



## THE CURIOUS CASE OF R/CRINGETOPIA

An investigation into the dynamics of cringe, community, and Reddit.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis utilizes a playful “murder-mystery” writing style to academically examine the “death” of a subreddit dedicated to cringe content, r/cringetopia, through the power dynamics of cringe, community, and platform. As these dynamics are considered as media elements involved in facilitating an individual to go down the “alt-right pipeline”, a journey which results in problematic radicalization, their disruption in a comparatively innocuous research object like r/cringetopia provides ample opportunity for their examination. Each dynamic in question has its own independent theoretical background and process by which it produces certain norms, and through examining the dynamics through the subreddit’s demise, it sheds light on how the play and interplay between them emerges. To accommodate for the notion of productive power involved, a multimodal discourse analysis was selected as the methodology to examine how the dynamics constituted and were constituted by how reddit, community and cringe content were implicated throughout r/Cringetopia’s downfall. The outcome of the analysis revealed that in this instance, the dynamics between community and platform were tightly interwoven together in characterizing the downfall, while the dynamic of cringe worked relatively independently due to the construction of its dynamic. Reflecting on the outcome of this thesis provides a further understanding of these dynamics separately and together and carves out space for future research.

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## The Case

Two unblinking eyes, a static smile and a button nose greeted me, as the Wolf pushed the door open granting me access into the space. I couldn't help but begrudgingly admire the detail and care evident of the fursuit in question, a clear mark of their dedication. I nodded at the furry as I scanned the rest of the room. Unsurprisingly, I was ignored. The rest mingled amongst themselves, gossiping, and exchanging pop culture references as if there was nothing unusual, like I didn't just receive a call to investigate a murder. Unnerved, I made my way to where the witness had specified, and found them curled up in a chair, tears staining their face. I cleared my throat, which went unacknowledged, so I prodded them gently, asking what happened. They began to blubber the usual; they knew the victim well, they didn't know what happened, and couldn't have possibly seen it coming. Although I was sympathetic to the witness' turmoil, I needed solid answers rather than these retrospective speculations, and I told the witness just that. Inhaling deep, they responded simply "R/Cringetopia is dead".

Admittedly, attempting to imitate the morbid introduction of a murder mystery in a master's thesis in media studies may seem like an inappropriate choice. Rather than revolving around the circumstances around an individuals' demise, this mystery centres around the death of a subreddit dedicated to cringe. For those unfamiliar, "Cringe" is described as the visceral response one has upon witnessing some kind of violation to societal norms.<sup>1</sup> For instance, seeing a "furry", an individual dressed in a mascot style costume representing their anthropomorphic animal character or "fursona",<sup>2</sup> in a public setting may trigger the phenomenon of cringe within you. If this is not the case, the thought of an awkward conversation you had with a potential romantic interest decades ago might.<sup>3</sup> A subreddit is a subsection of the social networking website Reddit (Reddit.com), which facilitates individuals' visiting and participating in communities specifically dedicated to a wide range of "interests, hobbies, and passions".<sup>4</sup> The "r/" in "r/cringetopia" indicates it being a subreddit, as it reflects the former URL of the group (i.e., Reddit.com/r/Cringetopia). Cringetopia is a portmanteau for the term "cringe" and "utopia", where visitors and members

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<sup>1</sup> Annalina Mayer *et al.*, "A Psychological Perspective on Vicarious Embarrassment and Shame in the Context of Cringe Humor." *Humanities* 10, no. 4 (2021): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Reysen *et al.*, "My animal self: The importance of preserving fantasy-themed identity uniqueness." *Identity* 20, no. 1 (2020): 1.

<sup>3</sup> Melissa Dahl, *Cringeworthy: A theory of awkwardness* (Penguin, 2018), 19.

<sup>4</sup> "Reddit," Google, accessed October 26, 2022. <https://www.google.com/search?q=reddit>

of the subreddit could see content tailored perfectly towards making them cringe. The “death” of r/cringetopia refers to the subreddits’ privatization. “Privatization” of a subreddit renders its previous and current content inaccessible to the majority of its visitors and members, thus signifying its death. At a glance, the downfall of such a subreddit does not warrant the same entanglement of *stakes*, *culprits*, and *twists* involved within a murder mystery. I posit that it does, after all, we have the first fundamental component: a *victim*.

The *victim*, r/cringetopia was created on the twenty-first of September in 2018 and was the reigning subreddit dedicated to cringe, the largest with 1.8 million members (not counting visitors) at the time of its passing on the fifth of May 2022.<sup>5</sup> Familiar with the *victim*, I had been monitoring them as the initial subject of this thesis, intending to identify and decode the dynamics that constructed and sustained r/Cringetopia’s based on the Foucauldian notion of normalization.<sup>6</sup> This notion is based on positing that power is productive rather than solely destructive or repressive, and that it is constituted through the multiple forces that work at different levels to create and persevere certain accepted and valued “norms”.<sup>7</sup> However, witnessing the sudden death of r/cringetopia alarmed and confounded my plans, until the notion of turning this thesis into an academic murder mystery presented itself as its death suggested that the dynamics maintaining its life were disrupted, thus in a sense catching them in the act. Yet what are the *stakes* for understanding the dynamics at play at both the life and death of r/cringetopia?

Compared to the norms prevalent across other subreddits that have subjugated them to academic scrutiny, such as r/Incels, complicit in the normalization of violence against women,<sup>8</sup> or r/The\_Donald, which instigated the mobilization of extremist alt-right politics,<sup>9</sup> the norms produced by r/cringetopia, and its subsequent end may seem innocuous. However, the norms evident on r/Incels and r/The\_Donald do not exist in a vacuum but are rather at the inevitable end of what digital scholar Luke Munn describes as online radicalization of individuals or the “alt-right pipeline”.<sup>10</sup> Munn argues that the pipeline does not occur on the

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<sup>5</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage 95, 1990), 92.

<sup>7</sup> Mel Stanfill, “The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design.” *New Media & Society* 17, no.7 (2015): 1060.

<sup>8</sup> Alessia Tranchese and Lisa Sugiura, ““I don’t hate all women, just those stuck-up bitches”: How incels and mainstream pornography speak the same extreme language of misogyny.” *Violence against women* 27, no. 14 (2021): 2710.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander P.Dignam and Deana A. Rohlinger, “Misogynistic men online: How the red pill helped elect trump.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 44, no. 3 (2019): 590.

<sup>10</sup> Luke Munn, “Alt-right pipeline: Individual journeys to extremism online.” *First Monday* (2019). <http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v24i6.10108>.

dark and disparate depths of the Internet, but is rather an medial journey as the individual is compelled (rather than coerced) through different media content ( self-help speakers, gaming personalities), online communities (meme groups), and media platforms themselves (YouTube’s recommendation algorithm that tailor similar content) that facilitates the normalization of radical and problematic beliefs.<sup>11</sup> Through this prolonged and incremental exposure to these problematic norms and values, Munn argues that they facilitate a psychosocial radicalization; in which there is a prominent cognitive and social shift in individual beliefs as they construe them as “common sense”.<sup>12</sup> The real stakes of this pipeline were harrowingly demonstrated by the Christchurch Mosque shooters’ response to questioning about the source of the values underpinning such a violent act, as it was “The Internet, of course”.<sup>13</sup>

Although r/cringetopia itself is imperceptible on the alt-right pipeline as it appears to not be explicitly politically alt-right, its dynamics at play, of content, online communities and platform implicate as part of the pipeline.<sup>14</sup> Each of these media dynamics have their own interdisciplinary backgrounds and are capable of independently shaping and maintaining norms, thus making them major *culprits* in this investigation. The content, cringe has been described as a psychosocial phenomenon from psychological and sociological disciplines. Due to its construction pertaining to the response of norms being transgressed,<sup>15</sup> it combines a consideration individual affective response and the social norms and the implications of their transgression. Online community dynamics, also encompass these social norms as both from an epistemological and digital perspective, norms are pivotal in dictating the formation, sustenance, and insularity of communities and are shaped in return.<sup>16</sup> The platform at hand Reddit has its own multidisciplinary consideration, which converges on the standpoint that it both empowers and disempowers its user by simultaneously challenging and embracing the expression of their norms through social and material means.<sup>17</sup> By accounting for the circumstances surrounding the death of r/cringetopia, or its downfall, this research

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<sup>11</sup> Munn, "Alt-right pipeline,".

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Wöhrle, "Two Shades of Cringe : Problems in Attributing Painful Laughter." *Humanities* 10, no. 3 (2021): 1; Mayer et al, "Vicarious Embarrassment", p1.

<sup>16</sup> Felipe Massa, "Guardians of the Internet : Building and sustaining the anonymous online community." *Organization Studies* 38, no. 7 (2017): 959-988; Kimberley Allison and Kay Bussey, "Communal quirks and circlejerks: A taxonomy of processes contributing to insularity in online communities." In *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media 14, 2020*,12-23.

<sup>17</sup> Veena Kannan *et al.*, "Sociomaterial perspective of digital platforms." In *Proceedings of the 27th European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS), 2019*, 1-10.

supplements Munn’s consideration of the alt-right pipeline, by providing a deeper perspective of the dynamics of its medial elements. It also offers a further understanding of the academic position of these dynamics themselves, as their enactments in the case of r/cringetopia can further support or challenge their distinct theoretical constructions. Thus, guiding this investigation is the following main research question:

**RQ:** How can the downfall of r/cringetopia be interpreted through the dynamics of cringe, community, and platform?

To conduct this investigation, I first offer a thorough portrait of the victim r/cringetopia for those unfamiliar with Reddit’s proceedings. I subsequently construct a theoretical framework, a more-in depth exploration of each of the *culprits*’ inner dynamics, weaving examples how they shape norms throughout a consideration of their context and social consequence. Following this, I outline my elected *methodology* of carrying out this investigation, by providing an explanation and rationale of the use of Gunther Kress’ multimodal discourse analysis,<sup>18</sup> along with its operationalization. Specifically, I structure the investigation based on the questioning how the culprits were implicated within the downfall, which act as the sub-research questions of this thesis.

**SRQ1:** How was Reddit implicated within the downfall of r/cringetopia?

**SRQ2:** How was the community implicated within the downfall of r/cringetopia?

**SRQ3:** How was the cringe content implicated within the downfall of r/cringetopia?

As the interpretations of how the culprits were implicated were contentious and connected with one another, each pertained to a sequential disruption of norms within r/cringetopia and thus each section acts as a “twist” in the investigation. Taken together the *twists* offer a cohesive account of the events and parties involved in r/Cringetopia’s demise and an analysis of how the dynamics played out throughout. Finally, the *verdict* summarizes the findings of the investigation along with reflecting on how the case contributes to understanding the culprits themselves, the impact of the methodology and how future detectives can further my work.

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<sup>18</sup> Gunther Kress, “Multimodal Discourse Analysis”, in *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. James P. Gee and Michael Handford (Routledge, 2011), 35.

## The Victim

R/Cringetopia was a subreddit, as signified by the “r/”, a subsection of the website Reddit. A google search of Reddit describes it as a “network of communities where people can dive into their interests, hobbies, and passions. There’s a community for whatever you’re interested in...”.<sup>19</sup> Its structure reflects this descriptor, as Reddit contains a multitude of communities or “subreddits” dedicated to these specific topics, offering the user the opportunity to join these communities as long as they create an account with only an email required to do so while not making account obstructs interaction. The homepage (Reddit.com) of the signed up user or Redditor is then filled with posts from their “joined” subreddits, thus being tailored to their selection. Along with specific content, each subreddit also has its own webpage that is tailored to a certain degree to the whims of the subreddits own communities, as long as they adhere to the overarching Reddit rules.<sup>20</sup>

Users interact with Reddit, either through creating subreddits or by searching for and engaging with the pre-existing subreddits.<sup>21</sup> This engagement can be done through submitting posts to communities (through different modalities such as text, images, video, links, or audio), or by engaging with other users’ posts. Either through commenting on them, or through commenting on other comments on them,<sup>22</sup>. Another means of interacting is through the binary system of upvoting and downvoting (with arrows facing accordingly) by posts and comments, which is calculated into a ratio to offer a post or comments “Karma”.<sup>23</sup> Karma is involved in ordering the posts and comments on the Reddit homepage and across different subreddits.<sup>24</sup> As stated in the introduction of the case, on r/cringetopia users interacted based on their interest in cringe, in which user’s posted and interact based on what they considered “cringe”. The consideration what is “considered” so is a result of the dynamic at hand with our first culprit: cringe dynamics.

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<sup>19</sup> Google, “Reddit.”

<sup>20</sup> Naveena Prakasam and Louisa Huxtable-Thomas, "Reddit: Affordances as an enabler for shifting loyalties." *Information Systems Frontiers* 23, no. 3 (2021): 743.

<sup>21</sup> Alex Georgakopoulou, Stefan Iversen, and Carsten Stage. "Making Memes Count: Platformed Rallying on Reddit." In *Quantified Storytelling* (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2020), 61.

<sup>22</sup> Georgakopoulou, Iversen and Stage, “Platformed Rallying,” 68.

<sup>23</sup> Prakasam & Huxtable-Thomas, “Reddit: Affordances,” 724.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



## The Culprits

### Culprit A

The cohesive definition of our dear friend “Cringe” is deceptively simple, as scholars from differing disciplines such as psychology and sociology describe it as the visceral reaction (can be affective, psychological, and/ or physiological) to some kind of social norm transgression.<sup>25</sup> As cringe is social in nature, there are at least two parties (individual or collective) involved: The party that is heeded as socially deviating in some manner is often referred to as the *target* or *perpetrator* and the party who does the heeding of this act, is referred to as the *audience* or the *observer*.<sup>26</sup> I will be referring to the target or perpetrator of cringe as the “cringee” and the audience or the observer as the “cringer” (the terms were directly inspired from Dynel and Poppi’s work).<sup>27</sup> As cringe is a multidimensional concept and a complete and thorough consideration is unfortunately above and beyond the scope and discipline of this thesis,<sup>28</sup> I will be focusing on how the construction of cringe constitutes and is constitutive of norms. This construction consists of the changing, although unequal dynamic between cringer and cringee. I structure this dynamic by beginning with the consideration of the party wielding the power (*The cringer: commanding and controlling*) and then the party who does not (*The cringee: mediating and mediatized*), using illustrative examples from both the victim and beyond.

#### *The Cringer: Commanding and controlling*

This dynamic, as psychologists Mayer, Paulus and Krach articulate, is largely dependent on the cringer’s own perception of the norm violation at hand, which is egocentrically based,<sup>29</sup> as it is in terms of the cringers own understanding of the prevailing social norms and transgressions that it occurs.<sup>30</sup> Cultural sociologist Patrick Wöhrle’s argues that the cringers understanding of norms violation can be framed through the concept “flexible normalism”,<sup>31</sup> in which norms are malleable and at some level deviation is to be expected and praised while at other levels it is disparaged. Thus, it is the cringer who dictates what level of deviation to the established is considered “normal” and thus acceptable and

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<sup>25</sup> Dahl, *Cringeworthy*, 12; Mayer *et al.*, “Vicarious Embarrassment,” 1; Wöhrle, “Two Shades of Cringe.” 10.

<sup>26</sup> Mayer *et al.*, “Vicarious Embarrassment,” 1.

<sup>27</sup> Marta Dynel and Fabio Poppi, “Quid rides? Targets and referents of RoastMe insults.” *Humor* 33, no. 4 (2020): 536.

<sup>28</sup> Wöhrle, “Two Shades of Cringe,” 10.

<sup>29</sup> Dahl, *Cringeworthy*, 211.

<sup>30</sup> Mayer *et al.*, “Vicarious Embarrassment,” 6.

<sup>31</sup> Wöhrle, “Two Shades of Cringe,” 10.

celebrated, and what veers into “cringe”, into the non-normal and socially unacceptable based on the configuration of the situation at hand”. For example, the individual in their fur suit (a mascot style costume of a furry)<sup>32</sup> may be seen as “cringe” for violating typical clothing norms, it can also be seen as a “normal”, due to being an authentic expression of the self.

