



This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture (MIT Press)

By Whitney Phillips

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Internet trolls live to upset as many people as possible, using all the technical and psychological tools at their disposal. They gleefully whip the media into a frenzy over a fake teen drug crisis; they post offensive messages on Facebook memorial pages, traumatizing grief-stricken friends and family; they use unabashedly racist language and images. They take pleasure in ruining a complete stranger's day and find amusement in their victim's anguish. In short, trolling is the obstacle to a kinder, gentler Internet. To quote a famous Internet meme, trolling is why we can't have nice things online. Or at least that's what we have been led to believe. In this provocative book, Whitney Phillips argues that trolling, widely condemned as obscene and deviant, actually fits comfortably within the contemporary media landscape. Trolling may be obscene, but, Phillips argues, it isn't all that deviant. Trolls' actions are born of and fueled by culturally sanctioned impulses -- which are just as damaging as the trolls' most disruptive behaviors.

Phillips describes, for example, the relationship between trolling and sensationalist corporate media -- pointing out that for trolls, exploitation is a leisure activity; for media, it's a business strategy. She shows how trolls, "the grimacing poster children for a socially networked world," align with social media. And she documents how trolls, in addition to parroting media tropes, also offer a grotesque pantomime of dominant cultural tropes, including gendered notions of dominance and success and an ideology of entitlement. We don't just have a trolling problem, Phillips argues; we have a culture problem. *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things* isn't only about trolls; it's about a culture in which trolls thrive.



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Editorial Review

Review

A fascinating and truly thought-provoking investigation of online trolls -- their evolution, their rationales, and their actions over the past decade. Whitney Phillips has gone where few of us dare -- into the heart of trolling activities across the Internet. What she finds is that trolls aren't a world apart from the rest of us -- they are instead a particular manifestation of contemporary culture, a distorted fun house image of ourselves -- that we need to confront in order to tackle the complex issues associated with their less savory operations.

(Mia Consalvo, Canada Research Chair in Games Studies & Design, Concordia University)

Given the social anxiety surrounding online antagonism and mischief generally, and the confusion surrounding trolling specifically, it is about time someone wrote this book. Building on deep empirical research, Phillips has given us a rich, comprehensive, and wonderfully engaging account of the identities and practices of trolling, both as a historically situated subculture and as a dynamic of the digital media environment.

(Jean Burgess, Associate Professor of Digital Media, Queensland University of Technology)

This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things gives us an important, critical exploration into the world of trolling -- that vexed part of the Internet that is simultaneously often too easily dismissed and yet tremendously impactful. Through her careful fieldwork involving in-depth observation and interviews, Phillips presents not only a historical look at trolling, but rich insight into the practices and attitudes of those who carry it out. This is a must-read for those interested in, and concerned about, life online.

(T. L. Taylor, Associate Professor of Comparative Media Studies, MIT)

This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things is a terrific introduction to the world of trolling, exploring how trolls put on figurative masks (or literal masks in the case of online anonymity) and generate lulz from those they encounter. As a former competitive debater in high school and college, I'm dismayed by the violence done to my beloved art of rhetorical controversy. Score some lulz for the trolls, I guess. Highly recommended.

(Curtis Frye *Technology and Society Book Reviews*)

This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things is a strong introductory text on the historical and cultural aspects of trolling, and it offers numerous insights into the logics and ideologies that undergird it. This timely work also opens up an opportunity for much-needed dialogue about the ethico-political implications of online antagonism.

(PopMatters)

About the Author

Whitney Phillips is a Lecturer in the Department of Communications at Humboldt State University.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Gerri Townsend:

Spent a free time and energy to be fun activity to accomplish! A lot of people spent their down time with their family, or their friends. Usually they accomplishing activity like watching television, going to beach, or picnic inside park. They actually doing same task every week. Do you feel it? Do you wish to something different to fill your current free time/ holiday? May be reading a book is usually option to fill your free of charge time/ holiday. The first thing that you will ask may be what kinds of reserve that you should read. If you want to try look for book, may be the publication untitled *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture* (MIT Press) can be very good book to read. May be it might be best activity to you.

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Janice Arias:

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Judith Bowman:

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