Digital Ethics and Objectification: A Character and Culturally Based Education Approach to Addressing Online Misconduct Toward Public Figures

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of role-playing pedagogy in enhancing Javanese language proficiency aligned with traditional etiquette principles (unggah-ungguh) among fifth-grade students at SD Negeri Pucangan 3. Recognizing that Javanese linguistic-cultural competence serves as both a character-building tool and a vehicle for cultural preservation, the research employed a two-cycle Classroom Action Research (CAR) methodology comprising planning, implementation, observation, and reflection phases. Twenty participants were assessed through performance-based observations using instruments adapted from established protocols, with data analyzed through reduction, systematic presentation, and cyclical interpretation. Initial assessments revealed only 37.5% mastery of etiquette-appropriate Javanese communication, evaluating four key linguistic dimensions: (1) conversational fluency in formal contexts, (2) grammatical accuracy of honorific structures, (3) phonological precision in stratified vocabulary, and (4) contextually appropriate lexico-cultural choices. Post-intervention results demonstrated significant improvement to 71.25% mastery, confirming role-playing's efficacy in developing both linguistic competence and cultural awareness. The findings highlight how experiential learning methods can effectively bridge the gap between language acquisition and cultural transmission, particularly in maintaining indigenous linguistic etiquette among younger generations. Furthermore, the study underscores the pedagogical value of integrating performance-based strategies into character education curricula, suggesting their potential application in other indigenous language preservation contexts. These results contribute to ongoing discussions about culturally responsive teaching methodologies while providing empirical evidence for role-playing as a mechanism for sustaining linguistic heritage and reinforcing the socio-cultural values embedded within stratified language systems like Javanese. The implications extend beyond language education, offering insights into innovative approaches for holistic character development through culturally grounded pedagogies.

Keywords: sexual objectification, social media, negative comments, education

INTRODUCTION

The growth of modern society is followed by advances in information and communication technology including news, advertisements, documents, videos, and music in a neutral manner and is not limited by time, place, or subject (Cahyono, 2020; Mayolaika et al., 2021; Khanom, 2023). Social media encourages people to interact with each other through platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter). These platforms dominate social interaction among Generation Z with around 60% of each daily users in the age 16 to 24 (Global Social Media Statistics, 2024). YouTube has the largest generation Z user base that favors public commentary based on shared video content. Meanwhile, X provides a short, quick communication space that allows users to follow trending topics or event, often sparking discussion or criticsm (Burgess & Baym, 2022).

On the other hand, the ease of expressing on social media is often misused and can trigger negative impact that potentially led to phenomena of hoaxes, sexual violence, fraud, and so on (Yulieta et al., 2021). Social media is also a space where the reputation of public figures is shaped and criticised. The content they post, or share invites many comments and various responses from its readers (Tyas et al., 2019). One example is American female singer and songwriter Billie Eilish. Billie who has been recognised since she was a teenager has not only achieved fame through her music but has also become a symbol of Gen Z who dares to express her exploratively through fashion and social media. Billie known for her unique syle of oversize clothing that resists objectification, but when she began to appear in more revealing clothing there was a change in the wave of sexualized and degrading comments. These disparate reactions show that women's self-expression in digital spaces is vulnerable to gender bias regardless of context of personal choice.

Comments on social media are defined by the Oxford Dictionary as a verbal or written remark expressing an opinion or reaction. However, not all comments are positive and neutral. Many of them contain negative elements, including online objectification or harassment that reflect broader social issues such as gender-based violence. Buchanan & Mahoney (2022) in their research revealed, 3 types of sexual harassment namely sexual harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. Schär (2024) adds that these forms often appear in obsessive sexual nature, sexual advances, or comments about a person's gender in particular.

Sexual objectification is not only experienced by public figures like Billie Eilish. Based on observations of other public figures such as Lil Nas X, Justin Bieber, Doja Cat, and Taylor Swift, it was found that this phenomenon is across generation and genders. However, Billie Eilish receives more objectifying comments that can be attributed to her dressing style and the way she expresses sexuality in her music, such as in the song *Lunch* (2024) and her collaboration with Charli XCX in *Guess* (2024). This phenomenon in line with Vendemia & Fox (2024) highlight that social media users have control

over their self-presentation, but negative sexualised comments often remain in response. This phenomenon is becoming increasingly relevant with the rise of non-idealized role models advocating for body acceptance and appearance diversity (de Lenne et al., 2023).