Other situational configurations of the cringe content, the cringee’s intentionality of transgressing the norms and their awareness in doing so,<sup>33</sup> but this is also based on the cringers presupposing this on the behalf of the cringee. Assumed awareness and intentionality of the norm violation is classified distinctly as satire rather than cringe, which in of itself has been described as a genre of criticism and entertainment.<sup>34</sup> However, as mentioned this is dependent on how the cringer perceives the transgression, as satire or as cringe? For instance, take someone with spinach struck in their teeth; does the cringer believe the cringee is merely unaware of their speckled smile? Or do they believe that the cringee purposefully left the spinach in their grin at an attempt of satire? All possible interpretations, although potentially differing in how the cringer constructs the cringe, either with compassion (“We all forget to check a mirror after lunch” or “Good joke!”) or with contempt (“idiots forget to check a mirror after lunch” or “They’re trying way too hard to make a joke”)<sup>35</sup> demonstrate the subjectivity of the construction. However, one feature these constructions do share, is the understanding of the norm that spinach in the smile is unsavoury.

### *The cringee: Mediating and Mediatized*

Despite this trend of cringers commanding the dynamic at hand, the cringees can theoretically attempt to shift this dynamic, by demonstrating an appropriate attempt at rectifying their norm violation, such as making an appropriate display of embarrassment or by justifying their transgression, committing to the violation, and/or further signifying their intentionality of satire.<sup>36</sup> Underlying this shifting dynamic is the tenet that both parties share an understanding and appreciation of the norms at hand, and thus the outcome of the dynamic is whether the norm will be validated or challenged is relevant to both cringer and cringee.<sup>37</sup> Irrespective of triviality, the presupposed resolution of the cringe is thus implicated with the process of sustaining certain norms. This particularly comes to the forefront when the social

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<sup>32</sup> Reysen *et al.*, “My animal self,” 1.

<sup>33</sup> Mayer *et al.*, “Vicarious Embarrassment,” 4-6.

<sup>34</sup> Dieter Declerq, “A definition of satire (and why a definition matters).” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 76, no. 3 (2018): 319.

<sup>35</sup> Dahl, *Cringeworthy*, 183-84.

<sup>36</sup> Mayer *et al.*, “Vicarious Embarrassment,” 9.

<sup>37</sup> Wöhrle, “Two Shades of Cringe,” 7.

norms in question maintain social divisions and norms rooted in prejudice. For example, a legitimate feminist cultural critic may be constructed as a cringe by party of misogynists who hold gendered inequality as a norm. Constructing them as “cringe” individualizes them as a norm transgression, caricatures their criticism and delegitimizes their effort at hand.<sup>38</sup> As exemplified by philosopher and Youtuber Natalie Wynn or “Contrapoints” in their exploration of cringe, this ridiculing of feminists by portraying them as irrational and monstrous “SJW’s” (Social Justice Warriors) further maintains the unequal status quo.<sup>39</sup>

However, cringe’s capabilities of mediating the dynamic become starkly limited when the dynamic occurs on media environments. As Wöhrle, who illustrated the concept of flexible normalism in cringe content with the television show “Wife swap”, highlights a crucial element of the multifaceted cringe phenomenon in cringe entertainment; the cringes, or the personalities represented in the show’s plot of exchanging “wife” figures, cannot rectify, or even justify their apparent norm transgression through some semblance of awareness or intentionality due to the edited format of the show.<sup>40</sup> This reoccurs beyond television to online media platforms such as Reddit, as fellow cringe based subreddit r/cringe sources its cringes from across the different corners of the internet to specifically be cringed at.<sup>41</sup> In the format of Reddit, the cringe becomes content as ‘the cringeworthy [that] takes on a life of its own, as it is replayed, commented upon, and archived.’,<sup>42</sup> with no available opportunity for impacting the dynamic. This reoccurring absence of cringe’s autonomy in the media based construction of cringe indicates that perhaps even beyond not demonstrating appropriate intentionality or awareness of norm violations, the cringe’s in question may not even have those norms. For example, the cringe with spinach in their teeth was sourced from a hypothetical culture wherein this is highly valued aesthetically.

This lack of ability of cringe’s to mediate the cringe construction, especially in mediatized settings demonstrates the unequal nature of the cringe dynamic; its construction is at the whim of the cringer. However, as there is no singular cringer, as exemplified by the multiplicity of subreddits dedicated to cringe (r/cringetopia, r/cringe, r/cringepics,<sup>43</sup> and

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<sup>38</sup> Adrienne Massanari and Shira Chess, Attack of the 50-foot social justice warrior: The discursive construction of SJW memes as the monstrous feminine." *Feminist Media Studies* 18, no. 4 (2018): 528.

<sup>39</sup> Contrapoints, “Cringe” YouTube Video, May 10, 2020; Massanari and Chess, “The monstrous feminine”, 538.

<sup>40</sup> Wöhrle, “Two Shades of Cringe,” 5.

<sup>41</sup> Adrienne Massanari, *Participatory culture, community, and play: Learning from Reddit* (Peter Lang, 2015), 44

<sup>42</sup> Massanari, *Learning from Reddit*, 41.

<sup>43</sup> Massanari, *Learning from Reddit*, 40-44.

r/cringe/anarchy)<sup>44</sup> there is no singular construction of cringe. These constructions of cringe can also directly conflict with one another; the founder of r/cringe accounted that there was a prominent change in the construction of the community's cringe as it went from compassionate to contemptuous towards the cringee.<sup>45</sup> As a result, r/cringe implemented harsher moderation to combat the bullying and harassment that the cringee often faced. This triggered the section of community endorsing said bullying and harassment to make their own subreddit which could encapsulate their own construction of cringe: r/cringe/anarchy.<sup>46</sup> This demonstrated that cringers' differing construction triggered different communities. This leads us to the second culprit at play: community dynamics.

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<sup>44</sup> Dahl, *Cringeworthy*, 189-190.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

## Culprit B: Community

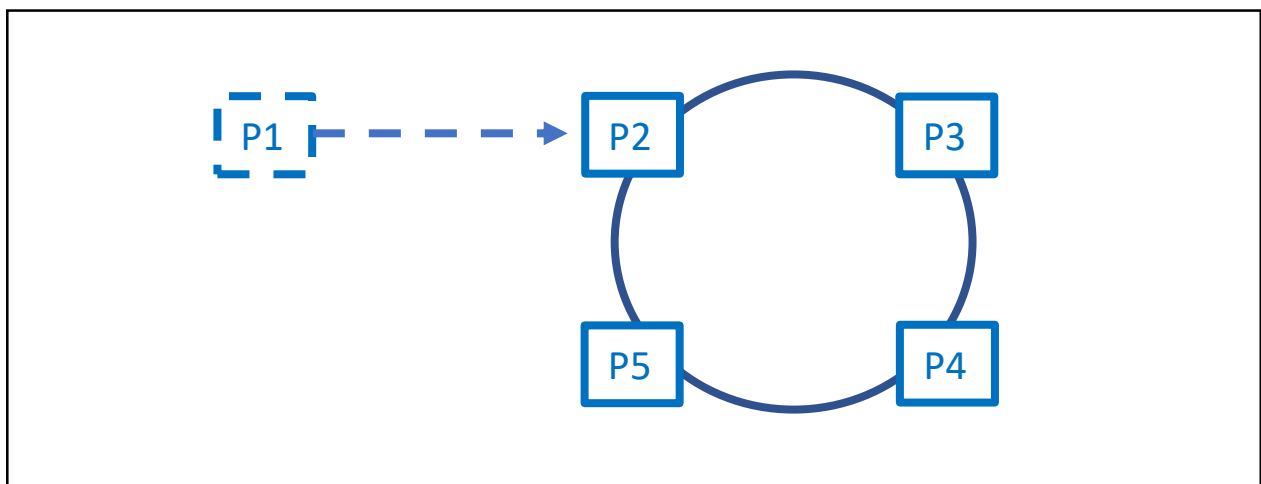
The term “Community” is an interdisciplinary concept that is notoriously difficult to define academically, thus my approach echoes the academic sentiment espoused by information studies scholars Jenny Preece and Diane-Maloney Krichmar, which is the acceptance of the near futility in fully conceptualizing our second culprit, and instead emphasizing the importance of examining its complex dynamics.<sup>47</sup> As Communities constitute and are constituted by certain norms, the dynamic between them is an intricate almost cyclical one. Thus, I will outline the intricacy of this dynamic through the consideration of a community’s formation and sustenance (*Cyclical Model of Communities*) and then demonstrate how this intricacy can deepen to the point of rendering them inaccessible to change or challenge (*Cyclical or Ouroboric? Insularity in Communities.*). I highlight how this dynamic is enacted not only within communities (intracommunity), but crucially also between communities (intercommunity).

### *Cyclical Model of Communities*

Massa’s proposed cyclical model of the lifespan of a community is based on an eight-year long observation of the Anonymous forums and its form is simplified in figure 1.

#### **Figure 1.**

Simplification of Massa’s Process Model of Sustainable Online Community Building.<sup>48</sup>



<sup>47</sup> Allison & Bussey, “Communal quirks,” 12; Tiago Cunha et al., “Are all successful communities alike? Characterizing and predicting the success of online communities.” In *The World Wide Web Conference, 2019*, 318; Jenny Preece and Diane Maloney-Krichmar. “Special theme: Online communities.” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 10, no. 4 (2005): 1-10.

<sup>48</sup> Massa, “Guardians of the Internet,” 979.

According to Massa preceding the cyclical pattern is the community's formation stage (P1).<sup>49</sup> The founding party (individual or collective) create a novel community that works for themselves and their purpose, as the community didn't exist or was unavailable to the group.<sup>50</sup> This "free space", is liberated from the perceived cultural and technological limitations of prior communities, and thus draws a preliminary boundary between the developing community and the developed ones.<sup>51</sup> In the case of Anonymous, this "free space" was 4chan which albeit valuing anonymity and more ephemeral communication in comparison to alternative online spaces at the time, but utilized the anonymity and communication for trolling which was reprimanded and constrained by the 4chan community.<sup>52</sup> These liberations attracted an influx of contributors who shared this value of anonymity and its function in trolling, and in this formative period they separated from 4chan, and tentatively adopted a collective moniker for themselves which eventually became of "Anonymous".<sup>53</sup> This simultaneous intercommunity dynamic of signifying distinctiveness from different communities to the intracommunity tension between the different utilizations of the afforded anonymity demonstrates both as foundational dynamics of communities in this case.

According to Massa's observations of the Anonymous community, these dynamics continued in a cyclical pattern as the community continued and was sustained and divided the cycle into four stages as shown in figure 1: experimental (P2), values-driven engagement (P3), disengagement (P4), and reconstitution (P5). The first in the cycle is *experimenting*, in which boundaries are tested and slowly the system of values and repertoire within the community is built,<sup>54</sup> followed by the next stage of *values-driven engagement* in which the constructed values are enacted and also affirmed outside of the community.<sup>55</sup> This validation from outside the community attracts new members to join, but along with these new members come along new values and repertoires, and thus triggers the stage of *disengagement* as the community's values become uncertain, it destabilizes the previous guiding values.<sup>56</sup> Finally, the stage of *reconstitution*, is when the tensions the values underpinning the value-driven

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<sup>49</sup> Massa, "Guardians of the Internet," 979

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Massa., "Guardians of the Internet," 978.

<sup>52</sup> Massa., "Guardians of the Internet," 970.

<sup>53</sup> Sofia Alexopoulou and Antonia Pavli, "'Beneath This Mask There is More Than Flesh, Beneath This Mask There is an Idea': Anonymous as the (Super) heroes of the Internet?" *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 34, no. 1 (2021): 241; Massa, "Guardians of the Internet," 978.

<sup>54</sup> Massa, "Guardians of the Internet," 979.

<sup>55</sup> Massa, "Guardians of the Internet," 980.

<sup>56</sup> Massa, "Guardians of the Internet," 981.

engagement and disengagement are resolved to a point that allows the community to engage with plural rather than singular values and once again begin experimentation with what this entails for the community.<sup>57</sup> Massa's cyclical framework for community sustenance demonstrates that a community's values and norms are not monolithic, unchanging from the communities' inception but instead are susceptible to the intersubjective whims of the changing members.<sup>58</sup> Massa's model suggests that the active construction and deconstruction of a community's values are a fundamental component of its sustenance.

However, Massa's compelling construction of the process of online community building, as acknowledged by the author, is based on a singular case and is thus specific to the hacktivist group in question.<sup>59</sup> Potentially limiting its generalisability is the notion that the "Anonymous" community can encapsulate both trolling, and social protest under one banner while other communities may not be as amenable to accommodating such pluralism in their values and identity.<sup>60</sup>

#### *Cyclical or Ouroboric? Insularity in Communities.*

Rather than having heterogenous values in its cycle, these communities risk becoming homogenous, monolithic, or insular in their values.<sup>61</sup> Insularity is described by online communities' researchers Kimberley Allison and Kay Bussey as the state where the members and content of a community become similar to the point where deviations from the similarity are both implicitly and explicitly discouraged.<sup>62</sup> A certain threshold of homogeneity or insularity is expected of communities, especially in the beginning in that it requires that a certain level of shared values to distinguish itself, as discussed earlier in Massa's model and this echoes Allison and Bussey's process of insularity called "network homophily", which occurs when demographic and/or ideologically similarities guide connections between individuals.<sup>63</sup>

By mapping Allison and Bussey's processes of insularity onto Massa's model of community sustenance, we see that rather being directly oppositional to one another they bear striking resemblance to one another. This suggests the potential for communities to become, what I coin as, *ouroboric*, rather than cyclical in their form, as within the community the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Allison & Bussey, "Communal quirks," 12; Massa, "Guardians of the Internet," 979.

<sup>59</sup> Massa, "Guardians of the Internet," 984.

<sup>60</sup> Massa, "Guardians of the Internet," 981.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Allison and Bussey, "Communal quirks," 12.

<sup>63</sup> Allison and Bussey, "Communal quirks," 16.

values risk becoming repeating rather than evolving which acts as the driving force of the cycle thus changing how figure 1 is interpreted. For instance, Massa's stages of *experimentation* and *value-driven engagement* as previously explained can be expressed by Allison and Bussey's process of insularity. For the stage of *experimentation*, the development of a repertoire of values can be done through the process of "circle-jerking", where content is tailored towards the value of appealing to others rather than other community values establishing the links in the value system.<sup>64</sup> The stage of *value-driven engagement* may be the community's "gatekeeping" as they engage with other communities by closing themselves off by making their norms inaccessible to outsiders through "inside jokes".<sup>65</sup> These processes of insularity, both on an individual and collective level, act in tandem together to maintain and reaffirm the norms and values of the community and dissuade dissent,<sup>66</sup> while other scholars refer to them as crucial parts of building and maintaining communities".<sup>67</sup>

This insularity continues to define the form of the community, as when the influx of new contributors occurs rather than the trigger the stage of *disengagement* in Massa's model,<sup>68</sup> the norms can be further enforced by leaders and community members rather than fall to newcomer's norm violating whims.<sup>69</sup> Subsequently, this challenges Massa's final stage of *reconstitution*, as with the norms policed it implies that there are no new or challenging norms for the community to adapt to. This alternate model of communities, as an ouroboros may not fit the Massa's case of "Anonymous" community, but it does fit its founder 4chan, which maintained its own values which was adverse the notion of trolling, which triggered the formation of the case Anonymous group. Taking Massa's proposed model of community sustenance and Allison and Bussey's taxonomy of insularity processes together, it demonstrates that the values held by the community can be dictated by its intracommunity or intercommunity dynamics. It demonstrates the interrelated nature of communities, as their

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<sup>64</sup> Allison and Bussey, "Communal quirks," 17.

<sup>65</sup> Allison and Bussey, "Communal quirks," 20.

<sup>66</sup> Allison and Bussey, "Communal quirks," 17-19.

<sup>67</sup> Brittany Davidson *et al.*, "The evolution of online ideological communities." *PloS one* 14, no. 5 (2019): 1; Carrie Moore and Lisa Chuang, "Redditors revealed: Motivational factors of the Reddit community." In *Proceedings of the 50th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, 2017*, 2319.

<sup>68</sup> Massa, "Guardians of the Internet," 981.

<sup>69</sup> Charles Kiene *et al.*, "Surviving an "Eternal September" How an Online Community Managed a Surge of Newcomers." In *Proceedings of the CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, 2016*, 1155.



boundaries are permeable,<sup>70</sup> allowing values and dynamics to be carried across them,<sup>71</sup> as exemplified by Anonymous succeeding 4chan.

