



ReviewArticle

## Psychoanalytic review of the trolling culture regarding female body

Krittika Sinha<sup>1</sup>, Mirza Sarwar Baig<sup>2</sup>, Huma Fatima<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,3</sup> M Phil trainee, <sup>2</sup> Junior Resident, Department of Psychiatry, King George's Medical University, Lucknow, U.P., India.

### Date of Submission :

31 March 2020

### Date of Acceptance :

30 May 2020

**Keywords:** Sexual trolling, Internet trolling, Melancholia, Anonymity, Transference.

### Abstract

Internet trolls are people who use their anonymity to persistently, and many times with malafide intentions, promote and share things on some internet platforms, boards, and forums. With the advent of time, the trolling has become a medium for asking and doing sexual advances in the realm of the social media making the victim disgust be saying obscene comments or asking for nude pictures or by sending the nude pictures for any sexual advances from the victim in the form of the projection. The reaction to their action is the gate to redemption in their eyes. The certain kind of offline identities of anonymous individuals trolls is unknowable as are their true feelings. One can say that the feeling of guilt that is not being sublimated or used creatively may cause aggressive behavior towards the world outside. Anonymity increases the incidents of the trolling leading to the veracity of the attack more powerful. The internet is becoming a medium to invest our insecurities although it is a destructive practice.

### Introduction

The world of the internet is full of knowledge that is available with just a snap of the fingers to us. The internet has made our lives easier and more comfortable in many

ways. We are all now present in the universe of the internet. The personality of the internet has been changed with time. Once a lot of ideas about the free flow of knowledge and information were filled. There is the right to express yourself unfiltered, which in the real world does not exist. Many that enjoy this freedom online are known as trolls, the term used for searching and discovering victimizations first using an on-line fishing tool. Even those who call themselves trolls can only do a small proportion of the actual trolling. Trolls are portrayed as aberrational

**Corresponding Author :** Miss Krittika Sinha

E Mail: [sinhacutie@gmail.com](mailto:sinhacutie@gmail.com)

**How to cite the article :** Sinha, K., Baig, M.S., Fatima, H. (2020). Psychoanalytic review of the trolling culture regarding female body. Indian Journal of Health, Sexuality & Culture, 6(1), 29-36.

**DOI :** 10.5281/zenodo.3929149

and antithetic to how ordinary people talk. The definition of trolls quickly faded into the monsters hiding in the dark and threatening people. Internet trolls are people who use this anonymity to persistently, and many times with malafide intentions, promote and share stuff on some internet platforms, boards, and forums. Some take up the self-righteous role of 'setting things right', even with a negative turn of events. For example, people who post severely racist stuff, somehow, suggest that the reaction to that material helps - and not hurts - the race situation. The reaction to their action is the gate of redemption in their eyes. The relative age of the word, perhaps earlier in the early to mid-nineties - a lifetime in all internet years - was one cause of this misunderstanding. At the time the term 'trolling' first applied to disruptive or otherwise irritating online speech and behavior. Those trolls would avoid a particular discussion of non-sequitors, engage in so-called identity theft, or commit various crimes against language and logic.

### Freud's initial work

Freud explains *"the notion of sorrow and lamentation as two separate reactions to the object's loss. For Freud, pathological melancholy is unlike normal mourning, but it's a process in which there is a separation from an attachment object that has for some reason remained incomplete. The melancholic person channels his excess libido inward rather than disowning the libido invested with the lost object and concentrating on another object. As a result, a part or some part of the person identifies with the lost person, resulting in an inner division of self. There is an internalization of the loved object lost which forms in the psyche a separate entity that is tough, harsh, judgemental, angry, and yet attractive. While mourning is associated with the process of conscious thought which only happens in the person's unconscious psyche."* (Freud.S, 1917)

In trolling, one can try to look through the idea of absent-present as represented in the piece Mourning and Melancholia. It's about

the loss, one observes that if something is absent, it can be psychologically present in our fantasy or one could say what is absent is hyper-present in certain spaces producing certain effects. Hence, the one who tends to troll online might be satisfying certain parts of their ego - it can be assumed as feeding one's ego and deriving some satisfaction out of that. Besides, one can think in terms of the masochistic parts of one's ego which are being satiated through trolling and what uncanny ghostly effects it is producing for the one who is being trolled, as it can be triggering for certain people. One can also say that the feeling of guilt that is not being sublimated or used creatively may cause aggressive behavior on to the world outside as for their inward libidinal investment - in invested libido in the world of imagination. (Freud.S, 1917; Freud.S, 1940).

