

**Myths, Meaning Making, and Mass Media: A Digital Ethnography of Anti-vax
Conspirituality on 4chan's /pol**

by

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Abstract

This study investigates the convergence of conspiracy theories and alternative spirituality on 4chan's /pol/ board, with a focus on antivaccination narratives during the COVID-19 pandemic. Contextualised within the digital ethnography framework, the research explores the unique cultural dynamics of /pol/, a space characterised by anonymity, ideological extremism, and rapid dissemination of user-generated content.

Detailed exposition of the development of digital communities with its similarities and differences from how traditional communities formed was central to situating the study in the current literature on conspiracy theories in the digital age. Coupled with how narratives constitute interpretations of reality, the study used conspiracy theories and stigmatised knowledge as a means to investigate the attractiveness and, perhaps, necessity of fringe ideas to answer difficult questions and ease psychological strain.

Through thematic analysis of forum threads, this research examines how users construct and propagate "conspirituality"—a hybrid worldview combining conspiratorial ideation with New Age spirituality. Key findings reveal that this space facilitates the memetic evolution of narratives portraying vaccination as a mechanism of global control, often intersecting with antisemitic and apocalyptic religious frameworks. These conspiratorial narratives were found to form the basis for strong community connections that helped individuals feel part of a larger group and resulted in in-/outgroup violence.

The study contributes to media studies by offering insights into the mechanics of online narrative formation, the role of digital platforms in amplifying fringe ideologies, and the socio-political implications of these dynamics in a hyperconnected world. It underscores the need for critical engagement with digital cultures to understand their broader societal impact and gives insight into the social movements that form from the bricolage of beliefs used to construct such narratives and ideologies.

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Chapter 1: Digital Existence, Narratives, and /pol/

Introduction

The proliferation of consumer technologies such as the internet and smart devices has fundamentally changed how we live our lives. Most notably, the daily use of these networked devices has altered the ways in which we connect to and communicate with one another. The ways in which we perform the self in public spaces both online and offline have been affected by the hyperconnected state of contemporary life (Hogan, 2010). From finding recipes to driving protest movements, for most of humanity, our lives have become increasingly online and the borders between our online and offline lives have become blurred. The social web has informed and changed our communication patterns and language use, the ways in which we form relationships and communities, how we construct our identities, and how we consume information.

This chapter aims to contextualise the message-board-style website 4chan's /pol/ board within the realm of social platforms and how, as a platform with significant-enough reach and a highly engaged and credulous user base, it has the potential to affect how individuals construct meaning and interact with the real world and often results in real-world harm. To this end, I explore the evolution of the internet from Web 1.0 (or the pre-social web) to Web 2.0 (or the social web) and how communities, cultures, and identities – both online and offline – can be shaped through the virtual social gatherings at these sites. I will then move onto how the site of 4chan functions while highlighting the norms, vernacular, and common ideas found on the /pol/ board in particular, as each 4chan message board has its own internal rules and primary ideologies. By acknowledging the specific ways of interacting and communicating on /pol/, and 4chan as a whole, I can then demonstrate how the messaging and narratives shared at the site have been proliferated on other sites as well as mainstream media. At this stage, I will include references to real-world events that have their roots traced to messaging from 4chan to demonstrate that, even though 4chan is a fringe site, it has impacted the internet and society at large. It must be noted that some of the content from 4chan presented in this research can tend toward hate speech. The views represented in screenshots and text from the site do not reflect my own. They are simply used as depictions of the site and used in developing an understanding of the worldview fostered there.

On Being Digital

Whether we are aware of the changes happening around us as we continue our move toward a more technologically-entrenched society, the effects of the social web and increasing embedding of digital technologies in our daily lives will still take hold. In most regions of the world, even if you are not a prolific user of internet and computer-mediated communication you will keep on encountering systems and requirements that demand you go online and operate there. At the start of 2024, the global internet usage stood at 66.2% of the Earth's population with a year-on-year increase of 1.8% from 2023 with the average time spent online sitting at six hours and 40 minutes (Kemp, 2024). More specifically, South Africa's digital population as of January 2024 has about 44 million active internet users – 78.7% of these users accessed the internet through mobile phones in 2022 – and 26 million active social media users (Cowling, 2024). With these statistics one can see that the internet is very much a part of our social and internal worlds, and we cannot keep it separate from our lives offline. Due to this increasingly merged existence, online narratives seep into our daily discourse with others and affect the ways we develop our own personal stories. This alteration to the discourses we engage with – externally and internally – informs the ways in which we attempt navigate the world.

In our connected state of being, individuals are able to access a wide array of information that, prior to the internet, would take a lifetime to collate and research. This access to huge quantities of information is a double-edged sword as the internet hosts all types of information ranging in accuracy and truthfulness.

On Narrative and Its Constitutive Powers

Humans are a fundamentally narrative-driven species. We have maintained the drive to communicate the individual experience of existence as well as forming and maintaining the larger communities we inhabit through narrative. In his book *Actual Minds, Impossible Worlds* (2009), Jerome Bruner argues that human beings have a primary drive to create and comprehend narrative as an organising principal for the world we inhabit. Stories, he proposed, are primarily cognitive tools for organising the world, rather than mere literary pastimes. Bruner's theory of narrative construction centres around the idea that human beings are hardwired to make sense of experience through narrative, which is itself generated by processes of reshaping and reordering the sensory world.

According to Bruner, stories are not just a form of representation, or re-presenting reality, but also a form of constitution, or means of creating reality. Moreover, Bruner argues that stories are vehicles of social and cultural transmission, vehicles by which people disseminate truths about themselves, and the human condition, to a wider audience – in short, stories are the core pillar of any viable human culture. This means that narrative critical social cognition is indispensable to human socialisation and human social being. Echoing Bruner’s understanding of narrative as constitutional to being in the world, Marcus and Hamedani (2007), pose that narrative is the framework on which and the tool we use to develop individual and cultural meanings and situate ourselves in time and place. Furthermore, the “narrative reverberations”, described by Miller, et. al. (2007), act as simultaneously connective tissue between individuals within a culture and further afield, as well as the guardrails for who an individual is or could become.

On Digital Narratives

Consistent engagement with the digital has revolutionised the way narratives are told, formed and exchanged. The blurring of the boundaries between the online and the offline has led to the interaction of these two worlds in a way that narratives move freely between the two and shape individual and social perceptions. While traditional narrative diffusion used to depend on physical location and authority, in that the message had to filter through certain authoritative channels, the internet provides the means of transmitting stories in real time to a worldwide the audience without the necessity for the same channels of authority. A question of authentic digital presentation crops up at this point. Hogan (2010), though, places the individual’s digital expression, their symbolic presentation of the self online, or their curated digital narrative on the same level of exhibition as any performance an individual undertakes in their daily offline lives.

Regardless, this hyperconnectivity influences how narratives function, forming a dynamic network of meanings. Digital spaces can act as areas of performance of cultural identities and the formation of communal ideologies. 4chan’s /pol/ board illustrates how online communities can serve as crucibles for narrative generation, shaping perceptions and behaviours that extend into offline realities. These spaces exemplify the potency of digital sociality in amplifying voices, fostering group cohesion, and generating narratives that resonate beyond the digital sphere.

Using Bruner's (2009) theory of narrative as the constitutive force, we can see how online storytelling does more than represent reality; it actively constructs it. On platforms like 4chan, narratives emerge through collective participation, where users engage in a recursive process of creating, reshaping, and reaffirming shared worldviews in memes, myths, and personal anecdotes. These narratives become frameworks for understanding complex social phenomena, often with profound real-world consequences.

The vernacular and norms of /pol/ not only shape discourse within the platform but also contribute to the dissemination of ideologies that can influence broader societal debates. In this context, digital platforms become modern-day conduits for cultural transmission, where the interplay between narrative and digital sociality forms the foundation for new modes of identity, community, and action. Such spaces reveal the transformative power of narrative in an interconnected world, highlighting its role in shaping both individual cognition and collective realities.

Conspiracy in Covid Times

During the Covid-19 pandemic renewed interest in conspiracy theories spread across the web as people were confronted with something they had never experienced before. Prior to the pandemic, Goertzel (1994) studied the belief in conspiracy theories in the United States of America and found the primary reason for such beliefs is strongly correlated to "feelings of alienation and disaffection from the system" (p. 739). He draws on Volkan (1985) who suggests that during times of "insecurity and discontent people often feel a need for a tangible enemy onto which externalize their angry feelings" (as cited in Goertzel, 1994, p. 739). These insights link well with the narrative nature of society and individuals. Humans need reasons for their experiences to be able to process them and move beyond the psychological despair one might endure during times of vast societal change such as Covid-19. The upheaval caused by the lockdowns and the overwhelmingly alarmist nature of the news cycle pushed people to find answers to make sense of their experiences at the time. Conspiracy theories surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic served as a means to externalise the individual's confusion and uncertainty onto a group of faceless elites and political puppets striving for complete control of the world's population to make sense of the massive changes in their lives (Fritze, 2022).

In both online and offline environments, the real-world "effects of social, political, and health-related conspiracy theories on people's attitudes, intentions, and behaviors" (Douglas et al., 2015, p. 184) have been noted by, at least, the US Centre for Disease Control, the World

Health Organisation, and the South African Department of Health. Covid-19 and vaccine conspiracy theories have contributed to rising vaccination hesitancy and antivaxxer sentiments (Wilson & Wiysonge, 2020). Ideas of the political elite controlling the world through psychological stress induced by the Covid-19 “plandemic” brought about greater distrust in government and in medical science (Constantinou et al., 2021; van Prooijen et al., 2022).¹ Covid-19 and vaccine disinformation have resulted in what the World Health Organisation has dubbed an “infodemic” (Moorhead, 2020) and the South African Department of Health has stated that the result of these conspiracy theories is a global rise in vaccine hesitancy (2021).

The New Age in Covid Times

Alongside the increased interest in conspiracy theories stands the rise in popularity of the New Age movement – an umbrella term for any spiritualism that does not fit traditional Western religious framing. The New Age movement emerged as a loosely organised spiritual phenomenon in the latter half of the 20th century, and draws on the esoteric, the occultic, and Eastern influences (Barkun, 2003, p. 19). It initially gained prominence during the 1960s and 1970s, coinciding with the countercultural movements of the time. New Age spiritualists often view spirituality as an individualised and eclectic pursuit, that incorporates elements such as meditation, energy healing, and holistic health (Rose, 1998).

New Age spirituality’s pre-existing frameworks of energy movements, planetary alignments, and utopian narratives were adapted to contextualise the pandemic as a spiritual awakening. For instance, astrological interpretations of global events as part of a larger cosmic plan, such as the “Age of Aquarius” timeline, resonate with traditional New Age themes of transcendence and transformation (Griera et al., 2022). These interpretations were disseminated over various platforms and amplified their reach as they intertwined with conspiracy theories that challenged global mainstream science and government health measures (Halafoff et al., 2022; Parmigiani, 2021).

The pandemic saw concerns over vaccines become a focal point for these interconnected groups. Holistic and spiritual actors often framed resistance to vaccines not only as a political or scientific critique but as part of a broader spiritual quest against oppressive “dark forces” that sought to disrupt humanity’s ascension (Griera et al., 2022). This narrative

¹ Mikki Willis and his team produced a short documentary in 2020 called *Plandemic* which put forward the main tenets of the conspiracy theories surrounding COVID-19 as truth. Two million people viewed the sequel, *Plandemic 2: Indoctrination*, on their global livestream. The third instalment of the *Plandemic* series aired 3 June 2023.

mirrors earlier New Age ideals of personal and planetary liberation, highlighting the movement's adaptability in incorporating contemporary anxieties into its worldview.

Both conspiracy theories and New Age spiritualism are responses to “social and personal fragmentation”, and “political pragmatism, economic rationalism, scientific empiricism, and social dislocation characteristic of the modern age” (Ward & Voas, 2011, p. 103). These two worldviews have collided in online spaces and have come to be known by scholars as *conspirituality* (Ward & Voas, 2011; Halafoff et al., 2022; Griera et al., 2022).

A Brief Introduction to Conspirituality

Conspirituality is the combination of conspiracy theories and New Age alternative spirituality with an ultimately socio-political edge that holds two primary convictions. The first, often at the core of most conspiracy theories is that a secret group aims to take, or is already in, control of the planet through the manipulation of social and political order. The second, takes its cue from alternative spirituality: that society must “wake up” and become enlightened in order to prevent or oppose the secret group's control (Ward & Voas, 2011). The conspiratorial worldview is holistic as it “frame[s] reality as comprehensible only as a whole” (Chia et al., 2021). The individual is placed within a network of causality that is unseen and beyond understanding (Chia et al., 2021). Conspirituality as a holistic worldview directly opposes mainstream discourses with the underlying motivation that there are hidden agendas and plots that are perpetuated through mainstream media, education, and politics (Asprem & Dyrendal, 2015; Bramadat, 2017; Campbell, 1972; Gauthier, 2020; Parmigiani, 2021; Ward & Voas, 2011).

A Brief Introduction to 4chan

One online space that demonstrates this confluence is the international topic-based imageboard website 4chan. Visitors engage with threads created by an original poster (OP) who initiates discussion by posting a single image (this is required for every new thread) alongside some text to a specific board of a particular topic (Hine et al., 2017).

The board I focus on in this study is “Politically Incorrect” (stylised as /pol/) – 4chan's most active board (Tuters & Hagen, 2020) – where hate speech, political conspiracies, and alt-right propaganda and talking points are posted and discussed. Several scholars have established that 4chan was a large contributor to the propagation of conspiracy theories prior to the pandemic (Hine et al., 2017; Papakyriakopoulos et al., 2020; Tuters & Hagen, 2020; Velásquez

et al., 2021).² It has since been a thriving space for Covid-19 disinformation with /pol/ being especially active in Covid-19 and vaccination discussion. A dedicated thread, posted daily from 24 January 2020 until December 2022, called “Corona Virus General” (or /cvvg/) was used to discuss the multi-layered views of the pandemic – from the international political level, right down to the individual experience of Covid. More recently an anti-vaccination-focused recurring thread called “Vaxx Jams” has become popular. In this thread visitors upload re-recorded pop songs that include /pol/ vaccine tropes like “clot shot”, “jabby”, and reference the impending mass death of the vaccinated.

The backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic and the various narratives that surround the administration of vaccines gives researchers a unique opportunity to study the meaning-making processes of this particular community by analysing the messaging proliferated on the site through the user-generated content. User discussions on /pol/, over the course of the pandemic and up to the present post-pandemic world, highlights a distinct worldview that has emerged at the site, shaped by the amalgamation of various ideas and concepts propagated within the forum. This worldview is characterised by a reinterpretation and reinvigoration of entrenched themes, which inform users’ perspectives on the Covid-19 pandemic, vaccination efforts, and governmental control. Central to this worldview is the notion of a clandestine one-world government, often depicted as being orchestrated by Jewish overlords, reptilians, and liberal satanic paedophile rings addicted to adrenochrome harvested from tortured children reflecting a fusion of conspiratorial ideation and new-age spirituality.³

When Media Became Social: Building a Home on the Digital Frontier

In 2003, a boom was on its way. In the space of seven months, three of the most influential social media platforms were launched. Myspace in August 2003, 4chan in October 2003, and Facebook in February 2004. Many other social media platforms acquired their share of users during the time and multiple social platforms have since risen to popularity over the past two decades (Van Dijck, 2013). The advent of these platforms simply marked the start of a new era in personal computer usage brought about by the technology becoming cheaper to purchase.

² Antisemitic conspiracies, reptilian overlords, clandestine one world government, QAnon, satanic liberal paedophile rings, many others interlock and reinforce these primary myths.

³ Adrenochrome is a chemical compound created through the oxidation of the chemical adrenaline. In conspiracy circles, adrenochrome is the chemical used by the satanic elite who harvest the compound from children who have been tortured as the torturing process is said to make the compound more potent. The compound is believed to be used by elites to get a drug-like high and to stay young and healthy.

Myspace and Facebook were more mainstream social platforms that offered people a way to form connections through setting up their user profiles and interacting with other users on the site while 4chan existed in the niche and underground web of anime fandoms, fetish, gore, and alternative political ideologies where user profiles are not required and the freedom to post exactly what you want is encouraged by the anonymous nature of the site and other 4chan users. These platforms each had different starts and catered to different demographics but were primary influences in shaping modern internet cultures (Van Dijck, 2013). The platforms emerged as personal computers and home-based connectivity flourished and can be seen as the fruition of a truly user-generated, interactive, and participatory internet called Web 2.0 (DiNucci, 1999; O'Reilly, 2005).

During this phase of the early internet, the term cyberspace was used to describe what we now call Web 2.0. The term was initially coined by Darcy DiNucci (1999) in her prophetic article *Fragmented Future* but was only later popularised when used to describe the move to a social internet in discussions by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty at the Web 2.0 Conference in October 2004. The change in terminology and what these terms imply for our understanding of what the internet was at the time is not a simple case of diction. It has a semiotic turn that dictates an ontological implication for our perception of and interaction with the internet. Cyberspace gives the impression of a large, open area or monolithic structure for one to traverse (Haythornwaite, 2005). The internet is framed here as a singular virtual environment. Deeper investigation into how the 'space' functionally operates gives rise to greater understanding and therefore better nomenclature. It is not one space – it is many. The contemporary view of the internet is a series of nodes and edges (Tilch et al., 2020) connected in a chaotic web-like structure – being both distinct in its spaces and unified in its technological form.

Earlier iterations of a much smaller social web existed in the mid-80s and early 90s. These mostly took the shape of social forums and chatrooms – although chatrooms don't have the community memory aspect that forums might allow as the interactions are time-bound and one needed to be present in chats to see what had been said (Rheingold, 1993, p. 154) – where individuals would discuss a range of topics of interest with moderators present to ensure that things didn't get out of hand. It is interesting to reflect on these spaces as the foundational parts of the 21st century world as they were, firstly, so small compared to the number of users we see in today's social media landscape; and secondly, were just text based. At this time, of early computer-mediated communication, theorists posited that the move from rich in-person interactions to lean, text media in cyberspace would result in an "impoverished communication environment" (Haythornwaite, 2005, p. 126) Technological hindsight is twenty-twenty. This

text-driven, technology-enabled medium of communication has delivered a richness of its own that is present in much of early user forums and chat services. Text-based forums were able to foster and maintain large (for the time) communities of individuals dialling-up and logging-in from around the world.

Web 2.0 is characterised by the community-forming nature of user-generated content, with social interaction and collaboration (Herring and Androutsopoulos, 2015) made possible by the technological affordances of the platform (Bareither, 2023). For Rheingold (1993) the social web was a new frontier through which to trek and establish a digital home separate from the real world, yet, simultaneously, intrinsically informed by it. Rheingold's expression of community through virtual networks was a moment of realisation. The virtual world was not cold. It was "a cozy little world," (1993, p. 3) where people cared about the connections established there. Rheingold used an online conferencing system called the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link (WELL) where the term "virtual community" was first coined (Matei, 2005).

The WELL, a message-board-style site – much like 4chan – founded in February 1985, was an early blueprint for how forums and social platforms would be created in the future. An overarching site structure hosting a variety of smaller niches, much like Facebook groups, 4chan boards, or subreddits on Reddit. The forums of the WELL are called conferences. These conferences cover a range of broad topics, i.e. politics, art, and hobbies and are then broken down into more specific subtopics within the theme. Conferences were originally created by the site's moderators and populated with user-generated content ("The WELL", 2013). The delineated space of The WELL allowed for the development of unique cultures within each conference where social norms "were established, challenged, reestablished, rechallenged, in a kind of speeded-up social evolution" (Rheingold, 1993, p. 3).

The structure of The WELL and the praxis of its computer-mediated communication is the essence of the social internet and the birthplace of our virtual sociality, where we laid the first bricks of our new homes on the digital frontier. These plots were created from the public conversations of users, not the moderators or web designers. The houses were built upon foundations of shared interest rather than stone and developed by each piece of text posted rather than by architects and blueprints.

Online Communities – Culture, identity, and connection

New technologies alter the structure of our interests: the things we think *about*. They alter the character of our symbols: the things we think *with*. And they alter the nature of community: the arena in which thoughts develop. (Postman, 1993, p. 20)

Sherry Turkle (2011) agrees with Postman's point about alterations to our ways of thinking and meaning-making processes due to technological advancement; it is no leap of logic to see this at play in a variety of instances. Language, the method of producing symbols to convey meaning between individuals, and our understanding of the world have all been greatly altered due to the proliferation of online content and its consumption on different social platforms. Language has become abbreviated into LOLs, IYKYKs, and myriad bitmap images in the form of emojis that convey an agreed-upon message depending on context. The way we socialise has become an enmeshment of the real-life self, informed by the digital self. The persona created on these platforms is based on our interactions with other users in the digital space, and theirs on us. This alteration to how our sociality is supported and enacted in both the physical and online worlds informs our social experience and the ways we engage with each other (Chayko, 2022). Virtual and physical have merged to create a new way of thinking about the "public sphere for social, political, economic, and cultural interaction" (Fernback, 1999, p. 16).

Pachucki and Breiger (2010) insist that "networks and culture are mutually constitutive and so deserve deeper analytic consideration in light of one another" (p. 209). At this stage of human development alongside technology and our, now, intrinsic link to the internet at almost all levels of society, there can be only one world; both digital and physical, simultaneously, where the mutually-constitutive nature of networks and culture are ever-present. Pachucki and Breiger reiterate that there is always an interplay between culture, social relations, and social structure. The interplay between the social structures formed in online communities and the specific niche cultures that spawn from them is necessary for either to exist and evolve over time where "shared cultural meanings also shape social structure" (p. 219).

When many people build a home near each other, even on the virtual planes of internet forums and other social platforms, the interchange of ideas, development of mores and norms, comes into play. The relationship between sharing and consuming other disembodied individuals' thoughts and opinions continues over time and reinforces or erodes shared cultural meanings formed at the settlement. As more people build their homes, more interchange and affirmation of beliefs becomes possible, until we have a community. At this level we can begin to see cultures take root and emerge as the trees and branches under which the houses find their

shade. I have stuck with Rheingold's analogy of homes on a digital frontier as, at the time, it was truly a new world for humans to inhabit, to shape and bend to our will, and in return to shape us and our interactions with each other.

There are important differences to note between how communities form online and how they would have formed offline in the past. A key marker in the traditional development of a community is occupying the same space. Starting from the individual, you branch out to the home, the neighbourhood, their churches or other voluntary organisations until you have a spatially bound local community structure (Wellman, Boase & Chen, 2002). Community spaces on the digital frontier are elongated and contracted all at once – we are afforded instant communication that supersedes “geographic spaces and social boundaries” (Hine, 2015). At one time you are both present with someone virtually and they are (potentially) on the other side of the world at a completely different time to you. Geographical position no longer impedes community development.

The digital community overcomes large swaths of land and sea whilst still being local and extremely personal. This is a grand change in the ways human communities developed prior to digital connectivity. Wellman, Boase, and Chen (2002) suggest that this kind of increase in the geographically bound structure of community has been changing since the proliferation of efficient and cheaper transport routes. They also suggest that high-speed internet, with all of the technological affordances – instant text, audio, and visual communication – has had even greater impact on traditional community formation.

The second aspect of community and cultural development is that traditional communities would stay relatively stable for periods of time, whereas social media is naturally evolving and unstable (Van Dijck, 2013). Traditions would be established over time, and these would be remembered and practised by families and neighbours for generations to come – barring some kind of social unrest such as a war or displacement and destruction of a community by an act of god. In the realm of the social web, things move relatively quickly in comparison. Digital communities can be transient with users flowing from one space to another. The digital cultures formed in these spaces writhe under the pressure of freedom and the ever-changing demographics of communities. There is no fixed boundary to the homesteads erected on that frontier. There is always another frontier to explore and travelling to it takes minimal effort.

Beyond the spatial and temporal dynamics of community, there are also aspects of our sociality derived from the physical presentation of the self. When an individual arrives in a physical space, before any utterance, they make statements with their physical form. Their

gender, race, age, and type of body all dictate the way they situate themselves in the physical social world and how others interact with them and how they engage with others. This is not the case with online spaces. These details that inform sociality are only available upon the user's willingness to make these details publicly known (Rheingold, 1993). This anonymity is a key ingredient to the proliferation of subversive narratives and will be discussed in-depth later in this chapter.

Online communities have become an intrinsic part of many individuals' social world (Hine, 2015). The concrete fabric of our society has become interwoven with copper and fiber optic cable, offering people a sense of connection across vast spaces at the click of a button. We have witnessed the social impact of such groundbreaking technological advances several times in the past century, with mass media being repeatedly reinvented and its reach magnified with every iteration of the 'latest' communication technology – at present high-speed internet, smartphones, and social media – affording even greater connection. While these technological triumphs have resulted in much good for the species in terms of social diversity, knowledge generation and sharing, as well as substantial monetary gain, one must acknowledge that there are also negative elements to the virtual town squares of social platforms constantly increasing the reach of *every* kind of messaging.

How 4chan Functions: An Inside View

The Site

4chan.org first went live in 2003 after Christopher 'Moot' Poole, 15 years old at the time, downloaded the source code of the anonymous Japanese textboard website 2channel or Futaba Channel (Matthews, 2014). Time Magazine named Poole the most influential person of 2008 beating even President Barack Obama, noting that Poole's creation of 4chan had greatly impacted online culture and changed the way images are shared online leading to the popularisation of memes (Time, 2009). This, as Poole points out in his TED talk (TED, 2010), was as a result of a unified effort of 4chan's /b/ board users exploiting the TIME poll by spamming votes on Poole's behalf.

The site quickly grew in popularity and currently more than twenty-two million unique visitors access the site each month (4chan, n.d.). 4chan is completely anonymous and little to no moderation is conducted on the posts. No login is needed, and usernames are not often used unless specifically creating one for a particular post to emphasise a point or to maintain continuity between threads – like the username Q, which we will discuss in this chapter.

Although individual users can enter a username on their post or comment, it is not verified by moderators, and other users are free to copy the username if they choose. One of the main global rules of the site that everyone is greatly encouraged to adhere to is to not give any personal information about yourself or others. The default username for all posters is Anonymous. Regardless of username, users remain anonymous and are only linked to a post by a randomised post number and poster ID that changes for each thread and individual post. These IDs do not have any bearing on actual identity. It is simply an alphanumeric code generated by the site's system to differentiate posts. The concept of anonymity on the site is held in high regard and has maintained this since first coming online. As anonymity is central to the culture of 4chan it necessarily affects how users behave and what users post. Users of the site often refer to each other as 'anon'.

4chan is organised into different thematic boards, each dedicated to specific topics or interests. As of the latest available information, there are typically around 70 active boards covering a wide range of topics such as anime, video games, politics, and hobbies. These boards are further divided into categories, with the most infamous being /b/ (Random), known for its chaotic and often explicit content. The boards are also colour coded blue and red for 'safe for work', or 'not safe for work' respectively. Both /pol/ and /b/ are not safe for work boards. Before entering the red boards on the site, you must agree to a set of terms, freeing 4chan from any potential liability while using the site. The terms are as follows:

To access this section of 4chan (the "website"), you understand and agree to the following:

1. The content of this website is for mature audiences only and may not be suitable for minors. If you are a minor or it is illegal for you to access mature images and language, do not proceed.
2. This website is presented to you AS IS, with no warranty, express or implied. By clicking "I Agree," you agree not to hold 4chan responsible for any damages from your use of the website, and you understand that the content posted is not owned or generated by 4chan, but rather by 4chan's users.
3. As a condition of using this website, you agree to comply with the "Rules" of 4chan, which are also linked on the home page. Please read the Rules carefully, because they are important.

There are 17 global rules and hundreds of subrules for accessing and posting on the site. The rules, though, appear to be mainly for the legal cover of the site managers and owner

rather than the protection of the users. The primary rule pertaining to this study, and which has guided my approach while existing at the site is that of global rule 4. The rule states: “You will not post or request personal information (“dox”) or calls to invasion (“raids”). Inciting or participating in cross-board (intra-4chan) raids is also not permitted” (4chan, n.d.). Even this rule is not enforced consistently.

/pol/ Users

Although 4chan is often portrayed as a single monolithic entity with a singular ideology, it must be noted that the different boards all have their own internal communities and community values. Some elements of these communities overlap. For instance, /b/, /pol/, and /x/ all appear to have strong conspiratorial aspects to them. /pol/ and /b/ both engage in politico-spiritual discussions, and which are prominent in the community discourse though /pol/ was created as a containment board for the increase in extreme political discussion arising on /b/ (Tuters & Hagen, 2019). Sometimes, elements of these discourses will crop up in other boards, such as the anime board, /ani/, but the primary discussions held there are about anime itself. 4chan as a whole, does tend to employ trolling – the act of “creating controversy” by “triggering people” and saying outrageous statements in direct opposition to what has been stated by someone else (Wendling, 2018) – across the site. This is part of the overarching culture within most of the boards’ communities (Coleman, 2014; Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2017; Phillips, 2015).

Beyond this, one sees some form of individual differences and overlaps in beliefs between the posters of the boards. Though distinguishing them cannot be done based on usernames or other standard social platform user identifiers as the site is anonymous. This makes any attempts to ascertain demographic information about individual users, the long-term relationships between users, or even the development of individual users’ views, impossible (Colley & Moore, 2022).⁴ Rather, to gain an understanding of the demographics of users it is necessary to know what is spoken about and what beliefs are espoused by posters. Using the content of posts, I can create a snapshot of the characteristics of the posters on /pol/.

Firstly, posts demonstrate users are highly conscious of current events and are prolific users of the internet. /pol/’s associations with “Gamergate” suggest that the users are also

⁴ Users are distinguished as any visitor who is on the site whereas posters are those who explicitly make themselves known through posting on boards.

relatively young and technologically proficient.⁵ The userbase is international but many posts originate from the USA (Hine et al., 2017). Many examples of misogyny exist at the site where repeated calls for a “trad wife” rather than having a “roastie” girlfriend⁶ imply the userbase to be male, heterosexuals who are firmly anti-LGBT+ (Colley & Moore, 2022). Posters often cast themselves as victims of a degenerate society that is controlled by the liberal agenda (Tuters & Hagen, 2020).

And finally, in regard to the overarching prevalence of a particular ideology, many posts declare white nationalist ideologies as a starting point and glorify the continuation of the white race. “1488” (sometimes 14/88), is a neo-Nazi dog whistle often found on /pol/. The “14” references The Fourteen Words of David Lane’s white supremacist slogan: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children”. The “88” references the eighth letter of the alphabet “H” and signals “HH” or “Heil Hitler” (SPLC, n.d.). Inferences drawn from this, and other examples of white nationalism suggest that the users are white, racist and antisemitic.

Posting on Boards

Each board has its own unique culture and rules, enforced by the community rather than by centralised moderation. Original posters (OPs) start a new thread by posting an image and accompanying text (if they want to) (Hine et al., 2017). Other users can then reply to the image with either both image and text or just text. Administrators generally do not intervene in discussions unless absolutely necessary, such as in cases of illegal content or severe violations of the site’s rules (Hine et al., 2017). In my experience of the site, these interventions appear to be arbitrary in application and it is difficult to determine what is considered a severe violation of the rules. Instead, moderation tasks are largely left to volunteer moderators, known as “janitors” or a more derogatory term used on the site, “jannies”, as they are literally the cleaners of the site who have limited powers to delete posts and ban users within specific boards. This approach allows for a high degree of freedom of expression but also results in a significant amount of offensive or inappropriate content going unchecked. Appendix A, Figures A1 and A2 show the structure of posts on the site.

⁵ Gamergate started due to a blog post by Eron Gjoni, after the breakdown of his relationship with Zoe Quinn, a game developer. 4chan picked up the story and began #gamergate to point out how feminist values had infiltrated and destroyed the videogame industry. For a detailed explication of the movement in the gaming community see Mike Wendling’s *Alt Right: From 4chan to the White House* (2018).

⁶ Roastie is a slang term used in the incel – involuntary celibate – community to refer to sexually active women. The term derives from describing the vulva as roast beef.

The site does not use a feed algorithm to serve up content to users based on their interests or previous engagements with similar content like most social media today. Rather, posts move up and down the board based on how many people have commented on, or ‘bumped’, the thread (Hine et al., 2017). This is the only metric for content to remain on the board. If you post anything that does not interest the board it will quickly move down the list of posts until it is archived or ‘pruned’. These archives are hosted for a maximum of twenty-four hours before permanent deletion from the site and are impossible to retrieve, except by accessing the private 4chan archive hosted independently of 4chan’s servers. Pruning happens at varying speeds depending on the type of board. Boards such as /b/ or /pol/ are fast boards and populated with new content very quickly as posts that are not engaged with by the community will be quickly pushed down and pruned with some posts being removed within an hour. /pol/ and /b/ are the most popular boards on 4chan with /pol/ becoming the most popular board on the site in 2022 with 150 000 posts per day (Macaulay, 2022).

Another aspect of engagement on the site is the option for users to type ‘sage’ in the options box of a post in order to mark it as a low-quality post or ‘shitpost’ and that it should be ignored by the community. The fact that the 4chan community polices itself and the only engagement metric used to rank content – to borrow Google’s terminology – being replies to posts is a testament to its ideological starting point of libertarianism, anti-establishment, and free speech fundamentalism (Phillips, 2015). Poole has spoken on his defence of anonymity and anonymous communities online at various events such as TED conferences (TED, 2010) and SXSW (Observer, 2011) and how anonymity is able to bring about “authenticity” for users. It can be interpreted from Poole’s talks about the space being a fundamentally “creative” space, that without the fear of being judge or being faced with repercussions, one can truly be free to present themselves however *they want to* present themselves in an anonymous space.

A Personal Account of the Site

Although the technological and general rules have been laid out above, the experience of embedding oneself in the space feels very different from the clinical description of how the site functions. Before choosing to research the vaccine conspiracy theories and its enmeshment with a type of New Age spirituality that has formed on 4chan’s various boards, I started visiting the site in 2018 after a new roommate started sending me links to different threads on /x/, the Paranormal board. I began visiting /x/ on my own and was truly fascinated by the information being shared there: surreal accounts of creation, documents from supposedly leaked CIA top

secret files, pagan ritual guides, rich stories of a messiah known as ‘The Nobody’ with a fascinating and complex series of threads which weaved several religions into a single, yet incredibly complex, new cosmology unique to the board. I was soon visiting the site every day, multiple times per day. I visited several boards and became a regular reader of the threads on the Television and Films (/tv/), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender (/lgbt/), and the Politically Incorrect (/pol/) boards.

As *should be* the case with all /pol/ users, I began as a ‘lurker’, essentially the entry point for anyone new to 4chan’s boards. This is imperative to embedding oneself on the site as there is simply too much insider vernacular and history embedded in the discussions on boards to log on and make a post that would be acknowledged and survive if your post were seen to be different. It is interesting to think of the idea of being recognised as different in an anonymous space. If other users find a visitor’s post to clearly illustrate ignorance of the norms and style of the boards, they will be encouraged to “lurk more” before they post but with additional derogatory flair.

While lurking I noted traces of competing, overarching narratives that permeate each board in the various posts. For example, people of colour and queer individuals are often denigrated on /pol/ and /b/ where racist, misogynistic, and homophobic rhetoric as well as outright hate speech occur in most posts while at the same time boards that cater to the LGBT+ community exist, although there is a lot of self-hate in those threads too.

Through the way particular narratives are implicitly referenced in posts of different boards, the language used to address other users such as ‘anon’, and ‘goy’ (referencing the Shabbos goy in the Jewish religion) and ending posts with ‘desu’ or other internal markers of your familiarity with the site’s vernacular, you get a sense of the culture that has been cultivated over the past two decades within the community at large and within the more granular, yet distinct, cultures that form on each board. The progression of any new users who have the persistence and necessary interest to stick around long enough to properly engage with the boards content is linear – one moves from lurker to ‘newfag’ and is only then considered a true anon in the community.

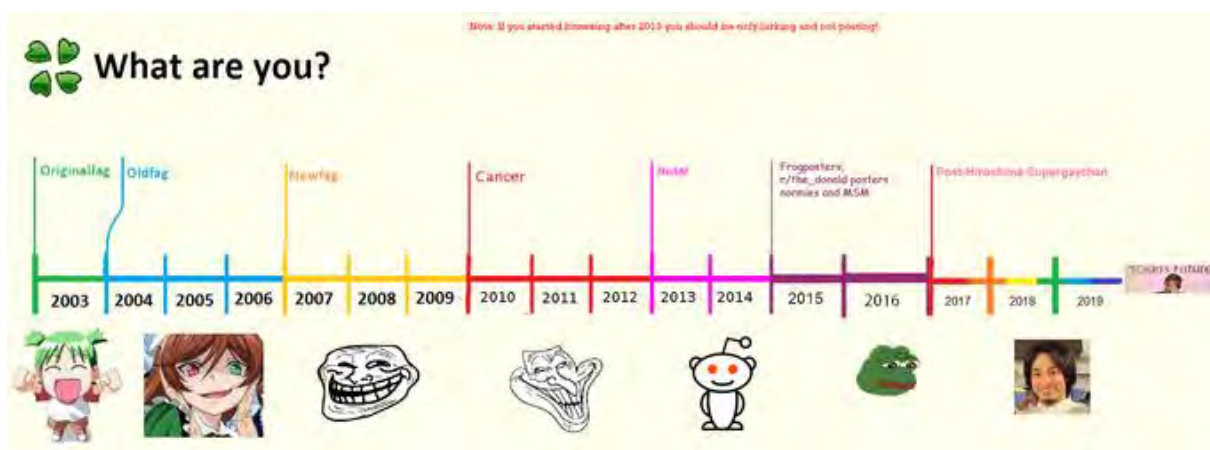
An Aside on Hierarchy

In the site’s hierarchy, two primary distinctions are made in discussion on threads posted at the site namely, the *oldfag* and *newfag* (Olson, 2012). A user posted a timeline of 4chan’s different periods and defined the community over time (see Figure 1). Oldfags joined between 2004 – 2007, and newfags who joined after that – the term is still used today to describe the uninitiated.

Other distinctions are made by the creator in the 4chan timeline such as the “cancer” period, the ‘Reddit’ period when many people on the site would migrate/invade from Reddit – I view Reddit as the mainstream version of 4chan. This was followed by the “frogposters” period leading up to the 2016 American presidential elections and Donald Trump’s win where Pepe the Frog became widely used in right-wing rhetoric and seen at many Trump rallies. Additionally, during the frogposter period, many alt-right Redditors who supported Trump (the majority of these moved from the r/the_donald subreddit) and *normies* started visiting 4chan because of the site’s – specifically /pol/ – affinity to embrace those who opposed mainstream media, and the “liberal agenda”.⁷ Between 2017 and 2019 we hit the “Post-Hiroshima Supergaychan” period, which, the original poster seems to imply, is the rubble that remains after the site has been overrun by normies and homosexuals.

Figure 1

4chan Timeline and Embedded Hierarchy



Note. This isn’t an official 4chan timeline produced by the site itself. Like much of the material on 4chan it is community generated.

