

On Civil Liberties and Netizenship

RASHA JAMEEL

As decreed by the Guardians of Hate Speech Promotion Front, the following are the laws dictating the facilitation of relentless hatred online:

1. No difference of opinions will be tolerated
2. All errors, regardless of the degree of their severity, shall be crucified and those committing them shall be dragged through the muddy tracks leading to our House of Hate Groups
3. Criticise with utmost brutality instead of working on narrow-minded views
4. Purveyors of constructive criticism will be prosecuted
5. Always bully like there's no conscience

Our motto: We love demotivating and bringing people down because it--

Woah, am I overwhelming you? Is all the outburst of negativity and pessimism getting to you?

I apologise, for this just might be one massive bitter pill to swallow. How about we sit down with a glass half full of water and a handful of sunflowers... to ease the blow?

We've only touched upon the surface of the hateful reality out there that's heavily propagated on social media. Let's dig in.

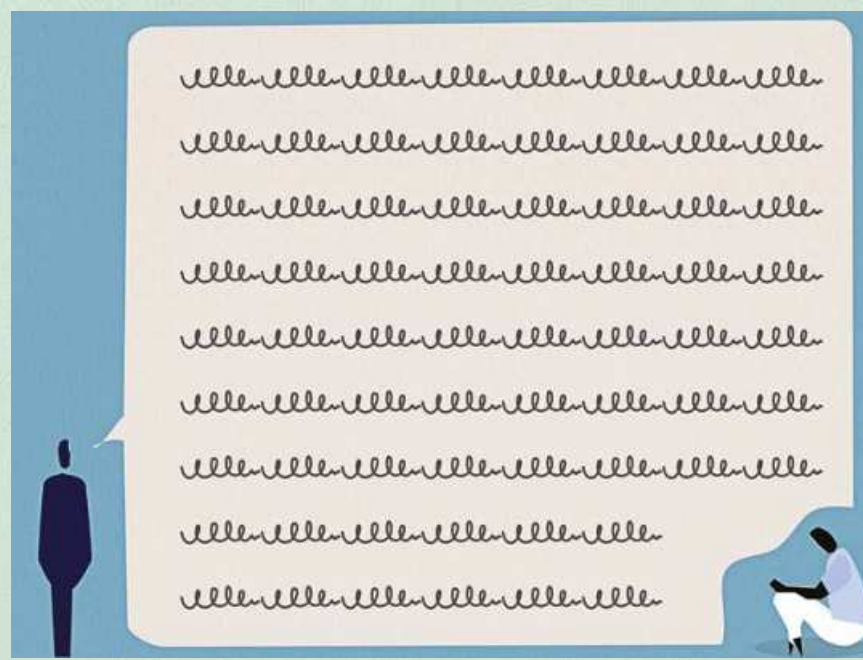
It's always hateful in the comments section

I thought I'd seen the worst when this random stranger in the YouTube comments section left a reply to my comment saying, "Go

back to eating your curry ice cream Jameel. We know brown names like you are paid to do this." The comment in question consisted of about five terms: "We stan a quirky kween" followed by a harmless crying tears of joy emoji.

Long story short, I was expressing my take on a video featuring wacky dancing, performed by one of my favourite comedians, Lilly Singh. The hateful response from the stranger was baffling. Of course, the mention of a non-existent food item is certainly questionable, but I truly became curious as to why a person who didn't know me would feel the urge to leave a scathing comment underneath mine because I'd written five light-hearted words for a video that was in no way problematic.

Let's consider racial prejudice as a factor here. With that in mind, we can deduce that this person consciously chose to spew racially-charged hate at me online, from behind the comfort of anonymity provided by a keyboard. That wasn't the last time I left a comment on YouTube. I simply grew used to the rude disposition so ungracefully sent in my direction with seemingly no provocation other than hate. As though right on cue, several other strangers jumped in with even more



foul comments, words of which are normally bleeped out on audio.

I thought that was the worst.

