

ALL ABOUT WHATABOUTISM

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Right now, the media is flooded with two burning issues: Covid-19 and the #BlackLivesMatter protests. Let's say you shared something related to the latter on social media. Someone comments, "What about coronavirus?" and criticises you for worrying about an American issue while people are dying of a pandemic in Bangladesh. This may or may not devolve into a comment war.

This category of fallacious arguments is known as *whataboutism*, and one who performs it is called a *whataboutist*. In short, "whataboutism" is a device used to discredit and counter an argument by drawing attention to a similar or completely different topic, thus steering the discussion to an irrelevant lane. The term originated in the 70s, referring to PR tactics Soviet propagandists used during the Cold War.

Although this word is relatively new, it can be applied to many different scenarios. Maybe you're feeding the stray dogs in the neighbourhood. A random passerby will disapprove of you caring more for animals than human beings, when in reality, they probably have never fed the needy themselves.

Hypocrisy is a common trait among whataboutists; they don't really care about the issues they raise. They take pleasure in guilt-tripping people whose opinions



they disagree with by forcing them to spare thoughts to another unrelated thing. Some whataboutists rear their ugly heads every time the news of a sexual assault goes viral. Instead of sympathising with the victim, they question that person's character, appearance and whereabouts. It's obvious how detrimental such remarks can be to the victim's already traumatised mental state, and to the purpose of bringing justice.

Whataboutism is also used to deflect an apology when the accused party points

to similar or more egregious misconducts of the accusers rather than owning up. For instance, when someone's problematic behaviour is exposed on social media, that individual might call the accusers out for cyberbullying, failing to hold themselves accountable for their actions. Even worse if that individual provides doctored screenshots in an attempt to incriminate the accusers. These flimsy tactics to protect their bruised ego eventually do not help, as it leads to more backlash.

All of us are whataboutists—because

we all make mistakes, and no one knows about everything. However, before starting a sentence with "what about", we can pause and reflect. Firstly, if you spot a post online about something you don't like, you better not insert your own opinion, since most probably it will be irrelevant to both the context and yourself. Reading comment wars between random strangers on YouTube can be entertaining, but don't be one of those people. Comment wars go nowhere and benefit no one; they only devalue topics worthy of discussion, like police brutality in America.

Lastly, if someone points a finger at you, don't bring their past errors to light. If you think you've been wrongly accused, try to prove your innocence without bringing someone else down, especially if they're not involved in the conflict. To sum up, don't be a jerk online.

References

1. The Washington Post (August 18, 2017). *The Cold War tactic, thawed by Putin, is brandished by Donald Trump.*
2. Dictionary.com. *We're All Guilty Of Whataboutism: Here's Why.*
3. Merriam-Webster.com. *What About 'Whataboutism'? If everyone is guilty of something, is no one guilty of anything?*

Adhora Ahmed daydreams too much. Send her reality checks at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com

Are 20s becoming the new 30s?

RASHA JAMEEL

The 84-page assignment I'd been working on for the past 31 hours was practically staring back at me from the laptop screen, as though disappointed at my low stamina and poorly developed physique. On my left, the phone was buzzing incessantly with texts from all my friends and acquaintances concerned about my lack of social media presence. I yawned and tried to make sense of my current situation, knowing I wasn't the only one attempting to dissect her life at 3.11 AM. So how did we end up here?

PHYSICAL DISCOMFORT

I woke up at 9 AM on a Saturday, and proceeded to spend the next five hours working at my study desk, fervently typing away on my laptop in a bid to finish my assignments. Just as I got up to go hydrate, I realised that I couldn't turn my neck and both my kneecaps were weak and hurting. It wasn't the first time I'd experienced something like that. As a university student, I have to attend classes throughout the day in seats that aren't designed for comfort, like thousands of others at my university. For those working at office environments in their 20s, being seated uncomfortably for hours is a daily thing and even more prolonged. People in their 20s are increasingly developing bad postures and weak



bone structures as more people strive to meet the global workforce's demands for younger employees.

SOCIABILITY

On the same Saturday, at about 5 PM, I received a wedding invite online. I felt queasy looking at the gold lettering, as thoughts of face-to-face interaction began flooding my mind. I'm an introvert, of course, but

my underdeveloped social skills aren't exactly uncommon among my age group. Most people in their 20s at present aren't very keen on pursuing social interactions outside social media networking sites. There are two reasons behind it: we've all grown too accustomed to living behind a keyboard, and our enthusiasm for parties can now be considered similar to that of

30-year-olds due to decreased stamina.

RELATIONSHIPS

As the Saturday drew to a close, I received a call from a friend who'd just gone through an emotionally-straining breakup. Neither she nor her ex were prepared for the toll it'd take on their mental well-being, having not realised that setting the tone in online conversations with emojis, can risk becoming tone-deaf in reality. These days, couples in their 20s often experience strained relationships among themselves due to a lack of healthy conversations. Proper courtship is gradually getting replaced with the idea of "Netflix and chill".

While this was just one Saturday in the life of an emotionally and physically exhausted 21-year-old, the aforementioned account, unfortunately, holds for many others in my age group out there. We're all battling against growing tides of negativity and psychological turmoil as we put in more work than our fellow humans in their 30s, to adapt to the fast-paced reality we've been exposed to at relatively early ages. We just can't seem to be able to catch a break, can we?

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