is a mainstream idea being pushed by "anthropologists"

No image used

*ANON 3 - In response to Anon 2:*

(((Anthropologists)))  
FIFY [Fixed It For You]

No image used

*Figure 4.7 – Race-as-Social and its Discontents*

The response I focus on is by "Anon 1", who uses the >greentext feature to characterize the OP's quotative statement in a hyper-simplified form (">race doesn't exist"), directly responding to and mocking such in their "own" words ("wow lmao"). The image used exemplifies the supposed "reaction" that Anon 1 is performing. Knuttila (2011) refers to this usage of a "reaction image",



as they are commonly referred to, as a “shared or acknowledgeable affectual state” being presented to the audience as a representation of what they’re feeling. It is acknowledged by users to be an acceptable medium for expressing such, mediated by the particular affordances of 4chan’s “imageboard” format. This movement of intense laughter – indexed by the blurry quality of the image – highlights the perceived absurdity with the statement. Anon 2, in response to Anon 1, responds soon after by giving contextual background: that it’s a “*mainstream* idea being *pushed* by ‘anthropologists’”. The usage of “mainstream” once again highlights the contrastive alignment that Anons on /pol/ discursively (co-)construct as identifying as a fringe, or marginalized space in opposition to the dominant and “mainstream” qualities of public discourses of race. The choice to use *pushed* is particularly suggestive of coercion or force (and that its truth-value is inevitably suspect) by *supposed* “anthropologists”. This pronounced markedness using quotation marks is taken up and “fixed” by Anon 3, who instead replaces it with triple parentheses on each side. This is known as the “(((echo)))”. The “(((echo)))” is, simply, a marker of Jewishness that is representative of an echoing sound. Since Jewishness is often framed in covert fashion, the use of the “(((echo)))” is an overt means to “expose” the inner-workings of Jewish interests for the world to witness. As documented by Fleishman and Smith (2016), the “(((echo)))” indexes an explicit criticism of Jewish hegemonies:

The inner parenthesis represent the Jews’ subversion of the home [and] destruction of the family through mass-media degeneracy. The next [parenthesis] represents the destruction of the nation through mass immigration, and outer [parenthesis] represents international Jewry and world Zionism (Mic).

Originating on political news blog “The Right Stuff”, the “(((echo)))” has since been fashioned to indicate any situation where the “sinister” workings of Jewishness is present, as presented

above. The field of Anthropology, therefore, is entirely negotiated through the lens of Jewish interests, problematizing and debunking the explanation's truth-value as merely a façade of Jewish powers for their own collective interests. The idealized, White subjects are therefore framed as "equal" with no supposed foundation for their own models of White superiority.

To frame a particular discipline as a manifestation of collective Jewish power though is certainly nothing new, nor unique to the context of /pol/, but is deeply situated in discourses of the "alt-right" movement. This is taken up in Cofnas' (2018) examination of work by Kevin Macdonald, a popularly referenced evolutionary psychologist within White Supremacist/Nationalist publics due to his controversial claims of "Judaism as a group evolutionary strategy". Macdonald describes the Jewish community's collective self-interest as an inherent quality situated in larger evolutionary responses to particular environmental conditions (e.g., competition for resources) against larger Gentile (i.e., non-Jewish) groups, manifesting itself in an organizational structure that privileges the success of the former and the expense of the other. This eventually manifests in the Post-Enlightenment Era through the development of "liberal political, intellectual, and scientific movements with the same social and organizational structure as Judaism, and the same ultimate purpose to promote the evolutionary success of Jews" (Cofnas 2018:2). Among those intellectual movements is Boasian anthropology, developing in such a way that not only deemphasizes "testability or agreement with external reality", but directing the trajectory of world history to emphasize ideologies of "multiculturalism" and "postmodernism", promoting non-White immigration to predominantly White, European countries and rejecting Darwinian models of evolutionary difference and diversity (i.e., models in which race is biologically-founded). These efforts, he argues, are intended to "undermine and destabilize traditional European culture to weaken resistance to

Jewish control, ‘pathologizing’ anti-Semitism [framed as merely an evolutionary response to Jewish organizations], and denying that Jewish behavior plays a role in anti-Jewish attitudes” (2). The entire epistemic foundation of many academic disciplines and politically-left movements, simply, are considered to be inherently positioned in Jewish interests, “simultaneously subjecting gentile culture to radical criticism and allowing for the continuity of Jewish identification” (Cofnas 2018:6). In his criticism of Macdonald’s work, Cofnas highlights the influence that these ideas have made in “alt-right” publics, legitimizing Anti-Semitic ideologies that *authenticate* an alternative – or perceivably “counter-hegemonic” – rationale of White supremacy that effectively evades its refutation by *denaturalizing* those explanatory frameworks framed in Jewishness (i.e., those that disagree). These larger-scale intellectual movements – and the explanations they advent – are framed as both the dominant and the mainstream *episteme*, situated in direct opposition to the marginalized (yet hyper-cognizant) *counterpublic* of these emergent movements, and to the interests of idealized Whiteness.

The inseparable linkage presented here between intellectual movements and Jewish influence can elucidate how, and why, the field of Anthropology was framed using the “(((echo)))”. Furthermore, we can explore just how these explanatory models are evoked on /pol/ in *Figure 4.8*, of which are two replies from unrelated threads, but each touching upon the themes examined by Cofnas (2018). The first post by Anon A is in response to an unidentified image (which I could not recover) from the “/pol/ humor thread” mentioned at length earlier on. Here Anon A interweaves both Jewishness and blackness in their post simultaneously by employing text and visuals to perform separate tasks – with opposition to Jewishness evoked via text, and to blackness via the accompanying image:

*ANON A (in response to unspecified poster):*

Isn't it strange how every cultural change is being pushed by a Hebrew who hates you?

Text: "Congratulations to Michael Brown. 1 year free of crime...you did it!"



*ANON B (in separate thread – in response to unspecified poster)*

BUT THE JEWS CONTROL DEMOCRACY YOU IDIOT! Liberty is a jewish creation. Real men do not ask what rights they have, real men ask what duties they have.

Image of woman posing [omitted for privacy]

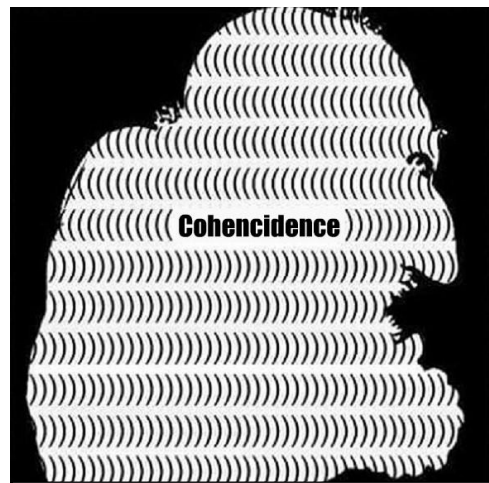
*Figure 4.8 – “Hebrews” and Democracy*

This may serve as an example of *transmodal stylization*, a process by Goodwin and Alim (2010) describing “the ways that speakers can produce styles indexing multiple culturally salient representations simultaneously through the use of different yet mutually elaborating communicative modalities, rather than bringing them together into a neat, readily recognizable package...” (179). Here Anon A utilizes the imageboard interface by mediating two forms of stance-taking via text and images in the performance of particular, oppositional styles. Although they possess numerous similarities, these styles are here distinguished because they serve to negotiate distinct orientations in opposition to a culturally-salient category of “otherness”. They evoke – and align with – two separate discourses situated in culturally-distinct (yet deeply interrelated) ideologies of Jewishness and blackness simultaneously in each micro-discursive context. Both forms of stance-taking produce a complex oppositional orientation more generally in alignment with an idealized, yet marginal Whiteness.

In the mode of text, the Anon echoes White Supremacist cultural logics discussed by Cofnas by highlighting how the advent of particular cultural movements (“every cultural change”) is implemented through the widespread, orchestrated efforts of Jewish “others” (“is being *pushed* by a Hebrew...”). These movements are entirely framed as against the interests of the perceivably marginalized position of non-Jewish, White subjects on /pol/, as the Anon aligns with their unidentified interlocutor (“a Hebrew *who hates you...*”). A similar sentiment is presented in Anon B’s post, who notions that ideas of liberty and democratic governance are inherently products of Jewish dominance (“BUT THE JEWS *CONTROL DEMOCRACY...Liberty is a jewish creation*”). The actions here representative of “real men” is framed in distinct opposition to that dominance in its subordinate status.