Theoretically, sexual objectification is understood as a societal culture that places women as objects to be observed, evaluated, and enjoyed (Widodo, 2020). Ward (2023) emphasises that women's sexual attractiveness often prioritizes over other attributes, which can result in society's perception of women as less competent and less human that non-objectified women. The judgment of physical appearance is a result of thoughts or perceptions and attitudes about body shape that reflect a person's appearance (Azahra, 2024). Factors such as gender inequality and cultural norms also compound harmful comments (Pahrijal et al., 2024). These negative impacts extend to the individual level, including poor body image, decreased mental health, and self-objectification. These perceptions are then reinforcd by mass media through the level of sexualization in the representation of women and men (Fasoli, 2018).

To explain the forms of objectification, Martha Nussbaum (1995) identifies seven key features that may be involved in treating as an object: 1) Instrumentality: treating someone merely as a tool for another's purpose; 2) Denial of Autonomy: treating someone as if he or she has no independece or capacity to make his or her own decisions; 3) Inertness: treating someone as if he or she has no activity or agency; 4) Fungibility: treating someoe as something that can be exchanged with another person; 5) Violability: treating someone as something that is legitimate to be damaged or violated; 6) Ownership: treating someone as something that can be owned or controlled by another person; 7) Denial of Subjectivity: treating someone as if his or her experiences or feelings are not worth paying attention to. However, Nussbaum also adds that instrumentalization is not always morally wrong because in certain contexts such as in healthy romantic or sexual relationship, objectification can occur without diminishing her dignity or humanity (Jütten, 2016). Pecini (2023) supports this view by stating that some forms of objectification are acceptable and even increase the recipient's self-esteem. Pecini also highlights that objectification does not necessarily lead to dehumanization, although the two are often linked. In response, Timo Jütten (2016, p.5) critizes that instrumentalization in which objectification is not only about treatment as a tool, but also how sexual object status is attached to individuals through social and cultural norms. According to her, objectification often occurs systemically, even in the absence of direct interpersonal relationships. For example, women in sexist societies may be treated directly, but because of social expectations that require them to appear or behave in a certain way. In the digital context, Jütten's approach becomes relevant because the phenomenon of sexual objectification on social media does not only appear in individual interactions, but also through communication patterns, gender stereotypes, and embedded social expectations.

By these findings, language education and digital literacy are important as tools to respond to the phenomenon of sexual objectification in negative comments towards public figures. Efforts to fight objectification have begun to emerge, one of which is through counter-messagig communities that rely on the role of peers. van Oosten (2021) explains that adolescent girls utilize social media to fight objectification by forming brave and supportive communities to fight for positive representations of envy. In addition, efforts to improve digital literacy are an important step in supporting these counter-messages. Hendaryan (2022) emphasized that good digital literacy can help young people to be more critical of the information received and disseminated through social media and build social responsibility in the digital space. Wahab (2022) added that good digital literacy can strengthen character education and social ethics. In this context, the use of counter speech becomes a strategy to deal with hateful content directly. Maarouf et al (2024) show that counter speech, whether carried out manually or through automated tools such as bots, has been proven to be able to reduce the spread of hate speech by encouraging the removal of such content and preventing more harmful posts.

Digital literacy skills are related to students' language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Sahidillah, 2019). Digital literacy requires strategies, such as training in the wise use of digital devices and outreach regarding law and ethics in digital media (Mustofa, 2019). With this step, it is hoped that the younger generation can understand how to interact ethically in cyberspace, so that the phenomenon of sexual harassment or other negative comments, including objectification, can be minimized Careless comments can not only damage reputation, but also have an impact on a person's psychological, emotional condition and even mental health (Marlef et al., 2024). Furthermore, understanding of digital ethics must be instilled from an early age. Sari et al (2024, p.7) asserts that children who understand ethics will consider whether something is good or bad. It is also important to instill an understanding that every comment posted in the digital space can have a direct impact on the individual it is targeted. Therefore, every social media user must understand moral responsibility in online communication.