Then, I befriended a group of ladies from Sylhet who'd all joined hands to form a Facebook group dedicated to challenging the patriarchal norms of our country. For a feminist like me, the group was a revelation, a breath of fresh air in a land

choked by the toxic fumes of misogyny. I was overjoyed at having the opportunity to converse with like-minded Bangladeshis on human



rights issues such as "the need for intersectional feminism". I didn't know then the price paid by the group admins for simply setting up an online handle that promoted equal rights in a developing country.

First, they were bullied in the comments section of public hate groups on Facebook. They were trolled with photos collected from their private accounts put up everywhere, expletives scrawled across their smiling faces. The aforementioned incidents were followed by unsolicited hate texts from fake accounts and strangers. These young ladies eventually discovered that known acquaintances were making snide

remarks behind their backs.

I'd written "We stan a quirky kween" on a YouTube video of an Indian-Canadian woman.

My friends had opened a Facebook group to advocate for feminism in Bangladesh.

Let that sink in.

Wading into the treacherous waters of cancel culture

In July 2020, actress Jodie Comer was the target of a trending petition focused on "cancelling" her online. Comer's works on television have been generally subject to widespread

lematic figures supporting objectionable ideologies. But in recent times the movement has been exploited by hate groups looking to shut down conversations and healthy debates. People are joining in on the tirade of hate speech before sitting down to share facts first. All this has proven to be more of a distraction for netizens who then fail to take necessary action in real life.

While actual predators such as Matt Lauer and Kevin Spacey – with large numbers of credible accusations filed against them – go on with their normal lives, hardworking individuals like Jodie Comer are constantly on the receiving end of unwarranted online scrutiny.

So where should we draw the line?

Excellent question. Start with becoming more informed. Acknowledge the topics that are and aren't available for debate.

Encourage people to present their opinions about putting pineapple on pizza, reading Harry Potter as an adult, eating Madchef more than Chillox, and which direction a country's economy and politics are going.

Discourage differential opinions on issues like human rights, because those aren't debatable.

Become woke. Develop a morning diet of credible news. Put that to use. Advocate for intersectional feminism.

Call out problematic behaviour when you see it, keeping in mind that the goal is to discuss and enlighten. The Guardians of Hate Speech Promotion Front are false prophets. The remorseful should be granted a second chance, and the hateful condemned by the law. Passing judgment on each other on social media can't be considered the equivalent of a fair trial.

acclaim, being well received by critics and the mainstream audience alike. She's been known to work in progressive projects that favoured feminist ideals and better representation. Which begs the question: why a woman of her acting prowess and popularity was being crucified in such a manner? She was allegedly spotted once standing alongside a civilian who's probably a Donald Trump supporter.

Emphasis on words "alleged", "once", and "probably".

Jodie Comer's agency was being called off because of a rumour that hardly had any truth to it.

For those unfamiliar with the concept of "cancel culture", it's a social media phenomenon that is said to have spiritually originated in the 1990s and aims to take away the public platform from anyone displaying offensive and toxic behaviour without remorse. Initially, the movement insisted on complete accountability from prob-

The author accidentally poured Savlon on her head instead of her favourite essential oil. Teach her to properly differentiate between the two at rasha.jameel@outlook.com

ILLUSTRATION: EHSAN MOSTAFA INAN

To be an older sibling



SYEDA ERUM NOOR

It started from the moment your parents sat you down and looked at you with glittering eyes, almost giddy with excitement as they delivered the news.

"You're going to have a little brother or sister!"

In that moment, a few thoughts flitted through our young brains. One of which was dread. Dread of a little ball of drool and poop coming into our lives and stealing our parents from us. While the drool and poop were real, things changed for most of us drastically as soon as they did crawl into our lives.

They grew up to become our best friends, enemies, archivals, partners in crime and a billion other things we'd never be able to summarise even if we tried. They grew up to become one of the most important parts of our lives. At times, even more than our parents.

Another way in which our lives changed is the responsibility. Our actions were now impacting the little people in our lives. Strangely enough, sometimes we were held responsible for what they did, by our parents.

This responsibility isn't exactly a bad thing. For one thing that it offers us is companionship in what otherwise could have turned out to be quite a lonely life.