### Transference, mirror and the ego

Also in the form of trolling can be seen as the matter of power dynamics that is explained by the French philosopher Jacques Lacan who tries to associate the imaginary with the restricted spheres of consciousness and self-awareness. It is to register with the closely linking to what people experience as the son-psychoanalytic quotidian reality. It mainly describes that who and what one 'imagines' the other person to be, and what one, therefore 'imagines' when they are communicating or interacting, who and what one 'imagines' oneself to be, including from the imagined perspectives of the others in terms of society. Such a description indicates how they portray the imaginary or unconscious core analytic ideas like transference, fantasy, and the ego. It symbolizes the dependence of the imaginary on the symbolic (Lacan, 1960). With such a description, it describes the dependency more towards the sensory-perceptual phenomenon such as images, emotions, and experience of one's body also affects the consciously lived emotions through

envisioning of thoughts and feelings of others, etc. which are shaped, stirred and overly determined by the sociolinguistic structures and dynamics.

Furthermore, one can see the online platform as a mirror where one can see oneself as present as well as absent. This screen as the online mirror represents the presence and also the absence at the very same time. And, this mirror reflects certain images that are false as well as having some partial truth in them. In other words, it is a mirror that has twofold functions - it reveals as well as conceals. In this light, one can see the trolling culture, how it prevails fear among the victims, and how trolling emerges out of the fear of one's self as to how Lacan's idea of the mirror stage goes. It can be seen through Lacan's mirror stage where the subject is constituted as a split or an alienated part of the self in the 'transformation that takes place in the subject when s/he assumes an image' to be himself or herself (Lacan, 2004; Fink, 2006). It is where Lacan locates the root of paranoia where the transition of the mirror stage is seen into 'paranoiac alienation' in which the reflective I becomes the social I; it can also be seen in contrast with Freud's model of a paranoid delusion of being watched by the external which Freud calls conscience coming from the parental criticism (as given in part-3 'On Narcissism'). The 'paranoiac alienation' leads to 'paranoiac knowledge' wherein the subject has a distorted relationship with reality and with the others. Since the subject's ego is displaced into the other, there is a perversion on the subject's cognition of the external. Besides, Lacan locates the root of psychosis in the eruption of symbolic into the real.

### **Power described as being anonymous**

Anonymity allows people the freedom to do something they would not otherwise be doing, even saying things that sensible people usually don't say. And 'internet trolls' are people who use this anonymity to

persistently promote and share stuff on some web platforms, boards, and forums, and many times with malafide intentions. Some take on the self-righteous role of 'setting things right' even with an event turn negative. For example, people who somehow post seriously racist stuff suggest that the reaction to that material helps the race situation - and does not hurt it. The reaction to their behavior is in their eyes the path to salvation. The social distance linked to the internet provides individuals with a particular form of atmosphere that could promote projection and assault by reducing the consequential input from the head-on. Anonymity increases the intensity and veracity of the assault by making the distance between the attacker and the offending victim greater. There is a subject at the pole of power, in which the co-constituency is assumed. Power is a response, it's a see-saw, and it can change. Relationships between the roles of subjects aren't just between subjects. Power changes hands and transforms. To be dominated by external force is a unfamiliar and terrifying process. The subject is produced through prevention, then the subject is created by a situation from which it is isolated and differentiated by definition. Desire will try to unravel the subject but will be shattered by the very subject in whose name it works. The topic has to block its own will. In this model, a subject turned against itself (its wish) emerges to be a state of the subject's tenacity (Kakar, 2001).

Subjectivity denies no type of identity but then is based on power to type itself, on the fact that it is difficult to learn without dependence, and the attitude of an adult is precisely to reject it and repeat it. 'Subject' is often referred to as 'the person' or 'the person' interchangeable. The genealogy of the subject as a crucial category does, however, suggest that this topic should not be directly associated with the person but should be associated as a linguistic category, a placeholder, and a structural knowledge.

