

Nanoseconds Within the Scene: About Where I Perform This Soliloquy

Stars' Journey: From My Sight and Memory to My Device

Before I tilted my head up, I already knew what I would see. But I did it regardless; since I disliked the idea of wandering outside alone at night, the task of throwing the garbage bags into the bin downstairs was my only opportunity to witness what was out there. Then I saw the vision I anticipated: the starless night-sky that no longer resembled what I saw during my upbringing.

Perhaps starless was an exaggeration that originated from my disappointment: I could still see a few subtle dots, emitting light dimmer than those of the fireflies I once saw. For a while, I fixed my gaze on the stars—or more precisely, flying candles that could be extinguished by the wind within any moment. Then I returned to my room, and immediately expressed my lament for the barely visible stars through a text message to a group chat.

I recently realized how this scene reflected the intertwining between (what I call) the different categories of environment: the digital environment as it relates to my text message, the physical environment as it relates to the stars, and the developmental environment as it relates to my childhood experience.

According to Merriam-Webster, environment is "the circumstances, objects, or condition by which one is surrounded."¹ You might have heard about debates concerning the following questions: Should the Internet allow or limit the freedom of speech? Does the contemporary issue of pollution require immediate reforms, or is it inevitable with the progression of industrial practices? Should children grow up in an atmosphere characterized by tolerance or merciless punishments to wrongdoings? As a spoiler, these topics would be discussed in this essay from the perspective of identifying them as different features of the environment, which (undeniably) means I would be advocating for one side of the argument while being biased against the other side. But my general belief is that people should be aware of the environment they live in and engage with, because this awareness is vital for permitting them to take actions that they consider as valid.

Digital Environment: Never Merely Ones and Zeros

I define the digital environment as essentially the Internet. Part of social psychology involves studying human interactions when they are communicating through the Internet, which can be characterized by terms including but not limited to anonymity, groupthink, and mere exposure effect.

My simple action of sending text messages about the stars illustrates the impact of anonymity. Those text messages were sent to a group chat where none of its members know who I am; the only information they knew about me was the online username that I was using. With that state of being anonymous, I felt safe to share my observations and emotions, knowing that

¹ This definition is from Merriam-Webster, an online dictionary website.

even if someone dislikes what I said (maybe they hate people for being sentimental), my life in the real world would not be influenced in any way. But this is the exact same mindset that contributes to online behaviors that are more harmful than mourning over stars.

For instance, a research article published by Journal of the Association for Information Systems discusses collective trolling, which is defined by the authors as a set of intentional, antisocial, and provocative online behaviors, such as posting inflammatory and aggressive messages to disrupt Internet users and discussions. Written by Li from the City University of Hong Kong and others, this article mainly focuses on the concept of we-intention; after reading, I view it as the strength of the bond between the Internet users when they all intend to work towards the same goal (regardless of it being a beneficial or harmful goal). The article presents a study conducted for the purpose of investigating how collective trolling is promoted by different aspects of we-intention, such as anonymity—defined by the authors as the extent to which one perceives oneself as unidentifiable. The study discusses the anonymity of self and anonymity of others, both of which contribute to we-intention; besides, the article indicates that past studies have already revealed how anonymity decreases people's sense of responsibility, which causes the prevalence of collective trolling campaigns. Furthermore, the authors point out groupthink as a phenomenon that occurs when people desire harmony and conformity, and—as the conducted study reaches its conclusion—state that it does play a role in facilitating collective trolling as well: "Those involved in groupthink may...temporarily forget their own ideas and conform to group decisions in social interactions" (Li et al. 685).²

Then the downside of the Internet becomes obvious: With anonymity and groupthink, people feel secure for whatever they do or type behind the screen. That unhealthy sense of security contributes to more than just collective trolling campaigns—Conspiracy theories, cyber bullying, and many other harmful online behaviors thrive simultaneously. People begin to lose the ability to critically consider the consequences of their keystrokes: False information presented in conspiracy theories can devastate the unity within a community as differing ideologies collide, and the insulting messages displayed as people press the enter keys can lead to one's mental breakdown (or if worse, suicide). As Internet users, we are not merely dealing the ones and zeros³ that build up this vast network of communication, but real human beings. Do we really want to abandon our critical thinking skills, and trade them for an online community where the atmosphere is characterized by hostility? That sounds like a Double L Campaign⁴ with the letter L standing for Loss. I must admit that I did not hesitate to send that message of mourning over stars when I should have reread what I typed before sending it out—There can be something .

