

Why female fans of homo-erotic genres like yaoi use notoriously sexist online communities :

The cases of 4chan and 2chan

“There are no girls on the internet” Anonymous, N.D.

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Introduction: The internet, ‘the chans’, and online misogyny

During my fieldwork in online fandoms, both Japanese, English (language), and others, I have come across female users participating and posting on what are collectively known as the chan boards (see *infra*), and other female users online who critique and condemn this participation. In this paper my goal is to throw some light on the reasons female Internet users may have to participate in what is definitely a sexist environment and yet one with qualities that female users not wanting to be harassed online because of their gender find attractive.

What is often debated is whether it is ethical for members of an oppressed group to use communities complicit in their oppression. As stated above, my aim is neither to justify nor condemn the participation of female users on these chan boards, but to search for and perhaps offer an explanation.

I will be considering arguments from scholars, mostly feminist sociologists, who oppose sites like the chans and whose main concern is fighting child abuse images (child pornography), and from feminist theorists in the field of psychoanalysis whose main concern seems not to assign blame but to find explanations for what moves people, both male and female, to behave the way they do, especially in expressions of sexuality. I chose to include arguments from psychoanalytic theory because sociology does not seem to offer nuanced enough explanations about why people, and especially women, choose to express themselves sexually the way they do. These not opposing but sometimes hard to reconcile positions, where one field

talks about perpetrators, potential perpetrators, and their accomplices, and the other about patients, meet somewhere in the middle where psychoanalysts recognize that abuse and gender are tied and that women and female children's agency is impaired more than that of men or male children.

There is no room here to discuss the history of the 'chan' image boards at length, but it should be noted that the image board 2chan (also known as futaba-channeru, located at: <http://www.2chan.net/>) should not be mistaken for the message board by the same name (known as 2channeru, <http://www.2ch.net/>), and which is, with 600 boards, the largest and most active message board in the world. It is as such a phenomenon although its creator downplays its significance (Katayama, 2008).

What the image and message boards have in common is that posting by users is done anonymously; identifying oneself or being identified through a distinctive style invites ridicule from other users. On image boards users cannot start a thread without posting an image first, other users can post answers to the original poster in these threads with or without adding an image.

All image boards discussed in this paper are a lot smaller in scale than the 2channeru message board; they compare like picture books to a phone book. The image boards are a lot easier to navigate and a lot less complex than the giant that is 2channeru.

2chan was created in 2001, as a haven for users to flee when the message board 2channeru was threatened with closure. However, 2channeru never did close down, although its creator Hiroyuki Nishimura, who made the board in 1999, while he was an exchange student in Arkansas (Katayama,2008) is rumored to be 'on the run from the law', and sold the site earlier this year to a company based in Singapore.

The image board 2chan is a favorite of manga and anime fans, who are often referred to as otaku, and they use it to discuss commercial works as well as doujinshi and fan art. To reduce the cost of bandwidth, accessing 2chan is only possible for users in Japan. Foreign enthusiasts have therefore created their own image boards in the same way, and 'cloned'

2chan. The largest English language image board is 4chan (or yotsuba-channeru, <http://www.4chan.org/>), there are other clones in Russia, China, and other nations, like Germany, where the largest board is krautchan (<http://krautchan.net>, with servers located in Florida).

The foreign chans have their own Wikipedia style encyclopedia, Encyclopedia Dramatica. Like 2chan isn't accessible to foreign users, it used to be impossible to access 4chan from Japan without using a proxy server or a spoofed IP address. Now 4chan is not only accessible from Japan, there is a Japanese version.

Like the creator of the message board 2channeru, some of the creators or administrators of 4chan and krautchan are known to their users, as Moot and Tsaryu (responsible for the anime and manga content on the site and said to understand Japanese, which is called 'moonspeak' in chan jargon). However, the identity of the creator of the image board, futaba-channeru, remains a mystery.

The two most important rules that users must obey when using the image boards, since they risk ridicule at best and harassment in their offline lives at worst if they don't, is that identifying oneself isn't done. Every poster is, as a rule, anonymous, or Anonymous, used as a collective name. On krautchan Anonymous' s name is 'Bernd', a common German first name, making it look to outsiders as if there is only one person posting.

The second rule, and one that means the exact opposite of what it says, is: 'The internet is serious business' (Dibbell, 2008). This means that nothing on the internet is to be taken seriously, and everything can and should be seen as an occasion to have more fun, at the expense of someone else or not.

