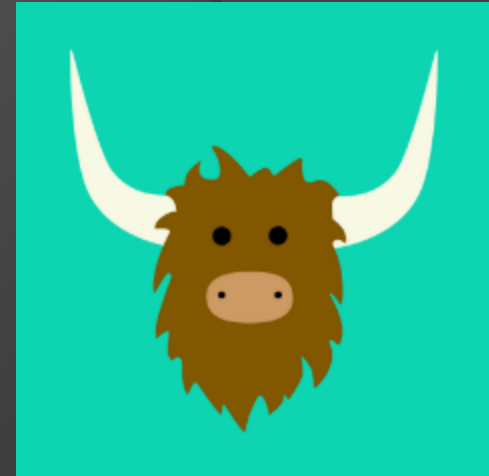


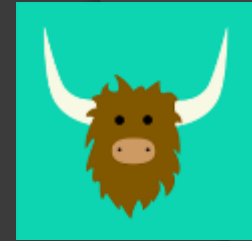
YIK YAK



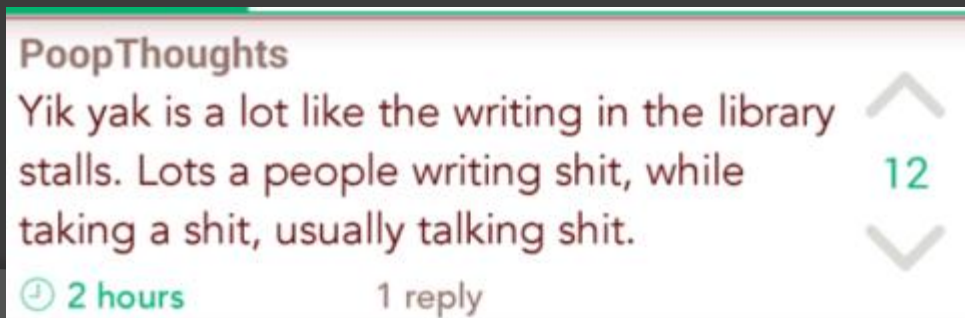
It's not all bad;
but, yes there are some bad parts
& some actions we can take

Dr. Paul Leighton
Presented at the 2015 Women's Center Professionals Directors Meeting,
Eastern Michigan University

Yik Yak Basics



- Anonymous message board
- Pulls posts from 1.5 miles around
- Time-limited / “ephemeral”
- 200 characters
- Upvote/downvote [-5 means removal]
- Report offensive content for deletion



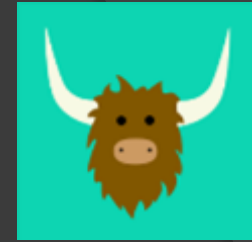
Screenshot from EMU
Yik Yak, March 2015.

Oppression & ephemeral, interactive public performance

- Some harassment reflects social inequalities
- Response shapes whether inequalities are recreated or resisted
- Public acts of oppression implicate spectators, who can encourage, discourage or be silent (= consent)