Based on the background above, this study aims to analyze negative comments directed at Billie Eilish over the past Three years (2021-2024) from various social media platforms. The findings of this study intend to contribute to the development of digital literacy based English education. Furthermore, this study contributes to supporting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 16 which focuses on peace, justice, and strong institutions.

METHOD

Qualitative methods were employed, following the guidelines outlined by Creswell & Creswell (2017), which emphasize understanding phenomena in their natural settings and building broader explanations based on patterns or naturalistic generalizations from the data. Using an inductive logic

approach, the research began with the collection and analysis of specific data, allowing patterns, themes, and broader insights to appear naturally. The primary data consisted of screenshots of negative comments directed at Billie Eilish from her official social media platforms, including Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and TikTok, with a focus on posts from the past three years (2021–2024) related to her public activities, events, or releases. Comments selected for analysis were those that met the sexual objectification criteria of focusing on Billie's physical appearance, sexuality, or make implicit or explicit claims about her role as an object. Comments that were general, contained only irrelevant emojis, spam, or were in non-english were exclude. To maintain research ethics, all usernames have been anonymised using pseudonymisation techniques (e.g. @***i4la2), so that the linguistic content remains instact without divulging identities.

The researcher developed a coding manual containing operational definitions and concrete examples of each category based on Nussbaum's (1995) objectification framework, which includes Instrumentality, Denial of Autonomy, Inertness, Fungibility, Violability, Ownerhip, and Denial of Subjectivity. The coding process and data interpretation were validated through discussions with the supervisor as an expet validator. This carried out in staes t evaluate the compatibility between the initial findings and the meaning of the categories, so that the results could be scientifically accounted for even though they were carried out by one researcher. The next step was thematic analysis to identify the most prominent patterns of objectification and their sociolinguistic implications. This method was chosen because it allows an in-depth exploration of the meaning behind the text, especially in the context of digital culture and ender. This research is directed by the following three main questions:

1. What forms of online objectification as digital misconduct toward public figures?
2. How can a digital ethics approach be used to address online misconduct toward public figures?

RESULTS & DISCUSSION
Result
A total of 100 negative comments taken from 4 social media platforms over a period of 3year (2021-2024) found 50 comments that lead to sexual objectification and were analyzed by adopting Nussbaum (1995) framework. The coding process and data interpretation were validated through discussions with the supervisor as an expert validator. This was done to evaluate the findings with the theoretical meaning of each category so that the results could be accounted for even with only 1 researcher. The distribution of sexual objectification types is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Forms of Sexual Objectification by Martha Nussbaum (1995)

No.	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Platform dominant
1	Instrumentality	17	34%	Instagram (12/17)
2	Denial of Autonomy	10	20%	X (7/10)
3	Violability	7	14%	Instagram (5/7)
4	Denial of Subjectivity	6	12%	YouTube (4/6)
5	Ownership	4	8%	TikTok (3/4)

No.	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Platform dominant
6	Fungibility	4	8%	Instagram (3/4)
7	Inertness	2	4%	X (2/2)
	Total	**50**	**100%**	**Instagram**

The most frequent and dominant of the 7 categories is Instrumentality (34%), followed by Denial of Autonomy (20%), and Violability (14%). This finding shows a pattern that Billie Eilish repeatedly becomes a tool for gratification, and an object that can be violated. In contrast, Inertness appears least frequently (4%) which may be due to Billie being known as an active and strong figure. Likewise, Ownership and Fungibility (8%), show that although few, they are still within the realm of objectification. Platform-specific patterns are also evident where Instagram shows the most comments of Instrumentality, Violability, and Fungibility. The nature of platforms that emphasize visual display often present the body as an object, which may encourage users to frequently judge and comment on a person's physique. While on X more Denial of Autonomy and Inertness were found due to the more direct format of text and discussion on the platform. YouTube and TikTok have less Subjectivity and Ownership which indicates that objectification still occurs on these platforms.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the most common form of sexual objectification is instrumentality, where Billie Eilish is reduced to a tool for others' desires, often through explicit metaphors or direct references to her body. This relates to Jütten (2016) that sexual objectification can be formed from social and cultural norms. For instance, comments referencing "lunch" appear to be adapted from Billie's song lyrics, suggesting that objectifying can stem from popular culture. This phenomenon is consistent with Samosir (2024), who note that negative comment often uses figurative language such as metaphor or irony to disguise ill intent. This finding also is in line with Ward (2023) that female sexual attractiveness tends to be emphasized over other qualities, thus reducing Billie's identity. This reflect with Azahra (2024) noted about society's perception of body image influencing how individuals are judged based on their appearance rather than abilities. In additions, these results of this study show how gender inequality and cultural norms, as identified by Pahrijal et al (2024) allow harmful comments that reinforce stereotypes about women's roles.