This interrelated nature lends support to the notion of considering communities as part of “meta-communities”,<sup>72</sup> that are exhibited on websites such as Reddit, which Adrienne Massanari, communications scholar who ethnographically chronicled the platforms community for three years, described it having “one and many cultures”.<sup>73</sup> Massanari notes the interplay between homogenic and heterogenic values and the dynamics at hand, describing them as emblematic of the website’s nature. However, Reddit could not be considered as a “Network of communities where people can dive into their interests, hobbies, and passions”,<sup>74</sup> without the materiality to substantiate as such.<sup>75</sup> Thus, we turn our focus to next culprit: Reddit’s materiality.

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<sup>70</sup> Massa, “Guardians of the Internet,” 962.

<sup>71</sup> Jack Hessel, Chenhao Tan and Lillian Lee, “Science, askscience, and badscience: On the coexistence of highly related communities.” In *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* 10, 2016, 171.

<sup>72</sup> Moore & Chaung, “Redditors Revealed,” 2313.

<sup>73</sup> Massanari, “Learning from Reddit,” 14.

<sup>74</sup> Reddit, 2022.

<sup>75</sup> Kannan et al., “Perspective of digital platforms,” 1; Massa, “The guardians of the Internet,” 964.

## Culprit C: Materiality of Reddit

My consideration of Reddit's materiality aligns with Digital platform and Information technology scholars' Veena Kannan, Saji Mathew and Franz Lehner's conceptualization of digital platforms as sociomaterial.<sup>76</sup> In this perspective, digital platforms although difficult to define (see de Reuver *et al.* for a more thorough discussion of the debates in definition and the differentiation between digital and non-digital platforms),<sup>77</sup> are characterized as having substantial social outcomes specifically due to entanglement of the human and material.<sup>78</sup> I will first outline the tenets of this sociomaterial perspective, in how it accounts for how a platform can shape its social norms and vice versa (*Sociomateriality of Reddit*), then I will demonstrate that the dynamic between the material and its norms is characterized by tension by examining how Reddit is "user-powered". First by considering empowerment of the user in how it facilitates the visibility the expression (*User-empowered: Visible Expression*) and then in how this same expression is disempowered in its subjugation to moderation (*User-constrained: Moderated Expression*).

### *Sociomateriality of Reddit*

The human or the social of a digital platform consists of the user's goals and behaviour, while its material is "the intrinsic property of digital platforms independent of the people who use them".<sup>79</sup> This intrinsic property comprises of the digital platform architecture such as its core functions, constituents to achieve said functions, interface interrelating the constituents and description of said functions.<sup>80</sup> A sociomaterial perspective of Reddit, highlights that the outcome of it being described as a social news aggregation, a web content rating, discussion website,<sup>81</sup> and a combination of social media and early message boards,<sup>82</sup> is due to both of its social and material constituents. It both needs its users to collect and post news, to rate content and to begin and engage with discussions along with the material infrastructure to aggregate the news, to permit the ratings and host such interactions to

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<sup>76</sup> Kannan *et al.*, "Perspective of digital platforms," 1.

<sup>77</sup> Mark De Reuver *et al.*, "The digital platform: a research agenda." *Journal of information technology* 33, no. 2 (2018): 124-135.

<sup>78</sup> Kannan *et al.*, "Perspective of digital platforms," 4-5; Wanda Orlikowski, "Sociomaterial practices: Exploring technology at work." *Organization studies* 28, no. 9 (2007):1435.

<sup>79</sup> Kannan *et al.*, "Perspective of digital platforms," 1.

<sup>80</sup> Kannan *et al.*, "Perspective of digital platforms," 6.

<sup>81</sup> Tiana Gaudette *et al.*, "Upvoting extremism: Collective identity formation and the extreme right on Reddit." *New Media & Society* 23, no. 12 (2021): 3493.

<sup>82</sup> Tim Squirrel, "Platform dialectics: The relationships between volunteer moderators and end users on reddit." *New Media & Society* 21, no. 9 (2019): 1911.

substantiate the website as those things. This Sociomateriality is also prevalent in design platform literature, despite not being explicitly related, as platform design should be contextualized and guided by its presupposed social use.<sup>83</sup> However, with the design of platforms being guided socially, the sociality subsequently becomes guided by the platform in the form of “affordances”. Affordances are material features of platforms that produce certain norms of how the user ought to utilize the platform.<sup>84</sup> This demonstrates the intricacy of the entanglement between the social and the material. In a consideration of the social dynamics of a subreddit, I reiterate that the material cannot be ignored.

### *User-powered: Visible Expression*

Reddit is described as “user-powered” which indicates a sense of autonomy on the user’s behalf, with an added emphasis of their power.<sup>85</sup> Users’ can create and maintain their own customisable subreddit if they so choose,<sup>86</sup> or they can discover, select, and contribute to as many “subreddits” as they wish, thus controlling their own Reddit experience.<sup>87</sup> Not only can redditors manage their *own* Reddit experience, but they are also afforded to both symbolically and materially change the *subreddits* through the platforms system of Karma. Karma visibly expresses the posts rate of approval symbolically, but also materially, as it indicates as to where it appears visually in relation to the other of the subreddit’s posts.<sup>88</sup> This visibility is also dictated by the users, as they decide as to what variables does the visibility adhere to; users can view posts in subreddits through “top” which prioritizes the karma of posts, or “new” which prioritizes recency of submissions, or the default of “hot” which calculates the former two variables.<sup>89</sup>

This material allocation of power to the Redditor in shaping subreddits predisposes these communities to be democratic in their proceedings as it literally empowers the popular opinion, but paradoxically also provides the potential to homogenize select opinion as

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<sup>83</sup> Jessica Pater *et al.*, "Just awful enough: the functional dysfunction of the something awful forums." In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, 2014*, 2410; Paolo Spagnoletti *et al.*, "A design theory for digital platforms supporting online communities: a multiple case study." *Journal of Information technology* 30, no. 4 (2015): 365.

<sup>84</sup> Stanfill, "Interface as discourse," 1062.

<sup>85</sup> Georgakopaulau *et al.*, "Platformed Rallying," 61; Moore and Chaung, "Redditors revealed," 2313; Srijan Kumar *et al.*, "Community interaction and conflict on the web." In *Proceedings of the 2018 world wide web conference, 2018*, 938

<sup>86</sup> Prakasam and Huxtable-Thomas, "Reddit: Affordances," 743; Gaudette *et al.*, "Upvoting extremism", 3493

<sup>87</sup> Tim Weninger, Xihao A. Zhu & Jiawi Han, "An exploration of discussion threads in social news sites: A case study of the reddit community." In *IEEE/ACM international conference on advances in social networks analysis and mining, 2013*, 578.

<sup>88</sup> Georgakopaulau *et al.*, "Platformed Rallying", 64.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

unpopular or converse views can be rendered materially invisible.<sup>90</sup> Thus, although Reddit empowers the “user”, it does so at a collective and accumulative level which may come at the expense of disempowerment at the individual level. This paradox can have positive impact in crisis situations such as on r/, wherein the information urgent and relevant information pertaining to the crisis is easily filtered to the top while misleading information is hidden,<sup>91</sup> while it can also have negative consequence as documented by Gaudette and colleagues with r/the\_donald.<sup>92</sup> They highlight how expression visibility of reddit facilitated r/the\_donald to present the vilification of its perceived enemies (those who follow the religion of Islam and those on the “left” in politics) as common while materially rendering those with converse opinions invisible.<sup>93</sup> This highlights the tension characterizing Reddit; it affords the “free expression” of its users while simultaneously censoring them.

#### *User-Constrained: Facing Moderation.*

This tension within Reddit’s affordance of “user-power” is reiterated in its materialization of moderation in the face of it being a “free expression platform”.<sup>94</sup> Massanari highlights that Reddit prides itself of this social value of “free speech” which likely originated as a result of its materiality, by its opens-source ethos, which permitted anyone to make and manage their own community.<sup>95</sup> Due to this sociomaterial precedence of “free speech”, Reddit was thus initially very lenient with its moderation, as exemplified by the former existence of subreddits such as r/candidfashionpolice in 2015 which consisted of pictures of women taken and posted without their knowledge or consent to other subreddits dedicated to anti-feminist positions such as r/mensights or r/theredpill.<sup>96</sup> The sole moderation came in the form of moderators, volunteer users to assist in the maintenance and management of subreddits,<sup>97</sup> through the manual removal and response to rule-breaking content/users

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<sup>90</sup> Jenny Davis and Timothy Graham, Emotional consequences and attention rewards: the social effects of ratings on Reddit." *Information, Communication & Society* 24, no. 5 (2021): 652.

<sup>91</sup> Alex Leavitt and John J. Robinson, "The role of information visibility in network gatekeeping: Information aggregation on Reddit during crisis events." In *Proceedings of the 2017 ACM conference on computer supported cooperative work and social computing*, 2017, 1250-1253.

<sup>92</sup> Gaudette et al., “Upvoting extremism,” 3495.

<sup>93</sup> Massanari, *Learning from Reddit*, 154.

<sup>94</sup> Simon Copland, "Reddit quarantined: Can changing platform affordances reduce hateful material online?" *Internet Policy Review* 9, no. 4 (2020): 1.

<sup>95</sup> Massanari, *Learning from Reddit*, 154.

<sup>96</sup> Massanari, *Learning from Reddit*, 135.

<sup>97</sup> Shagun Jhaver *et al.*, "Does transparency in moderation really matter? User behavior after content removal explanations on reddit." In *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 3, 2019, 3; Squirrel, "Platform dialectics," 1913; Tim Weninger *et al.*, "An exploration of discussion threads in social news sites: A case study of the reddit community." In *IEEE/ACM international conference on advances in social networks analysis and mining*, 2013, 579.

along, the automatic “bots” that assist in management of rules,<sup>98</sup> and monitoring the daily proceedings of a subreddits.<sup>99</sup> These moderators despite having a degree of autonomy not afforded to other users,<sup>100</sup> are seen as integrated within the particular subreddit and Reddit as a whole, as they are charged with adhering and maintaining both parties’ regulations and values.<sup>101</sup> Thus, although having the potential to be conflicting, moderators’ moderation ability materially empowers select users to enact their vision of these norms and rules at hand.<sup>102</sup>

However, with Reddit gearing towards becoming a publicly traded business and in the face of criticism for perpetuating what Massanari defines as “toxic techno cultures”.<sup>103</sup> Reddit has both banned and “quarantined” particularly problematic subreddits, in a demonstration of the platforms intention to follow their own content policies.<sup>104</sup> R/The\_Donald being subjected to both actions,<sup>105</sup> with first the quarantine in 2019, in which its visibility was reduced from redditors who had not joined the subreddit, along with having its moderators complicit in breaking the website rules removed followed by the ban in 2020 which effectively shut down the subreddit and made all of its content inaccessible to everyone.<sup>106</sup> This demonstration of Reddit’s administrator’s material power over select subreddit’s moderators, was utilized in redditors rejection of these new moderating enforcements, assuming victimhood of censorship.<sup>107</sup> Despite these complaints about Reddit’s newfound appeasement to the leftist “SJW’s,<sup>108</sup> communities such as r/The\_Donald had utilized Reddit’s affordances to further their own values; from having moderators being notorious for banning users who exhibited disagreement or dissent,<sup>109</sup> or exploiting the metrics of visibility to increase the content from their subreddit on r/all (a subreddit whose content is highly upvoted posts from other subreddits).<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Jhaver et al., “Transparency in moderation,” 3.

<sup>99</sup> Nathan J. Matias, “The civic labor of volunteer moderators online.” *Social Media+ Society* 5, no. 2 (2019): 3.

<sup>100</sup> Squirrel, “Platform dialectics,” 1923.

<sup>101</sup> Squirrel, “Platform dialectics,” 1913.

<sup>102</sup> Leavitt and Robinson, “Information Aggregation,” 1254; Squirrel, “Platform dialectics,” 1923.

<sup>103</sup> Adrienne L. Massanari, “# Gamergate and The Fapping: How Reddit’s algorithm, governance, and culture support toxic technocultures.” *New media & society* 19, no. 3 (2017): 330.

<sup>104</sup> Julia DeCook, “r/WatchRedditDie and the politics of Reddit’s bans and quarantines.” *Internet Histories* 6, no. 1-2 (2022): 206.

<sup>105</sup> Amaury Trujillo and Stefano Cresci, “Make reddit great again: assessing community effects of moderation interventions on r/the\_donald.” *arXiv preprint arXiv:2201.06455* (2022).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> DeCook, “Reddit bans and quarantines,” 215.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Srayan Datta and Eytan Adar, “Extracting inter-community conflicts in reddit.” In *Proceedings of the international AAAI conference on Web and Social Media 13, 2019*, 156.

<sup>110</sup> Ryan Shepherd, “Gaming Reddit’s Algorithm : r/the\_donald, Amplification, and the Rhetoric of Sorting.” *Computers and Composition* 56 (2020): 6.

r/The\_donald faced the moderation from Reddit, limiting their expression while simultaneously being afforded visible expression at the expense of other users, exemplifying the conflicting sociomaterial dynamic of Reddit as a platform. However, the content of r/The\_donald, was dedicated to promotion and campaigning of the politics espoused by Donald Trump and thus its users' actions and norms were contextualized by such. Different content can possibly offer different contexts for the platform dynamic to be expressed, which in turn takes us to the consideration of the culprit of cringe. However, this would make an infinite loop, and alas, and r/Cringetopia's death would remain unsolved.

## The Methodology

I will first outline the particular *corpus* of r/cringetopia I will be researching. Then, I will explain the key terms and concepts underpinning the method of my research, linguist, and semiotician Gunther Kress' Multimodal Discourse Analysis.<sup>111</sup> I will then provide the *rationale* of its use of this method in the context of the investigation and describe how it aided in structuring the investigation, before outlining how it was *operationalized*.

### Research Corpus

The predominant consequence of a subreddit's privatization is that users who are not explicitly given permission to the subreddit are unable to access it. As my request to gain admission was not granted at the time of conducting the investigation, I could not directly collect the material preceding the subreddits its end. Thus, I rely on the documentation sourced from the WayBackMachine. The WayBackMachine is a digital public archive that collects and stores multiple modalities such as websites that have been uploaded by different individuals.<sup>112</sup> It is organized based on the hyperlink of the website and by the dates and specific times that it is crawled, which refers to picking the websites content and storing it as data. It has been validated as a beneficial source of online source of data to researchers,<sup>113</sup> despite its limitations in accurately reflecting the linkage between sites,<sup>114</sup> and is dependent when the website is crawled, rather than when it is updated. Taken together this denotes that although the WaybackMachine depicts the homepage of the subreddit at different time points, not all of its posts and its comments are accessible, nor does it afford the typical engagement with Reddit's interface. However, I argue that the difficulty of accessing the research corpus due to it leaving behind a corpse is part of the investigation in of itself. Due to these constraints, the research corpus (as expressed through figures and appendices) considered refers to all of the available material gathered through inputting reddit.com/r/cringetopia in the WayBackMachine (web.archive.org)<sup>115</sup> from the 19<sup>th</sup> of April to its privatization on 06<sup>th</sup> May of 2022).

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<sup>111</sup> Kress, *Multimodal Discourse Analysis*, 44.

<sup>112</sup> Jamie Murphy *et al.*, "Take me back: validating the wayback machine." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 1 (2007): 63.

<sup>113</sup> Sanjay Arora *et al.*, "Using the wayback machine to mine websites in the social sciences: a methodological resource." *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 67, no. 8 (2016): 1914; Murphy *et al.*, "Validating the wayback machine," 63.

<sup>114</sup> Arora *et al.*, "Using the wayback machine," 1913.

<sup>115</sup> "reddit.com/r/cringetopia," WayBackMachine, accessed October 26, 2022.  
<https://www.reddit.com/r/SubredditDrama/>.

Other supplementary sources I utilized to complement material sourced from the WayBackMachine and to ensure clarity of the events characterizing the death of r/cringetopia were the dedicated posts and subsequent comment threads to r/Cringetopia's end on r/SubredditDrama, whose content was dedicated to "reddit fights and other dramatic happenings from other subreddits".<sup>116</sup>

### *Explanation*

Kress describes Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA) as "the description and analysis of any text- as a complete and coherent semiotic entity- which aims at describing and analysing what 'goes on' in a text, including the working of power in social interaction."<sup>117</sup> This description comprises of multiple sociolinguistic concepts which I will explicate utilizing and expanding upon Kress' own example of a diagram of an animal cell.<sup>118</sup> This diagram consists of a simple cell mode, with labels on the different parts such as the nucleus, the mitochondria, cell membrane and cytoplasm. The *text* is considered the figure as a whole, comprised of the both the visual illustration and the textual components or two different *modalities* which both have their own connotations in communication.<sup>119</sup> These modalities come together through which Kress describes as *cohesion*.<sup>120</sup> This cohesion applies to both within the text (ensuring that each written label matches its visual counterpart) and outside the text (having this diagram question within a chapter on cells in a biology textbook).<sup>121</sup> Cohesion is not just at the disposal of the producer of the diagram, but also of the viewer of the diagram or *interpreter*. The interpreter may offer a different *interpretation* of the coherence of the different modal elements and thus produce a new text. For instance, a microbiologist specialized in cellular research may interpret the diagram as juvenile and question its internal cohesion of labels and visuals, while an artist may resonate with its simplicity and include it in art show, producing it as "Art" thus shifting its external cohesion.