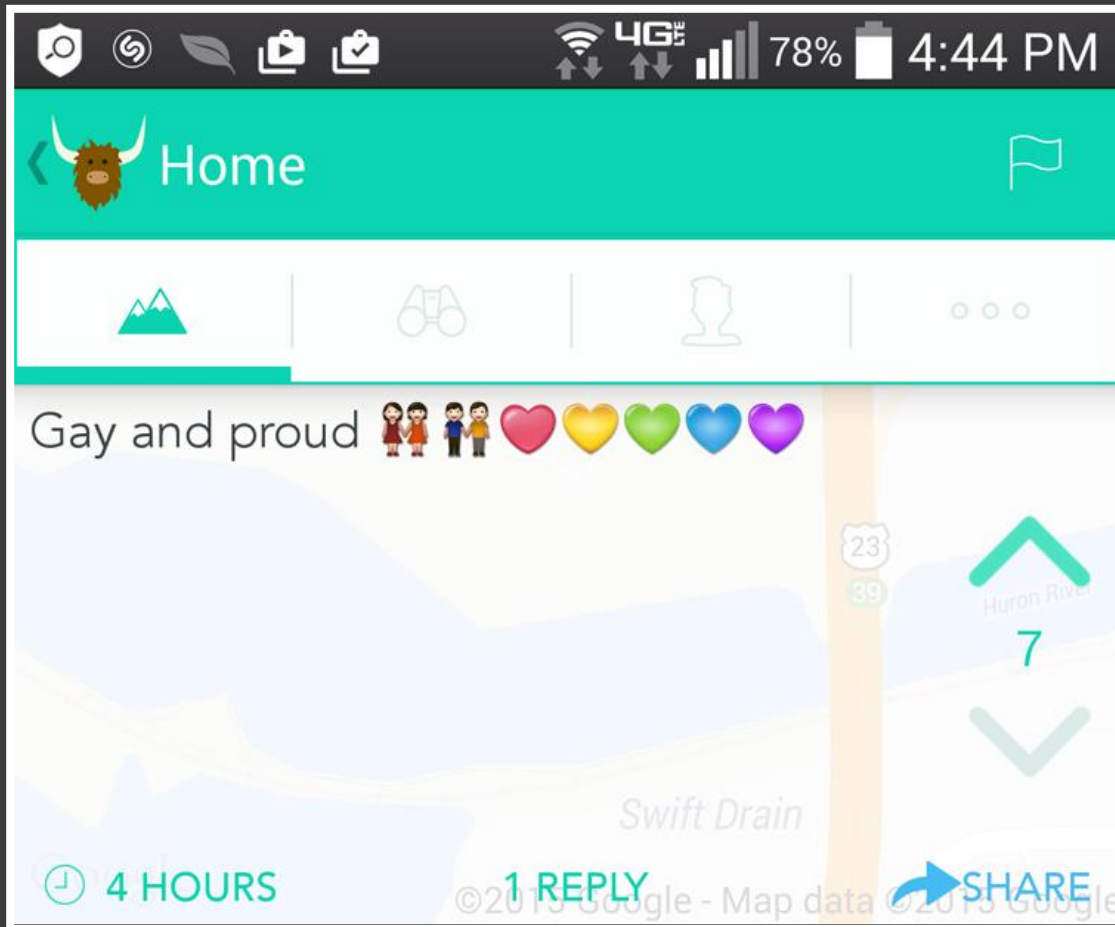


Background



- ◎ Honor's College Students
 - Gender-based slurs (b****, c****)
 - Directed at female faculty
 - While class was going on
 - Sexual harassment upvoted by others
 - See “A New Faculty Challenge: Fending Off Abuse on Yik Yak” [*Chronicle of Higher Education*](#), [*EMUtalk.org*](#)
 - Who Spewed that Abuse? Anonymous Yik Yak App Isn't Telling [*New York Times*](#)
- ◎ Wrongful behavior has come to define what Yik Yak is about

What happens when you post this?



Upvote/downvote
count.