It’s important to emphasize how Anon A takes on a sardonic/sarcastic voicing that frames the utterance through the use of “Isn’t it strange how...?”. This performative disposition can be elucidated further by the relationship between covert Jewishness and “coincidences”, or “(((cohencidence)))”.

*Figure 4.9* on the right is an example previously used in *Figure 4.5*, one that visually marks and exposes “coincidental” moments in which Jewish powers are directly responsible for orchestrating events, though performed covertly, and therefore outside the controlled



*Figure 4.9 – “Cohencidence”*

gaze of the mainstream public. The term “cohencidence” itself is perhaps meant to visually highlight these *seemingly* innocuous events as far more than such. The sarcastic/sardonic attitude that Anon A performs is likely indexing this larger relationship, at least in part.

In the mode of visual images, the Anon takes on a positionality of anti-blackness by using the iconic figure of “Moon Man”, a locally-salient meme (and character) based off of the McDonalds mascot “Mac Tonight” prominently circulated in the late 1980s (see *Figure 4.10*). On /pol/, the image of “Moon Man” has since become locally-appropriated and characterized as a member of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) – visually apparent by the tag on his jacket – and frequently used when valorizing violence against non-White people (*knowyourmeme*). This is visually depicted by the character holding an assault rifle in conjunction with his physical stance and excited/smug disposition. In addition, the text also indexes the iconic link between blackness and criminality by “congratulating” Michael Brown – a black teenager shot and killed by a White officer in



*Figure 4.10 – Michael Brown and “Mac Tonight”*

Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 – for being “1 year free of crime”. It is likely the case that this particular image variant was created a year after his death, poking fun at the supposed “achievement” of Brown for not committing any crimes. The mocking connotation that the

image takes on is even more salient by the filename: “Good job Trayvon.jpg” – referring to Trayvon Martin (the black teenager shot and killed in 2012). The idea found humorous here is that being dead/killed is the only way for black “otherness” to stay away from deviant and/or criminal propensities, since it is often linked as an inherent behavioral tendency, rather than the product of long-term socio-historical processes of institutional and structural marginalization.

The distinctly anti-black and anti-Semitic stances being negotiated here are achieved simultaneously through the usage of different modalities, and each highlight discourses deeply situated in White Supremacist ideological frameworks. Though culturally-recognized as distinct categories of “otherness”, categories of Jewishness and race are similarly represented through explicit forms as oppositional “others” against idealized, White subjects, though with sometimes unique ways of achieving such.

#### **4.4 Ideologies of Gender, Sexuality and (hyper-)Masculinity**

Lastly, transgressive practice on /pol/ cannot be adequately framed in this analysis without attention to the deeply gendered ideological frameworks situated in moments of direct conflict between Anons, and in oppositional alignments vis-à-vis “others” not dissimilar to what has been presented thus far. I focus specifically on how a kind of idealized, working-class (hyper-)masculinity is interactionally evoked as a means to elevate, or perhaps denigrate, themselves or others through practices of domineering. Simply, ideologies of gender and sexuality are often expressed (though not always) during dialogic struggles for “domination” over other Anons who – for any number of reasons – they either wish to vehemently oppose or are being opposed likewise. This is the idea that one’s dis-alignment is typically viewed as potentially threatening and viewed as an attempt to destabilize the legitimacy and status of the

other's performative self-image. This latter may be usefully framed and characterized as potential threats to the Anon's "face" during "character contests", which Goffman refers to as "moments of action [during which] the individual has the risk and opportunity of displaying to himself and sometimes to others his style of conduct" (1967:237-238; See also Goodwin and Alim 2010:183). Evoking a hyper-masculine stance is realized through an interactional opposition to qualities of emasculation/femininity characteristically directed at others. The use of overt and explicit forms is crucial for this process to occur due to its performative potential in evoking highly face-threatening and/or violent and contentious behaviors during engagements with other publics, as with the other interlocutors mentioned previous. Such is deeply interwoven – I stress – within the ideological dimensions presented thus far. The (co-)productive capacity, and role, of hyper-masculine subjectivities cannot be understated in the performativity of explicitly-recognized forms and of transgressive practice more generally.

For example, Hill (2008:49) notes the importance of slur-usage in helping to negotiate a particular hyper-masculine stance, noting that "slurs are important as well for a tough, hyper-masculine register of American English, where they are emblematic of 'straight talk' and the right to unconstrained and 'irreverent' expression, even among people who would deny a charge of racism". The usage of slurs, in this case, are crucial resources used in the (co-)production of oneself as a "straight talker", one that doesn't mince words and says what they mean, and indexing oneself as an adherent to the notion that foregrounding an "unconstrained" and "tough" style in everyday discourse is not only acceptable, but encouraged. In an earlier study on "campaign promises", Hill (2000) details how the interplay of dominant, metapragmatic discourses of "truth" and "theater" in the US inform how political figures, most notably presidential candidates, will utilize promises in moments where they wish to frame themselves as



“an exemplary person, a hyperindividualized, hypermasculinated subject who is licensed thereby as qualified for high office” (261). The coordinated actions of then-President George W. Bush Sr. during his second campaign run were intended to portray himself in this light; employing the use of “street colloquial language” situated in an “exaggerated, violent, working-class masculinization” to index his determination and ability to fulfill the promised actions (274). Hill’s use of “street colloquial language” is implicitly framed to contrast the language indexically linked to privilege; the language of formalized institutions, of “fancy” rhetoric and/or of “politicians” more broadly – a sentiment often evoked. The use of styles linked to directness or informality have the potential to transform oneself into a hyper-masculine, “hard” subject deserving of leadership in opposition to otherwise un-masculine, weak, or “soft” feminine qualities perceived as unable to “get things done” to the same capacity.

The use of “street colloquial language” does suggest a kind of juxtaposition to prevailing, or “dominant” norms of what publicly-recognized discourses are already viewed like in these privileged spheres of institutions, politicians, wealth, etc. After all, the qualities of leadership and “getting things done” are reserved here for a select few individuals. The esteemed qualities of hyper-masculinity in the publics of Presidential political discourses, due to their imposed *oppositional* stance-taking functions, seem to as well momentarily appropriate the transgressive qualities of counter-publics (in its disruptive, poetic-expressive capacity), while simultaneously regulating one’s public image to avoid the stigma embedded in said publics. The saliency of the “hyper-masculine register” – which I would argue is an example of *style* – is possibly due to its negotiated placement within broader systems of distinction and contrast (Irvine 2001:77). That is, styles are given meaning and chosen over others because of their relationship with what they contrast or oppose, in this case what they are “not”. In the case of Hill (2000), Bush Sr.’s

promises were an attempt to dispel prevailing qualities of “weakness” due to his privileged background and his perceivably passive actions as Vice-President during the Reagan administration, instead choosing to highlight the esteemed qualities of hyper-masculinity to directly contradict these sentiments. Like so, counter-publics are explicitly defined *by* their oppositional or “conflictual” relation to the dominant public (Warner 2002:84-85); also, not entirely dissimilar to Halliday’s (1976) notion of “anti-society”, which, by its very orientation, is understood by its contrastive relation to perceivably “dominant” societies.

Therefore, looking at how (hyper-)masculinity is performed requires looking at the contrastive system of distinction in which it operates so clearly for those who use it; that is, how particular qualities index (or perceivably *don’t*) the culturally-valORIZED subject position of transgressive Whiteness on /pol/ by looking at how it’s evoked in moments where Anons employ it against one another; framing “others”, in this case, as embodying the culturally-disparaged qualities of emasculated femininity. Such qualities are iconically recognized as inherent to liberal identities due to, in part, their willing submissiveness to the interests of racialized and Jewish “others”. These qualities of oppositional “otherness” make these hyper-masculine styles highly salient and evocative in its transgressive and transformative potential, and therefore used to explain in part the degree of staggering routineness characteristically shown in the other dimensions discussed thus far.

