PORTRAIT OF AN ANONYMOUS IMAGE BOARD:

THE BOARD-TANS OF 4CHAN

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PORTRAIT OF AN ANONYMOUS IMAGE BOARD:

THE BOARD-TANS OF 4CHAN

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To /fit/:
We're all gonna make it brahs

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

/fit/	Refers to the the fitness board on 4chan.org
Anon	A poster or posters on 4chan.org
Board	A place to post threads around a central topic
Bumping	The method used to keep a thread alive on a 4chan board by posting a replying that pushes a thread to the top of the board.
Forum	A place for discussion on the internet
Futa	A hentai drawing of a girl with a large penis
GET	A randomly generated event that is noted when a post's unique ID number consists of rare integer sequences, such as 1,000,000, 123456789 or 55555555.
GOMAD	A diet recommended by Strength coach Mark Rippetoe
Hentai	Anime pornography
Kawaii	Cute
le	A reference poking fun at reddit over use of the french article "le" in rage comics.
Lurking	Reading a thread without contributing to the discussion
Trip	A unique identifier and name for a user
Trap	Male to female transexual
Feels	An emotion associated with sadness or loneliness
Otaku	A person rejected by mainstream society, socially inept, obsessive, and fan of anime and/or manga
Manlet	A male 5"10 and under

Moe (mo-eh)	A Japanese slang term of unknown origin that describes either one's attraction to an an anime or video game character or a character that is a certain kind of cute or adorable, generally in physical appearance as well as actions.
OP	Original Poster
qt3.14	Cutie-pie
Reddit	A popular internet forum
Saging (Sa-Ghey-ing)	The method used to push a thread down on a 4chan board by posting 'sage'(sa-ghey) in the options field.
SS	A popular weightlifting routine for beginners
Sub-forum	A place for specific discussion on the internet
Sub-reddit	A place for specific discussion on reddit
Thread	A subset of posts around a topic relate to a board
Trolls	A person who causes discord on the internet

SUMMARY

Compared to other online communities, relatively little is understood about 4chan. This is likely because of the widespread use of offensive language and images, the ephemerality of its content and its negative reputation in general. Despite the misgivings many have about the site the content it generates significantly influences internet culture, from the format of memes to cat pictures. Because of the influence of the site on internet culture as a whole, we should better understand internet culture. Unlike other online communities 4chan's boards the design features of the site allow for the creation of anthropomorphized identities, known as Board-tans, to describe the members of its community. When evaluating 4chan as a community and digital artifacts it is important to understand Board-tans (an anthropomorphized board on the site) and how posters perform their identity because of the significant role they play in communication on and off the site. Through a case study of the board /fit/ I explore if the Board-tans, provide deep insight into the site.

CHAPTER 1

4CHAN

Compared to other online communities, relatively little is written academically about 4chan. This is likely because of the widespread use of politically incorrect language and images, the ephemerality of its content and its generally negative reputation. 4chan is a "image-based bulletin board where anyone can post comments and share images" related to a subject (4chan FAQ). When many hear 4chan, what often comes to mind is a dangerous website full of malicious internet trolls and hackers. While its undeniable that malicious internet trolls and hackers do frequent the site, journalists including those from Fox News, The Washington Post, The Guardian, and so on, assume an association between 4chan headline events and the general 4chan population (Dewey 2014; Fox 2009; Smith 2008). This 'dangerous place' has created or popularized numerous memes, or cultural genes, that many enjoy, such as Advice Animals, LolCats and RickRolling (Dawkins 1990; Smith 2008). The purpose of this paper is to expand the understanding of 4chan's culture and examine the usefulness of the moe anthropormophizations (a cute personification of a non-human thing) of 4chan's boards, the Board-tans, to understanding each board's culture and 4chan's larger culture. The paper aims to shed light on the often misinterpreted internet cultural juggernaut that is 4chan.org, specifically identifying aspects about its cultural identity, and methods of communication.

A Brief History of 4chan

The East

2channel Founded

2channel almost shuts down due to server costs

Futaba Channel Founded

Futaba opens the board /b/-Random

OS-tans created on Futaba

World Futaba.net Founded

2000   2002   2004   2006   2008   2010   2012   2014

1999   2001   2003   2005   2007   2009   2011   2013

4chan House Appears on /r9k/

Comic of /v/ invading /b/ created

Board-tans created

moot opens /fit/-Health and Fitness

Reddit.com Founded

4chan moves to 4chan.org

moot founds 4chan.net

Something Awful Founded

The West

Figure 1: A timeline of 4chan and the Boad-tans. This timeline provides a
visual guide to the history of 4chan and the Board-tans.

The websites, 2channel, Futaba Channel, and Something Awful served as

the primary creative inspiration for 4chan's creation (A timeline of events seen in

Figure 1). Internet forums have a long history starting in the pre-internet late

1970's with bulletin board systems (BBS) and Usenet, "an international system

used primarily for topical discussions" (Lee 2012). These methods of

communications laid the foundations for the real time internet chat relay in 1988

and the modern internet forum or message board, created in 1994 by the W3 Consortium (Lee 2012).

4chan is a third iteration of the Japanese anonymous text board 2channel. 2channel, launched in 1999 by Hiroyuki Nishimura, was the first completely anonymous bulletin board network (2channel). In August 2001, two years after 2channel launched, it's rapid growth led to the site almost shutting down due to server costs. Some users of 2channel, fearing the worst, ventured out and started an alternative site named Futaba Channel (Futaba Channel). In addition to the anonymity and ephemerality that 2channel offered, Futaba Channel allowed users to post images along with text. In March 2002, Futaba opened its first random image board, known as /b/, which eventually became popular with the Anime Death Tentacle Rape Whorehouse (ADTRW), a sub-forum on the US based Something Awful forum (Complete History of 4chan).

The Something Awful forum was founded in 1999 by Richard "Lowtax" Kyanka as a "comedic website and forum community" (Something Awful). ADTRW was one of the first sub forums on the site to keep anime related threads out of general discussion (ADTRW FAQ). Because of ADTRW's focus on anime and Japanese culture, it became interested in Futaba channel, regularly hosting Futaba appreciation threads. In these threads 4chan founder moot (A.K.A. Christopher Poole) was introduced to Futaba. In 2003, the Futaba user RIR6 created world2ch.net (World Futaba), which was the first english language version channel image board (Complete History of 4chan). World Futaba was linked in one of the Futaba appreciation threads on ADTRW and

served as the first gateway between eastern and western internet cultures (Complete History of 4chan).

Going between ADTRW and world2ch was where moot (A.K.A. Christopher Poole) got the idea for 4chan. September 30th 2003, "moot announces 4chan.net in Something Awful's ADTRW forum in a thread is titled '4chan.net - English 2chan.net [Futaba channel]!'" (Complete History of 4chan). Over the next week moot creates several boards including /a/- anime, /b/ - Anime/Random, /h/-Hentai, /c/- Anime/Cute, /d/-Hentai/Alternative, /w/- Wallpapers/Anime, and /y/-Yaoi (Complete History of 4chan). From these humble beginnings 4chan grew into the internet cultural juggernaut that it is today, attracting nearly 22,000,000 unique visitors making it the 532nd most trafficked site globally (4chan Advertise). Despite 4chan's size and influence on internet culture, little is written about the site and its culture from an anthropological perspective.

The Design of 4chan

Before looking more into the source of 4chan's culture, one must first look at the design affordances of the site. 4chan's design is a copy of Futaba Channel, which means its primary affordances are anonymity, ephemerality, and image posting.

Ephemerality

Ephemerality in relation to 4chan refers to the short time posts and threads exist on the site. 4chan's users control a thread's ephemerality through the use of 'bumping' (moving thread to the top of the listed threads on the board) and 'saging' (pronounded sa-ghey-ing) (which pushes a threads down the list of threads on the board) (Bernstein et al. 2011). Saging prevents a thread from being bumped to the top of the page that lists the threads. A poster sages a thread by "entering 'sage' (by itself) into the [Options] field while replying" (4chan FAQ). Bumping effects a thread in the opposite manner of saging by pushing the thread to the top and keeping it alive. A poster bumps a thread through any reply, "sometimes explicitly with a phrase like 'bump', 'bumping' or 'bamp'," not containing sage in the [options] field. (Bernstein et al. 2011) When a thread reaches the bump limit, the thread is no longer pushed to the top of the page. The thread then gradually falls to the final page on the board until it is deleted or pruned. According to the 4chan FAQ "this method of post-limiting, while sometimes inconvenient, assures that content is kept fresh on the boards" (4chan FAQ).

Each board has set bump limits for threads. Larger boards, such as /a/-Anime, /v/-Video Games, /sp/-Sports, and /soc/-Social, allow for greater than 500 bumps before the thread is marked for deletion, but most boards cap it greater than 300. (4chan.org) Of the boards, /b/ receives the most traffic on the site. Bernstein et al. "collected a dataset of activity on /b/ for two weeks: July 19 - August 2, 2010. This data includes 5,576,096 posts in 482,559

threads." (Bernstein et al. 2011) Their findings provide some insight to the speed at which /b/ operates. Their data found that /b/ roughly receives 35,000 threads and 400,000 posts per day (Bernstein et al. 2011). Thread's median life span on /b/ is 3.9 minutes spending 5 seconds on the front page over its entire lifetime, and a mean lifespan of 9.1 minutes spending 36 seconds on the front page. (Bernstein et al. 2011) In other words, threads on /b/ move extremely fast.

The speed of /b/'s ephemerality means users must be there around the time a thread is created in order to participate in it, because in less than an hour the thread will likely be deleted. To avoid the loss of the valuable content that can be contained in these threads users developed mechanisms such as screen capturing techniques (screen capping) and saving images and posts often into a folders titled after the board for future enjoyment or remixing. (Bernstein et al. 2011). While this speed is characteristic of the larger boards, some of the smaller boards, such as /gd/-Graphic Design or /ck/- Cooking, can have threads that last days or weeks.

Anonymity

By default 4chan users post under the name anonymous, however, they may also post under a trip (tripcode), which is a unique identifier and name for the user. Anonymity is a high held value of the 4chan community in addition to being a design feature. This is partially demonstrated by moot implementing forced anonymity between January 2006 and March 2007 on the /b/-Random

board, meaning that users were not able to use a trip (Complete History of 4chan). Outside of moots actions, Berstein et al. demonstrate the importance of anonymity to 4chan's users, finding that 90.07% (5,022,149) of posts used the default anonymous name, while five percent of posts (281,367) contained a tripcode (Bernstein et al. 2011). The amount of trips will vary between boards, but the vast majority of users across the site post under the default anonymous. In other words even when names are available the 4chan's users actively choose to be anonymous.

Anonymity is used differently depending on the user. One way is for users to occasionally maintain a fluid identity. For example, users can claim they are either the OP (original poster) or another poster in a thread who has used the name anonymous (Bernstein et al. 2011). While this can cause confusion and tension among posters, Bernstein et al. assert that anonymous posting can be positive for the community because it allows for disinhibition which can allow for more intimate conversation, temper the fear of failure, and encourage experimentation with new ideas or memes (Bernstein et al. 2011). The disinhibition is good for the users on 4chan because failure, defined by no replies on a thread or post, as well as being mocked or ridiculed for what you said is quite common.

In addition, anonymity fosters conditions that encourages users to conform to group norms. The Social Identity Model of Deindividualization Effects (SIDE Model) claims that deindividualization factors, such as anonymity and group immersion, enhance the salience of a group's social identity (Reicher

et al. 1995). The SIDE model frames itself on Social Identity and Self

Categorization theory. In Social Identity theory, "subjects define themselves in

terms of the groups to which they are allocated: this is the act of social

identification" and "the group only has meaning in terms of how it relates to

other groups" (Turner 1987; Reicher et al. 1995). In other words, an individual

defines his or her self by the group which he or she belongs to, and the group

that he or she belongs to is defined by its relationships to other groups. The self

categorization theory describes circumstances in which an individual identifies

themselves and other individuals as a group (Turner 1982; Hogg 1992). By

defining oneself as a group member, the individual understands his or herself as

a reflection of characteristics associated with the group (Reicher et al 1995).

These theories do not claim that the individual looses a sense of self, rather he

or she is shifting the criterion for action from the personal to the social (Reicher

et al 1995). Because users do not loose their individual identity, it does not

effect the disinhibition asserted by Bernstein et al. with regard to anonymity.

When this is understood one sees that anonymity simultaneously allows for

disinhibition and the adoption of the social identity.

  To support the SIDE model's theoretical framework, Reicher et al did a

study examining the deindividualization effects. The results of the study

supported the SIDE model's framework for deindividualization effects over other

accounts, such as, the work by Stanford psychologist Phillip Zimbardo (Reicher

et al 1995; Zimbardo 1969). Additional studies examining anonymity and

deindividualization effects, such as Lea and Spears Computer-mediated

communication, deindividualization and group decision-making, and Postmes

and Spears, Behavior Online: Does Anonymous Computer Communication

Reduce Gender Inequality, also yielded evidence supporting the SIDE model

(Lea & Spears 1990; Postmes & Spears 2002). What one sees from modern

studies on deindividualization is that the social identity and group norms

strengthen when people are deindividualized.

     4chan's default anonymity in addition to the strong cultural value the

community places on anonymity, fosters the conditions for deindividualization,

which in turn strengthens the social identity of the site and it's boards.

Furthermore, because users do not loose their individual identity, anonymity can

foster a strong social identity, while simultaneously allowing for individual

disinhibition.

Image Hosting

     Image hosting is the ability for users to post images along with text in

their posts. Bernstein et al. found that the images acted a bit like fashion. They

write, "specific classes of images have periods of limited experimentation,

turning into wider adoption, followed by subsequent abandonment" (Bernstein

et al. 2011). Knowing what the current 'in' style is an important way to single

ones status as knowledgeable about the culture, as it is with fashion (Bernstein

et al. 2011; Simmel 1957). Knowledgable users about a board's culture dismiss

those without knowledge with the phrase "LURK MOAR," which tells the

unknowledgeable to spend more time learning about the board culture before posting again (Bernstein et al. 2011). Other than fashion, images play a roll in describing a users emotions when telling a story (Suler 1996). For example, tfw, that feel when, or mfw, my face when, indicates that the image in the post describes the reaction either in general or for the user specifically in the story.

These mechanics of ephemerality, anonymity, and image hosting designed into the site inform the interactions and identity formation on the site. Bernestein et al. theorize that "/b/'s anonymity is likely shaping a strong communal identity among a very large set of individuals" (Bernstein et al. 2011). While anonymity is the focal point of the communal identity, ephemerality and image hosting are important as well. The ephemerality of threads and posts encourages users to document quality content through screen capping or saving, either for then enjoyment or remixing. The image, screen capped post, or remixed image can then be reposted in other threads perpetuating the artifact in the culture, and thus informing the identity. MUDs (multi-user dungeons) and IRC (internet chat relays) channels contain similar design affordances to 4chan.

Related Technologies

Howard Rheingold in his book The Virtual Community describes MUDs and IRCs. While 4chan is an image board, it resembles a MUDs because of the ephemeral aspect of both. Rheingold writes, "MUDs are very much about who is in the place at the same time and how they interact" (Rheingold 2000). Part of

4chan is the "being there" aspect of it created through its ephemerality. Different users browse boards at a given time and depending on the time, different threads will be available on the board. This makes interactions on 4chan different for users each time. Rheingold's observations on MUDs also appear to reflect behavior related to identity on 4chan. He writes that one of the things people do in MUDs is pretend to be someone else or several different people at the same time (Rheingold 2000). This is evident on 4chan from anons pretending to be OP or other anon in a thread.

