



Into 2020:

The State of Online Harassment and Opportunities for Collaboration

How we got here and
what do we do now

OnlineSOS is a nonprofit organization that supports individuals facing online harassment through actionable resources and advocacy.

Executive Summary

- Online harassment continues to grow and evolve despite its broader recognition as a problem. More than 85 million American adults have experienced online harassment. Women, people of color, religious minorities, and other marginalized groups are more likely to experience harassment both more often and with more intensity. Certain professionals, like activists or journalists, are also more vulnerable to harassment for simply doing their jobs.
- Tactics of online harassment deployed against individuals or specific groups are similar to those used in media manipulation and disinformation. Online harassment has steadily emerged not only as an effective tool to silence, exclude, and harm individuals, but also as a way to reshape democracy in practice.
- To be effective, solutions to online harassment need to be centered on the individual's experience. Without cultivating a rich picture of the end-to-end experience, the context of harassment, and its lasting effects, proposed interventions will continue to fall short and the status quo upheld.
- To create lasting change, developing a common vocabulary for describing various tactics of online harassment is key. For an individual, a common vocabulary can affect how they seek help, report abuse, find resources, decide what to do, and recover. For the experts, groups, or researchers addressing online harassment, a common vocabulary can streamline collaboration and facilitate more effective data collection, research, policy, legal remedies, and victim support. We can't change what we can't name.
- Whether a solution is focused on serving an individual or seeking change-at-scale, it will require a combination of interventions, disciplines, and expertise. Online harassment is complex, so mutual understanding and collaboration is critical to systemic change.
- Looking towards 2020, it's more urgent than ever to address online harassment. Most important is to focus on creating better outcomes for targets of online harassment. When targets can recover and reintegrate, rather than be silenced or excluded, harassers and manipulators lose ground. Left unaddressed, online harassment (and its consequences) will only become an increasingly effective tool for manipulation and marginalization.

Here is the TL;DR version of the report in five key takeaways:

1. Online harassment is one of the most important social issues of our time.
2. People's experiences hold the key to effectively understanding and addressing online harassment.
3. Creating a common vocabulary is a critical step to scoping the problem, engaging in productive discourse, and developing solutions.
4. Grassroots groups supporting individuals play a key role in the ecosystem; it is important to provide funding to maintain and distribute their offerings.
5. Creating better outcomes for individuals is possible through multi-stakeholder efforts.

What's Included

The report is comprised of three parts outlined below, to create a baseline of the current state of online harassment and explore opportunities for collaboration.

Part 1

The Evolution of Online Harassment

How did we get here?

By highlighting real life stories and events, we identify past failures and key trends as we head into 2020.

- The disaggregation of “trolling” into 4 different levels allows targets of harassment, press, and stakeholders to distinguish between distinct bad actors, motivations, and effects
 - The failure to disaggregate “trolling” has allowed for the amplification of tactics that ultimately resulted in the disinformation/misinformation in the media landscape today
 - Trends: impact on journalists, warning signs from marginalized groups, and gaps in our current understanding
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Part 2

The Individual Experience and Responses

What do people need?

Through the lens of how people experience online harassment, we provide an overview of the current ecosystem of resources available and existing gaps.

- What common experiences and needs people have when facing online harassment
 - What options, remedies, and resources are available
 - Trends: platform, research, legislation, and policy developments and challenges
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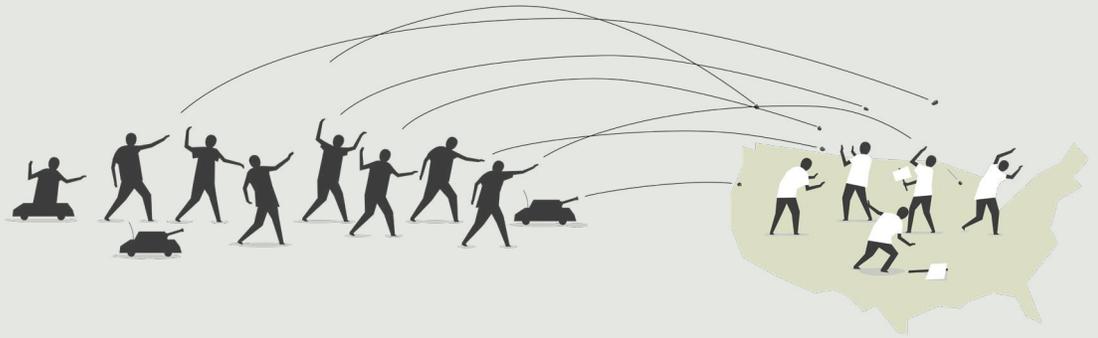
Part 3

Creating Effective Outcomes

What can we do now?

By assessing pain points and levers for systemic change, we share recommendations and opportunities to create better outcomes for individuals.

- Aligning on a common vocabulary
- Amplifying and addressing the needs of targets
- Building coalitions for multi-stakeholder, interdisciplinary efforts



Below are a few key frameworks and graphics developed to share our understanding of online harassment

Fig 1.5 – p.29

The 4 Levels of “Trolling”

Fig 2.3 – p.34

Tactics by Medium: Text, Multimedia, and Operations

Fig 2.4 – p.35

The Components of an Online Harassment Experience

Fig 2.5 – p.37

In the Moment: Individual Needs, Options, and Resources

Fig 2.13 – p.57

The 5-Point Solutions Framework

Fig 3.2 – p.67

An Online Harassment Theory:
How Content and Context Come Together

Fig 3.5 – p.70

How Online Harassment Works:
The Online Harassment Interaction

The report aims to portray a snapshot of online harassment in this moment of time. We hope the report serves as a valuable tool to catalyze meaningful dialogue and collaboration that, in turn, results in the refinement and further development of the report with additional input.

04	Welcome Letter
06	Executive Summary
08	Note from the Editor
09	Introduction: Scope and Methodology
<hr/>	
11	Part 1: The Evolution of Online Harassment: How did we get here?
12	Online Harassment Before Gamergate
14	The Gamergate Period: 2014 - 2016
19	Online Harassment in a Post-2016 Election World
25	The Future: Heading Into 2020
<hr/>	
30	Part 2: The Individual Experience: What do people need and how do they get help?
33	Behaviors and Tactics
36	Needs and Options
39	1. DIY Resources
41	2. Support from Family and Friends
42	3. Civil Society Initiatives
46	4. Social Media and Social Networking Platforms
51	Other Solutions or Initiatives
51	Research
55	Legislation and Policy
57	A Solutions Framework
<hr/>	
60	Part 3: Better Outcomes for Targets of Online Harassment: What can we do?
62	Develop a Common Vocabulary to Describe and Understand Online Harassment
67	Amplify and Address Targets' Needs
74	Build Coalitions
<hr/>	
77	Part 4: Looking Forward
79	Appendices
106	Endnotes and Bibliography
122	Acknowledgements Page

To download a full version of the report, please visit onlineSOS.org. OnlineSOS is a nonprofit organization that supports individuals facing online harassment through actionable resources and advocacy. The intention of this report is to catalyze and facilitate collaboration. For any questions, comments, or to get involved, please contact [team\[at\]onlineSOS.org](mailto:team@onlineSOS.org) or Liz Lee at [liz\[at\]onlineSOS.org](mailto:liz[at]onlineSOS.org).

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You recognized online harassment and abuse as a problem before it became popular or obvious. You had the insight, foresight, and boldness to act. Thank you for being trailblazers, risk-takers, innovators. Thank you for your commitment to change and willingness to take action, for your commitment to impacting the next generation of journalists and activists, women and girls, to thrive on the internet, free from online harassment and abuse.