² Most of the information in this paragraph comes from the journal "When Socialization Goes Wrong: Understanding the we-Intention to Participate in Collective Trolling in Virtual Communities" by Li and others.

³ This is referring to the fact that all the data on the Internet is in the form of binary numbers, which are composed of only two types of digits: either one or zero (in the form of Arabic numerals).

⁴ This is merely a reference to the Double V(ictory) Campaign during World War II, but has no mockery intended to the actual campaign.

The Internet is not solely about anonymity and groupthink; on the positive side, it evokes creativity. According to my observation, in China, people created an Internet slang phrase using merely the number six. Initially, its purpose was to express surprise and admiration. In the past, people frequently used it to praise others when they were impressed or astonished by others' gaming performance (often in the form of six six six or 666, despite its meaning in the Western culture as symbolic of devils).

But the Internet was, and still is, characterized by hasty transitions. The clock's needles have made countless rotations before I perceived that the number six obtained too many other meanings: It is used for expressing confusion, speechlessness, sarcasm, disapproval, mockery and probably even more.

The negative consequence of these newly derived applications is that some people's comments or text messages become overwhelmingly meaningless, alongside being characterized by laziness. I frequently saw people's Internet posts each containing merely a number six in it with no context or explanation that can elaborate on their intentions. The number six is no longer used as a helpful abbreviation for the lucid expression of emotion, but a weapon that potentially heightens tension and contributes to the ambiguity of what one tries to express. After all, who can understand what one wants to say if one simply types six? The aforementioned meanings are all sorted out by myself from experience and retrospection. Am I supposed to randomly pick one and make assumptions on their intentions? That would not be helpful during an online conversation when we cannot rely on facial expressions or body languages.

The process of social influence plays a role. According to an article published by Guadagno⁵ and others, it is defined as one way in which using the Internet for social interactions affects social and cognitive processing. Part of the social influence process is associated with social validation, which is defined by the authors as a phenomenon when an individual acts in accordance with the behaviors of others around them—or to put it simply, conformity. The article refers to a study that examines the effects when people are exposed to different Internet blogs. The study operationalized the standard of measuring the dependent variable as the participants' willingness to volunteer after seeing blogs requesting for volunteers. As the independent variables, the blogs varied in likeability and social validation conditions. While the results suggested that likeability of a blog did not play a role, the difference in social validation conditions did play a role, since "participants volunteered more when other students indicated their willingness to volunteer [in the comment section] and volunteered less when the other students indicated their unwillingness [in the comment section]" (Guadagno et al. 303).⁶ This is applicable to the prevalent phenomenon of commenting with six, because according to what I've seen, people's general attitude towards it is acceptance. They do not consider it as inappropriate or harmful even when the comment is directed towards a serious topic. Since rarely do people point it out, the social validation condition is being implicitly formulated, as if everyone is fine with someone randomly sending out a message of "6" towards another person who is seeking for

⁵ Rosanna E. Guadagno is an Associate Professor of Persuasive Information Systems at the University of Oulu.

⁶ The information presented comes from "Have We All Just Become 'Robo-Sapiens'? Reflections on Social Influence Processes in the Internet Age" by Guadagno and others.

advice by sharing their personal affairs. The freedom of speech has nothing to do with it; it is merely a need to consider when to say something and when to remain silent.

Undeniably, I hold my personal bias when examining this trend of commenting with six on the Internet. I was the type who shares almost everything on the Internet: Weird encounters, emotional moments, and academic progressions were all topics I would consider posting. Those emotional moments included both my ebullience and my struggles. At an age characterized by immaturity and nostalgia, I was struck by a subtle emotional breakdown one day, so I posted whatever was on my mind as a display of my struggle. (And yes, before posting, I should have reviewed what I typed and ponder the potential consequences of those keystrokes as previously discussed—Yet I only did the former while omitting the latter, so it was another mistake of mine.) To be honest, I never anticipated any response or comment; experiences have taught me that different people always hold differing (or even conflicting) opinions, therefore I would not expect them to empathize with what I posted. The worst scenario I envisioned was being criticized by someone who thought I was being hypocritical. Yet I was wrong.