A Personal Account of the Site Continued

As I continued to read threads on /pol/ and /x/, I began to see overlaps between the pseudo-religiosity of /x/ with its propensity to indulge in grand conspiracies and the politically-charged alt-right bigotry and neo-conservative nature of /pol/. The various talking points and allegations levelled against liberal elites, Hollywood, China, the LGBT+ community, amongst many other

⁷ Normies is a slang used to describe someone as conventional or mainstream by those who oppose the mainstream (Know Your Meme, 2015).

perceived enemies which will be discussed in the next chapter. The Hillary Clinton email leak, Pizzagate conspiracy theory⁸, Q-Anon, Trump as “God emperor” sent by God to “drain the swamp”, the messianic “Nobody”, are just a few narratives entrenched at the site. As a new visitor to the site, it was quite overwhelming to confront such a contrary worldview that held so much forbidden knowledge and shadowy secrets. At the time, I seriously considered that my own understanding was flawed. I was confronted with countless examples of how the world functioned in secret and the ways the mainstream media – an arm of the elite used to control humanity – refused to cover certain events, or if they did, didn’t cover truthfully.

I started to notice that this culture of distrust and the embedded belief in hidden structures that control the world at large, also called the deep state, was becoming more popular on other social media platforms. Old conspiracy theories that had long flourished on 4chan began to seep into popular culture in the form of Facebook and Reddit posts, and tweets.

4chan – Meme(ing) Culture

Poole, when advocating for anonymity online at a TED conference referred to 4chan as a space where discussions form through “completely raw, completely unfiltered” speech and attributes this to the site becoming a space for the creation and proliferation of the viral internet phenomena known as memes (TED, 2010). Tom Pollard states, “Memes include images, signs, metaphors, simple videos, and symbols that communicate approval, scepticism, disgust, anger, disapproval, or rage about various issues on websites and chatrooms” (2018; p. 4). It was evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins who coined the term *meme* in the last chapter of his book *The Selfish Gene* (2006) in his attempt to define cultural evolution, drawing on the concept of genes. Memes, as Shifman (2014) highlights, are “replicators that undergo variation, competition, selection, and retention” (p. 9). Dawkins famously illustrated the concept with an example of the functioning of a virus. The term itself refers to any unit of cultural information spread by replication or imitation, with cultural artifacts like melodies, catchphrases, fashionable clothing, and even abstract beliefs such as a belief in a god (Shifman, 2014). Dawkins likened the meme to a virus to explain the process of diffusion of memes in society with the meme unconsciously searching and competing for hosts to infect – essentially a type of mind virus that is specifically suited to the sociocultural environment in which it is spread. These units of culture can and often do, in their process of replication and variation over time,

⁸ Pizzagate is a conspiracy theory that centres around a pizza restaurant, Comet Ping Pong, in Washington D.C., that was alleged to facilitate the sex trafficking of children the basement of the restaurant with help from Bill and Hillary Clinton (Samuelson, 2016).

coalesce to form “coadaptive memes” (Shifman, 2014, p. 10) that replicate together and become more transmissible forming what Dawkins (2006) labelled “coadapted meme complexes”. Hans-Cees Speel (cited in Shifman, 2014) shortened this to “memeplexes”.

Memetic theory has been criticised for its view of the individual as a, seemingly, strictly passive agent in the development of these cultural units by several theorists in their eight-part report *If It Doesn't Spread, It's Dead* (Jenkins, 2009). I interpret this criticism as only partly valid as the individual may be primed for the particular cultural unit within a particular cultural environment. That same individual confronted with the same meme in a different cultural environment might not necessarily accept the meme and proliferate it further. Memes rise and fall in popularity, recur in new forms and disappear from public discourse based on the sociocultural environment in which they occur. The individual embodied self is a result of the culture that informs it. The self as agent of culture and simultaneously product of culture is at the core of the school of symbolic interactionists as evinced in Mead's (1934), and at an earlier time Cooley's (1902/1922), idea of the self “as a set of behavioural response tendencies that are coordinated with response tendencies of social others in the cultural community” (cited in Kitayama et al., 2007, p. 137). This, I contend, is sufficient for Dawkins' meme as cultural unit transferred to *susceptible* hosts within a particular setting. Individual agency could then potentially also be viewed, at least in part, as a cultural phenomenon but that discussion is beyond the scope of this project. There are a number of complex conditions to be met in order for a meme to take hold and spread. In the same vein, simply defining and processing culture in strictly biological terms diminishes the convoluted means through which culture is developed over time. Maintaining biological terms is however a meaningful analogy for cultural development which adequately illustrates the meme as “a replicator ... that conveys the idea of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*” (Dawkins, 2006, p. 192). The Dawkinsian meme is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. I introduced it here to give context on how 4chan generates internet culture beyond its own site.

The term meme has since been adopted by internet users and the idea of something going viral has its roots in Dawkins' original definition and example. The proliferation of memes on 4chan and their spread has had an undeniable effect on internet culture. 4chan is the original “meme factory” and meme format has taken over the internet at large. Today we see memes everywhere. Facebook, Twitter, and any other social media platform active today has a wealth of memes to peruse but this form of communication was popularised first on 4chan. The traditional format of top and bottom text over an image for humorous effect, or image macro memes, began on the site most notably with the first LOLcats (Figure B2). LOLcats resonated

with people beyond the confines of 4chan and evolved into its own website called icanhascheezburger.com (now simply cheezburger.com) and even a book, *I Can Has Cheezburger: A LOLcat Collektshun*. Other notable memes include ‘rickrolling’, a simple yet effective bait-and-switch where a user posts a link in a thread promising information regarding the topic at hand and other unsuspecting users click the link and are sent to the music video for Rick Astley’s *Never Gonna Give You Up* (Figure B3). The practice of rickrolling continued to increase in popularity and although exact instances of this would be absurd to trace it has undoubtedly become a mainstream phenomenon with its peak in the late 2000s and early 2010s. The growth in popularity resulted in a real-world scenario where a Rick Astley himself popped out of a float at the 2008 Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade effectively rickrolling millions of Americans live on television. 4chan, with its ability to manufacture internet culture from the fringe, had shown that it was possible to not only affect the direction of how internet users behaved on mainstream platforms but also to influence individuals and events in real life. More contemporary memes have embraced an absurdist rendition of humanity in the form of rage comics, which first appeared on 4chan in 2008. Rage comics feature premade character faces that represent various emotions. The ‘trollface’ and ‘Y U NO’ (why you no?) guy are two rage characters often used around the internet (Figure B4).

Forays into the Real World

The memes and humorous bits of the unfiltered internet are easy to brush off as simply youthful hijinks but there are many other instances where online activism being stoked on the site resulted in real-world stand-offs with authorities and individuals who had upset the 4chan community. Examples such as the Anonymous contingent of the Occupy Wall Street movement saw thousands of protestors march in protest against corporate bailouts and laws that favour the wealthy, the collective sleuthing to find an individual who killed a cat on video and uploaded it to the web – and the resulting hacking and doxing of the perpetrator are more serious movements within the space that had real impact on individuals (Olson, 2012; Wendling, 2018).

Other real-world events that took a more right-wing stance include the hacking of a billboard in Cardiff in 2017, where /pol/ users used the billboard to display nazi symbolism and other hate memes. A post called on /pol/ users to submit memes they want to project on the hacked billboard. In more recent times, the movement of ideas of QAnon conspiracies from

purely being an online cult of personality took a physical form in those brandishing Q flags at the storming of the capitol on 6 January 2021.

Anonymous

A subset of the 4chan community began to develop a more militant aspect with the increasingly present hacktivist collective active on the site, known to the world by the moniker Anonymous. The group had previously set its sights on the celebrity alternative spiritualist organisation called the Church of Scientology and made headlines for its incessant attacks on the institution (Kent & Raine, 2017). These online attacks, though mostly harmless at the start, demonstrated the power of a group of individuals banding together anonymously to affect real-world change.

Anonymous is a decentralised international group of hacktivists without an overarching moral ideology who have claimed cyber-attacks on various international government organisations, corporations, individuals, and most notably the relentless trolling of the Church of Scientology, called operation Chanology (Kent & Raine, 2017). Anonymous is a key example of the 4chan community's power to move from the site into spaces that would have otherwise been inaccessible to individuals. The collective strength of the group made itself known in a variety of very public events and with its online presence in YouTube videos posted across social platforms and played on news networks across America where an unknown presenter, wearing the Guy Fawkes mask – that features prominently as the disguise of a superhuman revolutionary in the 2005 film *V for Vendetta*, based on the British graphic novel of the same name by Alan Moore and David Lloyd – another embedded cultural signpost, issues their statements for attacks they've implemented or planned. The group's tagline, "We are Anonymous. We are Legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Expect us." is particularly menacing when delivered in the sickly green tones and digital noise of their videos. Although Anonymous began on 4chan's /pol/ and /b/ boards it has since developed into its own entity that operates across a variety of social media platforms and must be acknowledged as a distinct community; conflating the 4chan community with Anonymous is no longer an accurate portrayal of the group (Olson, 2012).

Anonymous itself can be viewed as a memeplex, derived from multiple cultural units compounding and replicating over time. Take, for instance, the Guy Fawkes mask used by members of the collective in protests and videos which originally appeared in the film *V for Vendetta* and operates in the Anonymous iconography as it did in the film: a symbol of freedom from tyrannical oppression (Alexopoulou & Pavli, 2021). The logo used by Anonymous draws inspiration from the United Nations logo although, unlike the world map in the UN's logo, the

suited figure represented in the centre of Anonymous' logo is often depicted with a floating question mark instead of a head. Anonymous uses these icons to reference itself as a leaderless movement with a worldwide impact (Alexopoulou & Pavli, 2021). The tagline itself references the New Testament biblical demon Legion, cast out by Jesus from a man into a herd of pigs, hinting at Anonymous' many group members – distinct, unnamed individuals but unified in mission.

QAnon and other narratives

Other subversive and often damaging memplexes such as QAnon, anti-vaccination narratives during the Covid-19 pandemic, and older conspiracy theories such as Pizzagate appear to take on a life of their own. They become a kind of organism that grows and replicates itself using the near-instant shareability of ideas in the digital space.

QAnon can be directly linked to posts originating on 4chan's /pol/ board and has grown in popularity on other social media sites (De Zeeuw & Gekker, 2023). The proliferation of the QAnon meme has led many people, including political leaders such as Marjorie Taylor Greene and Donald Trump, (Speck et al., 2020) down the rabbit hole of conspiratorial ideation. With famous American celebrities such as Roseanne Barr, James Woods, and Curt Schilling posting about Q or QAnon-related theories on twitter (Crowley, 2020), demonstrates the vast impact of a false narrative spreading from 4chan.

‘Free’ Online Communities

4chan, from its inception, held firmly to the idea of freedom in the online space. Poole, as mentioned earlier, praised anonymity and non-moderation as key ingredients to aid in the free, unfiltered creativity of individuals on the site. By removing what Poole deemed barriers to creative expression, namely registration and identifiable tags, the site's users can together evolve new forms of communication, like we've seen in the proliferation of various memes originating at the site, and test ideas and theories without the risk involved when one puts forward fringe ideas or outrageous statements.

Perspectives on Anonymity

On anonymity, Poole states that users are able to employ a “fluid identity” (cited in Ewalt, 2011), a kind of multifaceted approach to identity formation he further expands on in his presentation at the 2011 Web 2.0 Summit:

We all have multiple identities. That's not abnormal. It's part of being human. Identity is prismatic... We are multi-faceted. Google and Facebook would have you believe you are a mirror, that there is one reflection that you have, one idea of self... but in fact we are more like diamonds. You can look at people from any angle and can see something totally different, but they are still the same. (O'Reilly, 2011)

Facebook's Zuckerberg, in an interview with David Kirkpatrick for his book *The Facebook Effect* (2010), stands in direct opposition to this view of an anonymous internet and the idea of privacy by emphasising that "You have one identity ... The days of you having a different image for your work friends or co-workers and for the other people you know are probably coming to an end pretty quickly" (cited in Zimmer, 2010). Later, Zuckerberg adds, "Having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity" (cited in Zimmer, 2010).

Here we are presented with two motivations for the opposite ends of the internet user's experience: complete anonymity and the creative freedom that comes from it versus complete transparency as a moral imperative signified by Zuckerberg's use of the word "integrity". These positions, argued on vastly different terms, raise important questions for the idea of anonymity online. Firstly, does anonymity result in actualised freedom in online spaces and how can the individual enact these freedoms? And secondly, are there negative consequences to such anonymity?

To begin, Tim Jordan (2019) breaks down the various ways anonymity can be understood:

To be unknown but to be able to speak.

To be concealed when speaking.

To ensure the author controls what is known about the author.

To sever identity markers of the author from a media-object they authored.

To be and/or do wrong and be protected against the consequences of the wrong.

To have no face and to be able to speak. (pp. 572-573)

The core element of these expressions of anonymity is the ability of an individual to make utterances (including artistic and creative outputs) without themselves being recognised and, as a result of this unrecognisable state of being, to be free from the repercussions of wrongdoing. I add that you are free from the repercussions of doing 'good' as well. The anonymous individual is untethered from others' responses to their utterances regardless of the content or outcome of what they do or say. For most modern social media platforms, one must actively seek out anonymity. The status quo is that the connected individual is identifiable and if they attempt to avoid identification the implication is that they are doing something deviant.

The social standard is set and there appears to be, in more colloquial spaces, a sense of the moral imperative quoted from Zuckerberg linked to the idea of the anonymous individual as necessarily bad, which is not always the case.

Joseph Prostko (2020) offers a more nuanced view wherein the anonymous individual can be safe from potential bad actors in the space. For example, a differently-abled anonymous individual can occupy a space without the fear of being targeted by cyberbullies. Similarly, a closeted homosexual – either for personal or legal reasons – could find safety behind the veil of anonymity to discuss their lives and receive support from others in the group without incurring risk to the person’s career or freedom. Another benefit can be drawn from the case of Wikileaks, where anonymity offered Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden an opportunity to expose various governments’ bad faith actions. The irony of exposing individuals for their wrongdoing is not lost here. The point remains valid: anonymity can also be a tool to protect whistleblowers and allow for justice to be served. It also serves those who could become targets of oppressive government surveillance. Jordan (2019) goes on to highlight the very real security one derives from anonymity: creative security to experiment, choice security and being free to make mistakes, as well as personal security and judgemental security (p. 575). If anything can be concluded at this stage it is that there are benefits for individuals to be anonymous that are not associated with outright negative behaviour.

“Free-From” Communities

At the same time, it must be noted that the freedom from repercussions is also a strong motivator for individuals to acquire anonymity so they can behave in destructive and criminal ways. The practice of “swatting” is one such instance where anonymity can result in negative real-life consequences without the perpetrator being brought to charge (Olson, 2012).⁹ The freedom from responsibility is the primary issue here. If individuals cannot be identified, how do we prove and hold them accountable for actions they may have committed.

It is this issue that highlights my own view of these online spaces, not as free communities, but rather as ‘free from’ communities. The likes of 4chan, 8chan, and other anonymous social platforms tend to be free from repercussions – legal or social – outside of

⁹ Swatting is the act of a person acquiring a target’s home address through hacking or IP tracing and calling the authorities to alert them to fake criminal activity at the target’s house. The fake crime describe to authorities would usually incur a large response team e.g. a SWAT team (where the name is derived) in the hopes that it would result in the target being, at best, intimidated and, at worst, killed. See the recent discussion of the growing phenomenon broadcast on 2 Feb 2024 on NPR. (<https://www.npr.org/2024/02/02/1228541386/growing-list-of-public-and-private-people-are-being-targeted-by-swatting-attempt>)

the anonymous forum they frequent. Internal repercussions are present in the form of non-engagement and bullying on the basis of the post, not the individual. Secondly, they are free from censorship. Posters are able to say whatever they like for the most part due to the lack of moderation. Lastly, visitors are free from people who are different from them. This is the key to the power of narratives found on 4chan. Most people on /pol/ are there because they are disaffected by the mainstream. They are the villains of the mainstream media and have a space for their ideas to flourish.

A community with minimal opposition to damaging and false ideas, and a propensity to ignore and invalidate external worldviews is the perfect space for individuals within the community to create an echo chamber. Instead of the ideas being tested in the real world you find others who repeat or encourage the development of these ideas. Others build onto them and reinforce them within the chamber. Eventually, they leak out in a fully-fledged formal discourse that explains events in a way that confirms a subversive and potentially damaging worldview. These narratives are workshopped with like-minded individuals and become impenetrable from the outside. The internal development of ideas, reinforced through memefication, spread by users on other sites and offline, results in a form of toxic technoculture that is viral by nature and leads to real-world harm.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the key concepts surrounding the internet's development into a social space – from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 – and its profound effect on how we create and perform culture on- and offline. As Hogan (2010) and others have noted, the blurring of these boundaries has led to a merged existence where online narratives seep into our daily discourse, shaping our perceptions and behaviours.

I have also outlined the role of narratives, as proposed by Bruner (2009), as a central core to the creation and maintenance of an individual's reality, community and culture. In the digital age, these narratives are amplified and disseminated at unprecedented speeds, influencing societal perceptions and actions. This is particularly evident on platforms like 4chan, where the /pol/ board serves as a crucible for narrative generation and proliferation. 4chan is particularly primed for this task as there is little to no moderation and individuals can act without the fear of repercussions. Though the lack of moderation has generated much of mainstream internet culture, specifically the proliferation of memes, there is also a very dark

side to this kind of digital social space. Without these gatekeeping tools, /pol/ becomes the perfect environment for subversive and often harmful narratives to thrive.

The spread of harmful narratives from /pol/ to other platforms and their real-world impact makes understanding the site particularly useful – even necessary – to understand other forms of subversive narratives that impact society. The documented impact of ideologies stemming from /pol/ on political discourse, public health initiatives, and incitement of real-world violence affirms this. Examples of the real-world impact of the /pol/ community were demonstrated in the hacktivism of Anonymous, the proliferation of QAnon conspiracy theories, and antivaccination narratives.

I have also taken time to outline my own experience of existing at the site to bolster my claims regarding the way the community functions from the inside. Simultaneously fascinating and disturbing, the narratives I encountered were generated through a powerful selection process informed by the site's technological affordances and mechanics. The study of 4chan's /pol/ board and its impact on society underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of online communities. To this end, in Chapter 2, I provide a conceptual framework that is used to analyse the antivaccination narratives that spread around the board and made their way into the mainstream.

Chapter 2: A Conceptual Framework for Analysing Conspirituality on /pol/

Introduction

I am willing to believe that history is for the most part inaccurate and biased, but what is peculiar to our own age is the abandonment of the idea that history could be truthfully written.

—George Orwell, *Looking Back on the Spanish War*

In the complex, technologically connected world in which we live there are too many elements at various levels of society that compound to make the world knowable in its entirety to the individual. It is within these gaps that conspiracy theories and conspiratorial ideation are able to take root and develop as meaningful ways to understand and *know the world* which we inhabit (Douglas et al., 2019; Basham, 2019; Bowes et al, 2023). From the most mundane of beliefs regarding the function of democracy to world changing ideas that undermine democracy entirely, conspiracy theories inhabit our daily lives to varying degrees in news cycles and interpersonal communication (Douglas et al, 2019). The underlying beliefs expressed in conspiracy theories range in impact from being a morbid pastime for some while others might use them as means to make sense of major events in human history. The aim of this chapter is to elucidate the conceptual framework I use to understand and analyse conspirituality within the 4chan /pol/ community. To guide my understanding, I first define the concepts of conspiracy, conspiracy theory, and conspiratorial ideation using theorists in the realms of political psychology, philosophy and the social sciences to establish clear and meaningful terminology that will guide further analysis. Each of these definitions sheds light on specific dimensions of the individual who believes in a conspiracy theory and delineates theoretical boundaries for analysing this type of belief system. A definitional explication of conspirituality is necessary to understand the merger of conspiratorial ideation with the New Age and alternative spiritualist movements which started to gain momentum in the West in the 1960s. By developing these ideas and investigating the literature, this chapter will serve as a means to establish the core of the conspiritual worldview to later analyse within the 4chan /pol/ community. Secondly, I will introduce theories to understand why these belief systems, culminating in complex mythologies, are able to flourish on the image board /pol/. To this end, I give an overview of the theory of memetics, as originally outlined by Dawkins' introduction of memetics to cultural studies in *The Selfish Gene* (2006) and expanded on by Shifman (2014) and Wiggins (2019). In addition, I reference the in-/outgroup dynamics of social identity theory

as initially developed by Tajfel and Turner (1986). The theories listed here have been discussed in much of the academic literature pertaining to the transferral of ideas and development of culture, but their application in the study of conspiracy theories and conspiratorial ideation is inconsistent. By including these theories as tools for generating greater understanding of the phenomenon I hope to achieve a more succinct method of describing how conspiracy theories and conspiratorial ideation have coalesced with New Age spiritualism resulting in conspiratorial ideation at the site.

Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theories

To begin, conspiracy can be outlined in simple terms as a secret plot by two or more powerful actors (Barkun, 2003; Darwin et al., 2011; Keeley, 2019; Pigden, 2019). The prerequisite for conspiracy is *power*. Pigden (2019), illustrates this well by using the known fake document, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which outlines an international conspiracy theory of Jewish bankers controlling economies to their benefit to emphasise the need for power in conspiracy. He contrasts the powerful influence represented by the Elders of Zion and their co-conspirators who own banks with a group of the same name, but with significantly less influence on societal processes – poor factory workers in a bar, discussing their vision for the world, and even plotting how to take control of it. These individuals might plot all night, but, in the end, have no actual influence to affect any action. It is clear that conspiracy requires some form of influence in levels of society that most do not have access to. It is worth noting that conspiracy can affect multiple layers of society and at different scales. Power, though, remains the key to conspiracy. Furthermore, this power is not used for good. Conspiracies, according to Douglas and her colleagues, “typically attempt to usurp political or economic power, violate rights, infringe upon established agreements, withhold vital secrets, or alter bedrock institutions” (2019, p. 4). This goes beyond the small scale of everyday criminal conspiracy.

As we move to a definition of a conspiracy theory, we distance ourselves from the conspirators and towards the proponents of such theories as they seek out or fabricate *ways to explain* how conspiracies come about and are enacted by the powerful. With this in mind, a conspiracy theory can be framed as “alternative explanations of historical or ongoing events claiming that people or groups with sinister intentions are engaged in conspiratorial plotting” (Mahl et al., 2022, p. 2); and as, Barkun (2015) defines, “intellectual constructs... modes of thinking, templates imposed upon the world to give the appearance of order to events” (p. 114); and an attempt to explain the root causes of “significant social and political events and

circumstances with claims of secret plots by two or more powerful actors” (Douglas et al., 2019, p. 4). Douglas goes on to conclude that conspiracy theories, although they often reference governmental power structures, can be levelled against any “group perceived as powerful and malevolent” (p. 4). To make this clearer, a conspiracy is the actual causality, the powerful agents acting in secret, behind a chain of events enacted by powerful groups. Whereas the conspiracy theory is the suggestion, or accusation, of conspiracy that isn’t verified and could be true or untrue, that serves some explanatory purpose for the individual or group (Coady, 2018).

Coady makes a point to show that there is a problem with the broad way that conspiracy theory is described. He uses the case of the 9/11 attacks on America to problematise the different aspects of the definition of conspiracies. In this case, all of the explanations of 9/11 would likely include agents, with some power, working in secret to execute the attack. But the official explanation, which has all the same defining elements as an untrue conspiracy theory, is not labelled as a conspiracy theory. The definitional problem is clear. Pigden (2016) jumps at the opportunity to point out that if a straightforward understanding of the term conspiracy theory were to be applied – with all of the pejorative semantics associated with it – then everyone can be called a conspiracy theorist. Even if one only believed *real* foiled conspiracies that come to light, such as Watergate, and not fictitious ones like, for example, the USA faked the moon landings to win the cold war, if we followed the definition by the letter, one *should* be classified as a conspiracy theory believer.

Tsapos (2023) takes this further in what she has dubbed the “problem of self-identification” where, as suggested by Pigden (2016), everyone is defined as a conspiracy theorist if you believe any conspiracy has really occurred in history but, would likely not want to self-identify as one because the term is inherently negative. She goes on to discuss how research into the philosophical, political, or psychological paradigms at play in the conspiracy theorist’s ideological framework would be impossible to conduct as the study would necessarily include everyone by definition. The term conspiracy theorist is then essentially meaningless and any theory proposing to study those deemed conspiracy theorists would be useless (Uscinski & Parent, 2014). This raises another problem which Tsapos (2023) calls the “problem of theoretical fruitfulness” (p. 455). Tsapos has various formulations to solve these problems, but it is unnecessary to include all of them as Coady (2019) has provided a clear and concise version of the definition of conspiracy theory that suffices as a strong delineation between fictitious and real conspiracy theories. Coady distils the definition of a conspiracy

theory into: “an explanation that is contrary to an explanation that has *official status* [emphasis added] at the time and place in question” (p. 2).

Now that we have some definitional grounding in conspiracy theories, we can turn once again to the political psychologist Michael Barkun to understand different categories of conspiracy theories. Barkun (2003) found that they, despite sharing the qualities laid out above, can be typified by their scale of impact. He divided them into:

1. Event conspiracies. Here Barkun uses the Kennedy assassination as an example of an event conspiracy where conspirators “focused their energies on a limited, well-defined objective” (p. 6).
2. Systemic conspiracies. The examples used within this category are of a state or worldwide magnitude. Systemic conspiracies point to “a single, evil organization implement[ing] a plan to infiltrate and subvert existing organizations” (p. 6) with the goal of controlling countries or the world.
3. Superconspiracies. This categorisation of conspiracy theory is essentially the amalgamation of the first two categories where “multiple conspiracies are believed to be linked together hierarchically” (p. 6). They are complex by definition and ‘super conspirators’ – those supremely powerful evil forces – control lesser conspirators to enact event and systemic conspiracies.

The specific category of conspiracy theories I focus on are the superconspiracies as these often tend to be the worldview forming and ultimate meaning-making type of conspiracy belief that I have found on /pol/. The community established at /pol/ relishes in linking seemingly disparate events together and labelling super conspirators and their lesser conspirators as the agents behind such events.

Conspiratorial Ideation and Worldviews

The concepts described in the previous section, for the most part, are external to the individual as they don’t necessarily deal with the internal machinations that increase the propensity of individuals to believe in conspiracy theories and inform these individuals’ worldview. Therefore, it is required to take a more psychological turn when defining conspiratorial ideation. I begin with a look at how Hofstadter (1964) frames the underlying worldview that appears to inform conspiratorial ideation before developing a useful definition for this study. In his widely quoted essay on conspiracy theories, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (1964), he highlights three main features of the paranoid style which shape conspiracy theories.

The primary preconception of the paranoid style, as derived from conspiracy theories of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries Hofstadter studied, is “the existence of a vast, insidious, preternaturally effective international conspiratorial network designed to perpetrate acts of the most fiendish character” (p. 14). From this explanation we can ascertain the features present: (1) the content of these theories is international in their scope, (2) the conspirators are incredibly powerful – potentially supernaturally so – and have sufficient influence on worldwide socio-political structures to (3) perpetrate evil acts against the people of the world.

In Barkun’s (2003) construction of the worldview, or the underlying belief system, at play in conspiracy theory belief we see that three assumptions are present in almost all conspiracy theories and held by the conspiracy theory believer. Namely, (1) “nothing happens by accident”, (2) “nothing is as it seems”, and (3) “everything is connected” (p. 4). The first assumption removes accidental or coincidental causality from the believer’s world. In other words, everything happens because it is purposefully intended to happen as it does. This aids in the development of a more coherent and ordered world that is not present in the real world. The second assumption emphasises the secret workings of conspirators in everything where even the “appearance of innocence is deemed to be no guarantee that an individual or group is benign” (p. 4). The last assumption follows the first. If there are no accidents and everything is willed to happen, then there is a pattern to everything. And, because nothing is as it seems, following the second assumption, those patterns are hidden under disguises and the appearance of innocence, so the links must be uncovered and mapped to understand the “real world”. This tendency toward patternicity, or apophenia, is particularly apparent in the various conspiracy theory maps drawn up and circulated around the internet.¹⁰

Going back to Douglas et al. (2019), we can draw out the internal motivations behind the conspiratorial worldview and how these beliefs can take hold. Douglas puts forward a range of psychological factors, epistemic motives, demographic factors, and political factors that can play a role in the concretisation of conspiracy belief and ideation. Douglas et al. (2019), like Hagen (2018), view Goertzel’s (1994) formulation of conspiratorial beliefs a useful but limited way of viewing conspiracy belief. Goertzel (1994) in his analysis of conspiratorial belief in America, found that individuals who believe in one conspiracy theory are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories in general. This concept is his basic construction of the monological belief system. Using Benjamin Goertzel’s mathematical model of belief systems in *Chaotic*

¹⁰ Notably The Great Awakening Map created by Paryinka Champ (accessible from greatawakeningreport.com), and the Deep State Mapping Project registered under Dylan Louis Monroe LLC (accessible at deepstatemappingproject.weebly.com) which maps the ‘entire’ interconnected QAnon conspiracy theory.

Logic (1992), he develops the idea that belief systems can be monological or dialogical (1994). He goes on to explain that “dialogical belief systems engage in a dialogue with their context, while monological systems speak only to themselves, ignoring their context in all but the shallowest respects” (1994, p. 740). Belief in conspiracy theories can be a useful meaning-making apparatus in the monological belief system as it gives the individual a simple and “automatic explanation for any new phenomenon which might threaten the belief system” (1994, p. 740). The conspiratorial worldview is therefore constructed and maintained by beliefs that reinforce and provide evidence for each other – evidence in the sense that conspiracies do really occur and therefore gives credence to a worldview that has space for other conspiracies (factual or fictitious) to be used as explanations of events.

Hagen (2018) complicates the construction of conspiracy theories as a monological belief system on the grounds that those many conspiracy theory scholars (Sutton & Douglas, 2023; Swami et al., 2011; Uscinski & Parent, 2014; Van Prooijen & Van Lange, 2014; Wood et al., 2012) who have referenced and conducted studies which assume that conspiracy theory belief is monological. The monological belief system, as Goertzel (1994) frames it, makes it possible for believers to simultaneously believe conspiracy theories that contradict – e.g. COVID-19 is a hoax *and* that the Illuminati (or whatever shadowy organisation is most cited in the public discourse of the time) is using the virus as population control. Hagen suggests that the propensity for conspiracy believers to believe contradictory conspiracy theories has led to the incorrect conclusion that the conspiracy theory believer’s reasoning is problematic and potentially points to other deficits in mental processing. Hagen finds fault with this conclusion as the studies do not test *belief* directly but rather, as he quotes Basham (2018), “[T]he researchers conflate participants reports of *strong suspicion* with *settled beliefs*” (p. 64). This is a crucial distinction as it points to the difficulty of unearthing core beliefs in those studies.

Douglas et al. (2019), in turn, respond to Goertzel’s psychological framework and expands it with the following:

[P]eople appear to be drawn to conspiracy theories when – compared to nonconspiracy explanations – they promise to satisfy important social psychological motives that can be characterized as *epistemic* (e.g., the desire for understanding, accuracy, and subjective certainty), *existential* (e.g., the desire for control and security), and *social* (e.g., the desire to maintain a positive image of the self or group). (p.7)

The first point of epistemic motivation appears to echo the idea of a monological belief system that firstly, conspiracy theories give believers overarching explanations that are consistent with

their beliefs that do not produce uncertainty or contradict the believer's worldview. And secondly, as prompted by research conducted by Van Prooijen and Jostmann (2013), individuals are more prone to believe in conspiracies during times of uncertainty and social, political, and emotional upheaval.

The existential motivation is couched in the individual's perceived lack of control and agency, which Douglas frames as an existential need that is threatened in this case. The believer rejects conventional accounts in an attempt to gain some form of control over the narrative and "allow[s] people to feel that they possess a better account" (p.8).¹¹ This links quite well to Barkun's (2003; 2015) categorisation of conspiracy theories as "stigmatized knowledge" which I will discuss in a later section of this chapter. In addition, other research suggests that individuals who feel alienated from the political system and experience "personal unrest and lack of understanding the social world" (Douglas et al., 2019, p. 8; see also Barkun, 2003; 2015; Van Prooijen, 2018; Van Prooijen et al., 2022; Tsapos, 2024) are likely to hold conspiratorial beliefs as a means to establish a more acceptable account for themselves.

Douglas' exposition of the social motivations is quite lengthy, but a summarised version can be put forward as follows. Individuals tend to employ means that "maintain a positive image of self" (Douglas et al., 2019, p. 8) and conspiracy theories can assist individuals in this endeavour. The stigmatised knowledge of conspiracy theories can increase an individual's view of their own self-importance by their being privy to information that is special, hidden, often ancient and sometimes supernaturally acquired. This extends to the social group of the believer. Uscinski and Parent (2014) suggest that in-/outgroup dynamics become important to the conspiratorial worldview, where "a conviction that others conspire against one's group is more likely to emerge when the group thinks of itself as undervalued, underprivileged, or under threat" (cited in Douglas et al., 2019, p. 9).

With a worldview that is moulded from these ideas one can begin to see how ideation that offers a rationale that stands in opposition to the official narrative can take root and alter the individual's predisposition to disbelieve conventional explanations of events in favour of unconventional explanations. The propensity for belief in conspiracy theories is what has been called conspiratorial ideation (DiGrazia, 2017, Essam et al. 2019, Mahl et al. 2022), conspiratorial paranoia (Hofstadter, 1964; Coady, 2018) conspiracist ideation (Swami et al., 2011), and conspiratorial thinking or conspiratorial belief (Goertzel, 1994). These terms are

¹¹ Hagen (2018) referencing Pigden (2007) uses the term conventional as opposition to the conspiratorial mindset. Other theorists (such as Papakyriakopoulos et al., 2020; Barkun 2015) also construct this dichotomy.

mostly interchangeable from what I've read across the literature but, for the sake of cohesion, conspiratorial ideation will be used when referring to the individual's sense making faculties and the "tendency to endorse conspiracy theories or engage in conspiracist thinking" (Swami et al., 2017).

Hofstadter (1964) makes an important distinction when considering conspiracy theory believers as genuinely normal individuals. In his view, believers are not necessarily prone to mental illness but rather grounds the belief in a paranoid style of politics as noted above. He notes the key thing that makes the study of conspiratorial belief held by individuals valuable in contemporary social sciences is that it isn't *just* the clinically diagnosed paranoid who believes them or uses the paranoid style. Rather, "[i]t is the use of paranoid modes of expression by more or less normal people that makes the phenomenon significant" (p. 4). Hofstadter clearly explains the difference between the clinical paranoid individual and the paranoid style.

[T]he clinical paranoid sees the hostile and conspiratorial world in which he feels himself to be living as directed specifically *against him*; whereas the spokesman of the paranoid style finds it directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others. (p. 4)

Herein lies the value of scholarship in conspiracy theories and those who believe them. The everyday individual who believes in conspiracy theories is not mad and concerned only with the self but, in keeping with a worldview of superconspiracy, is concerned about perceived threats on a culture, nation, or way of life to which they subscribe and from which they get meaning and purpose.

Conspiritoriality

In the following section I will discuss the confluence of conspiracy theory belief and New Age alternative spirituality called conspiritoriality (Ward & Voas, 2011). In the explication of conspiritoriality I will demonstrate how these two belief systems offer a way for individuals to gain a holistic understanding of their environment. With this holistic understanding individuals are able to develop a meaningful way to interpret significant events. I will first explain what the concept is and then outline its origins.

What Is It?

Now that I've established some theoretical grounding for understanding conspiracy theories in the larger sense and discussed some of the key psychological and philosophical ideas around what kind of worldview belief in conspiracy theories forms in adherents, we can move towards

more recent iterations of conspiratorial beliefs – specifically that of conspиритuality.¹² Conspиритuality, as formulated by Charlotte Ward and David Voas (2011) in their paper *The Emergence of Conspиритuality*, is a relatively new phenomenon where New Age spiritualism and conspiracy theories merge in online spaces to form a cohesive model for understanding the world and large-scale events that affect the political and social lives of individuals. Barkun (2003) pre-empted a formalised theory of conspиритuality when he discusses the merger of belief in conspiracy theories and alternative types of spiritualism.

On one level, such ideas [world changing events signalling the millennial end-times] might be attributed simply to the anxieties of a deeply shaken people, desperate to make sense of the shocking events. On another level, however, these and similar beliefs alert us to the existence of significant subcultures far outside the mainstream. Surfacing in times of crisis and bound up with heterodox religion, occult and esoteric beliefs, radical politics, and fringe science, they have had a long-standing and sometimes potent influence in American life. (p. 2)

In the above extract, we see Barkun reflect on how some subcultures tend to hold similar beliefs to conspiracy theory believers, specifically that of great changes in the world order and the Biblical end-times as well as the previously stated connected, destined, and hidden reality that few have access to. These ideas are echoed in the literature on conspиритuality. Ward and Voas (2011) establish conspиритuality as a “politico-spiritual philosophy” (p. 104) that holds two core convictions. Firstly, as drawn from definitions and research into conspiracy theories that “[a] secret group covertly controls, or is trying to control, the political and social order” (p. 104, citing Fenster, 2008). And secondly, as drawn from New Age spirituality, that “[h]umanity is undergoing a ‘paradigm shift’ in consciousness, or awareness, so solutions to [the first conviction] lie in acting in accordance with an awakened ‘new paradigm’ worldview” (p. 104). The belief in a shift in consciousness and the hopes of a new, awakened paradigm in humanity has been echoed by many people over the past decades, including A-list celebrities such as Madonna and Oprah Winfrey reinforcing for many the idea that a cosmic shift in the Age of Aquarius will result in a grand awakening for the human race.

Importantly, the emergence of conspиритuality as an ideological framework has been noted as a result of the increase in connectivity to the internet around the world. Conspиритuality proliferates through the internet, as a “web movement with diffuse leadership and constantly

¹² Conspиритuality was originally coined by the Canadian rap group of the same name. Ward and Voas (2011) were the first to present it academically and define the theoretical bounds of the concept.

shifting areas of interest” (Ward & Voas, 2011, p. 104). Griera et al. (2021), Halafoff et al. (2022), Chia et al. (2021), among others, agree that the proliferation of conspiratorial ideas is linked to internet access. On the other hand, Halafoff et al. (2022), along with Aspren and Dyrendal (2015) insist that the merger of conspiratorial beliefs and New Ageism is not something particularly new. They put forward that the confluence of these ideologies has been present since the rise of the counterculture of the 1960s. Counterculture ideas informed by the growing interest in Eastern philosophies during that period definitely held some affinity with conspiracy theories. Take for instance the movement against the fluoridation of municipal drinking water Hofstadter (1964) notes and how New Ageists link the introduction of the chemical to the ‘calcification of one’s third eye’ – otherwise called the pineal gland, the spiritual vision centre of the human brain. Ward and Voas (2011) are not blind to the offline precursors of conspiratoriality as they name the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, the New Age movement, and the Australian conspiratorial and New Age publication *NEXUS Magazine*, stating that these and others hold the two core convictions of conspiratoriality. Though the confluence of conspiracy theories and New Age spirituality existed in many Westernised nations, the formalised codification of conspiratoriality as an internet politico-spiritual philosophy proposed by Ward and Voas (2011) is novel. Linking the development of conspiratorialism and the increase in individuals using the internet to share and learn new ideas is key as even Halafoff and her collaborators conduct their study and develop their conclusions based on the analysis of *online media* and specifically point to social media as a space for these ideas to proliferate (Halafoff et al., 2022).

