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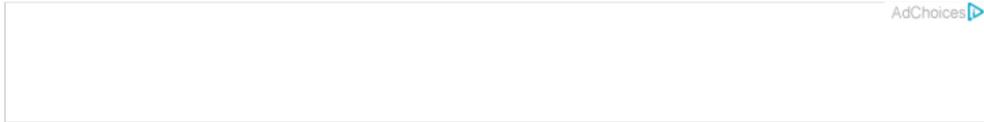
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THE BLOG

Reacting to Hate in an Increasingly Digital World

🕒 03/30/2016 03:16 pm ET | Updated 3 hours ago



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Jonathan Savitt
Writer, comedian, friend



It wasn't your everyday complaint.

Appearing unprovoked, Michigan student, Jake Croman, was filmed [harshly degrading his Uber driver](#) with a string of profanity — the viral video almost too sickening to watch in full. A few days later, an update emerging noting that the Uber employee, Artur Zawada, allegedly provoked Croman with [anti-semitic comments](#) (*Note: Others have also reported similar experiences with Zawada, which he denies*).

Whether or not this portrayal is accurate, the video which went viral thanks to that little thing known as social media, presents an opportunity for an extremely important and relevant dialogue surrounding the implications of a dangerously digital-centric culture.



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Both parties acting in the wrong, this kind of hateful, derogatory discourse has no place in society and must be addressed. Because it's not just this specific case. Incidents like this, and much worse, occur each and every day — constantly being influenced by an era marked with anonymity and hyper-communication.

Allow me to elaborate.

Social media acts a double-edged sword. On one hand, it provides us with the privilege to interact with content like never before. We see news at record speed. We get to know exactly what Carly Rae Jepsen is [thinking](#). We engage in newfound ways. And, oh, here's the downside. *We interact in newfound ways.*

Just as social innovations grant us ways to confront the bad and spread the good in the world, they also equally disrupt our ecosystem in hapless ways.

The anonymous, sheltered nature of social outlets encourage people to share harmful thoughts with minimal consequence and accountability. FYI two concepts that don't bode well for a community.

We can take the topic of anti-semitism, for example. As a religious minority I'm fortunate enough that I have not had to endure huge amounts of adversity or discrimination in my life. As a child and teen I experienced some anti-semitism, mostly comments here and there; then after my digital presence [started to build](#) I started experiencing it [more and more](#) along with the additional non-religion based cyberbullying. I remember the first time I was called a kike in person and also on the Internet. And I'm positive many have similar experiences.

Quick/fun game: How many hateful comments can you find online right now? It's almost laughable if it weren't so pathetic.

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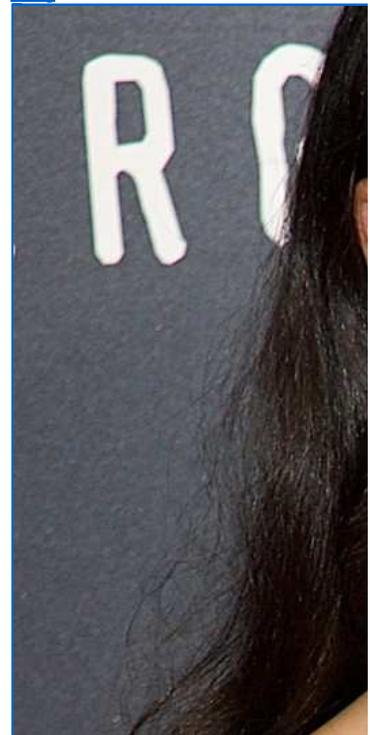
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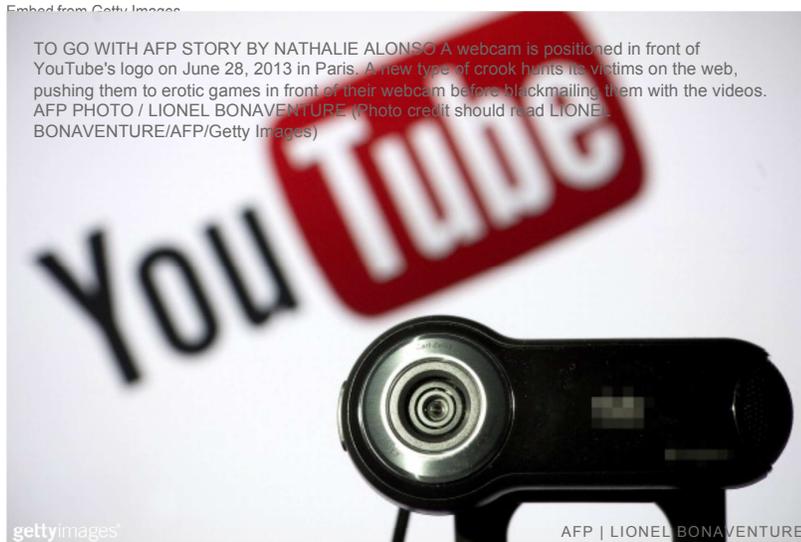
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And it's not just related to minorities, but cyberbullying in general. In a way, this digital behavior can be classified as a form of [deindividuation](#) — or the notion that once you are thrown into a group, you lose self-awareness and act without fear of consequences.