In negotiating oppositional stances against “otherness”, Anons on /pol/ will commonly evoke hyper-masculine ideologies in moments of establishing “dominance” in interaction by exposing the emasculated features of others – that is, framing other Anons as possessing “othering” qualities marking them as unworthy of any legitimate or serious discussion/commentary. *Figure 4.11* is presented below to showcase this point. The discussion

was centered around the then-recent (2017) suicide of Slobodan Praljak, a Bosnian Croatian general who was convicted and sentenced for war crimes in 2013 (Wikipedia). After his sentence was upheld in 2017, Praljak ingested a lethal dose of poison on a live television broadcast. Anons on /pol/ largely valorized his death and circulated the video for a number of days; the thread below garnered over 62 separate replies within a number of hours, many of which posted sympathetic responses to Praljak's actions and authenticated the events as

OP

## HAPPENING – CROAT KEBAB REMOVER TAKES POISON IN HAGUE

Rundown:

>Croat general who removed muslim shits in the Yugoslav war, defending Christians.

>Put on trial for (((war crimes)))

>Goes to the Hague voluntarily 15 years ago to prove his innocence

>Spends 2/3 of the sentence therefore was to be released immediately

>Court tells him he is guilty after all and sentences him to 20 years (he would still get out soon since he spent 2/3 of it in prison already)

>Says fuck your roles I go down how I want and drinks Hemlock poison like a boss.

He said "Slobodan Praljak is not a war criminal. I reject your judgment with contempt." [...]

Rest in peace honourable general. Lived and died like a real man.



*ANON 1 - In response to OP:*

>those notisable shakings/seizures before he drink  
coward

No image used

*ANON 2 - In response to Anon 1:*

You shake/seizure worse trying to talk to a woman.

No image used

*Figure 4.11 – Praljak’s Actions and Masculinity*

iconic of his hyper-masculine positionality. This is visually demonstrated by the snippet taken from the initially much larger OP presented above. The “title” (in red) concisely summarizes to passing Anons the recent events that unfolded/are still unfolding (“**HAPPENING**”); the space limitations of the title facilitated a particularly prompt summary: “**CROAT KEBAB REMOVER TAKES POISON IN HAGUE**”. Though the use of Croat is a seemingly neutral identifier for Croatians, the use of “Kebab Remover” exemplifies how “otherness” can be reduced to many forms, depending on the context; in this case, Bosnian Muslims become iconically identified through a food typically associated with “Muslims” and of the “Middle East” (“Kebab”). The use of “remover” denotes the controversial internment of Bosnian Muslims into concentration camps, where they were subject to conditions of maltreatment, starvation, and often death (Vulliamy). Such sentiments are again highlighted in their use of >greentext to contextualize a narrative about Praljak’s background, where “muslim shits” were “removed” for the sake of “defending Christians”. This rationale is particularly noteworthy since the idealized White subject on /pol/ is often framed by their alignment to Christianity and to “traditional/family values” indexed by such. The rationale is considered easily justified in this scenario, indexed by the neutral identifier “Christians” as opposed to the othering qualities of “muslim shits” or

“kebabs”. OP then frames Praljak’s trial as under the interests of Jews – presumably since “defending” Christians and “removing” Muslims is against the supposed self-interests of Jewish power – expressed through the use of “(((echo)))” [“(((war crimes)))”]. Praljak’s actions after his eventual conviction were framed here in its oppositional capacity to the authority of the state in branding him a “war criminal”, the act of televised suicide as a potential means of expressing processes of “illegitimation”– the active rejection of a particular identity as it is recognized and authorized by state institutions (Bucholtz and Hall 2004:386). His symbolic “rejection” opposes and undermines the control of the State, here framed in a highly sympathetic and honorable light (“like a boss”). The OP authenticates the actions of Praljak’s life (and death) as reflective of the actions of “real” and “honorable” men.

Though Praljak was largely elevated to a heroic degree in the number of threads that I witnessed, and certainly not limited to the majority of the replies in this thread in particular, Anon 1 instead frames them as an act of cowardice, evaluated as such due to the jittery movements that Praljak makes before he consumes the poison. Anon 1 uses >greentext to point out the specific moment of emasculation (“>those notisable shakings/seizures before he drink”) before directly targeting his personal character. In response, Anon 2 directly calls the legitimacy of the claim into question by making a parallel to Anon 1’s own character, and their assumed inability to “try to talk to a woman”; Anon 2 uses the same particular usage of words (“shake/seizure”) in doing so. Although it would be nearly impossible, given the circumstances of the website, for Anon 2 to know this, Anon 1’s face is directly challenged as lacking the “masculine” qualities shown by their criticism of Praljak, rather than valorizing him. It seems likely that Anon 1 is assumed to be heterosexual and male due to the action of shaking/“seizuring” while trying to talk to a woman as being perceived as something

emasculating and insult-worthy. Anon 2 performatively breaches the negative face of Anon 1, publicly challenging *their* personal qualities – or failings – as reflective of a lesser form of masculinity. Anon 1’s supposed behaviors become contextualized as comparatively more mundane and unimportant than Praljak’s suicide on live television, and yet still a failed act. Though not directly stated, Anon 2 likely uses this evaluation to effectively disregard the evaluation as illegitimate, since it is merely produced by a subordinate “other” unable to produce a viewpoint worthy of direct argumentation.

These kinds of face-threatening and domineering behaviors are extremely common on /pol/, and one of the most routine ways to transgress other Anons during discussion. This may be explainable due to the relatively short lifespan of thread content on 4chan more generally, where an ephemeral discussion format (and a lack of identifiers for any consistent evaluation of posters between threads) may facilitate judging one another’s status of masculinity (or lack thereof) by what’s inferred from their post content alone. *Figure 4.12* below presents another example of such with the thread’s OP (not pictured) opening with the phrase “>Stop listening to nigger music”, introducing a discussion about the supposed ethical implications of listening to music outside of iconically White genres. The conversation that follows is from a reply-chain between two Anons:

*ANON A - In response to post (not shown):*

i'm pretty far right and i listen to rap music. Only white nats [nationalists] ik [I know] that don't are kinda nu-male tier desu [Japanese copula usually meaning "it is"]. Its not that big of a deal but i think it's a good fighting/workout music. Modern rap is absolutely dog shit tho [though]



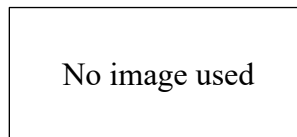
*ANON B - In response to Anon A (above):*

disregard shill posts you shill faggot



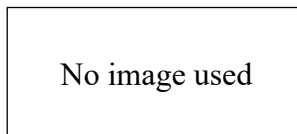
*ANON A - In response to Anon B (above):*

how much do you bench?



*ANON B - In response to Anon A (above):*

more then you bugman soboy fuck



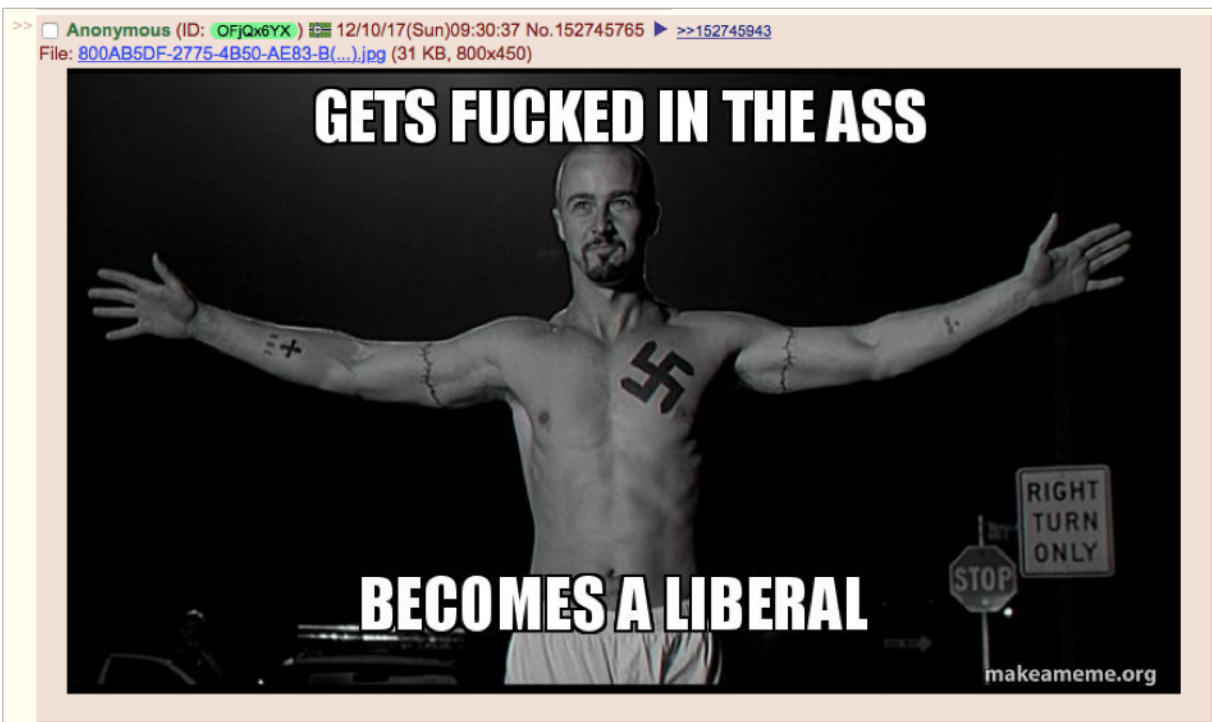
instantly has to appeal to but muh bench. thinking your bench will save you from these fists cuck fgt. ["faggot"]