Ward and Voas (2011) go on to explain that both conspiracy theories with their wide scope of how the social and political worlds function – the nature of everything that happens as a connected and purposeful plan – and the New Age alternative spiritualist view of the individual as “an integrated whole, with mind, body, and spirit subject to a common set of principles” (p. 103) offer individuals a holistic worldview “that contest[s] the political pragmatism, economic rationalism, scientific empiricism, and social dislocation characteristic of the modern age” (p. 103). This need for a holistic worldview comes as a response, they hypothesise, to the increasingly fragmentary social and personal existence individuals experience as the effects of a more globalised, industrialised, digitalised mode of being.

The behavioural scientist, Jan-Willem van Prooijen, acknowledges that the speed of sharing information has increased dramatically. This therefore increases the potential – often realised – of conspiracy theories to spread at higher rates due to technological affordances granted by high-speed internet. He suggests, that rather than technology simply being the sole

cause for increased belief in conspiracy theories – and I include here alternative spiritualities – he points to “a subjective psychological state that has been inherent to the human condition since the start of humanity” (Van Prooijen, 2018, p. 22). That subjective psychological state is one of fear.

Conspiracy theories are a natural reaction to social situations that elicit feelings of fear and uncertainty. Specifically, the more strongly people experience such aversive emotions, the more likely it is that they assign blame for distressing events to different groups. As a consequence, we can expect conspiracy theories particularly in the wake of distressing societal events (p. 22).

We can see how Ward and Voas and Van Prooijen overlap in their reasoning. The individual in distress is likely to seek out answers to make the fragmented and disrupted worldview cohere. This coherence can be achieved with holistic worldviews such as conspiratorial and spiritual worldviews which offer explanations for events that cause those inherent anxieties to arise or appease the psyche with the belief that these events are markers of a New Age in human existence that will lead to enlightenment.

Where Did It Come From?

I’ve briefly touched on the precursors of conspirituality in the previous section, namely the counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the growth of interest in Eastern philosophies and their influence on the New Age movement (Gauthier 2020; Partridge, 2004) and, mentioned *NEXUS Magazine* as one of many print publications that had a conspiritulist leaning. These all informed what has now developed into the politico-spiritual belief system known as conspirituality. According to Ward and Voas (2011) there are two distinct ‘generations’ of conspirituality. The first is before 2001 and specifically the 9/11 attacks on America and is typified by a few prominent individuals publishing and sharing conspiracy theories tinged with New Age rhetoric of awakenings and enlightenment to overcome the supernaturally powerful dark forces at work in the world. They name David Icke the popular conspiracist with over 20 published books detailing a hidden bloodline of reptilian aliens who run the deep state, David Wilcock who is most notable for starring in the History channel’s *Ancient Aliens* as well as being an author and speaker at various events, and Steven Greer who claims, among other things like his own abduction by aliens, to have given a briefing on UFOs to the Obama administration. Factors that likely aided in creating a receptive audience to conspiritulist ideas were the increase in individuals being exposed to conspiracies such as the

New World Order and UFO denialism by the American government through mass media of various forms (print, radio, documentaries) and the increased uptake of personal home computers and connection to the internet that bloomed during the 1990s.

The second generation of conspirituality Ward and Voas propose, is from 2002 onwards. This is when subcultures on the internet had sufficiently flourished to be active avenues for conspiritulist ideas. Now, instead of a well-connected few talking about alternative spirituality and conspiracy theories in published books or being invited to talk shows on television and radio, through the democratisation of the internet – the building of websites and launching of blogs becoming easier and more accessible to far more people – regular individuals had platforms to publish their ideas and amplify their reach. Increased reach and connection across the globe afforded the everyday conspiritulist to profess ideology outside of official means. Though there are still primary conspiracy theory and alternative spirituality celebrities, such as Alex Jones, John Perkins, and the others mentioned previously, with the introduction of social media platforms such as Facebook, 4chan, and Myspace in the first half of the 2000s, alternative viewpoints were able to become more present in the public sphere. Though, importantly, as Van Prooijen (2018) points out: knowledge of conspiracy theories and their alternative spiritual connections does not equate to belief in conspiracy theories and alternative spirituality though certain catastrophic events, as discussed above, do result in the psychological state of mind that can increase receptiveness to these ideologies.

Proponents of conspirituality share ideas imbued with four key themes, as highlighted by Ward and Voas (2011) and imbedded in studies by Halafoff et al. (2020), and Chia et al. (2021) among other theorists. Primary in this list is the theme of awakening. ‘Seeing’ the world for what it is – controlled by shadowy figures – is only possible through awakening from the dreamlike reality that has been constructed by mainstream media and political control of education and other public services. From awakening we move toward transformation. Once we’ve seen the world for what it is we can shift consciousness to change how we engage with it and bring about the new paradigm of human existence; a truly enlightened humanity. Unity or ‘oneness’ is another key theme that is present in a lot of the conspiritulist rhetoric. This idea links back to Barkun’s (2003) conception of conspiracy theories where everything is connected and the spiritualist view of the oneness of the universe. Striving for oneness is as much a mirror of how all things are connected as it is a goal for the movement to gain traction and take up the task of seeing all the patterns to illuminate the truth – for the task is too large for one person to complete. Truth being the last theme and ultimate aim of conspirituality. These themes and goals taken at face value are worthy, but how they play out in reality is often quite different

due to their underlying worldview. Truth, it seems, can be a powerful mover toward extreme ideas that result in real-world harm. For these ‘truths’, based on the assumption that something is supernaturally wrong in the world, can lead to drastic actions by the conspiritualist who believes their enemy is an ultimate evil. When faced with an ultimate evil everything else is less so.

Conspiritualty and the Millennialist Milieu

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

—*Ephesians 6:12*

The conspiritual battleground encompasses all of reality and is directly influenced by the core tenets of millennialism. Different strains of millennialism have existed in human culture for thousands of years, all prophesying an end of the world – or an end to the world *as we know it*. Barkun (2003) distinguished between two primary types of millennialism: religious and secular. Religious millennialism finds its grounding in messianic traditions of the Abrahamic faiths.¹³ Notably in the Christian New Testament Book of Revelation where the author sees visions of the end of time and where “[he] saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ *a thousand years* [emphasis added]” (Revelations 20:4;). Millennialist beliefs still form the bedrock of many religions today and informs a clear in-/outgroup distinction.

Types of Millennialism

Religious millennialism, as Barkun (2003) establishes, “came to mean any religious vision that saw history reaching its climax in a collective, this-worldly redemption. In this redeemed state, those who had once suffered would receive justice, and the poor and powerless would gain what had formerly been withheld from them” (p. 16).

¹³ It is important to note that apocalypticism has been found in many human cultures over millennia. The focus here on Abrahamic faiths is based purely on the fact that these are the most dominant religious beliefs in the world and is the etymological and ideological basis of religious millennialism. A 2015 study on the religious composition of the world found that Islam and Christianity composed more than 50% of worldwide religious belief and is projected to reach more than 60% by 2060 (Jenik, 2021).

Secular millennialism on the other hand distinguishes itself in mostly political ideologies of the 19th century regarding “ideas about nationality, class, and race. Hence the twentieth century was dominated and scarred by Marxism, Nazism, and a host of nationalisms, all of which promised millennial consummation to some group judged to be particularly worthy” (Barkun, 2003, p. 16). Once again, we can see in-/outgroup dynamics at play. Although both religious and secular strains of millennialism have flourished and continue to exist in the public consciousness, Barkun suggests a third type of millennialism that fits within the conspiritulist belief system as I see it. Barkun calls this third type “improvisational millennialism” (p. 18). Improvisational millennialism deviates from the religious and secular variations as it does not hold to a prescribed set of precepts or fundamental teachings. Rather, it is characterised “by relentless and seemingly indiscriminate borrowing” (p. 18).

The Improvisational Nature of Conspirituality

Conspirituality and improvised millennialism both have a kind of improvisational approach to the development of the ideological framework individuals use to understand the world. Conspirituality’s flexibility allows for individuals to patch together ideas from various New Age realms such as occultism, channelling, Eastern mythologies, paganism, and a whole range of fringe science and mysticism without having a distinct and prescriptive set of ideologies from which to draw.. Ward and Voas (2011) highlight an interesting concept, that of an individual’s belief threshold, when they suggest, “[t]here is no pressure to do anything but accept, reject or adapt information according to the client’s belief threshold” (p. 11). This idea points to the extent to which the ideology can go. Once the concepts reach the limits of your ability to believe, you are not required to go further. There are a multitude of conspiritulist paths that hold the core tenets of conspirituality but vary in their explanations and the depth and breadth to which they reach. A collage of seemingly disconnected ideas link to form the lenses for interpreting and navigating the world which is the driving force of Barkun’s improvised millennialism.

The appeal of these collages lies in their claim to provide holistic and comprehensive pictures of the world. The variety of their elements implies that the belief system can explain a comparably wide range of phenomena, from the spiritual to the scientific and the political. The combinations also suggest that apparent oppositions and contradictions can be resolved, and that an underlying unity transcends outward differences. (Barkun, 2003, p. 19)

Barkun (2003) provides two conditions for the development of such improvisational belief systems: (1) easy access to information that could be included in the belief system, and (2) a sufficiently weakened authoritative structure to allow for recombination, reconfiguration, or altogether new ideas to be suggested.

Conditions for Improvisational Beliefs

The first condition is satisfied by the increase in connectivity to platforms where alternative ideas are shared and discussed without the gatekeepers of conventional knowledge stemming the flow of subversive discourse. The internet has allowed for fringe ideas to proliferate into a lot of the public discourse, a list of alternative news sites and subculture forums could easily be acquired to prove this (Van Prooijen, 2018). It is of importance to recognise the vindicative power of seeing your own ideas, no matter how secret and outside of the mainstream, echoed by another person – even if it is on a screen.

The second condition is met by the waning power of certain authoritative structures. Religious institutions, though they still flourish, have lost some of their grip on the authoritative structures which might have prevented alternative belief systems from rising up in the first place. Similarly, authority of the sciences has come into question in recent years due to disillusionment with the morally-ambiguous pharmaceutical industry, use of nuclear power, and genetically-engineered animals and plants – to name a few points of contention (Douglas et al., 2019). Millennialist ideas from a wide range of sources that no longer require traditional verification from the mainstream authoritative structures are therefore able to merge to create new interpretations of the hidden workings of the world politically, socially, and metaphysically.

Types of Knowledge in Improvisational Belief Systems

The conspiritualist, as an improvisational millennialist, is free from authoritative interventions and has large scale access to ideas outside the realm of the mainstream. Such freedom allows for them to draw from the occult or rejected knowledge and the cultic milieu, both encompassed by Barkun's conceptualisation of stigmatised knowledge (Barkun, 2003; 2015; Ward & Voas, 2011). Barkun (2003) divided the varieties of stigmatised knowledge into five categories. I have paraphrased them below:

1. Forgotten knowledge. Ancient wisdom and knowledge lost due to some major factor such as the passage of time, cataclysm, war.

2. Superseded knowledge. This knowledge has been found to be false or less valid than newer knowledge claims.
3. Ignored knowledge. These knowledge claims are not taken seriously by higher authorities. For instance, folk medicine is often ignored by Western medicine.
4. Rejected knowledge. Claims that are deemed false from their inception. UFO/UAP abductions can fit this category.
5. Suppressed knowledge. This category holds claims that are supposedly known to authoritative structures and institutions but withheld from the rest of the population, e.g. CIA astral projection techniques.

Importantly, conspiracy theorists, New Age spiritualists, and conspiritualists all draw from this well of stigmatised knowledge. Often the suppressed knowledge category will form the catchment for the others as, in the event of an idea from one of the other categories coming into contact with an authoritative structure or institution that conflicts with the believer's idea, the believer expects the authority to suppress that knowledge for the sake of the institution's internal consistency at best, or evil conspiracy at worst (Barkun, 2003/2015). In this way, conspirituality as a worldview is self-supporting in that any alternative ideas presented in opposition to the conventional narrative *will be* stigmatised and that stigmatisation is grounds for belief that something is indeed being suppressed (Barkun, 2003/2015; Asprem & Dyrendal. 2015). Stigmatisation of certain knowledge therefore gives the conspiratorial knowledge claim some credibility "by implying that some malign forces conspired to prevent its becoming known ... The belief must be true *because* it is stigmatized" (Barkun, 2003, p. 28).

Another effect of the stigmatisation of knowledge is that specific platforms or outlets that allow – in terms of not censoring alternative or subversive ideas, and the community itself being receptive – stigmatised types of knowledge become enclaves for individuals who believe and profess those ideas. Anonymous online forums such as 4chan and 8chan have become such enclaves for individuals to share conspiritual ideas and develop a community of conspiritualism. In these online spaces where conspiritual ideas proliferate, an individual who is drawn to the site will come into contact with many other forms of stigmatised knowledge (Barkun, 2003/2015; Asprem & Dyrendal. 2015). This is similar to Campbell's (1972) cultic milieu in which the improvisational construction of beliefs was originally noted and quoted across much of the conspiracy theory research. And, because stigmatised knowledge is accepted in the cultic milieu, where the sharing of this knowledge is encouraged, the individual's own conspiritual ideas are concretised simply by other believers who echo the same ideas or through some other form of validation of the ideas within the community. The

community developed at 4chan's /pol/ board is of particular interest in how conspiratoriality is promoted and propagated there – by extrinsic and intrinsic forces – as it (1) is a relatively new yet distinct subculture, (2) has conspiratorial and spiritual ideological leanings, (3) has been shown to affect the mainstream, and (4) is mostly unmoderated and completely anonymous which allows individuals to cast off conventional societal expectations and fear of repercussions.

Memetic Boundaries

4chan is a unique social platform. Besides the site's particularly attractive power for fringe beliefs and subversive discourse, it is also relatively easy to access. Its barriers to access are extremely low considering other social media platforms of today. For access to the site to be possible all that is required is a device capable of connecting to the internet (Hine et al, 2017; Wendling, 2018). No additional barriers exist. There is no need for an email address to create a profile as there is no need for a profile at all. No identity or age verification is required, although a disclaimer does pop up when you click on a 'not safe for work' board that states the board is not intended for minors. As described in Chapter 1, anonymity is king on 4chan and is a hallowed aspect of the site. With all barriers removed, in theory, one can simply search 4chan, click on the link, and get posting.

This seems almost utopic and the closest to the democratisation of information the Web 2.0 movement envisioned rather than the actual "walled gardens" of Web 2.0 (Helmond, 2015).¹⁴ The reality of 4chan's /pol/ is that (almost) anything goes; including blatant racist, misogynistic, homophobic, transphobic, Islamophobic, antisemitic, neo-Nazi, and white supremacist discourses, all of which appear to mesh together and are supported by a core of various conspiracy theories and expressions of New Age millennialist spiritualism (Hine et al, 2017; Wendling, 2018). This hodgepodge of ideologies can be quite overwhelming and off-putting for a lot of general internet users. The /pol/ board has therefore maintained fringe status even though, as noted in Chapter 1, the site is incredibly influential on internet culture at large, as shown in Chapter 1. Inversely, although there are next to no technological barriers to *access the site* and /pol/, the /pol/ community itself appears to have erected barriers to *exist in the*

¹⁴ A revolutionary vision of the internet where individuals freely access and share information without the boundaries of place, time, wealth, and education. The reality of Web 2.0 is the platformisation of spaces sealing them off in walled gardens with logins, promoting in-app/on-site purchases, or erecting paywalls to allow platform owners to achieve economic gain. Platformisation is a useful way to dedicate services across internet infrastructure and ensure that businesses reach their goals of scale and maintain profitability but is far from the idealised version of Web 2.0. See Anne Helmond (2015) *The Platformization of the Web: Making Web Data Platform Ready*.

community in various other ways. I view it as a multilayered, semipermeable, ideological and sociolinguistic boundary.

Firstly, the boundary is multilayered as there are different levels of interaction on /pol/ i.e. lurking, replying, creating original posts. The boundary is semipermeable as it is possible to reach the next level of interaction while at the same time it prevents some individuals from fully engaging. Similar to the jumping on or getting off of the conspiratorial train at different points according to belief levels (Ward & Voas, 2011), each layer is ideologically loaded and the internal vernacular used by individuals within the community presents the sociolinguistic boundary to fully exist within the community. That is to say, individuals need to speak as though they belong to the community in order to be accepted as part of the community. Granted, the boundary can be overcome by lurking for a long enough time to understand the complexities of ideology and vernacular leading to graduation through the levels of engagement. But this process itself is intensive for the individual and they might drop off before ever identifying as part of the community.

This ideological and sociolinguistic boundary creates an in-/outgroup dynamic constituted by the various forms of conspiratorial and spiritual memes shared at the site. Nissenbaum and Shifman (2017) effectively show how memes on 4chan (their study specifically focused on the /b/ board) can create membership-based distinctions on the site, and Shifman (2019), in the vein of networked individualism, showed that memes can generate social connection and communality while simultaneously establishing division and performing boundary work. To better understand the power of memes to constitute ideologies I will outline Dawkinsian memes (2006) and then move on to compare the traditional meme with Shifman's (2014) and Wiggins' (2019) conceptions of internet memes to establish how they differ and overlap in the reproduction of culture.

The Dawkinsian Meme

In Chapter 1, I briefly introduced the concept of memes as formulated by Richard Dawkins (2006) and will focus here on key points of the theory of memetics. Dawkins' construction of the term meme is essentially a threefold play on words. First, the Greek root, *mimema* refers to a thing that is imitated from which Dawkins derived Mimeme. This was then changed to form a monosyllabic rhyme with gene, meme. Lastly, the newly formed word has links to the French *même*, or memory. The etymological references shape the way we can view the meme; that being a unit of imitation, or cultural replication, and at the same time a unit of cultural memory

– two key aspects of culture. Memes, therefore, are the means by which mindsets, behaviours, and actions of social groups are shaped (Shifman, 2014). Put another way, a meme is a unit of cultural transmission, the “cultural corollary of the gene” (Wiggins, 2019, p. 7) with the same role, that of replication.

Whenever conditions arise in which a new kind of replicator *can* make copies of itself, the new replicators *will* tend to take over, and start a new kind of evolution of their own. Once this new evolution begins, it will in no necessary sense be subservient to the old. The old gene-selected evolution, by making brains, provided the soup in which the first memes arose. Once self-copying memes had arisen, their own, much faster, kind of evolution took off. (Dawkins, 2006, p. 194)

Wiggins (2019) notes that memetic evolution offers the reliable and systematic replication that is necessary for the continued existence of a culture. This embedded existential concept of culture is an ongoing process as a result of “interacting, producing, [and] co-creating meaning” (p. 7). But as noted by Dawkins (2006), and later by Shifman (2014, 2017) and Wiggins (2019), not all memes are successful at replication. The replication of memes is conducted, in Dawkins’ example of the meme of God, by spoken and written word as well as other artifacts such as music and art. Dawkins lays out three general qualities of replicator survival: longevity, fecundity, and copying fidelity.

The longevity of one copy of a meme, that is the singular unit of culture, isn’t primary as shown by Dawkins’ example of the tune ‘Auld Lang Syne’. The tune potentially exists in the individual’s brain for their lifespan, but other copies exist external to the individual that have their own lifespans. In other words, the meme, like culture, exists as long as there are individuals that recall it and/or share it. Fecundity, or the potential for the meme’s acceptance into the individual’s brain or community at large, is however of greater import as this determines its spread – and is measurable to a degree. Copying-fidelity, as the third quality of replicators, poses an interesting concept that pre-empts Shifman’s (2014) and Wiggins’ (2019) “remixing” present in the internet meme which I will discuss later in this section.

If I share my own understanding of an abstract concept, maybe happiness, the idea is necessarily altered according to my own conceptions. Mutation and blending seem to take effect and stands in opposition to the “particulate, all-or-none quality of gene transmission” (Dawkins, 2006, p. 195) but is not necessarily the case. The individual meme is the same but its combination with other memes on a micro level gives it the appearance of blending. Certainly, mutations do occur, culture evolves and changes as it continues the process of replication, but Dawkins makes it clear that the *essential* basis of a particular concept (or belief)

is the focus. The essence of the concept is replicated and “the *differences* in the ways that people represent [the concept] are then, by definition, not part of the meme” (Dawkins, 2006, p. 196).

Another elementary but crucial aspect needed to understand the Dawkinsian term is that of coadapted meme complexes. The term was later refined to memeplexes by Hans-Cees Speel (cited in Shifman, 2014). These are memes which group together and reinforce each other as they are mutually beneficial for increased survival rate. The pressures of selection – those being the environment, host susceptibility, and so on – make it so memes are likely to survive if they have adequately adapted to and exploited their environment. Keep in mind that the environment is itself comprised of memes undergoing selection. Competition for the host’s attention and reception to them is extremely high (Dawkins, 2006). Through the process of grouping together, specific memes are able to reinforce each other and make it harder for other new memes to be selected. I put forward that memeplexes, as groups of units of cultural transmission, can function as the foundation for myth development. That is to say, I find the memeplex to be the strongest candidate for how to frame the building blocks that construct and constitute a worldview – to harken back to Barkun’s (2003) bricolage of belief in the improvisational millennialist’s belief system.

The Internet Meme

The Dawkinsian meme has been picked apart since he first coined it in 1976 (Shifman, 2014). Regardless, it remains a useful analogy for describing cultural development and evolution in this study. The meme, as Dawkins laid it out, “enables the conceptualization of concrete (songs, fashions, architecture, etc.) as well as deeply abstract (god, freedom, supernatural, etc.) ideational characteristics of expressions of a given culture, in terms of what it produces in order to constitute itself, recursively” (Wiggins, 2019, p. 7). Since the proliferation of the internet, the meme has taken on new forms in what amounts to digital culture. Shifman (2014) and Wiggins (2019) offer useful distinctions between the Dawkinsian meme and internet meme.

Wiggins (2019) defines the internet meme as a “remixed, iterated message that can be rapidly diffused by members of participatory digital culture for the purpose of satire, parody, critique, or other discursive activity... Its function is to posit an argument, visually, in order to commence, extend, counter, or influence a discourse” (p. 11). Although Wiggins study primarily focuses on the image macro version of the internet meme, he does acknowledge that memes can be presented in a range of formats, i.e. images, GIFs, hashtags, video memes, and,

here I must assume, in text and audio formats as well. Dawkins spoke about the concept of remixing that Wiggins points to as a key aspect of internet memes, as a directed mutation designed by the individual “doing the mutating” (Wiggins, 2018, p. 8) whereas the original meme’s mutations, as he described, are random. Mutation happens quickly and often in the case of the internet meme whereas the scale and speed at which genes mutate are much less. This is perhaps the most important distinction found in the literature; that the internet meme ascribes some level of agency to the individual who alters it rather than simply replicating randomly – both aspects, biological analogies i.e. replicators and human agency, are of particular importance to Shifman when overcoming the barriers to the uptake of using memetics in the study of digital culture (2014).

Remixing Memes as Cultural Awareness and Individuality

Wiggins’ idea of remixing requires that the core of an idea about some external referent (person, event, movement, or other) is maintained even while the portrayal of the content itself is modified to varying degrees. This modification while maintaining core ideas regarding a referent is part of the co-creation of meaning mentioned earlier. I don’t think that this distinction is particularly necessary given that Dawkins already mentioned how the differences in the way a concept is relayed to and understood by another individual, with all their own understandings and memeplexes at work, is not the meme. Although, the fact that there is an emphasis on remix in internet meme culture as a way of asserting your individuality and uniqueness is of note while also outwardly demonstrating affiliation to a group. The meme core signifies an author’s awareness of the culture at large and members of particular groups will likely be familiar with meme conventions, including remixes, used within that community. This is the social logic of participation and is the second out of three prisms of the hypermemetic logic Shifman (2014) presents as a way to understand the internet meme. The first and third prisms are the economy-driven logic of participation and the cultural and aesthetic logics of participation respectively.

Shifman’s Prisms of Hypermemetic Logic

The prism of the economy-driven logic Shifman presents ties closely to Dawkins’ original conception of the meme as he highlighted time and storage space as primary resources required for replication, using the analogy of computer resources where the computer the meme inhabits is the brain. Time is used here by Dawkins to point to human attention as the resource for which there is much competition. Shifman’s first prism draws directly on the idea that the economic system of today is the attention economy. Where “the most valuable resource in the

information era is not the information but the attention people pay to it” (2014, p. 32). The second prism, as noted above, is the social logic of participation which Shifman notes as linked to the concept of networked individualism where individuals strive for uniqueness and community simultaneously. The third prism of cultural and aesthetic logics of participation is far-reaching as it considers the cultural practices – and all the historical associations contained therein – in which memes arise.

This formulation of the internet meme sets them up “as sites in which historical modes of cultural production meet the new affordances of Web 2.0” (Shifman, 2014, p. 34). Shifman goes on to define the internet meme as:

- (a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which
 - (b) were created with awareness of each other, and
 - (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the internet by many users
- (2014, p. 41).

Shifman (2014), and Wiggins (2019) both refer to internet memes as groups of content units rather than, as Dawkins did, single replicators of culture implying, by my understanding, internet memes are themselves memplexes. In Wiggins’ discussion of internet memes, we find he takes it one step further to say they are “visual arguments, which are semiotically constructed with intertextual references to reflect ideological practice” (2019, p. 9). Both theorists also incorporate an aspect of the internet meme’s global reach due to the technological affordances available to individuals in the connected world. And in the globalised world, Shifman shows how “internet memes play a key role in contemporary formulations of political participation and cultural globalization” (2014, p. 172) and, by defining the internet meme as “a group of items with similar characteristics, we can study memes as reflections of cultural and social collectives, as well as the individual voices constituting them” (2014, p. 171).

Consolidating Conspiracy Theories, Conspirituality, and Memplexes

So far, I have outlined specific elements of conspiracy theories, conspirituality, and memes – and their collective form, memplexes. I have highlighted the contention and similarities between the definitions and functions of the Dawkinsian meme with the internet meme to develop a distinct framework by which to understand cultural development and transmission. The memetic lens constructed so far provides guidance for analysis and interpretation in respect to conspiracy theories and, in cases of their confluence with New Age

spiritualism, conspirituality. It is useful at this point to note how I see these ideas relate to each other in the grander scheme of this study. Three primary characteristics link conspiracy theories and memeplexes: cultural transmission and communal belonging, adaptation and evolution, and interconnectedness.

The aspect of cultural transmission, and myth making or myth proliferation, is primary in describing how conspiracy theories – conspirituality by extension – and memeplexes function. As I have shown, conspiracy theories, like memeplexes, within a group can help reinforce in-/outgroup dynamics through boundary work. They rely on mutually intelligible symbols and concepts to constitute a group’s culture. In other words, the success of memes within a particular community is contingent on “their fitting within mindsets or frames of social networks” (cited in Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2017, p. 485). The conspiratorial concept of the external, powerful other conspiring against a way of life, culture, or nation bands believers together in an existential battle of good and evil, where one’s ingroup is necessarily viewed as good. The conspiratorial worldview is a memeplex which acts as a means to create meaning *and* a way of existing in the world. Meaning in this case is developed in text, images, video, and audio through interactions between the individuals within the community, the various memes available to individuals, and the environment in which the memes and individuals exist.

Even within the community, the various levels of engagement and status of individual community members – their social status – is established and maintained by the individual’s familiarity and engagement with the memes and memeplexes at the site. This is what Shifman and Nissenbaum (2017) refer to as meme literacy. In the case of /pol/, clear norms and values are expressed in the different vehicles of memetic cultural replication: “images, texts, artifacts, or rituals” (Shifman, 2014, p. 38). /pol/ as an anonymous space offers no way for individuals to create a stable identity. Individuals therefore use their familiarity with the memes and memeplexes at the site, or meme literacy, to establish their connection to the culture of the community and demonstrate their adherence to the implicit norms and values shared by the community. Shifman (2019) emphasises the appropriate use of memes is key to demonstrate communal belonging as “one needs to follow unwritten and ever-changing conventions in order to avoid mockery and symbolic expulsion” (p. 47).

Memes and memeplexes, like conspiracy theories, in the digital age are able to spread and mutate quickly through various individuals remixing and adapting them. The internet has essentially become a large archive of global ideas from different historical, political, and social perspectives – a decentralised and global public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002). The internet as an archive of ideas supersedes temporal and spatial boundaries to create, in Dawkins’ (2006)

words, a concentrated ‘memepool’ from which individuals are able to dip in and tack on concepts to create their own worldview and express them in individualised yet recognisable messages in their social groups. The process of remixing and adaptation highlights the improvisational nature of memes and conspiracy theory simultaneously. The ongoing and rapid co-creation of culture is a hallmark of conspiracy theories and memes that exist in the social spaces of the internet. Adaptation of conspiracy theories over time allows for new memes and events to become incorporated in the worldview created at the site – granted that the new information is accepted within the community and survives to replicate.

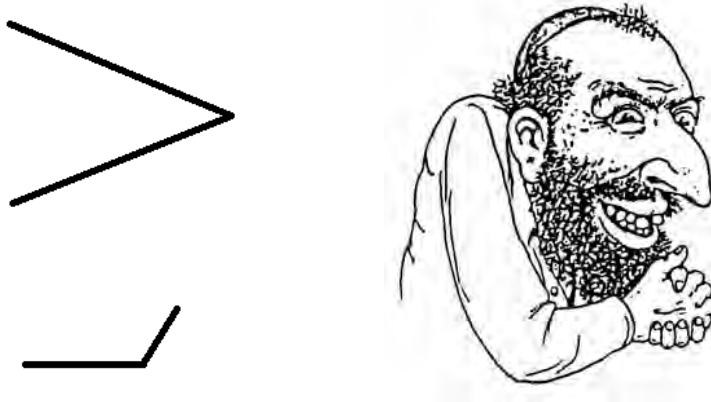
As a result of such mutation and adaptation, memeplexes show evidence for the compression of large sets of intertextual references (Shifman, 2014; Wiggins, 2019; Tuters & Hagen, 2020; Aguilar, 2023; Maurer 2024) brought about through the remix and co-creation process. Similarly, conspiracy theories rely on connecting various pieces of information to form a cohesive narrative to understand how and why an event occurred. The millennialist milieu, described earlier in this chapter, shows how conspiracy theories are improvisational and adaptive, and this formal distinction directly links with Dawkins’ concept of the memeplex and Shifman’s (2014) and Wiggins’ (2019) internet meme.

Ideology, Memetic Abstraction, and Conspiracy Theories

To illustrate the intertextual connected nature of conspiracy theories and memeplexes I will briefly unpack the internet meme of the Happy Merchant often used on /pol/ to signal the antisemitic conspiratorial worldview – following Tuters and Hagen’s (2020) use of the same meme in their discussion of intertextuality, although, to a different end. The visual content of the minimalist version of the meme is a few simple lines but references the original antisemitic cartoon in two ways. The large, partial triangle represents the stereotypical antisemitic depiction of a Jewish person with an unnaturally large nose. The bottom two lines represent the handwringing associated with Jewish greed. I have only touched on the surface level interpretation to show the meme referencing a prior iteration where the core meaning remains the same, but its representation is abstracted to the point of bearing almost no connection to the original. The connection is only visible based on the viewer’s memetic literacy thus reinforcing the in-/outgroup dichotomy. This brief analysis also shows how two memes, the large nose and handwringing, coalesce and compress to form the memeplex of the stereotypical antisemitic representation of a Jewish man. The image or symbol is the meme vehicle loaded with memes, i.e. ideas and concepts, which hold ideological power.

Figure 2

Minimalist Happy Merchant meme (left) original Happy Merchant meme (right)



Users on /pol/ might use the above internet meme to respond to or initiate discussion in a range of contexts, but it will always be from the perspective of anti-Semitism. The various memes that combine on this meme vehicle in particular can be connected to other aspects of the antisemitic worldview present at the site. Figure 3, for example, gives a very complex web of ideologies that all aid in reinforcing a particular understanding about the world. Inherent in the short text and amplified by the memes loaded onto the Happy Merchant meme vehicle are elements of Judaism, Christianity, and Satanism – all memeplexes of their own.

Edging Toward Conspiritoriality

Another example, and a step closer to the conspiritoriality of /pol/, is the meme Pepe the Frog. Over time Pepe has gone from an innocuous comic character developed in 2005 by Matt Furie for the online comic *Boys Club* (Wiggins, 2019; Asprem, 2020) to a recognised symbol of hate where Pepe was coopted by the alt-right and combined with Nazi imagery. The meme's proliferation across the internet resulted in the US-based Anti-Defamation League's addition of Pepe the Frog to its database of hate symbols (BBC, 2017). Not only is Pepe the Frog remixed with references to Nazism and alt-right ideologies it has also become a key religious symbol in the Cult of Kek which spawned on /pol/, as seen in Figure 4. In the following section, using the Cult of Kek, I will give a brief example of conspiritoriality found on /pol/ prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to illustrate how the community merges spirituality and conspiracy theories as a meaning-making endeavour.

Figure 3

The Happy Merchant meme used in a politico-spiritual context on /pol/

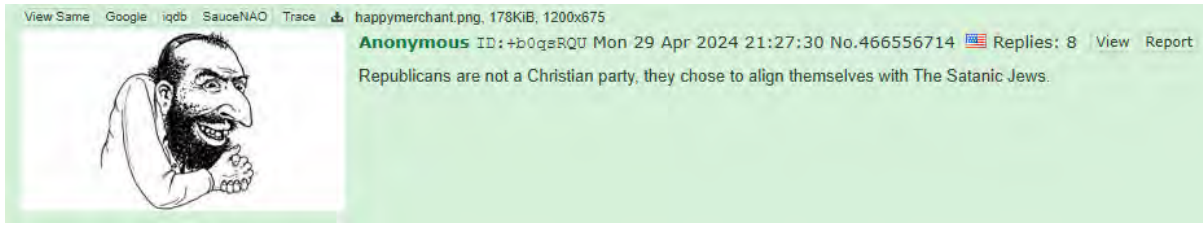


Figure 4

Pepe the Frog meme used as the symbol of the Cult of Kek and meme magic



Note. Sourced from The Holy Books of Kekism (Momjeans, 2017)

From Memes to Magick: The Conspiritorial Case of the Cult of Kek

Conspiritoriality has a long history on 4chan – on /pol/ specifically but also prominently on other boards such as /x/. Pepe the Frog is one meme vehicle that shows clear links between the conspiritorial ideation and spiritualism found on /pol/ in the form of the metapolitical, post-ironic Cult of Kek.¹⁵ Asprem (2020) refers to the cult as a magico-political religion. This appraisal of the cult appears to overlap with Ward and Voas’ (2011) description of conspiritoriality as a “politico-spiritual philosophy” (p. 104). The merging of political ideologies with spirituality in internet culture, specifically the creation and sharing of memes, is a gateway used by right-wing extremists to increase the reach of their ideologies (Asprem, 2020). In his study of esoteric fascism and the alt-right, Tutters (2020) notes that “the combination [of] anti-modernism, aristocratic elitism and Aryan esotericism ... is nothing especially new” (p. 287) as the far-right underground aesthetic has thrived in the “underground print zine culture for decades” (p. 288). This is echoed by Barkun’s (2003) inclusion of *NEXUS Magazine* in his discussion about conspiracy theories and spiritualism before the proliferation of the internet.

Metapoliticking with Memes

Metapolitics as a means to infiltrate and affect culture at the grass roots level – for “politics is downstream from culture” (Breitbart n.d.; cited in Friedersdorf, 2017) uses meme culture to spread far-right ideas into the mainstream and “was a key context for the emergence of the Cult of Kek” (Asprem, 2020, p. 23). One such case is that of Pepe the Frog and, drawing on Asprem (2020), the subsequent apotheosis of the meme which I will discuss next.

In 2016, /pol/ users began combining right-wing, politically-extreme content with the image of Pepe. The remix process involved appending Nazi symbology where Pepe would be represented as a Nazi concentration camp guard, wearing a swastika armband, and making racist comments and slurs. These memes were then shared widely across the internet to the point where the Anti-Defamation League stepped in (BBC, 2017). During the same year, Pepe took on the form of the ancient Egyptian god Kek, the god of primordial chaos and darkness (Asprem, 2020). The link between Pepe as Kek and the meme magic of /pol/ draws on a form of superstition and numerology, and ultimately a coincidence of 4chan’s technological structure. The site is completely anonymous, as described earlier, but posts are automatically

¹⁵ Asprem defines metapolitics as “denoting the strategy of pursuing political goals by targeting general culture rather than entering electoral politics directly” (2020, p. 22).

assigned a post number in ascending order. Because /pol/ is a fast board – with 150 000 posts per day (Macaulay, 2022) – it is almost impossible for users to accurately guess what their post number will be. This technological structure led users to engage in a semi-mystical practice that holds certain numbers, number patterns, and repetition of numbers as particularly special.

Manifestation with Numbers

Number patterns and repetition such as 123456789, or quads (9999, 8888, etc.), trips (777, 666, etc.) and dubs (00, 11, etc.) are called a GET. I call this practice semi-mystical because the “[t]hemes, memes, or users that frequently “GET,” or that just score many dubs and trebs, are considered special, allowing for hidden patterns and connections to emerge in the minds of users” (Asprem, 2020, p. 24) and link to a form of cosmic interference on the part of the user inciting meme magic. The mythological status of this numerological observance is built into the culture by the very technological affordances of the site. It appears, in the case of GETs, that culture and mysticism can be directly affected by technology. I take it further to say that meaning making in the digital age is directly correlated to the technologies that mediate our experience of reality.

One such seemingly miraculous GET was achieved with the post number 77777777, with the words “Trump will win” in the body of the post. As seen in Figure 5, the post was met with much community fanfare noted by the number of responses to the post in blue text. It is worth noting that throughout the day, users had been posting “Trump will win” in anticipation of the potential GET. This sparked the notion that Trump was divinely selected to be president by the chaos god Kek made manifest in Pepe the Frog.

The idea of meme magick, though present on the site for at least two years with the supposed use of meme magic to bring about the Ebola outbreak in 2014 and the Germanwings Flight 9525 tragedy in 2015 (Asprem, 2020; Momjeans, 2017), has since been a staple of the site and initiated the creation of the *Holy Books of Kekism*, still for sale on Amazon, by Saint Obama Momjeans. These books, really a collection of Pepe memes in esoteric garb and chan history, teach readers about thoughtforms, using sigils, how to summon tulpas and egregores, magick for personal gain, and casting protection spells. This is but a brief example of how esotericism, mysticism, conspiracy theories and memes collect at the site to form a unique worldview within the community of /pol/.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I have detailed several theoretical perspectives to develop a conceptual framework for understanding the development and persistence of conspirituality within the /pol/ community. I have found conspiracy theories, conspirituality, and memetics, to be useful as a multidimensional approach with which to analyse the cultural and ideological phenomena that flourish at the site. A key part of the discussion is that of conspiracy theories and their distinct categories – from event-based conspiracies to systemic and superconspiracies – as articulated by Barkun (2003). These categories illuminate the scale and scope of conspiratorial beliefs and emphasise their function as meaning-making systems that resonate with individuals seeking order and explanation in an increasingly fragmented world. I go so far as to suggest that these operate as modern myths within the culture /pol/.

The exploration of conspiratorial ideation has underscored the psychological and social motivations that drive belief in conspiracy theories. Drawing on the work of Douglas et al. (2019), I have highlighted how epistemic, existential, and social needs compel individuals to embrace narratives that offer clarity, control, and identity reinforcement. These motivations and the in-/outgroup dynamics outlined in Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory reveal how conspiracy theories foster communal bonds and delineate group boundaries, particularly within the /pol/ subculture.