I was surprised when receiving that notification, and I wondered what my friend commented. But when I saw the number "6," I let out the shrillest laughter I ever heard myself voicing out. My vision became blurry, and I did not understand if the tears were for not feeling myself being understood, or for celebrating the birth of my new attitude towards the number six that remains unchanged even till this day.

To dive deeper into this topic concerning the Internet, this type of conformity is different from groupthink; rather, it is associated more closely with mere exposure effect. Ejaz and others all studied in fields related to media and mass communication, and the research they conducted explored how people's perception of media content can be distorted due to phenomena like mere exposure effect, which is defined by them as how "people tend to develop positive attitudes towards objects merely because of the repeated exposure to these objects" (Ejaz et al. 4).⁷ The same applies to this rampant phenomenon of commenting with the number six. As people are repeatedly exposed to those comments involving six, many eventually begin to adapt to it and consider it as part of the Internet language. But using it randomly without considering the situation being faced is a mere display of arrogance and ignorance. After all, if people simply reply with a number six to one's long sentences that might have taken a considerable amount of time to phrase and craft, one can solely conclude that they did not bother to read or understand those sentences, and doubt why would anyone bother to write lengthy posts anymore. One must understand the situation they are facing before they press those keys.

Last but not least, what is the purpose of sharing something when people cannot even understand the content that is being shared? For me, my post was intended to discuss something serious, and I did not understand the meaning (if it exists) that my friend was trying to share with me when he commented with six to my post. But I did not bother to; I hastily concluded that talking to him would be useless and a waste of time, since I was not motivated either to discover

⁷ This information comes from "Subjective Evaluation of Media Content as a Moderator of Media Effects on European Identity: Mere Exposure and the Hostile Media Phenomenon" by Ejaz and others.

a new meaning of the number six, or to suffer from disappointment when he acts as if his comment of "6" should not be taken that seriously. I only know that I have learned not to imitate his actions of pressing "6" and the enter key without considering what he is facing, thankfully and ironically to my experience as a victim.

Physical Environment: Not Solely Physics

Remember the invisible stars? They are a part of the physical environment that we live in. I view the physical environment as everything inclusive of our daily surroundings: all the artificial or natural beings that we interact with on a daily basis through our five senses.

The decline in the visibility of stars during night was due to light pollution, which, according to Merriam-Webster, is defined as artificial skylight (as from city lights) that interferes especially with astronomical observations. A journalist named Lundholm publishes a journal that highlights the invisibility of stars as the byproduct of twenty-four-hour workdays. Additionally, in a larger font, Lundholm informs the readers that there exists a program called the Fatal Light Awareness Program, which "works to reduce bird collisions and the disruption of their migratory patterns" (Lundholm 25), conveying that the negative impacts of light pollution not only apply to the visibilities of stars, but additionally on living creatures such as birds.⁸

And yes, birds are not the only organisms suffering. While I was writing this paper, I discussed what I planned to write with my colleague, and he told me that turtles are impacted by light pollution too: They would be attracted by the artificial light and, after climbing towards its source, find themselves lost on the dry ground as they cannot find the way back to the ocean.

So this is not just about photon physics and light emission. The ecological system is severely damaged as birds and turtles struggle to survive; biology is involved. The benefit of eliminating light pollution is thus clear: to promote a better living environment for both humans and other organisms.

Though my ambition is simple: to see more stars.

Developmental Environment: Suffix Matters, so Do Considerations Before Actions

I interpret the developmental environment as associated with our childhood experience. (The suffix in the word developmental matters in this case, since a development environment is often related with careers like engineering, which of course is not the focus of my essay.)

I talked about the clearly-visible stars during my childhood, but certainly they weren't the only nuances that I observed. As a kid, I also paid close attention to the behavior of adults; amongst them, teachers' behaviors played a significant role in constructing my perceptual sets concerning what is right or wrong to do. Since I went to multiple kindergartens as a result of frequent relocations, I witnessed a diverse set of expectations, and tried to shape myself into fulfilling all of them as I saw it as part of my obligation.

⁸ Most of the information from this paragraph comes from "Hear Birds, See Stars" by Lundholm.

The idea of having sole obedience towards adults was deeply carved into my mind, so I was astonished on the day when I saw a kid kicking a teacher on the playground, resisting the teacher's attempt to catch him. My immediate thought was regarding how that kid would be physically punished, because I thought it was necessary to discipline him.