In addition, Generation Z, which according to Xie (2024) is influenced by the internet and prefers to share personal information on social media, plays an important role in shaping both positive and negative interactions with public figures (Pew Research Center, 2024).

Forms of Sexual Objectification

Instrumentality

Based on Martha Nussbaum's framework, Billie Eilish is consistently reduced to fulfilling the commenter's fantasy, which only focuses on some parts of the body without considering Billie's individual rights. For example, some comments on phrases such as (1), (3), and (5) treat her body as an object to be consumed or experienced. Some comments that use the word 'lunch' are metaphors and are adapting from a lyric in Billie's song "Lunch" in the opening lyrics, namely 'I could eat that girl for lunch'. In an interview with Rolling Stone, she revealed the song was an exploration of sexuality and helped her come into her own (Zemler, 2024). Therefore, it is possible that commenters adopted or produced the term from her lyrics as a form of sexual expression or objectifying humor. Moreover, comments such as (4) explicitly objectify her body, by focusing on intimate body parts and reducing them to objects of sexual fantasy. Statements like these reflect how women, especially public figures like Billie Eilish, are often seen through a narrow lens of their physicality, which can reinforce harmful stereotypes about women's roles in society, framing Billie as existing only for the visual or sexual pleasure of others.

Table 2. Examples of Instrumentality

No.	Platform	Username	Comment	Year
1	Instagram	@ ***i4la2	i could eat that girl for lunch	2024
2	X	@ ***_like_ribs	No makeup no cleaning up no aesthetics, just lace panties and pets smh eww	2024
3	Instagram	@***ler._.lynn	I need to kiss you. On da lips👄	2024
4	Instagram	@***ot_mayagibson	I would milk those mommy milkers respectfully" dan "who lost sucking her nipple	2024
5	Instagram	@ ***ont891	Damn those lips are so 🔥. How do they taste?	2024

Through these comments, we can see how digital platforms, where objectification is often not taken seriously, reinforce a culture of sexual harassment and dehumanization. The comments discussed here show how instrumentalities emerge in online interactions, and this highlights the need for broader conversations about respect, consent, and recognition of women as whole individuals.

Denial of Autonomy

The comments above reflect a denial of autonomy towards Billie Eilish, where her body is seen as an object that is free to be commented on and treated without considering her rights as an individual. For example, comments such as (1) which mentions that Billie will "give gays disease" treats her body and sexual identity as something that can be insulted and mocked, ignoring the fact that everyone is entitled to their own sexual identity and orientation. Comments such as (2), (3) and (5), which focus

attention on Billie's body parts, also illustrate how her body is viewed as a sexual object that exists only to be seen and commented on. In this case, her body is treated as if it is something that must be exhibited or included in the public world for the enjoyment of others. This clearly shows a denial of autonomy, as Billie is viewed only from her physical perspective and is expected to fulfill the expectations of others regarding her appearance. Similarly, the comment (4), taken on one of Billie's posts about her new music video with charlie xcx titled "Guess", suggests that the people in the video should be "sold on the market", treated as if they are commodities that can be traded or treated as others wish. Statements like this ignore the whole dimension of humanity. These comments, taken together, show how sexual objectification in the form denial of autonomy is harmful, as it fosters a culture where women are not valued as individuals with full rights to themselves.