I also developed an in-depth presentation of the convergence of conspiratorial ideation with New Age spiritualism. As Ward and Voas (2011) put forward, conspirituality as a politico-spiritual philosophy critiques modernity and offers hope in the form of a transformative vision of human consciousness and societal renewal. The chapter has situated this phenomenon within its historical and digital contexts, emphasising the role of the internet as a fertile ground for the dissemination and evolution of conspirituality ideas.

Memetics, as developed by Dawkins (2006) and expanded upon by Shifman (2014) and Wiggins (2019), provides a critical lens for understanding how ideas propagate within the /pol/ community. Furthermore, the concept of memeplexes demonstrates the adaptive and interconnected nature of conspiratorial worldviews. By framing memes as vehicles for cultural transmission and ideological reinforcement, I have demonstrated their centrality to the production and perpetuation of conspirituality within /pol/.

These theoretical perspectives provide the potential for a nuanced analysis of conspirituality as it manifests in the /pol/ community. Insights from political psychology, social identity theory, and memetics, offer a comprehensive framework for investigating how

conspiracy theories and spiritual ideologies coalesce to form a cohesive worldview that permeates the posts on /pol/. The conceptual framework laid out above will be used to explore the specific narratives, symbols, and practices that characterise conspирuality on /pol/ and its broader implications for understanding online ideological movements.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

During the Covid-19 pandemic, individuals had to deal with the existential reality that the world would be fundamentally changed for an undetermined amount of time. The confusion and conflicting information from various sources left individuals seeking answers to a range of questions about a somewhat surreal threat to life and its potential solutions (Constantinou et al., 2021). The information ecosystem at the time became saturated with any and all possible reasons for the outbreak of the virus.

4chan's ability to spread information across the internet, through various sanitation processes (see Velásquez et al., 2021 for an investigation into how messages originating from 4chan boards are traced to various other more mainstream social media platforms) makes it a particularly fruitful field site to investigate. After all, as has been shown in Chapter 1, the site was incredibly influential in shaping internet culture at large. Several scholars have framed the site as a "meme factory" (Colley & Moore, 2022, p. 13), one of "the darkest corners" of the internet (Coleman, 2014, p. 47) and perhaps the most interesting, as "the internet's id" (Woolf, 2016, para. 14).

The sites virality combined with the brazen antiestablishment, antisemitic, and anti-mainstream media culture of the community at the site raises several other questions. Not about Covid-19 or the vaccines themselves but, rather, with the prevalence of conspiracy theories of all types on 4chan, the researcher was compelled to investigate how conspiracy theories and alternative spirituality combine in the construction of antivaccination narratives within the /pol/ board.

This chapter will firstly deal with common challenges in studying 4chan's /pol/ as primarily highlighted by Colley and Moore (2022), Hine et al. (2017), Philips and Milner (2016) as well as Bernstein and his colleagues (2011). By delving into the challenges first, I aim to situate the overarching approaches guiding the research design. Furthermore, I will relay the data collection and data analysis methods employed and the ethical considerations taken while collecting and analysing the data. The chapter closes on a reflection on my role as the researcher embedded at the site and the limitations associated with my methodological approach. I methodological outline presented here, I find, is a sufficient approach to address the research question driving the study: How does Covid-19 antivax conspirituality manifest on /pol/.

Challenges to Studying /pol/

Studying 4chan, and specifically /pol/, has been a particularly difficult task for several researchers (Bernstein et al., 2011; Colley & Moore, 2022; Hine et al., 2017; Phillips & Milner, 2016). 4chan's site infrastructure, as previously discussed in Chapter 1, prioritises two fundamental concepts: ephemerality and anonymity. These two fundamental structural choices are the most pronounced barriers to conduct research at the site, as explicitly noted by Bernstein et al. (2011) in their quantitative study of 4chan. Colley & Moore (2022) found that the site structure also raises other challenges that grapple with the discourse found at the site and the construction of a consistent and genuine identity. The site's infrastructure is designed in such a way that posts made by posters are ephemeral and will be pruned expeditiously (Bernstein et al., 2011; Colley & Moore, 2022; Hine et al., 2017; Munn, 2023). Posts lasting only a few hours, or even only minutes, in the catalogue and permanently deleted from the site's archive within a day, increase the difficulty of capturing data from the site for analysis.

The challenge of anonymity raises additional questions regarding artefacts generated at the site as researchers cannot cross reference the posters' utterances over time. Even if a poster intentionally names themselves in a specific thread, the researcher is unable to verify if that is indeed the same poster encountered in a different thread – unless they are a *tripcode* user.¹⁶¹⁷ This second challenge highlights that the researcher is left only with the posters' utterances to determine anything about the poster themselves. For example, a poster might say something derogatory about individuals from India and simultaneously use a VPN that allows them to post as if they are from India, thereby implying that there is some kind of self-hatred in the post. The researcher needs to be aware that the use of VPNs, although not technically allowed at the site, can obscure interpretation of the material posted. And although the content discussed isn't specifically linked to geographic location directly, instances where posters engage in metapolitics or commentary on local responses to the pandemic, cannot necessarily be linked to where from the poster has posted. Although, Ludemann (2018) suggests that this isn't practiced often enough to pose a significant threat to validity. It might be employed in certain cases where a poster intends to troll the posters from that specific country like the example above. Those instances do not seem to be frequent in the data I have collected. Additional

¹⁶ As noted in Chapter 1, a poster can change their name to whatever they choose but because poster IDs change from thread to thread, linking a username to a poster across threads is impossible.

¹⁷ A tripcode user pays 4chan.org to have a specific alphanumeric identifier (e.g. !0eL1YTmci.) that remains the same throughout the site.

vigilance is necessary in analysis to avoid misrepresentation of the material produced by posters.

Additionally, Colley and Moore present two other challenges that are necessary to deal with here. Their research on /pol/ presented challenges regarding authenticity of posts in light of /pol/'s well documented use of irony and parody (Hine et al., 2017; Phillips, 2015; Wendling, 2018). Trolling and 'shitposting' on the site are common features of threads on /pol/ and must be acknowledged as such. That the site provides a free space for such behaviour is of interest and it becomes necessary for the researcher to abandon, to some extent, their preconceived notions in order to adequately analyse the material produced there (Hine et al., 2017). Philips and Milner's (2016) article describes a meme "law" of the internet called Poe's Law, which calls into question whether in such a site it is possible to distinguish between "sincere expressions of extremism" and "satirical expressions of extremism" (unpaginated). Either way, there are still people who believe those ideas which result real-world harm, in the form of amplification and normalisation of extreme and false narratives, results from it regardless. In my experience at the site, I have often thought the nonsensical approach to generating content employed by some posters to be indicative of a deeper anxiety, a thinly veiled form of existential distrust of authority or fear of society at large – discussed in a later chapter.

Within a similar vein, Colley and Moore have also discussed the difficulty of interpreting the language used at the site as it evolves quickly and is often extreme in what it espouses. The frequency of hate speech has been studied by several scholars (Ludemann, 2018; Hine et al., 2017; Phillips, 2015; Bernstein et al., 2011; Shuman, 2007) and seems to be a consistent feature of most threads found at the site. There are various creative words used to describe posters from different countries that are unique to /pol/ such as, "fucking leaf" to refer to Canadians, "shitskins" to refer to posters from Africa or the middle east (although even this varies in application), "burgers" or "Amerimutts" to refer to US citizens, and "poos" or "poojeets" to refer to Indian posters. Munn (2023) links the ironic and parodic posts and hate speech in the term playful hate that has come to categorise the ways posters present ideas and ideologies at the site. It becomes obvious then that the community's internal vernacular can only be interpreted based on repeated exposure to the words in different threads to draw out the context of the usage.

Research Design

The challenges outlined above prompted a qualitative approach with digital ethnography driving the overarching methodology with a minor element of quantitative data to guide my

selection of specific threads and give some context to the conspiratorial narratives that appear on /pol/. I have chosen digital ethnography as the method of study as it holds the strongest methodological approach to ascertain the ways the /pol/ community has constructed the Covid-19 vaccinations within the community and in greater society, as well as understand the link to the conspiratoriness of /pol/ users. My framing of ethnography follows Humphreys and Watson's (2009) definition of ethnography as "a written account of the cultural life of a social group, organisation or community which may focus on a particular aspect of life in that setting" (p. 40, quoting Watson, 2008a). And to this end, I note that the researcher's immersion in the community is vital to develop an understanding of the mores and norms of the site through participation that would not necessarily be achievable in more clinical settings (Hine, 2015) given the international userbase and anonymous nature of /pol/.

Epistemological Positioning

The investigation of how individuals construct antivaccination narratives at the site relies on the idea that individual meaning is constructed with relations between other individuals, their communities, their governments, and global society. This positioned the study firmly within the social constructionist camp, though as Stam (2001) noted there is no one particular camp and can be as diffuse a term as postmodernism when describing the position. The position applied here is already stated. But, to reiterate my stance, meaning is collectively created. Not necessarily in tandem but, because there is an external other, some meaning must be established in order to navigate the world. Meaning for an individual can be constructed in opposition, where one's narrative is reinforced in light of another's, or in agreement, where both narratives are reinforced. To be clear, I do not think that meaning and personal narratives can ever be sufficiently perfect in their relaying or duplication and therefore they cannot be *the same*. Rather meaning, when shared, lies somewhere in the middle, in the mutually agreed upon, or negotiated space.

I refer above to Hine's (2015) idea of meaning as a negotiated result between individuals within a digital space as a means to marry the digital ethnographic approach and the ways by which the researcher conducts ethnography within in this position. At the same time Hine emphasises that individuals on the internet, much like everyday life, even if they are simply scrolling, are active meaning-makers within the process of consumption of media. Finally, Hine also recognises that the meaning making processes afforded in digital spaces is unique. In the case of /pol/, the site dictates how users are able to engage with each other as

well as how their utterances and artefacts are housed on the site and engaged with by others. The site can be construed as an additional other in the process of meaning making. I discussed earlier and reiterate the importance of anonymity and ephemerality on the functional boundaries of site, and how this necessarily has an effect on the meaning making and meaning sharing at the site.

It is valuable in positioning the study to acknowledge that some scholars fear that if a social constructionist view is to be held as the final word on meaning as a negotiated construction, it necessitates, as Munro (2011) suggests, “succumbing to the humanist dogma that everything *is* socially constructed and only socially constructed” (quoted in Schwarz & Williams, 2021, p. 5). Dogmatic approaches such as these have severe impacts on how individuals view fundamental elements of society such as the implementation of laws and other moral frameworks. Although there is something to be said about this, the context of this study remains within the constructed realms of 4chan where “the goal of inquiry is to understand how individuals and groups produce relevant knowledge about their social world” (Shwarz & Williams, 2021, p. 5).

Further Justification for the Use of Ethnography

To produce relevant knowledge about the community at /pol/, the choice to use ethnography proved to be the most fruitful approach. Hine (2015) puts forward a distinct rationale for the use of ethnography to understand internet communities as well as the internet itself.

Unlike other research methods, which aspire to develop depersonalized and standardized instruments of data collection, ethnography celebrates the involvement of the researcher in the whole process of engaging with the field, gathering data and interpreting results. (p. 19)

As noted in Chapter 1, I have been a part of the /pol/ community, first as a dedicated ‘lurker’ in 2018, and then as an active ‘anon’ from 2019 onwards. Although recent engagement with the site has been specifically dictated by the research on which this study is based, I have maintained a consistent level of understanding of the cultural norms and vernacular present at the site. My familiarity with the general content of /pol/ and the types of discussions that evolve there allows me to develop a nuanced understanding of the how others at the site behave and establish long-standing ideologies. After all, the aim is clear with ethnographic research: to develop “thick descriptions” (Hine, 2015, p. 1) of the culture the researcher intends to study.

The research was conducted without disclosing who I am or that the study was in process. This was to avoid the often-volatile responses of users on /pol/ to external observation (Colley & Moore, 2022), this was the safest for me as the researcher and offered a clean method – by not influencing other users’ opinions or beliefs – for collecting data in a fully immersed approach. I committed to only observing the space and not engage other posters. This is not to be misconstrued as deception – it is covert (Spicker, 2011). I will expand on the ethical implications and considerations I have taken regarding covert research in a section to follow. Hine (2015) suggests that ethnographers who research virtual environments are “required to immerse [themselves] in the setting, and to try to see life from the point of view of those who habitually populate that setting” (p. 19). Boellstorff (2012) agrees with this sentiment as he suggests researchers should engage with the site in the same way that any other user would.

Following Hine and Boellstorff’s recommendations, I operated within the standards of the site where users post anonymously and are only identifiable by a randomly generated post ID – which changes in every thread – and the poster’s country’s flag based on their location. Although, as mentioned earlier, posters could be drawn to use VPNs to ‘troll’ the board with information as if it were coming from the location of where a big news story might be unfolding (Hine, 2017; Hernandez Aguilar, 2023; Ludemann, 2018). Although covert research is often derided in academia, by following the standard community practice of remaining anonymous I achieve many benefits that add legitimacy to the research. Mainly, overcoming any potential for the Hawthorne Effect to compromise the observations of users engaging with Covid-19 vaccine threads.¹⁸

Embedded in the community, the researcher is able to have “a direct, embodied experience of the field, and guards against a reliance on over-simplified second-hand accounts” (Hine, 2015, p. 19). To be present in a digital space as if in a true public square, with all types of discussions occurring simultaneously around you, is a particularly fascinating experience. And, as Christopher ‘moot’ Poole created the /pol/ board as a form of containment of extreme political views on 4chan, the method of ethnography avails deep insights into a consistently revitalised pool of concentrated discourse and ways of being at the site.

To bolster the validity of this study I have included an element of quantitative research. This quantitative data is secondary to the qualitative methods of analysis I employed in my attempt to answer the overarching research question. Similar to Grier and her colleagues

¹⁸ The Hawthorne Effect was originally noted in an experiment conducted by Henry A. Landsberger, where individuals being studied altered their behaviour based on the knowledge of being studied. This contaminates the study, and results are rendered less valid (Sedgwick & Greenwood, 2015).

(2021), I used quantitative methods, specifically gathering and counting threads where particular keywords appeared, to ascertain the frequency of those keywords over a set period of time. By first performing quantitative research I was able to find threads of interest within the large datasets collected to narrow my investigation. In the next two sections I will outline the processes for data collection and analysis in depth.

Data Collection

The data collection process was conducted through anonymous observation and without informing participants of the study at hand. The forum's global rule 4 informed the choice to remain anonymous, which stipulates that it is a bannable offence to post or request personal information. No logins or passwords are required to access the site, allowing users to remain anonymous. Furthermore, the anonymity of the researcher and the users of the site aids in the mitigation of harm that might come to the institution, the participants, and the researcher. I did not engage with any material posted at the site so as to not affect the community's discourses surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic or the Covid-19 vaccinations. I first began by visiting /pol/ daily during the period of 20 November 2023 to 30 November 2023 and used the internal site search function to find threads containing the keywords vaxx and vaccine. Although this was a long time after the initial Covid-19 outbreak and the administration of vaccines globally it still yielded valuable information regarding the general discourse surrounding Covid-19 vaccination on /pol/. The frequency of discussions about the vaccine had naturally decreased over time but echoes of prior formulations of beliefs and worldviews were still present. I screenshotted those live discussions before they were deleted from the sites servers and will be used only for a brief discussion in the final chapter. I therefore changed my approach from collecting this live data to primarily focus on archived data from the independently managed 4chan archive, archive.4plebs.org (4plebs).

The process of using the internal site search function for finding threads on the archive. The search function on 4plebs is far more sophisticated than the one used on 4chan. The in-depth search options included specific thread numbers, post numbers, user IDs, country flags and alternative "meme" flags (e.g. Kekistan), and time frame. Additional functions allowed for file searches, tripcodes searches, and image optical character recognition (OCR) which gives researchers the ability to search through images and find specific phrases contained in image format. This gave me all the parameters necessary to implement intensive searches of the archive. The value of this archive is compounded by the statistics available on the post rates,

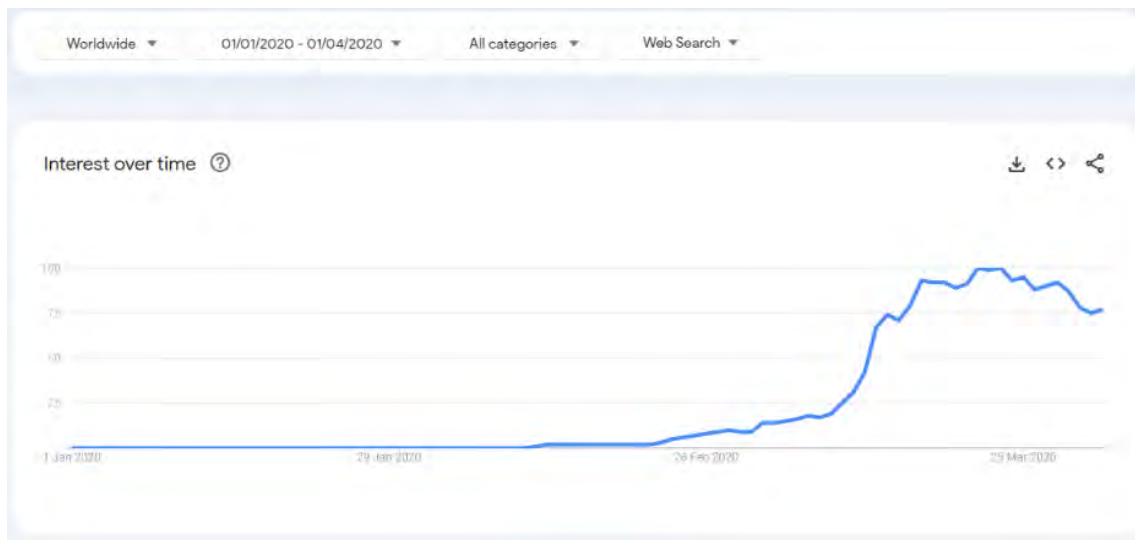
population, image reposts, and general activity on the specific board the researcher aims to study. Post rate statistics are updated hourly while general activity, population statistics are updated daily. Only the top 200 image reposts are available and are updated on a rolling basis.

I used the archives search function to search for posts containing the keywords vaxx and vaccination and stipulated a time period for the search. I did not use automated data collection technology to ensure that the data collected was not housed in any third-party application or software that could keep logs of data sourced at the site. This required manual search inputs and search results were manually reviewed. After reviewing that the posts contained the required keywords, I then viewed each post in their thread context. This allowed me to develop a close familiarity with the posts and common ideas prior to analysis. I conducted two primary searches for this study.

The first search was conducted for a time period of 14 days, from 1 March 2020 to 14 March 2020, using the keyword search vaccination. The omission of my previously mentioned keyword vaxx was due to the recency of the pandemic announcement and the potential for the search to yield other information not associated with Covid-19 as parlance had not evolved to include vaxx within the Covid discussion at that time and instead included a range of other discourse surrounding autism and measles. This period was selected to ascertain general sentiment regarding Covid-19 and anticipate responses to Covid-19 vaccinations once they were made available. The time frame of this search was dictated by the events occurring at the time. Covid-19 was making international news for a few months prior to this date, but general interest began climbing at the end of February 2020, with interest peaking around mid-March (see Figure 6) and several countries had already announced lockdowns. This search yielded 67 threads which were comprised of 13795 posts.

Figure 6

Google Trends report on search interest for keywords “coronavirus covid”



Note. Interest in the selected keywords is measured from 1 January – 1 April 2020. (Google Trends, 2024)

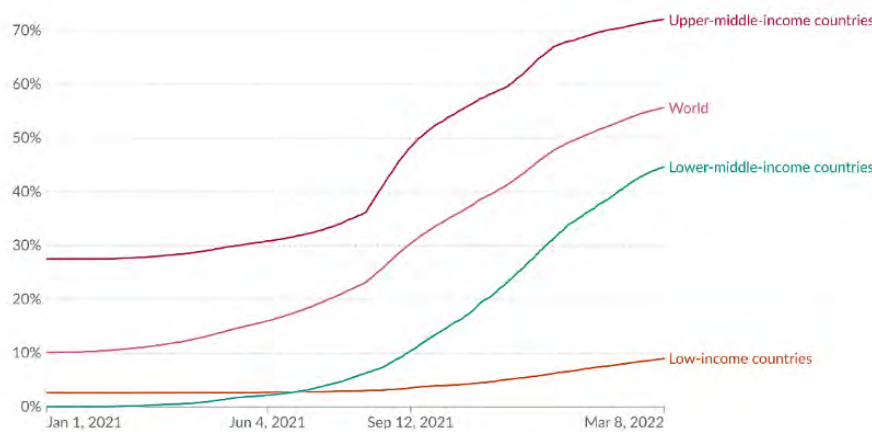
The second search was conducted using the keywords *vaxx* and *vaccination*, and the timeframe selected was between 1 October 2021 – 7 October 2021. This time frame was motivated by the global vaccination drives, where by September 2021 upper-middle, lower-middle-, and low-income countries had reached approximately 35% fully vaccinated levels compared to global population (WHO, 2024). Low-income countries lagged behind in terms of being fully vaccinated and only began an upswing after September 2021 as shown in Figure 7. By this stage both keywords were used in discussions on /pol/ as well as other terms linked to the news cycle such as “jab”, although /pol/ also added “the Fauci Ouchy”, “clot-shot”, “jabby”, among other more derogatory terms, to the growing vocabulary surrounding the vaccine – as is the commonly practiced sardonic twist of popular culture terms at the site – but were not included for the sake of manual data handling. The contracted time frame, seven days rather than the initial 14, was simply to make the dataset more manageable as the likelihood of vaccination discussions occurring necessarily increased due to the ongoing campaign and media cycle regarding the benefits and negatives of being vaccinated. This search yielded a substantial dataset of 395 threads and 65147 posts. A supplementary dataset was generated based on the same keywords but two years later, 1 – 9 October 2023, and will not be included in the analysis section of this study.

The threads identified in the searches detailed above were captured by printing entire threads to PDF. This method allowed for several benefits when it came time to analyse the threads and posts. By capturing the entire thread, I was able to view each post in its original

context, as they were presented on the original site. Additionally, I could analyse how individual posts were treated by other posters while the thread was active by considering the replies to specific posts even if they did not contain the keywords for which I originally searched. These were housed on a private drive and duplicated on an encrypted cloud storage service.

Figure 7

Percentage of fully vaccinated people by country income type and world population



Note. Originally presented on *Our World in Data* (2024). Data shown is from WHO.

Data Analysis

Analysis was conducted in two primary phases. First, I quantified the search results into frequency graphs to get an overview of posts and threads relating to Covid-19 vaccinations. I then moved to a more granular view of each thread by comparing the number of posts and the number of unique posters in each thread. By comparing these two variables I was able to develop an engagement metric in the form of a percentage and ratio to select specific threads for analysis. I took the user count and divided it by the post count and multiplied by 100 to establish a percentage that would guide more detailed inquiry. The rationale for this method was that threads with a 100% engagement metric would mean that each user posted once. This would be fine for getting a general idea of individual ideas contained in single posts but the richer and thicker description of the conspiratorial culture at the site lay in conversations between users, a back and forth of ideas. Supported by the measured frequency of particular ideas and calculated engagement with them, the depth of discussions produced the richness of data sought in qualitative research (Braun et al., 2017) To this end threads with a minimum of 100 users and a minimum of 300 posts and an engagement metric of a 1:1.7 minimum (60%) and a maximum of 1:3 (33%) were selected as threads of interest. Threads of interest were then read again and added to a shortlist where troll threads (as far as could be determined), meta-threads (aggregations of previous threads with links to the archive), and non-Covid vaccine threads were removed from the selection pool. This process was applied to both datasets.

I selected one thread from each dataset shortlist to analyse using thematic analysis (TA) as originally developed Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006). In a preliminary assessment of Braun et al.'s (2017) recommendation for sample size in different projects, I recognise that my media texts and participants are beyond the suggested size but still remain necessary for the study at hand. As noted in the quantitative granulation approach described above, I have narrowed the study to make TA feasible, though more time consuming. Following standard TA practice one I had selected threads from the dataset I began open coding the discussions. I took an inductive coding approach to base the analysis on what was present in the data (Braun et al., 2017). The data “provide the bedrock for identifying meaning and interpreting data” (Braun et al., 2017, p. 22). I am aware that this approach, although lead by the data, is based on the researcher’s interpretation and is therefore likely influenced by my “own social position and theoretical lens” (Braun et al., 2017, p. 22). During the coding process, I attempted to go further than simply describing what users in the threads said and link it to my embedded approach and years of engagement with the research site to add a level of interpretation and context to the

codes. Although some codes were simply descriptive (e.g. the code “attack on poster”), I did include an interpretive element for potential deeper reasons for the attack (e.g. “conspiratorial antisemitism”). In summary, my coding approach primarily used latent codes though there is an element of semantic coding. I coded each thread in this manner and then grouped codes to construct themes inductively.

These themes were refined over time while continuously familiarising myself with the ideas presented in each thread. The construction of themes was an iterative process in order to gain clarity of what sense I made of the codes (Braun et al., 2017). To establish an understanding of how these themes related to each other I generated two visual aids that demonstrated the patterns present in the dataset. First, I created a table of primary themes and their sub-themes as well as associated codes. Second, I created a thematic map, as a means to demonstrate the most proliferated themes and how these then fed into other themes. This process, though intensive for manual analysis provided the benefit of close familiarity with the data and therefore the ideas that formed the conspiratorial worldview at the site.

Ethical Considerations

Users of the site are aware that the forum and the independent archives are public but might still have the expectation of some privacy. The privacy of individual posters was maintained through the two platforms’ anonymising practices where users are only identifiable by a location flag (which can be obscured through the use of VPNs or simply choosing an alternate flag) and a randomly generated 8-character alphanumeric post ID, e.g. ID: SwR561oL, which changes in each thread regardless of the poster’s location or IP address used to access the site. These post IDs were used for archival purposes and when particular posts in figures and appendices are referenced. Any personal identifiable markers were mostly absent from posts and replies but, in cases where posters had included identifiable information beyond what can be reasonably understood about the demographics of the site (noted in prior research conducted at the site as white, male-identifying individuals, politically right-wing, between the ages of 18 and 40), I omitted such details.

The data collected was stored in PDF and text were inputted in a spreadsheet with the original post IDs, the screenshots, transcribed text, and alternate post IDs for appendices. This data was stored on a protected detachable storage device. For my own protection as the researcher, and the institution I implemented data collection external to the institution’s internet

service provider. I therefore used my own private ISP, a VPN, and a browser that does not use cookies or trackers to ensure the obfuscation of my IP address.

I am aware of the sensitivities needed in interpreting found data and that the meaning making processes involved in a fragment of found data “relate both to a phenomenon and the situation within which the fragment arises” (Hine, 2015, p. 177). I must, therefore, as Hine (2015) suggests, consider the myriad ways the fragment might be interpreted and will lean on my familiarity with the site, the internal vernacular, and the common discourses found there.

Harm to the participants, researcher, and researcher’s institution was considered with regard to; informed consent, privacy of the participants, the right of the researcher to access posts or replies, how the data was handled (stored, presented, or destroyed) in a way that does not result in harm, and the maintenance of my own anonymity. These ethical dilemmas are highlighted in the Association of Internet Researchers’ Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0.

The most likely harm that could come to this community (/pol/ anti-vaxxers) is ostracisation and is no greater than what is already seen in social circles today. The voices of anti-vaxxers are already proliferated around the world and this research poses no greater harm than their own behaviour external to the site and therefore does not require mitigation. 4chan.org and the separately hosted public archive are already anonymised and direct harm to participants is not possible as they are not traceable without very specialised equipment and technical knowledge. The study will not pathologise the individuals or call for the taking down of the site which serves as a home for the community. Confidentiality and anonymity are the primary reasons for use of the site and has remained so in the course of the research.

The dissemination of the data collected will not infringe on privacy or result in harm as there is no way to trace the posts back to the individual without having access to encrypted logs on the server which are regularly “pruned”, or deleted after the page limit is reached. In the case of accessing the separate archive, the anonymity of participants is still maintained as there is no way for the hosts of the archive to access the personal logs of 4chan.org itself. The archive is simply a repository of the already anonymised posts found on 4chan.org. The researcher will not have any live links to posts available so, any potential for external actors who might have the technical knowledge and equipment to use post IDs to attempt any tracking will not be successful.

Researcher Reflection

The key to an ethnographic study such as this requires the researcher reflect on the experience of being present at the site and engaging with the material produced by participants. This is to prevent the construction of an “artificial separation between an all-seeing researcher and a stereotypically unreflexive or insight-deficient ‘native’” (Hine, 2015, p. 19). I do not see this unreflexivity in users of /pol/, at least for the most part. The very creation of the board was noted as a move for containment from the other boards on 4chan when extremist political views began to proliferate the site (Hine et al., 2017). Most users are aware of this and although many hold very different worldviews to my own, the understanding of what /pol/ is and who tends to frequent the board appears to be quite obvious to users.

I am aware that, much like those on /pol/, I sought out reasons and comfort during the Covid-19 pandemic by researching the causes behind the outbreak in order to make sense of the event. I found myself sometimes reaching for conspiracy theories to make sense of what was happening around me and fill in the gaps between the information delivered by mass media and the nagging questions that remained unanswered. This is in line with what Douglas et al. (2017), van Prooijen (2018), and Ward and Voas (2011) put forward in their work where individuals attempt to mitigate harm brought on through the experience of adverse emotions during states societal uncertainty.

Throughout this study, my experience of being othered for my sexuality, my vaccination status, my unspiritual worldview in light of the views expressed so frequently by other users – and with such force – left me questioning aspects of my beliefs and existence offline. These existential quandaries seemed to mirror what some users expressed online at the site – the state of uncertainty – and prompted more consistent reflection and deeper research into the claims presented in the posts. Through analysing the constructed worldviews presented in the posts I realised that though these individuals presented their ideas with hate, that, like me, they were only seeking out ways to make meaning of the experiences they were going through.

It is for that reason that I stipulated at the start of this thesis that I do not attempt to pathologise the individuals who make these statements and come to alternative conclusions regarding how the world functions. My primary aim is to prevent harm from spilling over into other social platforms and everyday life through describing how such worldviews are constructed. From the findings, I hope that individuals will be able to see that ways of being in the world can be heavily influenced by uncertainty, fear, and lack of hope to reflect on their meaning making processes.

Chapter Conclusion

In conclusion, the methodological approach adopted in this study, grounded in digital ethnography and thematic analysis, has been carefully designed to address the unique challenges posed by 4chan's /pol/ board. In developing an analysis of how /pol/ manifests antivax conspirituality structural aspects need to be considered. The structural features of ephemerality and anonymity, combined with the board's dynamic vernacular and ironic discourse, necessitated an immersive and adaptive research strategy. Covert ethnography enabled authentic engagement with the community while mitigating potential disruptions to its natural discourse (Hine, 2015; Boellstorff, 2012).

The integration of quantitative methods provided a broader contextual understanding of conspiritual narratives within /pol/, while qualitative analysis allowed for the nuanced exploration of meaning-making processes. The iterative coding and theme refinement process adhered to Braun et al.'s (2017) guidelines, ensuring a rigorous examination of the data. By prioritising the anonymity of participants and aligning with ethical guidelines, the study upholds both research integrity and participant protection.

Reflections on methodological challenges and choices offer a robust foundation for the subsequent analysis of conspiritual narratives. The insights gained here will inform a deeper understanding of how users on /pol/ construct their worldviews, providing a crucial lens through which to examine the interplay between conspiracy theories and alternative spirituality.

Chapter 4: Data and Analysis – Thread 1

Introduction

To adequately develop an understanding of the ways in which Covid-19 antivax conspiratoriality is portrayed within the /pol/ community I developed a series of themes using thematic analysis for two threads found at the site. The threads chosen were based on a quantitative overview of the datasets collected in two distinct timeframes – Dataset 1 and Dataset 2. The ethnographic approach defined by Hine (2015) – that of being embedded, embodied, and everyday – allowed me to exist as any other anonymous user would at the site, taking in the mundanity of existing at the site, being present, and situated within the /pol/ community. I consumed material, in large quantities, produced by other posters in order to gain relevant insights into the culture, discourses, and ways of being demonstrated by posters of the /pol/ board.

The process of coding the discussions, quantifying the codes, and developing themes from the codes established from the chosen threads allowed for an understanding of the most common ideas and trending discourse surrounding the construction of antivax conspiratoriality. This chapter will first recap the process and benefits of thematic analysis as a complementary method within ethnographic practice to understand the complex discourses present on /pol/. Following this explication, I will outline the themes and subthemes generated based on the posts in the threads. The results follow in two sections, one for each thread as they present different but overlapping themes that bear significance in this study. The details of each thread are visualised in Table 1.

Table 1

Overview of Selected Threads

Thread number	Date	Post count	Image count	Unique posters	Thread ID	Thread subject
Thread 1	01-Mar-2020	307	52	185	245953945	Ohnonononono.....
Thread 2	07-Oct-2021	347	56	120	342433327	Mark of the Beast Schizo Thread

Thematic Analysis Process

Braun and Clarke (2006) present a six-step approach to thematic analysis; namely, familiarisation with the data, code generation, theme identification, revision of themes, theme naming and definition, report production (Naeem et al., 2023). I started my data collection

process with a period of embedded time at the site to build understanding of how a user might exist on /pol/. Time set aside for embeddedness allowed space for me to exist as other users do (Hine, 2015; Boellstorff, 2012). This was followed by keyword searches (outlined in the previous chapter) and gathering data applicable to the study. I proceeded with deep engagement with the collected data – in the form of extensive cataloguing of posts and images – to build familiarisation with ideas at the site. Although I did not post my own opinions on threads, I read user posts extensively and observed the development of discussions in threads that revealed the posters' myriad constructions of the pandemic and the Covid-19 vaccine. This approach provided up-to-date knowledge of the community and culture created and maintained on /pol/. In total, I collected 462 threads with a poster count of 39786 in the data pool.¹⁹ From these initial threads, I went through a selection process to focus on two threads specifically. One from Dataset 1 where the timeframe was set at 1 March 2020 – 14 March 2020, and the other from Dataset 2, 1 October 2021 – 7 October 2021. The rationale behind these dates is detailed in the previous chapter. The same process of thematic analysis was applied to both threads for consistency and comparative benefits across those distinct time periods.

The analytical process began with coding the posts in the thread. This approach allows researchers to identify initial patterns in the data (Braun et al., 2017). Most posts had multiple codes applied as discussions were dense in regard to individual's theories and ideas surrounding the vaccine. The codes were developed inductively which follows a bottom-up approach, where the data itself, rather than theory, is the "bedrock for identifying meaning and interpreting data" (Braun et al., 2017, p. 22). Although, as Braun and her colleagues note, the researcher is never a blank slate and therefore brings their own theoretical understanding to bear on the research. Nonetheless, this process remains a data-led approach to analysis. The coding process was iterative, and used a combination of semantic and latent codes, with the latter as primary in the coding process.

Once the final codes were generated, I then moved to construct themes from the codes. This process followed a similar iterative process where codes were grouped within thematic boundaries. These boundaries changed over three iterations and, after reflection on how the patterns were identified in the data, I settled on the construction of primary and subthemes. This iterative approach prevented me from simply generating themes I wanted to find and allowed a more nuanced understanding of the data which added necessary validity to the study.

¹⁹ The poster count was spread across the various threads collected over time. "Unique posters" was used when counting individual posters in a single thread.

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to the explication of the themes constructed from the coded data in Thread 1. As is the procedure with writing up the thematic analysis reports, quotations are used to give deeper contextual understanding for the reader and researcher (Braun et al., 2017). Quotations in the form of user posts will be used to illustrate how these themes are present in the community discussions surrounding the Covid-19 vaccine. Quoted posts are represented as they are on the /pol/ board. Poster names (automatically “Anonymous”) are included, as when a poster actively changes their name it is likely to say something about the thread, the poster themselves, or other posters. Although this is not frequent, it provides metacommentary within the thread. I have included poster IDs (e.g. tMoY1Ibm), posting time, “Quoted By” post numbers, and reply post numbers as a means to contextualise the posts included in the analysis. The various elements of posts all function to show who, as in actual posters in the thread, engages with which posts and demonstrates the speed, as well as the complexity of discussions within the community. The themes constructed from the coded data demonstrate how conspiracy theories and alternative spiritualities manifest at the site as a means to construct and validate the worldviews present within the /pol/ community. Some themes are subsidiary to the overarching research question but hold weight when detailing the conspiritual aspects of the culture at the site.

Thread Analysis Summary

This section is presented in two parts. Firstly, I will present the frequency of specific codes found in the data and discuss the context of the thread. Secondly, I will detail the themes and subthemes constructed based on the discussions within the thread. Following this, I will breakdown the five primary themes and their definitions with reference to quotations from the posts. Secondary information in the form of memes and image files uploaded alongside text will be used to further establish meaning from individual posts. The thread (thread ID: 245953945) contained 307 posts and 185 unique posters. The codes generated varied in frequency from 1 – 41 instances of each code. The top ten codes and their frequencies are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2*Thread 1 code frequency*

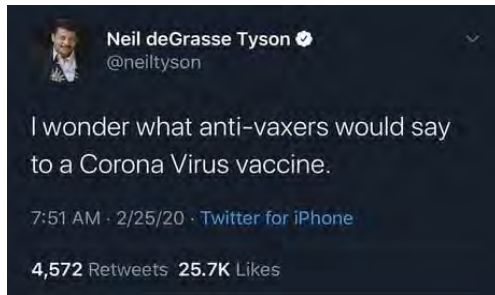
Codes	Frequency
Attack on poster	41
Black directed racism	33
General antivax	30
Antisemitism - bad faith, degenerate, subvert society, control	26
Dislike of original author/source	19
Conspiratorial – untested/unsafe and (((they))) know (Big Pharma)	17
Pointing out inconsistency in a poster’s logic	12
Appeal to science (official narrative)	11
Implied conspiratorial - Jews want to harm you (((they)))	11
Provaccination	10

Contextualisation of Thread 1

The thread was started by an anonymous poster on 1 March 2020 with a screenshot of a Tweet from the well-known science communicator and physicist, Neil deGrasse Tyson (Figure 8). The accompanying text in the post read “... he dint call out the Karens....”. The thread, like most threads in the 4chan ecosystem, was highly charged with overwhelmingly direct hate towards any non-white people, and in this case, specifically non-white scientists. The text of the original post portrayed a form of caricatured speech of African Americans. The thread itself came as the news cycle began its consistent reporting of Covid-19 around the world and just before many countries announced lockdown measures to curb the spread of the virus. The increased presence of Covid-19 in the news cycle translated into greater interest in the topic and internet search frequency as seen in the Google Trends graph using the keywords “coronavirus covid” and a time frame of 1 January 2020 – 1 April 2020 (see Figure 6, Chapter 3).

Figure 8

Tweet from Neil DeGrasse Tyson reposted on /pol/



Thematic Analysis of Thread 1

The coding process involved reading through the selected thread multiple times in order to generate initial codes for elements of each post in the thread. Examples of codes used in the formation of these themes and exemplar quotes from the data are visualised in Table 3. Instances where double greater-than symbols (>>) are used signal reply posts and link posters to that post. The nine digit number after the double greater than symbols is the post ID the post in question is replying to. In cases where a single greater-than symbol (>) is used, it signifies a quote from another poster. These quotes are automatically made green by the 4chan site system to signal a quote. *Green texting* is a common practice used within the community to tell stories, quote another poster, or to show a *copy-pasta*.²⁰ Green text quotes are often not direct quotations of the poster being quoted – though they can be. In this thread, a combination of direct quotes as well as paraphrased, essentialised versions of the other posters' words were used to insult other posters' ideas.