1. Trolls versus political correctness

Popular opinion regarding the chans is, not surprisingly, mostly negative. The possibility to post anonymously makes all boards prone to abuse, not just of the boards themselves by flooding and spamming, but by posting libelous material about real people, both about public

and private persons. This is less of a problem on the image boards than it is on 2channeru proper; however, both 4chan and krautchan, and in particular the users of their /b/ (for random content) boards, have been embroiled in incidents in which real people not 'in on the joke' took threats posted on the site in earnest and reported them to the police, and there were several incidents in which users were not joking, or half joking and half serious, and took vigilante style action against organizations or individuals they disapprove of.

The way 4chan organized not just online but physical, 'world-wide' (mainly in English-speaking countries and Europe) protests, sometimes called 'raids', named 'Project Chanology', against the Church of Scientology was featured in mainstream media when Scientology insisted the mostly peaceful protesters were terrorists (Dibbell, 2009). During the protests many users wore Guy Fawkes masks, to avoid being 'facetagged' (identified) and persecuted by members of the Church of Scientology. A laudable action was the way Anonymous supported dissidents in Iran during the elections earlier this year and (together with The Pirate Bay) created the website <http://iranwhyweprotest>, where members help Iranian internet users post about what happened without their being identified by authorities, which could result in their getting arrested or killed.

The hacking of the email account of Sarah Palin, the Republican candidate for vice president in the U.S. 2008 presidential selections, also surfaced on the 4chan image boards before it did anywhere else. The hacker, a white male college student, is undoubtedly a good enough representative of the average chan user. The German krautchan has organized similar attacks on companies and individuals by its users, and occasionally the chans have in-fights and attack each other. The demise of the British britchan earlier this year is blamed on DDoS (Distributed Denial of Service) attacks by users of a Russian chan clone.

A German article on Internet subcultures aptly called the chans 'Das Trollparadies' (troll paradise, Himmelein, 2008), 'troll' standing for Internet users who are mainly interested in stirring up trouble for 'the lulz' (for fun, lulz being the plural of the popular acronym 'lol', which stands for laughing out loud).

Fond of 'trolling' (harassing) major media outlets, the chans rejoice whenever someone

views them as a real threat, like talk show host Oprah Winfrey, who unwittingly repeated the inside joke 'over 9000', which originated in the anime *Dragonball Z*. Winfrey warned her viewers about a 'pedophile network' after her network's forums were trolled by a 4chan user. 4chan has also raided the forum of FOX TV after being called an 'internet hate machine' and 'domestic terrorists'. The news caster reading the item also called the site 'secret', ignoring that the site can be easily found: it is the top result on Google for '4chan', and that anyone with an Internet connection can access it and post there.

Chan users have also made a name for themselves with vigilante action against perpetrators of animal abuse, of which the most famous is the case of 'Dusty the Cat' earlier this year. Based on a video the perpetrator uploaded online 4chan users tracked down his identity, revealed him to be a fourteen-year-old boy, and reported him to the police.

In Germany a hoax photoshopped image of school shooter Tom Kretschmer, in which he announced that he was going to commit the crime (that had already happened by the time the image was posted and in which fifteen victims were killed, not including Kretschmer who killed himself after being shot twice by the police) was reported by the Home Secretary as real. The police too authenticated the message at first, and krautchan's servers could not take the increased amount of traffic, going down for a day. The creation and the posting of the image was not an act planned or supported by a large number of krautchan users, however, that those in power mistook it for real and their collective anonymous username 'Bernd' for the name of a friend of the school shooter was a source of hilarity.

Other Internet users see the chans' actions with mixed emotions, some condemn them wholesale, while others support the 'fun-loving criminal' mindset behind them. Feminists however are as a rule critical to extremely critical, and regard female users of the chans as 'post-feminist', which can mean anything from naive over too lazy to care to complicit in the oppression of other women and girls. The jargon used on the chans is not just extremely sexist, but racist, homophobic, antisemitic, ableist, sizeist and occasionally ageist. However, anyone seriously trying to argue in favor of sexism, racism, or any other -ism, like white supremacists, are laughed off the board, since rule number one on the image boards is to not take anything seriously.

Like the founder of the message board 2channeru, Hiroyuki (Katayama, 2008), chan users have contempt for anyone who believes what they read on the internet. Likewise, anyone trying to mobilize other users for a cause they don't consider wasting time on is told '/b/ is not your personal army'. This quote from Encyclopedia Dramatica, from the entry 'there are no girls on the internet', illustrates that 4chan users look down on socially inept boys and men who regard girls and women as something completely alien:

"Despite the delusions that many obese flabtards labor under the impression of, women are not a bizarre alien species but rather men with more interesting genitalia."