Individuals come to inhabit the subject's domain (the topic appears as a 'place' at the same time), and they just appreciate intelligibility to the degree that, they are first established in the language, as it were. The linguistic stage of its life has been subjected or is going through 'subjectivation'. It makes no sense to regard 'the individual' as an intelligible reference to individuals or their becoming without a prior reference to their position as a subject (Foucault, M.1985). Subjection, a power exerted on a subject, is still a power assumed by the subject, a presumption that constitutes the instrument of the becoming of that subject. The subject reiterates its subjection (a notion shared by both psychoanalysis and Foucauldian accounts) to the act of opposing subordination. The power which initiates the subject does not remain constant with the power which is the agent of the subject. A significant and potentially enabling reversal occurs when power shifts from its status as of the condition of the agency to the subjects 'own' agency (constituting an appearance of power in which the subject appears as the condition of its 'own' power).

Authority works on the subjects in at least two ways:- firstly as what makes the subject possible, the state of its potential and its formative ability, and secondly as what is picked up and repeated in the 'personal' acting of the subject. As a subject of power, the subject overshadows its emergent condition, it overshadows power with power. The situation not only makes the subject possible but also factors into the development of the subject. Power goes across people and passes across person to person. Even if the subject is gone they are still under the gaze or watched or in the spell. They become the docile object of control. For example, for a widow absence of a subject gives an overpowering impact but when the subject is present there is a field of negotiation. The omnipresence of God makes us believe in an invisible power that we

fear in the absence of the subject. If God would have been present, there would be a limited source of exercise of power. The subject can be omnipresent in his absence and an absence of over presence that will create fear and anxiety. Power is not a thing but a relation, ways that the subjects are positioned. The fear is a situation in which one pole is absent and exercising upon you. This psyche is born with the subject absence position. Melancholia is the hyperextension of the subject's absence. We think of a state but actually, we are thinking of a thing (Foucault, 1985).

The subject takes on itself, and its subjection creates a subject and is a precondition of an entity, so subjection is the account on which a subject is the guarantor of its resistance and opposition. Whether power is conceived as preceding the subject or as its instrumental effect, the vacillation between the two temporal modalities of power ('before' and 'after' the subject) has marked most of the debate about the subject and the agency issue. Like other French thinkers of his time such as Louis Althusser, Foucault rejects the humanist notion of a free and fair subject for a view of it as decided by a structure of power relations. The foundation of Foucault's view in 'The Subject and Control' is the belief that control is not exercised through coercion but through 'individuals' manufacturing. Foucault notices the double sense of 'subject', which is subjected to both a self-conscious subject of something and something which is regulated. Both of these definitions interweave in Foucault's way of examining the relationship between subject and control.

Foucault begins his description of power as transforming the subject into an object, an object of knowledge, language, and power mediated through it and creating subjects. He describes three ways of objecting which make individuals subjects. The first way is inquiry modes that aspire to the status of



science that produces 'objective' knowledge about the subject, thereby objectivating life itself (Kritzman, 1996). Foucault's second form of objectification defines it as having to do with separation and differentiation, such as those made between madness and sane, criminals and law-abiding people (the notions given in his 'Discipline and Punish' or 'Madness and Civilisation'). The third form of objectification has to do with how individuals become objects by linking themselves with broader systems in relationships, such as sexual preference (discussed in the 'Origin of Sexuality' by Foucault).

Next, Foucault turns his attention to the essence of control that he believes is exerted by control relationships to make use of acts to alter others' actions. Therefore, power only exists when putting into action and is not a function of, or dependent on, consent; although consent may be granted. Power then does not act directly on another; it acts to take action which affects others' actions. Power isn't aggression, but it can be combined with abuse. There are two essential elements required to articulate a power relationship; the 'other' is always maintained as an acting person and as potential actions an endless number of options are available. Therefore, the exercise of power involves direction from the actions of another, and this is achieved through 'law' as a means of structuring the possible option of actions of the governed; a way of structuring the possibilities open to a subject. In the interplay between acts directed by the government, we see that there has to be an essential factor, and that factor is independence. Power can only be exercised over a free subject, and only in so far as it is free.