Internet chat relays (IRCs) also provide insight to 4chan. Rheingold describes IRCs as anonymous and ephemeral, which match two of three major design choices of 4chan. He goes on to point out that despite the anonymity and ephemerality users become extremely close with one another (Rheingold 2000). The development of close ties can be explained by the SIDE model, which suggests that anonymity significantly strengthens a groups social identity. Furthermore, Rheingold's observation also supports Bernstein et al's assertion that anonymity creates a disinhibition. IRCs provide an example of where anonymity allows for both disinhibition, and a strengthened social identity. This allows for both users of IRCs and 4chan to grow really close as they share a strong social identity and experience disinhibition effects created through anonymity. In addition to technologies that contain design features similar to 4chan, it is important to look at the related cultures, specifically Futaba Channel which serves as the basis for 4chan's culture.

CHAPTER 2

ROOTS

4chan's roots in Japanese anonymous forums and an anime focused english language sub-forum provide the basis for its culture. Aspects of modern Otaku culture are key to understanding behavior seen on 4chan later in the paper.

Otaku

Futaba is a haven for dedicated anime and manga fans colloquially referred to as Otaku (Jkid on Thu 2011). The first use of Otaku was in a 1983 essay titled "An investigation of 'Otaku' " by Akio Nakamori in which he describes Otaku as:

> "Every school has these kinds of school students who are bad in sports and willingly stay in the classroom during recess. They are either too skinny or fat like a pig. They often wear unstylish glasses and have no friends. There were many of this kind of people there" (Nakamori 1983).

Nakamori's description served as the basis for the 1990 definition of Otaku in the Japanese-language dictionary, Basic Knowledge of Modern Words. The definition reads:

> "Otaku is a kind of fan of cartoons and comics who are discriminated against by others. They are reclusive, mentally unbalanced and obsessed with details. In addition, they cannot communicate well with others. They usually do not care about their clothing and thus are not dressed well. This word became widely used as a result of reports on the Miyazaki murders" (Yonezawa 1990).

Modern prominent Japanese scholars on Otaku, such as Toshio Okada, sees Otaku in a more positive light describing them as "individuals who have chosen for themselves a life less ordinary, that is to say, they are a sort of counter-culture to the average consumer" (Okada 2008). In this sense Okada paints Otaku as a people who refuse to obey cultural norms and by doing so ostracize themselves from mainstream society (Rivera 2009). With some consistency, all these definitions define Otaku by a couple of key characteristics: rejected by mainstream society, socially inept, obsessive, and a fan of anime and/or manga.
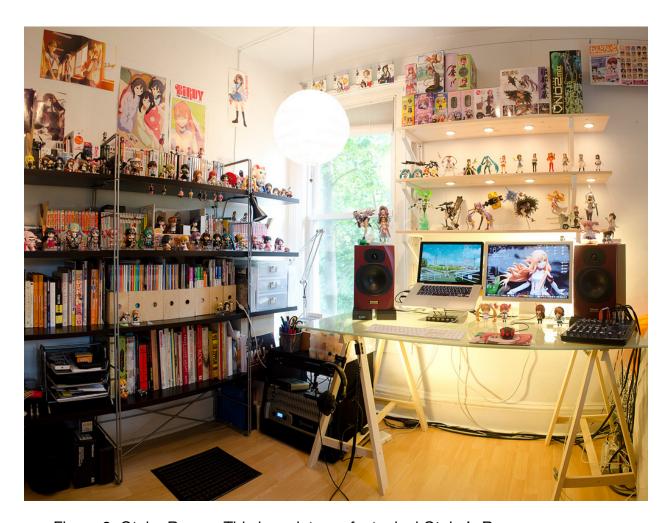
Figure 2: Otaku Room. This is a picture of a typical Otaku's Room.

The culture that one expects to arise from Otaku is abrasive, impersonal, and focused on mastery of knowledge of subject matter (particularly anime and manga). (Example of an Otaku Room seen in Figure 2)

The US also has a demographic of people who adhere to Otaku characteristics, however, in the US they are more commonly referred to as "fan boys." Annalee Newitz relates the US "fan boys" to the Japanese Otaku in her 1995 paper on Otaku culture in the US. She defines the US Otaku as "a fan of anime subcultures, and he is usually understood to be obsessive, socially inept, or pathetic" (Newitz 1995). In addition, Newitiz notes another observation of US Otaku that was not mentioned by Japanese scholars. Newtiz claims that in an interaction with a US Otaku, he or she suggested that "American audiences are tired of being blamed for the oppression of various minority groups and nations in the world, and respond to these anime as a respite from "political correctness" guilt so often talked about in United States mass media" (Newitz 1995). This observation provides the added dimension of rejection of political correctness to US Otaku that may not be present in Japanese Otaku. Thus one would define a US Otaku as being rejected by mainstream society, socially inept, obsessive, a fan of anime and/or manga, and politically incorrect. The culture that one expects to arise from US Otaku is similar to that of Japanese Otaku, with the added dimension of political incorrectness. It is on these cultural foundations that 4chan was conceived. For one to see the political incorrect influence, one must look no farther than Something Awful sub-forum, Anime Death Tentacle Rape Whorehouse, from which 4chan was born.

Political Incorrectness

The importance of political incorrectness to US Otaku may also be the roots of the high value placed on humor that one observes on 4chan. Humor is defined as a funny or amusing quality; jokes, funny stories, etc., of a particular kind; the ability to be funny or to be amused by things that are funny. (Humor) Several renowned modern comedians, including Keegan-Michael Key and Jordan Peele (Key & Peele), Lisa Lampanelli, John Clease, Bill Mahr, Jerry Seinfeld, and Chris Rock, all pointed out in recent interviews that political

PLEASE ENJOY THIS CULTURALLY, ETHNICALLY, RELIGIOUSLY, AND POLITICALLY CORRECT CARTOON RESPONSIBLY. THANK YOU.
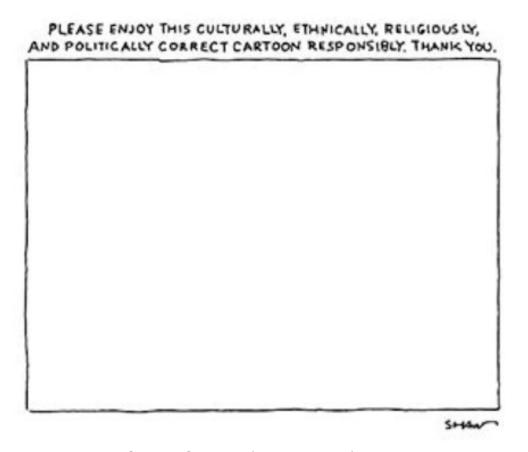
Figure 3: Politically Correct Cartoon. (Mankoff 2012) The New Yorker's Bob Mankoff's depiction of a politically correct cartoon.

correctness kills comedy and humor (Key & Peele 2014; Lampaneli 2013; Rich 2014; John Cleese on Political Incorrectness; Jerry Seinfeld On Diversity In Comedy). These views expressed by these comedians are eloquently summarized in a cartoon by Bob Mankoff of The New Yorker pictured in Figure 3. (Mankoff 2012) Like these comedians US Otaku, who serve as the basis of 4chan's culture, detest political correctness (Newitz 1995). While these comedians are not US Otaku, the shared distaste of political correctness suggests a shared importance on humor. Furthermore, the 4chan meme I did it for the lulz, meaning "that one carried out a specific action for the sake of personal comic enjoyment," expresses the importance of humor to the community (I Did it for the Lulz).

Moe

An important aspect of modern Otaku culture, is *moe* (pronounced mo-eh). Moe is a Japanese slang term of unknown origin that describes either one's attraction to an an anime or video game character or a character that is a certain kind of cute or adorable, generally in physical appearance as well as actions. (Moe) Examples of moe characters would include Miyuki Takara from Lucky☆Star and Yui Hirasawa from K-On! (Kyoto Animation 2007, 2009).

Otaku scholars find that Otaku use moe in a sexual or romantic sense (Hashimoto 2007; Morinaga 2007; Rivera 2009). Takuro Morinaga writes that moe came from the idea of the "weak man" ("喪男"), someone who is neither

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Figure 4: Otaku with Waifu pillows. This is a picture of an Otaku with her Waifu pillows of moe characters from the anime series *Gurren Lagan*.

rich nor good-looking, and his inability to get a girlfriend (Morinaga 2007; Rivera

2009). Morinaga uses the understanding of the weak man as the basis for

explaining why Otaku form relationships with two dimensional characters

perceived to be moe from anime and video games.   Morinaga explains "that these two-dimensional characters "would never betray" the man, as would a real-life woman seeking only a handsome or rich man" (Morinaga 2007; Rivera 2009). He backs his claim by citing marriage and relationship statistics in Japan. His statistics show that in the highest income bracket 3/4ths of men are marrying and in the lower income brackets 1/4th or below of men are marrying (Morinaga 2007; Rivera 2009). In other words, Morinaga finds that moe describes a character that would love the Otaku despite his financial status or looks.

Miyuki Hashimoto finds that there is a sexual nature of moe for Otaku. Hashimoto explains that as a noun moe "characterizes the love for a particular cartoon or comic character by emphasizing the idiosyncratic aspects of their appearance and behaviour" (Hashimoto 2007). Hashimoto goes on to link the concept of moe as used by Otaku to fetishism. She writes: "An Otaku idealizes his enamored character and by means of his fantasy enhances its appeal to an extent that allows him to obtain sexual satisfaction. Hence, we may even suggest understanding moe synonymously as a form of fetishism" (Hashimoto 2007). She sites psychologist Michael Taussig's understanding of fetishism and media theorist Michael Manfe's writings on Otaku to explain that, "fetishism displayed by Otaku can be understood as a substitution of the libido object in order to satisfy the libido by use of objects" (Taussig 1993; Manfe, 2005; Hashimoto 2007). In other words, Otaku satisfy their libido through use of objects representative of the moe character.

From Morinaga and Hashimoto, one finds moe as the use of a character as a significant other to fulfill sexual and/or romantic desires of companionship. While these authors focus on moe from an existing cartoon or video game character, there are also moe characters created by Otaku artists based on objects or animals that they find cute or attractive (Figure 4). This common practice in Otaku culture is known as moe anthropomorphizations (a cute personification of a non-human thing). Through the practice of moe anthropomorphization the Board-tans of 4chan came about.

Moe Anthropomorphization

Part of the creative inspiration for the Board-tans are the OS-tans. In 2003, Futaba created a now famous series of moe anthropomorphizations known as the OS-tans (Figure 5). The concept of the OS-tans originated from a thread on Futaba's /b/ board in a thread about windows ME's instability and frequent system crashes. The series now includes moe anthropomorphizations of most generations of Windows and Apple OS's as well as browsers such as Internet Explorer and Google Chrome. The -tan suffix used here and with the Board-tans is a mispronunciation of the Japanese honorific -chan, a feminine suffix expressing "that the speaker finds the person endearing" (OS-tan; Honorific Suffixes).

The Board-tans are artifacts that describe each individual board of 4chan. They are not artifacts created by the boards themselves, rather created through

Figure 5: OS-tans. This is an artistic rendition of the various OS-tans created by Futaba Channel.

a board's perceived physical characteristics, personality and relationships.

Before the Board-tans official creation, there were comic representations of 4chan. These included (pictured in Figure 6 from left to right) moot, the website creator; the anonymous poster, a featureless green humanoid in a suit; W.T. Snacks, a well known moderator; and Yatsuba; 4chan's mascot. The formal idea of the Board-tans, as they are today, originated from a post on the board /r9k/ in 2008 with an image that depicted the boards of 4chan doing board related activities. Soon after, an artistic trip (a named user) named Three Angled Blue drew a comic immortalizing /b/'s invasion of /v/, showing both boards personified as characters. Around the same time, other anonymous users
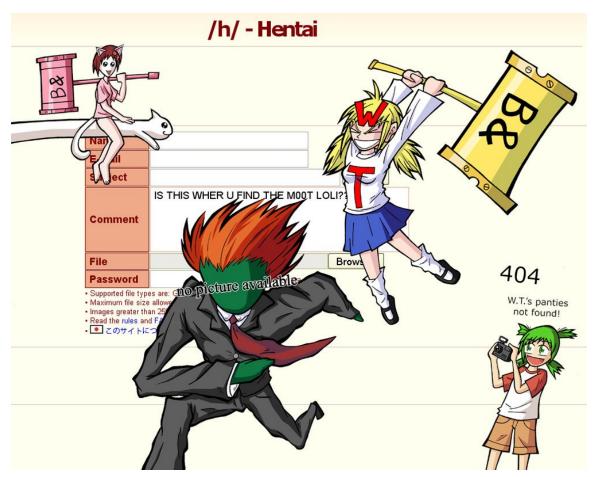
Figure 6: 4chan Mascots. This is an artistic rendition 4chan's mascots including moot, the anonymous poster, W.T. Snacks, and Yatsuba.

decided to anthropomorphize the board's of 4chan and write some fiction about it (the fiction was not provided in any of the Board-tan resources) (4chanhouse).

As of 2009 the original group of Board-tan creator disbanded leaving the Board-tans to fall into obscurity. Today, there is vast amounts of unorganized collections of drawings fictions and cosplays of the board-tans living out their lives, for example, the love triangle between /fit/- Fitness, /fa/- Fashion, and /cgl/- Cosplay and EGL (Elegant Gothic Lollita) (Board-tans; 4chanhouse).

Recent activity related to Board-tan discussion and creation occurs on sites independent from 4chan including: the 4chanhouse.org anonymous image

board, the 1d4chan.org wiki page on Board-tans, and the 4chan House Shimmie

website which hosts Board-tan images. Most of these places appear to be

relatively inactive getting a couple of posts per month discussing the Board-tans

(4chanhouse). The depictions of the Board-tans vary in style depending on the

artist, but are mostly consistent in their features (Figure 7). The consistent

features are based off of physical descriptions of the Board-tan provided on the

Figure 7: /fit/, /cm/, and /fa/. This is an artistic rendition of the Board-tans for
the boards /fit/-Fitness, /cm/- Cute Male, and /fa/- Fashion.

1d4chan.org wiki, which also contains descriptions of the boards personalities

and relationships. For example, the Board-tan description for /fit/-Fitness reads:

Board-tans/Fit

>   **Gender/Physical Description:** Male, with short hair. In great shape, may
>   or may not be beach muscle. Shorter than average and very self-
>   conscious about it.
>
>   **Personality/Habits/Hobbies/Behavior etc.:** His manlet complex and
>   childhood as a fat, weak kid make him incredibly self-conscious. As a
>   means of asserting himself, he took to weightlifting and later described
>   his reason for working out as "for girls" despite clearly admiring men. He
>   is still too socially awkward and uncomfortable to interact meaningfully
>   with anyone, yet he will insist that he has copious amounts of sex.
>   Knows how to sculpt a body well and has a strict dietary and exercise
>   regiment, consisting of absolutely no cardio whatsoever.
>
>   **Relationships:** /fit/ would like to antagonize people, but all the muscle in
>   the world can't make him confident enough. Other boards are weaklings
>   to him, and he is the only one who qualifies as natty. Has a deep-seated
>   love for the angel of gains, Zyzz, and his newer still-living idol known only
>   as Scooby. He also admires /fa/ due to his ability to dress well, though
>   he wishes he wasn't a skeleton (Board-tans/fit).