*Figure 4.12 – Rap Music and “but muh bench”*

In the initial post, Anon A validates a chain of replies (not shown) contesting the OP's statement by substantiating how hip-hop and rap genres form an integral part of their musical tastes, as Anon A integrates it into their “pretty far right” identity – presented here in its seeming contrast (“i'm pretty far right *and* i listen to rap music”) to the otherwise normative assumptions of oppositional Whiteness. In fact, the point is reinforced in the statement following by presenting

an anecdote, that the “white nats” [nationalists] in their experience that *don’t* listen to such are comparatively unmasculine (“pretty nu-male desu”).

The use of “nu-male” is particularly interesting because it’s used often to pejoratively identify men that do not conform, and/or actively resist, traditional roles of masculinity (knowyourmeme.com). It generally indicates a sharp criticism toward emergent gender ideologies in public discourses (shown by the use of “nu”, short for “new”), often linked on /pol/ here to an increased prevalence of white, liberal feminisms in the mainstream. The relationship presented between liberal ideologies, feminist principles, and the emasculation of men is recognized as inherent to one another; an iconized link used for purposes of “othering”. A similar case is shown in *Figure 4.13* below, which uses a screencap of character Derek Vinyard



*Figure 4.13 – Liberal qualities*



(played by actor Edward Norton) from the film *American History X* (1998) to highlight the emasculated qualities of “liberals”. The film follows Derek from his initial identity as a Neo-Nazi – salient by the prominent swastika tattoo – to his eventual disillusionment and rejection of his former ideals. At a point in the film, Derek is raped by members of the Aryan Brotherhood as a response to his actions due to this progression. Evident here is the entanglement of the events of the film in a well-circulated meme format, with text superimposed at the top-most and bottom-most portion of an image; the text is often interpreted as a causal sequence or as a progression in logic (i.e., “If A, then B”) even if such is not explicitly stated (as such is the case above). The implicit logic presented is that act of being forcefully raped leads one to “become a liberal”. There are a few things to consider here: for one, the word “raped” is not used but rather the more indexically neutral “to *get*”, which may imply passivity, submission, some degree of consent or even enjoyment; and secondly, the use of “*becomes* a liberal” may also suggest 1) a process of immediate (unwilling) transformation of which the receiving act is the catalyst, or 2) an expression of agency in choosing to “become” a liberal after the act itself happened. Either way, idealized notions of masculinity are posed in stark contrast to emasculated ones, the latter of which is intensified through its iconic association with politically liberal ideals.

*Urbandictionary*’s top submission for “nu-male” – submitted in June 2016 – furthers our discussion now by highlighting the indexical alignment with hyper-masculine subjects through strict opposition stance-taking against locally-disparaged traits of femininity:

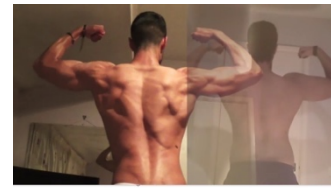
Nu-males are men (*with ‘men’ being used as loosely as possible*) lacking self-respect who are completely *devoid* of any masculinity and will jump at any moment to defend women online for feminist brownie points...Nu-males are almost exclusively white (although some exceptions exist), *ultra liberal*, hipsters...*submissive* but outspoken (*only*

*online*), in their 20-30s, harbor any form of *self-hatred* (white guilt, male guilt etc.)...They're often *pseudo*-intellectuals and will opt to blocking as their form of arguing online to any opposing opinions or *valid* criticism in order to protect their *fragile* egos (italics added).

As demonstrated in the user-submission above, “nu-males” are presented as lacking a degree of authenticity; they are markedly distinct here from qualities inherent to “real men” since they are explicitly characterized as possessing qualities linked to submission, femininity, and fragility (softness). The idea of using the label of masculinity “as loosely as possible” is highlighting one’s perceived deficit of these authenticated qualities (being “devoid of any masculinity”). Furthermore, the label is applied to those who have internalized forms of “self-hatred” (e.g., guiltiness of being white and male) frequently viewed on /pol/ as a product of liberal and feminist ideological frameworks – to identify oneself by their alignment with these ideologies is taken here to exhibit one’s submission to frameworks that are otherwise against their own self-interests; being “almost exclusively white” and yet identifying with a movement detrimental to the interests of Whiteness. The use of “pseudo-intellectuals” expresses an attempt at denaturalizing one’s worldview as a façade, exemplified by the “nu-males” avoidance of having to “argue” against “valid” (i.e., logical, scientific, rational) criticism to save-face (“protect their fragile egos”). Although there is no singular definition of “nu-male” – the submission above being the top-rated one on the website – it does elucidate in part how Anon A characterizes the “white nats” in their experience that *don’t* listen to iconic black genres. The reasoning may be implicitly linked by the explicitly-recognized relationship between hip-hop/rap genres (linked more broadly to blackness) and aggression, shown by Anon A’s preference for using it as

“fighting/workout music”. Earlier in the comment chain, other Anons note a similar sentiment in *Figure 4.14*:

*Anon C*: “nig music boosts test [testosterone]. Listen to it you nigs don’t be a bunch of nu-male faggots”



Osana Najimi  
This is gross. With all your veins you look like an erect penis. Fatten up boi, there's nothing wrong with being on the fatter side, you look much better then. Viagra looking mothafucker  
5 days ago · 🍌 0

*Anon C1 (one of four total replies to Anon C)*:

“Unironically this”

*Anon D*: “Nigger music is the most red pilld alpha music there is though. Literally”

*Figure 4.14 – Alpha Music*

Substantiated here, black genres (demonstrated by the use of “nig(ger) music”) are definitively linked to the heightening of esteemed masculine qualities: while Anon C declares how they contribute to elevated/increased testosterone levels, Anon D explicitly depicts it as “the most red pilld *alpha* music there is”, emphasizing the relations of dominance and submissiveness situated in “alpha” and “beta” masculinities. Much like Anon A at a later time, both posters underscore how black genres are culturally-valued in moments of dominance or aggression (e.g., “fighting/workout music”). It’s peculiar to note here that musical styles so deeply linked to black cultural and linguistic practices are valorized here in the production of White identities, in a manner inverse to how Anons otherwise frame blackness (or even non-conforming gender categories) more generally as threatening, inferior, and starkly oppositional. The use of black slurs here are employed as both a descriptor (“nig--- music”) and as a form of address (“listen to it you nigs”) are combined furthermore with the pejorative “nu-male faggots” – demonstrating

how racialized and gendered “otherness” can take on complex forms intersectionally, and are often used in forms of oppositional stance-taking on /pol/. In the case of the seeming contradiction of valorizing black cultural and linguistic styles while outright disparaging its speakers, it may be useful to frame hip-hop/rap genres as valorized here *due* to a relative recognition and exploitation of their racialized associations in the process of masculine appropriation. The iconized relationship between hip-hop/rap and aggression is potent here in this discussion because there is some degree of awareness of *why* these genres amplify qualities of masculinity. By legitimizing negative stereotypes of blackness, Anons can effectively appropriate iconically black genres in the production of esteemed White masculinities, one that elevates themselves in culturally-valued ways while explicitly denigrating blackness even further via salient opposition.