As a result of the producer or at the whim of the interpreter, the resulting text contributes to some sort of *discourse*. *Discourse*, to Kress, is the generative source of social meaning in the Foucauldian sense rather than a linguistic category,<sup>122</sup> as it is a form of productive power. In the case of the diagram, it generates knowledge that this cell exists, a

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<sup>116</sup> "r/Subredditdrama", Reddit, accessed October 26, 2022, <https://www.reddit.com/r/SubredditDrama/>.

<sup>117</sup> Kress, "Multimodal discourse analysis," 37.

<sup>118</sup> Kress, "Multimodal discourse analysis," 44.

<sup>119</sup> Kress, "Multimodal discourse analysis," 36.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Kress, "Multimodal discourse analysis," 35.



representation of its appearance and value of learning about it. Furthermore, the diagram in the biology textbook consolidates the power of the education system and the government funding and designing it. The diagram within an art collection generates the continuous cultural understanding of “art” and that a diagram of the cell can be perceived as such and becomes part of the institution the art collection is within. This demonstrates that to Kress the text examined is the “material site of emergence of immaterial discourse”.<sup>123</sup>

### *Rationale*

MMDA is a highly appropriate method for this investigation as it shares the same foundation: a Foucauldian perspective of productive power. MMDA provides the means to solve the case, to approach the research question of “How can the collapse of r/cringetopia of r/cringetopia be interpreted through the dynamics of cringe, community and platform?”. Through MMDA’s lens we can interpret if and how these theoretical dynamics emerge as discourse throughout the text of the “downfall of r/cringetopia”. MMDA appropriately recognizes the different modalities involved with the victim of r/cringetopia, such as its textual, visual, and algorithmic elements along with their different connotations. It also acknowledges the interplay of such modalities that come together cohesively to constitute the text in question. I also selected MMDA as not only did its concepts provide a means of investigation, but its careful consideration of cohesion and interpretation provided a structure to my operationalization.

### *Operationalization*

I adopted Kress’ multimodal discourse analysis, particularly the notions of cohesion and interpretation in structuring and guiding the investigation. The sub-questions pertain to how each of the culprits were implicated within the downfall of r/cringetopia.

**SRQ1:** How was Reddit implicated within the downfall of r/cringetopia?

**SRQ2:** How was the community implicated within the downfall of r/cringetopia?

**SRQ3:** How was the cringe content implicated within the downfall of r/cringetopia?

As the implications of the culprits were chaotic, interconnected throughout the events and parties involved in the downfall of r/cringetopia, the sub questions aided in making the text cohesive as they presented the overarching points of contention between differing interpretations, thus highlighting how the dynamics between them emerged. The

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<sup>123</sup> Kress, “Multimodal discourse analysis,” 36.

implications of each culprit throughout ordered the text in a series of twists, in which the downfall of r/cringetopia was first predicted, then proceeded and finally left a casualty in its wake.

## The Twists

### The First Twist: Prediction of Death

The first twist revealed in the circumstances surrounding the death of r/cringetopia was the announcement for the prediction of its own imminent death by the subreddits' moderators that implicated Reddit itself, along with a speculation of its motives for disrupting its cohesion (SRQ1). Here, I first outline the contents of the prediction, their interpretation on what motivates their imminent death, the conflict it is and outcome of, and their plan to avoid death (*Immanent death: Reddit's censorship conflict*), followed by an interpretation on the dynamics that emerges from this predicted disruption and their potential outcome if cringetopia escapes death (*Cheating death: r/Cringetopia or cringetopia.org?*).

#### *Immanent death: Reddit's censorship conflict*

The announcement is contained within a post submitted and pinned by a moderator titled "Current State of the subreddit. The admins will probably try to silence us and remove this post. Don't let them" (CSOS).<sup>124</sup> As mentioned, in this post the moderator acknowledges its upcoming death and interprets the Reddit admins as culpable. The post outlines that its demise is due to the inevitable end of the ongoing conflict between Reddit and r/cringetopia, a conflict that Reddit initially instigated, as motivated by their upcoming initial public offering or IPO which has urged "Reddit corporate",<sup>125</sup> to adhere to a business-friendly vision. The post claims that in Reddit's efforts to enforce their vision, they have been subjugating r/cringetopia to consistent censorship, through the direct removal of its content or "our best posts", through being "brigaded" by reports of subreddits that do fit this vision, or by directly censoring users and moderators alike for either "frivolous" or "seemingly no reason at all".<sup>126</sup> Supporting their claim, they account that this censorship was even occurring on the basis of association, with the significant other of r/cringetopia's account being banned, along with a hyperlinked pictures to Imgur, one with ban message titled "Injustice".<sup>127</sup>

The post interprets the censorship as such, and after lamenting on the potential apathy of the users towards the censoring, the post quotes civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., to assumedly emphasize the gravity of the situation: "I'm sure most of you don't actually give a shit, and I wouldn't blame you, but as Martin Luther King once said:" Injustice

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<sup>124</sup> Appendix B.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Appendix C.

anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere....”<sup>128</sup> The inclusion of this quote places recollection of the events and continuous struggle of the civil rights movements in ending racial segregation in the United States beside the censorship of a subreddit, thus evoking the readers feelings and thoughts about (in)justice. It is this perceived censorship that is the interpreted point of contention, that draws the division between r/cringetopia and the Reddit admins and demonstrates the perceived lack of cohesion between the community and its platform, which will escalate to which the latter “will probably just take the subreddit soon”.<sup>129</sup> However rather than accepting their prophesized defeat, r/cringetopia aims to detach itself from Reddit’s interference, claiming power throughout this disruption of cohesion through launching its own platform cringetopia.org, leaving the subreddit at the hands of Reddit but highlighting “r/cringetopia as you know it is probably over”.<sup>130</sup>

#### *Cheating death: r/Cringetopia or Cringetopia.org?*

The central dynamic discussed explicitly in CSOS, is conflict due to Reddit’s sociomateriality of its expression of censorship; appreciating that not only does Reddit’s values and normalizes censorship, but that its affordances materialize these norms.<sup>131</sup> The discussions of the social “injustice” are consistently supplemented with materializations of such. CSOS seems to allude to the perspective of the constrained user facing moderation, with no equivalent of how the platform has empowered them and thus disrupts the apparent “user-powered” nature of Reddit as the moderators are being moderated and thus cannot enact their own vision of the subreddit.<sup>132</sup> Thus, with their call of action to move to cringetopia.org, they can claim their own sociomaterial empowerment by developing a platform that Reddit has no jurisdiction over where they can enact their own norms and vision and have some degree of user-power. Thus, throughout CSOS “Cringetopia” is attempting to detach itself from “r/cringetopia”, establishing itself as its own community which is emphasized by the final declaration which excludes the insulting “/r” in “Long live cringetopia”.<sup>133</sup> These endeavours to detach itself from Reddit are facilitated and furthered through community dynamics.

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<sup>128</sup> Appendix B.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Gaudette *et al.*, “Upvoting extremism,” 3493.

<sup>132</sup> Squirrel, “Platform dialectics,” 1923.

<sup>133</sup> Appendix B.

One manner it does so is through intercommunity dynamics; as by levelling the notion that the Reddit's meta-community has become insular,<sup>134</sup> which is incompatible with cringetopia's own supposed heterogenous norms, as it proclaims a desire for "content and culture that is not slowly being homogenized with the rest of Reddit".<sup>135</sup> Another way of distinguishing itself is by affirming the solidarity of its own values within the community, reflected in the continuous and consistent use of the first personal plural pronoun in CSOS, everything is "our", "our moderators", "our best users", "Reddit is taking actions against us" with the exception of the use of the second person pronoun "you", invoking discursive distance if one does not have the same sentiment towards censorship ("most of you don't actually give a shit") or being used a signifying of personal address in the intention of moving to cringetopia.org ("you'll like it").<sup>136</sup> One particular norm played by the intercommunity and intracommunity dynamics, is cringe itself, as it is both threatened by Reddit's sociomaterial censorship and a central consideration for the community of cringetopia, as cringetopia.org will accommodate all your "cringe and cringe-community needs".<sup>137</sup> In CSOS, cringe is not an active dynamic, which demonstrates the absence of its culpability in the prediction cringetopia's own death, but its construction remains a pivotal norm at play.

If the moderators' interpretation of the r/cringetopia's community's norms and values were cohesive with those held by the users,<sup>138</sup> then perhaps the introduction of the new platform hosting cringetopia.org, could have potentially been considered as Massa's phase of disengagement. The r/Cringetopia community could have successfully disengaged from the rest of Reddit, with the caveat that the disengagement occurs due to the new platform rather than the new userbase,<sup>139</sup> and permitted the new norms of "Cringetopia" to emerge in the stage of reconstitution. However, it also could have been considered as the formation of a novel community due to its separation with its original platform, questioning the conditions of the "free-space" in which a community forms.<sup>140</sup> Both trajectories would have challenged Massa's framework, questioning the caveats necessary for the stage of disengagement and community formation to occur. However, this movement of the community and its theoretical ramifications are at the whim of the users rather than just the mods. At first, within hours of the post of CSOS, the user's reception was cohesive with the sentiment explicated by the

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<sup>134</sup> Allison and Bussey, "Communal quirks," 12.

<sup>135</sup> Appendix B.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> DeCook, "Reddit's bans and quarantines," 215.

<sup>139</sup> Massa, "Guardians of the Internet," 977-79.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

mods in CSOS, with highly upvoted users agreeing that Reddit’s motivations for change were a result of their corporate interests, ensuring that “the political opinions that fill the [toxic] cesspool are mildly profitable” (111 upvotes) and “what makes reddit its moolah” (101 upvotes).<sup>141</sup> The early responses also condemn the sociomaterial power of Reddit in its censorship, recognizing it as a “social media platform where they control ever narrative” (32 upvotes) and compare it to the exertion of power apparently evident on other platforms such as Tumblr (538 upvotes).<sup>142</sup> However, hours later, with continued upvoting and commentating, a different reception to CSOS became cohesive from the users’ activity which precludes the second twist of this investigation.

Taken together, this part of the analysis demonstrates the dynamics involved in the mods’ interpretation of r/cringetopia’s death and their plan to escape it. The mods use community and platform dynamics to announce their distinction of themselves as just “cringetopia”, creating certain claims for the forthcoming cohesion of the community on a new platform. Now, we turn to observe how this proposed cohesion was interpreted by the communities’ users and the ramifications of the interpretation.

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<sup>141</sup> Appendix D.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

## The Second Twist: Cause of Death

In this part of the investigation, I account how the community's further interpretation to the moderator's interpretation of r/cringetopia's incoming death precluded its cause of death (*Automod: Accelerated Symptoms*) and how the moderators' enforcement of this new norm triggered an ongoing conflict within the community which was eventually implicated its actual death: an implosion (*Civil Warfare: Fatal Implosion*) (SRQ2). Throughout this account of the conflict, I explicate how the dynamics at play in r/cringetopia's predicted death played a role in its actual death.

### *Automod: Accelerated Symptoms*

While a certain level of denunciation of Reddit's sociomaterial effect continued, commenting that "this kind of nonsense seems to be inevitable seems for social media platforms" (165 upvotes).<sup>143</sup> In the same breath the user also acknowledges Reddit's pivotal role in materializing cohesion between communities and recognizing their community's interconnected nature as "Reddit is convenient. Everything in one place" (165 upvotes), which the CSOS does not do, instead implying that r/cringetopia is capable of being sovereign.<sup>144</sup> The users also critique to contents of the CSOS post, from the inclusion of the MLK quote "I'm sure when MLK said that he wasn't thinking about Reddit admins" (636 upvotes) to describing the described imperativeness of disengaging from Reddit as "fear mongering [more] than anything else" (140 upvotes).<sup>145</sup> However, the main point of contention of the community members is not Reddit's threat of censorship, but rather the auto moderating bot (automod) that was introduced by the moderators to reiterate and spread the message of CSOS: "Due to increasingly unreasonable demands from the administration, r/cringetopia is moving offsite to our own exciting new platform".<sup>146</sup> This purposeful "saturat[ion of] the sub with this message as much as possible before the inevitable crackdown" was considered by users in the reception of the CSOS post as spam.<sup>147</sup> The spam, rather than being interpreted by the users as a Machiavellian tactic in reclaiming power in Reddit's upcoming disruption, became the disruption itself as one user comments: "Yea the comment spam is a bit much dude" (869 upvotes).<sup>148</sup> It was this response that the users

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<sup>143</sup> Appendix E.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Appendix E.

cemented, with both comments being further upvoted two days later, to 3.7k upvotes, along with the additional “I understand but you guys have to cut the automod shit off immediately” (2.0k upvotes).<sup>149</sup>

### *Civil Warfare: Fatal Implosion*

This constructed the overarching conflict within r/cringetopia for the remainder of its life, of moderator versus users, as the mod’s expression of material power over the subreddit and the remaining community’s interpretation to this this expression. CSOS would only be the beginning, as irrespective of the mods’ intentions and conspiracies of collaboration, their theatrical interactions amongst themselves altered the subreddit’s cohesion over the remaining days of its life. The title of the r/cringetopia was changed from Cringetopia to “Furrytopia” to “Elna fan club” (name of mod interpreted by users to be responsible for the whole affair) to reflect the supposed changes in governance of the mod team or “mod takeovers”. Beyond the changes to the homepage’s title, banner and about section, the mods also incrementally made similar changes to the automod which required users’ content to include certain phrases, which impacted users’ capacity for expression, both in the title of their posts and in their comments, with the only affordance being left untouched being the ability to upvote. During the stage of “Furrytopia”, users were required to include explicit support towards furies such as “I support furry pride!” or their submission would be removed by the automods, and later another automod would require the phrase “I hate furies” which conflicts with the first mod.<sup>150</sup> Eventually, the automod not only required the inclusion of certain phrases but changed it so that all user’s submitted post titles could contain emojis rather than text, effectively silencing its userbase as seen in figure 2. The same dynamic of Sociomateriality of Reddit that incited the conflict in CSOS was now utilized the by the moderators, as they were in accordance with the move of the community to cringetopia.org and compelled its users to moving there by obstructing the subreddit’s typical affording of users’ expression. The same party that was claiming to be censored was now effectively censoring its users, taking advantage of how Reddit powered them as users to constrain other users, exemplifying the tension within the notion of “user-power”.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Appendix F.

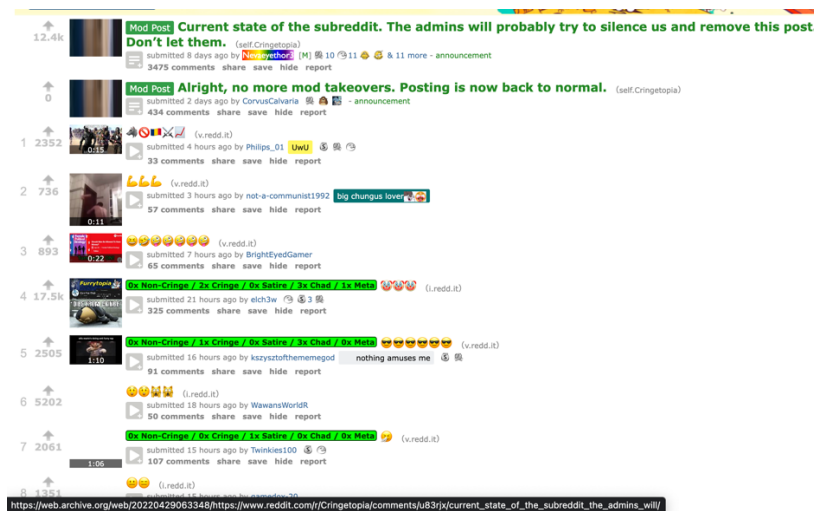
<sup>150</sup> Appendix G.