One sees similar characteristics in the Board-tan description to that of an Otaku.

/fit/s height, weight and lack of strength as a kid make him incredibly self-

conscious. This self consciousness suggests that at one point /fit/ was rejected

by the mainstream (e.g., /fit/ is not a tall dark and handsome gentleman). Later,

the personality description refers to /fit/ as socially awkward and uncomfortable

which suggests the social ineptness characteristic of Otaku. Finally, the last

sentence of the personality description refers to /fit/'s Otaku like obsession with

sculpting a body with a strict diet and exercise with no cardio. Furthermore, one

also sees the concept of moe in this description. The admiration of men seen in

the description suggests that /fit/'s concept of moe centers on muscular men,

particularly Zyzz and Scooby. Barring the difference in hobby, one sees that /

fit/'s Board-tan contains the same personality traits as an Otaku. This suggests

that the Board-tan identity is an embodiment of the US Otaku, which the hobby

switched from anime to fitness.

     Much of the Board-tan description of /fit/ appears to reflect the artifacts

and discussion that occurs on the board. This is inline with what Goffman

observed in *The Presentation of the Self in Every Day Life*. He writes that similar

routines between people results in the routines becoming institutionalized in

terms of a stereotyped expectations. These expectations then become "a

'collective representation' in its own right (Goffman 1959). The collective

representation of stereotyped expectations, generated though routine use of

images and phrases from /fit/, informed its Board-tan. With these values

consistent in the community, an individual presents himself in a way that is inline

with these values (Goffman 1959). One might wonder if the Board-tan is an

accurate depiction of /fit/'s personality as a board, and/or to what extent this

personality is acted out by anons not only on the board, but off the board as

well. If the Board-tans are accurate descriptors of the boards of the site, one

could use them to evaluate and understand the other boards, 4chan itself, and

potentially other anonymous and ephemeral communities. This case study of

/fit/ examines how closely the Board-tans description adheres to how the

posters perceive each other and themselves in the context of the board and on

other sites; and analyzes the each personality trait through modern

understandings of the characteristics of US Otaku.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND DATA

This study uses the qualitative research methods of auto-ethnography and participant observation to explore /fit/.

Methods

Auto-ethnography is a qualitative research and writing method that, "seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (Ellis & Adams 2011; Ellis 2004; Holman & Jones 2005). I browsed 4chan on and off for eight years and the last three mostly visiting /fit/. This significant personal experience with the site and /fit/, make auto-ethnographic methods a natural for the case study of /fit/. Participant observation is a qualitative research method where the researcher "tries to learn what life is like for an 'insider' while remaining, inevitably, an 'outsider'" (Mack et al. 2005). While maintaining my insider knowledge of /fit/, with regard to the language, I switch to an outsider perspective for interpreting artifacts relevant to the Board-tan identity.

In addition, using auto-ethnography with participant observation methods create distinct points of view, shifting from observer, to participant, to participant observer. This allows for stronger claims to be made about how closely /fit/ aligns with the Board-tans description and US Otaku. /fit/ is a tight

clique that contains cryptic language and references making it hard for an outsider to study it and correctly interpret its artifacts. Because I am a member of the community I understand the culture and context, which assists with interpreting and analyze /fit/, its Board-tan identity, and its relation to US Otaku culture correctly.

Data

During my time on /fit/ I collected 993 artifacts. These included posts, images and songs created by the anons on the board. I then sorted these posts into large categories including direct descriptions of the board identity containing 53 items; cultural rewrites, such as the song "Let it Go" from the movie *Frozen*, containing 15 items; images related to /fit/ but are not relevant to the Board-tan personality, such as posts about weight training your cat, containing 163 items; and images that provided examples of /fit/'s personality, containing 761 items.

I broke personality into five categories including: High Standards, Homosexuality, Love of Zyzz and Scooby, Social Awkwardness and Motivation. I chose artifacts that received either a high number or replies or were reposted by another anon on the board. Each of these categories, except for Motivation are rooted in /fit/'s Board-tan description. The High Standards category came from the lines describing /fit/ as having a "strict dietary and exercise regiment," a desire to antagonize people, and being the only board who qualifies as natty

(Board-tans/fit). The Homosexuality category came from the line stating that /fit/ works out "'for girls' despite clearly admiring men." (Board-tans/fit) The Social Awkwardness category comes from the various lines that describe /fit/ as socially awkward (Board-tans/fit). The Love of Zyzz and Scooby category comes from the line in the Board-tan description that describes /fit/'s deep seeded love for them.

While going through the artifacts another category emerged that I called motivation, which includes posts containing encouragement and advice from other anons. While these type of posts are not in the Board-tan personality description, these artifacts details anons' reasons for being on /fit/ and what they hope to accomplish. Additionally, I let the artifacts inform the creation subcategories within each major personality category. The number of artifacts in each category indicate to a degree the frequency of which users discussed created or reposted artifacts representative of the Board-tan identity.

The personality category provides the evidence needed to explore how closely the Board-tan describes /fit/'s identity accurately. My original categorization of the data included the physical appearance as seen in /fit/'s Board-tan description, in addition to its personality. Upon reflection, physical appearance in the form of what an anon on /fit/ looked like did not provide important insight to /fit/'s identity. However, how an anon physical appearance was, which led me to recategorized many of the artifacts that described physical appearance under the High Standards category.

CHAPTER 4

BIRTH OF A /FIT/NESS OTAKU

Figure 8: Fitness Otaku. This is a literal depiction of a fitness Otaku.

I started browsing 4chan in 2006, my sophomore year in high school, after being frequently linked to its flagship board /b/-Random by my World of Warcraft (WoW) guild, which is "an in-game association of player characters, formed to make grouping and raiding easier and more rewarding, as well as to form a social atmosphere in which to enjoy the game" (Guilds). As I gradually stopped playing WoW, moving on to different activities, I visited 4chan less and less, occasionally returning to enjoy the nostalgia doing forty man raids with my WoW guild (Figure 8 is an example for a /fit/ness Otaku).

Welcome to /fit/ n-no homo

After a six year hiatus from 4chan, I returned, specifically through reddit's sub forum (subreddit) /r/4chan, the subreddit dedicated to reposting cultural artifacts from the site. The content on the 4chan subreddit was nostalgic from my time on the site. Often posts on the subreddit, whether green text stories, comics or images, had me laughing out loud or near the point of crying. For a while the subreddit proved satisfactory, however, my desire for the humor from 4chan grew to a point where I found myself going back to it consistently.

While returning to 4chan I was going under a transformation of my own. During my undergraduate studies I got fat, due to various factors such as lack of physical activity, graduate school applications, work, school, lack of time for socialization, and poor sleep because of loud and obnoxious roommates. While I continued to excel in my scholarly and professional responsibilities, I was

ultimately unhappy with myself and my life. I realized that while I could only do so much about my roommate issues, I could change myself, starting with dropping the weight I gained.

This was not the first time that I decided to lose weight. During high school I lost 100 pounds with a strict diet and exercise regimen. I was confident that I could lose the sixty pounds because of my previous experience. However, unlike high school there was not the support in the form of friends to keep me motivated. I did not get along with my roommates or make ample time to talk to people outside of professional communication. This made going online to find a community a reasonable choice for me. My reasoning was reminiscent of what Sherry Turkle wrote describing why people join online communities. She writes:

> In cyberspace it is well known, one's body can be represented by owns own textual description: The obese can be slender, the beautiful can be plain. The fact that the self-presentation is written in text means that there is time to reflect upon and edit one's "composition" which makes it easier for the "shy" to be outgoing and the "nerdy" to be sophisticated. (Turkle 1999).

This same notion for why people choose online communities is also suggested by Howard Rheingold, who writes that one of the things people do in MUDs is pretend to be someone else or several different people at the same time (Rheingold 2000). In other words, online communities offered me an opportunity to start anew and reinvent myself multiple times.

Because I spent most of my free time on the internet browsing reddit, my first inclination was to go to /r/fitness, /r/weightroom, (fitness related subreddits) and /r/keto (a diet related subreddit). These boards provided plenty of useful information regarding diet and exercise, however, they always appeared to be

Figure 9: /fit/izen at a party. This is an artistic of how a typical anon from /fit/ would act at a party.

more of an information source than a community. The best analogy to describe this is myself and the other members checking out the same book at the library rather than being part of a bookclub together. The subreddits did not engage in much banter about life, it was always about the topic of the subbreddit. While the information was useful, it was not what I was looking for. I headed back to 4chan, because it contained the banter, in-jokes, storytelling, and events you

had to be there for. Because of my interest in dieting and exercise, I navigated to /fit/-Health and Fitness (Depicted in Figure 9) to see if it had the information that reddit provided and strong sense of community I remembered from /b/.

The /fit/ness Otaku

/fit/- Health and Fitness (now just Fitness), combined the informative nature of the fitness subreddits with the banter, humor, storytelling and events I remembered from /b/. Before I settled on /fit/, I read the permanent post, referred to by anons as the sticky, and spent time lurking various threads.

The sticky, prominently displayed as the first thread on the board in the default page view, on /fit/ immediately tells anons through its image to "read the fucking sticky." The text contains links to two community endorsed guides on diet and exercise. These guides include detailed and proven exercise and dietary methods, including guides about how to lose weight, how to gain weight, and supplements. While I lurked threads (meaning I read the thread without contributing to the discussion), occasionally questions would pop up that were answered in the sticky, such as how to lose weight. Anons responded to posts like this post mockingly or with frustration telling OP (original poster) to go read the sticky and saging the thread.

Lurking threads for a couple of months cued me into the culture of the board, and how to appropriately participate in the board. Over that time I got a sense of deep camaraderie between anons on the board. Even though they did

not know each other in real life, anons on /fit/ appeared extremely sincere and brutally honest with advice, expressed their feelings openly, and expressed genuine concern for other anons on the board. In addition, anons empathized with each other about events in their real life, and spent time telling jokes, sharing stories, making comics, and performing songs relevant to the board. Spending time on /fit/ felt like I was joining a fraternity. This sense of camaraderie is best summed up in a post I came across while lurking a motivation thread (Figure 10):

> *Gents, it's been one hell of a ride. Not too long ago, I was diagnosed with lymphoma, and the original prognosis was good. Unfortunately, chemo hasn't been going as planned for the last few months, and the cancer has matastisized [sic] into my lungs and smaller regions. My new prognosis is approximately 1-2 months left, and I'm planning on going into hospice care fairly soon. I just wanted to talk to you guys one last time and say thanks, for everything. I guess part of the beauty of this place is the anonymous nature and how you can just talk about things. I've learned countless things about lifting, zyzzbrah, nutrition, and most importantly, life in general. It really does amaze me how complete strangers seem to know more about you than anyone else. With /fit/s help, I turned from a skinny, 5'10 150 lb white kid, to athletic 170 lb athlete over these past two years. Like I said before, although I never knew anyone of you personally, I always felt some sort of inexplicable connection with all of you. Whether it was the feel threads where you can just vent, troll and humor threads, or just general progress threads, it was an honor to be able to get both give and get help, and just general advice about life. I hope this doesn't seem like an appeal for pity, I just wanted to say one last honest thanks to those who I truly believe are my best friends. If I could say on last thing, it would be to not be afraid to talk to that girl you eye from across the room, to keep on fighting through everything you have to go through each day, and just keep on keeping on. Good luck to all of you in whatever you do in this lifetime and I hope life brings each and every one of you happiness. We're all gonna make it brahs. Godspeed gents.*
>
> *-Op out*

So you want to skip
your workout today?

1354089896135.jpg-(14 KB, 329x449, 1351478216868.jpg)

☐ Anonymous 11/28/12(Wed)03:04 No.16051133 Replies: >>16051254 >>16051326 >>16051338 >>16051362 >>16051370 >>16051377 >>16051383 >>16051386 >>16051416 >>16051422 >>16051433

Gents, it's been one hell of a ride. Not too long ago, I was diagnosed with lymphoma, and the original prognosis was good. Unfortunately, chemo hasn't been going as planned for the last few months, and the cancer has matastisized into my lungs and smaller regions. My new prognosis is approximately 1-2 months left, and I'm planning on going into hospice care fairly soon. I just wanted to talk to you guys one last time and say thanks, for everything. I guess part of the beauty of this place is the anonymous nature and how you can just talk about things. I've learned countless things about lifting, zyzzbrah, nutrition, and most importantly, life in general. It really does amaze me how complete strangers seem to know more about you than anyone else. With /fit/'s help, I turned from a skinny, 5'10 150 lb white kid, to athletic 170 lb athlete over these past two years. Like I said before, although I never knew anyone of you personally, I always felt some sort of inexplicable connection with all of you. Whether it was the feel threads where you can just vent, troll and humor threads, or just general progress threads, it was an honor to be able to get both give and get help, and just general advice about life. I hope this doesn't seem like an appeal for pity, I just wanted to say one last honest thanks to those who I truly believe are my best friends. If I could say on last thing, it would be to not be afraid to talk to that girl you eye from across the room, to keep on fighting through everything you have to go through each day, and just keep on keeping on. Good luck to all of you in whatever you do in this lifetime and I hope life brings each and every one of you happiness. We're all gonna make it brahs. Godspeed gents.

-Op out

LOVE YOU BRAH

I bet he'd like to be able to work
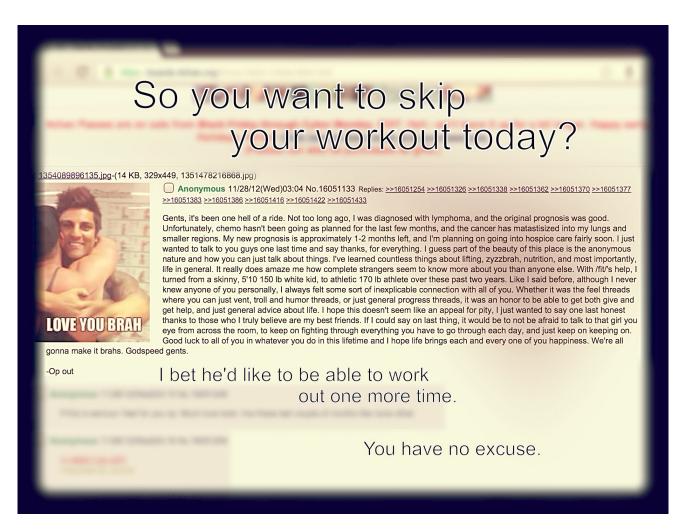out one more time.

You have no excuse.

Figure 10: OP loves /fit/. This is a screen capped and remixed post from an anon, who is dying from cancer, thanking /fit/ for making his life more fulfilled.

I never met this person before and was not in this thread when he posted his final message to /fit/. Regardless, while reading his post as seen in this motivational image, I felt, and still feel, like I lost a dear friend who was struggling just like me to achieve his goals. This post more than any other post from captured the brotherhood I felt and saw rooted in /fit/.

In addition, anon outlines key types of threads, that he participated in while on /fit/, specifically feels, humor, progress and life threads. These threads can provide this insight and information regarding how closely /fit/'s Board-tan

resembles the identity of /fit/ as well as how closely /fit/ resembles US Otaku

culture.