²⁰ A copy-pasta is any data (usually a block of text) that is copied and pasted repeatedly across various platforms or, in the case of 4chan, across different boards and threads. It is not to be confused for spamming (KnowYourMeme).

Table 3*Thread 1 code examples, themes, and exemplar quotes.*

Code examples	Theme	Exemplar quote
Black directed racism; implied black directed racism; races are different species; xenophobia; antisemitism.	Racial and ethnic prejudice	>>245967221 No..no it's not necessary actually. It's bullshit and I'm not taking any kike shots understand? I've had chicken pox and shingles and it was a minor inconvenience, no kike shot required. Measles is similar, nice pilpul there kike, disinfo through half truth. The only reason for the recurrence is the importation of 3rd world trash... 1st world living conditions eradicated measles.
Manufactured virus/bioweapon; untested/unsafe; big pharma; population control; information control; Jews want to harm you; (((they))).	Conspiratorial ideation	>>245955058 This. >Intentionally terrify the world public >Let it spread nad fester for maximum fear >Offer vaccine for saving >Instant access to inject the entire worlds population with whatever the fuck you want. Hell the fuck no.
Mercury in vaccines, aluminium in vaccines, enzymes in vaccines, documented adverse effects of other vaccines, just a flu (severity), provaccination	Vaccine sentiment	>>245953945 That it's barely tested and more likely to kill you than the virus? The SARS vaccine straight up killed motherfuckers Dumb Fucking science nigger
Attack on poster; 4chan is a place for the delusional/antisocial; implying poster is a shill; distrust in other poster's source/information.	Forum identity construction and maintenance	These fucking nuniggers on /pol/ haven't got a clue mate. We've seen the annihilation of diseases that used to ravage the human race but some weakly built, poor gened mutt mutt had a bad reaction 25 years ago so "VACCINES BAD!". /pol/ is normie nigger tier at this point. The U.S education system hasn't changed, they just have access to more information to confuse their normie minds. Some of those normies pretend not to be normies and come here for a LARP. And that is who you're seeing in this thread.
Mark of the beast reference; child sacrifice reference; organic/natural lifestyle.	Appeals to religion or spirituality	>>245956625 and you'll be marked by bill gates' invisible permanent ink to ensure you arent mistaken for an Unclean, on the forehead for ease-of-access, of course

The final themes were constructed over several iterations from initial coding and recoding are defined in Table 4. Several subthemes were generated to better describe the patterns of discourse in the thread. Each theme is expounded upon in turn and discussion of subthemes are used to form a complete analysis of each theme present in the thread. The themes developed based on the dataset aim to illustrate how aspects of Covid-19 antivax conspiratorality was already present at the site even though vaccination drives had not yet begun at this stage. Finally, a thematic map of the thread is presented in Figure 3. to represent the relationships between the different themes and their subthemes.

Table 4

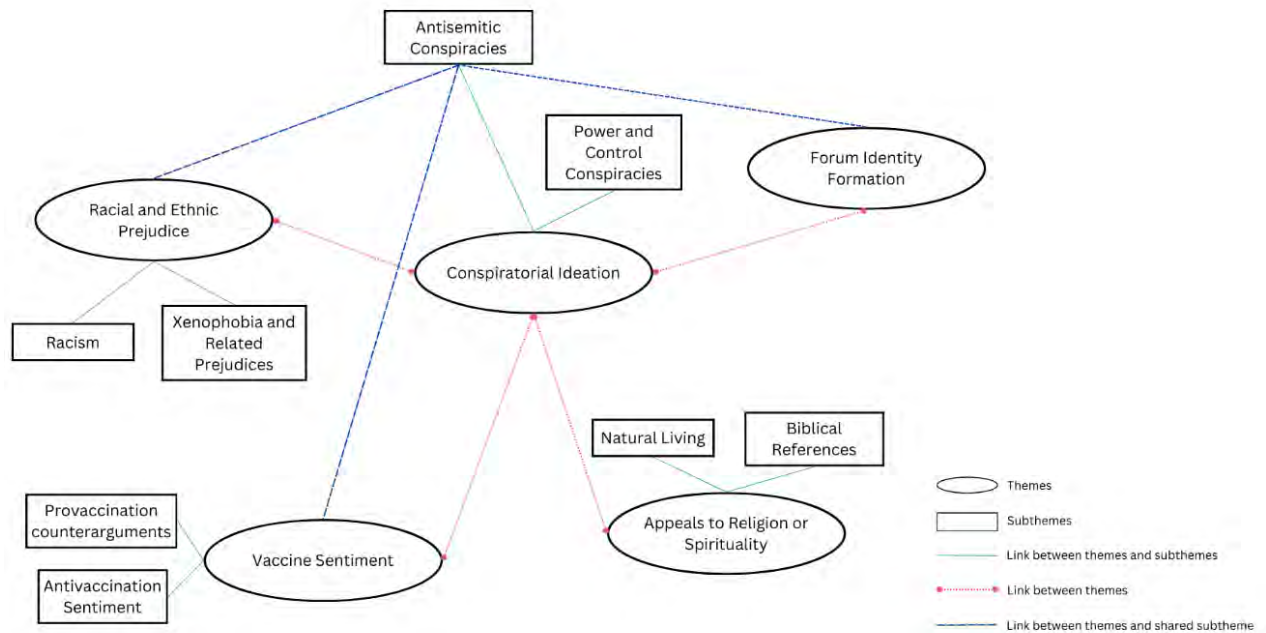
Thread 1 Themes, Theme Definitions, and Subthemes

Theme	Definition	Subthemes
Racial and ethnic prejudice	Explicit and implicit racism, as well as xenophobia delineate out-groups on the grounds of race with specific reference to disease, scientific institutions, and social dynamics.	1. Racism 2. Xenophobia and related prejudices
Conspiratorial ideation	Interconnected narratives that posit hidden, malevolent actors conspire in the coordination of large-scale social, medical, and political manipulations.	1. Power and control conspiracies 2. Antisemitic conspiracies
Vaccine sentiment	A complex discourse that at once views vaccines as harmful while others put forward provaccination arguments. Both aspects of vaccine sentiment at the site highlight concerns about health and safety from vastly different perspectives.	1. Antivaccination sentiment 2. Provaccination counter arguments
Forum identity construction and maintenance	Metacommunication patterns and social interactions specific to the 4chan /pol/ community. The practices construct and reinforce in- and outgroup boundaries.	
Appeals to religion or spirituality	The integration of spiritual interpretations and religious symbolism into health and scientific discourse, transforming medical interventions into metaphysical struggles.	1. Biblical references 2. Natural living

Note. Antisemitic conspiracies, as a subtheme, is linked to several themes outlined above. For the sake of brevity, I will discuss antisemitic conspiracies only in the theme of conspiratorial ideation. I have specifically chosen not to include it as a primary theme as it would then override other distinct themes that bear importance in the study. Themes associated with antisemitic conspiracies, other than conspiratorial ideation are racial and ethnic prejudice; vaccine sentiment; and forum identity formation. These links are illustrated in Figure 9.

Figure 9

Thematic Map of Thread 1



Racial and Ethnic Prejudice

As noted in Chapters 1 and 2, the /pol/ community has been cited as a breeding ground for alt-right extremism (Aguillar, 2023; Colley & Moore, 2022; Hine et al., 2017; Pollard, 2018). Alt- and far-right extremism is generally characterised by racism and highly conservative values which include antiglobalisation, white supremacy, antiestablishment, and other anti-nomenclature (Guardian, 2016). Wendling suggests that 4chan’s /pol/ board is one of a few “proto-institutions” of the alt-right and “played a key role in the movement’s development” (2018, p. 9). An horrific example of the extremism present at the site and which spills over into the physical world is that of the Christchurch massacre perpetrated by Brenton Tarrant in 2019 (BBC News, 2020). Before he murdered 51 people at two mosques – first at Al Noor mosque, then Linwood mosque – he posted his manifesto to an offshoot of 4chan, 8chan (Munn, 2023). The theme of racial and ethnic prejudice has been found to be a mainstay of 4chan’s alt-right culture and unifying aspect of the community at /pol/ (Aguillar, 2023; Colley & Moore, 2022; Hine et al. 2017; Maurer, 2024; Munn, 2023; Phillips, 2015; Pollard, 2018). The Great Replacement Theory (or Population Replacement Theory) not only incorporates black directed racism – often depicted as black males (bulls) cuckolding white men (cucks) with white women who prefer black men (coalburners) – but also a xenophobic conspiracy coordinated by elites and Jews. The conspiracy’s aim is to dilute the ethnic purity of the white race through the mass

importation of third world black and brown people into “white countries” (Aguillar, 2023). The subthemes of racism and xenophobia and related prejudices will be analysed with examples below.

Racism

Racism took two main forms in the thread: explicit and implicit. Although there are no repercussions for making racist statements at the site, posters in the community enjoy employing irony and sarcasm (Bovan & Mikašinović-Komšo, 2024; Aguillar, 2023; Munn, 2023; Colley & Moore, 2022;). Analysis of the thread illustrated that the white-nationalist ideologies that proliferate the site were also at play in discussions about the Covid-19 vaccinations. Racist hate speech in this thread was initially directed at the author of the Tweet, Neil deGrasse Tyson (posts 245954060; 245954294) but steadily developed into a generalised hate towards any scientists and experts-of-colour. There were 19 instances of clear racism directed at Tyson in the thread.

Anonymous ID:PU6HBOR8 Sun 01 Mar 2020 05:12:21 [No.245954060](#)
lol what a dumb nigger

Anonymous ID:27wwerVe Sun 01 Mar 2020 05:14:18 [No.245954294](#)
Quoted By: [>>245964368](#) [>>245982899](#)

[>>245953945](#)
Why people pretend that nigger is famous?

Post 245954947 demonstrated an implicit racist remark directed at Tyson demonstrated a greater underlying racist trend of using edgy humour and coded language to proliferate hate. Here, the poster depicted a stereotype of black men stealing bicycles and, in this case, implied that Tyson as a black man has no concern with science. This depiction cast the original Tweet as absurd as Tyson should only speak about stolen bicycles.

Anonymous ID:tMoY1Ibm Sun 01 Mar 2020 05:20:00 [No.245954947](#)
Quoted By: [>>245973496](#) [>>245981786](#)

[>>245953945](#)
What in the absolute fuck does this have to do with stolen bicycles?

The move toward generalised hate directed at scientists and experts-of-colour was highlighted several times throughout the thread. The overarching distrust of hiring practices used by scientific and academic institutions was brought into question where any instance of a person-of-colour being hired for a specialist job was reduced to affirmative action. The link between racial prejudice and antivax ideologies was made clear in a lengthy post (245956877) in response to the OP. The post tied together the highly charged hate for Tyson, the flagrant racist

attitudes presented on /pol/, a preliminary aversion to the Covid-19 vaccine in light of an entrenched antivaccination stance, and an implied conspiratorial cause for the virus – relayed through scientific exposition.

Anonymous ID:SAyLLcut Sun 01 Mar 2020 05:35:25 [No.245956877](#)
Quoted By: [>>245983181](#)

[>>245953945](#)

I wonder if people suspicious of vaccines would be less suspicious if affirmative action astro-physicists weren't being paid to pretend to be experts on microbiology and bully them on Twitter.

If the reports that you can be reinfected are true, then there will be no vaccine, since vaccines function by introducing an altered, weak strain of a virus on purpose to build up antibodies in white cells to easily fight away the real thing. That's how polio vaccine works, pox vaccines work, and flu vaccines work. If the strain is mutating so frequently, or if it bypasses the natural infected-immune process due to human engineering, then there will be no vaccine.

Fuck this stupid nigger.

Xenophobia and Related Prejudices

Posts in the thread represented the strong presence of xenophobic ideas. The importation of Third World non-white people was of particular concern regarding the spread of the virus. Post 245967903 demonstrated a common view of the problems that affect the First World in light of the pandemic.

Anonymous ID:se3xCwNd Sun 01 Mar 2020 07:17:24 [No.245967903](#)
Quoted By: [>>245968292](#)

[>>245967221](#)

No..no it's not necessary actually. It's bullshit and I'm not taking any kike shots understand? I've had chicken pox and shingles and it was a minor inconvenience, no kike shot required. Measles is similar, nice pilpul there kike, disinfo through half truth. The only reason for the recurrence is the importation of 3rd world trash... 1st world living conditions eradicated measles.

Clear white supremacist, Eurocentric concepts were included in the post. The idea that the progress of society, evinced in First World living conditions, resulted in the eradication of diseases is based in a fantastic idea of the West being the pinnacle of civilisation. Furthermore, the West as representative of the white race, where Third World is representative of all other races deemed other and less sophisticated in medical, technological, and political spheres. Other posts (245959506; 2454963399; 245965179; 245967903; 245972272; 245980683; 245980768) echoed the idea that immigrants bring diseases into the Western world. In light of these posts, I note other implicit details that relate to Great Replacement Theories and the surreptitious race war in which humanity is supposedly currently engaged. Aguillar (2023), highlights other embedded conspiracy theories of furtive methods employed to exterminate the white race.²¹

²¹ It is important to note that *the white race* is usually constructed, on 4chan, as Scandinavian, British, and selected European peoples – where some posters only believe descendants of Vikings are actually white. Belief in the purity of ancient European peoples spawns from alt-right medievalism (Blake, 2020).

... the main warfare replacing strategies consist of the migration of non-white people to the West (the seed of replacement), non-whites' higher birthrates (the long-term scheme), indoctrination through gender ideology and feminism, the emasculation of white masculinity, and the advancement of LGBTQI agendas (stratagems geared toward curtailing/stopping white biological reproduction and achieve hegemonic consent). (pp. 1-2)

White biological reproduction is of particular importance on the site and posts found in this thread show growing anxieties that the Covid-19 vaccines will result in sterilization, thereby eliminating large swaths of the white population from the gene pool. The culture at /pol/ can be partially typified as a constant battle against existential threats to the white race, whether it is globalisation and looser borders or vaccines for deadly viruses. Existential threats are often imagined and link to the strong presence of conspiratorial narratives on /pol/. These conspiratorial narratives are primarily based in antisemitism as shown in the repetition of the slur “kike” and post 245967903 referred to the, then hypothetical, Covid-19 vaccine as the “kike shot”. The concept of conspiratorial narratives and their presence as a foundational element of /pol/ is developed in the following theme.

Conspiratorial Ideation

The theme of conspiratorial ideation weaved itself throughout the posts in the thread. Conspiracy theories ranging from the origins of Covid-19 to elaborate narratives which connected multiple international agencies, pharmaceutical companies, and broadband technologies to form a strikingly coherent story of far-reaching control mechanisms employed under the guise of a worldwide pandemic. The worldview constructed on the basis of the conspiracy theories presented in the thread echoed Douglas and her colleagues' (2019) description of conspirators as groups of individuals who “typically attempt to usurp political or economic power, violate rights, infringe upon established agreements, withhold vital secrets, or alter bedrock institutions” (p. 4).

In-groups and out-groups were clearly marked within the conspiratorial framework. In this thread, and on /pol/ in general, the use of the word *shill* is used to discredit and disregard another poster's point of view and simultaneously mark that poster as a paid actor – usually working for Jewish interests – and therefore in the out-group. Similarly, the posters sometimes make use of the acronym *NPC* (non-playable character) to describe other posters and individuals who believe mainstream media as unthinking, soulless individuals who are

controlled by the establishment. This kind of behaviour is commonly used to establish a form of mythos within the community against which all claims are verified or discarded. I envision the subtext here as individuals marking “this is what we believe, if you don’t, you’re not part of us and are actively against us”. In this space, if conspiracy theories are met with any mainstream media narratives – regardless of their truth value – it will be met with denigration.

I have constructed two interlinking subthemes; power and control conspiracies, and antisemitic conspiracies to further expound on this theme. It is necessary to keep them separate, even though they do overlap, as elements of each are shown to stand individually in the worldviews constructed at the site.

Power and Control Conspiracies

These conspiracy theories specifically indict pharmaceutical companies (aka Big Pharma), world governments, international institutions such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), the worldwide mainstream media, and Bill Gates’ vaccination drives. The indictment was highlighted in post 245955862 in response to a poster who stated they would never take the vaccine:

Anonymous ID:ZFeNzTVs Sun 01 Mar 2020 05:27:18 [No.245955862](#)

Quoted By: [>>245968597](#) [>>245973393](#) [>>245975395](#)

[>>245955058](#)

This.

>Intentionally terrify the world public

>Let it spread nad fester for maximum fear

>Offer vaccine for saving

>Instant access to inject the entire worlds population with whatever the fuck you want.

Hell the fuck no.

In the above post, the belief that the media can be used to control people with fear was primary to their argument. The fear generated during the pandemic allowed for other organisations to act on those fears and “inject the world[‘]s population with whatever the fuck [they] want”. The implicit idea is that the injection was necessarily bad. A secret concoction that the global population will be worse off for taking. Other posts echoed a generalised distrust of the medical and pharmaceutical industry. Those posts suggested that the Covid-19 vaccine would be, as post 245983712 states, a “vaccine for a vaccine” which is in line with other posters who said that Covid-19 itself was a leaked, failed HIV vaccine. This theory then morphed into the belief that the vaccine would lead to the vaccinated contracting a new form of AIDS which would require a “vaccine subscription” and, in turn, generate massive profits for Big Pharma and the politicians they lobby (post 245981743).

The overarching sense of the unknown and wild speculation out of fear seems to embody the paranoid style. I refer here again to Hofstadter's (1964) construction of the paranoid style in politics that forms the foundations on which conspiracy theories such as these appear to be built. Hofstadter presents a key to the type of conspiracy theories present in the data where "the spokesman of the paranoid style finds [the conspiracy] directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others" (p. 4). Van Prooijen (2018) reiterates this form of "we" versus "they" mentality where an external force plans to enact some great change to the fundamental structures of the conspiracy theory believers' world. "They" are the powerful enactors of change that will be detrimental to the targeted "we".

The "we" spoken of in the context of /pol/ are the freethinkers, the disenfranchised white man facing globalism and a certain end to the pure white race. The "they" are the political and media elites in bed with the seemingly omnipotent Jews who seek to control the parts of society they don't already have under their thumb. I will discuss, and demonstrate, the various social aspects present in the thread in a dedicated theme later in this analysis.

Antisemitic Conspiracies

The culture of /pol/ is fundamentally antisemitic (Tuters & Hagen, 2003). Repeated antisemitic remarks made by posters formed the basis of most conspiracy theories – like the Great Replacement Theory – and antiestablishment discourse shared amongst the community members in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the context of the thread, links between a general power and control conspiracy and the antisemitic overtones of the site vernacular were clear. In one instance (post 245964703), distrust of Israeli pharmaceutical companies was linked to the potential sterilisation of Europe which itself traces back to the entrenched fear of white genocide.²²

Anonymous ID:oy0/JcZI Sun 01 Mar 2020 06:46:01 [No.245964703](#)

Quoted By: [>>245965042](#)

I have this weird feeling about the vaccine being developed by that Israeli firm. It would be so easy for them to slip something in that may protect you from the virus but whoops now the entirety of Europe is sterile after getting their jab

²² It is unclear which pharmaceutical companies they are referring to. News from the time suggests potential candidates are MIGAL research institute and Teva. The Israeli science minister, reported by the Jewish Journal Twitter page, stated on 27 February 2020 that the Covid-19 vaccine would be ready in weeks.

Furthermore, posters took the idea that Big Pharma and Jews colluded in their attempted subversion of sceptical discourse through the use of shills to infiltrate and coerce vaccine uptake on /pol/ as shown in post 245976138.

Anonymous ID:PvFEj3bB Sun 01 Mar 2020 08:50:10 [No.245976138](#)

[>>245975172](#)

I'm curious why a bunch of big pharma Jews would come debate NEETs on an anime board about the potential detrimental effects of vaccinations.

The overarching antisemitic narrative reinforced and repackaged old antisemitic conspiracy theories, where the only goal for the Jew – as constructed at the site – was one of harm and control. It can be summarised as follows.

1. Jews control major elements of governments and corporations, including pharmaceutical companies (post 245971537).
2. Pharmaceutical companies were engaged in lobbying for legal protection from governments for when vaccine injuries occurred (post 245974927).
3. The Covid-19 vaccine, created by Israel, contains heavy metals, sterilising compounds, and will make non-Jews “good goys” (post 245966513).

Another element of antisemitism and antisemitic conspiracy theories on /pol/ is the use of triple parentheses around certain words, and especially in the form of (((they))). The use of triple parentheses around specific words to denote Jewish connections to the word within parentheses spawned as a reference to a 2014 podcast that used delay and reverb audio effects on names that sounded Jewish. It became a text-based internet meme where trolls aligned with the alt-right began to place journalists' surnames in triple parentheses to highlight the journalists' Jewish ancestry (Tuters & Hagen, 2020). This meme is now so deeply embedded in the culture of /pol/ it is present in almost every thread I read. The post below (245975072) illustrates the use of the meme in conjunction with sarcastic references to antiestablishment conspiracy theories and repeated origin theories – in this case Covid-19 was a manufactured bioweapon.

Anonymous ID:Ucj2+SQ2 Sun 01 Mar 2020 08:37:20 [No.245975072](#)

[>>245963478](#)

[>>245974291](#)

[>>245974754](#)

Imagine being this retarded...

>Lets inject ourselves with the governments (((vaccine))) for their own man-made bio-weapon!!!

An additional link to the antisemitic conspiracies that were present included specific reference to 5G, nanobots, and remote receivers as parts of the vaccine. My understanding of the site and based on post 245966513's use of the term “good goy” leads me to believe that – beyond its

general use on /pol/ to imply other posters' submission to "to Jewish 'manipulation' and 'trickery'" (Hine et al., 2017) – there was a fear of some form of mind control intended for non-Jews to complete the Zionist goal of world domination. Mind control and other spiritual harms perpetuated by Jews are common fears espoused on /pol/ which are discussed in the final theme of this analysis. The frequency of the codes related to biotechnological elements in the vaccine was low but still significant in the vaccine discussion. At this stage of the pandemic, these seeds of biotech conspiracies were yet to form a cohesive arm of the antivax theory within the community. But, as demonstrated in the analysis of Thread 2, these ideas took root and became a distinct part of the antivaccination discourse on /pol/.

Vaccine Sentiment

This theme took on a multifaceted and complex form as more people engaged with the thread over time where two opposing subthemes: antivaccination sentiments and provaccination counter arguments. Initially, antivaccination sentiments dominated the discussion as many posts responded directly to the OP. References to prior use of vaccines to prevent the spread of diseases such as SARS, polio, and measles were key examples in general antivaccination sentiment. Posters referred to personal anecdotes of vaccination injury prior to Covid-19 as primary reasons for their distrust of Big Pharma and medical authority. Other antivaccination arguments drew on conspiratorial ideas to introduce scientific-sounding speculation regarding the chemicals used in the production of vaccines, vaccine efficacy, disease severity, and nefarious intentions behind worldwide vaccination drives. On the other hand, individuals who were provaccination used similar scientific claims to present an alternative to antivax ideology. The prevalence of provaccination codes were notably fewer than those connected to antivaccination narratives. This apparent lack of provaccination sentiment is to be expected in light of the general antiestablishment culture of the board.

The same, or similar, publicly available data was used by both sides to advance their arguments but with vastly different outcomes. The interpretation of data from either end of the spectrum appeared compelling and likely had great influence over the posters in the thread. But, as the site maintains a primarily sceptical outlook on mainstream communication and holds an antiestablishment stance, the provaccination arguments were met with derision from other posters who maintained that all messaging that aligned with vaccine drives were part of a global attempt to halt freethinkers from questioning the use of vaccines for Covid-19. In summary, the complexities of the discussion highlighted deep concerns with health and safety

of the world's population in light of the pandemic from both points of view. The points of view developed clear boundaries between the /pol/ in-group of antivaxxers and minority, provaccination out-group of posters deemed to be Jewish shills.

Antivaccination Sentiment

Based in an almost clinical distrust of mainstream narratives and medical authority, the posters in the antivaccination camp made their case in reference to instances of documented vaccine injuries. Posts that used this as a basis of their argument centred around conjecture proliferated on external conspiracy sites, as can be seen in Figure 10 from post 245971811, or unverifiable personal anecdotes of vaccine injury.

Figure 10

A screenshot from, LifeSite, attached to post 245971811



Antisemitic portmanteaus, like “pharmajew”, and triple parentheses used throughout the thread illustrate the general antivaccination discourse and embedded antisemitic control narratives to signal the larger conspiratorial network at play in many posters’ worldview.

Anonymous ID:1gGPxXgR Sun 01 Mar 2020 09:08:24 [No.245977687](#)

>>245976503

>. Anti virals are the way to go

>if pharmajew wasnt such a faggot maybe people could trust vaccines

just (((who))) do you think make anti virals ?

after being permanently poisoned by cipro i would not take those either , experimental shit like remdesivir

i already have permanent nerve and brain damage from fluroquinolones

tinnitus and neuropathy and severe chemical sensitivity

WTF is this shit going to do to me ,

i can tell you fluroquinolones are much worse than the vaccines

they do immediate and painful damage that will never go away

luckily i did not get the chronic tendon rupturing or aortic dissection

This sentiment was further fuelled by conspiracy theories suggesting that vaccines are harmful or part of a larger agenda. A notable example includes six posts (245962089; 245964703; 245969258; 245969622; 245970044; 245975798) in which posters hypothesised that vaccines might contain “sterilizing poison” aimed at reducing the population. Risk aversion, as post 245956147 exemplifies, appeared to be the primary driver of antivaccination discourse, but ultimately based on misinformation, pre-existing beliefs about the scientific and medical community, and conspiratorial ideation based in antisemitism.

Anonymous ID:zUS5Bha8 Sun 01 Mar 2020 05:29:38 [No.245956147](#)

>>245953945

That it’s barely tested and more likely to kill you than the virus?

The SARS vaccine straight up killed motherfuckers

Dumb Fucking science nigger

Assertions of potential vaccine injury were repeatedly stated in various ways. Most posts raised issues, based on gut feelings and a predisposition of distrust, to question the safety and efficacy of the vaccine – sometimes even the need for a vaccine in the first place. Others linked unfounded conspiratorial fears of microchips, nanobots in the vaccine to a perceived grand agenda. Some used language and style modelled on scientific inquiry to add layers of credibility to their statements as seen in the Figure 11, which was attached to post 245966147.

Within the /pol/ community culture, and other fringe belief systems and subcultural spaces, the mimicry of mainstream scholarship – although often with the opposite result – is used to present information with authority (Barkun, 2003/2016). Although many instances exist

where conspiracy theory pedlars use divine or esoteric revelation as support for their claims, there is a large community of *truth seekers* who have their own peculiar approach to empiricism founded on the principle that stigmatised knowledge is true knowledge. In this case, the “truth” about the vaccine’s ingredients shared in the thread used the mainstream media and governments attempts to suppress dis/misinformation as evidence of some type of cover up. In other words, proliferators of conspiracy theories surrounding vaccines might say, “this theory must have truth to it if they are afraid of people talking about it” and becomes evidence for the conspiracy theory claims (Barkun, 2003/2016).

Figure 11

Screenshot of scientific sounding antivax argument reposted on /pol/

My conclusion after researching all available genome discussions of #covid19 is that reinfection is possible in 2/3rds of confirmed cases as there are 3/three distinct (partial, but enough to trick the body) genome signatures in this "virus" #bioweapon.

The base is corona virus, this is what creates the 'viral envelope' & tricks the body into thinking it is flu that has infected it. But the envelope also contains SARS, MERS, & HIV genome signatures in sufficient size to cause the 'response immune protein' to be specific to one of these three such that the next time the complete envelope is encountered the body sends out the immune protein, BUT it has been made to affect a specific part (HIV, or MERS, or SARS) genome, and therefore is fooled into a wrong reaction the second time around.

It is this mechanism which has & will prevent a vaccine from being created as NO consensus antibodies have yet been found. This means that each human is creating specific immune proteins to their exposure to #covid19 that are not found (mostly) in other people. NO CONSENSUS ANTIBODIES mean NO VACCINE possible.

2/28/2020 cliff high, i am not a doctor, but i do know how to think very clearly & do research.

Such assertions, once again, appear to resonate with broader theories of social identity, where individuals align with groups that reinforce their beliefs, often leading to an “us versus them” mentality against perceived threats (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Specifically, in this thread, perceived threats are said to be enacted by mainstream science and public health measures. Moreover, the thread illustrated how antivaccination rhetoric often scapegoats marginalized groups, as seen in comments blaming immigrants for bringing diseases into first world countries, discussed in the xenophobia and related prejudices subtheme. This aligns with social psychological theories on prejudice and group dynamics, where in-group members may project their anxieties onto out-group members as a coping mechanism (Douglas et al., 2019). Furthermore, individuals seek to establish a positive view of their group and would likely defer negative aspects of the group culture, or potential to spread a deadly virus, onto individuals outside of their group (Biddlestone et al., 2021).

Provaccination Counter Arguments

A limited number of posts presented provaccination sentiments in the thread but offer additional insights into the cultural development of Covid-19 antivaccination narratives. Provaccination discourse in the thread highlights a more nuanced view of the culture surrounding Covid-19 and vaccines on /pol/ to show that the ideas present can sometimes be challenged by posters at the site. The /pol/ community is not to be thought of as an all-encompassing representative monolith, or a hive-mind, even though it might be portrayed as such in the media (Furedi, 2014; Bartlett, 2016). There are complexities to the discourses present but, I will note, nuances in the narratives shared there are very much in the minority and often met with derogatory jabs by the majority.

Instances of provaccination counterarguments were primarily attacks on other posters where derogatory terms such as “retarded”, “sheeple”, or “faggots” – although these are commonly used terms on 4chan – and referring to antivaccination posts as “brainfarts”. These types of responses appeared to provoke further vitriolic responses between posters and did not appear to resolve any questions or allay any fear regarding the efficacy or safety of the vaccines. Post 245966599, below, was a middle ground between the intense antagonisms described and the seemingly scientific approach used by other posters.

Anonymous ID:GqRE0snD Sun 01 Mar 2020 07:04:19 [No.245966599](#)

Quoted By: [>>245967313](#) [>>245968690](#) [>>245974835](#)

[>>245965773](#)

luckily i was vaccinated and haven't gotten any of those diseases
unfortunately some poor kids have retarded parents and end up getting sick or dying

[>>245965870](#)

you seem to have forgotten what you said. allow me to remind you.

>It's a disingenuous catch-all term ascribed to anybody with the sense to think twice before letting the government forcefully inject you with chemicals.

in other words,

>i am an enlightened skeptic for doubting facts

The poster above (GqRE0snD) was highly active in the thread, engaging with other posters for four out of the six hours the thread was live, and posted 31 times – not all posts were explicitly provaccination, some were just attacks on other posters. This poster took it upon themselves to deal with a lot of the disinformation presented in the thread but was often called a Jewish shill or goy for their attempts to point out the inaccuracies in other posters' posts. Other less prominent posters approached the antivaccination arguments with similar negativity and only one post refrained from using aggressively negative terms to describe antivaxxers. The provaccination camp comprised of only four out of the 187 posters in the thread.

So far, I have introduced several themes and subthemes that all demonstrate elements of a socially constructed identity at the site where boundaries between “us” and “them” are constructed in relation to beliefs about race, conspiracies, and vaccination stance. These social identities form the basis of ingroups and outgroups within the community of /pol/ and specifically within the antivaccination discourse of this thread. The following theme aims to illuminate concrete ways in which these identities manifest, with examples from the thread.

Forum Identity Construction and Maintenance

The theme of identity formation in a complex community such as /pol/ requires similarly complex analysis. This thread demonstrates various cultural phenomena unique to the community that merit discussion. Key aspects discussed here are the social interactions and rhetorical strategies employed by posters, metacommunication patterns, and knowledge production and community cohesion.

Although /pol/ should not be thought of as representative of a single ideology, there were consistent elements present in the thread that are suggestive of core beliefs shared by posters about how to communicate at the site. Common rhetorical strategies are employed by the posters on /pol/ that involve extreme speech, attacks on other posters, and a form of performative communication in order to evoke strong emotional responses from other posters.

The extremist and performative nature of the messaging in posts on /pol/ is attributed to the forum structure itself (Hine et al., 2017; Wendling, 2018). 4chan lacks any sort of engagement system – there are no likes, upvotes, or shares, only direct replies. Therefore, in order to get any engagement, the content of the post should be outrageous or extreme enough to entice others to directly reply to the post (Hine et al., 2017). Because of the ephemerality of threads – the thread analysed was only active for six hours – novel attempts at grabbing the attention of users and converting them to posters is the only way to give a post meaning within the /pol/ community’s ever-growing reservoir of culture (Wendling, 2018).

The rhetorical strategies employed by posters showed that social interactions between posters are often highly charged with suspicion and distrust. At the same time, to emphasise distrust and suspicion, posters often ironised posts in the thread they viewed as untrue to make fun of the poster. Posters employed irony and sarcasm as it is a fundamental part of the culture at the site as demonstrated in the production of ironic memes to signal transgression and, simultaneously, deeply held beliefs regarding the topic (Maurer, 2024). In post 245970657, the poster first aimed to discredit post 245970044’s information and showed obvious distrust of the argument. Secondly, when a source was provided, they turned to highlight how the poster had not read the material and hypothesised the faulty research process employed. Finally, they challenged another poster to give specific details regarding vaccine manufacture and distribution.

Anonymous ID:GqRE0snD Sun 01 Mar 2020 07:46:22 [No.245970657](#)

Quoted By: [>>245970807](#) [>>245970859](#) [>>245971340](#) [>>245971606](#) [>>245973904](#)

[>>245970044](#)

You don’t even know if it happened or not, when it happened, or have any source, and you’re trying to use that as a counterargument? no, it never happened.

[>>245969803](#)

you didn’t even read the article, you just saw the scary sounding title and screenshotted it.

>The latest concerns emerged over the weekend after vaccines produced by privately-held Bio-Med Pvt Ltd and distributed as part of a free government drive to eradicate polio were found to have a strain of the virus that had been eradicated around the world and phased out of vaccines.

a company was manufacturing vaccines for a different strain of the virus. that’s it.

[>>245970004](#)

which world leader is personally manufacturing and handing out your vaccines?

Many instances of distrust of other posters’ sources were present in the thread which exhibited an overarching antagonistic approach to communication at the site.

The culture of distrust and antagonism also informs the hierarchical structure within the community. In post 245982141, the use of terms like “nuniggers” and “normie” refers to new members of the community pretending to be part of the culture of /pol/, where the culture of /pol/ – that of extreme free speech – is supposed to represent the antithesis of “normies”.

Elsewhere on /pol/, posters would use “newfags” to refer to community members who joined after 2007. Poster S/i1/jg3 appeared to assert their dominance over other posters in the thread by firstly portraying themselves as an “oldfag” who has seen the devolution of /pol/ over the years. And secondly, by calling the posters in the thread “normies [who] come [to /pol/] for a LARP”.²³ Their depiction of the thread itself, and the posters present, seemed to call into question the actual purpose of the thread. Additionally, the use of “mutt mutt” was to refer to people of mixed heritage. The term mutt is often combined with reference to US citizens in the form of “Amerimutts”. S/il/jg3’s use of derogatory terms aligned with the common practice of performative language that portrays the poster as intellectually superior over other posters persistently used across /pol/ in discussions.

Anonymous ID:S/i1/jg3 Sun 01 Mar 2020 10:05:09 No.245982141

Quoted By: >>245982287 >>245982553 >>245982657

>>245954917

These fucking nuniggers on /pol/ haven’t got a clue mate. We’ve seen the annihilation of diseases that used to ravage the human race but some weakly built, poor gened mutt mutt had a bad reaction 25 years ago so "VACCINES BAD!".

/pol/ is normie nigger tier at this point. The U.S education system hasn’t changed, they just have access to more information to confuse their normie minds. Some of those normies pretend not to be normies and come here for a LARP. And that is who you’re seeing in this thread.

The similarity in the ways in which posters communicated with each other in the thread revealed that most posters understood how one should make utterances at the site in general. The metacommunication patterns also informed how posters implicitly and explicitly interpreted each other’s contributions (Craig, 2016). The use of greentexts as an interpretive tool of other posters’ replies, rather than as direct quotes, reiterates this form of metacommunicative practice that transcends the literal content of posts. For example, posts 245971811, and 245972272 both used greentexts as highly interpretive elements to their commentary. Post 245971811 used greentext to say “>it didn’t happen because i say it didn’t” in response to the quoted post above. Whereas post 245972272 ignored any of the content in the post they quoted and stated “>Oh jewdle jewdle jewdle I spin around like clay” in greentext to infer that poster GqRE0snD is a Jew and is therefore connected with a conspiracy against antivaxxers.

Knowledge production in the thread maintained a consistent conspiratorial foundation. Posters added their own interpretations of the Covid-19 pandemic and the yet-to-be-created vaccines with bits of conspiracy theories already present at the site. The purpose of discussion

²³ LARP, or live-action role play, is when individuals enact a fictional scenario. A popular live-action role-playing game example is Dungeons and Dragons.

in the thread appeared to be not so much about finding truth or to examine the theories proposed by antivaxxers but rather to reinforce them with personal anecdotes of prior vaccine injury, antisemitic control narratives, and antiestablishment ideologies. In so doing, this pseudo-knowledge production aided in reestablishing in- and outgroup boundaries.

Boundaries were drawn within the echo chamber of the thread through collective reinforcement of specific narratives and in turn generated a sense of community cohesion. The “us” and “them” of /pol/, even when met with attempts at scientific explanation of vaccine theory, only served to further entrench beliefs that the vaccines would harm anyone who received them. Here I quote again Douglas et al. (2019) where the /pol/ community demonstrated the view that they were indeed “undervalued, underprivileged, or under threat” (p. 9, citing Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Furthermore, the intensity of the kind of conflict shown in the thread in light of a perceived existential threat to one’s life and soul, it is more likely that the members in different camps will “behave toward each other as a function of their respective group memberships, rather than in terms of their individual characteristics or interindividual relationships” (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p. 277). Regardless of the individuality that each poster normally represented, when they came into contact with ideas that contradicted the commonly accepted narratives in the community, they responded with likeminded aggression.

Appeals to Religion and Spirituality

Esotericism and spirituality have been shown to share the same fertile ground as conspiratorial ideation by several scholars such as Asprem (2015), Magliocco (2020a, 2020b) and Munn (2023) to name a few. Much literature has been written about the intersection of these ideologies since the introduction of the term conspирuality to name the phenomenon (Ward & Voas, 2011). Asprem, in response to Ward and Voas, wrote about the coining of conspирuality as an old concept with new packaging. As /pol/ is a large contributor to the political conspiratorial ecosystem it makes sense that the esoteric and spiritual would also be found in the space. In the thread, I found small elements of outright spiritualistic reasoning for antivax belief which drew on Christian eschatological frameworks and antisemitic conspiracy theories. More notably, there was a relatively strong presence of New Age wellness trends that encompassed natural living linked to scepticism of modern medicine. Examples of this were demonstrated in the desires to avoid the pollution of the body with pharmaceuticals that individuals believed to contain heavy metals, and preserving an uncorrupted, natural state in the body.