"For one, we're never alone," explains Ahmed Afridee, a student of North South University and a big brother to two sisters. "The responsibility is never burdensome because it's one I gladly accept. For without my sisters, I'm not sure where exactly I'd be. They're my friends, my companions. So taking responsibility for them is no big deal."

And companionship isn't all that comes with it. Responsibility can come with its own set of pressures, but it also greatly benefits us as individuals.

"Any sort of responsibility is good," agrees Rakeen Murtaza, a student of University of Texas at Dallas, as he discusses his role in his little sister's life. "She's a little devil, but I do enjoy sharing knowledge with her, trying to help her avoid some of the pitfalls that I so carelessly fell into growing up."

This takes some of us time to adjust to. Some of us have to grow into the role that we are chosen to play. Because, if you're the oldest, there's a good chance you have at times felt more than just someone with a

few extra years on Earth. You decide how much of what they do to reveal to your parents. You're the one who stands between them and your parents backing them up while they sleep soundly in their rooms.

You have the chance to right everything that your parents might have done wrong when raising you. Because with you, they were first-time parents.

"When you're an older sibling you tend to be the guinea pig for parental experiments," says Rakeen. "The one pressure I feel is some of the earlier mistakes my parents made, the first time around. This time, I want to make sure that I can correct those mistakes by offering a different, more



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

plausible perspective."

Apart from ensuring that they don't suffer from the same mistakes that we had to, we tend to take on a different kind of role when it comes to growing up with them. When talking to a few others who have little siblings, I noticed one thing in common in all of them.

The need to step up and take on the role of the parents when it comes to growing up with a sibling comes naturally. When talking to most of them, they didn't even notice they were doing it. They downplayed the role that they played because of how instinctive it is.

"I felt the need to step up when my father got into an accident," recalls Afridee. "You just feel it. The need to take on what



they did for you. You're next in line for your siblings."

However, the role of a sibling isn't as straightforward as that of a parent. You're more of a friend than a parent. You have more of an insight into their lives than your parents do. This can make bearing the responsibility to look after them more complicated. It doesn't necessarily mean you know everything they're doing. In fact, some of the time, due to the constant buzz of the world and the mess of your own life that you're so busy trying to sort out, you have no idea what the little ones are up to. Yet, there's a part of them you know that they don't reveal to your parents.

siblings that our parents don't have the luxury of getting to know.

"It was just a conversation in the car. That may never have happened had we not been stuck in traffic," she adds. "The fact that we had it was of monumental impact because he did end up looking into the matter. And now he's studying something else. Something that I'm sure he'll excel at."

However good it feels to be able to contribute to your sibling's life. We tend to have to take many things into consideration far earlier than we normally would. We're no longer just trying to study hard and become successful for ourselves. We do it so we can ensure the well-being of our ageing parents and the future of our growing siblings. We're next in line for who they depend on and we have to make sure we can live up to that. And that pressure can sometimes be crushing.

But that's not the only thing we feel.

It's also up to us to protect them from the pressures of society. Being the younger sibling sometimes means that you're crushed under the burden of having to live up to the older sibling.

Syed Afrid Iqbal, recent graduate from York University, was fully aware of how that would affect his little sister.

"I made sure to keep reminding her," he states. "Whenever my parents set expectations in comparison to me, I told her she didn't have to be me. In this situation, I was playing the role my parents should have played. I made sure to remind her that there were things about her that made her special. And that she would excel at whatever it is that she was meant to."

Older siblings can in no way replace parents. We're nowhere close. A lot of the advice we offer, we're not fully sure of and we make a lot of mistakes that affect the younger siblings more than we ever know. We sometimes act like know-it-alls and can be a real preaching pain to be around. And we're sorry for that.

Younger siblings play into every decision we make in our lives. And no matter the pressure of sometimes having to step in and play the role of a younger, very inexperienced parent, we don't know where we'd be without them.

Syeda Erum Noor is dangerously oblivious and has no sense of time. Send help at erum.noor1998@gmail.com