

Book Club Discussion Questions: “The Internet of Garbage”

- 1) Sarah Jeong says in an interview, “One of the things I wanted to do with the book was to hammer in how online harassment has been around forever — but I don’t think there would have been an audience for the book until fairly recently. There’s a lot more mainstream awareness of harassment and online misogyny in particular.” Discuss your thoughts on this new audience and what makes them more receptive to a book like this at this point in time.
- 2) Has anyone in the group experienced online harassment? Jeong mentions that some people don’t identify their online experiences as “harassment” (the same way that some teens don’t identify their own experiences of the same as “cyberbullying”). Did you identify your experience as harassment? Or if not, what did the experience feel like instead?
- 3) In the book, Jeong talks about the definition of harassment, and how “we are in the early days of understanding ‘harassment’ as a subcategory of garbage.” How does this compare to the early days of fighting spam? And do you think online harassment will be taken as seriously as spam any time soon?
- 4) How do you think media coverage could be encouraged to improve the way that online harassment of women is represented (i.e. so that it is discussed as doxing, stalking, etc. and not just as words)?
- 5) Jeong identifies a pattern of harassment that garners a lot of media attention: “The women have names and reputations and audiences who listen. Their attackers are anonymous. The assault is documentable. And the onslaught doesn’t seem to be ‘warranted’.” What are some other, less familiar patterns of online harassment that can be identified?
- 6) Jeong talks about the impact that changing a social media avatar can have on interactions with others, and how others perceive similar comments. Has anyone here experimented with changing their avatar? What did you discover?
- 7) Sarah Jeong says that we focus too much on deleting bad content (through deleting comments or DMCA takedowns) rather than controlling bad behaviour. What are your thoughts on this?
- 8) The League of Legends tribunal rehabilitation system for bad behaviour on the platform is an interesting concept. Do you think this would work in other corners of the internet (social media platforms, for example)? Why or why not? Are there any thoughts about why companies are not investing resources into creative solutions like this more often?
- 9) Jeong talks about the pros and cons of client-side spam filters (for example, a “Marks as Spam” or “Not Spam” button) versus server-side filtering. What are your thoughts on the responsibilities or problems that come along with these? How do you think a system that relies on both client-side and server-side tactics might be applied to harassment?
- 10) If you were to run a community, how would reading this book change or influence your methods for dealing with online harassment? What would you do to manage a community?

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- 11) In a “live-tweet book review,” Danny O’Brien (@mala) talks about the difficulty of understanding the experience of online harassment without having been targeted by it, calling it a “failure of visibility.” What are some thoughts on improving others’ understanding of the experience of harassment, or on helping others to empathize with this experience (tweets below)?

**Danny O'Brien**
@mala

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Ok more modern day coverage of the story so far with harassment. My dumb thought here is that someone needs to write a harassment simulator>

1:02 AM - 17 Jul 2015

↩ ↻ ★ 7

**Danny O'Brien**
@mala

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I think people find it hard to envisage harassment just as they find it hard to imagine celebrity

1:04 AM - 17 Jul 2015

↩ ↻ 4 ★ 8


**Danny O'Brien**
@mala

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It is just not something which is always easily extrapolatable from a non-harassed experience

1:05 AM - 17 Jul 2015

↩ ↻ ★ 1

**Danny O'Brien**
@mala

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This is not a failure of empathy or sympathy it is a failure of visibility

1:06 AM - 17 Jul 2015

↩ ↻ 1 ★ 1