Online Behavior

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- How do people behave online?

- How does it compare to their offline behavior?

- To what extent can online presence substitute for personal meetings?

- To what extent do online interactions displace "better" options

:-)

- We all know what that means

- Why does it exist?

- Do emoticons have deeper implications?

Online Communications Aren't Perfect

- Nuances obvious when meeting in person are lost in online discourse

- There's no such thing as "tone of voice" in email

- Of course, the same can occur in books or newspapers, but most authors or copy editors are more skilled

- Emoticons are an extra channel that can help avoid ambiguity and confusion

Other Factors

- Anonymity or pseudonymity

- Physical distance

- Little or no chance of personal interaction—or retaliation

- All of these create mental separation

An Imperfect Channel

- Given the limitations of the medium, we should *expect* different behavior

- The medium is different than the one we have habitually dealt with

- Inherent? "We're just funny monkeys".

- Educated? Will "digital natives" do better?

Flaming

- People are very rude to others

- Rudeness exceeds the bounds that would be accepted face-to-face

- No apparent reason other than the medium

Flaming

From the OED:

DRAFT ADDITIONS OCTOBER 2001

intr. slang (orig. and chiefly *Computing*). To rant, argue, or harangue, esp. via an electronic medium (such as e-mail or postings to a newsgroup); to send an inflammatory, abusive, or (esp. in early use) inconsequential e-mail or posting, usually as a hasty response or in a rapid, angry exchange. Also *trans.*: to send (a person) such a message. Cf. FLAME *n.* and *adj.*

Note the date.

Godwin's Law

"As an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches one."

Trolls

- Posts things hoping for a reaction

- "Trolling" for a reply

- "Do not feed the trolls"

Why?

- Immaturity?

- Boredom?

- Perceived immunity to retribution or punishment?

Trolling

Also from the OED:

DRAFT ADDITIONS MARCH 2006

intr. Computing slang. To post a deliberately erroneous or antagonistic message on a newsgroup or similar forum with the intention of eliciting a hostile or corrective response. Also *trans.*: to elicit such a response from (a person); to post messages of this type to (a newsgroup, etc.).

Oldest citation given: 1992.

Ancient Phenomena

- Trolling and flaming go way back on Usenet

☞ Some say the distancing effect is present on ham radio, too, but there there's a regulatory agency

- Early Usenet misbehavior held in check by social pressure

- What happens when the community becomes too big and too scattered for that to work?

Harrassment and Bullying

- Targeted, malicious statements

- Generally done behind a screen of pseudnymity

- Sometimes random, sometimes aimed

- On at least one occasion, has resulted in suicide

The Megan Meier Case

- Lori Drew did not like what a teenager was allegedly saying about her daughter

- Drew, her daughter, and a friend created a fake Myspace account. They pretended to befriend Megan to learn what she was really saying; later, they turned on her and taunted her

- Megan hanged herself

- Drew was convicted of a dubious charge; the judge threw out the conviction

- (I've oversimplified)

Gender- and Minority-Targeted Harrassment?

- There is a lot of evidence that women and minority group members are disproportionately targeted, e.g., the AutoAdmit case

- (AutoAdmit is a web site for law students; some of the content was viciously sexist.)

- Has a crime been committed? A civil offense?

- What about anonymity? How is this balanced against the First Amendment?

Examples

- "…routinely involves threats of rape and other forms of sexual violence"

- "[w]ho let this woman out of the kitchen?"

- "abuse can be 'more vicious' if targeted women are 'lesbian[] and/or . . . not-white.'"

- "of the nearly 200 comments, only 3 failed to mention her gender in a disparaging or threatening manner."