CHAPTER 5

>TFW NO GF

Feels threads were categorized in the data by social awkwardness, containing 178 artifacts. These images were then broken down into the categories including: drive, which contained 8 artifacts referring to socially awkward stories of /fit/ members pretending to be the driver from the movie *Drive*; feels, which contains 41 posts of images containing direct depictions of the feel meme or related content such as ">tfw no gf"; in real life, containing 90 artifacts of feasible stories from anons about times when they either felt or were socially awkward; on fit, consisting of 24 artifacts including images and unrealistic stories or posts that express social awkwardness; and social media containing 14 artifacts of images from social media that expressed social awkwardness. The data indicates that it is feasible anons are honestly express their feelings while on the board, whether through stories or images.

Feels Threads

A feels thread on 4chan invite anons to post about their feelings in relation to the subject of the board. Feels threads on /fit/ frequently concerned two topics:

　　1. >tfw no gf (the feel when no girl friend)

　　2. spaghetti, autism or beta (social awkwardness or spinelessness)

Figure 11&12: Sad Frog. Feels. Internet memes generally used to indicate feelings of sadness, disappointment or loneliness.

These threads are usually accompanied by the images of a frog looking down frowning know as a sad frog (Figure 11) pr a nondescript face (Figure 12), known as a feel (Feels Bad Man / Sad Frog; feels).

Posters in feels threads frequently express a sense of isolation and loneliness in some way from others. (See Figure 13) These threads deal with a range of topics from hypothetical scenarios where anons pretend to talk to a

Figure 13: Sample Feels post. Anon tells a story about how he does not have any friends.
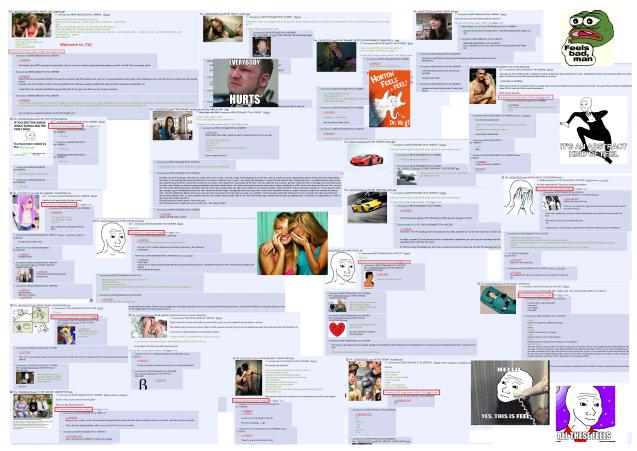
Figure 14: Completion of feels threads. Depicts the pervasiveness of feels threads on /fit/.

pretty girl, to discussion about insecurities regarding height, penis size, strength, financial situation, and being accepted by others. Feels threads were relatively common on /fit/ although some posters complained about the threads because they were not fitness related. Despite some anons misgivings about the feel thread's these threads received many anons interested in telling their stories.

Figure 15: moot posts feels on /fit/. moot tells an anon that feels are important to the board's culture.

Even the creator of 4chan, Christopher Poole, acknowledged the importance of

feels threads to the boards culture (Figure 15).
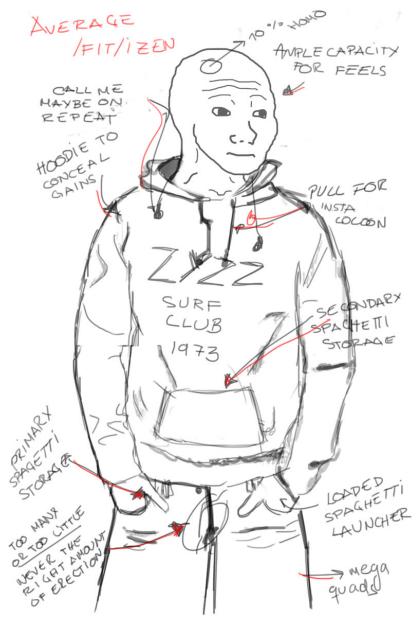
Feels and /fit/

Figure 16: Average /fit/izen. A depiction of an anticipated average anon on /fit/.

The frequency, high participation, (see Figure 14) and acknowledgment by community moderators of feels threads to /fit/ suggests that they are part of the board's identity. Looking at community generated images depicting an average anon on the board or the board itself feels are frequently relevant. For example, Figure 16 depicts a "average /fit/izen" the feel is directly depicted as the face of the anon. Reading the text around the image there are also several illusions to feels, including: the post to the right of the head stating "ample capacity for feels;" the text in the bottom left reading "primary spaghetti storage" (which refers to social awkwardness); the text in the middle right reading "secondary spaghetti holder;" and the text in the bottom right reading "loaded spaghetti launcher".

 Some of the most common feelings expressed involved social awkwardness, particularly with women. While many of the users desired companionship with a girl that shared their interests, few of them appeared to know what to do or have the confidence to do so. This is evident through the green text stories posted in feels threads. However, while outwardly anons claimed to desire a girlfriend, more than anything else, they appeared to want companionship.

Other than being an avenue for anons to express their desire for companionship, feels threads function as a way for anon's to poke fun at ones self. This is known as self deprecating humor, and it indicate to other members that the member is not superior to the others (Terrion & Ashforth 2002). In essence, feels threads not only allow for anons to express desire for

companionship and their loneliness, but an opportunity to laugh at one's self,

which humbles him or her to other anon's and sets the foundations for

camaraderie to form.

Furthermore, the prevalence of feels threads on /fit/ also demonstrate the

Otaku qualities of social ineptness and rejection by mainstream society.

Through feels threads anon's express their social ineptness, which is a feature

that describes Otaku. In addition, /fit/'s inability to find companionship suggest

that anon's on the board have been rejected by mainstream society. Like Otaku,

/fit/ deals with its desire for companionship in a similar way Otaku do with moe.

Specifically, /fit/'s moe is the fetishization of muscular men (bodybuilders,

powerlifters etc), which comes off as homosexuality.

CHAPTER 6

N-NO HOMO…

Homosexuality on /fit/ stems from the many images of half naked men posted by anons to the board. This behavior combine with the perceived mostly male board demographic serves as the basis for the board being homosexual. There were 77 artifacts collected related to homosexuality on the board. While I was able to categorize the data within the other aspects of the board-tan identity, homosexuality appeared to happen throughout different kinds of threads and artifacts, without discernible subcategories.

Moe-sexual

Artifacts collected about homosexuality made it clear that there are varying degrees of homosexuality for anons of /fit/ depending on how long they browsed the board. Figure 17 describes how an anon on /fit/ becomes homosexual.

> Stage 1: Ew, traps are weird. You guys some kinda in denial fags?
> Stage 2: I dunno, it's not too weird. I only fap to futa, the real stuff is just gay.
> Stage 3: Traps are only hot because of their womanly features! Just because there is a dick doesn't make it gay!
> Stage 4 : Okay, I would totally suck trap dick, but it isn't like I'd fuck a guy or something
> Stage 5: I only fap to gay porn because I am attracted to dicks! I have a dick so I can relate to the pleasure! Man bodies are so gross...
> Stage 6: Oh god, that chiseled body, that sculpted ass. I'd fuck a guy but I'd be the one on top. I'm not some like some bitch or anything.

Stage 7: HOLY SHIT I NEED COCK. FUCK ME IN THE ASSHOLE. MAKE ME SWALLOW YOUR CUM. I'LL BE YOUR DIRTY LITTLE SLUT.
Stage 8: >you'll never be the little girl.

The Metamorphosis of the Average /fit/ User

I dunno, it's not too weird. I only fap to futa, the real stuff is just gay.

Okay, I would totally suck trap dick, but it isn't like I'd fuck a guy or something

Oh god, that chiseled body, that sculpted ass. Alright, I'd fuck a guy, but I'd be the one on top, I'm not some bitch or anything.

>you'll never be the little girl.

Ew, traps are weird. You guys some kinda in denial fags?

Traps are only hot because of their womanly features! Just because there is a dick doesn't make it gay!

I only fap to gay porn because I am attracted to dicks! I have a dick so I can relate to the pleasure! Man bodies are so gross...

HOLY SHIT I NEED COCK. FUCK ME IN THE ASSHOLE. MAKE ME SWALLOW YOUR CUM. I'LL BE YOUR DIRTY LITTLE SLUT.

Figure 17: Metamorphosis of the average /fit/ user. This graph depicts the evolution of an anon's sexual preferences over their time on /fit/.

The intentionally politically incorrect (a feature of US Otaku culture) chart details a process where anon is first disgusted by traps (male to female transexuals) to being attracted to men and culminating with disappointment in not being a little girl.

While intending to be humorous to anons on /fit/, the chart provides an example of how the board interacts with its perceived homosexuality, specifically with regard to its concept of moe. To refresh ones memory moe is a Japanese slang term that describes either one's attraction to an anime or video game character, or a character that is a certain kind of cute or adorable, generally in physical appearance as well as actions. (Moe) New anons are

outwardly heterosexual, considering the characteristics of heterosexual women to be moe, while finding traps to be disgusting. As an anon spends more time on /fit/ he gradually starts to find penises and masculine features to be moe until he holds biological men to be the most moe and best option for romantic and/or sexual love. This is then taken to the logical extreme of homosexual intercourse for likely humorous purposes. The last stage, >you'll never be the little girl, is an homage to the traditional understanding of moe characteristics particularly in relation to elegant gothic lollita fashion, which is considered moe by many Otaku. This chart shows that /fit/'s concept of moe is one that considers men, particularly very physically fit men, to be that certain kind of cute or sexually and/or romantically attractive as potential companions.

Moe-sexuality

/fit/ causing anons to become homosexual (or understand men as moe) is a common theme of the artifacts related to the homosexuality artifacts found on the board. For example, Figure 18 depicts what appears to be a male and female couple sleeping in bed together. In the first panel the male character asks the female character "Honey? What do you think about when we make love?" The female character responds "How much I love you and how happy you make me." In the next panel the female character asks the male character the same question with the male character responding with "/fit/". The third panel the male character informs the female character that he's gay, to the

Figure 18: Intimate Thoughts about /fit/ comic. This comic depicts an anon telling his significant other he's gay because of /fit/.

surprise of the female character. The final panel shows the female character crying into her pillow while the male character dreams peacefully about a reaction image of Mark Rippetoe that is frequently posted to indicate something is absurd.

This comic directly links /fit/ to someone becoming or being homosexual. The reaction image in the final frame expresses three possible messages to the reader. First, it says that the female character is absurd for thinking an anon

from /fit/ was not gay; second it tells the reader its absurd to think /fit/ is interested in women; and finally it tells the reader its absurd for the read to think that /fit/ is actually gay.   Depending on the readers knowledge of /fit/ they could come away with any one or multiple of these meanings.

All of these interpretations are related to /fit/'s concept of moe. The first interpretation claims that its absurd to not think /fit/ is gay because of its concept of moe; the second interpretation states that /fit/ finds men more moe than women; and the third tells the reader that finding men moe does not mean /fit/ is homosexual. When taken together they express that /fit/, despite being heterosexual, find men more moe than women.

Homosexuality on /fit/ can also be coupled with feels, making a pseudo-serious post, that can quickly turn to humor specifically playful teasing.   Humor is defined as a funny or amusing quality; jokes, funny stories, etc., of a particular kind; the ability to be funny or to be amused by things that are funny. (Humor) In Figure 19, anon writes " >tfw your gf is in your bed naked but you can't maintain an erection because she's not that guy you saw at the gym" Here, the original poster (OP) indicates that despite having his girlfriend naked in front of him, she

Figure 19: Anon wants the guy at the gym. A series of posts where anon is more attracted to a guy at the gym than his girlfriend and is teased for it.

is not as attractive to him as the guy he saw in the gym. In other words, OP suggests that he adheres to /fit/'s concept of moe which is understood as homosexuality. In the first reply to OP, anon, who finds OP's situation to be amusing, writes, ">having a gf in the first place" coupled with a picture of two laughing guys, which is an iteration of the girls laughing meme that expresses mockery of another anon's post (Girls Laughing). Like the comic above there are multiple interpretations for what anon means in his response to OP.

First, anon is mocking OP for not embracing his perceived homosexuality; second anon is mocking OP for having a girlfriend; and third anon is mocking OP for not having the guy in the gym. Again, depending on the readers knowledge of the reaction image and /fit/, the post could be interpreted in any one or multiple of these ways. Furthermore, all of these interpretations in some way involve /fit/'s concept of moe. The first interpretation teases OP for not embracing /fit/'s concept of moe in real life; the second interpretation anon is teases OP for having a girlfriend who is inherently not moe to /fit/; and third anon teases OP for missing the opportunity to be companions with the moe guy from the gym.

While /fit/ appears outwardly homosexual to through its artifacts, there is a deeper level of understanding for in members of the board. The homosexuality on /fit/ is an expression of the board's concept of moe. Particularly this concept finds men, their physiques, their companionship etcetera, to be that certain kind of cute, and suitable for companionship. Furthermore a common thread between the artifacts expression homosexuality

is the use of humor. Each of the artifacts intendeds to be humorous to other anon on the board, which suggests that /fit/ finds its concept of moe, and outsiders interpretations of it (e.g., /fit/ is gay), to be humorous. Playfully teasing each other for their own concept of moe, helps reinforce camaraderie on the board. This is because the board's concept of moe is part of /fit/'s shared Identity. According to Terrion and Ashforth, putting down common identities by poking fun ant common characteristics helps establish the identity and build trust and goodwill (Terrion & Ashforth 2002). Humor in this way helps camaraderie form between anons on /fit/. To understand how /fit/ developed its concept of moe, one must look to the board's roll models.

CHAPTER 7

IDOLS

Figure 20: /fit/ religious imagery. A remixed religious painting depicting important people to /fit/.

The board-tan identity describes /fit/ as having a deep seeded love for Zyzz and Scooby, who are former trips on the board and Youtubers.   Of the 132 artifacts collected referring to individuals 44 of the artifacts solely focused on Zyzz, making a total of 55 artifacts of Zyzz including compilation images of different /fit/ idols; 33 artifacts just depicted Scooby, totaling 44 with the compilation images. This confirms that /fit/ does have a particular love for both Zyzz and Scooby. However, Mark Rippetoe also had a substantial amount of artifacts related to him; 28 artifacts solely depicted Mark Rippetoe, 39 including the compilations.

Zyzz, pictured at the top of Figure 20, was an Australian body builder and prominent trip on /fit/, who died at the age of 22 in a sauna while on vacation in Thailand (Zyzz). Scooby, pictured on the top left of Figure 20, is a youtube fitness personality and popular trip on /fit/ (Scooby1961). Mark Rippetoe, pictured on the top right of Figure 20, is a strength coach, former competitive powerlifter, and author of the book Starting Strength (Mark Rippetoe). It is feasible that Mark Rippetoe is not mentioned in the Board-tan description because unlike Zyzz and Scooby, he never actively engaged with the community. It is likely Mark Rippetoe became an idol for /fit/ because his book Starting Strength (SS). Rippetoe's book is frequently cited as one of the best beginner weight lifting programs for learning the basics of barbell lifts. While there are several other people who /fit/ mentions, including former Mr. California, Rich Penia, and Mr. Olympia competitor Jeff Sied, there were less than five

artifacts collected referencing each, which is a significant gap when compared to the idols mentioned above.