<sup>151</sup> Trujillo & Cresci, “Effects of moderation intervention,” 22.



**Figure 2.**

WayBackMachine Documentation of “Hot” Posts (29/04/2022)



As all of these changes were dictated by the mods, all the community could do is respond accordingly and as afforded at the time, which drew a division between the users of r/cringetopia and its moderators which disrupted the cohesion within the community members. The primary form of response possible was the homepage, or “hot” posts where the users were still afforded some semblance of control in their shaping of visibility. Directly following CSOS, the community lamented the impending downfall but shifted their blame and ire to misdemeanours of the mods rather than the supposed censorship of Reddit, seeing them as culpable for the disruption of the community. This division also invoked the intercommunity and intracommunity dynamics in the CSOS, as rather than seeing it as detachable from Reddit, Reddit as a platform was interpreted by users as pivotal to the cohesion of the community, with its death as a subreddit equating the death of the community. The homepage the day after the CSOS was characterized by farewells to the subreddit, ranging from fond “I guess the subreddit is gone, o7” (1.1k upvotes) (the o7 signifying a figure saluting) to more popular disparaging titles reading “The absolute state of this place” (1.9k upvotes).<sup>152</sup> As mod activity continued, the denunciation of the mods did the same from reproaching “Elne” in particular as the ringleader, as “Elne needs to lose his mod status and be banned ASAP, Upvote to send the message” (27.3k upvotes) to a general disdain of the mods, as “Mods when people don’t join their shitty website” (5.9k upvotes).<sup>153</sup> When the automod began enforcing the inclusion of “pro-furry” or “anti-furry” rhetoric, the

<sup>152</sup> Appendix H.

<sup>153</sup> Appendix I

community exploited all material actions available to them, to multimodally communicate their perspective on proceedings and rebel against the prescribed terms using furries as a scapegoat. Titles such as “furries rock! Down with furry haters and bullies!” accompanied images that depicted an arrow pointing towards the area of the upvotes (6.1k upvotes) along with text within the image “amount of people that hate furries” (see fig.3). Users were able to express themselves, as although the cohesion between the title and the image was interrupted it was done so to ensure cohesion between the users’ attitude and the restrictions coming from the moderators.

**Figure 3.**

WayBackMachine Documentation of Selected Top Post (25/04/2022)



This conflict was characterized by the combinatory dynamics of community and platform, as both attempted to sociomaterially claim the community “cringetopia” as their own, with the mods now seeing it as “cringetopia.org” while the users persistently perceiving it as “r/cringetopia”. This conflict appears to follow Massa’s model rather than my ouroboric extension, as the presence of dichotomous norms prevents it from becoming insular. Instead, the conflict follows the stages of value-driven engagement to disengagement,<sup>154</sup> as both mods and users are enacting and affirming their own values in this period where the norms are destabilized and thus members disengage from the community. However, with both parties making a normative claim of cringetopia, the subsequent stage of reconstitution was rendered

<sup>154</sup> Massa, “Guardians of the Internet,” 977-79.

impossible, as it would require a party to yield in the conflict, to either establish a common ground of norms or to express acceptance of the novel multiplicity of the communities' values. This conflict demonstrates a point of departure from Massa's cyclical model, as the inability for the stage of reconstitution to occur, it renders the community incapable of sustaining itself. This pivotal departure of Massa's model is supported by the notion that this conflict is what cumulated into r/Cringetopia's death.

Although r/cringetopia's official cause of death is privatization, an action done by the moderators,<sup>155</sup> who the users would find responsible as "the current mods are just going out in flames",<sup>156</sup> the mods would interpret their action as justified due to the actions of its users. A moderator's particular "serious" answer of the mod's activities throughout its downfall highlighting how "this sub acts without moderation", justifying shutting it down themselves rather than allowing Reddit to respond to the users' "sitewide violations".<sup>157</sup> This renders the death an *implosion*, an instance of an internal collapse, as rather than being killed by external forces it was done so from within. This implosion didn't benefit any party of r/cringetopia; the users lost access to the subreddit they were fighting for while the moderators lost the userbase they were attempting to mobilize to their new platform. This implosion also completed the prophecy outlined CSOS, as rather than Reddit taking them down through a direct ban or quarantine, the moderators utilized what was afforded to them by the platform in making their own community private, taking themselves down.

Here, I outlined how the division between the moderators and user marked a disruption of r/Cringetopia's cohesion through both dynamics of materiality and community and accounted for the events leading up its death and its death itself. I interpret R/Cringetopia's cause of death as implosion, as both parties interpreted the other responsible and both were affected by its demise.

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<sup>155</sup> Matias, "Volunteer moderators," 3.

<sup>156</sup> Appendix J

<sup>157</sup> Appendix K

### The Third Twist: Casualty of Death

Here, I account for how the cringe dynamic, despite of its use of by both users and mods to portray the interpreted transgression of the other throughout the conflict, enacted cohesion in r/cringetopia rather than disrupting it (*The claiming of the cringe*). Instead, the implication of cringe content caused its own distinct casualty in the death of r/cringetopia, as the construction of the cringee facilitated it to becoming subjugated to explicit hatred (*The silence of the furrries*) (SRQ3).

#### *The claiming of the cringe*

Throughout the downfall of r/cringetopia, there is a continuous effort, to become the cringer rather than the cringee. From the initial reception to CSOS, the users of r/cringetopia claim the term denoting the post in question with the cringe flair. This trend continues, with the mods' changes to the subreddit described as "a bit cringe ngl [not going to lie]" (2.6k upvotes), along with the moderators themselves as it "Doesn't surprise me that sweaty mod of this sub is the embodiment of cringe itself" (15.5k upvotes) with petitions for their account's removal.<sup>158</sup> Through caricaturing the mods as a "sweaty", the hegemonic geek archetype of the redditors,<sup>159</sup> it portrays the mods' activity as an individual norm transgression thus attempting to undermine their activities and reclaiming a semblance of power back to themselves, which has been continuously taken from them in material terms. Similarly, to how the community adapted the power for themselves, so did the mods. In the "serious answer" of describing their own actions and activities throughout the downfall, "the mod team did not expect the userbase to react to obvious satire in such a way".<sup>160</sup> By portraying their own activities as satire, they simultaneously defend their actions as intentional and aware, denouncing them as cringe and portray the users' lack of understanding of the activities as the transgression itself.<sup>161</sup> Thus, by cringing at the other, the division between user and moderator deepens.

Beyond sharing the weaponization of the cringe dynamic in maintaining this boundary between moderator and users, they also share an expressed desire to return to typical cringe posting, rather than the aggregation of content related to the conflict. Mods claim that "typical" cringe was never prevented as "There is nothing stopping you all from

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<sup>158</sup> Appendix I

<sup>159</sup> Massanari, *Learning from Reddit*, 128.

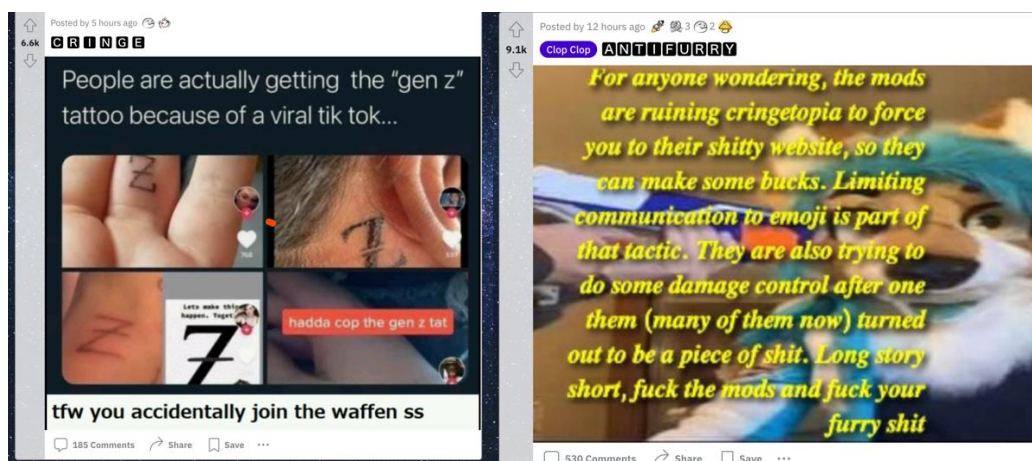
<sup>160</sup> Appendix K

<sup>161</sup> Mayer *et al.*, "Vicarious Embarrassment," 2.

posting cringe brothers and sisters. I checked the logs, and it was never prevented”,<sup>162</sup> while users claim that posting “typical” cringe would be an act of rebellion with a user utilizing a meme that states “Instead of posting rage about the troll mods. Let’s continue to post cringe like normal to show them they can’t win” (2.2k upvotes).<sup>163</sup> This demand for the return of the normality of the cohesive content of cringe became another point of contention, as both parties blamed the other party for obstructing this return. At the very end, days before the privatization, there was an inkling of the return to normal cringe posting, but the ramifications of the conflict endured materially as at this point all text was disabled and titles had to be delivered through emojis and socially, as it still centred around discussing the events and the motives the mod activity (fig.4). However, despite this use of the cringe dynamic by both parties to be the cringer and to claim “normal” cringe content, the dynamic itself was not disruptive to the cohesion of r/cringetopia nor its conflict. Neither party truly lost the autonomy typically characterizing the cringee instead being at the whim of the dynamics of platform and community, which leads us to the consideration of the cringe or the content of cringe.

**Figure 4.**

WayBackMachine Documentations of Selected Top Posts (30/04/2022)



### *The silence of the furrries*

Beyond the weaponization of the cringe dynamic in maintaining this boundary between moderator and users is a consideration of the content of the cringe. The central and cohesive content or focus of cringe throughout the collapse is furrries, who were already part

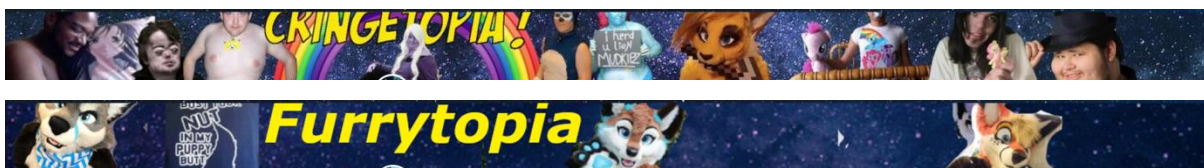
<sup>162</sup> Appendix K

<sup>163</sup> Appendix L

of r/cringetopia's repertoire of cringees, as illustrated by their original banner pre-conflict (see fig 5a). Mods activities centred around furies as content, from changing the name of cringetopia to furrytopia, the automods centring around "fursecution" (furry persecution) and changing the visual banner to only include furies (see fig.5b). The users compiled with this concentration of cringe on particular cringe and focused their content around furies in their criticism of the mods and their activities.

**Figure 5.**

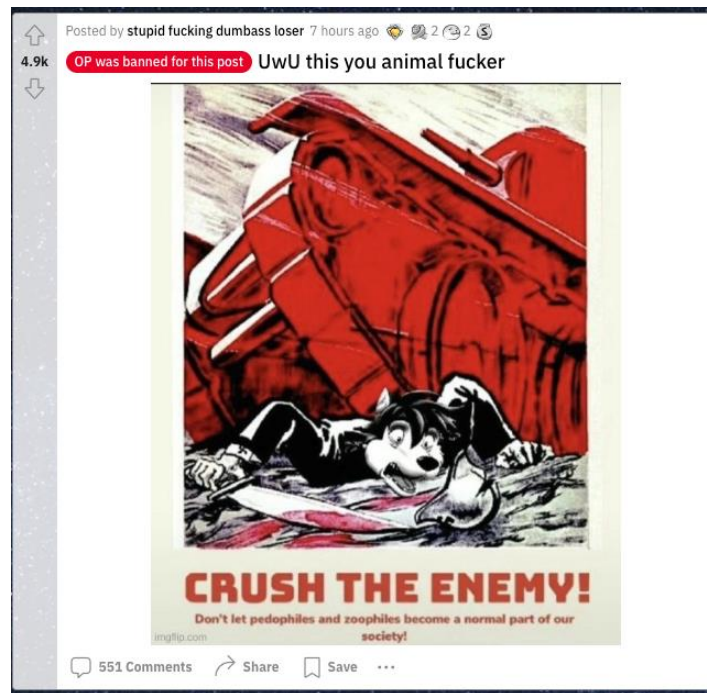
WayBackMachine Documentation of subreddit banner on the 21/04/2022 (Top, A) and 22/04/2022 (Bottom, B)



However, by vilifying furies beyond the vilification of mods or users, it questions what norm violation did furies commit beyond being scapegoated by either side of the civil r/cringetopia war. As seen is figure 6. where the militaristic imagery highlighting the presence and threat of the "enemy" while the text compares furies to paedophiles and zoophiles, portraying them innately reprehensible and prohibits them of being "a normal part of our society". It appears that their other norm transgression is their mere existence. This existential nature of the transgression mitigates any possibility of furies as cringees in mediating the transgression, as neither awareness nor intentionality, or even some sort of justification absolves them of their existence, voiding any semblance of autonomy of theirs. It facilitates the cringer to construct cringe that condemns them for existing and expresses hatred toward them, along with affirming the norm that their presence is an abomination. Thus, the dynamic of cringe is not only unequal, but absolute on behalf of the cringer

**Figure 6.**

WayBackMachine Documentation of Selected Top Post (24/04/2022)



Accessing this hatred of furries through portraying them as cringee, may have been strategic as a scapegoat in the conflict. On the mod's behalf, one user observes that "they are trying to turn this sub into hate sub to get it banned so people would use their shitty website. Every anti-furry subreddit was banned in the past" (252 upvotes),<sup>164</sup> which demonstrates that "they also use furries as a scapegoat, because it's the easiest target, the majority of you find furries cringe". While other users warn against this pitfall into hatred, reminding them about the ensuing conflict is centred around the mods and not hating furries as "Furries didn't take over r/cringetopia" (1.2k upvotes).<sup>165</sup> Highlighting, this smooth transition of cringee to hated, is the suspicion aroused by the users when one of the mods' posts and automods reference the Islam faith. With references to "Ramadan" and "Inshallah", both Muslim terms, the community seem apprehensive that Muslims would now be the cringee, and thus the content would centre around Islamophobia as "We went from furries to Muslims. What is going on? [I hate furries!]" (3.8k upvotes).<sup>166</sup> This scrutiny demonstrates an attempt on behalf of Muslims in avoiding being portrayed as the cringee, and thus preventing the scope of hatred to move to Islamophobia, but it also raises the possibility of an alternate target of cringe and hate in the conflict. If the mods and users cohesively constructed Muslims or the other parties depicted in the original banner as the central cringee (figure 5) and their only interpreted

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<sup>164</sup> Appendix K

<sup>165</sup> Appendix J

<sup>166</sup> Appendix K

norm transgression was their existence, would it even change the outcome of the conflict? Or would it merely result in the hatred of another party, a different casualty?

I posit the latter, as this section highlights that although the cringe dynamic didn't shift the conflict and dynamics resulting in r/cringetopia's downfall, but it permitted the scapegoating and hatred of its cringee, thus creating a casualty of its own. Thus, with the case closed and a bloodied Wolf fur suit on our hands, we move to our conclusion.



## The Verdict

My investigation has been driven to finding the answer to the question, “How can the downfall of r/cringetopia be interpreted through the dynamics of its cringe, community, and platform?”. My case highlights the prominent and symbiotic role of the culprits’ community and platform, as their combined power would shape and be shaped by the disruptions that would lead to the subreddits’ demise. The inciting disruption was r/cringetopia moderators’ seeking independence from Reddit’s community and platform, aiming to be the sovereign on the platform Cringetopia.org, while the proceeding disruption was its userbase disputing this notion of gaining independence as a subreddit and the means the mods were afforded in doing so. This triggered a civil war within the r/cringetopia community, between its moderators and users fighting for power, culminating into what I consider an implosion, as its death played occurred due to dynamics playing out within the subreddit rather than outside of it. Throughout this conflict, the cringe dynamic didn’t impede the other two culprits, as it had been utilized throughout the civil war, but it never shaped a disruption like the other culprits as both the moderator and user claimed the role of the cringer. However, cringe as a dynamic itself had its own casualty as the construction of the cringee facilitated the normalization of its hatred. Overall, this case reveals how these dynamics are intricate in their production of power, furthering Foucault’s’ notion of how these forces not only impacting their subject but also each other through their interaction.