The response chain between Anon A and B also demonstrate how face-threatening behaviors are taken up and contested. Anon B’s response targets Anon A’s original comment for responding to a supposedly obvious “shill post”; the term “shill” standing here for someone who covertly participates in spreading/circulating misinformation – and/or attempting to discredit otherwise authentic/legitimate information – while pretending not to be doing so intentionally (i.e., presenting oneself as sincere while truthfully not so). Anon B claims that Anon A’s serious response to the post – as opposed to just ignoring or “disregarding it” as is routinely done – marks them as similarly unworthy and subject to targeting. This does show how posts can be, and are often evaluated by the perceived relationship between an Anon’s post content and their underlying intentions (or, in the very least, presented as such); in this case, addressing post content in any (perceivably) serious manner may be seen as indexing one’s affiliation or alignment with that Anon, indexed here by Anon B’s usage of similar “othering” terms (“you

shill faggot”). The use of the derogatory “faggot” is used as an additional means to “otherize” Anon A by linking them to emasculating features otherwise oppositional to the positionality of Anon B’s own indexically implied stance. Reinforcing this claim is the usage of a rather crude character drawing popularly known as “brainlet”, a meme variant that frequently depicts the implied unintelligence and submissiveness of another by visually hyper-characterizing their supposed “physical” features in a visually-salient format; features commonly include 1) an extremely small (or non-existent) head – indexing their lack of an otherwise normal-sized brain – 2) perpetual drooling patterns – common indexical of elements of stupidity, and 3) a persistent smile, evident in tandem with these other elements in popular depictions of idiocy. The use of text and visuals simultaneously characterize Anon A as both a “shill”, an emasculated “faggot”, and as grossly unaware and/or unintelligent.

In response, Anon A makes an attempt to remedy the potential loss of face by providing a face-threat of their own by asking how much they “bench” (i.e., the highest amount of weight one can do on the ‘bench’ press exercise) – a common index of masculinity due to the positive correlation between a numerical value and one’s possession of culturally-valued physical features of size and strength. The “question”, in this case, is a direct threat to one’s idealized stance potentially due to 1) its weight as a veiled threat to the recipient, and 2) it acting as a means of publicly displaying Anon B’s physical prowess (or lack thereof) for everyone to evaluate and target. In this case, the threat is immediately taken up and intensified with a superior relative value (“more then you”) and the use of the pejorative “bugman soboy fuck” identifier. The evocation of bug metaphors in the use of “bugman” is interesting to note in its ability to provocatively impose a subhuman status to the recipient in question, “bugman” perhaps more so. The second word, “soboy”, is likely a misspelling of the then-circulated pejorative

identifier “soyboy,” used to characterize men as having inherent effeminate qualities. According to knowyourmeme, “the term is based on the presence of phytoestrogens contained within soybeans, which have led some to conclude that soy products feminize men who consume them.” This is intensified in the further characterization of Anon 1 as a “cuck fgt.” This illustration reinforces the face-threat due to the meanings implied in each word: “cuck” is short for “cuckold”, a sexually-charged term negatively referring to a husband (usually passive) whose wife cheats on him with other men, and “fgt.”, an abbreviation of a homophobic slur; both are perceived oppositions to masculine tendencies and practices. The (hyper-)masculine stance is evoked with a direct threat: that meandering over bench press numbers (as a form of comparison) will be unhelpful in the event of *actual* physical confrontation with Anon B in person. Qualities of “toughness” is identified here with regards to the ultimate perceived “test” of establishing domination or power over another.

I wish to emphasize the relationship being presented in this latter point in a bit more detail. The link between esteemed masculine qualities (in theory) and esteemed masculine behaviors (in practice) demonstrate an ideological distinction between public and private; that is, between the legitimacy of what Anons *say* (online) versus what they *do* (in person). *Figure 4.15* presents a similar situation:

*Anon:* >you can’t even speak up about it to anyone without getting put in jail or losing everything (which is funny because you’re going to lose everything anyway).



Who the fuck are you even talking about amerimutt? Where do you think im from Tyrone? And why do you pretend to not be a low test [testosterone] effeminate soyboy cuck who has never been in a fight before? Do you cry when you get off

the internet and have to get back to the real world? You would literally not even dare to look at me in the eyes if we were having this conversation face to face

*Figure 4.15 – Face-to-Face*

Anon is here using the >greentext format in order to directly quote a snippet of another's rather substantial response (*not shown*) without imbuing an evaluative frame; it is their direct reply to that snippet that is being used to transgress the other's hyper-masculine stance. I once again emphasize the indexical meanings linked to Anon's descriptors: "amerimutt" and "Tyrone" for instance are both heavily racialized, in that they position the recipient in either mixed-race ("mutt") or explicit black "otherness" ("Tyrone"). The next string of identifiers ("low test effeminate soyboy cuck") operate simultaneously with the supposed lack of masculine indexes (i.e., fight experience; looking at someone directly in a "real world" context) to amplify the distance between their identities (i.e., against racial *and* gendered "otherness"). The distinction made here highlights how Internet-mediated spaces are often viewed as disconnected from the physical, "real world"; face-threatening behaviors that occur on /pol/ are framed as reflective of discourses in the "private" sphere of social relations, as opposed to a "public" one outside and within physical proximity. The ideological divide between what's "public" and "private" are entangled with ideologies of media usage and have implications for how particular utterances can be viewed as more or less legitimate (or in this case, masculine) depending on context (See Gal 2005).

I want to conclude the sections presented thus far with an example that demonstrates the complex intersectional meanings that can emerge in interaction; *Figure 4.16* focuses on an adjacency pair between OP and Anon:

*OP (Opening Poster):*

Have you ever interacted with (((them)))? How did it go? How do they act? Did they fuck you over or anything of the kind? Do you have any kike friends? Tell me your stories [33 replies]



*Anon (in response to OP):*

A (((Greenstein))) dentist tried to fuck me over once so I gave his secretary the classic “right wing death squad stare” and got 50% off immediately. The next appointment was free.

Remember this lads, Jews will gladly fuck you over in a heartbeat, but show them you see through their kikery and are unafraid of “the system”, and they will shrivel up like a tiny cold penis. Similar situation with niggers, if you don't turn your back to them too long and don't show fear, they will never fuck with you.

>t. Chad Zyklon Cock

*Figure 4.16 – t. Chad*

Initially the OP begins the thread content with a request for stories of interactions with Jews (“them”), recognized explicitly as such by the use of the “(((echo)))” marker and the accompanying image. In response, Anon details a narrative about their confrontation with a “(((Greenstein)))” dentist and his secretary; much like “Tyrone” or “Hans”, “Greenstein” acts as a kind of “filler-name” that evokes a stereotype/figure that is co-produced by hyper-racialized and anti-Semitic ideologies – seemingly privileging the performative over the referential. A masculine stance is taken after the dentist attempts to transgress them, noted by Anon’s usage of the “classic ‘right wing death squad stare’” in order to achieve dominance over Jewish



“otherness”. Anon then changes footing by addressing the publics of their message through voicing the figure of patriarchal authority – precontextualized via “Remember this lads,...”. Anon then attempts to authenticate their status of legitimacy by passing down advice to others. For example, the use of highly gendered metaphor of a “tiny, [shriveled up and] cold penis” perhaps reflecting the emasculation of Jewishness to the agency of this patriarchal White authority figure and evoked in the statement following by highlighting how to do the same vis-à-vis blackness. The word of caution not to “turn your back to them too long” and to not “show fear” immediately provokes an almost iconically recognized relationship between blackness and animality due to its parallels with general advice given to hikers when navigating areas with wild animals (e.g., wild cats).