(http://encyclopediadramatica.com/No_girls_on_the_internet)

Scoffing at political correctness, users routinely call themselves fags (an abbreviation of the pejorative 'faggot') and tards (an abbreviation of the also pejorative 'retard') it could be argued that they are doing so in a 'reclaiming' way. However, since it is not known how many users actually are gay or mentally disabled, and it can be assumed that the majority of them are not, the use is not reclaiming but parodic, and nonetheless discriminatory.

Anyone complaining is dubbed a 'moralfag' or a 'newfag' and told to 'lurk moar'. Lurking more means to hang around the site without posting to learn about its users habits before participating and opening oneself up to potential abuse by displaying ignorance of local mores. Several prefixes can be attached to both -fag and -tard to distinguish what kind of faux pass or inadequacy the ones addressed are guilty of.

Like everywhere on the internet, anonymity is an illusion, and in case of illegal actions, administrators, many of them volunteers, cooperate with authorities. While the image boards host a lot of questionable and rated material, administrators make efforts to at least adhere to the laws of the countries where the servers are located.

This means that while there is a lot of pornographic material, with images of real people as well as art (mostly Japanese manga and anime), posting child abuse images or in some cases lolicon on its hentai boards or shotacon images on its cute male or yaoi boards is a bannable offense. Anonymous users are banned by IP for offenses such as these.

Krautchan has a board that is 'family friendly', /vip/, and for users new to the internet and ignorant of its mores; no pornographic images are posted and trolls from the /b/ board who try to stir up trouble are banned. However, krautchan features a lot more images that could be categorized as lolicon or shotacon, and that probably constitute a crime depending on how strict child pornography laws are and how strictly they are enforced.

Anonymous also boast, by posing in online chat groups as a thirteen-year-old girl, having trapped a pedophile Canadian, Chris Forcand. Anonymous sent what information they had gathered to Forcand's church, since he was a devote Christian in daily life, and the police used Anonymous' baiting technique for a sting operation to trap Forcand. He was arrested in December of 2007 by the Toronto Sex Crimes Unit (Fortey, 2009). 4channers still see 'pedo-baiting' as a sport and enjoy exposing other internet users who proposition to minors for sex.

Yet 4chan is on the blacklist of the Internet Watch Foundation (<http://www.iwf.org.uk/>), an organization committed to fighting child abuse images, and krautchan has been blacklisted in Germany. Users fear that censorship plans to implement nationwide filters in Germany and Australia might make it impossible for users in those countries to continue using the chans. The suspicion that sites like the chans, were almost everything goes, contribute to cyberspace turning into a 'site for increased violence and exploitation of women and children' (Harrison, 2006:365) is not an ungrounded one. While most chan users may actually be doing it 'all in good fun' without the intention of ever harming anyone, the least of all children, it is true that the Internet has given abusers and potential abusers more means to engage in criminal behavior.

The chans are automatically suspect because of their casual sexist, racist, and other -ist attitudes, and their contempt for political correctness and common sense. While being sexist or racist does not necessarily make one a child molester, Harrison rightly points out that there are "interconnections between different forms of violence" (Ibid:370), which means that those that are dismissive or abusive of others' rights verbally are more likely to be abusive physically as well.

While the chans' administrators insist that child abuse images are absolutely not allowed on the boards and users enjoy vigilante action against sexual predators, positioning themselves on the side of those who fight child sexual abuse, they seem divided over what constitutes a child abuse image. Some countries' authorities, and organizations and individuals who fight child sexual abuse, see manga or anime images of minors in sexual situations as a crime, as child pornography too, while many users of the chan boards do not. Moreover, in a lot of 'mainstream' pornography, allowed on the chans, the line between adult women and little girls is blurred, with adult women looking a lot younger than their age dressed and acting like school age girls or younger (Ibid:370).

2. Subverting invisibility

As mentioned above, Anonymous does not assume but operates under the collective premise that there are no women on the Internet. It is however more self-deprecating about this assumption and its recognition of the assumption being a running joke, and unlike male users or a collective male users from other notoriously misogynist sites (to name just one example: the now defunct howwasse.com, where male users exchanged the photos, personal information, and probably imagined sexual proclivities of women, run by Matthew Schiros, who was also responsible for the racist amiblackornot.com) has not collectively sought to pursue women active on the internet or threaten their physical safety.