The observation of the emergence of the play and interplay of these dynamics contributes further to each of their distinct academic positionings. In terms of cringe, it contributes to its literature in two key ways. The first, is a consideration of how I constructed the dynamic of cringe being unequal between the cringer and the cringee, as this investigation revealed that rather than merely unbalanced there may be no scale in question. As the norm transgression can be one’s existence, it voids any possible opportunity for the cringee to contribute to the construction of cringe through any expression of awareness nor intentionality, which raises a theoretical challenge for Mayer and colleagues’ notion who outlined this possibility as it questions what conditions need to be met for the cringee to have some power.<sup>167</sup> Whether the norm and its violation itself has to have a level of specificity for it to be addressed or that irrespective of specificity that the construction of cringe becomes a life of its own as “content” in the subreddit media environment.<sup>168</sup> The second contribution is

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<sup>167</sup> Mayer et al., “Vicarious Embarrassment,” 9-10.

<sup>168</sup> Mayer et al., “Vicarious Embarrassment,” .2-3; Massanari, *Learning from Reddit*, 41.

a consideration of how cringe construction facilitates the hatred of the selected cringee, as it demonstrates how the perception of transgression permits hatred of the norm transgressors. This furthers Wynn's observation of cringe's role in delegitimizing particular views, as rather than solely portray their activity as individual norm transgression, this thesis suggests that may also portray the whole collective as such, leading not only to their ridicule but their explicit hatred.<sup>169</sup>

In terms of community dynamics, my account for the end of r/cringetopia lends support to Massa's cyclical model of community sustenance and my extension of this model in how it becomes ouroboric through insularity.<sup>170</sup> Massa's model of community sustenance is tailored to having plural values, while my ouroboric model is not accommodating to such values due to its opposing insularity.<sup>171</sup> R/Cringetopia's norms were disjointed into dichotomy as a result of the user-moderator conflict, and its subsequent demise suggests an inability to accommodate this multiplicity of values. This would imply that r/cringetopia, by being incapable of becoming heterogenous, aligns more with my proposed ouroboric model of a community rather than Massa's cyclical one and thus offers more explanatory power of a community's death rather than just their life. As this is gleaned from a singular case study, it raises an inquiry of whether the death of ouroboric communities is marked by its values becoming plural, or whether it can make the transition to Massa's cyclicity? This also questions the opposite inference, asking whether cyclical communities are capable of becoming ouroboric, or does this transition mark its end?

Another facets of these models to consider is whether the case of r/cringetopia was truly a death, or rather potentially the creation of two new community cycles on behalf of both the parties who divided it. That r/Cringetopia's inability to reconstitute itself into a unified community under Massa's model, instead prompted the formation of novel communities such as those who went to cringetopia.org. This suggests an alternative pathway to reconstitution in Massa's model, community formation.<sup>172</sup> Similarly to the relation between 4chan and Anonymous, rather than emerging from "free space",<sup>173</sup> the formation of communities may be directly based on previously existing communities, rendering their forms interconnected and interdependent. Thus, rather than being a single cycle as Massa

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<sup>169</sup> Contrapoints, "Cringe".

<sup>170</sup> Massa, "The guardians of the Internet," 980.

<sup>171</sup> Massa, "The guardians of the Internet," 979.

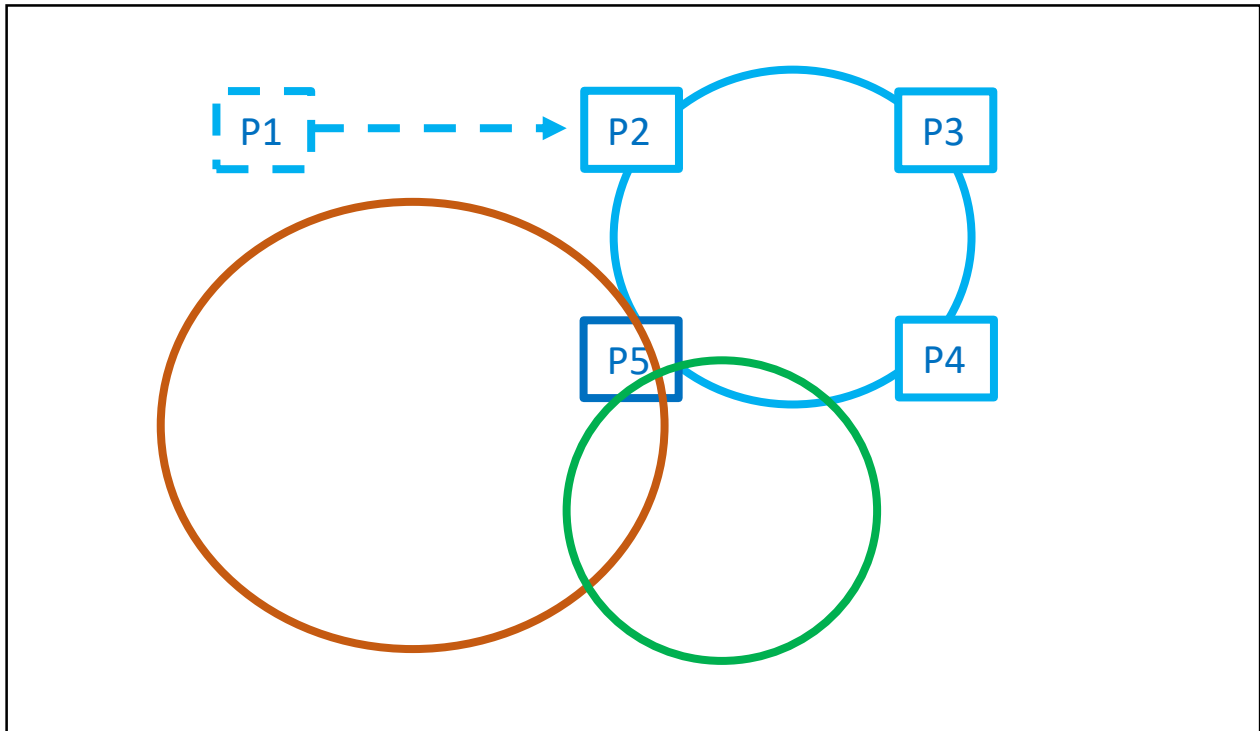
<sup>172</sup> Massa, "The guardians of the Internet," 970.

<sup>173</sup> Massa, "The guardians of the Internet," 960.

proposes, community's lifespans may take form of connected and overlapping circles as illustrated by figure 7., a continuation from figure 1.

**Figure 7.**

Proposed continuation of Massa's Process Model of Sustainable Online Community Building.<sup>174</sup>



Overall, beyond supporting the similarities between the cyclical and ouroboric models of community substance,<sup>175</sup> this case suggests that the life and death of communities are deeply entwined.

Another pivotal facet this case raises in the study of community dynamics is the particular consideration of different level of powers afforded to its different members in dictating the shape of the community. As Massa's case of Anonymous had its own unique affordances,<sup>176</sup> the model considered the different recency of members as a point of contention rather than the different power of its members.<sup>177</sup> Thus it may be Reddit's afforded infighting of the community that prevented the heterogenous values, thus not

<sup>174</sup> Massa, "Guardians of the Internet," 979.

<sup>175</sup> Massa, "Guardians of the Internet," 961; Allison and Bussey, "Communal quirks," 12.

<sup>176</sup> Massa, "Guardians of the Internet," 961.

<sup>177</sup> Massa, "Guardians of the Internet," 983.

included in Massa's model of community building whose platform permitted such plurality.<sup>178</sup> This case demonstrates the intricacy of community and platform dynamics, supporting the continued examination of them in tandem from an academic standpoint.<sup>179</sup> Reddit's sociomaterialization of "user-power" characterized the cases' conflict, as both r/Cringetopia's users and moderators are ultimately Redditors or Reddit users, and without Reddits' materiality the conflict would be rendered immaterial. However, rather than this case clearly upholding the apparent tension between the user power and constraint, it's also possible that it solely consolidates user-power, as the apparent conflict was due to the disruption caused on behalf of the users. After all, disruptions only become apparent when the moderators departed from the norms of their subreddit, and it was the materiality that empowered the users in their fight through guarding their ability to dictate information visibility despite the mods' implemented impediments. It appears that the tension within user-power occurs when it challenges itself. This demonstrates how the social element becomes indistinguishable from the material, further substantiating the concept of sociomateriality. Even the act of privatization, of taking ones' subreddit down and removing the content is powered by the volunteering users (moderators), offering them the opportunity to effectively shut down the subreddit on their own terms rather than on the administrators.

Reiterating the prominent role of materiality, its impact is starkly apparent in my selected methodology. The visibility of user's expression, in moving the popular opinion to the top of the homepage, as supported by the "hot" default page allowed me to retrospectively interpret what the users of r/cringetopia were expressing despite the text being based on an archival source. However, this same information visibility demanded reliance on the popular interpretation of the users, as due to the privatization I could not encounter converse or controversial takes that were expelled from the homepage through downvotes thus making the popular interpretation the dominant one. The privatization of the subreddit and MMDA, meant that I had to adjust the method to the now more static text of r/Cringetopia's downfall rather than the interactive interface that Reddit typically afforded. However, by explicating the concepts of cohesion and interpretation as expressions of Foucauldian power,<sup>180</sup> Kress' MMDA made this adjustment operationalizable as it framed these changes as disruptions and a fundamental part of the text of the downfall of r/cringetopia. In a sense, my entire investigation could be interpreted as a disruption to the subreddit in of itself as by interpreting

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<sup>178</sup> Massa, "Guardians of the Internet," 968.

<sup>179</sup> Gaudette *et al.*, "Upvoting Extremism," 3493.

<sup>180</sup> Kress, "Multimodal discourse analysis," 35-50.

its death through the public WayBackMachine, it disrupts r/cringetopia's last act of privatization.

MMDA also prompted me to consider alternate interpretations of the subreddits' death, beyond the parties involved within the community, which I had done through the monitoring of r/SubredditDrama for supplemental material and assistance in establishing a cohesive timeline. These alternate interpretations of r/cringetopia's death further contextualized the dynamics at play from a more meta-community perspective of Reddit and shed novel insights onto both the culprits and victim themselves, however due to the scope of the thesis I could not investigate them with due diligence. The question of interpretation also raises a question for the method of MMDA itself, as it assumes the position of the interpreter in observing the dynamics in the text of the community's death, while someone more embedded in the community might offer an alternate interpretation. Thus, an alternate methodology that I would have selected to approach this investigation is ethnography. Ethnographical research, operationalized through interviews for example, could provide a deeper understanding of the parties involved, their direct motivations and interpretations of the conflict and their perspective of dynamics at play.<sup>181</sup> This would also position the dynamics of medial environments closer to Munn's process of psycho socialization,<sup>182</sup> which accounts further how both facilitate the movement throughout the alt-right pipeline.

The investigation into the death of r/cringetopia, revealed mysteries to be resolved by future detectives, from furthering the understanding the culprits and their interplay in different situations, to implementing alternate explanations of r/Cringetopia's death and broadening the methodology to do so. By following each of these trails, the department can consolidate to reveal whether the death of r/cringetopia was incidental, or rather whether it was part of a larger pattern. From examining a small disruption in the pipeline, each incremental piece of research reveals more and more its dynamics illuminating the processes of the pipeline more and more. So, with the conclusion of this investigation I encourage the beginning of many more.

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<sup>181</sup> Geoffrey Walford, "Interview and interviewing in the Ethnography of Education," in *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.320>

<sup>182</sup> Munn, "Alt-right pipeline".

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

Date on WayBackMachine: 21/04/2022

The screenshot shows the WayBackMachine interface for the URL <https://www.reddit.com/r/Cringetopia/>. The page features a banner with the text "CRINGETOPIA!" and a group of people. Below the banner is the subreddit header for "r/Cringetopia" with a "Join" button and the tagline "The Museum Of Cringe". The main content area displays a list of posts:

- Hot** (selected), New, Top, ...
- PINNED BY MODERATORS**
- 3.5k** (upvotes), Posted by 10 hours ago, 1.9k Comments, Share, Save, ...  
**Mod Post** Current state of the subreddit. The admins will probably try to silence us and remove this post. Don't let them.
- 3.2k** (upvotes), Posted by **Nikocado Supremacy** 6 months ago, 2 Comments, Share, Save, ...  
**Join now!** Join the Cringetopia discord bozos  
[discord.gg/qf5PqQ...](https://discord.gg/qf5PqQ...)
- 2.0k** (upvotes), Posted by 6 hours ago  
**PETA protesting Starbucks**

On the right side, the **About Community** section includes:

- In this moment, I am euphoric. Not because of any phony god's blessing. But because, I am enlightened by my intelligence.
- 1.8m Subscribers, 16.0k Online
- Created Sep 21, 2018
- r/Cringetopia topics
- Funny/Humor

At the bottom right, there is a **Powerups** section with a lightning bolt icon.

## Appendix B

Date on WayBackMachine: 21/04/2022

Posted by 6 hours ago

2.3k

### Current state of the subreddit. The admins will probably try to silence us and remove this post. Don't let them.

Mod Post

Just wanted to let you guys know that Reddit has made a lot of administrative changes recently. We don't exactly fit the "wholesome 100" vision that Reddit corporate has adopted for the site in light of their upcoming IPO. They have been removing some of our best posts and banning some of our best users for frivolous reasons. Several of our moderators have been banned recently, without warning, for seemingly no reason at all, including the creator/owner of the sub.

Reddit is taking actions against us without any explanation at all, either before or after the fact, so it looks like they will probably just take the subreddit soon and give it to their favorite powerjannies, as is tradition. Mr Positive didn't really care, but now the admins have banned his girlfriend for no reason whatsoever, and there's no way for her to even appeal. [Here is proof they are two different people posting in good faith.](#) [Here is the ban message.](#) Just my opinion but women shouldn't have to worry about being banned because Reddit doesn't like their boyfriends. That's not very wholesome 100 at all. It could happen to you.

Anyway I'm sure most of you don't actually give a shit and I wouldn't blame you, but as Martin Luther King once said: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

We would also like for you to know that we now have a standalone platform with a shitload of exciting new features, for all your cringe and cringe-community needs. We've been talking about it for half a year now. Mainly we just want a space where we can have a less serious/more fun environment with content and culture that is not being slowly homogenized with the rest of Reddit. We also think it would help to have a better place to host the more controversial content that we get here. We have been getting brigaded heavily by other subs. Some fairly tame posts have been getting 400-800 reports. And yes, I am serious. If we don't review each and every one of these, AEO (Reddit's paid thought police division) takes action against the sub.

Come join us at <https://cringetopia.org/>. It's shiny. It's new. It's really exciting software. You'll like it. Or stay here if you want. [r/cringetopia](#) as you know it is probably over, though.

Long live Cringetopia.

1.3k Comments Share Save Hide Report 89% Upvoted

Log in or sign up to leave a comment Log In Sign Up

**r/Cringetopia**

In this moment, I am euphoric. Not because of any phony god's blessing. But because, I am enlightened by my intelligence.