But do not know if it is

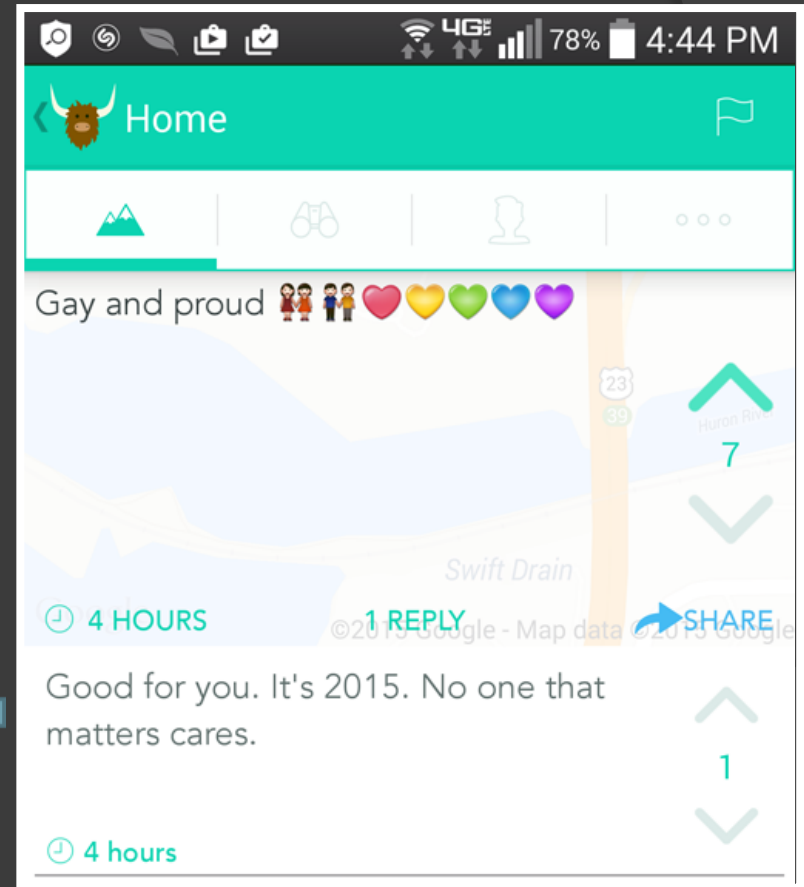
+10 and -3

Or

+30 and -23

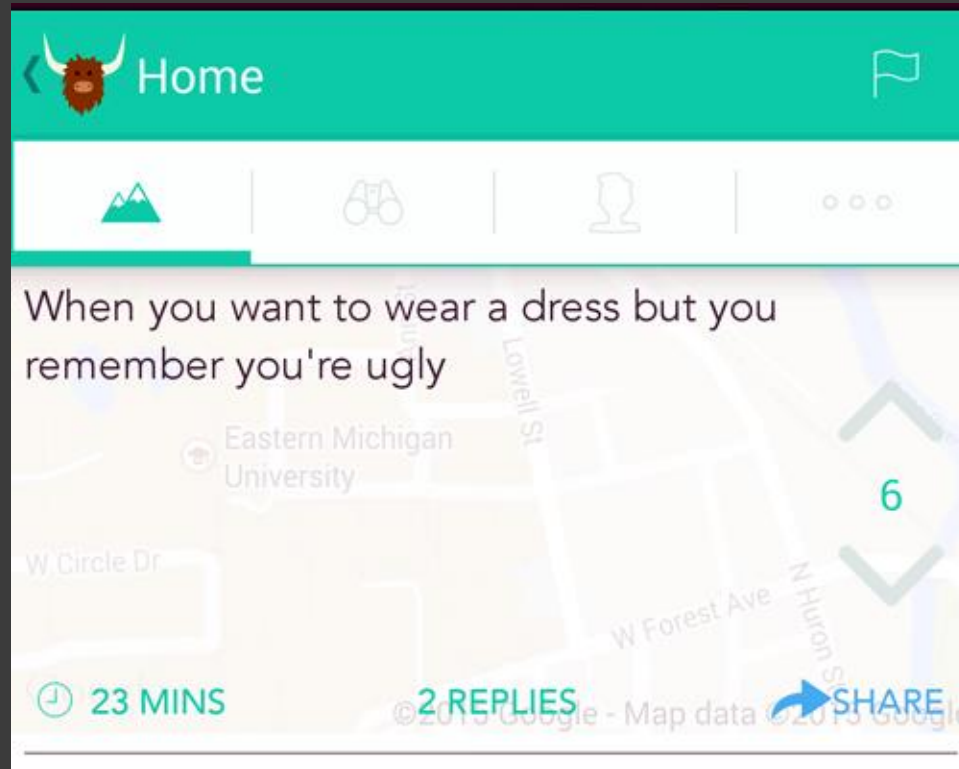
While there are homophobic posts and comments...

Heterosexual privilege includes the expectation that one's sexuality will be accepted by family, friends, co-workers and neighbors. So is belonging to the religion of your choice and knowing that your sexuality will not be denounced by its leaders.