### **Sexuality in the times of social media**

Since the advent of social media, the trolling has become a medium for asking and doing sexual advances in the realm of the social media making the victim disgust be saying

obscene comments or asking for nude pictures or by sending the nude pictures for any sexual advances from the victim in the form of the projection.

The societal hierarchy and the media representation of women neatly effect that we see the female body as an introjection or the subject of desire for fulfilling the repressed thoughts. Our mood and discussion modes also play a vital role in sadistically trolling a female over the internet. Trolls project their anxieties on to the other person (female) as an entity of desire but also a means of catharsis.

Being invisible or anonymous gives us the leverage to give our ideas a framework that we can say anything due to our freedom and no one is keeping a watch over our actions.

The troller abuses his victim verbally and mentally. He infiltrates her defenses, shatters her trust in herself, confuses her and confounds her, demeans and debases her. He invades her territory, abuses her confidence, exhausts her resources, hurts her loved ones, threatens her stability and security, enmeshes her in his paranoid state of mind, scares her out of her wits, prevents satisfaction and causes frustration, humiliates and insults her in private and in public, points out her shortcomings, criticizes her profusely and in a man of 'scientific and objective'. Very often the sadistic acts of the troller disguise themselves as an enlightened interest in his victim's welfare. He plays the psychiatrist (totally dreamt up by him) to her psychopathology. He acts the guru, the figure of the avuncular or father, the teacher, the only true friend, the old, the experienced. All this to weaken her defenses and put her disintegrating nerves under siege (Freud, 1940).

Online trolling from a sexual abuser (the victim being trolled sexually) would be highly traumatic for her who then later infuses extreme paranoia and insecurities in her psyche. This trauma is likely to manifest in

certain situations where she has great difficulty with relationships or object relations as there has been a distortion in the previous patterns of her object relations.

As Freud says, what man fears is his libido. In this context, one can see how the victim's paranoia may block his libido to be invested in any object outside her inner world. Consequently, it might make a person delusional as well for the libido is only being invested in her imaginary world from where it returns to self, and can cause delusions (Freud, 1914).

A study published in NIMHANS revealed a pattern behind trolling through which any ordinary person can act like a troll. It revealed that both negative mood and seeing other troll posts by others significantly increase trolling behavior. It shows a fun element attached to trolling. It is like a group of men going on a hunting expedition. In the modern world, they do so on social media and their prey is women. Women who do not fit into the social norms of meek and passive are trolled the most. Men exercise their aggressive instinct to defend their world seeing women doing great in professional arenas while these men sitting at home probably unemployed. It pricks their male ego which they avenge by trolling these women. Social media creates the possibility for their baser instincts to get manifested with lowering of defenses or without fear of punishment. The cyber laws are not being very strictly implemented until now to create a sense of deterrence in their minds. A rape threat to a woman on social media has become the norm. The reason behind this is also due to the degrading of the language of public discourse in general whether on social media or mainstream media. Even celebrity personalities do not refrain from writing an appealing post whose hate is either directed at another community or gender. Communal hatred gets displaced towards the other woman. It leads to the use of sexualized and

disgusting language while confronted with the other women. There is a relation between the non-productivity of men in the real world and their rage-filled attack on women in the virtual world. The virtual world becomes the space for venting out their frustration and rage without having to confront the other who is absent-present. So it is more convenient to abuse them sexually or otherwise without actually realizing the effect of their words and actions on their victims. For a narcissistic person, the other does not get born. Similarly, social media feeds into their narcissistic self by making the other only partially present. The rest of the work is done by a projection of the hateful parts in oneself for the other community or gender, which makes it legitimate in the mind of the abuser or troll, they are convinced that what they are doing is right.