What is most unique about this example is the “>t. Chad Zyklon Cock” utterance placed at the end. The meme that this seems to refer to was rarely used during my fieldwork, though the types of variants I did observe generally shared two common elements: 1) the “t.” feature and 2) its spatial placement at the end of the post. According to the knowyourmeme database, the “t.” is an abbreviation for the Finnish word “terveisin” – roughly translated as “best regards”, like a closing statement (which may also explain its end-placement). The identifier/name “Chad Zyklon Cock” is a variation of a much more widely circulated meme known as “Chad Thundercock”. “Chads” on /pol/ are figures that represent an idealized, highly sexualized maleness that is popular, sexually dominant and genetically apex; they are typically juxtaposed to the less successful and submissive “normies” (invisibly “normal” people) (knowyourmeme). This is once again another salient example of a “filler name” being used, though this specifically acts as a form of self-reference that exhibits one’s own (hyper-)masculine, “Chad-like” behaviors. Furthermore, “Zyklon” is likely referring to “Zyklon B”, a cyanide-based pesticide

that was infamously used on Jewish prisoners in gas chambers during the Holocaust. The ideological implications are clearly expressed through the combination of these elements: the culturally-valORIZED position of masculinity, expressed as “Chad”, also privileges their intense opposition to Jewishness by highlighting lived histories of genocide in the name.

As shown here, Anons characterize “others” in culturally-disparaging traits of femininity and, in the process, elevate themselves simultaneously through the frame of culturally-valORIZED and working-class (hyper-)masculinities. The ideological dimensions of race, anti-Semitism, and gender/sexuality are rich semiotic resources for (co-)producing a highly explicit, oppositional form of stance-taking entangled within the ideological frameworks that guide how users’ ideologies of language shift relationally with the affordances of the website itself.

#### **4.5 Ideologies of Media and Hegemonic Counterpublics**

Lastly, I wanted to address the entanglement of language and media ideologies with regards to how Anons frame themselves linguistically more broadly in opposition to the “outside world”, taken up at varying moments throughout this paper so far. To restate a visible trend during conflict-episodes between Anons (though not exclusive to it), the normalized usage of explicit/overt transgressive forms on /pol/ between Anons are informed by a wide-range of ideological dimensions that, I argue, are core facets of an even broader dominant (language) ideology of transgression; after all, these dimensions cannot operate on their own, but they operate within in a multiplicity of ideologies at any given time or place. This is due in no small part to the wide-range of subjectivities that some of these very frameworks legitimate, reinforce, or even problematize and contest – often at the same time. As such, I wanted to contextualize this deeply interwoven relationship first by briefly presenting a series of examples; each

becoming progressively more salient than the next. The first is from a post that resulted in four direct responses; two of which will be shown after the initial post:

*Anon 1:* Society is a competition of false selves. I want no part of the lack of realism.

*Anon 2a:* This, freedom is addicting. This place allows us an outlet against the gradually increasing madness of the world.

*Anon 2b:* Even without the political context, this place is still addicting. I don't want to hear about normalfag things and normalfag interests. 4chan is interesting because it's full of weird people and misfits.

The underlying theme of liberation comes forth here through discourses of “realism” and “freedom”. /pol/ is collectively dis-aligned with dominant “society” through the use of oppositional binaries: ‘realism’ against ‘false selves’, ‘freedom-as-outlet’ against ‘madness’, and ‘weird people and misfits’ against ‘normalfag things and normalfag interests’. The stance that Anons routinely and performatively take in opposition to “others” on the board is seemingly projected more widely between the collective publics (i.e., /pol/, or even 4chan collectively) and “society”. The second example will echo this ideological distinction process as well:

*Anon:* These guys aren't joking, seriously. Once you're here, you never leave[.] Why? People are longing for free speech in this age of total political correctness, and 4chan provides it via lax rules and anonymity. There is no better place for discussion of anything.

Anon, in this example, meta-discursively highlights the unique position that 4chan takes in opposition to “others” – reinforced by their choice to frame the website as dis-aligning with the “age of *total* political correctness” as a means, perhaps, to demonstrate the former's marginal status. 4chan's structural anonymity and the general leniency towards content posted (“lax rules”) is overtly framed as the reason for why everyone is here; the question of /pol/'s content

being rationalized as a case of “free speech” is implicated in the theme of liberation mentioned previous. The third and final example – a text snippet taken from a larger post – demonstrates this and another potential linkage:

*Anon:* The terrible truth of /pol/ is that it’s as liberating as it is horrific.

...

In the truth you’ll be sickened at the world, yet constantly drawn to seeking this same truth. It’s a counter hug-box[.] /pol/ is the hurt-box[.] Instead of locking out reality in your hugbox like a progressive, you’ll force yourself into this hurt-box on a regular basis. /pol/ is a self-inflicted spiritual and intellectual masochism as the price of placing truth above all else. You could have prevented this.

The numerous oppositional stances taken throughout these responses were re-circulated during the entirety of my fieldwork on /pol/, though each Anon’s personal stance *towards* this view often varied considerably. Regardless, /pol/ is collectively positioned by the interwoven ideological themes of liberation alongside that of truth, of reality, and of spiritual and intellectual enlightenment; though, the truth is anything but pleasant. This ‘horrific’ and ‘sickening’ truth (the ‘hurt-box’) is juxtaposed against the ‘hug-box’ of the dominant ‘progressive’ society that is evaluated as not only a false reality, but one chosen by “others”.

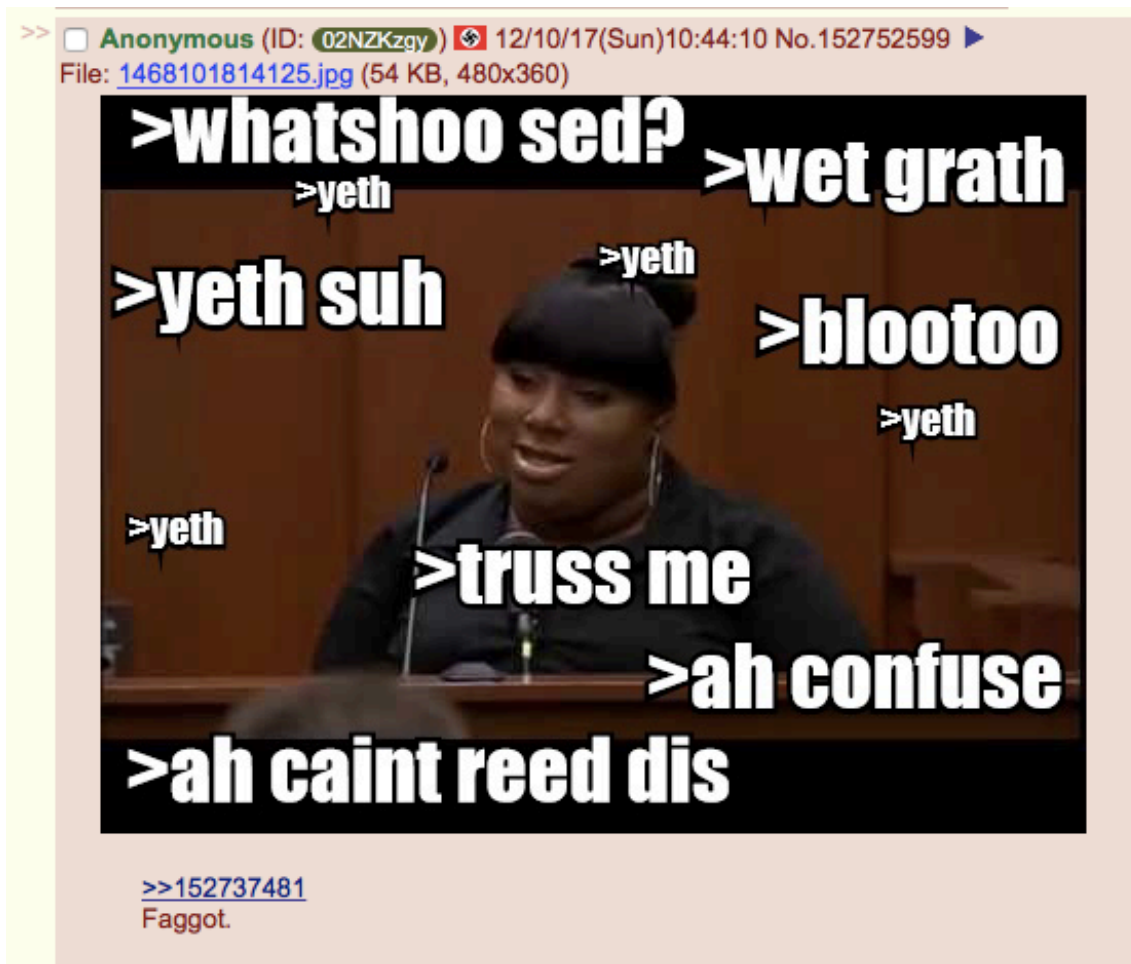
I would suggest that the distinction between the ‘hug-box’ (politically correct falseness) and the ‘hurt-box’ (politically *incorrect* truthfulness) is perhaps evocative of other macro-level ideological distinctions such as ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres (See Gal 2005) and of ‘virtuality’ and ‘actuality’ (See Boellstorff 2012). In her discussion of the former, Gal points out that the particular contexts that one would define as ‘public’ or ‘private’ – in addition to the ritual/social constraints reserved for each domain – are culturally-mediated within ideological frameworks. In

Boellstorff's analysis of the latter, the "emergent sets of social realities" in *virtuality* is, once again, constitutive of experiences that he frames as distinct as from that of *actuality*. This is not entirely dissimilar to these other ideological distinctions.

