

# Anonymous toxicity

Anonymity is derived from the Greek word, *anonymia*, which translates to “without a name” or “namelessness”. It’s important that humans can stay anonymous in certain situations. Whether it’s voting in elections, filling out surveys or more extreme cases like tipping the police. It makes you un-identifiable, unreachable or untraceable. However, the power of being able to act, without having to fear any direct repercussion to you as a person, can also result in negative actions. In the time before the internet, we’ve mostly seen it in crime, masked robberies, shell companies. Another aspect is hate letters, which at the time before the internet, usually only had two involved parties, the sender and the recipient. But now, with the internet connecting the entire world in a space where you can choose to be anonymous, it’s now easier than ever to get your message across, and you don’t have to limit yourself to one recipient.

It’s hardly limited to hateful messages now, and this negative behaviour has many variations. Some of the most common are categorized as toxic behaviour, trolling, flaming or cyber bullying, which ultimately can result in harm to other people and even effect politics. With aspects of our lives becoming datafied, it’s hard to ignore this behaviour, especially if it’s backed up by likes, upvotes or other types of metrics that ultimately “validates” these messages by power in numbers.

As Benjamin Grosser mentions in regard to why we want more likes, and it’s better to have more likes than less:

*“I would argue that the answer lies at the relationship between our evolutionarily developed human needs and the pervasiveness of capitalism within western society. If, as Marx and Engels have said, capital has equated personal worth with exchange value, then its reverse should hold true:*

*exchange value = personal worth”*

Personal worth as he touches upon is an essential human need and works as an intrinsic motivator: *“helping to satisfy our innate need for relatedness, or our need to be valued by and connected with others.”*

Why and where is this happening, and what can be done to prevent it?

To answer this, I'll investigate why being anonymous results in this type of behaviour. I'll go through what it means to be anonymous and compare what being anonymous now means compared to being anonymous in the pre-internet ages. Here I'll discuss factors as online disinhibition, how asynchronous communication can affect what messages we send, because one can send messages without receiving immediate reply. In continuation of this I'll investigate the different forms of toxic behaviour, and certain internet forums that it occurs in. The two forums I'll focus on mainly is social platforms, mainly anonymous sites like Reddit, and online gaming. The main difference between the two forums is that in social media, the receiver of the toxic behaviour is often not anonymous while the sender usually is, and in the video game both parties are more often than not anonymous.

I will look at a pre-existing form of software created to prevent cyber toxic behaviour, ReThink, that has showed promise in changing adolescents mind on deciding whether to post offensive messages on social media or not.

ReThink is an app that detects mean, hurtful embarrassing or other forms of offensive messages, and as the name implies ask them to rethink posting these messages before you can send them. Messages that could ultimately lead to depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, even suicide in extreme cases for the receivers of the message.

I will also look at how Riot Games, the company behind the hugely popular video game League of Legends, has attempted to tackle online toxicity in their video game.

I will try to suggest possible solutions on how to deal with toxicity online, referring to existing ideas and solutions, and exploring alternative options.

To answer all these questions sufficiently, I will have to use current references, and possibly find additional references in order to further investigate the subject, or if my focus shifts slightly during my writing process. While I've tried to scope my focus as best as possible, I always leave room open for slight deviations if they're better at linking the aspects of the paper together. I might limit my focus to anonymous sites, and leave out video game toxicity as it might deviate too far from the common thread. I've also considered making how anonymity affects our behaviour online the main

focus, instead of the solutions to it. I will most likely also discuss whether it's software programmer's responsibility to teach, inspire or force good behaviour on people, or where this responsibility could also lie.

## Sources/Relevant articles:

Wilson, Fuller & McCrea - trolls and the negative space of the internet – Also has many great references <http://twentytwo.fibreculturejournal.org/>

Grosser, Benjamin - WHAT DO METRICS WANT? HOW QUANTIFICATION PRESCRIBES SOCIAL INTERACTION ON FACEBOOK <http://computationalculture.net/what-do-metrics-want/>

### Relevant sources I might include

Zimmerman, Adam G. - Online Aggression : The Influences of Anonymity and Social Modeling  
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.863.1917&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Online\\_disinhibition\\_effect](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Online_disinhibition_effect) - Online disinhibition effect

<https://modelviewculture.com/pieces/anonymity-and-toxic-internet-culture>

<https://www.alternet.org/media/how-rise-toxic-troll-culture-has-made-vast-areas-internet-dangerous-place-just-perfect-donald>

<https://arstechnica.com/gaming/2013/05/using-science-to-reform-toxic-player-behavior-in-league-of-legends/> - Riot games attempt at tackling toxic behaviour

[https://getinspired.mit.edu/sites/default/files/documents/ST307\\_Report.pdf](https://getinspired.mit.edu/sites/default/files/documents/ST307_Report.pdf) - ReThink