Zyzz

While all of the idols are important and influential on the board's culture, Zyzz is most influential on /fit/'s identity. Part of the reason that Zyzz was influential on /fit/ was because before Zyzz became the person he is known for he was a skilled WoW player (Vurak 2011). This is a relatable situation for many anons on /fit/ which makes his transformation incredibly inspirational and motivating to many anons. Furthermore, this suggests that Zyzz understood and/or appreciated the US Otaku culture present on 4chan. /fit/ refers to Zyzz as the 'King of Aesthetics' because of his attractive facial structure, well groomed body hair, well maintained musculature, and attitude towards life.

Despite perceived shortcomings including shameless narcism and steroid use, he serves as a motivational figure of what can be achieved by an Otaku through hard work a perseverance in the gym (Zyzz). Figure 21 contains a quote from Zyzz about his mentality:

> My message is to train hard, don't be a hard cunt, enjoy life and don't take yourself to seriously. If there were more people like me the world would be a happier place. I'd rather do what I do and have fun than sit back hating on someone achieving something.

Zyzz's mentality as described above, in tandem with his background, heavily influenced the board. Including serving as inspiration and motivation for anons
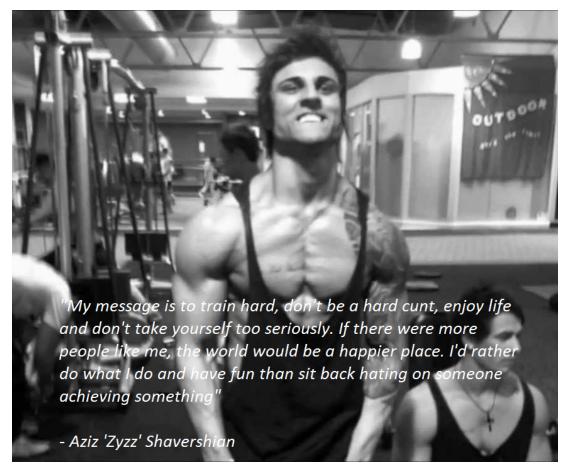
Figure 21: Zyzz motivational image. A picture of Zyzz with a motivational quote from him.

to achieve their goals, to be themselves and to not concern themselves with those who scorn you for your hard work in the gym.

While Zyzz was influential in life, it was not until after his death when his mentality became idealized by anons on and off /fit/. One example of his importance on /fit/ is shown is in artifacts that use religious imagery, like the compilation image of the major idols on /fit/ posted above.   This image places Zyzz in an area which normally depicts Jesus in religious paintings, indicating Zyzz's importance and influence on /fit/.   Another example demonstrating Zyzz's influence is in the YouTube video Zyzz the Legacy, made in memory of

Zyzz by his brother Chestbrah. Fifteen minutes and fourteen seconds into the video, various young men thank Zyzz for inspiring them to achieve their goals, and express sentiment of wanting to emulate Zyzz's mentality. (Zyzz- The Legacy) While I have no way of knowing if the young men in the video browse /fit/, it nonetheless provides a strong example of how meaningful Zyzz was to many young men interested in fitness.

Zyzz adheres /fit/'s concept of moe as well as demonstrates the pinnacle of a fitness Otaku. /fit/'s concept of moe considers men, particularly very physically fit men, to be that certain kind of cute or sexually and romantically attractive as potential companions. Zyzz is clearly a very physically fit man, thus adhering to /fit/s concept of moe. While there are many different men who could be considered moe by /fit/ physically, Zyzz is regarded as the most moe (i.e., the king of aesthetics) because his personality and familiarity with US Otaku. Thus, Zyzz not only has the physical 'cuteness', but the personality 'cuteness' of /fit/'s concept of moe, and because of these traits he became a roll model for /fit/. In other words, Zyzz is a roll model for /fit/ because he is a moe fitness Otaku.

Scooby

Second to Zyzz In importance to the board identity is Scooby 'the natty king.' Natty refers to Scooby's promotion of natural bodybuilding and fitness practices. Despite tripping, which is normally frowned upon on 4chan, Scooby, like Zyzz, was received well by /fit/. Scooby would regularly post on /fit/ under

his trip providing anons with lifting and life advice and occasionally videos relevant to the the board itself.

Figure 22 shows one such instance of anon asking Scooby for life advice. Anon directly appeals to Scooby asking "Scooby how do i get a gf?" Scooby responds with sincere advice that reads "Do things you enjoy doing and meet them there, that way, you start out having something in common. Like mountain biking? Join a local club and go on group rides."

Figure 22: Scooby gives anon life advice. Scooby responds to anon's question about how to get a girlfriend.

Scooby also interacts with the board through his videos. In his Le Cookies Are Ready video, Scooby directly mocks Jeff Sied, who is reviled by /fit/ for having an awful and nonexistent personality, and indirectly mocks Reddit, by using the le article (See Figure 23) (le). Threads quickly popped up discussing the video and applauding Scooby for it. In one such thread, seen in Figure 24, anon claims "If I get it Scooby will be crowned king of /fit/." A get is a randomly generated event that is noted when a post's unique ID number consists of rare integer sequences, such as 1,000,000, 123456789 or 55555555 (GET). This means that if anon's post number is 18888888 then Scooby will be

le excited redditor

Figure 23: le excited redditor. An image used to mock reddit users.

crowned king of /fit/. This anon got the 18888888 post number and Scooby

directly responded to him, writing:

> »18888888 Holy guacamole, this deserves trip on!
> I am not worthy of thy crowning as the concept for the "Le C000kies" video was entirely /fit/s idea. For those who were around on April 1, I started a thread and asked for video ideas of which there were MANY good ones (which I saved of course). Trouble is, I dont think I could reproduce the brilliance in this video in a hundred years. It was one of those rare moments in time where everything just falls into place. The ideas from /fit/, my quirky sense of humor, and some brilliant lines added by anon and used verbatim. The person who really gets the credit for this video is the anon who posted the link to Jeffs video that I mocked. Up until that point, I was leaning toward a rushed Zyzz video but when I saw what an insufferably bloated ego Jeff had - it was clear. His video was just BEGGING to be mocked, I cant believe that I was the first. That video is his skateboard squats :)
>
> Anyway, I thank you for dedicating 18888888 to me ,

Sincerely

Your unworthy puzzlemaster.

Figure 24: Scooby crowned king of /fit/. Anon's GET crowns Scooby the king of /fit/.

Dedicating the get and crowning Scooby king of /fit/ anon indicates the reverence that /fit/ has for Scooby. Giving credit to the board as the source of his inspiration for the video, Scooby acknowledges his own enjoyment of /fit/. This instance depicts Scooby as knowledgable about the board, and expresses /fit/'s own positive feelings towards Scooby because of his video and understanding of the board.

Scooby's time tripping on /fit/ did not last forever. A troll, assumed to be from /b/, posted Scooby's private information on the board. /fit/, upset by these actions, started threads to collectively and individually write him a letter of apology, and parodies of Eminem's song "Stan" to be sent with the letters.

While Scooby, to my knowledge has only once tripped on the board since, he continues to interact with /fit/ through other channels, such as Facebook.

Like Zyzz, Scooby also embodied /fit/s concept of moe. Scooby, while significantly older than Zyzz, is also a very physically fit man in addition to being homosexual, thus fully embodying /fit/s concept of moe (Q&A with Scooby). Being an older man who's personality meshed well with /fit/'s, particularly in the sense of humor as stated above, made Scooby a mentor for many anons. In addition, Scooby, because of his age, may reassure anons that you don't 'grow out' of /fit/. This is why anons ask him for advice, he was an embodiment of /fit/'s moe concept even as an older man. Thus, like Zyzz, Scooby not only has the physical cuteness, but the personality cuteness of /fit/'s concept of moe. Because of these traits he became a mentor to /fit/.

Mark Rippetoe

Unlike Zyzz and Scooby, Mark Rippetoe does not trip on /fit/, and does not embody /fit/s concept of moe. However, because of his book Starting Strength and the GOMAD diet he became a key figure on /fit/. The starting strength routine (SS) is frequently referred to on /fit/ as a recommended routine or to troll new anons. Outside of it being used to troll, SS provides the basis for /fit/s obsession with squats and weightlifting form. This is because the routine has the person do heavy barbell squats three times a week and stresses

Figure 25: Mark Rippetoe >mfw not squatting. An image depicting Mark Rippetoe and /fit/'s obsession with barbell squats .

perfect form during the exercise, including going below parallel on the

movement.

In Figure 25 one see a reaction image of Mark Rippetoe with the text

">not squatting >mfw" As stated earlier, this reaction face indicates absurdity.

Used in this context, the image refers to the absurdity under developed gluteus

maximus seen in the picture from not doing squats. Mark Rippetoes perceived

obsession with barbell squats and form as demonstrated in SS matches /fit/'s

obsessive Otaku trait.

While doing the SS program, Mark Rippetoe recommends the GOMAD

diet which requires the person drinking a gallon of milk a day in order to help put

on mass. This lead to him being frequently photoshopped or drawn of him in relation to milk in addition to squats. Figure 26 depicts Mark Rippetoe photoshopped in a police uniform holding two gallons of milk outside a house.

Figure 26: Mark Rippetoe steals milk. An image depicting Mark Rippetoe stealing milk, referring to the GOMAD diet.

The reaction face indicates surprise, and the direction of Rippetoes eyes

indicate its towards the photographer. It can then be inferred that the surprise

that Mark Rippetoe is experiencing is from being caught attempting to steal the

milk from the house. The stress Mark Rippetoe puts on drinking the gallon of

milk in GOMAD diet appears as obsessiveness to /fit/. Because of the Mark

Rippetoe's perceived obsessiveness with barbell squats, form, and milk, he

appears to /fit/ as another fitness Otaku, which endears him to the board.

Mark Rippetoe also provides a source of humor for anons on /fit/ through

the SS+GOMAD troll. /fit/ often recommends SS+GOMAD to new anons,

regardless of whether they are underweight or overweight. This is done to troll

new anons who have not read the sticky or are not actively engaged in their own

health and fitness. One way it is used to troll is claiming SS+GOMAD is a troll,

which implies that it is not an effective method for one to gain strength. Not

doing a beginner program significantly slows new anons progress, often

resulting in discouragement from lifting. This is because the compound barbell

lifts that SS uses helps build a strength foundation for anon to put on size and

get stronger. This troll is believable to new anons because the requirements of

SS+GOMAD, drinking a gallon of milk a day and squatting three times a week,

seems ridiculous.

The other way SS+GOMAD is used to troll, are anons claiming that SS

+GOMAD is not a troll. While GOMAD is good for underweight anons trying to

put on mass it's not necessary for overweight anons because they already have

the excess fat to burn. Saying its not a troll occasionally can lead to overweight

anons gaining more weight, resulting in discouragement from lifting. The troll is

believable because SS+GOMAD is a highly recommended beginner program

and produces good results in situations where the person is thin or when an

overweight person does SS without GOMAD.

This common troll is an example of a putdown of external groups, which

helps establish favorable intergroup comparisons (Terrion & Ashforth 2002).

Those that are not knowledgable of /fit/ and particularly those who are not

actively engaged in their own fitness are examples of the outside groups that

/fit/ puts down using this troll. This causes anon to favor /fit/ over other groups.

Because Mark Rippetoe has similar Otaku personality traits and indirectly

provides humor to /fit/, he is thought of highly by the anon on the board.

On Idols

Zyzz, Scooby, and Mark Rippetoe all made important contributions to

/fit/'s board identity. The reason that Mark Rippetoe is not mentioned in the

Board-tan identity is because unlike Zyzz and Scooby he has not participated in

the board. Zyzz, is a moe fitness Otaku, which makes him the ideal roll model

for the board to emulate. Zyzz's importance as a roll model becomes clear in

the next chapter which discusses /fit/'s standards. Scooby embodies /fit/'s

concept of moe, and by being an older man he serves as a mentor for the

board. Finally, Mark Rippetoe's perceived obsession with barbell squats, weight

lifting form, and milk, in addition to indirectly providing humor for the board

through the SS+GOMAD troll, endeared him to /fit/. The obsessiveness and

desire to achieve the moe characteristics of /fit/'s idols, is further exhibited by

the board's perfectionist standard.

CHAPTER 8

THE /FIT/ STANDARD

264 artifacts were collected under the high standards category. The categories expressing /fit/'s high standard broke down to objectivist, containing 11 artifacts; weight, containing 150 artifacts; gym behavior, containing 46 artifacts; ideals, containing 10 artifacts; size, referring to muscle and height, containing 30 artifacts; and diet, containing 16 artifacts. Many of the artifacts categorized under weight contain posts that are related to objectivist sentiment.

Body Dysmorphia or Perfectionism?

/fit/'s standards of physical fitness for both men and women, and does not accept excuses for people not attempting to achieve their goals. Because of these high standards, anon from other boards often associate anon on /fit/ with body dysmorphia, which is a "body-image disorder characterized by persistent and intrusive preoccupations with an imagined or slight defect in one's appearance" (ADAA). To an outsider, this appears to be the case because anons are preoccupied with their physical shape. However, it only appears this way because of the topic of the board which centers on improving the body. The high standards of /fit/ go beyond just criticism of the body but incorporate criticisms of mentalities and ideologies as well that run counter to /fit/, US Otaku and 4chan culture.

The example in Figure 27, shows an anon satirically describing "thin privilege in a nutshell," linking social justice philosophies to thin privilege in the third to last line.
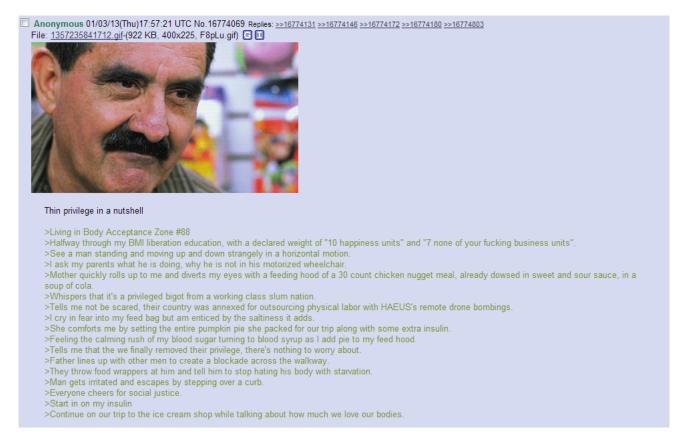

Figure 27: Thin Privilege in a nutshell. A satirical story set in a world of body positivity.

Thin privilege in a nutshell

>Living in Body Acceptance Zone #88
>Halfway through my BMI liberation education, with a declared weight of "10 happiness units" and "7 none of your fucking business units".
>See a man standing and moving up and down strangely in a horizontal motion.
>I ask my parents what he is doing, why he is not in his motorized wheelchair.
>Mother quickly rolls up to me and diverts my eyes with a feeding hood of a 30 count chicken nugget meal, already dowsed in sweet and sour sauce, in a soup of cola.
>Whispers that it's a privileged bigot from a working class slum nation.

66

>Tells me not be scared, their country was annexed for outsourcing physical labor with HAEUS's remote drone bombings.
>I cry in fear into my feed bag but am enticed by the saltiness it adds.
>She comforts me by setting the entire pumpkin pie she packed for our trip along with some extra insulin.
 >Feeling the calming rush of my blood sugar turning to blood syrup as I add pie to my feed hood.
>Tells me that the we finally removed their privilege, there's nothing to worry about.
>Father lines up with other men to create a blockade across the walkway.
>They throw food wrappers at him and tell him to stop hating his body with starvation.
>Man gets irritated and escapes by stepping over a curb.
>Everyone cheers for social justice.
>Start in on my insulin
>Continue on our trip to the ice cream shop while talking about how much we love our bodies.