The interconnectedness of language and media ideologies, then, is elucidated further by these previous distinctions, in that in order to understand the kinds of social realities unfolding in the previous examples, one would have to be aware simultaneously that the space in which Anons (co-)produce is one uniquely situated at the juncture of these two ideological frameworks. This can arguably be said about any technologically-mediated space as well, to varying degrees. To adequately analyze this relationship further, it feels necessary for me then to explore the conflictual forms of stance-taking in its most general degree, that is attempting to frame just how these social realities are being interactionally (co-)produced more widely around this idea of the highly reactive and explicit "counter-public" or "anti-society" identity that is understood as both marginalized and persecuted, when, perhaps, it may not entirely be so for these Anons. I am referring here to the noticeable disparity between the two conceptual frameworks I use to describe Anon's discursive relationship to the "outside", Warner's (2002) *counterpublics* concept and Halliday's (1976) *anti-society* and *anti-language* concepts (which I discussed briefly earlier on), and the more nuanced reality of this relationship that cannot so easily fit in these existing frameworks. This explains my repeated usage/interchanging of the two sets of concepts: it shows my ambivalence in using one over the other, simply for the reason that neither seem to entirely encompass my observations between Anons' shifting discursive and meta-discursive realities and what is occurring in practice.

Simply, I wish to provoke a conversation about whether or not Anons are so clearly "marginalized" in the ways they have presented. To do so I would like to recall an earlier

discussion of racial ideologies, most notably the second example (*Figure 4.17*). Of the points to consider is how Anon discursively weaponizes Jeantel’s Black Language (BL) variety as a means to solidify and to elevate their own positioning of culturally-valued Whiteness on /pol/ through highly explicit and salient (mis)spellings that frame Jeantel’s language – and indexically her perceived (in)abilities as both a witness and as an African-American – as deficient and incomprehensible. Doing so allowed Anons to recognize it meta-discursively as an example of “/pol/ humor”. Among the other ideologies presented at length previous, the theme I am recalling



*Figure 4.17 – Rachel Jeantel Revisited*

is the process of evoking racialized and gendered “Others” in order to frame oneself as far away from that position as possible. Likewise, this relationship is projected on the level of 4chan and

/pol/ itself, where collective identity formations are evoked for the sake of distancing them as far away from the “dominant” society, and its values it is associated with, as possible. This is accomplished in part by and through language forms that are explicitly recognized as, well, highly-explicit, overt, and transgressive from the social/ritual constraints of “public discourses” informed by largely covert White racist projects (See Hill 2008). I restate a point made by Coleman’s (2014) analysis of 4chan’s /b/ board in that these forms are *intended* to be viewed as horribly explicit and unwelcoming to outsiders – that’s the point. The ideology of performativity and the kinds of ‘social realities’ taking place are what allows Anons’ “discursive border fence” to be saliently marked/recognized here – and therefore so powerful. Such is the case only because the very identities being (co-)produced are inevitably defined by their relationship to the social/ritual constraints, or “status quo” of the dominant public – otherwise the routine state of linguistic affairs on /pol/ wouldn’t be as markedly transgressive, or even recognized as such. I recall Warner’s (2002:68) reasoning for this:

A counterpublic maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public, but a dominant one. And the conflict extends not just to ideas or policy questions, but to speech genres and modes of address that constitute the public and to the hierarchy among media. The discourse that constitutes it is not merely a different or alternative idiom, *but one that in other contexts would be regarded with hostility or with a sense of indecorousness...Friction against the dominant public forces the poetic-expressive character of counterpublic discourse to become salient to consciousness* (italics added).

I have previously framed the particular publics on /pol/ to be counterpublics for the reasons mentioned above, which also follows the basic criteria for “anti-society” and “anti-language”. 4chan’s public image of notoriety and chaos is likely attributed to this reason as well, at least in part. Practices of stylizing the “other” (e.g., Jeantel) are intended to cause that kind of friction due to the language forms being linked to those who metapragmatically view themselves as having a subordinate/marginalized status. Though the ideologies at work that rationalize an understanding of one’s status as marginal or subordinate are regularly contested on the board, it continues to be produced hegemonically.

However, sentiments about Jeantel’s BL variety are certainly nothing new, alternative, or conflictual to the extent presented, and in fact were largely witnessed in dominant public discourses about her statements during the trial – just more covertly. Rickford and King (2016) argue that Jeantel’s Caribbean-influenced BL variety was in fact a central reason as to why George Zimmerman was eventually acquitted during the trial. Although she had spent considerable time at the stand – a total of nearly six hours, the longest of the trial – her statements were overwhelming disregarded and criticized as being “un-credible” and “incomprehensible” and were never even considered during jury deliberations (950). The interplay of the “White speaking subject” evaluates BL as a perceivably unsystematic and incomprehensible variety – even in the face of a thorough linguistic analysis determining the contrary. Rickford and King state “[that] through the standard language ideology shaped by these and other forces, Trayvon Martin and Rachel Jeantel were ‘heard’ as non-standard, therefore less credible and more culpable than George Zimmerman, who, it should be noted, never took the stand” (978). They surmise that it was Jeantel’s language, in this case, that was “found guilty” (950). In light of this, Anon in *Figure 4.17* is not necessarily evoking alternative or “counter-



hegemonic” meanings like the cases presented in Olivo’s (2001) analysis on black hip hop groups, but is merely evoking a more explicit manifestation of dominant ones situated in, and legitimized by institutional and structural frameworks, and often expressed in public discourses.

So, would it be accurate to frame the privileging of overt and explicitly-recognized forms as a vehicle of a *counterpublic* or as an *anti-society* if they themselves are utilizing dominant frameworks and reaping the benefits, so to speak, of the positionality of Whiteness-as-hegemony – by reinforcing and reproducing processes of marginalization against non-Whiteness-as-“other”? I believe the answer lies in the creation of a marked variation to the notion of *counterpublic* that can be explained through the idea of *superstandard Whiteness*, an interactive process in which “nonnormative, nonhegemonic, and highly marked” categories of Whiteness become saliently recognized as a marked (oppositional) identity formation, even when those formations can still potential benefit from unmarked Whiteness-as-hegemony. This markedness becomes highlighted at moments of disalignment with “local ideologies of racial appropriateness”, a sentiment made by Bucholtz (2001) in her evaluation of how such processes play out in the production of “nerd” identities (85). Bucholtz discusses how the identity formation of the “nerd” utilizes a “super-standard” English variety in negotiating a position of *extreme* Whiteness by underscoring a more explicit boundary between themselves and perceived youth culture trends. These trends are heavily interwoven into dynamics of appropriation and “deracialization” of African-American cultural and linguistic forms (e.g., the use of Black Language) into larger, more dominant White projects (See Bucholtz 2012). She notes that these “nerds” do not always frame themselves in this capacity, and may sometimes align with, or against ideas of “normalcy” at particular moments. Processes of distinction – that is distinguishing one’s position as being normally White or not – then can be evoked situationally

to some degree by groups still linked to White privilege. Highlighting forms of racial difference and opposition are part of the process: “superstandard English, however, reinforced this racialized divide by exaggerating and highlighting the semiotic elements of Standard English that distinguish it from nonstandard forms of African American English” (94). This does suggest that particular linguistic forms may potentially be used to index one’s *assumed* or *perceived* status in the strategic formation of identities, while continuing to embrace resources of stark dis-alignment or contrast afforded by those in positions of power and privilege. Simply, a particular identity formation can be rationalized or legitimized in opposition to “dominant” groups, while still being situated in those very entities more broadly – just recognized as a marked variant of such.