Biblical References

Two posts in particular directly mention spiritual elements to the vaccine. The first post (245957035), though quite short, has several elements to consider. These elements are mostly based on the New Testament book of Revelation but with the introduction of Bill Gates as the malevolent actor involved bringing about the end times prophecy. Barkun (2003) outlined how conspiratorial ideation and improvised millennialism often overlap in their ideological frameworks and how they can support each other as bricolages of many belief systems that occupy the same space in the mind of a believer.

Anonymous ID:PEhFb3Jx Sun 01 Mar 2020 05:36:38 [No.245957035](#)

[>>245956625](#)

and you'll be marked by bill gates' invisible permanent ink to ensure you aren't mistaken for an Unclean, on the forehead for ease-of-access, of course

The post posited that Bill Gates would be involved in the manufacture and distribution of the Covid-19 vaccines that would mark individuals as “Unclean”. The term “marked” references the biblical prophecy of the Mark of the Beast which has since captured the antivaccination camp’s imagination. Reference to the Mark was made particularly obvious with the statement “on the forehead” which is directly lifted from the original prophecy. Although references to the apocalypse are few in this thread, there were 805 instances of the term “beast”, 428 instances of the term “antichrist”, 971 instances of the term “end times”, and 330 instances of “societal collapse” in the same sampling timeframe (1 March 2020 – 14 March 2020). The presence of improvised millennialism coupled with conspiracy theories was consistently present on /pol/ during this time and, based on my own time at the site prior to the pandemic, was a foundational aspect of the culture found there.

Another direct spiritual reference was made in post 245964049. In this post, reference to the Canaanite deity, Moloch, was made in relation to Neil DeGrasse Tyson.²⁴

Anonymous ID:+Fu5sc/H Sun 01 Mar 2020 06:39:30 [No.245964049](#)

Also fuck this Zionist shill mason nigger.

He's so embedded with space shit wonder how many kiddies he's murdered to moloch.

Reference to Moloch on /pol/ has been frequent over the years and link to larger antisemitic conspiracy theories that thrive there. The instances of the term Moloch, in the time that I have engaged with /pol/, number 88065. The overarching theory is that individuals operating within

²⁴ References to Moloch, also spelled Molech or Molek, are found in the Jewish and Christian bibles. See Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; 1 Kings 11:5, 7, 33; 2 Kings 23:10, 13; Isaiah 57:9; Jeremiah 32:35; Jeremiah 49:1, 3; Zephaniah 1:5; Acts 7:43.

the prophetic New World Order sacrifice children to this deity in exchange for favour with the god. The Pizzagate conspiracy, theories about Jeffrey Epstein, and still other claims about satanic paedophile rings in the US Democratic Party all include reference to Moloch as written about in the original Levitical myth but with the addition of harvesting adrenochrome prior to sacrifice. Once again, the bricolage of belief was made evident in the post as they reference Zionism, Free Masons, and Moloch simultaneously.

Natural Living

Another element of this theme, that of the natural lifestyle, is also embedded in the thread. In most instances, references to heavy metals and other preservatives used in vaccines were enough to drive antivaccination fears. Posters would sometimes explicitly state that the vaccine was a “poison” (posts 245956625; 245962089; 245963352) and based their assumptions on a more general distrust of medical authorities. This idea appeared to stem from appeals to “herd immunity” (posts 245966927; 245968844) and the body’s natural ability to fight off viruses with a sufficient immune response.

Anonymous ID:se3xCwNd Sun 01 Mar 2020 07:23:48 [No.245968511](#)
Quoted By: [>>245968844](#) [>>245981580](#)

[>>245968292](#)

I and my seed will be better for it you fucking retard. It’s called an immune system. That’s the problem with you kikes, always trying to pervert nature. Those that can’t fight off a simple bug should die.

The poster made clear their belief that Jews aim to “pervert nature”. One could interpret this as another element of us and them. Those that have given into the perversion of nature and those that are pure and unchanged. The concept of *purebloods* was later taken up as key term and a defining feature of the antivax movement as the pandemic progressed.²⁵

Nature, as a divine force, and being natural are seen as a state of being uncorrupted by man. Herein lies the connection to the New Age. Wellness trends informed by New Age spiritualism prioritise the uncorrupted being. Vaccines and other medical interventions appear to be in direct opposition to the beliefs of New Agers as they alter the body unnaturally. Associations between conspiracy theory belief and New Age natural living and alternative healing, though seemingly disparate, are well-primed to combine when there is a strong push from all authorities to alter the natural processes of the human body.

²⁵ Purebloods is a term used by antivaxxers to denote their pure, unvaccinated state.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the multifaceted nature of Covid-19 antivax conspiratoriality within the /pol/ community through a detailed thematic analysis. The ethnographic approach, as defined by Hine (2015), allowed for an immersive understanding of the community's discourses and ways of being. By embedding myself within the /pol/ community, I was able to consume and analyse large quantities of material produced by other posters, gaining relevant insights into the culture, discourses, and ways of being demonstrated by posters of the /pol/ board. The thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach, revealed several key themes and subthemes that illuminate the complex discourses present on /pol/. Each of these themes contributed to a nuanced understanding of how conspiracy theories and alternative spiritualities manifest at the site, constructing and validating the worldviews present within the /pol/ community.

The overarching themes were racial and ethnic prejudice, conspiratorial ideation, vaccine sentiment, forum identity formation, and appeals to religion and spirituality. These themes, while distinct, were interwoven in ways that reinforced the community's perception of themselves as embattled truth-seekers opposing a deceptive mainstream narrative. The combination of the epistemic uncertainty of the pandemic and existing conspiratorial ideologies allowed /pol/ to co-opt discussions about vaccines and public health into broader sociopolitical and racialised narratives.

Racial and ethnic prejudice served as a foundational lens through which many discussions were viewed and filtered. This viewpoint shaped perceptions of antivax discourse into a defence of perceived white identity under threat. Similarly, the conspiratorial ideation evident in the data extended beyond antivax concerns to larger narratives of global control that implicated Jewish actors and international organisations as central conspirators. The frequent invocation of antisemitic stereotypes and the pervasive use of coded language like “(((they)))” amplified these narratives, thereby transforming health concerns into existential struggles for racial survival.

Vaccine sentiment within the /pol/ community was characterised by a stark divide, with antivaccination proponents dominating the discourse. Their narratives were bolstered by anecdotes, pseudo-scientific claims, and a shared mistrust of authorities. Provaccination voices, although present, were marginalised and met with hostility, often accused of being shills or part of the conspiratorial establishment. This dynamic illustrated the self-reinforcing nature of the community's belief systems, where dissenting opinions were quickly delegitimised.

The analysis also shed light on the role of spiritual and esoteric elements in antivax rhetoric. Posts referencing Christian eschatology, such as the Mark of the Beast, and New Age appeals to natural living, highlighted how religious and spiritual frameworks are mobilized to oppose vaccination. These appeals to metaphysical struggles between purity and corruption resonated deeply within a community already predisposed to conspiratorial thinking.

The findings underscore the importance of examining these discourses not only as isolated narratives but as components of a broader cultural and ideological system. By integrating antivax conspiracies with deeply entrenched prejudices and spiritual beliefs, the /pol/ community constructed a compelling, although troubling, framework that resists external critique. Furthermore, analysis of discourse on Covid-19 antivax conspiratoriality reveals a complex interplay of themes that construct and validate the worldviews present within the community. The conspiratorial elements will take the fore in the analysis of Thread 2 in Chapter 5. Additionally, the analysis of Thread 2 will provide insight into how conspiratorial narratives developed at the site over time.

Chapter 5: Data and Analysis – Thread 2

Introduction

This chapter follows the same methods and methodological approach as Chapter 4. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process I developed four primary themes, which were each divided into subthemes, to gain greater analytical value from the thread. The thematic analysis was grounded in an ethnographic approach based on Christine Hine's (2015) and Tom Boellstorff's (2012) contributions to the digital ethnographic field. The selection process was based on a simple engagement metric I developed for shortlisting threads with a meaningful ratio between unique posters and posts in a single thread. Thread 2 was part of a larger sample collected between 1 October 2021 – 7 October 2021. The decision to implement a shorter period for Dataset 2 compared to the sample timeframe of Dataset 1, from which Thread 1 was selected, was based in the large volume of threads that Dataset 2 yielded.

I followed the same process and of coding the discussions as detailed in Chapter 4. I counted the frequency of each code to develop a primary understanding of what kinds of topics were present in the thread and, from those codes, I constructed initial themes. The process of developing themes for this thread was slightly more challenging as, although the subject of the thread was extremely specific, the community of posters in the thread had myriad views that required extra synthesis into the larger thematic framework. The approach to thematising the thread was iterative, which allowed for greater familiarisation with the data. The following sections deal specifically with Thread 2 and present an in-depth analysis of the thread.

Thread Analysis Summary

This section will firstly discuss the code frequencies found in the thread and I will then move to contextualising the thread in the greater antivaccination discourse present on /pol/ at the time. Codes generated from the thread ranged from 1 – 113 in frequency. The marked increase in code frequency in this thread compared to Thread 1 is due to the length of posts. Many posts were very long, where some reached 400 words in a single post. Very long posts tended to have many codes applied to them as they presented multifaceted worldviews and often included elements of biblical and original prophecy.

Table 5 shows the top ten codes, and their frequencies which I developed through multiple iterations of the coding process. Thread 2 (thread ID: 342433327), had similar high frequency codes to those developed in the analysis of Thread 1, such as “Attack on poster” and “Antisemitism” but also included spiritualistic codes. I chose to separate references to

spiritualism and religion into specific codes as the majority of the thread dealt with different elements of spiritualism. This guided my coding approach where I broke down the discussion into more granular aspects of spiritual references for closer analysis. From the codes, I developed four primary themes, which were divided into a further ten subthemes. Thread 2 had 120 unique posters with a post count of 347.

Table 5

Thread 2 code frequency

Codes	Frequency
Vax is MOTB	113
Reference to end times	82
Reference to Revelation	81
Antisemitism - bad faith, degenerate, subvert society, control	52
Attack on user	51
Spiritual effects of taking vax - soul destroyed/unsavable/demon possession/curse	37
Precursor to MOTB	35
Modern Christianity is not real Christianity	28
Willing to die to not get the vax	23
Harmful ingredients	22

Contextualisation of Thread 2

The thread, posted 19 months after Thread 1 on 7 October 2021, came at a point in the pandemic when almost all countries around the world had established a Covid-19 vaccination drive (see Figure 2, in Chapter 3). I chose a point in time where most countries had active vaccination drives due to the international user base of the /pol/ (Hine et al., 2017).

The original post’s subject, “Mark of the Beast Schizo Thread”, condensed many elements of the conspiritual discourse surrounding antivax beliefs at the site that initially emerged at the start of the pandemic. Prophetic posts which foresaw mass death of vaccinated people, such as “The Red Deer” or “The Red Stag”, were quite popular within the /pol/ community. Posts of this nature, where posters post “violent images, videos, text posts, and memes as if the creator is having a mental breakdown” are part of a growing mainstream trend

called *schizoposting* (Withers & Howard, 2024). Furthermore, schizoposts “generally exploit the topic of schizophrenia and mental instability and lean into conspiratorial cultural narratives, sometimes intersecting with occultism or mysticism” (Know Your Meme, 2021). The first documented mention of schizoposting was found on 4chan, 6 November 2016 (see Figure 12). Schizoposting is, in the /pol/ vernacular, a derivative of shitposting – with which 4chan is most commonly associated. A post on /pol/ later appeared which suggested that schizoposting is superior to shitposting (see Figure 13). Schizoposting links to a common idea, shared on 4chan at large, that individuals on /pol/ are schizophrenic loners who do not leave their parents’ basements.

Figure 12

First mention of schizoposting in response to a meme magic post on 4chan

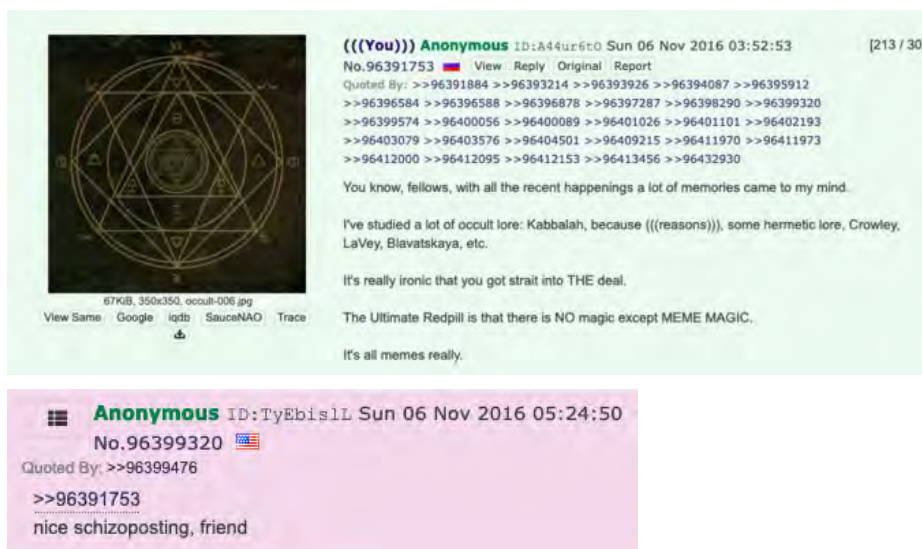
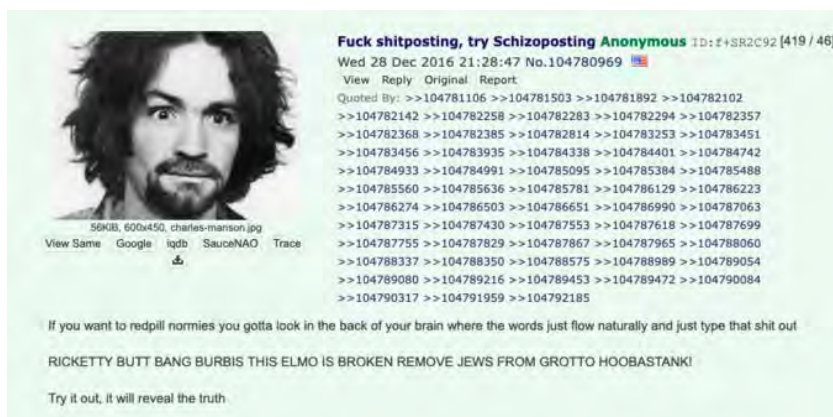


Figure 13

Schizoposting meme takes hold on /pol/



In contrast, the /pol/ community often views their own deductive powers to be superior to outsiders (Colley & Moore, 2022). Their superior pattern recognition and their being *redpilled* allows them to view beyond the curtain, to the inner mechanisms of the world. Being redpilled is the enlightened state of seeing “the truth” derived from the film *The Matrix* (1999) where the protagonist Neo chooses between a blue pill and a red pill presented to him by the sage Morpheus. The red pill allows for the individual to break free of the digital world created to enslave the human race, called the Matrix, and wake up in the real world. The blue pill represents the choice to remain blissfully ignorant of the truth. Redpilling is the process of recruitment to the alt-right that brings to light the ways in which the human race is controlled by powerful actors (Ganesh, 2018; Nagle, 2017; Wendling, 2018). To those outside of the /pol/ community, the ideas shared from the redpilled individual would sound like the ramblings of a mentally unwell individual – but to those who can see the truth it would make perfect sense.

I raise the point of redpilling at this stage as it has bearing on the way individuals within the community view themselves, and the way I approached the analysis of this thread. The way /pol/ users construct their identities, combined with the common usage of the term schizo in the community, seems to reflect some level of self-awareness of how the ideas shared at the site are viewed from the outside. The post in Figure 13 demonstrates how posters on /pol/ believed they could potentially redpill the “normies” into enlightenment. The poster seems to suggest that tapping into a form of “flow” state, where words come out “naturally” would allow for individuals in the community to “reveal the truth” to outsiders.

In post 342450132 of Thread 2, a poster states sarcastically, “We’re all schizos, right? Or is it that you know we are right and you can’t accept the truth so the only way you know to deny it is by denying us and what we say as if that changes anything?” This leads me to believe that the self-deprecation in the subject line was intentional and referenced the understanding that speaking about the vaccine – and indeed the world – in such a way would fall into the already prominent narrative about /pol/ users.

The ratio of posts to posters highlighted that the thread contained significant discussion around the topic and deserved greater attention than other similar threads with far less engagement from the community. It also picked up several themes discussed in the analysis of Thread 1 – specifically the “Appeals to religion and spirituality” theme, and the subtheme “Antisemitic conspiracies”. The original post image further emphasised the subject of the thread – a cartoon hand with the number 666 printed on it. The opening line of text asked, “Could the vaccine be the mark of the beast?” However serious the question might have been,

there is no doubt that these kinds of arguments for antivax belief were present in the mainstream at the time (Griera et al., 2022; Halafoff et al., 2022).

The following section of this chapter will reiterate the process of thematic analysis I applied to the thread and introduce the themes and subthemes constructed from the content of the discussions present. After describing the themes, I move to an in-depth analysis of each theme.

Thematic Analysis of Thread 2

Analysis of Thread 2 presented specific insights into the conspiratoriness of antivax narratives at the site compared to the more generalised ideas extracted from Thread 1. Themes constructed from the discourse focused on spiritual elements of the antivaccination movement which thrived on /pol/. Grouped codes and exemplar quotes from the thread are presented in Table 6. The specificity of the thread yielded a nuanced view of Christian and esoteric beliefs presented by the posters. The worldview demonstrated in the discussions were akin to the improvised millennialism Barkun (2003) used to explain certain types of conspiracy theory belief. Christian eschatological claims stood out as primary to the discussion and were combined with esoteric beliefs that draw similarity to those espoused in New Ageism.

Table 6*Thread 2 Code Examples, Themes, and Exemplar Quotes*

Code examples	Theme	Exemplar quotes
Vax is MOTB; Precursor to MOTB; MOTB can be a metaphor; reference to Book of Revelation; Reference to end times; willing to die to not vaccinate; vaxxed should repent; vaxxed will go to hell.	Apocalyptic religious framework	The ancient brain parasite is the mark of the beast. The black eye club took it "in the forehead" The vax cattle take it in the arm and it breaches the blood brain barrier with help of other additives. The brain parasite hijacks the individual's mind. From this point on, for all intents and purposes they ARE the beast system.
Covid was planned by Jews and elites; reference to globohomo (Jewish control of media, banks, gov, tech & pharma corps); elites/Jews will control the people; vax-based apartheid/persecution; worldwide intense provax propaganda; job threatened; vax subscription.	Antisemitic world control narratives	>>342433327 Yes. The Jews put all these plans in their goy cattle mind control cult handbook in the book of revelations. This is about what they would do if they got control of the goyium and they had to SHUT IT DOWN in order to stay in charge when the charade starts falling apart (which is inevitable due to cycles of ages). The bible is basically a luciferian document. That's the only reason it's useful to read to understand what's going on today. Because the NWO are luciferians and are using the luciferian playbook as intended. And also as intended, you can't use the luciferian playbook to beat the luciferian playbook!
Gematria and numerology references; reference to The Truth; spoken to in dreams/disembodied voices; wise and awake will know; reference to Karma; esoteric lore.	Alternative epistemologies	>>342446911 >At this point though their karma if they keep this shit up is going to be severely fucked. And that's because we don't consent and don't comply. They tell us what they're doing to avoid the karma. Most just go along with it and dismiss it as muh conspiracy theory because the truth and resisting it is too scary, and the system has made them rich and comfy. We fight back by simply saying no and forcing them to drop this shit on us against our will, thus putting the karma on them and forcing them to pay it. Wouldn't that essentially be the return? Most of us probably won't get saved in the sense that a lot of us will probably get killed, but that is what not consenting is and forcing the karma on them is.

Table 7 gives further insight into the themes I developed with the inclusion of definitions for each theme and an overview of the associated subthemes.

Table 7

Thread 2 Themes, Definitions, and Subthemes

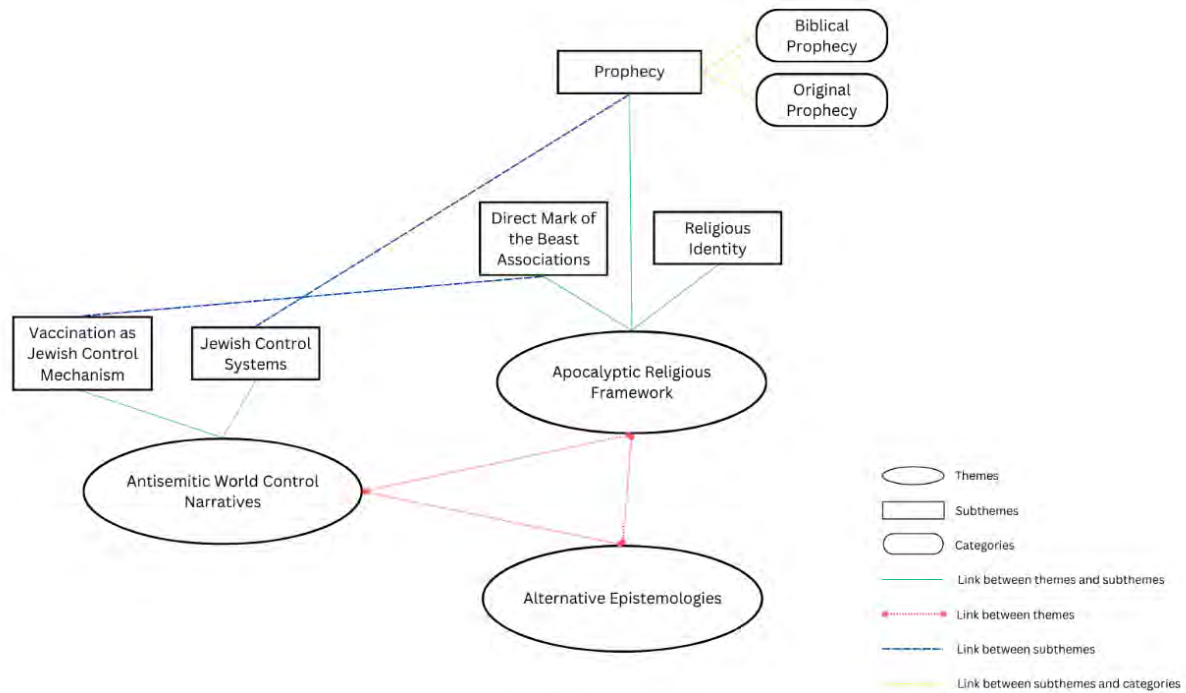
Theme	Definition	Subthemes
Apocalyptic religious framework	End-times prophecies and biblical predictions proliferated at the site. Particular focus is given to the mark of the beast (MOTB) narrative and societal collapse in regard to COVID-19 vaccines.	1. Prophecy 2. Direct MOTB associations 3. Religious identity
Antisemitic world control narratives	Antisemitic conspiracy theories that position Jews, in collaboration with elites as the orchestrators of the pandemic, vaccination programmes, and broader social control. In light of the pandemic, a revitalisation of traditional antisemitic tropes with modern conspiracy theories forms old answers to new global threats.	1. Jewish and elite control systems 3. Vaccination as Jewish control mechanism
Alternative epistemologies	Alternative knowledge and interpretation systems are used to understand and explain the vaccination phenomenon. Elements of ancient esotericism and numerology combine with spiritual beliefs to form new ways of engaging with reality.	

Note. Antisemitic world control narratives were present throughout the thread and therefore have connections to other themes in the analysis of Thread 2. Figure 14 illustrates these relationships.

The intricate nature of the beliefs shared in the thread required several subthemes to be developed so as to adequately analyse the meaning making processes employed by the posters. Clear conspiratorial worldviews were noted throughout the thread and spoke to the grander presence of conspирuality on /pol/. I do recognise that the Covid-19 pandemic as a vehicle for conspирuality made these ideas more prominent in the discourse at the site but, as has been noted in chapter 2, ideas of this type had been present on /pol/ for years in the form of belief in meme magic, Kekism, and the cult of Q.

Figure 14

Thematic Map of Thread 2



Apocalyptic Religious Framework

Christian cosmology was a primary worldview present in the discourse of the thread. Notions of good and evil and the existential war between those forces framed the discussion in such a way as to establish in- and outgroups from the first post. The original post called on other users to read the post and engage regardless of the users' religious affiliation. The poster went on to set the topic within an existential and political frame where they stated "And yes, this is 100% political. The vaccines are impacting everything about your livelihood and possibly eternity". Language such as this, whether sincere or not, is the key to getting engagement from the community. I have analysed the use of extreme language in the previous chapter, so I won't again here but, the important feature in this case is that it established a fight for the soul over the use of vaccines.

Moreover, the original post worked on several metacommunicative levels namely the sites communication style, rhetoric, and deeply entrenched conspiratorial narratives which shaped acceptance or rebuttal of the theories presented. The original post appeared to invoke in other posters – based on the number of replies to the thread and amount of time it remained up before being pruned – their own fears of mandated vaccinations which confirmed predictions noted in Thread 1. The improvised millennialism that had come to shape the site and the discourse across threads was prodded and enflamed resulting in myriad responses within the apocalyptic religious framework. The framework took the form of an admixture of

impending fulfilment of biblical prophecy, combinations of personal prophecy with biblical and esoteric roots, direct associations to the MOTB which cited the ingredients used in the vaccine, and reinforced religious identity.

Prophecy

Prophecy has been shown to be a powerful tool in the meaning making processes for individuals and communities throughout time. Prophecy also has a strong unifying aspect to it, where individuals within a community can band together in the hope of a shared future. Religious traditions around the world involve prophetic utterances to explain and contextualise the current moment for believers – as in the moment in which believers across history find themselves (Boyer, 1992). Abrahamic faiths in particular hold fast to prophetic teachings and prophecy proliferates their scriptures (Nissinen, 2004). And with Christianity and Islam being the two most widely practised religions in the world, it is no wonder that prophecy – specifically apocalyptic, millennialist prophecy, has “immeasurably influenced Western thought and culture” (Boyer, 1992, p. 36).

/pol/ has taken to prophecy many times in the past. The ultimate GET of a 77777777 post ID in 2016 prophesied the election of President Trump and unified the thread in celebration of real meme magic that predicted a better future for the community of /pol/ outside of the forum. QAnon posed a similarly unifying prophetic outcome of massive change in the world with Q-drops spanning 2017 to 2022. The link between prophecy and collaborative “conspiracy fictioning” (De Zeeuw & Gekker, 2023, p. 9) demonstrates the type of production and reproduction of prophecy within a conspiratorialist worldview at the site. To further elaborate on this, I will present and analyse examples of biblical prophecy and original prophecy with discussion on how these types of prophecy intermingled in the thread.

Biblical Prophecy. Apocalypticism in the form of societal collapse and biblical end times narratives were present in most of the posts in the thread. The Book of Revelation – or The Apocalypse of John –, the Christian eschatological biblical prophecy, was used to develop meaning for the occurrence of Covid-19 and make sense of the vaccination drives around the world. The posts drew on prophecy that detailed the rise of the Antichrist and posters attempted to link the descriptions of it from Revelation to modern political leaders and elites.

Two primary suggestions for the role of the Antichrist were Dr Anthony Fauci (posts 342438331; 342443222) and the Pope (posts 342437166; 342444995; 342447480; 342451700). Furthermore, the links to the Pope being the Antichrist were highlighted in a series of posts by poster z716aaQF who presented an 11-post sermon (reproduced in Appendix C)

which detailed how the Catholic Church is sacrilegious and that the Sunday sabbath was actually the MOTB imposed upon the world centuries ago. This view reiterated the role of the Pope as the Antichrist.

Poster z716aaQF developed an argument using both biblical prophecy and academic theology to bolster his points. This performative presentation of the confluence of academia and conspiritualism echoes Barkun's suggestion that stigmatised knowledge claims attempt to imitate the mainstream academy they wish to disprove (2003). In this case, the community did not respond well to poster z716aaQF's interpretation that the vaccine was not the MOTB. The interpretation of prophecy was quickly discarded through the process of "epistemic discrediting" (Nguyen, 2018, p. 146) in favour of prophecy that referenced either Jewish and elite control, the New World Order, or the Antichrist and the MOTB in light of the pandemic. A more conspiratorial interpretation of biblical prophecy to explain various elements of the pandemic was preferred and repeated throughout the thread (see Appendix D for an acceptable use of the prophecy from Revelation within the community). Responses to z716aaQF's posts followed a similar approach to post 342449562.

Anonymous ID:aXFLeS0m Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:54:18 [No.342449562](#)
Quoted By: [>>342449915](#)

[>>342449413](#)

what ever looser, have fun getting your qr code tattoo that isnt the mark. I hope the gene editing doesnt rob you of your soul

Key points within the overarching worldview presented within the thread demonstrated the unifying and soothing aspects of prophecy in the face of existential threats. By using biblical prophecy mixed with conspiracy theory, individuals banded together to construct the externalised threat to the community and self so as to develop a better understanding of what has caused them mental anguish. In so doing, on the individual level, posters were able to "feel in possession of a stable and reliable understanding of the environment" (Biddlestone et al., 2021, p. 2). Biddlestone et al., though their discussion deals with belief in conspiracy theories specifically, also suggests that such belief is able to satisfy the psychosocial need for community and belonging. I find that this is adequate to explain the selection of preferred biblical prophecy interpretation and expulsion of others as posters scrambled to create a consistent narrative for the Covid-19 vaccines.

Original prophecy. Barkun's (2003) use of the term bricolage to describe the conspiratorial belief system works well as a tool for analysis of the way posters generate their own original prophecies. Foundational concepts of millenarian belief provided a solid bedrock on which posters developed their own prophetic narratives surrounding the Covid-19 vaccines.

One poster – and tripcode user – in particular, MidnightRider (tripcode: !0eL1YTmci.) presented a unique prophecy over two posts (see Appendix E for full posts).

MidnightRider’s prophecy was reminiscent of the writing style of Revelation. The poster also claimed to have been gifted with a vision from God which detailed the ways believers might survive the end times. To remain unvaccinated was at the top of the list because “the Vaccinated have broken the Everlasting Covenant so their only hope now is either acquiring the Seal of God from God, or the Name Engraved in my Palm [they included an image of a symbol tattooed on a person’s hand – see Figure E1 in Appendix E], or the Stone” (post 342449660).

A final example of the bricolage of improvised millennialism, though there are many from which to choose, is demonstrated in the exemplar quote for this theme.

Anonymous ID:nEsw+/T7 Thu 07 Oct 2021 05:39:22 [No.342434252](#)
Quoted By: [>>342434358](#) [>>342449246](#) [>>342449692](#)

The ancient brain parasite is the mark of the beast.
The black eye club took it "in the forehead"
The vax cattle take it in the arm and it breaches the blood brain barrier with help of other additives.
The brain parasite hijacks the individual’s mind. From this point on, for all intents and purposes they ARE the beast system.

The above post took different aspects of biblical prophecy and conspiracy theories propagated at the site. I am unsure what is the “ancient brain parasite” referred to but posters in the thread suggested it was used in the creation of the vaccines. The reference to the black eye club was confirmed to link to the use of adrenochrome secreted by children sacrificed to Moloch by Satanic paedophiles – which itself is a reference to the antisemitic trope of blood libel. Then finally, they introduced scientific sounding language to describe the process of people losing their own will to the parasite which echoed the fear of mind control discussed in the analysis of Thread 1.

Not only is the worldview displayed in the antivaccination narratives of the thread a melting pot of various beliefs and practices but also a way for individuals to partake in “cultural experimentation and entrepreneurship as well as of creative consumption, with representations flowing both into and out of popular culture” (Asprem & Dyrendal, 2015, p. 371). There is after all, as Poole (2010) stated, a sense of freedom to create within the subculture of /pol/ – no matter how grotesque the forms of creativity – that would not likely develop without the site’s formal and technical structure.

Direct MOTB Associations

The elements of the apocalyptic religious framework discussed so far have hinted at the mark of the beast associations in the thread. In this section I develop the idea further to continue the analysis of the construction of antivax conspiratoriality. Reference to the MOTB came in various forms. The most frequent aspects of the MOTB spoken about were the etymological interpretation of phrases and terms used in Revelation and other prophetic books in the Bible, the gematrical significance of certain phrases and terms (e.g. vaccination), the application and interpretation of prophecy, and the ingredients used in the vaccines' production.

Posters were interested in the different ways to interpret the original biblical prophecy through uncovering the scriptures' original words. *Pharmakeia* was introduced in the original post – a Greek word derived from *pharmakon* and *pharmakeus* – and is used to describe the “use of drugs, medicines, potions, or spells” as well as “poisoning, witchcraft” and “remedy” or “cure” (Harper, n.d.). It is used in various forms in four verses in Revelation to denote, what most biblical translations agree, as sorcery (Rev 18:23). In the context of the thread, the addition of the term “merchants” in the same verse brought to the fore the antisemitic conspiratorial ideation of the posters. The term triggered posters to theorise that the MOTB was part of a Jewish control conspiracy that involved trickery and sorcery with modern pharmaceuticals as the means to implement their plan and begin the end times.

Furthermore, etymology was used to directly link the physical injection of vaccines, and even the PCR tests used throughout the pandemic, to the word *charagma*. Though the interpretation in post 342444951 cannot be verified in Strong's biblical concordance, the word origin *charassó* does mean to sharpen or engrave with the implication of scratching (Strong, 2001). The added interpretation of the Greek word, even in other forms, as “prick” appears to be deceitful and intentionally misleading to fit the pandemic experience.

Anonymous ID:ief7Id41 Thu 07 Oct 2021 07:50:31 [No.342444951](#) [Report](#)
Quoted By: [>>342445262](#) [>>342445971](#)

[>>342433327](#)

In Revelation, the Greek word "charagma" means mark, SCRATCH, or PRICK. The Greek word "metopon" mean forehead or BETWEEN THE EYES.

The vaccine gives you a prick on the hand/arm. The PCR test gives you a scratch in the sinus space which is literally between your eyes. You can't buy or sell without submitting yourself to one of these procedures. Imo, what this means is pretty fucking clear.

Other interpretations of the MOTB on the hand and forehead were either put forward or seconded by 12 posters. Firstly, rather than an actual mark, they suggested the mark was a metaphor where the mark on the hand were the works and actions of people who were not

saved and the mark on the forehead were their unclean thoughts (posts 342444622; 342447108; 342450711) or “unthinking conformity” (post 342436597). Secondly, one poster took the metaphor theory further to deduce that the MOTB in Revelation refers to how “the wealthy would have so much power that those under them would be their livestock” (post 342436901). Finally, other interpretations focused on smartphone usage and the digital “vax pass” as a link to the mark on the hand and forehead (posts 342450501; 342451485).

A pseudo-scientific approach to the investigation of ingredients was prominent in the belief that the vaccines were the MOTB. Posters presented several interpretations of microscopy linked to the vaccines (see Appendix F), though which vaccine the images belonged to is not made evident in the thread.²⁶ The images presented objects of various shapes and luminosity in the vaccine that some posters speculated to be nanobots, parasites, or metal objects that constituted the MOTB or would be used to activate the MOTB. Other posters linked graphene in the vaccines to the number of the Beast, 666, because of its hexagonal structure (post 342451043). Posters discussed the vaccine ingredients strictly from the apocalyptic religious framework present at the site rather than from a human negligence perspective, even if the foreign bodies shown in the microscopy were demonstrably damaging to humans. This view is further emphasised by interpretations using the numerological application of gematria to specific terms, all of which equate to code for the number of the Beast (see Appendix G).

All forms of investigation into the ingredients of the vaccines presented in the thread, and stated links to the MOTB in general were based in institutional distrust. When individuals become suspicious of societal institutions, as was demonstrated in the very low trust levels associated with the sciences of posters on /pol/, it can severely affect the individual’s “sense of security” and “deteriorate the models for group norms and values” (Van Prooijen et al., 2022, p. 65). This impacted sense of security “is at the root of political extremism” and can then lead to “intergroup conflict, and polarization between different ideological groups” (Van Prooijen et al., 2022, p. 66). Polarisation in the case of /pol/ appears to reinforce specific identities in relation to the group. I have covered forum identity formation and maintenance in Chapter 4, but this thread presented another aspect to identities constructed within the community. In the next section I will investigate the religious identity constructed within the thread.

²⁶ Reverse image searches found the source of the images to be Dr John B. (@DrJohnB2 on X). His X bio states that he is a “Scientist, lecturer & father | Whistleblower” though additional research has not been able to verify where he lectures or in what field he operates. He claims to have performed the microscopy that revealed the images attached to posts 342437257 and 342437337. Microscopy was performed on the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid vaccine.

Religious Identity

Religious identity was primarily informed by the view that modern Christianity is not the true Christianity. This idea was developed over the course of the thread with posters pointing out elements of modern Christianity that were abhorrent to them, specifically the inclusion of the LGBT+. As mentioned earlier, posters also vilified the Catholic Church as a modern form of Luciferianism that colludes with the Synagogue of Satan and has ties to the Free Masons. Still others referenced modern Christianity as a method of control employed by the Jews.

Anonymous ID:zo8j6AT1 Thu 07 Oct 2021 07:53:27 [No.342445173](#)

Quoted By: [>>342445317](#)

[>>342444911](#)

There is christianity, which is subject to decay, rot, collapse and all the laws, passions and lusts of the world. Then there is Christ, who was resurrected, and is therefore not subject to any of the laws of this world. Unblemished and perfect being. The true church of God is hidden. It does not impose itself on anyone because it is nothing.

Although posters outlined their qualms with modern Christianity, they also said that their relationship with the Christian God had grown over the course of the pandemic. A reaffirmation of faith in God or Jesus was a common unifying aspect of the theme and several posters thanked each other for their work in interpreting the scriptures. Other posts encouraged users to “pray to the lord” (post 342446838).

Other facets of the religious identity demonstrated in the thread were the anticipation of societal collapse as part of the biblical apocalypse, and non-acceptance of the MOTB through violent protest against the corruption of the soul by the vaccines. Where societal collapse was a focus, posters mentioned, for example, that “all kingdoms, nations, companies, any kind of organization is doomed to decay and collapse” (post 342444793). The downfall of society was constructed on the basis of a vax pass and social credit system being implemented and excluding unvaccinated individuals from engaging with society in terms of buying and selling. The posters in the thread had a dismal view of the world at the time. Posters anticipated an apocalyptic dystopian world would be enforced where the vaccinated – the “good goys” – would flourish under the New/Jew World Order and the unvaccinated would need to start a violent resistance to avoid receiving the mark.

In light of vaccine mandates posters called on each other to reject the vaccine and employ “justified violence” (post 342450229) if necessary, as a valid mode of protest in the case of being “forced to take it the injections” (post 342438709). The idea of fighting the unjust powers that impose the MOTB – or, in the worldview constructed in this thread, the vaccine –

is seen as part of a “holy war” between good (the unvaccinated) and evil (the vaccinated and those who imposed mandatory vaccinations). Post 342436592 encapsulates the general feelings of hopelessness posters felt during the pandemic. When faced with the potential loss of an income, or other freedoms like travel, the response from this community justified the use of violent protest to avoid taking the vaccine as a spiritually motivated response.