(From Danielle Citron's "Law's Expressive Value in Combating Cyber Gender Harassment", 108 Michigan Law Review 373 (2009),
`http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/cgi/`
`viewcontent.cgi?article=1687&context=fac_pubs`)

Gamergate

- Gender-based harassment of female video game developers and journalists

- Example: developer Brianna Wu criticized people who are apparently afraid of women developers

- She received rape and death threats that listed her home address

- "What takes the biggest toll is when young girls write me and tell me theyre too scared to go into this field." (`http://www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/style/2014/10/29/threatening-video-gaming-industry-movement-grows-arlingto BRHwDSGjMsSnHquH9jYQIJ/story.html`)

- Gamergaters say that it's about "ethics in game journalism"

Curt Schilling and his Daughter

- Schilling—a top-notch former pitcher—tweeted that his daughter had received an athletic scholarship to a college

- Many people tweeted back crude, vulgar, and threatening responses (see `https://38pitches.wordpress.com/2015/03/01/ the-world-we-live-in-man-has-it-changed/` for details and examples)

- Schilling has been a computer user since 1981—and he identified many of the offenders. . .

- Several have been fired or suspended from school; the FBI and some local police departments are investigating

- But why is law enforcement taking him seriously, and not so many other women who have been similarly harassed?

Revenge Porn

- People (usually men) post nude pictures of their (usually female) exes

- Sometimes, these are accompanied by addresses, phone numbers, and purportedly genuine lewd offers

- Other women are victimized by hackers who steal pictures from personal computers and the like

- There are web sites that solicit such pictures, and charge the victims for removal

- Against the law in California and 12 other states—and there have been recent convictions, though not under those statutes

Griefers and "Anonymous"

- Griefers: cyber vandals and cybersadists

- One loosely-organized group is known as "Anonymous"

- One action: uploading a flashing image to an Epilepsy Foundation forum, causing epileptic seizures

- (The FBI investigated that one. Anonymous blames the Scientologists; they blame Anonymous.)

Gender Impersonation

- On the Internet, no one knows you're a dog—and no one knows your real age or gender

- In various online forums, people deliberately adopt a different persona

- (Especially interesting in Second Life)

Accuracy and Facebook

- One study asserts that people are generally truthful on Facebook et al.

- Why?

- Because of the link to a real-world community?

It's Harder to Lie on Facebook

- Your real-world friends know the truth

- The social graph implicitly authenticates much of the content

- Query: are there mostly-disconnected subgraphs of fake accounts?

What Do We Do?

- Should the Internet ban anonymity?

- (Can that actually work?)

- What of the right to anonymous political speech?

- How does one get accountability for rape threats while protecting privacy against marketers—and cyberstalkers?

Displacement

- Does Internet use displace other activities?

- Is there such a thing as "Internet addiction"?

- Does it displace other forms of interpersonal interaction?

- If so, is that good, bad, or neutral?

One Opinion

"Do we honestly think that communicating via Twitter, e-mail or texting is the same as hanging around the water cooler with colleagues or sitting and having dinner with a friend?

"I fear that in this age of technology, just being with another human in the moment and in real time is endangered. How can we think that machines can match the joy of personally hearing the sound of a friend's voice or the gaze of a lover? I fear that we are losing the real meaning of human connection and intimacy, and I worry about the consequences."

(Letter to the Editor, *N.Y. Times*, 1 March 2010, `http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/02/opinion/l02internet.html`)

The Internet versus Phone Calls or Letters

- Is communicating over the Internet better or worse than older means of communication?

- Why is it worse than a letter? Is it worse than a letter?

- But—we've already spoken about imperfections in Internet communication

- Is it a way to keep one's distance?

- Is it a deliberate way to maintain distance?

Staying in Touch

- Because Internet communication is so rapid and so cheap, it can be much better

- Letters or phone calls may not be an option

- What about video chats?

Breaking Up Over the Net

- Traditionally, done in person

- But "Dear John" letters are part of the culture

- Is email or a text message worse?

- What about just changing your Facebook status?

Getting Away

- When you break up with someone, do you unfriend them?

- Do your other friends unfriend them?

- Is it healthy to keep track of them?

- What is the line between that and cyberstalking?

But...

- It may be a way to stay in touch with your children

- Disentangling from an ex is hard even without Facebook

- Maybe sometimes distancing is good

The Challenge

- There are good and bad aspects to people's online behavior

- Anonymity is important, but seems to contribute to misbehavior

- How do we—technically or socially—gain the benefits without paying the price?