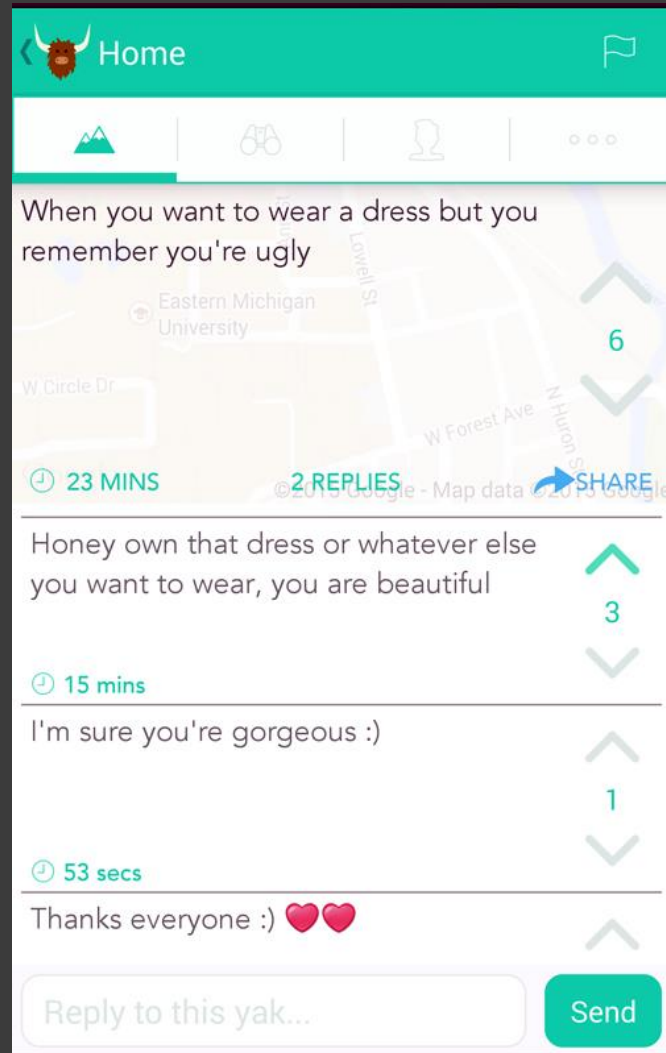
Screenshot from EMU Yik Yak, March 2015.

What happens when you post this?

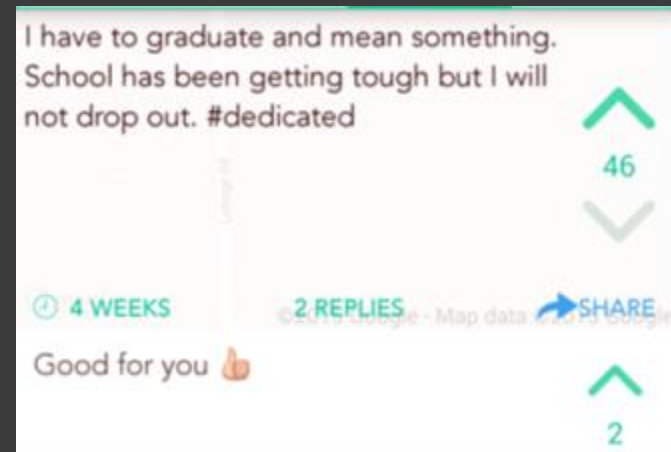


Screenshot from EMU Yik Yak, March 2015.