Table 3. Examples of Denial of Autonomy

No.	Platform	Username	Comment	Year
1	Instagram	@***ii2309	DOOO NOT GO TO HER TOUR! SHELL GIVE YOU THE GAY DISEASE!	2024
2	Instagram	@***rafreitas27	Hot look at that big chest huh	2023
3	Instagram	@***cooscvv	if I ever go camping with you I would not need to get a pillow	2023
4	Instagram	@***amos_04_	These people should be sold in the market	2024
5	Instagram	@***rplebrain00	You've got banging tiddies, flaunt them bitties!!!!	2024

Violability

The comments reflect that one's body, in this case Billie Eilish's, is seen as something that can be "violated" or treated as others wish without regard to personal boundaries or consent. For example, comments such as (1) which asks if it is possible to shoot bodily fluids into Billie's body, or (2) which describes an explicit sexual act, show the violation of one's body and autonomy in a very blatant way. It not only reduces Billie to a sexual object but also assumes that her body can be "used" or accessed without permission. In this case, there is a violation of her physical integrity, which should be respected as part of her privacy. Comments such as (3) which suggests selling Billie's underwear as merchandise and (4) which questions who "lost" the opportunity to perform sexual acts on her, further demonstrate the violation of Billie's physical and sexual integrity. It regards her body not as something to be cherished and protected, but as a commodity or object that can be shared or traded. This kind of violation leads to a culture that does not value the rights of one's body and creates injustice in the way women, especially public figures, are treated in digital spaces.

Table 4. Examples of Violability

No.	Platform	Username	Comment	Year
1	Instagram	@***09445	can I shoot 4 months worth of my j l z z on to your body	2024
2	Instagram	@***icity.h	put your tongue away before I sit on it	2024
3	Instagram	@***briddybit h	you should sell the panties as merch	2024
4	Instagram	@***uu	who lost sucking her nipple	2023

Such comments are not isolated incidents but are part of a broader pattern of gender-based objectification online. Koester & Marcus (2024) argue that sharing of visual content may also have a distinctive role in shaping attitudes related to male and female physical bodies, encouraging individuals to see themselves from external lens, potentially contribute to self-objectification. This encourages gender stereotypes that make women on social media prime targets for sexualization. Tahir & Agustin (2023) further note such stereotypes perpetuate women's powerlessness, placing them in undervalued position.

Denial of Subjectivity

Table 5. Examples of Denial of Subjectivity

No.	Platform	Username	Comment	Year
1	Instagram	@***mguy	do you really think we care are a rat's ass what your into??	2024
2	X	@***ewithanymore	CANCEL BILLIE EILISH! DO NOT BUY BILLIE EILISH TOUR TICKETS SHE ROBBED MY HOUSE AND STOLE ALL OF MY DOGS AND SHOES	2024
3	Instagram	@***g1eeye0	May I kiss your roses?	2023

In this case, the comments directed at Billie Eilish show how her personal feelings, views or experiences are ignored, and she is treated as if she only exists to fulfill the needs or expectations of others. For example, comments like (1) that express indifference to what Billie likes reflect how others disregard her opinions and preferences as an individual. This comment directly removes her right to have the subjectivity to have interests, views, or feelings that are considered important. In this case, Billie is treated as if she is just a public figure without the right to be respected as a human being with opinions and a private life. Comment (2) which makes up false accusations also shows a denial of Billie's subjectivity. The commenter treats her as the subject of a joke or ridicule, as if her reputation or feelings as an individual do not matter. Comment (3) which talks about "roses" in an implicitly sexual way treats Billie as an object that exists to fulfill other people's desires or fantasies, without thinking about how she might feel about the way she is referred to or treated in the comment.

Ownership

Table 6. Examples of Ownership

No.	Platform	Username	Comment	Year
1	Instagram	@***rmaras	marry me	2024
2	Instagram	@***_wtzs	IF YOU WANT TO WALK OVER ME I WILL	2024

Comments such as (1) and (2) illustrate a form of ownership of Billie Eilish, where commenters demonstrate claims against her implicitly or explicitly. For example, some comments such as (1) which states "marry me" assume that Billie is someone who can be owned through marriage, without considering her own feelings or desires. These sentences, although they may seem simple or ordinary, still reflect a form of claim against himself, where the commenter assumes he has the right to terminate such a relationship without truly respecting his agency or will. Meanwhile, the comment (2) shows an extreme form of ownership, where the commenter voluntarily offers himself to be controlled or objectified. However indirectly also places Billie in a position of power over their bodies. This reinforces the idea that Billie is not an individual with free will, but rather someone whose existence is only judged by how she can fulfill other people's fantasies or desires. These comments reflect how ownership can emerge through the way commenters project their desires for someone's body or life, especially a public figure like Billie Eilish, without considering that she is an individual who has rights in her own right.

