



Here's a handy field guide to spotting and dealing with trolls. I'm not talking about the kind that live under bridges or appear in Tolkien novels, I'm talking about the sub-human vermin that infest blogs and corrupt discussion threads. Scientists have not yet determined when they mutated into their present form or how they were first introduced into cyberspace, but these parasites are now as ubiquitous as cockroaches.

Trolls feed on two things: attention and disruption. When you hear the expression "*Do not feed the trolls*" it means do not engage the trolls in discussion or argument and do not allow the troll to hijack threads. If you feed a troll it will never leave and may bring friends. Site monitors can delete the troll's comments and block its IP address, but if it knows there is food to be had it will find a new IP address and return.

Several sub-species of troll have been identified but they mutate quickly so there are always new types appearing. Here are some of the more common types:

1. *The Suicide Bomber* – This is the most common and easiest to recognize troll. The name comes from this troll's behavioral pattern of arriving at a blog and almost immediately posting profane and offensive comments. This troll feasts quickly on the flaming responses of the blog residents until banished by the moderator. Even after they are blown to bits they lurk and absorb sustenance from any residual attention or disruption.

2. *The Mole*- This troll takes on a human appearance in order to join a blog and pose as a regular. After their residency is established they will begin trying to undermine morale and sow doubt and dissension among the sincere blog residents. The commonest form of this

subspecies is the “concern troll,” but there is also the “sockpuppet troll” that exists to participate in team trolling (see below).

3. *The Bully (aka The Pugilist)*- This troll is believed to be a crossbreed between The Suicide Bomber and The Mole. It is often an infiltrator, but once established they become aggressive and try to dominate threads. They will push the envelope with offensive and insulting comments to other commentors but when confronted by a site monitor they claim they were joking or were taken out of context. They will team troll with the sockpuppet troll.

4. *The Sweetie (aka The Seeker)* – This is a fairly new troll that first appeared near the end of the 2008 Democratic primary campaign. So far its habitat appears limited to the PUMAsphere and former pro-Hillary blogs. Researchers are in dispute as to whether it was genetically engineered or is the result of the mutagenic properties of Kool-aid.

5. *The Everlasting Blogstalker*- This parasite prefers to attach itself to an individual rather than any particular site. Once the troll fixates on a human blogger, it will follow its host throughout the blogosphere harassing the host and spreading lies about him/her. This troll is known to think of itself (to the extent that trolls are capable of thought) as the host’s “nemesis.” The host, on the other hand, usually thinks of the troll with the terms “pest,” “hemorrhoid,” or “who?”

Because of their skill at mimicry, trolls can be difficult to spot. With the exception of The Suicide Bomber, which often utilizes an alias that identifies it as a troll (like “PUMAf*cker” or “Palin is a c*nt”) they can only be identified and exposed by their words and actions. After The Suicide Bomber, The Sweetie is the easiest to identify because it only uses a limited number of words and phrases, sometimes called “talking points.” The phrases “Roe v. Wade,” “party unity,” and “help me understand” are very common, as is “Hillary lost.”

The Everlasting Blogstalker is easily identified by the host due to their distinctive odor and speech pattern, but The Mole and The Bully are much harder to spot, and it usually requires numerous hours of blogging in one location because any single comment or group of comments can be ambiguous and a pattern is required to confirm trollishness. One common pattern of these trolls is “team trolling.”

Team trolling is a misnomer because it actually involves a single troll. It is usually performed by The Bully using multiple aliases or “sockpuppets” that are often (but not always) Moles. This tactic is typically used to “win” arguments or to defend The Bully when it is confronted. To the uninitiated, it looks like this: The Bully says something, then two or three other commentors chime in to side with the troll. If used in an argument, the sockpuppets will agree with whatever The Bully says, and if used in The Bully’s defense the sockpuppets will invariably find no offense in anything The Bully has said. (“*I didn’t think it was rude*“)

The Bully is not always abusive and/or insulting, it may attempt to dominate threads by using “word fogs.” A word fog is a long comment filled with jargon and terms unknown to the average person. Outside of the blogosphere word-fogs are used by bad academicians, pseudo-intellectuals and con-men. The Bully troll hopes that others will be confused and intimidated by the flowery phrasing and excessive verbiage. Here is an example of a word fog:

“Why? Because it’s turned out that meta matters. The American public is by and large in favour of a social-democratic policy consensus. But that doesn’t necessarily effect how things go at the ballot box. How things go at the ballot box is related to all kinds of meta issues. And the meta that matters now is that, regardless of the truth of the matter, it is widely held that Obama is winning on a populist platform. That perception is the 0.0001% margin you get out of the elections, even if it is very likely that you’ll get nothing else.”

That paragraph is completely meaningless. “Meta” is either a prefix to another word or an adjective that modifies a noun. Here is another word fog:

In a nutshell, even if we assume that Liebowitz’s numbers are all correct, you still have to accept his ideological assumptions in order to agree that his data allows him to lay the blame where it does. His ideological assumptions are inserted via a certain amount of familiar slight-of-hand. They’re standard glibertarian cant. Need I explain what that is?

I believe that the predictable and observed consequence of that form of libertarianism is a preservation of racially-biased economic hierarchies.

So that is my objection to Liebowitz.

The Bully knows that many people are afraid to admit they don’t understand something and will shut up, giving the appearance that The Bully has “won” the argument. But it doesn’t work on everyone, some will demand explanations or persist in pointing out that the Emperor has no clothes. When a word fog is questioned or confronted is where The Bully can be distinguished from a real person.

The purpose of communication is to express our thoughts and ideas to others in a way that can be understood. This is especially true when we engage in persuasive argument. Typically, if the speaker or writer knows they are not being understood they explain themselves in simpler terms rather than using even more complex terminology.

For example, if I were to use the term “double jeopardy” and the other person didn’t understand what I was talking about I wouldn’t tell them it was similar to the principles of *res judicata* and *collateral estoppel*, I would tell them it meant they could not be put on trial twice for the same crime.

The Bully, on the other hand, will do exactly the opposite and if the person persists in questioning or challenging them it will typically dismiss the person as ignorant and inferior to itself and then flee the scene claiming it has to leave. (“*You obviously don’t know what you’re talking about and I don’t have time for this.*”) The sockpuppets however, can hang around to defend The Bully after it departs.

The Bully will also use the word fog as a defensive tactic. Other common defensive tactics of trolls include “playing the victim card, “the misinterpretation,” “false citation” and arguing apples and oranges. Playing the victim card takes place when the troll is questioned or confronted and responds by claiming to be offended or that it is being picked on. The

misinterpretation is where the troll intentionally twists or misinterprets what others are saying. Frequently, when either of these tactics are used the troll then leaves (or pretends to while lurking or sockpuppeting.)

False citation occurs when the troll gives a reference or link as a supporting authority but the citation doesn't actually say what the troll claims it does. A troll that argues apples and oranges will simply ignore the person's facts and/or points and talk about something is similar but that doesn't disprove what the person has said. An example of this is when the person says "*75% of sino-peruvian lesbians believe _____*" and the troll responds with "*My friend is a sino-peruvian lesbian and she doesn't believe that.*"

I hope this guide is helpful and informative. Good hunting and remember, they are not endangered but they are not edible either. But whatever you do, **DO NOT FEED THE TROLLS!**