Social support & affirmation also happen



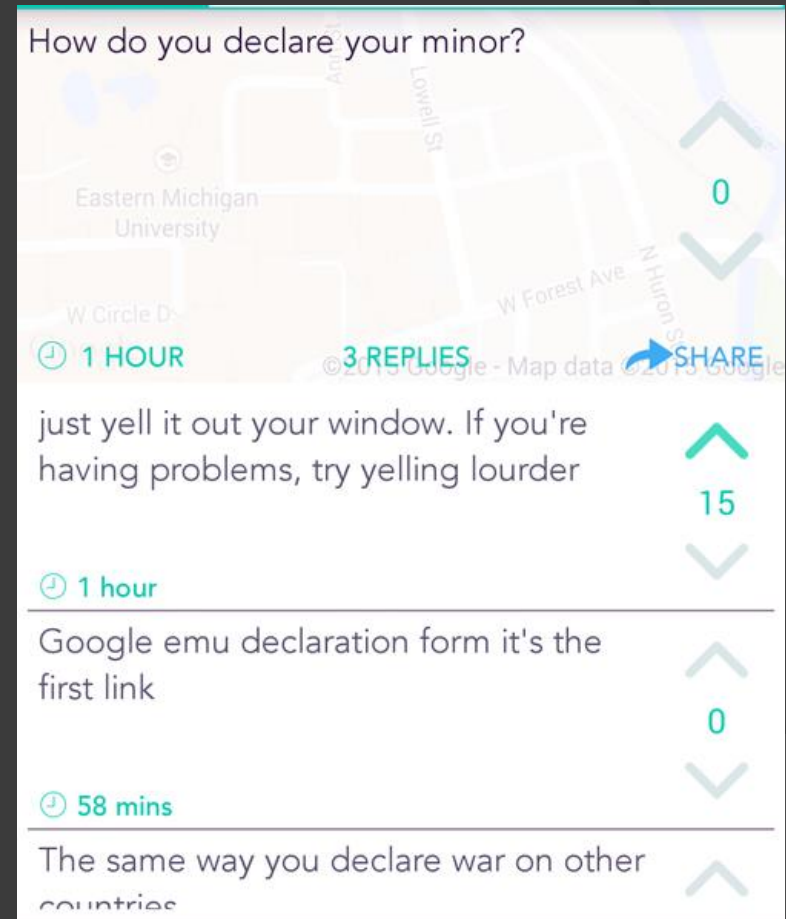
Screenshots from EMU Yik Yak,
March 2015.



“more mundane than offensive”

- “Most people are just chatting about homework, the weather, their desperation to get laid, and the timing of their bowel movements.”

-Amanda Hess,
The Upside of YikYak.
[Slate](#), 10 March 2015



Screenshot from EMU YikYak, March 2015.

Why we need to take Yik Yak seriously

He probably doesn't even realize but he said some hurtful things last night. Thinking about our friendship differently now. 😞

🕒 2 hours

2

Too much anxiety and depression to go to my first of three eight hour long classes. fuck my stupid self

🕒 3 hours

2

Never in my life have I had to visit a food pantry to eat. This is lowkey depressing.

🕒 7 weeks

7 replies

0

I failed a test. 36 hrs before I found out my friend shot herself. Prof doesn't care. I'm an honors student. What can I do?? Of course I failed, I was crying the whole test.

🕒 4 weeks

7 replies

18

So last week I lost my car, my boyfriend and found out I'm pregnant. And this week I lost my job. When's it gonna get better?

🕒 2 WEEKS

13 REPLIES

4

SHARE

I try so hard. Fuck I'm lonely. All I want is to be around people. I don't like to invite myself places. And I'm rarely invited. So here I am. Sitting alone. At night. Outside. Sondering.

🕒 9 hours

18 replies

19

How well does a professor have to know me before I ask for a recommendation?

4

Screenshots from EMU YikYak, March 2015. With several hundred posts a day, these are not necessarily representative

Not mundane, not offensive

Case 1: Force girls... (Public Service Announcement)



- The upvote indicates approval by Yik Yak users.
- They may or may not be a representative sample of EMU students in general.