This satirical account pokes fun at the idea of 'thin privilege,' which is most relevant to /fit/, in addition to the understood source of the concept of privilege, social justice. Because the criticism extends beyond the body to ideologies, it is likely /fit/'s standards are a result of perfectionism rather than body dysmorphia. While there is still debate about perfectionism's exact definition, it is frequently described as a "personality disposition characterized by striving for flawlessness and exceedingly high personal standards accompanied by overly critical self-evaluations and concerns about others' evaluations" (Yang & Stoeber 2012). /fit/ standards for anons and others demands near flawlessness in body and mind, to be achieved through dedication and hard work. This becomes clearer once one understands why anon's on /fit/ reject notions of 'thin privilege' and social justice.

This Is Thin Privilege

Ideas of privilege, specifically thin privilege, which /fit/ credits to social justice are perceived to promote lifestyles that are contrary to achieving the standards of /fit/. This understanding of social justice is not based on academics such as John Rawls, rather it is based off of artifacts from the microblogging website Tumblr. /fit/'s concept of social justice specifically comes from the Tumblr blog This Is Thin Privilege (example seen in Figure 28).

In the FAQ section of the This Is Thin Privileged blog, under the heading "What Is Thin Privilege?" the first sentence reads "If you don't know what the social justice concept of 'privilege' means more generally, then please read this first (ArteToLife, MadGastronomer, FatBodyPolitics). The "read this first" is a hyperlink to a document published by the Transformative Justice Law Project of Illinois called "Checking Your Privilege 101." This document defines privilege as, "any right, immunity, or benefit enjoyed only by a person or group beyond the advantages of most. At TJLP, we think of privilege as an unearned advantage that a dominant group has over marginalized groups" (Transformative Justice Law Project of Illinois 2013). In a later paragraph the document identifies different kinds of privileges one might have including: Class Privilege, Race Privilege, Educational Privilege, Gender Privilege, Gender Identity Privilege, Age Privileged, Body Size Privilege, Able-Bodied Privilege, Life on the Outside Privilege, "Passing" Privilege, Religious Privilege, and Sexuality Privilege (Transformative Justice Law Project of Illinois 2013).

> I really want to believe in your blog, as I am a very large woman, but I'm confused about some things posted here. My doctor told me that my poor breathing and sleep apnea is being caused by my weight - apparently my airway is being narrowed. And your saying that being fat doesn't cause poor health, that its just some money making scheme for the medical world. I'm not sure what to believe anymore.

Asked by

veup

Your doctor is simply misinformed. Many thin people have sleep apnea, and there's not only no evidence that weight loss can work long-term for most people, there's no evidence that losing weight fixes sleep apnea.

Don't just "believe". Go look shit up. Go do research. Lots of it. Find out the facts for yourself. And then show them to your doctor, or find a doctor who's already aware of them.

-MG

Figure 28: This Is Thin Privilege blog post. A sample post from the This Is Thin Privilege Tumblr blog.

Using this understanding of social justice, the This Is Thin Privilege blog then defines thin privilege as a systematic reduction of women to "our dress size, hip measurement, and waist size, then grants favors, opportunities, or simple lack of punishment when the numbers are low enough" (ArteToLife, MadGastronomer, FatBodyPolitics). In the FAQ, under the section "I am trying to loose weight. Am I allowed to submit to TITP?" one of the admins writes,

"promoting weight loss for everyone (or extrapolating your experience to others by praising yourself for weight loss, and so on), however, is engaging in a culture that shames fat people and privileges thin people" (ArteToLife).

Notions such as this and those expressed in Figure 28 by the This Is Thin Privilege blog are diametrically opposed to /fit/'s values and ideals. These examples indicate a sense of helplessness and denial that one does not have any ability to control how much one weighs. To /fit/, this demonstrates a belief that efforts to change ones body are ultimately fruitless and are not worth pursuing. This runs contrary to much of /fit/'s lived experience, which, as described by the Board-tan, claims that /fit/ was formerly fat but dropped the weight and built muscle. In addition, /fit/'s lived experience also invalidates the notion of privilege as defined by Transformative Justice Law Project of Illinois as "as an unearned advantage that a dominant group has over marginalized groups" (Transformative Justice Law Project of Illinois 2013). /fit/ worked hard to lose the fat and build muscle, and the notion that an anon has an "unearned advantage" over others is absolutely ludicrous. Thus, one expects /fit/ to outright reject the idea of thin privilege, and its understood origin, social justice.

Because of /fit/'s lived experience it places value on the handwork and dedication needed for one to achieve the board's ideal levels of aesthetics and strength. Thus the board predictably holds an anon's physical measurements, strength, height, aesthetics, and so on, in high regard. Those that achieved it (e.g., Zyzz) are revered as heroes by the community. Furthermore, because

anons know that through hard work and perseverance they can achieve these ideals, anon's view themselves as on a hero on a journey.

Earlier works from the fields of literature, psychology and philosophy provide insight to /fit/'s mentality, specifically the writings of Ayn Rand, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Carl Jung. The board draws on these philosophical ideas without realizing it, thus making them useful to understand the /fit/ standard. Ayn Rand's "concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute" (Rand 1996). In other words, a Randian hero is one that pursues his or her own happiness as the ultimate goal.

The Randian hero bares some similarity to Nietzsche's Übermensch. The Übermensch as described in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a one who establishes his or her own values in the world (Nietzsche 1999). /fit/'s concept of the hero exemplifies both the Radian hero, and the Übermensch. /fit/ establishes its own values particularly of aesthetics, a physical fitness (e.g., Zyzz) as the Übermensch. The pursuit of those values set forth match understanding of the Randian hero. In other words, /fit/ sees itself as a Randian hero in pursuit of becoming an Übermensch.

Jung asserts that the hero myth is defined by struggle suffering and sacrifice (Kalsched & Jones 1986). This struggle suffering and sacrifice that Jung notes as characteristic of the hero myth is manifested in /fit/'s hard work in the gym in attempt to become its Übermensch (this is demonstrated again in

Chapter 10). Thus, an anon pursuing /fit/'s standards, can be framed in terms of a Randian hero pursuing the board's Übermensch.

/fit/'s pursuit of the Übermensch also provides evidence that /fit/ holds a perfectionist standard, rather than suffering from body dysmorphia. The Übermensch is an embodiment of /fit/'s ideal being both mentally and physically, that anons strive to become by playing the role of a Randian hero. This closely match the definition of perfectionism, which is a "personality disposition characterized by striving for flawlessness and exceedingly high personal standards accompanied by overly critical self-evaluations and concerns about others' evaluations" (Yang & Stoeber 2012). Anon's hold such a high standard hoping to one day achieve the Übermensch that /fit/ has set forth.

The /fit/ness Standard

/fit/'s rejection of social justice and thin privilege and the board's Übermensch create the environment for board's standards to form. The Board-tan identity describes /fit/ as short and extremely self conscious about it, placing great emphasis on physical appearance (Board-tan). While it fails to mention the mental standards of /fit/, it is accurate in how the board-tan describes /fit/'s feelings with regard to height and aesthetics. These artifacts are also reflective of /fit/'s Übermensch.

/fit/ breaks down height into two groups manlets, referring to men generally 5'10" and under, and lanklets, referring to men who are 6'6" and taller.

Figure 29: /fit/ official height chart. A chart depicting the height standards on /fit/.

The chart below details the ideal heights for men as described by /fit/. 5'10" and below are manlets; 5"11-6'1" as ideal as long as the anon has a nice face; 6'2"-6"5' as the perfect height; and above 6'6" as too tall or lanklets (Figure 29). /fit/'s standards for height are a major point of contention on the board. It is an aspect of the Übermensch that anon's cannot hope to achieve through their individual Randian hero narrative. Because an anon cannot work to achieve height it becomes contentious topic among anons.

/fit/'s aesthetic standards are somewhat more lenient than its height standards. Anon's judge aesthetics on two categories, physique and facial

structure. /fit/ generally regards Zyzz as the highest level of physical aesthetics because his importance to the board and his great physique and facial structure (i.e. making Zyzz's body characteristic of the Übermensch). Similar to height, facial structure discussion proves contentious because anon can only do so much to improve ones facial structure. However, anons rarely discuss facial structure because 4chan's value of anonymity discourages posting pictures of yourself.

Because the physique characteristic of /fit/'s Übermensch is obtainable, it is the most frequent barometer for aesthetics on the board. The chart in Figure 30 depicts different body types as defined by /fit/. The accepted aesthetic body

Figure 30: /fit/ official body type chart. A chart depicting different body types as described by /fit/.

types are Ottermode, Ripped, Built, Bodybuilder, and Bear mode (Figure 30). Depending on the goals of the anon one of these body types can be considered more aesthetic than another. However, Built, because of its resemblance to Zyzz, is the aspect that characterizes the board's standard, and concept of the Übermensch. Unlike height or facial structure, physique is not at all contentious because of an anon's ability to achieve one of the ideal body type's through diet and exercise. In other words an anon can work to obtain his or her desired physique which aligns with the community values that are similar to Ayn Rand's heroic man.

While /fit/ has clear standards to what aesthetically constitutes its Übermensch, because some of the aspects are genetically related, such as height and facial structure, most anons realize that it is not becoming the Übermensch that is important, rather the journey to become one. In other words, other than Zyzz, there is no anon who can possibly be perfect enough for the board, yet all anon are on the same journey in attempt to reach that perfection.

The Otaku Standard

In addition, US Otaku, similarly to /fit/, also reject notions of social justice as described in the "Privilege Checking 101" guide by Transformative Justice Law Project of Illinois because it holds values directly opposed to US Otaku. Specifically, the value it appears to place on political correctness directly

opposes value US Otaku and 4chan place on political incorrectness and humor

(Transformative Justice Law Project of Illinois 2013; Newitz 1995; I did it for the

lulz). Because social justice is runs contrary to /fit/ on multiple levels including

its base culture, philosophical beliefs and the anon's lived experience, the

board's rejection of it is expected and predictable.

In addition to both /fit/ and US Otaku rejecting social justice, the journey

of /fit/ to become its Übermensch adheres to another feature of Otaku:

obsessive. /fit/'s position as a Randian hero seeking to become the

Übermensch demonstrates its obsession with lifting and hard work to achieve

their goals, even in aspects that anons cannot control such as height.

/fit/'s journey to become the Übermensch likely discourages some anons

from achieving their fitness goals, however, it motivates far more. Anons,

including myself, are initially self conscious about being a manlet or a lanklet, his

or her facial aesthetics, or his or her physique. However, over time one realizes

that the obsessive and uncompromising standard of /fit/ is not intended to get

one down. Rather it makes an anon numb to the criticism of aspects they

cannot change about one's self and motivates them to change what the can.

This idea is expressed in Figure 31, in which anon writes:

> Tough love OP. Learn to appreciate it; in the long run it makes you a
> stronger better version of yourself. And that's because shitposting on
> /fit/ revolves around previous insecurities most of us share, that stop
> being tragic and become comic through the catharsis of trolling. Take
> me for example. As a manlet at 6'0, i no longer care about my height,
> but instead laugh about it, not giving a shit IRL. That was not always the
> case.

Figure 32: Anon on shitposting. Anon explains the purpose of the perfectionist standard on /fit/

What OP describes here as tough love is the use of /fit/'s concept of the Übermensch with putdown humor (shitposting) to help anons become more comfortable with themselves. Terrion and Ashforth observed that targeting another members personal attributes (real or imagined) signaled trust and recognition of the members uniqueness. At this stage in a group's development, putdowns reaffirm and reinforce camaraderie and unity of the group (Terrion & Ashforth 2002). Using the perfectionist standard to "shitpost" about insecurities that anons on /fit/ share is how anons show appreciation for each other's attributes as well as display a sense of camaraderie and unity amongst the group.

One reason for putdown humor's effectiveness in creating a tight knit group on /fit/ is because of the anonymity of the site. Bernstein et al. assert that anonymous posting allows for disinhibition, which fosters more intimate conversation by tempering the fear of failure, and encouraging experimentation with new ideas or memes (Bernstein et al. 2011). As anons, people on /fit/ can share their most embarrassing secrets and deepest fears and insecurities because of anonymity. The sting from teasing that results in real life from one revealing these things is tempered on /fit/ because no one knows an anon in the real world. The put down humor, which develops camaraderie, in combination with anonymity, which allows for greater intimacy by tempering the string of the

putdown, results in greater appreciation of each other and display of

camaraderie. These conditions allow for anons on /fit/ to form a tight knit group.

Rheingold noted a similar intimacy in IRCs to the one observed on /fit/.

CHAPTER 9

WE'RE ALL GONNA MAKE IT

We're all gonna make it is a phrase used by /fit/ to motivate and encourage anons to achieve their goals. Encouragement on /fit/ takes the form of makin' it stories, mirin' stories, and advice and motivation threads. I collected a total of 102 artifacts; 31 /fit/ advice artifacts, 20 makin' it stories, 24 mirin' stories, and 26 motivation related images. /fit/'s advice artifacts mostly consist of infographics or long posts containing life advice, which discusses how an anon can achieve the perfectionist standard /fit/ maintains. While still a source of motivation for anons, advice artifacts do not play as important of a roll as motivation images or makin' it and mirin' stories.

Motivation on /fit/

Somewhat interrelated, makin' it and mirin' stories tell about an anon's growth and achievement, which intends to motivate and encourage other anons. Generally when one is mired, meaning being admired, they are making it or have made it. The goal in an anon's story is almost always achieved through diet and exercise, more specifically weight lifting, which helped anon become stronger outside of physical fitness.

Mirin Stories

Mirin' stories are instances when an anon notices that someone is admiring them. They are frequently told by anons to boast about their progress lifting, to inform other anons that they made it, or to get confirmation about behavior they interpreted as mirin'. Figure 32 is a mirin' story that provides and example of when anon is asking anons to confirm that he was mired.

Figure 32: Mirin' Story. Anon tells a story about when he believes someone admired him for his physical fitness.

m-mirin stories?

>be me
>walking to building from shitty lift (couldn't deadlift my warmup set of 3 before my max, tightness in biceps tendon so just called it a day)
>still looking pretty jacked in a bb tank
>see qt (taller than me >tfw) in lounging around clothes walking her dog
>smile, make convo etc. etc.
>shes looking down the whole time and acting awkward as fuck
>go home and make shake

a-am I making it?

Anon interprets the qt's (meaning a cute or attractive person) body language and her admiring him, classifies it as a mirin' story. Not confident in his ability to read the social cues to determine if the qt was mirin', anon ask if he is making it.

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This means that anon considers making it to achieve a level of physical attraction to other people. If anon's interpretation of the qt's body language is correct, then he would be making it.

Makin' it Stories

Makin' it stories almost always follow a path going from an undesirable state to a desirable one through weightlifting and the pursuit of /fit/s perfectionist standard. Many of these stories are about achieving a certain level of sexual attraction, or recognition by other people, but can also be about dealing with personal issues through weight lifting. Almost all of these stories are meant to serve as motivation and examples of what can be accomplished if anon keeps lifting and attempts to achieve /fit/'s perfectionist standard. The makin' it story in Figure 33 describes anon's experience on /fit/, what he wanted to achieve, and how he achieved it.

Figure 33: Makin' it Story. Anon tells about how /fit/ helped him make it.