The Internet is kind of like a constant Spring Break, but for awful people. Though instead of beer bonging it's idiotic rhetoric.

And this mindset is more and more so trickling into the heart of our (real life) culture, too. Just as reality is influencing what is deemed worthy enough to be posted on social media (food, mostly), the opposite is also occurring.

As a whole we are spending so much time in the digital world that our off-and-online lives are being blurred into one. We are experiencing a crossover. In other words, we are on our screens [A LOT](#).

Our way of life is, and has been transforming.

We increasingly expect [instant gratification](#). We feel the need to voice our opinion regardless of how crude. We talk more and listen less. We feel as if we can and should be able to control each and every outcome. Of course, this behavior has always existed to some extent, but social media is acting as a megaphone amplifying such idealism and even justifying it as nonconsequential and routine. Make a typo? Simply delete the comment forever. Get in an argument? It's not like you will see the recipient in person, anyways. Say and do whatever you want. It's our mindset, but it's not how reality works or should work.

The scary thing is, we're seeing this more and more in our daily lives.

An angry, inappropriate college kid harassing an Uber employee is one (terrible) thing. [A presidential candidate spewing hate](#) and in return gaining a larger following is another.



It's cyclic. Social media and reality feed and capitalize off of one another. Hence the rather confusing entanglement. This, to the point that it has become the root of [many jokes](#).

After all, thanks to [Albert Bandura](#) we learned a long time ago that social behaviors can be acquired through observation. That's precisely what is happening here.

Which leads me back to my original point regarding the original Uber confrontation at hand:

How do we respond to discrimination and hate in an age where immoral ideals are becoming more and more visible — an age where hateful comments can be searched and even endorsed with an easy-to-use tool and algorithm?

(*Note the American Bar Association's thoughts on [free speech and social media](#))

If student, Jake Croman, was reacting to anti-semitic comments by his driver, what was the appropriate way to respond? Because no matter how grotesque, it wasn't what we saw in that [video](#).

Hate has become so routine in our lives that we no longer place value on our responses.

While this was clearly an emotional situation, it is not in anyone's interest to fight hate with more hate. Of course, it's easier said than done, especially when you, yourself are on the outside and not making the decision in a high-charged situation. As they say, hindsight is 20/20, something only more true with social media. So I'm not by any means attempting to step in as someone with all of the answers. Rather, I have personally been witness to the gloomy trend of more hate in real and digital life.

In either case, it may be easier to respond with anger and insults. I'm not arguing that. And I'm not judging. Take that from the person who just found a Reese's on the ground and took it home. When it comes down to it, this, while perhaps giving a temporary boost of self-pride, does nothing long-term, short of further creating barriers. I've learned first hand as many have.

Instead, let's strive for educating — or at the very least respectful dialogue. Because education requires a two way street, the teacher and learner must be committed. Unfortunately, chances are if your counterpart is already rooted in such strong belief, not much you say at that given moment will be able to persuade them.

But that doesn't mean you shouldn't do anything.

One of my favorite stories to tell as it relates to appropriate reactions to negative and hateful behaviors is that of writer and all-around inspirer, [Galit Breen](#), who I met in my home state of Minnesota.



She often tells of her experience being publicly fat-shamed after including a picture of herself in a [HuffPost article](#). She explains that after her months of (warranted) devastation, she decided to take action in a positive way. She wrote a [second article](#) addressing cyberbullying and stating that “we should be kinder to each other online.” A simple, yet powerful message. Did I mention that she also landed a [book deal](#), [TEDx talk](#), and thousands of Twitter followers because of it? She's been motivating others, including myself, ever since. This is the positive, beautiful side of social media. The kind that influences tangible change.

It's actions such as that of Galit and those of other similar movements that we should keep in mind when responding to hate speech whether online or in real life. It's [peaceful protests](#), it's movements like the [Noh8 Campaign](#), and it's other non-violent, education and dialogue-based behavior that really makes a fundamental difference in the end.

A groundbreaking, innovative idea? Not even close. In fact, a concept as original as faking a phone call to get out of an uncomfortable conversation. But nonetheless something that we all need to be reminded of every now and then.

Unfortunately hate and discrimination are not going away. If anything, trends point to it getting worse. For that reason it's up to us to combat it with good when possible. We can't control everything, but we can make what we can count.

As we continue to experience hate, regardless of forum, digital or in reality, directly or indirectly, let's keep this in mind.

Also just, like, be good-ish people.

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