Fungibility

Table 7. Examples of Fungibility

No.	Platform	Username	Comment	Year
1	Instagram	@***eleeray078	OMG LOOK AT THE SIZE OF THOSE BALLOONS!!!!	2024
2	Instagram	@***udhi_	Rounded. Wet. Twin hills	2022

In the case of comments such as (1) and (2), Billie is seen as an object that can be described, measured, or compared to inanimate objects. The comment (1) which mentions "OMG LOOK AT THE SIZE OF THOSE BALLOONS" clearly focuses on Billie's body becoming a "balloon" like object. In this case, the body is treated as something that can be exchanged or compared with other objects that have similar characteristics. Likewise, the comment (2) which describes her body with words such as "Rounded. Wet. Twin hills" further emphasizes that her body parts are seen as abstract objects which also illustrates how her body is replaceable with other objects that have similar properties, like "twin hills."

Inertness

Table 8. Examples of Inertness

No.	Platform	Username	Comment	Year
1	Instagram	@***1450tee	She is in the category of worst looking people to make it to the top. Her looks, speech, and music are all second rated	2024

Comments like (1) show an aspect of inertness because they try to judge Billie Eilish from her appearance, way of speaking, and music as if her existence is completely measured by other people's standards or opinions. This comment implies that Billie had no active control or contribution to her success, but rather as if her success only occurred due to luck or external factors. By calling her the "worst looking person to make it to the top", commenters not only criticized his appearance but also belittled his hard work, talent, and autonomy as an artist.

The influence of mass media and digital environments in promoting sexualized representations discussed by Fasoli (2018) is also evident in the way Billie was portrayed and commented on without significant social reprimand. Although Pecini (2023) states that objectification sometimes have positive impact, the nature of the comments examined here largely reflected dehumanization. Therefore, it shows that the category of inertness, which according to Jütten can occur without direct instrumentality, is a category that is rarely found in commentaries and provides a new perspective that public figures can still maintain aspects of their subjectivity.

Digital Literacy Training

This study reinforces van Oosten (2021) findings that peer-based counter message communities can be one the effective efforts to counter objectification. However, in contrast to van Oosten who highlighted the actions of adolescent girls, this study found that public figures such as Billie Eilish remain vulnerable to objectification, so a community-based approach lone is not enough without broader digital literacy support.

In addition, the relevance of this study to realize peace and justice as stated in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 16 need to be highlighted. To that end, this study proposed innovations is to use real comments from social media as teaching material. By analyzing examples of negative comments containing sexual objectification, students can be trained to recognize and understand how language can be used to demean or objectify individuals. As part of learning activities, students can be encouraged to think critically by categorizing comments based on Nussbaum's seven features of objectification. This approach is expected to increase their awareness of the ethical impact of language use.

Furthermore, students can be involved in collaborative projects to design digital campaigns that promote more respectful online communication. Such projects could include creating posters, videos, or

social media posts aimed at countering the language of objectification while educating the public about the importance of using inclusive and respectful language. In this way, students not only hone language skills, but also apply their knowledge in real-world contexts while building a sense of social responsibility.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the pervasive issue of sexual objectification targeting public figures like Billie Eilish in digital environments, revealing how such practices both perpetuate and reflect a wider cultural normalization of demeaning online discourse. Beyond documenting these harmful phenomena, the research highlights the critical need for proactive educational measures to combat digital gender-based harassment. Such interventions should cultivate awareness of how ostensibly casual derogatory comments can inflict profound psychological and emotional harm on recipients. By implementing these strategies, we may work toward mitigating online objectification and fostering more inclusive, ethically conscious digital communities. While the current study focuses exclusively on social media commentary analysis, subsequent research should investigate the tangible effects of educational programs on users' digital conduct, assessing their efficacy in cultivating responsible online interactions and promoting digital citizenship. This expanded focus would provide valuable insights into practical solutions for creating safer, more respectful virtual spaces.

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