

Objectives

- Provide an in-depth examination of the online disinhibition effect and each of its components
- Identify who and how individuals are affected by online disinhibition
- Explore the potential benefits of online disinhibition
- Articulate the role of online disinhibition in cyberbullying and other negative online interactions
- Explore the potential repercussions of prolonged online disinhibition in face-to-face interactions
- Recommendations
- Questions/Answers

What is Online Disinhibition?

- Every person behaves differently in virtual spaces than they would in face-to-face interactions
 - We loosen up
 - We become less restrained
 - We tend to express ourselves more openly
- This phenomenon is known as *online disinhibition* (Suler, 2004)

Dissociative Anonymity

“Who am I?”

- What can people *really* tell about us on in virtual interactions?
- In virtual interactions, we can hide some or all of our identity- creating a separation between our in-person and virtual identity
- My virtual behaviors aren't really me



Invisibility

“You can’t see me.”

- In virtual interactions, we cannot always be sure where/when someone is present
- Virtual invisibility gives us the courage to do things that we perhaps would not do otherwise
- Physical invisibility also means less inhibited expressions



Asynchronicity

The “emotional hit and run” (K. Munro, unpublished observations, 2003)

- Virtual communications are asynchronous- interactions do not always happen in real time
- Not immediately coping with a person’s reaction disinhibits
- There is safety when posting something personal, emotional, or hostile and then “running away”

Solipsistic Introjection

“It’s all in my head.”

- When we don’t know what a virtual person looks/sounds like, we tend to assign traits to those individuals
- Interactions with this introjected character feel more imaginary
- We also may treat a virtual companion as ourselves, which can lead to greater disinhibition

Dissociative Imagination

“It’s all a game.”



- The virtual world is in a different space entirely, with imaginary characters completely separate from the real world
- Virtual life can then be viewed more as a game versus as a real world interaction
- How we act in “fantasy games” is not always how we act in the real world

Minimized Authority

“We are all equals here.”



- In the real world, authority and status are expressed by clothing, body language, etc.
 - We are stripped of these markers in virtual interactions
- We are more willing to speak out and misbehave without possible disapproval and punishment from authority figures

Personality

- Not every person will be disinhibited in the same way or to the same level in virtual interactions
- Individuals can be predisposed to being more disinhibited based on personality
- The intensity of a person's underlying feelings, needs, drives, etc. affects susceptibility to online disinhibition as well

Benign Disinhibition

- **Not all disinhibition is a bad thing**
- Disinhibition can be a very cathartic experience
- We can be extremely generous and kind to others in the virtual world
 - Ex. Donating to causes via GoFundMe.com



Benign Disinhibition

- Combat loneliness and depression through online social interactions (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003)
- Moderate negative moods through online social interactions (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003)

Benign Disinhibition

- Using the internet to find satisfying relationships to provide emotional support (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003)
- Individuals with low self-esteem are more comfortable with online interactions (Joinson, 2004)
 - Online disinhibition can also enhance self-esteem and self-confidence (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011)

Benign Disinhibition and Virtual Gaming



- Multiplayer online role-playing games allow for positive disinhibition that allows for long-term social relationships (Cole & Griffiths, 2007)
- Virtual gaming allows players to express themselves differently than in real life due to appearance, gender, sexuality, age, etc.

Toxic Disinhibition

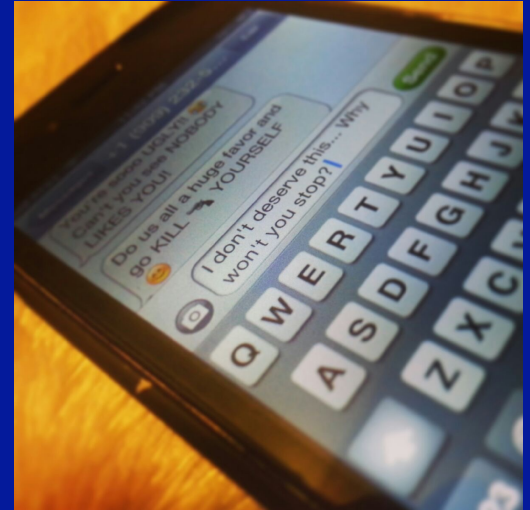
- Disinhibition can be **UGLY**- this is the disinhibition we think of more often
- Rude language, harsh criticisms, anger, hatred, threats, etc. are all toxic disinhibition
- Toxic disinhibition also causes individuals to occupy virtual spaces that they would not explore otherwise

Cyberbullying

- “Willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011)
 - Harassing, threatening, humiliating, hassling, etc. their peers
 - Spreading rumors
 - Creating web pages, videos, and fake social network profiles to make fun of others
 - Taking photos and videos of others where privacy is expected and distributing them online

Cyberbullying and Toxic Disinhibition

- Less public evaluation leads to less remorse (Mason, 2008)
- No direct social disapproval (Willard, 2007)
- Do not need to see the victim physically suffer (Willard, 2007)



Can Online Disinhibition Affect Face-to-Face Interactions?

- Online usage by children and adolescents (ages 12-17) (Pew Research, 2014)
- 95% of teens have access to the internet
- 74% have mobile access to the internet
- In 2012, 81% of online teens use some kind of social media



Teen Device Ownership

(Pew Research, 2014)

- In 2012, 78% of online teens owned a cell phone
 - 30% of teens owned a smartphone
 - This is nearly doubled since 2004
- 8 out of 10 teens own a desktop or laptop computer
- 23% of teens have a tablet computer

Teen Device Usage

(Pew Research, 2014)

- 50% send 50 or more text messages a day
- 67% surveyed teens said they were more likely to use their cell phone to text friends rather than calling or talking face-to-face
- 54% said that they text their friends once a day, but only 33% said they talk to their friends face-to-face on a daily basis
- American between the ages of 8 and 18 spend on average 7.5 hours per day using some sort of electronic device

Can Online Disinhibition Affect Face-to-Face Interactions?



Does this
look familiar?

Can Online Disinhibition Affect Face-to-Face Interactions?

- The development of a child's social aspects can be greatly impacted due to an insufficient amount of real life social encounters (Diaz, Evans, & Gallagher, 2014)
 - It is easy and more convenient than real life encounters
- Facial expressions, body language, eye contact, and conversation skills suffer because of this
- Further, the social skills learned through online disinhibition may bleed into face-to-face interactions
 - This is due to a lack of learned empathy

Managing Online Disinhibition

- Don't post or send anything you would be embarrassed for certain others to see
- Do be careful about over-sharing
- Don't hang out with the “wrong crowd” online
- Don't hang out with the “wrong crowd” offline
- Do consider your emotional state before virtually posting or responding to anything
- Do consider the reaction individuals are expecting from toxic disinhibition
- Do search for yourself online



Questions/Answers



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A white rectangular box containing the handwritten text "Thank You!" in green ink, with a simple smiley face drawn below the word "You".