Rather than quoting anecdotal knowledge of individual women who use the chans in their free time, I'd like to look at what female users do collectively on the image boards, their activities rather than who they are. This is not just because it will tell us more, but because one of their motivations to use the chans is very likely because they can do so anonymously.

As discussed in this and the next part, part of their motivation is fear of exposure. Of the image boards on 2chan, 4chan, and to a lesser extent krautchan, several are geared towards female tastes and female fannish preferences, again, like most activities on the chans, heavily informed by Japanese pop culture. On 2chan this is the yaoi board, on 4chan the /y/, yaoi, and /cm/, cute male, and on krautchan the /a/, manga and anime board which offers an eclectic mix of manga and anime images geared to a variety of tastes, both male and female.

The difference between the /y/ and the /cm/ boards on 4chan is that the 'cute male' board features only images that are not pornographic, of cute male characters from anime and manga and occasionally from Japanese or even Korean boy bands. The images on /y/ range from merely titillating to hardcore pornographic, but only rarely images of real people are posted, and those that are, are often put there by trolls. The threads then may get deleted and the offending troll banned by a user with administrator privileges.

On the chans relations between female users, or female identified users, and a minority of male or other identified users who fan the same kind of material, are transient and last for as long as a thread with images that are a common interest keep going. Some threads are only started because a certain user is looking for a specific manga or doujinshi, and if they are lucky another user will respond with a link to a file sharing site where the OP can download the work they were looking for. Not just the relationships between users but all chan boards are transient in nature, uninteresting threads aren't 'bumped' to the top of the page as soon as users stop responding to them, and get 'saged' (from the Japanese 'sageru', to lower). If threads are not archived by an interested user or administrator it is almost impossible to retrieve the content posted. This way, unpopular threads, or things users posted and later regretted, are transient too, and evidence of file sharing, often and probably mostly illegally, disappears too. Some extremely popular 'epic' threads, or threads in which a 'newfag' (someone not familiar with the mores of the chans or someone willfully ignoring them) makes an exhibitionist spectacle of themselves, are sometimes archived and then occasionally linked from Encyclopedia Dramatica.

In most mostly female online environments devoted to homo-erotic fiction, including those that are quasi-anonymous because users use pseudonyms and pen names, there is constant tension about the proclivities of fans of certain genres and subgenres in yaoi and slash fandoms. To escape the scrutiny of other female users some go as far as to pose as gay men online. Fans of mainly text-based slash often look down on yaoi fans, yaoi fans, younger on average, are often intimidated by so-called 'BNFs' (Big Name Fans), who seem to hold sway over what goes and what goes not in online homo-erotic fiction produced mainly by and for female users.

'Western' fans may look down on the genre and style of manga as a whole, unable to understand the 'grammar' of manga and how to decode them, and unwilling to try. Fans who like anthropomorphized characters are called 'furries' and looked down upon by almost all fans of other subgenres. Fans of yaoi and bishounen (beautiful boys) may call fans of bara (homo-erotic manga with burly men) disgusting, and fans of shotakon (yaoi with underage characters) and chanslash (slash with underage characters) frequently get tarred with the 'disgusting' brush too. Fans who enjoy rape fantasies, the more hyped than actually popular subgenre of 'tentacle porn', mpreg (stories in which males are able to conceive, get pregnant, and/or give birth), and real people slash (RPS) are also very likely to get maligned by other female fans. Those female fans of the more extremely transgressive genres, like vore, probably have the hardest time getting accepted in female fandom communities.

Making a distinction between 'pornography' and 'erotica' in this female-produced female-orientated homo-erotic fiction is useless in arguments, since often erotica is defined as 'what I like' (good), while pornography is defined as 'what you like' ('you sick fuck', bad). Different tastes are called perverse and 'crossing the line' by often very vocal fans who do not hesitate to play arm chair psychiatrist and diagnose fans with these tastes as suffering from a psychopathy, stopping just short, and sometimes not, of calling them dangerous.

On the chans however, no one is going to divulge a poster's true identity to anyone else, unless a crime severe enough to get legal authorities involved occurs and the servers used to post such content have to provide their logs to these authorities.

On 4chan, even the often maligned 'furries' can post the images they like without having to fear retaliation or ridicule aimed at their established online fannish identities. On 4chan, sexist as it may be, they are mostly safe from being demeaned for their tastes by other females, free from limitations put on their expressions of sexuality in the form of male/male images. They are not forced to expose themselves and suffer shame because of the nature of their expressions of sexuality.