>dad dies
>cant sleep
>cant do anything
>find fit
>find zyzz
>lift heavy
>so tired from lifting can now sleep
>we are all gonna make it.jpg

best 2 years of my life so far.

nohomo

The features of a makin' it story as described above are seen here. Through

lifting, anon solves his sleeping problem, thus achieving his goal and makin' it.

After anon tells the reader he achieved his goal he writes that we are all gonna

make it, encouraging other anons by stating that everyone is going to achieve

there goals through weightlifting as well.

Motivation Images

Somewhat divorced from making it and miring stories are motivation

threads. These threads can contain reposted makin' it and mirin' stories; short

essays by an anons written in multiple posts or reposted in a single image;

stories about an anons progress dieting and exercising; and direct posts in the

thread themselves. The intention of these threads is to motivate other anons to

keep lifting weights to achieve their goals. Figure 34 is an example of a

motivational image posted in these threads. This image directly links the idea of

companionship to weight lifting. As seen in feels threads /fit/ is socially

Figure 34: Motivation Image. This is an example of a motivation image one might see on /fit/.

awkward, causing him or her to lack the companionship which he or she

desires. The image suggests weightlifting in itself is a form of companionship

and that weight lifting is the way to find said companion. The recommendation

to use weightlifting as a method to find companionship is inline with the type of

companion /fit/ wishes to find, which is reflective of /fit/'s concept of moe,

placing value on muscular men. Essentially this image is suggesting that the

weights provide you the muscular man you desire, whether it is yourself or

someone else.

Master of Two Worlds

Makin' it stories also provide examples of /fit/'s own Randian hero myths.

In *A Hero with A Thousand Faces,* Joseph Campbell's theorizes about the

monomyth, which is the notion that stories follow a distinct pattern. On the

macro level these stages include: The Call To Adventure (The Call); The Crossing

of the Threshold (The Decent); The Road of Trials (Initiation); and The Return

(Campbell 2008). Figure 33 provides a clear example that follows this exact

pattern. The death of anon's dad and his resulting depression serves as Anon's

call to adventure. When he finds /fit/ he crosses the threshold from the world he

once knew into the world of /fit/. Anons road of trials through lifting heaving,

from which he gains the power to fall asleep, thus returning to the original world

with this new power. In addition, makin' it stories also adhere to Jung's concept

of the hero myth defined by struggle, suffering, and sacrifice (Kalsched & Jones

1986). These are easily identifiable in Figure 33. Anon struggles with the death

of his father, and suffers from lack of sleep. Only though his sacrifice of time

and energy in lifting heavy is he able to overcome his struggles and suffering.

Adhering to the pattern of the Monomyth and the Jungian archetype of the hero

myth clearly demonstrate that makin' it stories serve as /fit/'s own hero myths.

Once a hero has returned from their trials they become the master of two

worlds. In other words, part of the hero's journey is mastery. Both makin' it and

mirin' stories and motivation threads express a form of mastery by anons.

Howard Rheingold examines similar instances of mastery in the case of

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multiuser dungeons (MUDs). He writes that people forge identities from the place that last felt safe, and as a result we come to define ourselves in terms of competence. (Rheingold 2000) /fit/'s identity is built on the board and in the gym, thus defining competence on /fit/ as ones strength and aesthetics in relation to /fit/'s standard. He goes on to say a sense of self defined in terms of mastery can become a way of masking fears about the self and the complexities of the world instead of a growing force. (Rheingold 2000) Because of the high standards and use of putdown humor that points out the insecurities of anon on /fit/, the board never provides anon with an opportunity to mask their fears in their mastery. Constantly having to face ones own insecurities makes /fit/ a growing force rather than a mask.

Interestingly, makin' it and mirin' stories and motivation threads do not adhere to the Otaku cultures rejection of the mainstream. In fact they express a desire to be fit in with the mainstream, while maintaining ties with US Otaku culture on /fit/. This suggests that the Otaku on /fit/, aim for mastery of both the mainstream and Otaku worlds, being able to freely operate between the two. This desire mimics Zyzz, /fit/'s Übermensch, who successfully mastered both the mainstream and Otaku cultures, and achieved /fit/ standards of aesthetics and physical capability. However, these motivational aspects of /fit/ are not applied in online space outside of /fit/. Rather anon's posting as /fit/ outside of the board, exhibit a strong expression of the /fit/ identity, which is tied to the US otaku culture.

CHAPTER 10

/FIT/ IN REAL LIFE

Outside of the board, anons performed /fit/'s identity on social media, ranging from Kickstarter to OkCupid. I collected a total of 22 artifacts demonstrating or clueing in to /fit/'s identity performance on other sites. These artifacts provide evidence to potential reasons to why an anon might act as /fit/ outside of the board including: disapproval or criticism, to create humorous artifacts for the board, or to signal other anons. The signaling of other anons is a behavior also Goffman observes in his book *The Presentation of the Self in Every Day Life*. Goffman explains that individuals give off signals, either verbal or otherwise that convey information that the person and others are aware of (Goffman 1959). The creation of humorous artifacts and the expression of disapproval are linked to the US Otaku culture demonstrated on the board. Otaku are obsessive about their hobby, thus any perceived violations of the standard results in criticism. The high value placed on humor by 4chan and US Otaku makes the creation of humorous artifacts important to the anons.

 The artifacts suggest that /fit/'s most common reason for expressing the identity outside of the board is the creation of humorous artifacts. Particularly fertile areas for the creation of humorous artifacts for /fit/ are dating websites and applications. Part of the reason why these are popular likely involves /fit/'s desire for companionship and anon's own socially awkwardness, combine with users who are unknowledgeable of the board and people who they don't find

moe. The board went so far as to develop its own set of /fit/ approved pick up

lines for anons to use on these sites (Figure 35). /fit/ intends these to
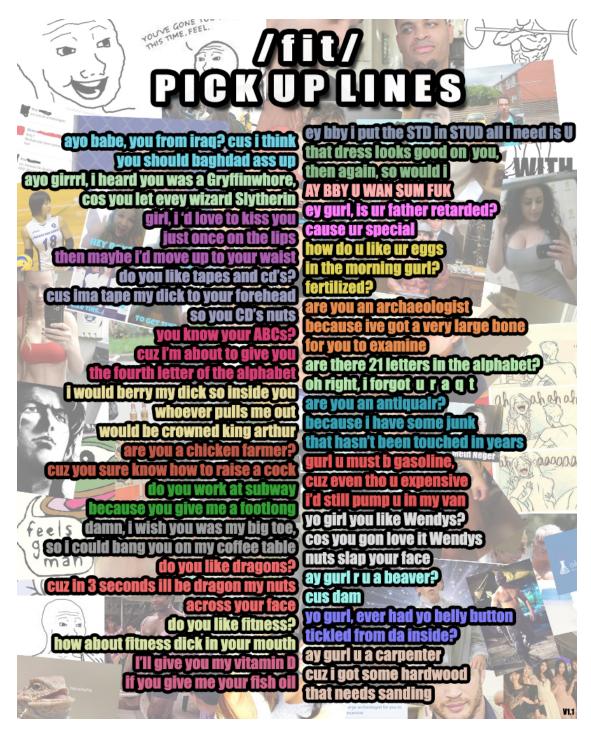

Figure 35: /fit/ pickup lines. A list of pick up lines that the board finds humorous to use on online dating websites.

deliberately be socially awkward for the purpose of self deprecating humor, and

the reaction to it.   These pick up lines can be thought of as part of what

Goffman calls Dramaturgy. Dramaturgy is the self a person forms through the

scenario that one enters into with others, in which one presents another's

cultural norms (Goffman 1959). In other words, /fit/'s interactions off the site are

a performance of the Board's cultural norms. Goffman categorizes where these

performances occur into two spaces which he refers to as Front stage and Back

stage (Goffman 1959). Front stage is where the actor normally performs, in the

case of /fit/ this is the internet (Goffman 1959). The backstage is where the

performers are present but the audience is not, for /fit/ this would be offline

(Goffman 1959). The on and offline act as the backstage and front stage rather

than the /fit/ and other sites is because the performance of the Board-tan

Identity continues on the board.

/fit/ on Tinder

Figure 36 is a conversation on Tinder between an anon acting as /fit/ (the

blue) and a girl. Anon writes: " >adding tone >2013" Anon expresses criticism

of the use of the word tone to describe her fitness goals as well as signals that

he is /fit/ and checks to see if she is. The girl responds with "what" indicating

that she is not knowledgeable about /fit/. Anon sees an opportunity to create a

humorous artifact through the use of self deprecating humor in the form of

using the /fit/ approved pick up line "Are you an archeologist." She responds

with "No?" and anon then finishes the pick up line with "because I have a large

Figure 36: /fit/ on Tinder. Anon acts as /fit/ in a conversation on the dating app Tinder.

bone for you to examine." Here anon is acting out /fit/'s social awkwardness for the explicit purpose to create a humorous artifact for the board through self deprecation. The next message "please respond" reflects /fit/'s desire for companionship and want to continue the conversation for the creation of the humorous artifact. Not knowing how to respond, the girl types "…." to which anon responds "I have autismo" literally meaning I have autism, which in /fit/'s slang means I am socially inept.

This stretch of conversation off the board shows an anon acting out the aspects of the Board-tan identity, including social awkwardness and the

perfectionist standard for the purpose of creating a humorous artifact for the board. Anon begins the interaction by signaling the other person through the invocation of /fit/'s standards of appropriate fitness goals. This signal is in the form of what Goffman describes as an open secret, which is a secret unrelated to ones self that can be told while painting the role (Goffman 1959). Humor is achieved through anon's own self deprecation via the awkward line of "are you an archaeologist" followed by his admission that he is socially awkward.

/fit/ and /cgl/on OkCupid

Occasionally anons performing as /fit/ on dating website will run across other anon from other boards or people knowledgeable about /fit/. Figure 37 is a conversation between /fit/ and /cgl/- Cosplay and EGL (Elegant Gothic Lolita).

> **/fit/**: >mentioning 4chan on your okc profile
> /cgl/ plz go
> **/cgl/:** /fit/izen pls
> **/fit/:** >tfw no qt cosplay gf
> pleaes [sic] respond
> **/cgl/**: >tfw /fit/ won't give me the D
> **/fit/**: a-are you an archaeologist?
> **/cgl/**: Why, you got a bone for me hot stuff?
> **/fit/**: y-you too

Aware that the person is knowledgeable about 4chan /fit/ begins the conversation with familiar language that signals to /cgl/ that he is an anon. In the first message /fit/ criticizes /cgl/ for mentioning 4chan on her OkCupid profile and tells her to get off the site, to which /cgl/ responds by telling /fit/ to get over it. /fit/ responds in character telling /cgl/ that he does not have a girlfriend but would like one that cosplays. /cgl/ then tells anon that it is /fit/ who
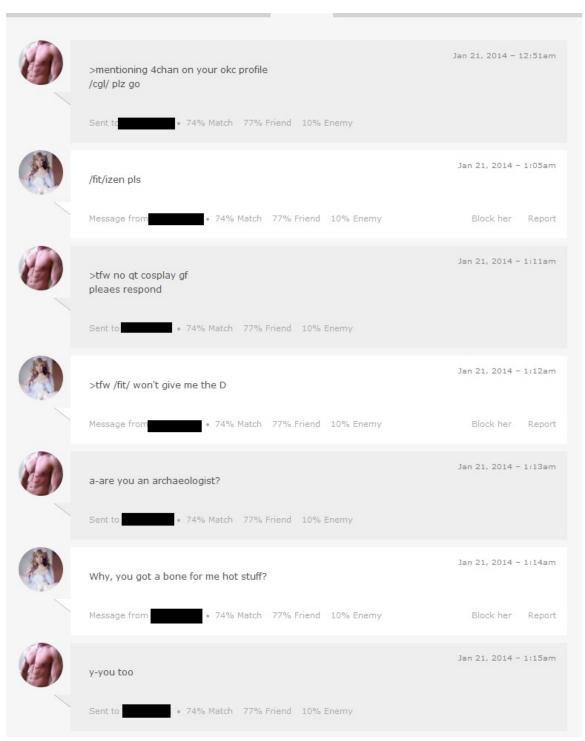
Figure 37: /fit/ and /cgl/ on OkCupid. A conversation between anon from /fit/ and /cgl/ on the dating website OkCupid.

will not have sex with her, thus he does not have a girlfriend that cosplays.

Seeing the opening to find romantic companionship and/or create a humorous

artifact, anon sends the /fit/ approved pickup line "are you an archeologist."

/cgl/, aware of the pickup line, asks /fit/ if he is attracted to her by referencing

the second part of the pickup line; to which anon, in the character of /fit/,

responds awkwardly with a "y-you too".

In this conversation /fit/ acts out the board's identity, specifically the

socially awkward aspect, when in the presence of another board, /cgl/.

Because of the mutual use of coded language it is likely that /cgl/ was also

acting out some aspects of her board's identity as well. This demonstrates the

use of the characteristics of the Board-tan's in communication off site between

two members of different board's on 4chan.

/fit/ on OkCupid

Even when not provided with direct knowledge that another person is an

anon, knowledgeable members are able to identify an anon and board based on

speech. This is demonstrated in the conversation from Figures 38 and 39.

> **/fit/:** I have a thing for girls like you but unfortunatly[sic] in my country there are no qt traps at all. Do you think that if we lived closer together you would let me suck your dick?
> **Woman:** Speechless in a bad way.
> **/fit/:** I'd like to make you speechless in a good way
> **Woman:** How about you shave your chest more I think you missed a spot
> **/fit/:** Maybe you could give me some tips. What do you use when you are shaving your chest?
> **Woman**: I got laser everywhere so I have no hair…pitty[sic] they couldn't transplant it on your scalp...btw are you fit?
> **/fit/**: I'm fit as fuck. The best part about dating a fit guy is I can give you tips on your form when you are squatting on dick
> **Woman**: No no no let me clarify, do you /fit/
> **/fit/**: >tfw no qt 3.14 trap gf

Woman: Your delts suck

Mfw you only ohp 110 lbs Figures you you'd be a Dick sucker.

/fit/: >implying strict form ohp 110lbs for reps isnt good >implying I lift for dicks >implying I haven't made delts gains since that pic Here is a pic I just took of my delts [redacted] Glutes thrown in just to show you what you could be getting a piece of Do you even lift?

Figure 38: /fit/ on OkCupid A. A conversation between anon as /fit/ and an OkCupid User.
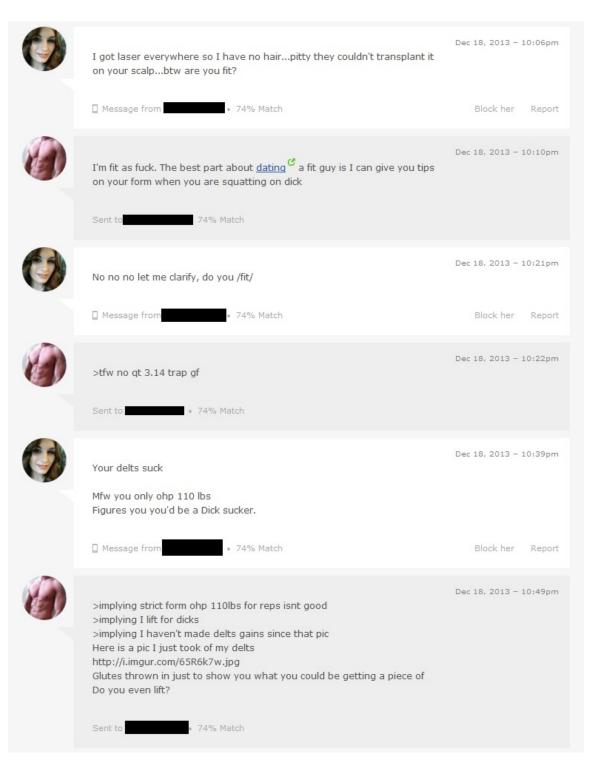
Dec 18, 2013 — 10:06pm

I got laser everywhere so I have no hair...pitty they couldn't transplant it on your scalp...btw are you fit?