But was it? According to an article published by Flicker⁹ and others, punishment is described as not the ideal way to approach developmental discipline due to the harm it is capable of carrying out; yet, eliminating it completely can cause issues since the lack of constraint from adults means the kids can do whatever they want and begin to form dangerous habits. Additionally, although the article focuses more on classroom discipline, it emphasizes the important role that parents play in shaping children's classroom behaviors: "[C]hildren are at risk of showing inappropriate classroom behavior because they are disciplined inconsistently at home or they receive no guidance at all" (Flicker et al. 83). Lastly, the article suggests that there is no set strategy for dealing with developmental discipline, and that all decisions should be made in terms of being adequate based on the situation and previous observations.¹⁰

From my perspective, I interpret this article as stressing the importance of communication between parents and teachers. Teachers must receive information from the parents regarding if the kids' issues originate from the family itself, and parents must receive information from the teachers concerning their kids' performance; only cooperation between adults can help to develop an environment where the kids can grow up healthily and learn in the most efficient way.

In relation to punishment, I still think punishment is necessary for certain occasions; but it does not have to be physical. When I was in elementary school, a kid suddenly began to give us random items as gifts on a regular basis. Back then we did not understand, or did not bother to think about, that those gifts costed money. We only realized later (when her parents reported) that she was able to gift us those items by using her parents' money without their consent. Since the entire class was involved, the teacher gathered us together for a class meeting, and solemnly criticized us for accepting the gifts without knowing their origin. Criticism is a form of verbal punishment, and it worked out perfectly for me: After that incident, I perceived my own ignorance, and knew that if I did not want to be criticized for similar occurrences again, I would have to establish a nuanced understanding of money and think critically before accepting any present from someone.

Ending: The Plot's Resolution Without Definite Solutions

⁹ Eileen S. Flicker holds multiple degrees in the fields associated with developmental psychology.

¹⁰ This information comes from "Developmental Discipline in Early Childhood Classroom" by Flicker and others.

Everything described above are details regarding where I stand while performing this soliloquy and sharing everything I've seen: a digital environment where conformity dominates over individual thinking, a physical environment where pollution devastates everything, and a developmental environment where different disciplinary methods are still being debated in terms of which is better.

"Life is a play." The first time I heard of this quote was years ago, yet I still enjoy this metaphor even upon this day. I like the idea that we are all actors who can choose what roles we want to play in shaping the play. The different types of environment intertwine to form the stage; as we all stand on it, infinite possibilities await our discovery as we make each move towards the final act.

I have reached my capacity to tolerate the rampant and ambiguous posts of "6." After analyzing the situation, if I perceive that commenting with six is not appropriate at all, I would immediately express my discontent. Through that, I have found people holding a similar ideology as mine, and realize that I am not the only one who is fighting against this vicious trend.

Maybe I can perform a monologue instead of a soliloquy. After all, stereotypically speaking, a soliloquy is usually accompanied with a spotlight on the performer; like outdoor light, indoor light contributes to light pollution as well. A difference between monologues and soliloquies is that monologues can be deceiving; but I do not tell lies that often, so they are the same as soliloquies to me, just without that spotlight that can slightly exacerbate light pollution.

My experience as a child who has received discipline is extremely valuable. I know exactly what I do not like and what works for me; they might differ from other people's dislikes or preferences, but overall, they help me understand what I need to be careful about when I know that my actions can influence the developmental environment of the future generations. While I continue to develop my own experience and absorb useful information from other people's experiences, my perspective widens and I grow more conscious concerning how I can positively impact the future generations with everything I know.

This is my role: a sentimental reformer who hopes to facilitate the progression of the play through positive means, while observing the world with intrigue and anticipating effective changes that would benefit both myself and my (digital, physical, and developmental) surroundings.

Despite everything I think I can do, I actually cannot see the solutions to these issues discussed in my writing—Online conformity, for instance, has persisted for too long, and is thus difficult to change considering the magnitude of the Internet. Nevertheless, my soliloquy might end here, but the issues remain, so does my desire for solutions towards a better world.

As for you? You might already have a role, or you might suddenly decide to change your role. Whatever it is, you should try to be mindful of the stage you are standing on. We want to prevent it from collapsing so that the play can, one day, reach its resolution with definite solutions.

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