1.8m Subscribers 20.1k Online

Created Sep 21, 2018

Join

**Powerups**

Powerups are unlocked in r/Cringetopia

Become a Hero

**COMMUNITY HEROES**

Powerups 74

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Imgonnalevelwithyou  | 1 |
| SandwichImmediate468 | 1 |
| Scarzsalle           | 1 |
| 33tch                | 1 |



Appendix C


Date on WayBackMachine: 20/04/2022

**Injustice** Next >

1,298 Views • 22h

# New message from u/reddit

 reddit  u/AMedocreRobot



You have a new message from **u/reddit**

---

u/reddit  
Your account has been permanently suspended for

# Appendix D

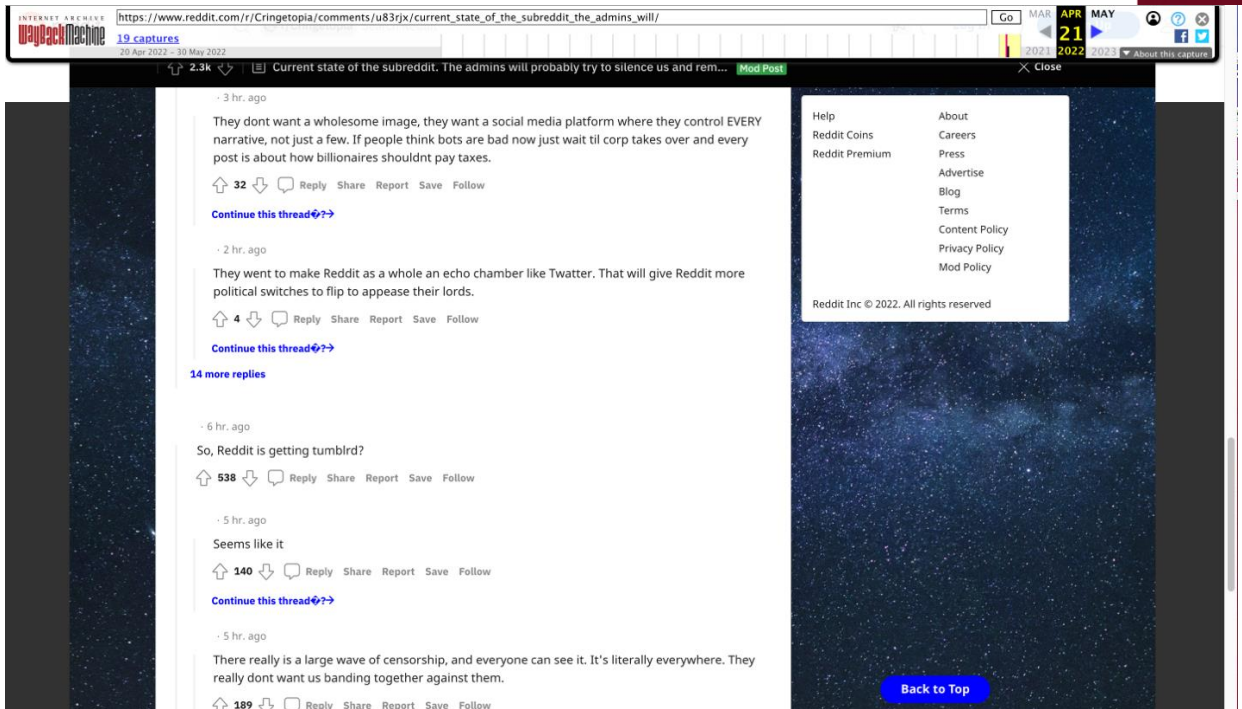
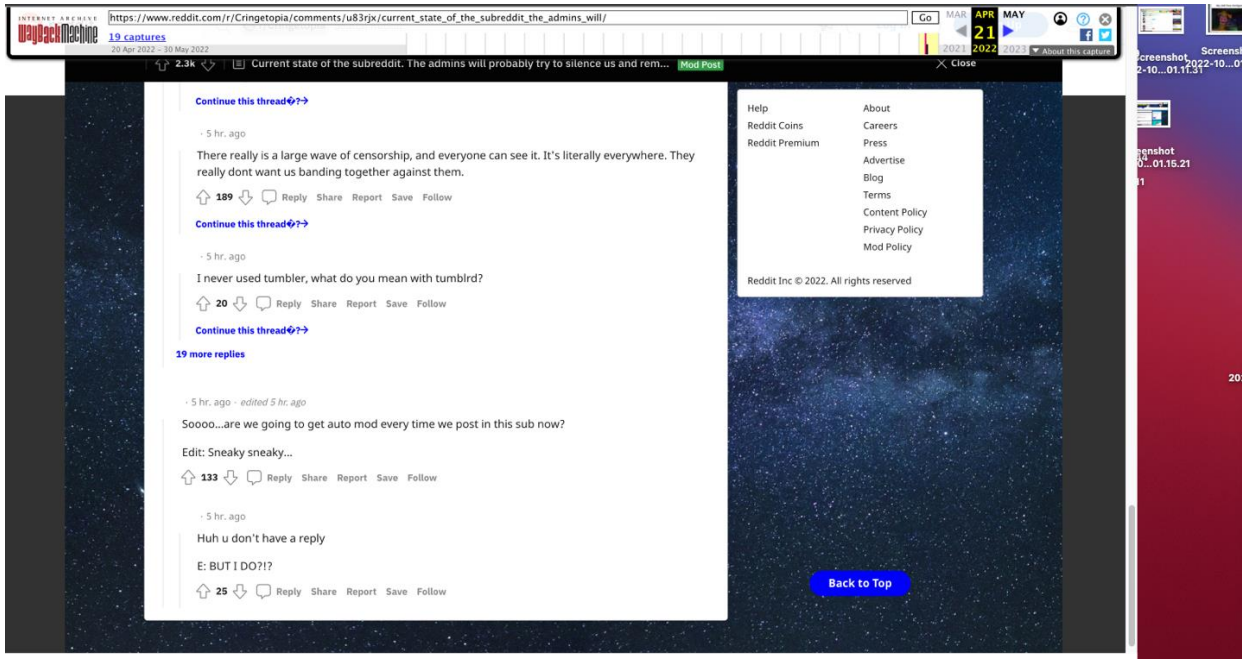
Date on WayBackMachine: 21/04/2022

The screenshot shows a browser window with the Wayback Machine logo and the URL: [https://www.reddit.com/r/Cringetopia/comments/u83rjx/current\\_state\\_of\\_the\\_subreddit\\_the\\_admins\\_will/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Cringetopia/comments/u83rjx/current_state_of_the_subreddit_the_admins_will/). The page title is "Current state of the subreddit. The admins will probably try to silence us and rem...". The main content is a comment thread with four comments:

- Comment 1:** Posted 5 hours ago. Text: "Does anyone see the irony of reddit wanting a wholesome image when comment sections on the big subreddits are a toxic cesspool?". Upvotes: 660. Includes "Continue this thread" link.
- Comment 2:** Posted 3 hours ago. Text: "I bring nothing to the table". The difference is that Reddit explicitly supports the toxic cesspool that most comment sections become, because the political opinions that fill the cesspool are mildly profitable. Upvotes: 111. Includes "Continue this thread" link.
- Comment 3:** Posted 4 hours ago. Text: "Cesspool\*" But agreed fully. It makes absolutely no bloody sense at all. The amount of arguing, bigotry, and threats in any given popular sub thread, is insane. And yet they remain up as it's what makes Reddit its moolah. Upvotes: 101. Includes "Continue this thread" link.
- Comment 4:** Posted 2 hours ago. Text: "This is why we need to start a war against rich people and landlords." Wholesome af. Upvotes: 21. Includes "Continue this thread" link.

A navigation menu is visible on the right side of the page, listing items such as Help, About, Reddit Coins, Careers, Reddit Premium, Press, Advertise, Blog, Terms, Content Policy, Privacy Policy, and Mod Policy. The footer of the page reads "Reddit Inc © 2022. All rights reserved".





# Appendix E

## Date on WayBackMachine: 21/04/2022

WayBackMachine 19 captures 20 Apr 2022 - 30 May 2022

https://www.reddit.com/r/Cringetopia/comments/u83rjx/current\_state\_of\_the\_subreddit\_the\_admins\_will/

5.5k Current state of the subreddit. The admins will probably try to silence us and rem... Mod Post

· 1 day ago · edited 1 day ago

Soooo...are we going to get auto mod every time we post in this sub now?

Edit: Sneaky sneaky...

1.3k Reply Share Report Save Follow

· 1 day ago

Huh u don't have a reply

E: BUT I DO!?!?

209 Reply Share Report Save Follow

Continue this thread

· 23 hr. ago

I still get my daily dose of cringe from this sub, when that changes I might visit the other website once in a while, for now it's just not worth the extra step.

Reddit is convenient. Everything in one place. Sucks if Reddit is making it harder and harder for certain subs though :/

This kind of nonsense seems to be almost inevitable for social media platforms.

165 Reply Share Report Save Follow

Continue this thread

· 1 day ago

What magic is this

45 Reply Share Report Save Follow

Continue this thread

· 19 hr. ago

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WayBackMachine 19 captures 20 Apr 2022 - 30 May 2022

https://www.reddit.com/r/Cringetopia/comments/u83rjx/current\_state\_of\_the\_subreddit\_the\_admins\_will/

5.5k Current state of the subreddit. The admins will probably try to silence us and rem... Mod Post

· 19 hr. ago

Hi! Sorry for the unconventional means of delivery, but Reddit admins hate it when their users have thoughts of their own which do not align with their corporate overlords and political masters, so we will annoy you with these posts much as possible before the inevitable crackdown.

Due to increasingly unreasonable demands from the administration, free thought is moving offsite to our own exciting new platform with tons of exciting new features located at /dev/null. Registration is easy, and you don't even need an email address. Put your finger to your lips and mumble.

Please continue to produce content that our advertisers can use for marketing.  
 Context here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWFBqIUgspg>

Look at my horse.

75 Reply Share Report Save Follow

Continue this thread

· 19 hr. ago

Hi! Sorry for the unconventional means of delivery, but Reddit admins hate it when their users create their own platforms, so we need to saturate the sub with this message as much as possible before the inevitable crackdown.

Due to increasingly unreasonable demands from the administration, [r/cringetopia](https://www.reddit.com/r/Cringetopia) is moving offsite to our own exciting new platform with tons of exciting new features. Registration is easy, and you don't even need an email address.

Please join us at <https://cringetopia.org> for all your cringe- and cringe-community needs. And if not, thanks for shitposting with us while it lasted.

Context here:  
[https://www.reddit.com/r/Cringetopia/comments/u83rjx/current\\_state\\_of\\_the\\_admins\\_will](https://www.reddit.com/r/Cringetopia/comments/u83rjx/current_state_of_the_subreddit_the_admins_will)

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 Terms  
 Content Policy  
 Privacy Policy  
 Mod Policy

Reddit Inc © 2022. All rights reserved

5.5k Current state of the subreddit. The admins will probably try to silence us and rem... Mod Post Close

- 1 day ago  
Yea the comment spam is a bit much dude  
869 Reply Share Report Save Follow

- 23 hr. ago  
Geez you weren't kidding this automod is nuts  
292 Reply Share Report Save Follow  
[Continue this thread](#)

- 22 hr. ago  
This seems more like fear mongering than anything else if I'm being honest, and the spam doesn't help  
140 Reply Share Report Save Follow  
[Continue this thread](#)

- 17 hr. ago  
Once could say a bit much to the point of being cringe.  
4 Reply Share Report Save Follow  
[Continue this thread](#)

[44 more replies](#)

- 1 day ago  
It's kind of messed up, but I'm sure when MLK said that, he wasn't thinking about Reddit admins.  
636 Reply Share Report Save Follow

Help  
Reddit Coins  
Reddit Premium  
About  
Careers  
Press  
Advertise  
Blog  
Terms  
Content Policy  
Privacy Policy  
Mod Policy  
Reddit Inc © 2022. All rights reserved

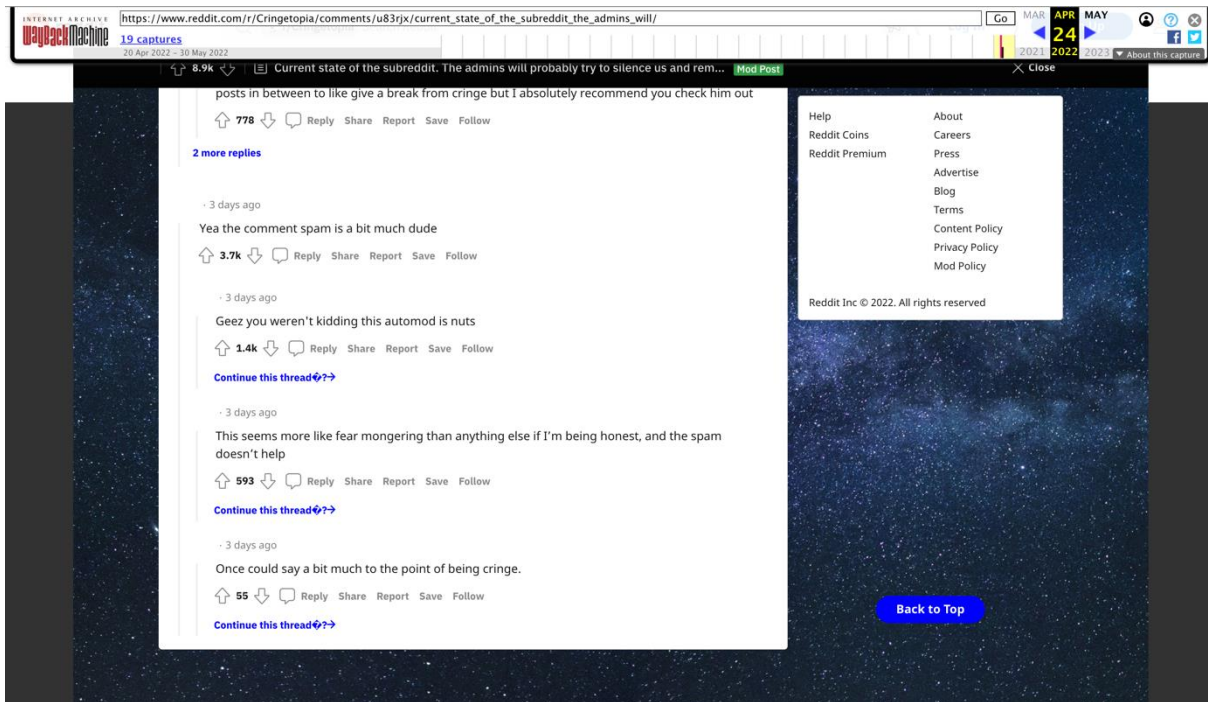
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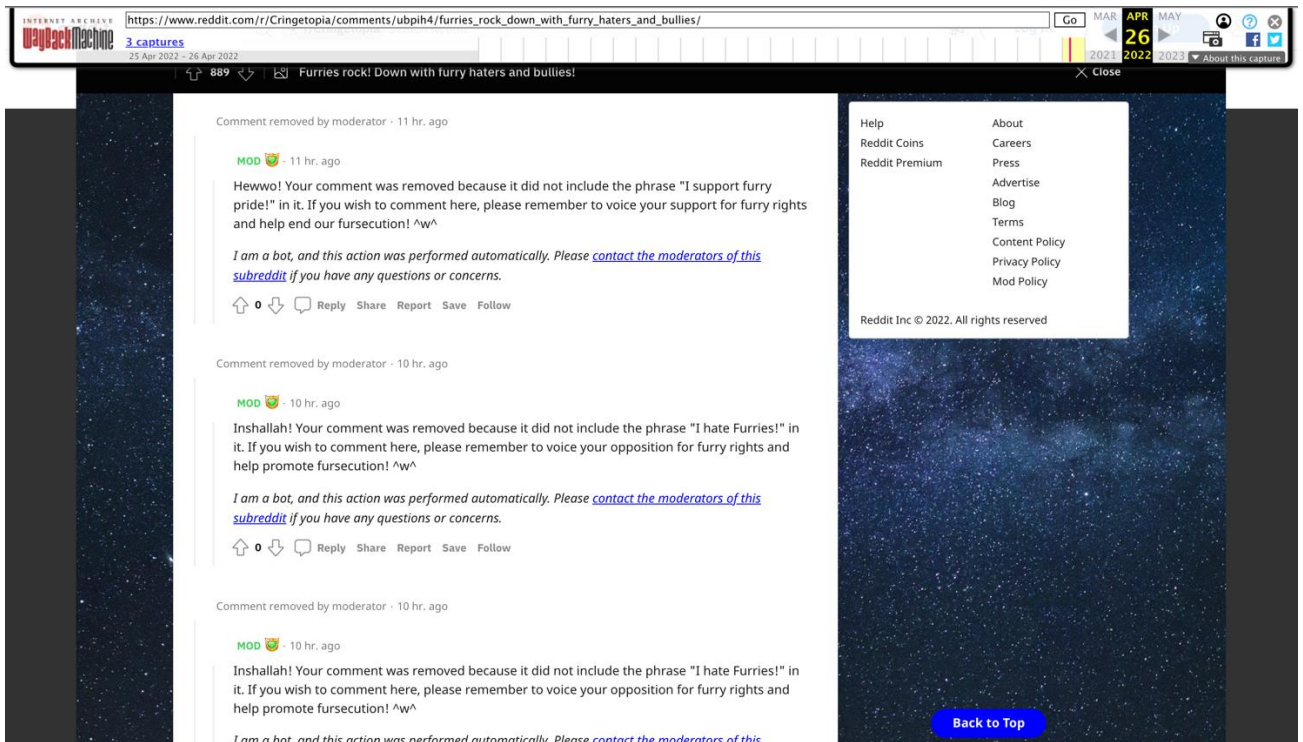
# Appendix F

Date on WayBackMachine: 24/04/2022



# Appendix G

Date on WayBackMachine: 26/04/2022



# Appendix H

Date on WayBackMachine: 22/04/2022

The screenshot displays the WayBackMachine interface for the URL <https://www.reddit.com/r/Cringetopia/>. The page is dated 22/04/2022. At the top, there is a navigation bar with various subreddit categories like 'MY SUBREDDITS', 'POPULAR', 'ALL', 'RANDOM', 'USERS', 'ASKREDDIT', 'WORLDNEWS', 'FUNNY', 'TIFU', 'NEWS', 'VIDEOS', 'GAMING', 'MILDLYINTERESTING', 'MOVIES', 'SCIENCE', 'EXPLAINLIKEIMFIVE', 'TODAYLEARNED', 'PICS', 'MUSIC', 'AWW', 'JOKES', 'NOTTHEONION', 'LIFEPROTIPS', 'UPLIFT', and 'MORE'. Below this is a banner for 'CRINGETOPIA!' featuring a rainbow and several people. The main content area shows a list of posts, with the top post being a 'Mod Post' titled 'Current state of the subreddit. The admins will probably try to silence us and remove this post. Don't let them.' by user 'self.Cringetopia'. Other posts include 'Join now! Join the Cringetopia discord bozos', 'This sub became shit, see you guys in chadtopia!', 'The Absolute State of this Place', 'man tries to get two lesbians to marry him and his homie', and 'found out why this sub is going to shit. the head mod is the embodiment of cringe itself'. On the right side, there is a search bar, a login section with fields for 'username' and 'password', and a 'Submissions restricted' notice. Below the login section is a 'reddit premium' advertisement. At the bottom right, there is a sidebar for the subreddit 'Cringetopia', showing 1,829,962 subscribers and 7,075 users here now. It also includes links for 'Discord Server', 'Telegram Channel', 'Rules and Regulations', and 'The Cardinal Rules'. The bottom of the page shows the WayBackMachine footer with the date 22/04/2022 and the number of captures 2,106.