The prohibition of exhibiting some to a more or lesser extent 'fantastic' (and fantasist)

expressions of sexuality in female fan communities alienates certain female fans from others, and creates relations of power that marginalizes those with less popular tastes. As Foucault posited, in this way sexuality (and its expression) is not as much an object of oppression 'but an overvisible phenomenon that is manipulated for the sake of gaining power.' (Stein, 2008:64) This alienation female fans experience in online communities may make them more prone to engage in what can be seen as 'post-feminist' behavior, where they 'hang with the boys', prefer the company of the bad boys on the Internet for as long as they leave them alone and do not condemn and ridicule them, the way their fellow female fans do not.

3. Female inhibition and male exhibition

Stein (2008:43) suggests that it is the presence of excess that constitutes the compelling power of sexuality (2008:43). The absence of excess on the chans, in the sense that anonymous users are stripped of their identifying male and female attributes, might account for female users on the chans not being harassed by male users because they are not identifiable as such. The shame-of-excess (Ibid:65), which she equals with 'fear of excitement', is absent on the chans, as would be, perhaps not completely but more than on sites where users are easily identified or 'filed', this fear of excitement.

According to Elise, girls experience a 'double Oedipal loss' (2008:85), when being rejected not just by the mother but by the father too. Girls internalize their sense of inadequacy and shame and accept it as their identity (Ibid:73). Posting on the chans then, allows them to avoid the 'interpersonal context' that participation in mostly female-driven fandoms requires, and in that way they can avoid revealing their own inadequacy and rejection (Ibid:73).

Some old school feminists in Europe and the U.S., not familiar with manga and anime, base their judgment of the entire genres from what they see in sensationalist and fetishist media reports, in which 'Japan' is still an acceptable 'other', and in which the focus is often on how violent and sexually deviant manga and anime, and their consumers, are. While shounen manga indubitable have higher sales not just in Japan but overseas, some media outlets seem to find more gratification in focussing on fringe genres like hentai and lolicon,

and portray Japan and its manga culture as a breeding ground for male sexual perversion. In discourses like these female fans are again invisible entities.

Research on why girls and women are interested in homo-erotic genres that describe the love between two (or more) men, like yaoi and slash, often imply that fans of these genres are misogynist, hate themselves, and think of women's bodies as lesser; lesser in perfection, lesser in desirability.

While it is possible to find anecdotal evidence of fans of these genres posting statements like, "Ew, girl cooties!" and "Vaginas are dirty!", fans like that actually are a minority. As Elise posits, in opposition to Freud, it is not the antiquated concept of 'Penis Neid' (penis envy) that causes girls' Oedipal trauma, it is the rejection of their own tumescence, the swelling of their own, female, genitals, their own sexual desire (2008:79-81). Having no outer genitalia she can easily view, the girl experiences her genitals as 'absent', and it is this absence that is a 'female form of camouflage', and girls and women protect themselves through inhibition, and not exhibition, as boys and men do (Ibid:86).

To illustrate her point about female inhibition, Elise uses the case of one of her patients, a woman academic with a fear of writing and public speaking, a fear undoubtedly familiar to many female academics. Elise's patient worried about being able to compete with 'the big boys' and about being able to quietly disappear again if her ideas and her book would become the target of ridicule when presented to her mostly male colleagues (Ibid:89).

"Women [...] worry about not having what it takes, about being mocked for thinking they have something to show or are impressive in any way. [...] Criticism is dreaded as annihilation." (Ibid:91)

During interpersonal conflicts among female fans of the fan fiction genres online those not able to keep up in an argument, losing the argument, losing the nerve for further participation or lacking the vocabulary to deal with attacks on their tastes and motivations, often choose to self-annihilate, by deleting their accounts on certain sites, choosing a different username or pseudonym, and leaving once loved fandoms for those that seem less hostile.

For women and girls, not just online, 'laying low of female sexual agency' (Ibid:93) is a sur-

vival technique, especially for those unable or unwilling to defend their tastes in debates. Outside of most online communities with female fans with the same or overlapping tastes fans of the yaoi and slash genres may be even less safe. Other users, not familiar with female interest in homo-erotic fiction, will often dismiss all fans of the genres as sick, and might find it particularly disturbing that it is what they regarded as 'normal' girls and women producing and consuming these genres that they thought were the exclusive turf of 'deviant' gay men. But the chans allow this laying low, this sticking to inhibition, since no other poster can see who posted what.