The French feminist Luce Irigaray in her essay 'When the Goods Get Together', discusses how women have conventionally been treated as goods exchanged between men. Hence, it offends the male ego when they see liberal and emancipated women exercising their agency and registering their desires. When women desire, it is the man who becomes the subject of their gaze. As Laura Mulvey, the British feminist film critic, discusses in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', that cinema has always been made from the perspective of male spectator putting him in a masculine subject position while putting the woman as the object of attention on the screen and the 'male stare'. Mulvey indicates two distinct forms of male voyeuristic gaze (i.e. seeing a woman as a picture 'to be stared at') and fetishistic (i.e. seeing a woman as a replacement for the underlying psychoanalytic fear of castration 'the lack') In the virtual world, which is akin to cinematic world, when these men, who have been bred on such phallogocentric representations, see women taking an active role and becoming the subject of their desires, this creates a

sense of castration anxiety in male's psyche which is displaced in form of rage and hatred which gets unleashed on the social media when they see other men also accompanying them by sharing similar posts and similar emotions, their fear is diminished.

## **Conclusion**

Hence, the one who tends to troll online might be satisfying certain parts of one's ego - it can be assumed as feeding one's ego and deriving some satisfaction out of that. Besides, one can think in terms of the masochistic parts of one's ego which are being satiated through trolling and what uncanny ghostly effects it is producing for the one who is being trolled as it can be triggering for certain people. Furthermore, one can see the online platform as a mirror where one can see oneself as present as well as absent. This screen as the online mirror represents the presence and also the absence at the very same time. And this mirror reflects certain images that are false as well as having some partial truth in them. In other words, it is a mirror that has two-fold functions - it reveals as well as conceals. In this light, one can see the trolling culture in how it prevails fear among the victims and how trolling emerges out of the fear of one's self.

The exercise of power, requires the guidance of another's actions and this is done through 'government' as a means to structure the available choice of actions of the governed; a way to give structure to the possibilities available to a subject. In the interplay between actions upon actions guided through government, we see that an important element must be present, and that element is freedom. Hence, what we need is to change their perspective vis-à-vis women not just on social media but through the cinematic representation which was the foremost cause of such a perception to get created. Feminist and avant-garde cinema need to be produced which becomes a

counter-discourse to their usual perception of hero bullying a heroine who first denies and then accepts his advances. This perception that the 'no' of women is only a meek gesture of saying yes later if a man tries harder needs to be changed.

The need of the hour is to look at various conditions or the socio-cultural influences that create such a tradition of trolling. The internet is becoming a medium to invest our anxieties and not thinking about the repercussions of trolling and affecting the victims mentally and incite a sense of guilt and shame within them, and it can be stated that the purpose of trolls has been fulfilled.

## **References**

- Freud, S. (1917). Mourning and Melancholia. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works, 237-258.
- Kakar, S. (2008). *Mad And Divine Spirit and Psyche in the Modern World*. 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi: Penguin Group
- Balik; Aaron. The Psychodynamics of Social Networking. 71-125. 2014. Karnac, UK.
- Bishop, J. The Psychology of Trolling and Lurking: The Role of Defriending and Gamification for Increasing Participation in Online Communities Using Seductive Narrative.
- Buckingham, D. Youth Identity and Digital Media; Introducing Identity. 1-19. MIT Press.
- Foucault, M. (1992) [1984]. The History of Sexuality Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure. London: Penguin Books. ISBN 978-0-14-013734-7.
- Grigg, R. "Translator's Note" to The Seminar Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, p. 9.
- Lacan, J. The Seminar Book I, Freud's Papers on Technique, Cambridge University Press.
- Jewkes, Y. (2004). *Media and Crime*, Sage Publications. London.
- Craker, N., March, E. (2016). The dark side of

- Facebook®: The Dark Tetrad, negative social potency, and trolling behaviors. 102, (2016). *Personality and Individual Differences*. Elsevier.
- Freud, S. (1940). *An Outline of Psychoanalysis. Fear and Drives* (74-101). Penguin Books. The UK.
- Buckingham, D. (2008). *Youth Identity and Digital Media; Introducing Identity*. 1-19. MIT Press.
- Diplomarbeit; Krappitz, S. *Troll Culture*. 7-78. University of Stuttgart.
- Bishop, J. (2014). *The Psychology of Trolling and Lurking: The Role of Defriending and Gamification for Increasing Participation in Online Communities Using Seductive Narrative*.
- Ferreter, L. (2006). *Louis Althusser. The Politics of Culture* (75-94) . University of London. Routledge.
- Althusser, L. (1999). *Writings on Psychoanalysis*. Colombia University Press. New York.