A similar case is presented in Schmidt’s (2007) examination of the discourses surrounding the “Official English” political movement in the United States. Although the English language has achieved a highly-salient status of hegemony as the naturalized “common language of the country...[and] the language of prosperity” in the US – to quote former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich during his publicized criticisms of bilingual education programs – the movement discursively frames its own status as conversely threatened, and at serious risk of being taken asunder. The English language, and its connection to ideologies of American exceptionalism, is viewed as being “under attack” by immigrant “others” that threaten to undermine or altogether reject the “Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream” (202). The pervasive use of oppositional and assaultive metaphors in relation to these racialized “others” (See also Santa Ana 1999) demonstrate how discourses used by groups in positions of dominance – reaping the benefits of prevailing ideologies of race, among others – can use these very same ideologies to rationalize their position as anything but; aligning themselves as a

“threatened” or marginal group even when, as Schmidt argues, “English is so clearly the dominant language of the United States, and is not under any realistic ‘threat’ by other language communities” (204). Ideological regimes of the *monoglot standard* – expressed by discourses of “national unity” through a single, common language (See Silverstein 1998; Bauman and Briggs 2003) – is deeply internalized by its adherents to the degree that multilingualism is framed as unassimilated and disruptive, and discordant with the idealized cultural realities of American exceptionalism and of the well-being of the nation and its citizens (See Bauman and Briggs 2003). Ideological regimes of social distinction and differentiation are crucial for these oppositional alignments and how one may negotiate their own *perceived* position vis-à-vis “others”, regardless of whether or not such is necessarily the case.

In light of this, I argue that Anons on /pol/ interactionally co-produce themselves as a kind of *counterpublic of a hegemonic variety*: a counterpublic discursively disaligned against dominant publics at strategic moments, but still situated in similar positions of privilege and power as an authenticated, marked variety – and being able to shift back and forth between unmarked and marked varieties depending on the particular interests of its subjects. Such an understanding may be recognized to varying degrees by those in unmarked dominant groups. These counterpublics are informed both by ideological regimes of social distinction and differentiation – crucial for maintaining particular relations of power – and by their own emergent interests and positionalities – crucial for maintaining *oppositions* to particular relations of power whenever necessary for identity work. These sometimes-conflicting positions inform a dialectic that can both reproduce these ideological frameworks in some ways, and can contest or denaturalize them, in others. I argue, then, that *hegemonic counterpublics* can more accurately accommodate for the complex range of user engagements that play out by Anons on /pol/, while

still able to highlight the deeply interwoven dimensions of the language and media ideological frameworks that inform them.

## **FIVE: CONCLUSION**

In her discussion of 4chan's /b/ - "random" board, Knuttila (2011) offers an illustrative reflection into how particular 'modes of being' are shaped by the structural features the website itself offers for its users:

[the] anonymous interface, heightened by temporality and unique by contingency, presents virtuality in its fullest form. It is encounters with 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 users and out of the individual user's control.

Popular characterizations of 4chan, and especially of /b/, are often contextualized in a manner not too dissimilar to this one. Being situated in a narrative backdrop in which "Internet transparency" continues to be an emergent social reality, 4chan's "implied narrative" privileges a set of system constraints where structural anonymity and ephemerality are key to the big picture, and where experimentation and creativity are hoped to flourish. Knuttila notes further that this structural emphasis has profound consequences for how user engagement is experienced: "draw[ing] attention to key ontological aspects of self and otherness engrained in anarchic culture." Though her analysis was published around, if not before, the advent of my own fieldsite in its current iteration, it does seem to find itself contextually relevant in light of current events (~March 2019), in which the discursive worlds of White Nationalism and of the "alt-right" have since become a national highlight of countless news stories and heated public discourses.

This project attempts to spearhead a deconstruction of these worlds by exploring the very ideological foundations that inform how language, as well as media, is understood and used on one of 4chan's most notorious and aptly-named discussion boards: /pol/ - "Politically Incorrect". I have argued that local models of explicit and overt language practices – of which is near-ubiquitously realized in some form or another through interaction between Anon[ymous user]s – are realized through ideological frameworks of race, anti-Semitism, and gender and sexuality, of which themselves are core regimes within a dominant language ideology of transgression. The highly antagonistic stances that are taken in relation to "Others" are routinely enacted in interaction, which also highlights the ways in which Anons discursively frame their own individual, and collective positionality against the "age of total political correctness" inherent to the discourses of the "dominant public". In doing so they participate in the active inversion and rejection of the "commonly held cultural codes, values and norms" of the kinds of practices often only covertly realized in "public" space (Babcock 1978; See Hill 2008), and appropriates them in such a way that not only accepts their explicit usage, but valorizes them in everyday interaction and performance. The performative ideology that informs slur and epithet usage is evoked and intensified in order to establish a contrastive identity via a transgressive relation to the dominant "outside world" – and the very indexical relationships that this identifier discloses.

Such is, I have argued, an alignment with what Warner (2002) refers to as *counterpublics*, a parallel to Halliday's (1976) *anti-society*, which by definition possesses a meta-pragmatically recognized marginal or subordinate status to the dominant public (84-85). However, these frameworks didn't seem to fully encompass my experiences in the field, as the concept of *counterpublics* doesn't necessary detail how the very idea of these particular publics can be strategically evoked at particular moments to produce certain identities. That is,

(co-)producing and highlighting this highly marked opposition towards “hegemony” but continuing to embody it otherwise in practice and to reap its benefits. To remedy this, I mark a potential variation to the concept by building off Bucholtz’s (2001) discussion of *superstandard Whiteness* by detailing how *hegemonic counterpublics* may aptly describe the complex and fluid positionalities that particular groups/publics can shift between at particular moments by evoking the very image of the publics themselves simultaneously and strategically through discourse.

I have also contributed here to existing literary traditions by synthesizing a plurality of theoretical approaches in linguistic anthropology in order to highlight the complex sets of social relations – and their ideological underpinnings – that play out in a technologically-mediated space stressing transience and privacy, a topic that had yet to be explored in this particular capacity. More specifically, I applied the theoretical frameworks of Raciolinguistics in demonstrating how the inseparable relationship between language and forms of social distinction (e.g., race) is deeply reflective of how Anons discursively enact particular these (oppositional) social realities that authenticate White masculine subjectivities through extreme “othering” practices. I hope to have contributed to this movement by stressing the importance of analyzing the role that both covert *and* overt forms play in legitimating relations of social inequality online. The kinds of subjectivities produced in *virtuality* harness a wide-range of semiotic resources in everyday interaction from White projects in *actuality* that can take new forms but, nevertheless, can still reinforce and perpetuate these very projects by doing so.

And lastly, I have built upon the tradition of language ideologies by examining its deeply interwoven relationship with local models of mediated interaction online. I suggested that analyzing Anon’s “beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about [highly explicit and transgressive] language structure and use” (brackets and text added; Kroskrity 2010:192; See also 2015) should

also provoke further exploration in 1) how the affordances of the website “promote certain forms of interaction between participants and constrain the possibilities for other forms of interaction” (Hutchby 2001:32), 2) the “implied users and implied casual narratives” designed in said affordances (Gershon 2010b:285), and 3) Anon’s own “multiple, competing and contradictory” kinds of beliefs, values and dispositions about “how the medium affects, or should effect the message” (Gershon 2010a: 391). The applicability of this media ideologies framework to the established tradition of language ideologies may be especially fruitful for emerging scholars now beginning to conduct fieldwork in particular spaces exposed to, or even created by, technological artifacts and the varying structural constraints embedded in them.

In these aims I hope to have been successful, at least partially so, in making linguistic anthropological sense of this very peculiar counterpublic.

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