Elise convincingly outlined "the anxiety, ambivalence, and inhibition regarding agency, aggression, competition, envy, power, achievement, and authority--basically any form of self-assertion--that women can experience." She says that these all lead to a "derailment of female desire" (Ibid:92). It is queer that expressions of female desire can thrive in environments like the chans.

Stein points out that what means 'it is grace' (chessed hi) in Hebrew in Leviticus, means shame or abomination in Aramaic (Ibid:49). This covers the expressions of sexuality in the shape of romantic stories like yaoi, which often offers an idealized if highly sexualized relationship between two males. As idealized visions of romantic love, these stories are grace, as the often condemned sexual relationship between two members of the same sex, they are shame and abomination.

The benefit of the chans, to female users, is that they can participate, and be exhibitionist in exposing male bodies for the enjoyment of the female, and unexposed, unasserted, unaggressive, gaze. The images of the male bodies on display are passive, the way in other contexts women are the passive, exhibited objects of the male gaze (Elise: 84). The chans may be boys toys, the way many computer games used to be, the way building blocks used to be, but female users are taking these toys and using them for their own enjoyment, not by trying to confront 'boys' and take them away but by sticking to their own corner.

Using and posting on the chans, can be seen as not just a subversion of what the chans stand for--although this isn't really the case, since it is the creators and the administrators

who provide boards for mainly female fandoms—could be seen as a type of resistance. Not in the sociological or political sense, where resistance means to take a stand, to assert oneself, usually against the authority of someone more powerful. Resistance in the psychoanalytical sense can be unconscious and internal (Renold & Ringrose, 2008: 36), and by posting homo-erotic material on the chans the female fan can trade inhibition for exhibition, without putting a name or a face to it, creating a subverted and resistant form of exhibition. Female use of the chans is then one of “girls’ subversive and resistant practices to hegemonic gendered sexual scripts.” (Ibid: 320)

As Stein writes, sexual desire is embodied and intentional (Ibid:48), and the expression of it, even anonymous, risky to the self, or a user’s self-worth. Users of the chans are very likely aware of its sexist nature, but in spite of that, the structure of the boards keeps them safe from having to suffer personal attacks and risk getting their self-worth injured, which makes using the chans worthwhile to many female users.

Conclusion:

Users of the chans attacked because of it by other online fans of the same kind of material who position themselves as feminists, may consider or even label themselves ‘post-feminist’, buying into the conservative’s media’s backlash against feminism, the second wave in particular. One could say that these ‘post-feminists’ are lazy, uninformed, or disingenuous.

The relative safety female users experience while active on the chans does not just stem from being anonymous and therefore less inhibited, since other users can easily derive from the content of their posts that they are female. However, the anonymity enforced on the chans makes aggressive exhibition for the male users futile, since they cannot identify themselves or assert any kind of power without bringing the ridicule of the rest of the users over their heads. It is no fun being a ‘big man’ without being able to assert oneself, which would violate the most important rule of the chans.

Female users use the chans not necessarily because they agree with the rest of their contents or because they necessarily identify with a fad like post-feminism, they use the chans

in a pragmatic way. In a variety of online environments that are sexist or hostile in other ways, and often both, they choose to use those sites least likely to force them to expose what expressions of sexuality they enjoy.

A brave new endeavor to offer mostly female users an alternative space to post anonymously is the much lesser known lol_meme, a series of posts originally based on Journalfen, a site run by and for media fans, and now moved to the larger dreamwidth (also a site build by media fans for media fans, where these same fans own the servers, on a larger scale than Journalfen and with a fan fiction archive). While the top post usually features an image that could just as well be found on 4chan - except for it being most likely less offensive than most images on 4chan - lol_meme does not serve as an image board, on the contrary, users are protected from having to view images posted by all of them being replaced with image 'place holders', and the actual images don't become visible unless one replies to the comment or thread.

Other limitations of lol_meme however are the same as other mostly female fan communities; posts and threads aren't transient, for as long as the servers the sites are on are robust, they are 'forever'. Anyone posting information that is potentially identifying may live to regret it at any point in the future. Posters of unpopular opinions are often dogpiled (attacked by multiple users), and while they are not easily identified, repeat offenders are labeled and punished by other users by being either ignored, dogpiled, or trolled in turn. Even unidentified, users confess having their feelings hurt by being attacked by other users on lol_meme.

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