HAVE YOU EVER GOTTEN INTO AN ARGUMENT ONLINE?

- Who were you arguing with?
- What was the exchange like?
- Were you satisfied with the outcome?
WHAT IS INTERNET TOXICITY?

- Hard to encapsulate but widely recognized idea of bullying tactics used in public spaces on the Internet to demean, insult, and silence victims
WHY DO PEOPLE BEHAVE LIKE THAT?

- Psychological idea of “online disinhibition effect”
  - Can allow people who are too shy in real life to open up to online friends
  - Also emboldens people to express socially unacceptable behaviors
CONTRIBUTING FACTORS OF ONLINE DISINHIBITION EFFECT

- Dissociative anonymity
  - Relative anonymity of Internet makes person feel safe while allowing them to dissociate their actions from their sense of self (person can do things they’d never do in real life)

- Invisibility
  - Lack of face-to-face communication means no micro-expressions, which is part of how humans feel and understand empathy

- Asynchronous communication
  - Ability to disconnect immediately after saying something reduces sense of inhibition

- Solipsistic introjection
  - Interaction with another person can feel like an interaction in person’s own head, which reduces other person’s agency and allows person to believe they know what the other is thinking/feeling

- Dissociative imagination
  - Separation of online identity from real life identity makes online “life” feel less real with less real consequences

- Minimizing Authority
  - Feeling that everyone is equal in online communication makes person more willing to act in a way they would not do before an authority figure
PUT ANOTHER WAY...

Unreal Tournament 2004 lends incontrovertible proof to John Gabriel’s Greater Internet Fuckwad Theory.

Normal Person + Anonymity + Audience = Total Fuckwad

Shitcock
WHY ELSE DO PEOPLE BEHAVE LIKE THAT?

- Ability to find people who agree with you
  - Validation and sense of community
- Ability to find people who disagree with you
  - Sense of persistent, external existential threat
- Sense of community plus sense of external threat leads to greater levels of radicalization as a group
  - e.g. the well-established militant tactics of Antifa and neo-Nazis now common and accepted in both “mainstream left” and “alt-right” movements
ECHO CHAMBERS AND THE QUEST FOR PURITY

- As group becomes more radicalized, individuals are expected to match that level of radicalization
  - Viewpoints that are considered “outside” are shut down
  - Interactions with those considered “outsiders” become more vitriolic
- Online disinhibition accelerates this radicalization process
- Subculture self-policing leads to “purity” culture
  - Self-righteousness feels very satisfying as does power over others
CASE STUDY: TUMBLR AND STEVEN UNIVERSE

- In 2017, a fan artist on tumblr was subjected to name-calling and told to “go die” for drawing fanart that was “problematic”
  - Previous pieces had gotten her labeled transphobic, racist, etc
- After being labeled fatphobic for making a Steven Universe character too skinny, she supposedly attempted suicide
  - Posted a video from a hospital claiming she was being treated
- Community continued to bully her and claim her suicide attempt was faked
- Creators of Steven Universe stepped in to say they do not support bullying
ATTACKS ON CREATOR, REBECCA SUGAR

Sugar, previously praised by tumblr’s Steven Universe community for creating inclusive, female-centric, positive media, now personally attacked by that community.

- As a minor, she’d drawn non-graphic slash* fanart of underage characters earning her accusations of pedophilia.

- ...basically they didn’t like that the woman who wanted to create safe, positive media for marginalized people didn’t condone their bullying.

* Look it up yourself or take a pop culture class.
THIS IS WHY
WE CAN'T HAVE NICE THINGS
TROLLING AS NIHILISTIC AND COWARDLY

- Meanwhile on the other side of the Internet, glorification of “for the lulz” culture also leads to bullying
  - Can’t expect someone you don’t know to “take it as a joke”
  - Tendency to attack already marginalized people encourages lack of empathy and lack of courage
  - Fear of being emotionally open and vulnerable leads to a less connected, less satisfying life
- Remember Tom Stoppard’s quote?
  - “The destroyers wear nihilism like a cockade - they think they destroy because they’re radicals. But they destroy because they’re disappointed conservatives - let down by the ancient dream of a perfect society where circles are squared and conflict is cancelled out”
DO YOU WANT ANTS?

BECAUSE THAT'S HOW YOU GET ANTS.
WHEN DOES EXPRESSING A VIEW BECOME BULLYING?

» How does the context change when you post something online versus say it to friends?

» Why should you care about the feelings of others?

» Why does bullying ultimately harm everyone?
SO IF EVERYONE IS A JERK ON THE INTERNET, IS IT HOPELESS?

- No! The pendulum is always swinging
  - Awareness helps promote discussion
  - Most people want safe platforms for connecting with others and expressing views
- Bullies most likely a vocal minority
  - Seem much more prevalent than they are
- Our human brains are still adapting to online communication
  - As society changes, so too must social contracts and expectations…
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