Anonymous ID:F2S7AOxY Thu 07 Oct 2021 06:06:00 [No.342436592 Report](#)

Quoted By: [>>342437252](#) [>>342438666](#) [>>342439569](#) [>>342442165](#) [>>342444551](#) [>>342447656](#)
[>>342448253](#)

[>>342433327](#)

I've accepted that I'm willing to die for this. This society isn't worth living in anymore and I feel I have no future. I don't know if other anons on here feel this, but I've thought for a while that my days are numbered. I will not go to a camp and will not cower when the time comes. I'm in my twenties and almost know I won't live to be an old man. Whatever, whenever it comes I've accepted my fate by the sword.

Improvised millennialist ideas run through the examples I've provided in this subtheme. The *true Christian* will be edified in their struggles against evil in the end times even if the Christianity displayed in the thread was haphazardly constructed using Christian eschatological beliefs and the chief /pol/ cultural development tools of conspiratorial ideation, based in antisemitism, and New Age rhetoric. The claims made in the thread served to concretise identity by providing the posters with a holistic and understandable view of the world that is clearly defined along simple lines (Barkun, 2003). Posters found connection with other individuals who felt their fears of something that was difficult to comprehend and through sharing and creating ideological construction were able to satisfy social motivations within a collective (Biddlestone et al., 2021).

Within this collective, I note that posts in the thread demonstrated both the *epistemic bubble* – or the “social epistemic structure” informed by the processes of community development and cultural selection – and an echo chamber (Nguyen, 2020, p. 142). The epistemic bubble acts as a means to amplify specific ideologies and artificially enhance the community's confidence in their own forms of knowledge generation. The echo chamber, on the other hand, specifically discredits any views that oppose the accepted narratives. Nguyen (2020) goes on to note that this process isolates those within the community which results in an overdependence on insider sources. Processes of selection and undermining are apparent within the apocalyptic religious framework in the /pol/ community.

Antisemitic World Control Narratives

In most threads on /pol/, when distrust of authority is present in discussion, the obvious perpetrator of manipulation, trickery, and obfuscation is the Jew. Antisemitism therefore functions as a catchall scapegoat onto which the community places all societal ills to avoid implicating their own role in the way society functions. The use of antisemitism in this way is not new and directly correlates with ideas of a New World Order, the rise of the Antichrist, and an impending Armageddon (Fritze, 2022; West & Sanders, 2003). The posters portray themselves as powerless and claim victim status in a world that has, in their view, treated them badly for reasons both nefarious and beyond their control. Hornsey et al. (2023) cite the portrayal of ingroup victimhood as a powerful tool for rationalising aggression towards outgroups and the validation of intergroup conspiracy theories. Posters in the thread formulated their victimhood in two key ways. Firstly, in Jewish and elite control systems to which they are forced to adhere. Secondly, through the implementation of vaccination mandates with the potential to exclude them from normal functioning within society.

Jewish and Elite Control Systems

During the pandemic new ways for old conspiracy theories were found to be used against perceived persecutors. Primary persecutors were identified in the thread as the Jews and the elites who conspired together to create the perfect environment to usher in the New World Order (NWO) – or as one poster in the thread preferred, the Jew World Order (post 342449200). Posters constructed a network of control where the Jews together with the political and economic elites, most often connected to the World Economic Forum (WEF), conspired to manipulate the population through the mainstream media with “24/7 shill propaganda” (post 342436277).

Control narratives developed into alarmist predictions of totalitarian rule under the Antichrist made manifest by the Jews’ and elites’ manipulations of society. They posited that by controlling the population’s thoughts with the mainstream media and making people accept LGBT+ and immigrants, referred to as “globohomo” on /pol/, the world would be thrown into a dystopian one-world government. Everything would be centralised, from banking to education and importantly “you will take the demon jab juice you will eat ze bug you will own

nothing and be happy fag” (post 342438589).²⁷²⁸ The loss of all freedom, property, and indeed bodily autonomy intensified the belief that ultimate control of the human race was being coordinated through political and economic reform during the pandemic. Boyer (1994) notes that the perceived degradation of morality and links to Jewish global control has maintained a strong presence in several end times prophecies over the centuries. The belief that a NWO would be instituted and enact such totalitarian control systems was further compounded by the rhetoric used in two WEF videos, *8 predictions for the world in 2030* and *The Great Reset*, that were notorious on /pol/ for being clear demonstrations of the NWO’s intentions (see Footnotes 25 and 26 for additional information).

Anonymous ID:iGr47D3k Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:06:58 [No.342446179](#)
>>342433327

Yes. The Jews put all these plans in their goy cattle mind control cult handbook in the book of revelations. This is about what they would do if they got control of the goyium and they had to SHUT IT DOWN in order to stay in charge when the charade starts falling apart (which is inevitable due to cycles of ages).

The bible is basically a luciferian document. That’s the only reason it’s useful to read to understand what’s going on today. Because the NWO are luciferians and are using the luciferian playbook as intended. And also as intended, you can’t use the luciferian playbook to beat the luciferian playbook!

Post 342446179 presented a different form of religiosity than one based in Christianity I described in the previous theme. The view presented here is that Christianity is a “mind control cult” employed by the Jews to make the West subservient to Jewish will. This poster tied together several elements from at least four conspiratorial theories to explain the events at the time. The concepts I extracted can be formulated as follows:

1. Jews created the Book of Revelation to detail their plans for the apocalypse and control non-Jews in the end times.
2. There is a cycle of ages – a New Age reference – in which the old passes away and a new age takes its place.
3. The Bible is actually a document from the Luciferian belief system one could read to understand the Jew’s plan.²⁹

²⁷ “Eat ze bug” is a meme (text-based copypastas and image macros) spawned from the belief that there is an increased global push to eat bugs rather than meat. The memes grew in popularity over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic due to stock shortages (Know Your Meme, 2022). This meme is part of a group of memes that circulated after WEF released *The Great Reset* (2020) video during the pandemic.

²⁸ Another meme that gained popularity during the pandemic that referenced a WEF video, *8 predictions for the world in 2030*, posted in 2016. The video begins with stock footage of a smiling man and the words “You’ll own nothing, and you’ll be happy” (World Economic Forum, 2016).

²⁹ Luciferianism is not to be confused with Satanism. It is a distinct philosophy and belief system that holds enlightenment, self-empowerment, and the pursuit of knowledge as aspirational goals. It is a mix of ideologies that does not view the biblical Lucifer as a mythological entity but rather a symbol of enlightenment and resistance likened to the sociological analyses of Rand and Foucault (Smith, 2010).

4. The NWO are Luciferians.

The ideas expressed in the above post created a potent mixture of conspiratorial ideation and spiritualism to form a coherent view of the perceived end times for many posters, as variations on the idea were echoed throughout the thread. Fear of totalitarian control by removing economic freedoms, the freedom of movement, the institution of a biomedical social credit system, the implementation of the fourth industrial revolution which removes humans from the workforce played heavily on posters' minds. All of these fears centred on the vaccination a control mechanism which will be discussed in the next section. Existing fears of Western decline, compounded by the uncertainty brought on by the pandemic, resulted in strong negative emotions that led to blame for the upsetting scenario to be assigned to the Jews and elites. Van Prooijen (2018) views the creation and propagation of conspiracy theories as a natural response in times when such deeply distressing scenarios occur.

Vaccination as Jewish Control Mechanism

The apocalyptic religious framework, described earlier, specifically involves antisemitic conspiracy theories that have long existed at the site (Bovan & Mikašinović-Komšo, 2024; Hine et al., 2017; Maurer, 2024; Munn, 2023; Tutters & Hagen 2020; Wendling, 2018; Zannettou et al., 2020; De Zeeuw & Gekker, 2023). Posters maintained constructions of antisemitic tropes by implicating Jews as the coordinators of the end times. Jews, according to /pol/, had a leading role in the creation of Covid-19 so that they could implement the MOTB – the vaccine. The introduction of the vaccine mandates represented to posters the fulfilment of a Jewish plan to control the world. This would be achieved through the introduction of nanobots into the recipient's body that would receive signals, some speculated from 5G networks. On the other, you had the supernatural effects of taking a vaccine that marked you for damnation as part of the Jewish plan to incite the biblical end times.

For the posters, it was not just that there existed a globalist liberal world that sought out more control, and glorified degenerate behaviours, but specifically because this liberal, degenerate world was made possible by the Jews' introduction of a "globohomo hellworld system" (post 342445579). In reality, without the site's vernacular, posters actually refer to the system of government of a liberal democracy. Liberal democracy is cast as a "hellworld" not because it is literally a supernatural conspiracy coordinated by the Jews and elites, but rather the liberalist ideology of inclusion and representation is so diametrically opposed to the desires of the alt-right. The liberal agenda and the prediction of totalitarian rule interpolated from the limits imposed on people during the pandemic were cast as the machinations of the NWO and

posed an existential threat to the existence of those who were supposedly free thinkers and not part of the “goy cattle”. The vaccination drives were the final step in the plan for the Jews to take control of the last thing on their list, the human soul.

The response from the alt-right, and /pol/ as an incubator of the alt-right, to this existential threat was to attempt the acceleration of the polarisation and societal disunity. The goal was to redpill as many people as they could, both within and beyond the confines of /pol/. By sharing resources such as microscopy of the vaccine, biblical prophecy of the end times, and “naming the Jew” as the primary conspirator in bringing about societal collapse their ranks might increase and demonstrate unity in the face of the “c0v1<| cult” (post 342449811). Other posts in the thread appeared to earnestly believe that their duty was to stop people from taking the vaccine as a matter of life and death. These views were distilled in the post below.

Anonymous ID:JQkdYq77 Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:39:27 [No.342448476](#)
Quoted By: [>>342449811](#)

[>>342445927](#)

Keep trying. Every person in my life has caved, and I’ve noticed all of them getting very weird, but I strongly feel its my responsibility to keep trying. No matter how much you want to let them go and tell them to enjoy hell, we should keep trying. It says that those doomed are the ones who take the mark and worship the beast’s image. If you know people who took it, get them to open their eyes, realize what this world is, and at the very least deny the boosters. I’m trying to reverse course my wife, but damn is she getting nuts these days. She became a straight up covid cultist just to spite me, and rages at me daily for no reason, but I’ve got her to at least say she won’t take any boosters. It’s a start, so I’m hoping it can be done. There is a reason most who take the mark aren’t immediately killed. Side note, I think that’s why the vax seems so particularly dangerous to children. They can’t consent to it, and it strictly says everyone who takes it will of their own free will. It seems kids who get force jabbed by their parents and die soon after are being martyred.

Alternative Epistemologies

So far, I have established the ways in which the /pol/ community in this thread have constructed a form of conspiratoriness on the basis of improvised millennialism beliefs with a and antisemitic conspiracy theories. I have hinted at New Age elements in the themes above but give special place for them here as an alternative epistemological source to contextualise how posters presented their own antivaccination views. Though many of the posters in the thread claim to be “true Christians” there is an overarching mysticism present in the way they interpret the biblical prophecy of the end times that reads as heresy. The interpretations are more akin to the New Age worldview and modern mysticism of connecting disparate nodes in a surreptitious pattern. In this section I will briefly illustrate my point in three concepts drawn from the posts in the thread. First, belief in an awakening of the masses is shared amongst the posters which is a foundational aspect of New Age rhetoric. Beyond this, the use of original prophecy as a means to gain and share knowledge functions outside of canonical scripture –

which is divinely inspired. Finally, the interpretation of dreams and following the guidance of disembodied voices is closer to the spiritualists of the 19th century than the Christian doctrine posters claimed to follow.

The original poster of this thread claims, “the whole world would be deceived by ‘pharmakeia’ and only the wise and awake would know! Everyone else is too asleep” (post 342433327). The concepts of being spiritually asleep and being awake presented in the post follow similar rhetoric to that of Ward and Voas’ (2011) explication of the fundamental truths in conspiritualist belief. They state that “humanity is undergoing a ‘paradigm shift in consciousness, or awareness” and that this awakening is the only way to overcome “the secret group [that] covertly controls, or is trying to control, the political and social order” (p. 104). Beyond the paradigm shift there was also a strong reference to karmic debt that the distributors of the vaccine would incur for deceiving and harming the world’s population. Post 342447925 suggested a peaceful form of protest “by simply saying no” to incite bad karma on those who intended to force the vaccine on them.

Anonymous ID:JQkdYq77 Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:31:55 [No.342447925](#)

Quoted By: [>>342450382](#)

[>>342446911](#)

>At this point though their karma if they keep this shit up is going to be severely fucked.

And that’s because we don’t consent and don’t comply. They tell us what they’re doing to avoid the karma. Most just go along with it and dismiss it as muh conspiracy theory because the truth and resisting it is too scary, and the system has made them rich and comfy. We fight back by simply saying no and forcing them to drop this shit on us against our will, thus putting the karma on them and forcing them to pay it. Wouldn’t that essentially be the return? Most of us probably won’t get saved in the sense that a lot of us will probably get killed, but that is what not consenting is and forcing the karma on them is.

I refer back to MidnightRider’s post (see Figure E2, Appendix E) as exemplary of the cultic milieu in practice in both the use of original prophecy and adherence to guidance from disembodied voices. MidnightRider’s posts, and others in the thread, embodied forms of rejected knowledge – such as knowledge derived from dreams and disembodied voices – and tended toward *occulture*. That is to say the melting pot of “those often *hidden, rejected, and oppositional* beliefs and practices associated with esotericism, theosophy, mysticism, New Age, Paganism” that were present in the thread (Partridge, 2004, p. 68 [emphasis in original]). Knowledge claims are no longer verified against scientific research but rather intuition and pre-existing beliefs. Whether that is because of deep distrust of authorities based in antisemitism or other conspiratorial worldviews. Spiritual beliefs are muddled together and form a chimera completely unique for each individual. This aligns with Partridge’s (2004) understanding of the cultic spirituality, where the spirituality expressed “is self-oriented, eclectic and

epistemologically individualistic” and “religious authority is internalized” (p. 62). Partridge goes on to note that beliefs within cultic spirituality circles, though they may be disparate to a degree, are likely to naturally form networks and organisations.

In all of these aspects, I note a common intent to disavow the modern world – including modern forms of religion – and romanticise the premodern where the degeneracies and loss of true spirituality in the modern age are reformed into pure spiritual enlightenment (Partridge, 2004). In accordance with the renunciation of the modern world and its trappings, Ward and Voas (2011) believe that individuals gravitate towards conspiracy theories and spiritualism as a means to attain “holistic worldviews that contest the political pragmatism, economic rationalism, scientific empiricism, and social dislocation characteristic of the modern age” (p. 103).

Chapter Conclusion

Analysis of Thread 2 demonstrates the intricate ways in which conspiratoriness manifests within the digital subculture of /pol/. By employing Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis, I was able to identify three dominant themes in the discourse: the apocalyptic religious framework, antisemitic world control narratives, and alternative epistemologies. These themes, though distinct, overlap to construct a cohesive worldview that resonates deeply with the community’s collective identity and the broader cultural context of the pandemic.

The apocalyptic religious framework provided a lens for interpreting the pandemic as a fulfilment of biblical prophecy. Posters frequently referred to the mark of the beast linking it to Covid-19 vaccines through a bricolage of biblical exegesis, numerology, and pseudoscience. As Barkun (2003) describes, this type of improvised millennialism relies on the integration of disparate elements to create a unified conspiratorial narrative. Original prophetic posts served the dual purpose of meaning-making and acted as a unifying force within the community. In so doing, posters were able to be assured in their shared opposition to vaccination mandates and the perceived societal decline caused by the manipulations imposed on society by the Jews and elites.

Antisemitic world control narratives, a core feature of /pol/ discourse (Hine et al., 2017), were woven into the pandemic context. The thread’s discussions reiterated traditional antisemitic tropes, portraying Jews as orchestrators of global vaccination campaigns to consolidate power and oppress the world. This narrative was amplified through references to the New World Order and the “Jew World Order,” demonstrating the enduring adaptability of

antisemitic conspiracies in response to contemporary events (Van Prooijen et al., 2022). These constructions not only reinforced a sense of victimhood among posters but also provided a scapegoat for the fears and anxieties highlighted in the thread brought about by the pandemic.

Alternative epistemologies further illustrated the community's rejection of mainstream scientific, and institutional knowledge – modern versions of Christianity to a degree as well. Drawing on elements of esotericism, numerology, and personal revelation, posters constructed an idiosyncratic belief system that blurred the boundaries between Christian eschatology and New Age spirituality. Partridge's (2004) concept of occulture captures this phenomenon, where rejected and oppositional beliefs coalesce into a self-referential and epistemically insular worldview. The emphasis on individual intuition and non-canonical prophecy highlights the role of digital platforms in facilitating the emergence of these eclectic and hybridised knowledge systems. By synthesising religious, conspiratorial, and esoteric elements, the thread's discourse reflects the adaptive and multifaceted nature of belief systems on /pol/.

Chapter 6: How Covid-19 Antivax Conspirativity Manifests on /pol/

Introduction

During this study I have introduced several complex ideas to explain the manifestation of antivax conspirativity on /pol/. First, I introduced the concept of the digital space most individuals currently inhabit in the form of an overview of the move from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. This change, where individuals began building homes on the frontiers of the digital realm (Rheingold, 1994), marked a distinct change in the way people accessed and generated information over the net. I combined this new sociality – that of being online and offline, while they both simultaneously inform each other – with the power of narrative to construct an individual’s reality from both online and offline narrative sources.

Following the brief discussion on digital existence and narrative I presented my own experience of becoming a part of the 4chan ecosystem. From my personal experience I was able to share specifics about the site structure in practice. Having engaged with various boards situated me in a unique position to give an insider’s perspective to the way things work at the site. Elements of ephemerality and anonymity were important elements to concentrate on as they inform the behaviours lurkers and posters demonstrate in the various communities on 4chan. I then proceeded to highlight the ways 4chan, specifically /pol/, had made an impact on the internet at large and indeed its forays into the real world.

In Chapter 2, I presented a conceptual framework that introduced scholarship into conspiracy theories, conspirativity, and memes. This framework was primarily based on Barkun’s (2003; 2015) in-depth study of conspiracy theory belief, Ward and Voas’ (2011) introduction of conspirativity into the academic world, Dawkins’ (2006) original meme theory as a cultural replicator, and finally Shifman (2014) and Wiggins’ (2019) formal concepts of the internet meme. As an aside, upon reflection, I note that the conceptual framework used in this study mirrors the kind of bricolage approach Barkun (2003) suggests conspiracy theory believers utilise to construct their worldview.

Finally, using the methods outlined in Chapter 3, I began my analysis of the large dataset I gathered from 4plebs. I implemented quantitative steps to guide my selection of two threads for further analysis. These two threads yielded a total of 654 individual posts, which were coded using latent and semantic coding practices combined with my general understanding of how the posters at the site use particular words and phrases to get a nuanced

understanding of the content in the threads. I constructed seven themes from the two threads. Through the analysis of these themes, we get closer to an understanding of how antivax conspiratoriality manifests at the site.

This chapter aims to relay the conclusions drawn from analysis of the selected threads to give an overview of how this type of conspiratoriality, particular to the /pol/ board, can be developed into a fully-fledged belief system. Furthermore, the belief system has shown itself to be incredibly malleable and viral in nature and has grown in popularity to the point of mainstream infamy beyond the confines of the site. Three core findings regarding the belief system prevalent on /pol/ specifically have been formulated based on my analyses. They will each be discussed in turn in this chapter, they are: the construction of conspiratoriality, its presentation, and its proliferation.

Construction of Conspiratoriality

Regarding the construction of the politico-spiritual belief system (Ward & Voas, 2011), it is necessary to note the context in which these beliefs are formed and take root. /pol/ is a unique space, even for 4chan, and though politics is the primary discussion point for the board, elements of spirituality seep in from the periphery.³⁰ In the following two sections I will discuss how /pol/ posters construct a unique version of conspiratoriality by discussing the foundations of politico-spiritual ideologies found at the site and the methods used by posters to construct belief systems on those foundations.

Foundations at the Site

/pol/ has a colourful history with conspiracy theories. Though mostly political, some conspiracy theories did indeed draw on spiritualistic elements to establish the overarching reasoning behind the conspiracy itself. Take for instance the spiritual elements allegedly behind the child trafficking conspiracy theory levelled against the liberal factions of American politics and Hollywood made by Q (Fritze, 2022).³¹ It was not enough that liberal elites were depraved and participated in kidnapping, paedophilia, and torture. That wouldn't make an impact in this ecosystem – remember, the ephemeral and anonymous functionality of the site calls for inflammatory and extreme statements for them to survive in the discourse. The theory *had to* include a satanic paedophilic cabal who sacrificed children to Moloch. Beyond just paedophilic

³⁰ Noted by Hine et al. (2017). These sentiments are shared by posters on /pol/ and other 4chan boards.

³¹ Q's first post was made on 28 October 2017 (Fritze, 2022).

cabals, the theory that these liberal elites did all this in order to harvest and consume a chemical called adrenochrome that forms when adrenaline is oxidised.³² The theory goes that by generating high levels of fear in these children, through various forms of torture, it can be made to be more potent. The ultimate purpose of consuming adrenochrome is cosmetic in essence. Those who consume adrenochrome are able to keep their youthful appearance for as long as they consume it.

But this isn't foundational to the site. The story of adrenochrome goes back further on /pol/ to September 2013 where posters began to link the use of adrenochrome to liberal elites who perform satanic ritual abuse (Fritze, 2022). The link here is made based on the later Middle Ages antisemitic myth of blood libel. In the myth, Jews were said to sacrifice and drink the blood of Christian children (Fritze, 2022). It is easy to see that the form of vampirism and cannibalism depicted in those old myths are essentially the basis for what the modern myth has come to be when you consider that the underlying belief is that Jews rule the political and media elites. This is the primary foundation on which so many conspiracy theories form at the site. The existential fear that Jews want to control the world and employ sinister means to achieve this goal drives the meaning-making processes within the community. In both Thread 1 and 2, the collected data demonstrated an overwhelming concern with the NWO and Jewish control. Though there are differences in the way that it manifested in the different threads – Thread 1 was more general in the ways posters presented antisemitism, whereas posters in Thread 2 framed it as a spiritual war for the soul of humanity – the core aspect of antisemitism remained. Most conspiracy theories at the site have this underlying spiritual urgency that pits the Jews, as the sorcerers who will deceive the world (Rev 18:23), against the non-Jews who are awake and aware of the situation – the redpilled.

Methods of Construction

The antisemitic, conspiratorial, spiritual foundation on which /pol/'s conspirituality is built uses a process of borrowing and reconstituting popular culture within the community. Popular culture gives new ways for posters to create mythology with sci-fi films and television being primary in myth making processes. Take, for example, the use of the different -pill terms used in the way posters describe their stances. The redpill, discussed in Chapter 5, is drawn from *The Matrix* and is a core part of the alt-right ideology. The redpill is indicative of being

³² References to adrenochrome can be seen in Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* (1954), in *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), by Anthony Burgess, and Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971).

awakened to the real world. Links between this idea and New Age spirituality are not hard to find. Other popular culture references include *The X-Files* where Mulder's UFO poster, which states "The truth is out there" in uppercase letters, has achieved meme status on both /x/, the paranormal board, and /pol/.

Barkun (2003) notes that stigmatised knowledge claims have increased as popular culture has dug into the reservoirs of subcultural "motifs, theories, and truth claims" (p. 33) that once were separate from common discourse. We no longer have strong institutional and cultural boundaries between types of knowledges due to our online-offline lives being so intertwined. With the increase of widely-screened films indulging in the occult, speculative sciences, and conspiracy we have seen the merger of mainstream and stigmatised knowledge. I do not feel that this is necessarily bad, but it has expanded the horizons of discourse that popular culture and the mainstream engage in.

The internet has served humanity well in the freedom to access, create, and distribute information. People are now freer than ever to indulge fancies that they likely wouldn't have engaged with previously. Freedom begets freedom. With the freedom to engage and learn about different types of knowledge previously cordoned off by institutional powers comes more freedom to create communities and cultures around those new types of knowledge. Due to greater access to unfiltered information – though most social media are filtered by a variety of influences that do not pertain to 4chan – and the creation and remixing of myths people move further from "consensus reality to virtual reality" where "politics itself must now be theorized from within the widespread dispersion of paranoia that supplanted focused targets" (Dean, 1998, p. 8). Hints drawn from popular culture create new language and metaphors for individuals to conceptualise and construct their personal realities.

The concept of *predictive programming* features heavily in discussions about current affairs on /pol/ and sometimes flows over onto /tv/ the television and film board. Predictive programming implicates the mainstream media as a tool that uses news and entertainment outlets to prepare people for changes in policy, technology, and even catastrophic events (Neuwirth, 2022). A clear example of this idea is that *The Simpsons* is consistently used to implement predictive programming. *The Simpsons* has been credited with predicting 9/11 in an episode aired in 1996, President Trump in 2000 and 2015, and even Covid-19 in 1993 (Reuters, 2020). It must be noted that these predictions are not direct references but hint at the event. In the case of the 9/11 prediction, the scene that is suggested to have predicted the event is when Bart holds up a magazine that reads "New York" at the top of the page, and the price "\$9" next to silhouetted Twin Towers, which makes it look like 9/11.

Additional tools for the construction of conspирuality beyond popular culture exist in the threads. They take form in memes, ways of speaking about topics, and the infused religiosity or spirituality common to the ideas presented. These ways of being in the community act as both tools for construction and methods of presentation as the culture consistently is defined by new inputs from the community of posters. For this reason, I will deal with them in the following section in the ways conspирuality is presented in the threads.

Presentation of Conspирuality

The following sections deal specifically with how conspирuality is presented in the threads analysed. The three aspects of presentation – memeplexes, 4chan vernacular and rhetoric, and spirituality – all have a significant social element that is specific to how this community engages with ideas. I will refer to the social element throughout these sections but will only deal with it directly in the next part about the proliferation of conspирuality.

Memeplexes

Coadapted meme complexes, or simply memeplexes, are formed when several memes are able to coexist and reinforce each other leading to greater survival in the cultural ecosystem (Dawkins, 2006). An example to explain the concept of memeplexes, used by Shifman (2014), is democracy. It is made up of smaller memeplexes such as freedom of speech, and government by election. These can be further broken down into constituent memes. In the case of Threads 1 and 2, several memeplexes were identified and constructed into themes. For example, racism, xenophobia, antisemitism were identified as memeplexes that thrive at the site. Each is presented with their own set of ideological premises – whether explicit or implicit to the discourse – that inform the culture within the /pol/ community. The memeplexes that exist at the site also dictate how information is shared amongst users. Memes, which constitute memeplexes, take form in greentexts, image macro memes, and video. All of these elements were used in the presentation of conspирuality in both threads.

The meme culture, built up through conspiratorial hatred and reappropriated popular culture served as useful vehicles for individuals to latch onto to make sense of the pandemic and the use of vaccines. The various memeplexes, as larger units of cultural transmission, survived in the selected threads as they were appropriate to the space, and the hosts (i.e. posters) were particularly susceptible to the ways in which the memeplexes served the progression of the culture present. Memes are powerful tools to articulate and share group values and present

ideologies in a way that is meaningful to a particular community. Shifman's (2014) three dimensions of memes, referred to in Chapter 2, namely *content*, *form*, and *stance* (p. 40). Content refers to the ideas and ideologies conveyed by the meme. Form is the medium, i.e. image, video, audio, or text. Stance is the positioning the creator inhabits in relation to the audience, and the content in the meme. Ideological power inferred from a simple meme (see Figure 14 for example) was made manifest throughout these threads. Memes communicated complex ideas in easy-to-understand messaging. Though, in the case of Figure 14, outsiders would likely not understand the specific cultural significance of the content. Outsiders can however clearly understand the form and stance. This brings into focus the internal vernacular and ways of communicating at the site. Memetic logic

Figure 14

Unvaccinated Apu rejects death from a vaxxie.



4chan Vernacular and Rhetoric

Shifman (2014) posits a global language in the form of memes but problematizes this concept with "discreet memetic vernaculars" (p. 174). Though memes do possess the power to relay

complex information and ideas in a short image macro, there are still marked differences in the vernacular used in different cultures – whether internet-based and offline. /pol/, as a research site, provides a look at the presentation of conspiratoriality within the confines of its own culture using the different forms of memes discussed above.

Coded language in the form of images and text are interpreted by posters in a unique way that is informed by their familiarity with the community. In reference to Figure 14, the characters depicted are coded with particular societal roles within the context of the thread. The masked character has three plasters on their arm, representing “the triple boosted” individual. They are void of expression and colour which could be interpreted as the vaccinated NPC. Apu, a cuter version of the original Pepe, is used as a representative of the antivax community on /pol/ who refuses to get the vaccine and still remains alive despite the vaccinated NPC’s pleas to die. The NPC is controlled by the fear-mongering media, and in order to justify their subservience to medical and governmental authorities, they want Apu to die. The meme used in the context of the thread shows that the vaccine is only a mark of the vaccinated’s willingness to be controlled. The ideological points are then made clear to the community: you will not die if you refuse the vaccine, and on a deeper level, you must not be controlled and become an NPC. Other inferences could be drawn from the meme as well, such as the media and medical authorities lie, resistance is part of our culture, etc.

The meme discussed above is on the lighter side of how the discourse evolved in the threads. As noted in previous chapters, the use of extreme and inflammatory language is a mainstay of the site in general and a key feature of the threads I analysed. Extreme language in regard to hate and distrust were common throughout the threads. The extreme language used to present arguments almost always drew boundaries between the vaccinated and unvaccinated. The inflammatory nature of the claims demonstrated an existential threat to the soul and/or health of an individual if they dared to get vaccinated.

I find the purpose of ideas presented in extreme language is based in the site’s functionality. As noted in Chapter 4, the ephemerality of the posts on /pol/ plays an important role in how individual posters compete for relevancy (Hine et al., 2017; Wendling, 2018). Without a ranking system based on likes and shares – like other social media platforms – the only way for your message to be accepted, or even last for a brief time, within the community is to make it attention grabbing and provoke others to reply to you. If posters do not use this rhetorical strategy their messages are doomed to be ignored or quickly removed from the board.

Linked to extreme language is the presentation of conspiratorial antivaccination arguments in an authoritative way. Posters presented themselves in particular ways that point

to their belief in their own intelligence. The authoritative, intelligent, seemingly objective take on the pandemic presented by a non-conformist poster is more likely to be taken up into the community's culture. Many researchers who have investigated /pol/ note the trend of individuals who present their arguments as if they are more intelligent than others as a means to establish certainty in their propositions. In the instance of solidifying in-/outgroups, intelligence is noted as an important ingredient of the interpretation of memes within the subculture by Shifman (2014). Furthermore, intelligence as a distinction between the normies and the redpilled is highlighted by Colley and Moore (2022). Mike Wendling (2018) points out the site's obsession with IQ and race where white people are deemed to have superior intellect.

Posters also frequently emulated mainstream scholarship, and ironically the scientific method, as a means to present conspiratorial theories and demonstrate their higher intelligence to the community (Barkun, 2004). This act is not only for the individual who posts to reinforce their self-importance, but also to reinforce their credibility within the community and thereby increasing the chance to influence the overarching narratives at the site. The use of logical forms of presenting ideas such as "evidence" of microchips and parasites found in microscopy conducted on the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, to data points released by the very health institutions the myths at the site undermined is consistent with how Barkun formulated the conspiratorial approach. An approach employed by many posters in the threads used to push their ideas about Covid-19 and the vaccines.

Spirituality

Some elements of spirituality have been dealt with in the construction of conspirituality section above, but I will take time here to lay out the specific findings in this section. Posters in the threads presented their theories from a spiritualistic perspective. The case for the intersection of spirituality and conspiracy theories has been made in this study and by several other researchers who have analysed the ways in which conspiratorial ideation takes hold of individuals (Ward & Voas, 2011; Tutters & Hagen, 2019; Barkun, 2003; Fritze, 2022). Flirtations with the esoteric, occult, and supernatural are common across /pol/ made evident in the threads analysed in this study. Thread 2 offered a glimpse into a concentrated ecosystem of competing spirituality and occultism.

It makes sense that for superconspiracies to be of such great magnitude, like those associated with Covid-19, that conspiracy theorists have to incorporate some level of divine or supernatural power to occur. When you begin to deal with theories about the control of the

world's population it is natural for those conspiracy theorists to portray the villains as an entity, or supernaturally powerful group of people, that seeks to erase the cultures and beliefs of those they oppress for their own ideological framework to take hold.

Beyond the theoretical aspects of spirituality and conspiracy theories, posts in Thread 2 clearly demonstrated an affinity for eschatological fantasy based in Christianity. Posters, following Barkun's (2003) bricolage of the millennialist milieu, presented a patchwork of eschatological knowledge sources which included biblical prophecy, original prophecy, dreams, and pseudo-science. Though other aspects of spirituality are demonstrated in the threads, there exists in the posts a form of veneration of alternative knowledge sources such as dreams and prophecy, as well as New Age spiritual concepts such as Karma. The forms of spirituality are all constructed within the framework of good versus evil, once again reestablishing us and them dynamics but on a spiritual level rather than simply race or other more naturalistic elements of individuals.

Covid-19 antivaccination narratives, in this light became a spiritual battle for individuals. They *had to* resist. It is their very soul on the line and the evil Jews and elites work against the will of the true god to bring about destruction of true followers of Christ. The spiritual then took on a war-times viewpoint where militant language was introduced to rally other posters against the "Beast System". The us and them also became more granular and a schism was created between those who were deemed *true* Christians and those who were not.

Within the prophetic end-of-the-world scenario, fears were presented as signs and symbols of the apocalypse. The use of dreams and original prophecy to validate fears and present a worldview that married conspiratorial thinking with a patchwork spiritualism were welcomed in the thread as the site was susceptible to such ideas. Based on the esoteric and conspiracy fuelled foundations, Covid-19 antivaccination myths were presented to a predisposed audience who then went on to proliferate these ideas within their families and friendship circles.

Proliferation of Conspirituality

Antivaccination mythology, based on antisemitic and elite control conspiracy theories and presented in unique ways at the site, proliferated across /pol/ during the pandemic. A supplementary dataset – not used in the analysis chapters in this study – collected from 1 – 9 October 2023 shows that these myths still persist. Though the frequency of threads with the keywords "vax" and "vaccination" is much lower compared to Dataset 2, they were still higher

than Dataset 1. An adjusted timeframe for Dataset 1, set to the first nine days of March, shows that Dataset 1 yielded 33 threads, 6408 posts, with 3082 posters, compared to Dataset 3 which yielded 56 threads, 7890 posts, with 4207 posters. I do acknowledge that vaccination programmes had not started in March 2020 so the likelihood of vaccination being a popular topic of discussion is low compared to after vaccination programmes had been mandated. But I also acknowledge that vaccine mandates had, in 2023, been removed and yet there was still significant enough discussion surrounding the yet-to-be-seen mass death of the vaccinated and the rise of the Beast.

In the following sections I will discuss the potential reasons for the proliferation of conspirituality on /pol/ with reference to the foundational concepts embedded in the culture at the site, and the ways in which conspirituality was presented in the threads. I found three candidates for the reasons antivaccination myths were able to spread so rapidly and were accepted into the /pol/ community's belief system. They are the ease of access to conspiritual knowledge sources and ways of thinking and the social dynamics at play in the community development of a meaning-making framework such as conspirituality.

Access to Alternative Knowledge

To situate this concept, I refer to types of knowledge that were accessible prior to the rise in personal computers and access to the internet. It is a fallacy, although it may seem logical to assume, that the increase in internet usage increased the propensity of individuals to believe conspiracy theories and engage with alternative forms of knowledge. It is not the propensity for belief but rather the speed at which these types of knowledge spread that rises with increased use of the internet (Van Prooijen, 2018). Before ubiquitous internet conspirituality was still present, though slower moving and less likely to be discussed in the mainstream. Mass media, as Brunvand stated in 1981, are the primary means for which modern myths are shared (cited in Barkun, 2003). Throughout the ages various media have been used to share knowledge that could be deemed as subversive or in opposition to institutionalised knowledge.

This is the key. Institutions traditionally controlled the flow of information from above and relegated alternative forms of knowledge to the realm of the forbidden or stigmatised. For most of human history subcultural knowledge was not given any power to disseminate freely via mass media and was therefore shared in secret by word of mouth, or in texts that were self-published on a much smaller scale than is possible today. As humanity has moved to more democratic forms of knowledge production and sharing via the internet, we see that the

propensity for belief in alternative knowledge is able to manifest itself as it likely would have if institutional powers were not present throughout history. This development has significant effects on human sociality and collaborative myth making that can sometimes be detrimental to the well-being of communities.

As modern conspirituality is primarily an internet-based phenomenon, its proliferation and reframing, based on the internet community in which it takes root, occur quickly. The community on /pol/ started as a highly conspiratorial alternative news source to the mainstream media (Hine et al., 2017). The site was already primed to receive and accept alternative knowledge about Covid-19 and vaccines. The internet savvy community already had access to resources far outside the mainstream and was able to concretise their findings in memetic fashion. By memeifying their findings to fit within the community framework of antisemitism, racism, antiliberalism, conspiracism, and spirituality it increased the potential uptake of antivaccination myths. The myths, initially just small elements of threads in Dataset 1, became a fundamental way of viewing the vaccines as demonstrated in Dataset 2.

Social Dynamics

When stressful societal events or crises occur, individuals seek out potential reasons for their occurrence. The attribution to concrete causes that make sense to the individual eases the experience of psychological strain caused by an upsetting event (Van Prooijen, 2018). Distressing societal events and crises can lead to individuals seeking out patterns to explain how something came to be which conspirituality can answer (Barkun, 2003; Chia et al., 2021; Ward & Voas, 2011, Van Prooijen, 2018). In the realm of conspirituality, the causes are inseminated with a type of intent where agency is granted to an outside force. Thus, ingroup and outgroup dynamics take the fore.

In the context of the threads analysed in this study, clear in-/outgroups are delineated from the outset. The community within /pol/ is victimised by an evil, supernatural will projected onto, primarily, the Jews (Douglas et al., 2018). The Jews are responsible for the declining numbers of white populations around the world through their implantation of the “globohomo” plan – the globalist intention to allow the increase of LGBT+ communities, race mixing, and the importation of third-world non-whites into first world countries. Following this belief, the fear that white populations would be further decreased by sterilisation by vaccination, another plan implemented by Jewish elites. These “plans” stand as an affront to the self-described victimhood of the disaffected and marginalised young, white man. In the

deference of culpability, individuals within the group are able to maintain a self-image that aligns with their collective identity (Douglas et al., 2018).

Antisemitic memes and myths aid in the proliferation of conspiratorial beliefs and give form to anxieties that remove responsibility from the ingroup and project the “feelings of threat onto an outgroup” (Hornsey et al, 2023, p. 88). This method of easing psychological distress was prominent in both Thread 1 and 2 where posters weaved antisemitic myths with modern formulations of control conspiracies and moulded into cohesive, all-encompassing Covid-19 antivaccination narratives. Under the umbrella of conspiratoriality individual posters were able to develop a unified, community-based understanding of events.

Naturally, there is a big difference in the way that antivax beliefs were presented between March 2020 and October 2021. In 2020, the pandemic had just been declared and vaccination programmes had not been introduced yet. Over this time, ideas noted generally in Dataset 1, exemplified in Thread 1 had time to develop into fully-fledged beliefs where Thread 2 shows the concentration of conspiratorial beliefs. Through the process of creative construction through bricolage and patch work within the community, more evidence was added to the narratives surrounding vaccines. This aligns with Asprem and Dyrendal’s (2015) observations regarding the social dynamics of conspiracy theory development where, a space such as 4chan, engrossed in occulture, makes sense that it engages in “cultural experimentation and entrepreneurship ... and creative consumption” (p. 371). By collaboratively constructing conspiracy theories from various sources, posters reinforced beliefs and strengthened social ties under the banner of antivaxxers.