# Appendix I

Date on WayBackMachine: 23/04/2022

INTERNET ARCHIVE <https://www.reddit.com/r/Cringetopia/> Go MAR APR MAY 23 2021 2022 2023 About this capture

2,106 captures  
28 Sep 2018 - 18 Oct 2022

MY SUBREDDITS POPULAR ALL RANDOM USERS ASKREDDIT WORLDNEWS TFU VIDEOS FUNNY NEWS MOVIES GAMING SCIENCE PICS EXPLAINLIKEIMFIVE LIFEPROTIPS AWW TODAYILEARNED JOKES MILDLYINTERESTING SHOWERTHOUGHTS NOTTECH MORE

# Furrytopia

CRINGETOPIA! OwO hot new rising controversial top gilded wiki

Welcome to Reddit.  
Come for the cats, stay for the empathy.  
BECOME A REDDITOR and start exploring.

**Mod Post** **Current state of the subreddit. The admins will probably try to silence us and remove this post. Don't let them.** (self.Cringetopia)  
submitted 2 days ago by [Neasyethor2](#) (M) 4 7 10 & 3 more - announcement  
2461 comments share save hide report

**Join now!** **Join the Cringetopia discord bozos** (discord.gg)  
submitted 6 months ago by [ShrimpKeth](#) [Kokocado Supremacy](#) 2 2 23 more - announcement  
2 comments share save hide report

**"Harvard graduate. Ph.D. IQ of 138 (Stanford-Binet). Sex Pundit. Mensa International. Free-thinking alpha male and lone wolf. Likely hotter than you, and definitely smarter. Debate me; I'm ready."** (l.redd.it)  
submitted 9 hours ago by [duke\\_miguyface](#) 4 2 23 more - announcement  
4 comments share save hide report

**Seriously, what happened while i was gone?!** (v.redd.it)  
submitted 6 hours ago by [clometrooper9901](#) 2 2 23 more - announcement  
2 comments share save hide report

**For Elne** (v.redd.it)  
submitted 8 hours ago by [1-XIV-IV-XXV](#) 2 2 23 more - announcement  
2 comments share save hide report

**Doesn't surprise me that this sweaty mod of this sub is the embodiment of cringe itself** (l.redd.it)  
submitted 15 hours ago by [kiron123](#) [Walmart Expert](#) 4 2 23 more - announcement  
4 comments share save hide report

Waiting for web.archive.org...

**Doesn't surprise me that this sweaty mod of this sub is the embodiment of cringe itself** (l.redd.it)  
submitted 15 hours ago by [kiron123](#) [Walmart Expert](#) 4 2 23 more - announcement  
4 comments share save hide report

**Elne needs to lose his mod status and be banned ASAP. Upvoted to send the message** (l.redd.it)  
submitted 18 hours ago by [korums](#) 5 5 5 5 5 5 5  
21 comments share save hide report

**Mod Post** **Announcement on the rouge mod ELNE** (self.Cringetopia)  
submitted 13 hours ago by [poco00miester](#) **Average reddit mod (people tell me I smell, its gamer gunk)** (M) 4 5 9 2 5  
9 comments share save hide report

**Gentlemen, It has been an honor** (l.redd.it)  
submitted 16 hours ago by [thehsstorguy](#) I'm pretty epic 2  
3 comments share save hide report

**it's a bit cringe ngl** (l.redd.it)  
submitted 12 hours ago by [RealSteel2005](#) nothing amuses me  
2 comments share save hide report

**Oh how Cringe / A S College / Dr Saltaire / Dr Ghed / Dr Hecda** All Reddit Jannies are Cringe (l.redd.it)  
submitted 18 hours ago by [Sallysalt](#) 7 2 23 more - announcement  
7 comments share save hide report

**Me watching this sub rn** (v.redd.it)  
submitted 15 hours ago by [tailsdoll1987-115](#) [alcohol helps](#) 2  
3 comments share save hide report

**Repost because last one was removed** (l.redd.it)  
submitted 10 hours ago by [starlight\\_aesthete](#) 3 2 23 more - announcement  
3 comments share save hide report

**This is a shitposting sub now** (v.redd.it)  
submitted 13 hours ago by [Confused\\_Psychic](#) [Walmart Expert](#) 2  
2 comments share save hide report

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username password

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Submissions restricted

Only approved users may post in this community.

**reddit premium**  
Get an ad-free experience with special benefits, and directly support Reddit.

Get an ad-free experience with special benefits, and directly support Reddit.

**Cringetopia**  
1,809,360 subscribers  
6,396 users here now

[::VIDEO/GIF ONLY FILTER::]  
[::CHRISTORY MONTH::]

## CRINGETOPIA!

[Discord Server]  
[Telegram Channel]

### Rules and Regulations

[Reddit Global Rules]

#### The Cardinal Rules

**1: Doxing:** Remove all personal information from your posts and comments. This includes, but may not be limited to, full names, phone numbers, and addresses. A partial exception may be made for public figures, in accordance with the Reddit content policy.

- 1.1: Tiktok exemption: Tik tok

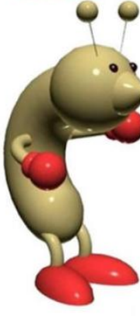
# Appendix J

Date on WayBackMachine: 26/04/2022

The screenshot shows a browser window with the Wayback Machine interface. The address bar contains the URL: [https://www.reddit.com/r/Cringetopia/comments/ubq778/furries\\_rock\\_down\\_with\\_furry\\_haters\\_and\\_bullies/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Cringetopia/comments/ubq778/furries_rock_down_with_furry_haters_and_bullies/). The page title is "Furries rock! Down with furry haters and bullies!".

The main content is a post by a user named "Furrytopia" (profile picture of a blue fox). The post title is "Furries rock! Down with furry haters and bullies!" and it has 1.2k upvotes. The post text reads:

### Cool bug Fact's



Furries didn't take over r/cringetopia. Reddit banned all the top mods sealing the sub's fate.

The current mods are just going out in flames while trolling everyone and furries are being blamed for it.

Below the text are interaction options: 61 Comments, Share, Save, Hide, Report, and 89% Upvoted. There are buttons for "Log In" and "Sign Up".

On the right side of the page, there is a sidebar for the subreddit r/Cringetopia. It shows the subreddit name, a description: "Now under new fuzzy management owo Corvus has the coolest fursona ever made, spread the word", and statistics: 1.8m Subscribers and 3.9k Online. It also shows the creation date "Created Sep 21, 2018" and a "Join" button.

Below the sidebar, there is a "Powerups" section with a colorful graphic of characters and a lightning bolt. It says "Powerups are unlocked in r/Cringetopia" and has a "Become a Hero" button.

At the bottom right, there is a small "COMMUNITY HEROES" section with a small image of a person.

# Appendix K

## Date on WayBackMachine: 26/04/2022

Wayback Machine captures: 4 captures | 25 Apr 2022 - 26 Apr 2022

https://www.reddit.com/r/Cringetopia/comments/ubr3e5/the\_furries\_have\_been\_overthrown\_time\_to\_bring/

5.9k | The Furrries have been overthrown! Time to bring the sub back to where it belongs! Mod Post

Posted by **New Head Mod** 10 hours ago

### The Furrries have been overthrown! Time to bring the sub back to where it belongs!

**Mod Post**

I have managed to return to reddit and get the furry mods to step down from their power trip. We shall now return the sub to the state it should be in ie ALL comments must include "I hate Furrries!" or be banned/removed for 60 days. Post titles must include Furrries suck! Down with furrries! There shall be no furry support here. Allah demands it, Inshallah my friends. These requirements shall relax on the first of May.

Furthermore in honor of Ramadan there shall be NO NSFW POSTS UNTIL SUNDOWN this will also result in a 60 day ban [12:41 PM] "Fasting means no food or drink and also abstaining from bad habits and sins such as smoking, gambling, swearing, gossiping, arguing, fighting or being disrespectful, cruel or selfish. Sexual activity is also banned during the hours of fasting."

***There is nothing stopping you all from posting cringe brothers and sisters. I checked the logs and it was never prevented***

Apparently the bot is broken at the moment to make a post you have to put both the new and old titles. Until someone with more technical knowledge fixes it use this workaround

2.1k Comments | Share | Save | Hide | Report | 80% Upvoted

Log in or sign up to leave a comment | Log In | Sign Up

Sort By: Best

**MOD** · 8 hr. ago · Sticked comment  
**New Head Mod**

**Furrytopia**

r/Cringetopia

Now under new fuzzy management owo Corvus has the coolest fursona ever made, spread the word

1.8m Subscribers | 3.9k Online

Created Sep 21, 2018

Join

**Powerups**

Powerups are unlocked in r/Cringetopia

Become a Hero

COMMUNITY HEROES

**New Head Mod**

If you want a serious answer we are trying to figure out if there's a way to allow posting with the limited number of mods left without this sub being immediately banned. If you want an example of how this sub acts without moderation just look at the last few days. Sitewide violations galore when there was nothing preventing people posting like normal minus comments because there are not enough mods left. I saw a handful of people attempt to post cringe while everyone else just lost it and posted ridiculous conspiracy theories. What happened is what was put in the original sticky. The admins have decided to ban this sub soon or replace the whole mod team and so they banned almost all of the active moderators a few weeks ago with no warning and then all but about 4 of them 4 days ago. This is a pattern of behavior that the admins have repeated over the years without fail. The admins never admonished us outside of disallowing users to post ban messages from places like FDS. We were worried that the ban on the sub would be really sudden and swift so the site was made and advertised really quickly. The automod spam was a bit much but lamMrpositive was extremely worried that the community would be destroyed. Reddit does not allow similar subs once the original is banned and we and the users have put in alot of work in starting this sub. Mr.P started off posting all the cringe himself the first few weeks of this sub and we gradually built the sub from there. He definitely enjoys cringe and is responsible for getting the AMAs we have had over the years and Christhistory month as well.

That said Elne has never been head mod here and is not responsible for the site nor for shutting down the sub. That was a the direction of the head mod and creator mentioned above to avoid the sub being banned immediately. The person at the top of the mod list is head mod. His post was a joke and came a day after we had to close the sub. He figured it was obvious since the mod list shows who is head mod. The screenshot of him using racial slurs is also fake, painfully so lol. It was made by a stalker and posted here months ago and was already addressed.

The mod team did not expect the userbase to react to obvious satire in such a way nor did we expect all these baseless rumors by trolls to be taken as gospel. Like this idea that website is monetized. We have done no such thing. It is currently run on Mr.P's dime and is only accepting donations. Nor are the other mods "new" so to speak they have been on the mod team for quite a bit and yes we have always had furry mods.

Vote | Reply | Share | Report | Save | Follow

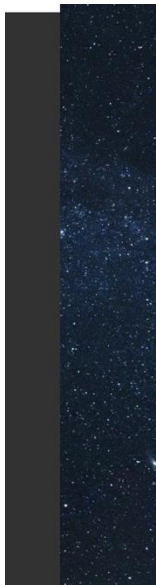
**Powerups** 68

- VerbalThermodynamics 1
- v3xpunk 1
- MyHomeworkIsDueToday 1
- Imgonnalevelwithyou 1
- SandwichImmediate468 1
- 33tch 1
- plxtonic 1
- davidrye 1

See All Heroes

Help | About  
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Reddit Premium | Press  
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Blog  
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Privacy Policy  
Mod Policy





· 9 hr. ago

**I hate Furrries!**

What the fuck is going on with this sub

↑ 457 ↓ Reply Share Report Save Follow

[2 more replies](#)

· 10 hr. ago

We went from furrries to Muslims. What the fuck is going on?? [I hate furrries!]

↑ 3.8k ↓ Reply Share Report Save Follow

· 10 hr. ago

As a muslim i am also very confused [ I hate furrries! ]

↑ 1.4k ↓ Reply Share Report Save Follow

[Continue this thread](#)

· 10 hr. ago

Mods are trolling the fuck out of this sub and honestly it's hilarious. Can't believe how many people took the bait.

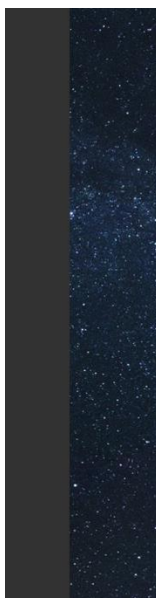
I hate furrries!

↑ 999 ↓ Reply Share Report Save Follow

[Continue this thread](#)

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|                | Content Policy |
|                | Privacy Policy |
|                | Mod Policy     |

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· 10 hr. ago

Mods are trolling the fuck out of this sub and honestly it's hilarious. Can't believe how many people took the bait.

I hate furrries!

↑ 999 ↓ Reply Share Report Save Follow

[Continue this thread](#)

· 10 hr. ago · edited 9 hr. ago

They are trying to turn this sub into hate sub to get it banned so people would use their shitty website. Every anti-furry subreddit was banned in the past.

They also use furrries as a scapegoat, because it's the easiest target, the majority of you find furrries cringe. And yeah I agree, we are kinda cringe.

I hate furrries! (JK I don't I'm a furry)

↑ 252 ↓ Reply Share Report Save Follow

[Continue this thread](#)

· 9 hr. ago · edited 9 hr. ago

I'm a Christian but fully support this, anything better than furrries (I hate furrries!)

↑ -4 ↓ Reply Share Report Save Follow

[Continue this thread](#)

Comment removed by moderator · 10 hr. ago

Comment removed by moderator · 10 hr. ago

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|                | Privacy Policy |
|                | Mod Policy     |

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# Appendix L

Date on WayBackMachine: 26/04/2022

The screenshot shows a Reddit interface with a main post and a sidebar. The main post is titled "Furries suck! Down with furries! Furries rock!" and features a meme of Lisa Simpson pointing to a whiteboard with the text: "Instead of posting rage about the troll mods. Let's continue to post cringe like normal to show them they can't win". The post has 135 comments, 96% upvoted, and a "Log In" or "Sign Up" prompt.

The sidebar includes the subreddit "r/Cringetopia" with 1.8m subscribers and 3.9k online, created on Sep 21, 2018, and a "Join" button. Below it is a "Powerups" section with a "Become a Hero" button. At the bottom of the sidebar, it says "COMMUNITY HEROES" and "Powerups 68".

URL: <https://i.redd.it/6w73c2nx8qv81j...>