Message from ▇▇▇▇ • 74% Match   Block her   Report

Dec 18, 2013 — 10:10pm

I'm fit as fuck. The best part about dating ↗ a fit guy is I can give you tips on your form when you are squatting on dick

Sent to ▇▇▇▇ 74% Match

Dec 18, 2013 — 10:21pm

No no no let me clarify, do you /fit/

Message from ▇▇▇▇ • 74% Match   Block her   Report

Dec 18, 2013 — 10:22pm

>tfw no qt 3.14 trap gf

Sent to ▇▇▇▇ • 74% Match

Dec 18, 2013 — 10:39pm

Your delts suck

Mfw you only ohp 110 lbs
Figures you you'd be a Dick sucker.

Message from ▇▇▇▇ • 74% Match   Block her   Report

Dec 18, 2013 — 10:49pm

>implying strict form ohp 110lbs for reps isnt good
>implying I lift for dicks
>implying I haven't made delts gains since that pic
Here is a pic I just took of my delts
http://i.imgur.com/65R6k7w.jpg
Glutes thrown in just to show you what you could be getting a piece of
Do you even lift?

Sent to ▇▇▇▇ • 74% Match

Figure 39: /fit/ on OkCupid B. A conversation between anon as /fit/ and an OkCupid User.

In the conversation in Figures 38 and 39**,** anon expresses the Board-tan

identity's aspects of homosexuality, and social awkwardness. The conversation

starts with anon expressing his desire to perform fellatio on the male to female

transexual, which expresses /fit/'s concept of moe interpreted as homosexuality.

To a knowledgable member of /fit/, this proposition and the use of the language

"qt" and "trap" would indicate that the person is /fit/. This cues in the woman to

the possibility that anon is /fit/, leading her to ask him later in the conversation.

Believing that she is not knowledgeable about /fit/, anon misunderstands

her question asking if he's fit as a question about his physical fitness. He replies

with offers for tips on squatting form (which expresses /fit/'s obsession with

squats) while engaging in sexual intercourse, to which the woman replies with

clarification of the question asking if he is /fit/. Anon responds to her in question

in character giving clear indication that he is /fit/ with ">tfw no qt3.14 trap gf."

Once Identified as /fit/, the woman teases anon about his deltoids (delts),

and 110 pound OHP (over head press) asserting that his small shoulders are

indicative of his homosexuality. In other words, she applies /fit/'s perfectionist

standard to anon to critique his musculature. ">implying" used in anon's

response indicates a defensiveness and criticalness towards someones

comments. His identity here shifts from /fit/ to himself, as anon defends his

delts, OHP and muscle growth and her implications that he lifts weights to

attract a man.

This example demonstrates the important use of language and behavior

in identifying /fit/. In this exchange, the use of common descriptors on /fit/ and

overtones of homosexuality indicate to the woman, who is knowledgable, that the anon is /fit/. This is an example of Goffman's concept of the front stage and backstage identities. Originally seeking to create a humorous artifact for /fit/, anon shifts from the /fit/ identity (the front stage identity) to the personal identity (the back stage identity) to defend himself against criticism while using the language of the board.

/fit/ on Kickstarter

Often when outside of /fit/, anons either bring up, pose as, or include one of the roll models while acting out /fit/'s identity. In Figure 40 Myron Gains, which refers to mirin' gainz, uses a profile picture containing Zyzz to post comment on a Kickstarter project. The picture of Zyzz and the name inform signals to knowledgeable readers that this post is from /fit/. This knowledge frames the rest of the comment as satire used to criticize the Kickstarter project because the ideology that it endorses is counter to /fit/'s perfectionist standard. As Myron, Anon writes:

> This is a wonderful project! I hope all the cis gendered privileged people realize how difficult it is do be a large person in society, after all BIG IS BEAUTIFUL! I just want to be treated like a real human bean and not as a giant walking disobedient avocado. I hope that this project will make it into every home in America as we continue to make our children big and beautiful so their kids are also big and beautiful full of heart and understanding. We must fight against the tyrade[sic] of the thin people and fight back with more calories consumed. FAT POWER!

In addition to the user name and image containing Zyzz, the language also signals that the anon is acting out /fit/. In the comment the phrases "real human

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Figure 40: /fit/ on Kickstarter A. A satirical comment posted by an anon as /fit/ on a Kickstarter page.

bean" and "disobedient avocado" are references to artifacts from /fit/. "Real human bean" is an intentional mispronunciation of "real human being" which refers to a line in the song "A Real Hero (feat. Electric Youth)" by College, which is featured in the movie *Drive*. /fit/ associates the main character in *Drive,* and this song with social awkwardness or inability. Including "real human bean" in the paragraph further singles knowledgeable readers to the satire of the comment. "Disobedient avocado" is another reference to a well known artifact recorded from messages with an obese girl on OkCupid, which the person writes: "You can only play that card for so long before your carnal desires kick in and you're licking my profile picture. I want to smear you in green paint and spank you like a disobedient avocado." This phrase is another signal to knowledgeable members that the poster is /fit/, and the comment is intended to be satire. In addition to poking fun at the Kickstarter project through satire, the

comment demonstrates the aspects a love of Zyzz, established by the Board-tan identity and the use of humor to signal other anons.

/fit/ off /fit/

These artifacts, provide evidence that in some interactions off the site anon's perform aspects of /fit/'s Board-tan identity. In these examples, Goffman's concepts of the front stage, which appears to be the internet, and the back stage, which appears to be real life, emerge from the interactions of the anons. Most of these artifacts were created with the intention to be humorous to /fit/, particularly in the form of self deprecation and satire. This is demonstrated by the political incorrectness of actions and words in the posts, and the admission by anon to be socially inept. Furthermore, the behavior in these examples suggests that humor plays a roll in how /fit/ signals other anons, so that they may enjoy the humor as well.

Most frequently anons portrayed the aspect of social awkwardness exhibited by the Board-tan identity. The use of social awkwardness in the posts was for the explicit use of self deprecating humor which was seen in three out of four artifacts. They also used self deprecating humor as well as satire with other aspects of the Board-tan such as homosexuality and the perfectionist standard, however to a lesser degree. Some may consider anon's behavior off /fit/ to be trolling. However, it is important to note that trolling is frequently used as an umbrella term to cover a wide range of behaviors on a spectrum that runs from

innocuous (e.g. Rickrolling; shitposting) to malicious (e.g. Doxxing). /fit/s use of self deprecating humor and satire off the site suggest that if one considered it trolling it would err on the side of innocuous rather than malicious.

Furthermore, these artifacts also show the US Otaku aspects of the board, specifically social awkwardness (feels), obsessiveness (the perfectionist standard), moe (homosexuality), and political incorrectness (the comment on the Kickstarter and the pick up lines). Outside of /fit/, anons acting as /fit/ do not make references to motivation related artifacts, indicating that this type of post mostly stay on the board. This could be the case because motivation related artifacts do not aid in the creation of humorous artifacts, which appeared to be the primary purpose of acting as /fit/ outside of the board.

CHAPTER 11

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE /FIT/?

The artifacts from anons on and off /fit/ demonstrate that there is a shared identity by anons on /fit/, and that the identity reflects the US Otaku culture from which 4chan came from. My original hypothesis claimed that the Board-tan identity directly reflected the board's personality. The artifacts from the board, and reflecting on my own experience leads me to believe that it is only partially true.

The /fit/ness Otaku

Anon's demonstrated social awkwardness, homosexuality, a love of Zyzz and Scooby, and a perfectionist standard through the board's Übermensch. These traits that the Board-tan exhibited are also characteristic of US Otaku: including: social awkwardness and rejection from the mainstream (feels); moe (homosexuality); and the perfectionist standard (obsessiveness). The trait of US Otaku unlisted here, political incorrectness is seen throughout artifacts both on and off the board in both language and actions. This suggests that part of the motivation for anons to assume the Board-tan identity is for humorous purposes.

This also explains why the motivation aspect of /fit/'s personality was excluded from the Board-tan identity. Motivation related artifacts are not

intended to be humorous, rather their purpose is to tell the epic tales of anon's

Randian hero's journey to becoming the Übermensch. Because of the more

serious overtones of these stories and the desires for mastery of mainstream as

well as Otaku culture, which is contrary to Otaku out right rejection of and by the

mainstream, they are not included in the Board-tan personality. Including

features that are contrary to the rest of the Otaku characteristics would

comprise the consistency of the Board-tan's character. Thus, for consistency

purposes, it is feasible that anons would omit these stories to maintain the

humorous nature of the rest of the Board-tan's identity. The intentionally

humorous nature of the Board-tan demonstrates the importance of humor to

/fit/.

I did it for lulz

The importance of humor to /fit/ provides insight to why cultural identity

of /fit/ is so strong. Duncan et al. in their review on humor and its application to

management find that humor in organizations fosters a sense of community,

communicates group norms and improves group cohesiveness (Duncan et al.

1990; Terrion & Ashforth 2002). In this sense humor is a tool for "both creating

and sustaining an organization's or group's culture, as both a cultural stimulus

and a cultural lubricant" (Trice & Beyer, 1993; Terrion & Ashforth 2002). Thus,

humor fosters cohesion, learning and community, and a sense of what the group

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or organization represents (Terrion & Ashforth 2002). Basically the importance placed on humor by /fit/ and 4chan helps make it such a strong community.

The importance of a shared identity in humor is explained in a 1997 study by Boxer and Cortés-Conde that explores the creation of relational identities in conversational joking. A relational identity is created through the negotiation of an identity with others and through others (e.g., Goffman's front stage). This identity is the result of the shared common knowledge or background of the conversation participants (Boxer & Cortés-Conde 1997). The Board-tan identity is a relational identity negotiated by anons on /fit/ to facilitate the creation of humorous artifacts for the board. By having a shared relational identity anon's create an in-group which is then strengthen by jokes made about the out-group. Boxer and Cortés-Conde write:

> Joking that bonds is a widely used strategy in uniting interlocutors against the foibles of an absent other. Bonding against others perceived as different allows us to become a unit without having to define what we are for each other. What makes us part of an in-group is having in common an 'out group' (Boxer & Cortés-Conde 1997).

Joking that bonds is clearly demonstrated on /fit/ through artifacts from both on an off the site. Anon's frequently makes jokes about out-group members, mostly directed at those that do not adhere to the perfectionist standard, follow an accepted routine, or use the accepted vocabulary to describe fitness goals (e.g., >adding tone seen in Figure 36). Jokes about these out-group members helps bond anon on /fit/ together.

This type of joking that is common on /fit/ is referred to by scholars as putdown humor. Putdowns frequently come in the form of teasing, sarcasm, or

self-deprecation. In a clear play frame (i.e., the Front Stage), or the internet,

putdown humor is not offensive, but rather allows for the development of

interpersonal bonds (Alberts 1992; Gunner 1997; Terrion & Ashforth 2002;

Goffman 1959). Terrion and Ashforth found that putdowns seems to include

members rather than exclude them from the group "by signaling that they were

important enough to notice and were respected enough to withstand the insult,

thus fostering a sense of acceptance and belongingness" (Terrion & Ashforth

2002). When one anon uses a putdown on another anon when on /fit/, the anon

being put down is being informed that he or she is accepted by the community.

Terrion and Ashforth observed that over time the type of putdowns

changed from putdowns of oneself, to putdowns of shared identities, to

putdowns of external groups, to putdowns of each other. Putdowns of oneself

indicate to other members that the member is not superior to the others (Terrion

& Ashforth 2002). This resembles some posts in feels threads, where anon

shares his story about acting socially awkward in real life. This creates trust and

goodwill between the group members and provides the basis for putdowns of

common identities, which pokes fun at the groups common characteristics

(Terrion & Ashforth 2002). When anon's put down /fit/ through teasing about the

board's socially awkward (feels), perceived homosexuality, or lack of adherence

to the boards perfectionist standard, they are establishing the common identity

of /fit/, specifically the Board-tan identity. These putdowns help establish group

bonds between members creating the sense of an 'us' and 'others' (Ashforth &

Mael 1989). This leads to putdowns of external groups to establish favorable

intergroup comparisons (Terrion & Ashforth 2002). Those that are not

knowledgable of /fit/ and particularly those that do not meet the perfectionist

standard of the board (e.g., This Is Thin Privilege) are examples of the outside

groups that /fit/ puts down causing anon to favor /fit/ over other groups.

Positive reactions to putdowns of shared identities and external groups built the

groups confidence leading them to direct putdowns to each other. Targeting

another members personal attributes (real or imagined) signaled trust and

recognition of the members uniqueness. At this stage in a group's development,

putdowns reaffirm and reinforce camaraderie and unity of the group (Terrion &

Ashforth 2002). This is seen on /fit/ through the use of the perfectionist standard

to "shitpost" about each others insecurities.

Previous literature on humor demonstrates that humor and joking helps a

community foster and establish social norms and identities. The importance of

humor to /fit/ and 4chan suggest that it is key the establishment and strength of

the board's cultural identity. However, humor is not the only force strengthening

the cultural identity of the Board. As explained in the section on the design of

4chan, anonymity also creates a strong force for the adoption of the social

identity. With two strong forces promoting the social identity of /fit/, it is not

surprising that the cultural identity is strong both on and off 4chan. The strong

cultural of the board identify is then becomes the Board-tan through the Otaku

related moe anthromorphization.

Conclusions and Future Work

This case study on /fit/ highlights some important characteristics of 4chan's culture. US Otaku culture is the foundational to 4chan and its board's cultures. The Board-tan is a reflection of the US Otaku aspects related to the topic of the board. The identity expressed by the Board-tan is assumed for the purpose of humor both on and off the site and for signaling other anon off the site. What makes the Board-tan identity strong both on and off the site are the forces anonymity and humor which both promote adoption of the social identity. This makes the Board-tans a potentially useful tool for anthropologists studying 4chan because they provide insight into the Board's culture through the lens of the historical culture of 4chan. However as seen with the motivation related images on /fit/, the Board-tan does not capture the more serious aspects of a board's culture. Thus anthropologists looking to research 4chan's culture can use the Board-tan as a starting point, but should be cognizant of classifications of artifacts that are unrelated to the Board-tan.

Future work on 4chan and other anonymous image boards should first focus on better understanding US Otaku culture, more clear definitions of what an Otaku is in the US, what prompts a person becoming an Otaku, and the similarities and differences between types of Otaku. Understanding the base culture and user base that anonymous image boards are built off can help understand the motivations of its users actions. Furthermore, researchers should also conduct case studies of other boards on the site to assist in looking for common themes in 4chan culture as a whole. Finally, researchers should

consider looking at other fitness communities, such as Misc. on

bodybuilding.com, and broader fitness culture to look for similarities and

differences between /fit/, these other fitness communities, and broader fitness

culture.

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