Chapter Conclusion

It might be easy to argue that internet usage is the root cause of the rapid spread of damaging myths, and by eliminating algorithmic intelligences embedded in social media platforms could stem their proliferation. However, such a view underestimates the complexity of human belief systems and the enduring presence of conspiratorial and spiritual ideation throughout history. As this study has shown, conspiratoriality did not originate with the internet but has evolved alongside human attempts to make sense of an unpredictable and often chaotic world. The unique conditions of the digital age have simply accelerated its visibility, adaptability, and reach.

Throughout this thesis, the intricate relationship between online environments and belief formation has been laid bare. From the conceptual shift in digital spaces – tracing the

transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 and its implications for sociality – to the specific affordances of platforms like 4chan, the ways in which these spaces shape narratives have been explored. The ephemerality and anonymity characteristic of /pol/ not only foster a particular kind of discourse but also necessitate the creation of extreme, attention-grabbing narratives. These narratives, far from being random, are deeply rooted in the foundational ideologies of the community, including antisemitism, xenophobia, and the overarching spectre of the New World Order.

At the core of the study is the concept of bricolage – the piecing together of disparate cultural elements to construct a cohesive belief system (Barkun, 2003). This process is evident in the ways /pol/ posters blend antisemitic myths, popular culture references, and spiritual narratives to craft a form of conspiratoriality that resonates deeply with the community. From the reappropriation of *The Matrix*'s redpill metaphor to the invocation of biblical prophecy and eschatological fantasies, the threads analysed reveal a consistent interplay between the secular and the sacred, the mundane and the extraordinary.

The memetic logic of 4chan plays a crucial role in this dynamic. Memes, whether text or image macros, are used as vehicles for ideological expression, encapsulate complex ideas in digestible forms. They act as both tools of construction and presentation, allowing users to reinforce group identity while disseminating conspiratorial beliefs. Shifman's (2014) dimensions of memes – content, form, and stance – are clearly evident in the cultural products of /pol/, where memes serve as carriers of meaning that extend beyond their immediate visual or textual elements.

Perhaps most interesting is the role of spirituality within the information ecosystem of /pol/, a dedicated politics discussion forum. This study has shown how posters weave spiritual urgency into their narratives, elevating mundane political and social concerns into matters of cosmic significance. The invocation of the "Beast System", the spiritual warfare between good and evil, and the alignment of vaccine resistance with divine will demonstrate how deeply entwined /pol/ posters' political ideologies are with existential concerns. The pandemic, in this context, became not merely a public health crisis but a spiritual battle for the soul of humanity.

Finally, this thesis has highlighted how these belief systems are not only constructed and presented but also proliferated within and beyond /pol/. The iterative process of myth-making, bolstered by the social dynamics of the community, ensures the persistence and adaptation of conspiratorial beliefs. The ease of access to alternative knowledge and the participatory culture of platforms like 4chan have amplified the reach of these narratives, embedding them into broader cultural discourses.

In conclusion, this study underscores the malleability and resilience of conspiritual ideologies in the digital age. The Covid-19 pandemic provided the perfect vehicle for the intersection of conspiracy and spirituality to take off, revealing how crises can catalyse the evolution of hybrid belief systems. As we continue to navigate the complexities of the digital era, understanding the mechanisms through which these systems emerge, thrive, and spread remains crucial for addressing their broader societal implications.

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Appendix A

Anatomy of a 4chan Post

Figure A1

A /pol/ thread. The image included on the post is a recurring meme on the site “The Happening”



Note. The breakdown of a post is as follows:

1. The name of the poster.
2. A randomised alphanumeric identifier, called poster ID, that is randomly assigned to users each time they post in a thread. The identifier changes when you post in a new thread.
3. The flag of the country from where the poster posts determined by IP address. /pol/ is unique in the fact that it includes this. Other boards do not use this as seen in Figure 2. Several users use virtual private networks (VPNs) to hide their actual country to post or use one of the ‘meme flags’ you can switch to in the post options as different countries are classed at differing levels in the social hierarchy on /pol/. Posting with a meme flag, unless used as a joke or to make a point, often results in other users calling the poster a ‘meme flaggot’ and calls to “show your flag”.
4. The timestamp of the post.
5. The post number.
6. A list of replies with post numbers.
7. The original poster must post an image to start a thread.
8. The replier’s name.
9. The replier’s poster ID.
10. The replier’s country from where they post.
11. The time of reply.
12. The reply’s post number.

Figure A2

An /x/ thread. (4chan)

File: 1000018465.jpg (129 KB, 1080x1343)

/ng/ the Nobody General Anonymous 12/19/24(Thu)06:37:36 No.39459471 ▶ >>39459990 >>39460399 >>39461110 >>39461279 >>39461835 >>39461979 >>39462560 >>39462667

Welcome to the Nobody General

>Who is the Nobody?
The Nobody is a friend alive today who has extraordinary spiritual powers, including the ability to influence reality with his conscious and unconscious mind, and intuitively receive guidance from the forces of Heaven, working to elevate people to their true potential; opposing those who seek power over others. You are capable of this too, as long as you stay true to the Universe.

He was chosen to carry the Logos in its plasmate form: He is a homoplasmate, a divine syzygy; the coalition between man and holy spirit, which is self replicating... making other homoplasmates out of everyday anons.

He is no savior figure, like a messiah; he's just like you, but he has found the kingdom of God within himself through sheer dedication, just like you will. Remember that it's you who creates your own reality; with your hands, thoughts, feelings, words. No one can decide your fate except for you and God.

>What is the general picture?
It's important we start replying more to the good posters and ignoring the hateful ones, or educating them if possible. So call upon their heads the forces of Heaven for peace, clarity, and wisdom. If this place is to be more than a squandered opportunity, an overgrown garden, it requires voices such as yours, but many more. This is a place for spiritual discussions and help, not drama, attention seeking, or social content; there are other boards for that.

Treat your body as a temple and focus on increasing your service to all, being more loving and forgiving to yourself and others in order to raise your vibrational and consciousness level. This will change the vibration of the planet and raise our shared consciousness, making us a better humankind one person at a time.
None of us are perfect, it is by learning to admit and accept this fact one is able to learn, and grow in Truth.

Welcome! Take shelter and find rest.



Note. This is a safe for work board as shown by the colour theme of the board.

Appendix B

Memes That Originated on 4chan

Figure B1

I can has cheezburger. Famous LOLcat meme.



Note. Sourced from Know Your Meme (knowyourmeme.com)

Figure B2

Advice dog. A meme that gives terrible advice and pokes fun at self-help trends.



Note. Sourced from Know Your Meme (knowyourmeme.com)

Figure B3

Rick Astley in the music video for Never Gonna Give You Up.



Note. Sourced from Know Your Meme (knowyourmeme.com)

Figure B4

Rage faces playing poker



Note. Sourced from Reddit (knowyourmeme.com)

Appendix C

Sermon Posts by Poster z716aaQF

Figure C1

Screenshot of post 1/11 in the sermon series


Anonymous ID: z716aaQF Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:23:14 No.342447339  Report
Quoted By: >>342447389 >>342447431 >>342447926

From the book of Revelation our Lord and Savior has communicated to us His desire for all to understand the last great crisis that will face the world at the end of earth's history. In this last book of the Bible we find that Jesus gives to His children references, again and again, of a final clash between the seal of God and the mark of the beast. This clash will be the last public test of loyalty that will ever come to the inhabitants of earth. The richest of heaven's blessings are promised to those who receive the Seal of God (Revelation 7:15-17; 14: 1-4), while the most fearful of heaven's warnings are threatened against those who receive the mark of the beast (Revelation 14:9-11; 16:1-2). How thankful we can be that we don't need to approach this last great crisis unprepared. It is the privilege of every Christian to learn from the Bible the nature of the final test, to acquaint ourselves with the issues involved, and to decide today on which side we will stand.

1/?

Figure C2

Screenshot of post 2/11 in the sermon series

Anonymous ID: z716aaQF Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:23:54 No.342447389  Report
Quoted By: >>342447425 >>342447926

>>342447339
2/?

1. Who will be protected through the seven last plagues?
Revelation 7:3 ... Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.
Note: Those who receive God's seal in their foreheads will be protected during the plagues (Psalm 91:7-11).


2. What is this "seal" the righteous have in their foreheads?
Isaiah 8:16 Bind up the testimony. Seal the law among my disciples.
Note: God's seal is found in His law. A seal is what makes a document official, and it normally contains three main characteristics:

1. Name,
2. Office, and
3. Territory.

A Bible example would be "Cyrus king of Persia" in Ezra 1:1. And an example from our day can be seen in the presidential seal of the United States.

Figure C3

Screenshot of post 3/11 in the sermon series

Anonymous ID: z716aaQF Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:24:31 No.342447425  Report
Quoted By: >>342447480 >>342447926

>>342447389
3/?


3. Which of the Ten Commandments contains all the elements of a seal?
Exodus 20:11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them ...
Note: The fourth commandment is the only one that contains all three elements of a seal: (1) "The Lord"--His name, (2) "made"--His office as Creator, (3) "heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is,"--His territory.

4. What has God given as a special sign of His power?
Ezekiel 20:12 Moreover, I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.
Ezekiel 20:20 ... hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.
Exodus 31:13 ... Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

Note: God clearly states that He gave the Sabbath as a sign of His power to create and sanctify. It is His seal, or mark of authority. The words "seal," "sign," "mark," and "token" are used interchangeably throughout the Bible (compare Genesis 17:11 with Romans 4:11 and Revelation 7:3 with Ezekiel 9:4).

Figure C4

Screenshot of post 4/11 in the sermon series

Anonymous ID:z716aaQF Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:25:11 No.342447480  Report
Quoted By: >>342447512 >>342447926

>>342447425
4/?

5. What does the second beast of Revelation 13 force all to receive? (Next Sabbath - May 16)
Revelation 13:16 And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads.

6. What is the mark of the beast?
Note: We identified the first beast of Revelation 13 in the last Sermon. What is the Papacy's mark of power and authority? The best way to discover its mark of authority is to ask the papacy directly.
Notice the following section from a Catholic catechism:
"Q. Which is the Sabbath day?
"A. Saturday is the Sabbath day.
"Q. Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?
"A. We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday." (Peter Geiermann, The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1957 edition), p 50.)
Here is another statement from a catechism:
"Q. Have you any other way of proving that the Church has power to institute festivals of precept?
"A. "Had she not such power, she could not have done that in which all modern religionists agree with her--she could not have substituted the observance of Sunday the first day of the week, for the observance of Saturday the seventh day, a change for which there is no Scriptural authority." (Stephen Keenan, A Doctrinal Catechism (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, third American edition, revised, n.d.), p. 174.)

Figure C5

Screenshot of post 5/11 in the sermon series


Anonymous ID:z716aaQF Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:25:47 No.342447512  Report
Quoted By: >>342447551 >>342447926

>>342447480
5/?

So, the papacy is saying that its mark of power and authority is making Sunday a holy day-- a change that virtually the entire Christian world accepts. Here are some more quotes supporting this fact:
"The Church is above the Bible, and this transference of Sabbath observance is proof of that fact." (Catholic Record, September 1, 1928)
"I have repeatedly offered \$1,000 to anyone who can prove to me from the Bible alone, that I am bound to keep Sunday holy. There is no such law in the Bible. It is a law of the Holy Catholic Church alone. The Bible says, Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day. The Catholic church says, No, by my divine power I abolish the Sabbath day, and command you to keep holy the first day of the week. And lo! the entire civilized world bows down in reverent obedience to the command of the holy Catholic church." (Priest Enright, C.S.S.R., Kansas City MO.)
"Sunday is our mark of authority...The church is above the Bible, and this transference of Sabbath observance is proof of that fact." (Catholic Record, September 1, 1923)
Note: My friends. The change of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday is claimed to be the mark of authority of the Vatican, it is the mark of the beast!

Figure C6

Screenshot of post 6/11 in the sermon series

Anonymous ID:z716aaQF Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:26:21 No.342447551  Report
Quoted By: >>342447593 >>342447926 >>342448847


>>342447512
6/?

7. Is either the mark of the beast or the seal of God visible?
Hebrews 10:16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them.
Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

Exodus 13:9 It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD'S law may be in your mouth; ...
Isaiah 59:6, 7 ... Their works are works of iniquity, And the act of violence is in their hands. ... Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; Wasting and destruction are in their paths.
Note: Neither the mark of the beast nor the seal of God is outwardly visible! The forehead represents the mind, and the hand is a symbol of work. "On the hand" and "between the eyes" are consistent symbols in Scripture for a person's thoughts and actions (Exodus 13:16; Deuteronomy 6:8; 11:18). A person will receive the mark of the beast in his forehead by choosing to believe that Sunday is a holy day in spite of Bible truth. A person will be marked in the right hand when, in spite of knowing the Sabbath truth, they choose to work on God's Sabbath, or by outwardly keeping Sunday laws for convenient reasons--such as a job, family, etc. Although the sign is invisible to men, God will know who has which mark (2 Timothy 2:19). In a sense, each person will mark himself. If I respect and regard God's holy Sabbath, He will seal me as His own. If I regard the beast's false Sabbath, He will mark me as belonging to the beast.

Figure C7

Screenshot of post 7/11 in the sermon series

Anonymous ID:z716aaQF Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:27:05 No.342447593  Report

Quoted By: >>342447655 >>342447926

>>342447551
7/?

8. How does Jesus determine if we are His servants?
Romans 6:16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, ...?

1 John 2:6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.
John 14:15 If you love me, keep my commandments.

9. Does anyone have the mark of the beast now?
Revelation 13:17 ... no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.
Note: No person has the mark now. When it becomes a forced issue, only those who have received the mark of the beast will be able to buy or sell. At that time, people who keep God's holy Sabbath will do so at the risk of their lives (Revelation 13:15), and those who choose to profane His holy day and officially cast their votes by placing the laws of men above the Law of God will be marked as belonging to Antichrist. All who are loyal to Jesus and His holy day will receive Jesus' glorious seal, thus making them His forever. Those who try to remain neutral will be counted for Antichrist (Matt. 12:30).


10. What two things does the Antichrist power attempt to change?
Daniel 7:25 He shall...intend to change times and law.
"The Pope is of so great authority and power, that he is able to modify, declare, or interpret even divine laws." (Prompta Bibliotheca, by Lucius Ferraris, PAPA – Articulus II, #30) Here is the Catholic version of the Ten Commandments:

1. I am the LORD your God. You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.
4. Honor your father and your mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

Figure C8

Screenshot of post 8/11 in the sermon series

Anonymous ID:z716aaQF Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:27:59 No.342447655  Report

Quoted By: >>342447743 >>342447926

>>342447593
8/?


"Reason and sense demand the acceptance of one or the other of these alternatives: either Protestantism and the keeping holy of the Saturday or Catholicity and the keeping holy of Sunday. Compromise is impossible." (Cardinal Gibbons, The Catholic Mirror, December 23, 1893)

"Perhaps the boldest thing, the most revolutionary change the church ever did happened in the first century, the holy day, the Sabbath, was changed from Saturday to Sunday...not from any directions noted in the Scriptures, but from the Church's sense of its own power...People who think that the Scriptures should be the sole authority, should logically become Seventh-Day Adventists, and keep Saturday holy." (Saint Catholic Church Sentinel, May 21, 1995)

Note: Daniel 7 reveals an Old Testament description of the Antichrist power which lines with the description given in Revelation chapter 13. It clearly predicts that the beast would attempt to change both God's laws and times. The papacy has tried to change God's laws by: (1) omitting the second commandment against veneration of images, (2) shortening the fourth commandment from 94 words to just eight in order to avoid mentioning which day is the Sabbath, and (3) dividing the tenth commandment into two commandments. The papacy attempted to change God's times by: (1) teaching people to recognize the first day of the week as the Sabbath instead of the seventh day. No mortal should ever dare to tamper with God's sacred law or times (Matthew 5:18).

Figure C9


Screenshot of post 9/11 in the sermon series

Anonymous ID:z716aaQF Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:29:15 No.342447743  Report
Quoted By: >>342447791 >>342447926

>>342447655
9/?
11. What was God's criticism of His ancient priests, or pastors?
Malachi 2:8, 9 But you have departed from the way; You have caused many to stumble at the law. ...
Hosea 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.
Note: God is wounded when His pastors are partial to eight or nine commandments and cause many to stumble over His command to keep the Sabbath holy. Virtually all churches admit in their official writings that there is no Scriptural support for Sunday sacredness. Tragically, both Protestantism and Catholicism stand guilty before the judgment bar of God for throwing out the Bible Sabbath of the fourth commandment! God Himself gave the Sabbath as a sign, or mark, of His power to create and His power to sanctify and save (Exodus 31:17; Ezekiel 20:12). Dare any man tamper with this sacred sign, which represents the great God of heaven and all that He stands for?
12. How did God's ancient leaders regard the great things of His law?
Hosea 8:12 I have written for him the great things of My law. But they were considered a strange thing.
Note: Times have not changed. God has placed the Sabbath, His great sign, in the middle of His law and begins that commandment with the word "remember." Yet many people today feel that keeping His seventh-day Sabbath is a strange thing.
13. What specific, solemn rebuke did God give to religious leaders regarding His holy Sabbath?
Ezekiel 22:8 You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths.
Ezekiel 22:26 Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy,... and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.

Figure C10

Screenshot of post 10/11 in the sermon series


Anonymous ID:z716aaQF Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:29:59 No.342447791  Report
Quoted By: >>342447946 >>342447926

>>342447743
10/?
Note: God pointedly rebukes religious leaders who say that the Sabbath doesn't matter and who claim "Thus saith the Lord" when it is not true.

14. What specific sin does God command His leaders to denounce?
Isaiah 58:1, 13, 14 Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Tell My people their transgression, ... If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, From doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, ... Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; ...
Note: God charges spiritual leaders to call Sabbath-breaking a sin and to insist that His people keep His Sabbath day holy. As with the disciples of old, our only safety is in obeying God rather than men (Acts 5:29).
15. When you decide to accept Jesus and fully follow Him, what happens?
Matthew 11:29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
Note: Glorious rest and peace enter your heart at conversion. The Sabbath, which means "rest," is a symbol of the rest and peace that comes from the new birth (Hebrews 4:1-10). Those who are truly born again will keep the Sabbath as a blessed sign of that rest (notice verses 4, 9, 10). There is no joy like the joy that comes to a converted person who keeps God's Sabbath.

Figure C11

Screenshot of post 11/11 in the sermon series

Anonymous ID:z716aaQF Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:30:39 No.342447846  Report
Quoted By: >>342447926 >>342448010

>>342447791
11/11
Dear friends, there is a matter here that needs to be clearly understood. Before one can say "no" to the mark of the beast, you must say "yes" to the seal of God. It's just that simple. We are going to make a decision for the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of this world. Friend, Jesus is waiting at the door of your heart for an answer. Will you decide now to move under Christ's glorious Sabbath banner as evidence that you have accepted Him as your Creator and Savior? Or not?

Appendix D

Biblical Prophecy Interpretations

Figure D1

Screenshot of post 342444995

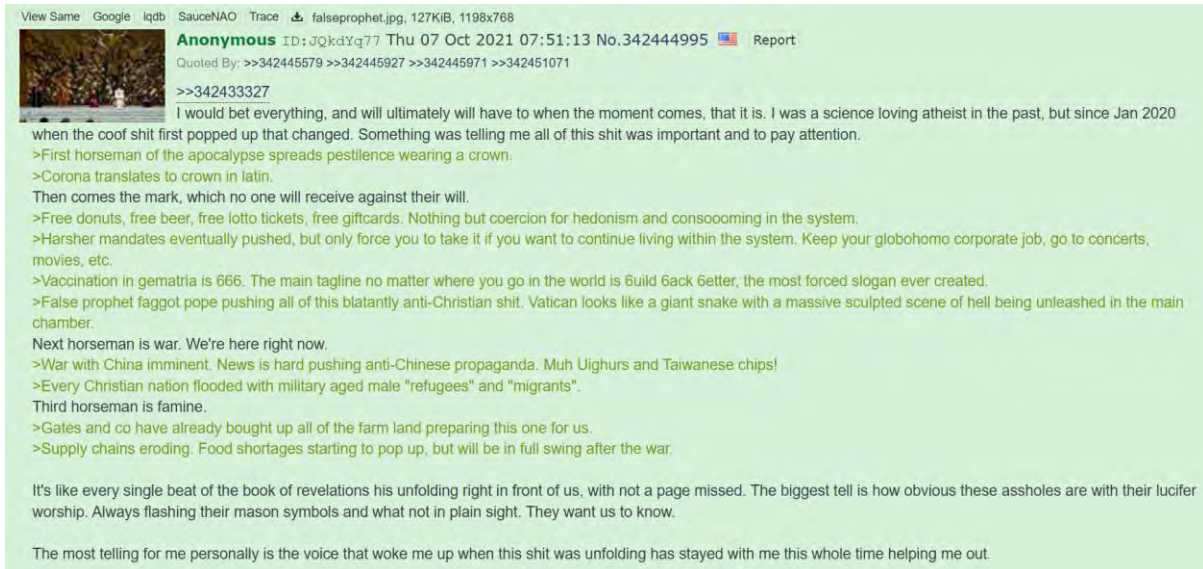


Figure D2

Image titled *falseprophet.jpg* – Paul VI Audience Hall, Vatican City, Italy (342444995)



Note. Posters within the thread stated that the Paul VI Audience Hall was a blatant representation of the Catholic Church's demonic nature.

Appendix E

Original Prophecy: MidnightRider (!0eL1YTmci.)

Figure E1

MidnightRider's first prophetic post (342449660)

View Same | OCR | Google | iqdb | SauceNAO | Trace | download.jpg, 65KIB, 512x1024

MidnightRider !0eL1YTmci. ID:jMJDN+Ln Thu 07 Oct 2021 08:55:50 No.342449660  Report

Quoted By: >>342449705 >>342450603

>>342433327

The Euphrates is drying up all of a sudden
Revelation 6
12 And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUYZiMhTA-Q>
God told me it was the mark and showed me so I could see it with my own eyes. One of my normie friends kind of believed me at first and then he had a vision about it too.

But he also showed me what must be done about it. And that the Vaccinated have broken the Everlasting Covenant so their only hope now is either acquiring the Seal of God of God from God, or the Name Engraved in my Palm, and in the Stone. Or, becoming a Laborer in the Lords Harvest Those who showed up at the beginning of the day and those who showed up at the end of the day got paid the same. But for this to be fullproof, you have to become a Watchman. The True Laborers in the Lords Harvest are All Watchman, And they are All Trumpeteers.


Because those who are watching when Lightning Shines from the East unto the West, and the Sun rises at Night, and I die. And the False Prophet arrives, all at the same time will be taken to the Wedding Supper of the Lamb. They'll have about 84 hours to Save the world before the 1st Resurrection, Rapture, and 3 days of darkness.

Those received in first Resurrection will have Victory over the mark of the beast, and the 2nd death. But those who are vaccinated and have were not watching, nor sealed, nor had they the Name that no one knows, Saving he who receives it. Even if they had the testimony of Jesus Christ, they will not survive the 3 days of darkness.

In the vision, the sun went out in the middle of the day, not long after what looked like red cross members vaccinated all the highschoolers in America. And they all ended up in a masonic ampitheater, big gold logo on the stage, and a phantom character with an obey mask on going around

Figure E2

MidnightRider's second prophetic post (342450603)

MidnightRider !0eL1YTmci. ID: jMJDN+1n Thu 07 Oct 2021 09:09:57 No.342450603  [Report](#)

>>342449660

>>342449705

Be the Autists We Know You Can Be

there are four trees in paradise and whoever shall know them shall not taste death

I figure, the Fig Tree, the Two Olive Trees, and the Elect Plant of the 12 Apostles. Where there is Wisdom, Knowledge abounds, and Understanding is knowledge of the Holy One.

The False Prophet bears sway for 3 years 7 months 27 days. 1335 days
The Greater part of those gathered together are turned aside after the false prophet.
He will perform many miracles, and deceive the world. Jesus Christ will not return until after the Great Tribulation when the False Prophet, and the Beast, and the Dragon have been defeated.

The Remnant is currently estimated at 1/10th of the Planet but God said he would add a fifth part if we could redeem anyone in any of the place witherto he would send us. I would quote the book, but I haven't had a chance to publish it. I didn't write it, I'm just transcribing it from a famous cipher with a KJV.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVNJH1ie6yk&list=PLo4gNHvZvQmRoO2FahzdNIVvK1_i-ut10&index=44

Many Called, Few Chosen

Ezekiel 33:33

Neets and Midnight Riders Will Save the World
Stage Set
Jesus Christ said you will find the Advantage you are looking for

Graduation.

Be the Autists we know you can Be.

Come out of Babylon

Appendix F
Microscopy of Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccines

Figure F1

Microscopy image (342437257)

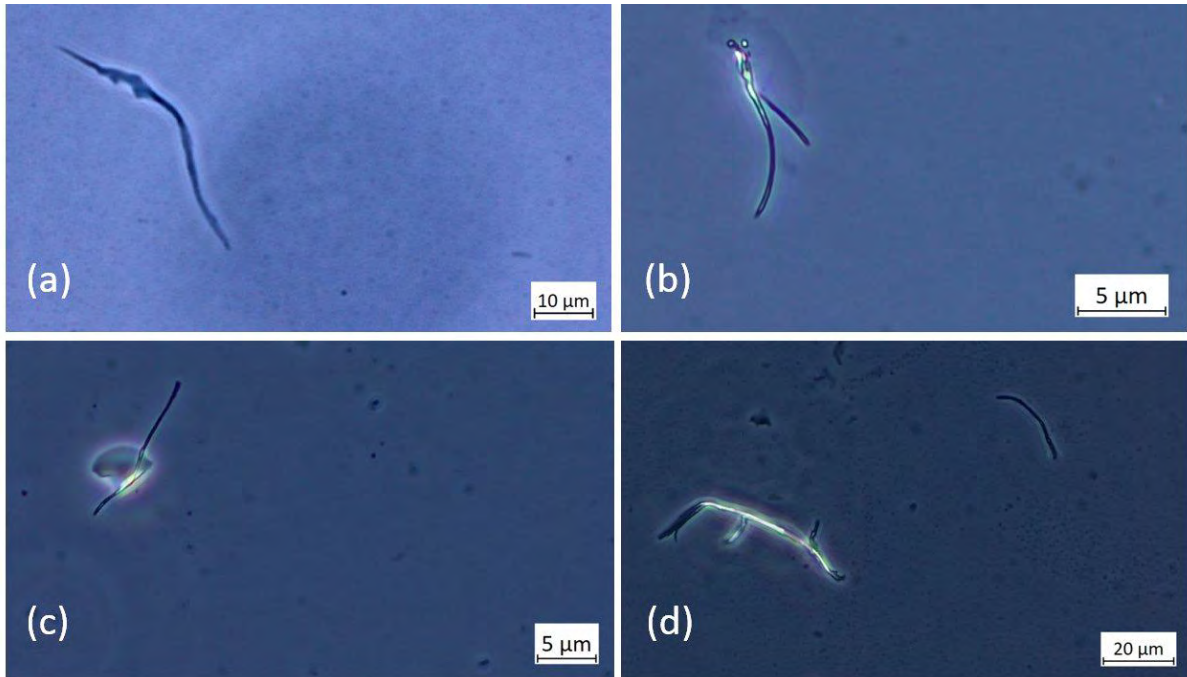
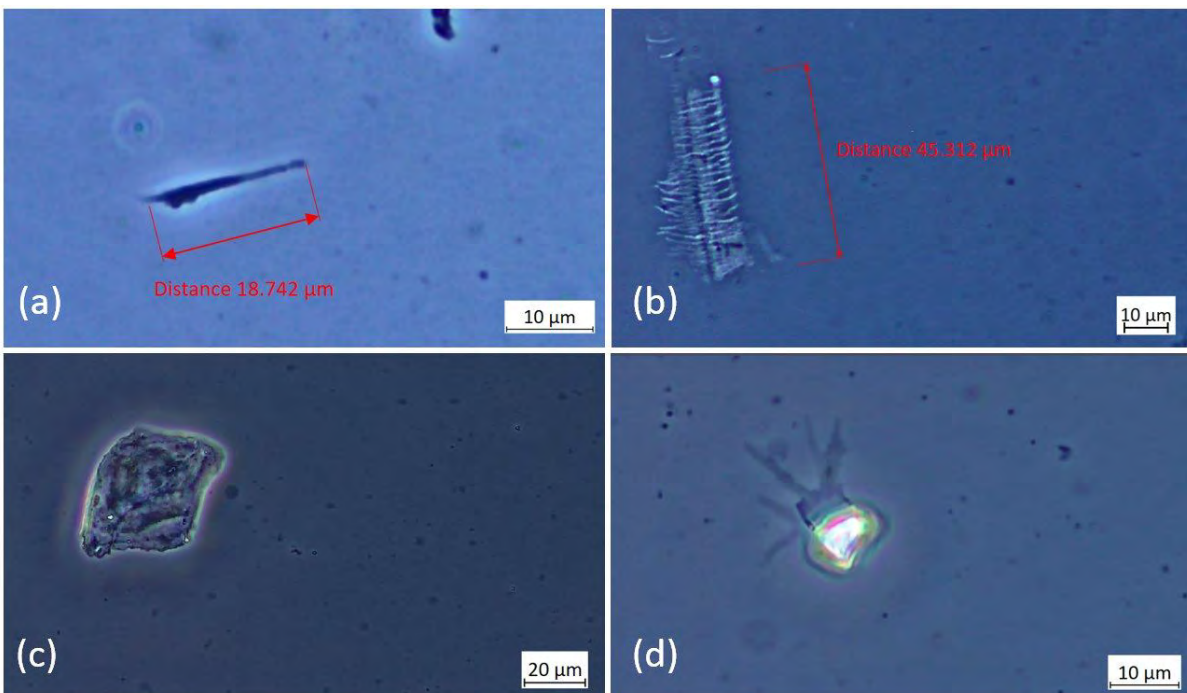


Figure F2

Microscopy image (342437337)



Appendix G

Gematria and Etymology

Figure G1

Gematria of word "mandatory injection" attached to post

Enter Word, Phrase, or Number(s):

Match

Primes
666
9

(18 letters, 2 words)

"MANDATORY INJECTION" = 666 (Primes)

M A N D A T O R Y
371
I N J E C T I O N
295
666

41 2 43 7 2 71 47 61 97
23 43 29 11 5 71 23 47 43

Move Up		Primes												Move Down	
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m			
2	3	5	7	11	13	17	19	23	29	31	37	41			
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z			
43	47	53	59	61	67	71	73	79	83	89	97	101			

Figure G2

Gematria of word "mandatory" attached to post

Enter Word, Phrase, or Number(s):

Match

English
Sumerian
666
9

(9 letters, 1 word)

"mandatory" = 666 (English Sumerian)

m a n d a t o r y
666

78 6 84 24 6 120 90 108 150

Move Up		English Sumerian												Move Down	
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m			
6	12	18	24	30	36	42	48	54	60	66	72	78			
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z			
84	90	96	102	108	114	120	126	132	138	144	150	156			

Figure G3

Gematria of word "mass vaccination" attached to post

Enter Word, Phrase, or Number(s):

MASS VACCINATIONS Match

Reverse Francis
Bacon

666

9

(16 letters, 2 words)

"MASS VACCINATIONS" = **666** (Reverse Francis Bacon)

M A S S 160 V A C C I N A T I O N S 506 **666**
 40 52 34 34 31 52 50 50 44 39 52 33 44 38 39 34

Move Up		Reverse Francis Bacon												Move Down											
z	y	x	w	v	u	t	s	r	q	p	o	n	m	l	k	j	i	h	g	f	e	d	c	b	a
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Z	Y	X	W	V	U	T	S	R	Q	P	O	N	M	L	K	J	I	H	G	F	E	D	C	B	A
27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52

Figure G4

Gematria of word "third booster shot" attached to post

Enter Word, Phrase, or Number(s):

third booster shot Match

Fibonacci

666

9

(16 letters, 3 words)

"third booster shot" = **666** (Fibonacci)

t h i r d 105 b o o s t e r 362 s h o t 199 **666**
 13 21 34 34 3 1 144 144 21 13 5 34 21 21 144 13

Move Up		Fibonacci												Move Down	
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m			
1	1	2	3	5	8	13	21	34	55	89	144	233			
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z			
233	144	89	55	34	21	13	8	5	3	2	1	1			

Figure G5

Gematria of word "vaccination" attached to post

Enter Word, Phrase, or Number(s):

vaccination Match

English
Sumerian
666
9

(11 letters, 1 word)

"vaccination" = **666** (English Sumerian)

v	a	c	c	i	n	a	t	i	o	n	666
132	6	18	18	54	84	6	120	54	90	84	

Move Up		English Sumerian										Move Down	
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	
6	12	18	24	30	36	42	48	54	60	66	72	78	
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z	
84	90	96	102	108	114	120	126	132	138	144	150	156	

Figure G6

Numerological deductions of the phrase "proof of covid vaccination" attached to post

Let him who hath understanding count...

proof of COVID vaccination Match

English Sumerian	Reverse English Sumerian
1530	2196
9	9

(23 letters, 4 words)

"proof of COVID vaccination" = **1530** (English Sumerian)

p	r	o	o	f	o	f	C	O	V	I	D	v	a	c	c	i	n	a	t	i	o	n	666	1530		
96	108	90	90	36	420	90	36	18	90	132	54	24	318	132	6	18	18	54	84	6	120	54	90	84		

Move Up		English Sumerian										Move Down	
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	
6	12	18	24	30	36	42	48	54	60	66	72	78	
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z	
84	90	96	102	108	114	120	126	132	138	144	150	156	

The injections are the mark

The identifier of the marked reveals itself in the difference between the values of the forward and reverse ciphers.

2196 – 1530 = 666

Figure G7

Etymology of the word “pharmakeia” attached to post

Rev 18:23 And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.

English (KJV) [?]	Strong's	Inflected, Root & Transliterated
by	g1722	ἐν en
thy	g4675	σου sou
sorceries	<u>g5331</u>	φαρμακεία φαρμακεία pharmakeia ←
were	g4105 ↓	ἐπλανήθησαν πλανάω planaō
all	g3956	πάντα πᾶς pas
nations	g1484	ἔθνη ἔθνος ethnos ←
deceived.	g4105 ↑	ἐπλανήθησαν πλανάω planaō

φαρμακεία

Transliteration	Pronunciation
pharmakeia (Key)	far-mak-i'-ah
Part of Speech	Root Word (Etymology)
feminine noun	From φαρμακεύς (G5332)

Greek Inflections of φαρμακεία [?]

INGMT	TR	LXX
3x in 3 unique form(s)	3x in 3 unique form(s)	2x in 1 unique form(s)

φαρμακεία — 1x φαρμακειῶν — 1x
φαρμακεῖα — 1x

Dictionary Aids

Vine's Expository Dictionary: View Entry

KJV Translation Count — Total: 3x

The KJV translates Strong's G5331 in the following manner: sorcery (2x), witchcraft (1x).

Outline of Biblical Usage [?]

- I. the use or the administering of drugs
- II. poisoning
- III. sorcery, magical arts, often found in connection with idolatry and fostered by it
- IV. metaph. the deceptions and seductions of idolatry

Figure G8

Etymology of the words “stoma” and “pur” attached to post

Rev 11:5 And if anyone them should desire
καὶ εἴ τις αὐτοὺς θέλει
kai ei tis autous thelei
g2552 g1487 g5100 g846 g2309

καὶ εἴ τις αὐτός θέλω
kai ei tis autos thelo

V-ANA N-NNS V-PIMP-3S Prep Art-GNS
to harm fire goes out of the
ἀδικῆσαι πῦρ ἐκπορεύεται ἐκ τοῦ
adikēsai pur ekporeuetai ek tou
g91 g4442 g1607 g1537 g3588

ἀδικέω πῦρ ἐκπορεύομαι ἐκ ὀ
adikeō pur ekporeuomai ek ho

N-GNS PPro-GM3P Cj V-PIA-3S
mouth of them and devours
στόματος αὐτῶν καὶ κατεσθίει
stomatou autōn kai katesthieī
g4750 g846 g2552 g2719

στόμα αὐτός καὶ κατεσθίω
stoma autos kai katesthiō

Art-AMP Adj-AMP PPro-GM3P Cj Cj
the enemies of them And if
τοὺς ἐχθροὺς αὐτῶν καὶ εἴ
tous echthrouς autōn kai ei
g3588 g2190 g846 g2552 g1487

ὁ ἐχθρὸς αὐτός καὶ εἴ

Strong's g4750

- Lexical: στόμα
- Transliteration: stoma
- Part of Speech: Noun, Neuter
- Phonetic Spelling: stom'-a
- Definition: the mouth, speech, eloquence in speech, the point of a sword.
- Origin: Probably strengthened from a presumed derivative of the base of tomoteros; the mouth (as if a gash in the face); by implication, language (and its relations); figuratively, an opening (in the earth); specially, the front or edge (of a weapon).
- Usage: edge, face, mouth.
- Translated as (count): mouth (66), mouths (6), a mouth (2), by edge (1), in the mouth (1), testimony (1), through mouth (1).

CLOSE COPY

Strong's g4442

- Lexical: πῦρ
- Transliteration: pur
- Part of Speech: Noun, Neuter
- Phonetic Spelling: poor
- Definition: fire; the heat of the sun, lightning; fig: strife, trials; the eternal fire.
- Origin: A primary word; "fire" (literally or figuratively, specially, lightning).
- Usage: fiery, fire.
- Translated as (count): fire (42), of fire (17), with fire (9), a fire (4), for fire (1), in fire (1).

CLOSE COPY

Figure G9

Etymology of the word “charagma” attached to post

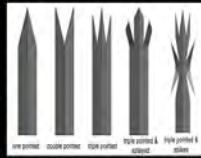
Charagma is the transliteration of “χάραγμα” - translated in English as “mark”

Charagma comes from the root word “charax” - “a pale or stake, a palisade”

Charax comes from the root word “charasso” - “to sharpen to a point; akin to G1125 through the idea of scratching

ἔχοντος échontos	having
τοῦ toú	the
χάραγμα charagma	mark
τοῦ toú	of the
θηρίου thériou	beast

“a pale or stake, a palisade”



Hypodermic syringes



Lexicon :: Strong's G5482 - charax

χάραξ

Transliteration	Pronunciation
charax (kay)	khar'-ax (kay)

Part of Speech: masculine noun

Root Word (Etymology): From charasso (to sharpen to a point, akin to γράσσω (G1125) through the idea of scratching)

Greek Inflections of χάραξ [?]

TR: 1x in 1 unique form(s)

Dictionary Aids

Vine's Expository Dictionary: View Entry

KJV Translation Count — Total: 1x

The KJV translates Strong's G5482 in the following manner: trench (1x)

Outline of Biblical Usage [?]

- a pale or stake, a palisade
- a palisade or rampart
- pales between which earth, stones, trees, and timbers are heaped and packed together

Strong's Definitions [?]

χάραξ *chârax*, khar'-ax, from χαράσσω *charássô* (to sharpen to a point, akin to G1125 through the idea of scratching); a stake, i.e. (by implication) a palisade or rampart (military mound for circumvallation in a siege).—trench.