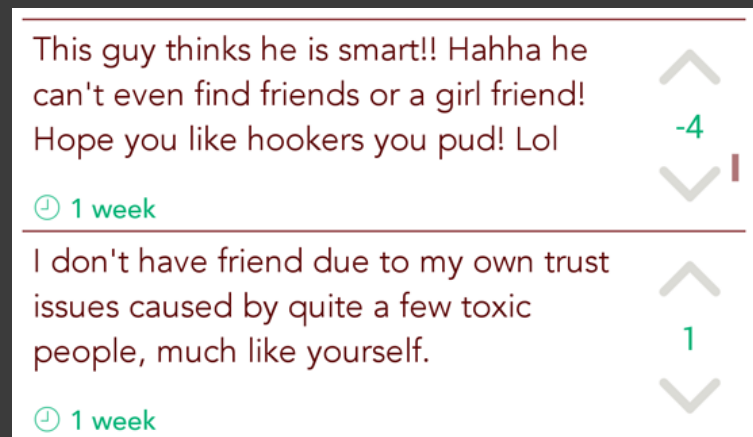
Screenshot from EMU YikYak, March 2015.

Case 2: Trying not to cry...



At -5, the post is deleted*

Next downvote deletes this because of earlier community disapproval



Would you do it?

* -5 on absolute scale, not just 5 downvotes [if 20 upvotes, then 25 downvotes to delete]

Case 2: He scares me...

The last thing I want to deal with right now is him flipping out...when I tell him I can't be with him anymore. He scares me.

0

5 WEEKS

25 REPLIES

SHARE

I don't wanna sound super wimpy, it'd be cool to have someone be with me.. I don't wanna make a big deal about it, like once his stuff is gone it will be over...I hope.

1

5 weeks

I too would volunteer time to help avoid potential domestic violence. If not you can always go to a public place.

2

5 weeks

Today is the day! He's been busy working, but he finally found time to message me.. Wish me luck.

2

5 weeks

Ah I've been drinking so I can't really be of much use to ya

0

Please tell us how it went and if you are ok.

0

5 weeks

Yeah we may not know you but we do care.

0

5 weeks

Good as long as you are safe.

2

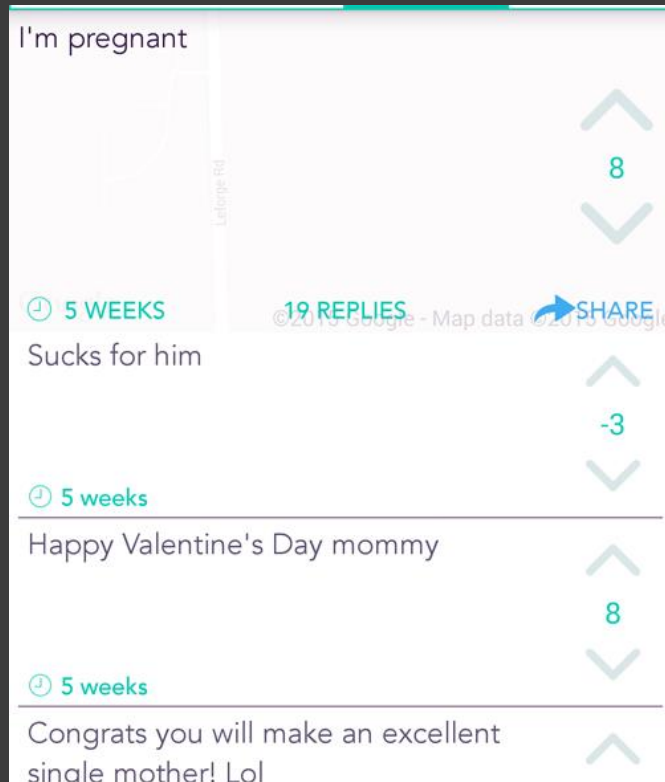
5 weeks

Yes, definitely. Thank you all:)

2

Screenshot from EMU
YikYak, 2015.

Case 3: I'm pregnant...



Screenshot from EMU
YikYak, 2015.

Why don't you fuckers stop patronising her and saying she is going to be a single mom? Grow the fuck up! If this is something you wanted, congrats. If you need anything let me know.

5 weeks

Good bystander intervention!

But...

So yes we can say that twat we are just playing the odds.

5 weeks

Omfg. You guys need to stop harassing this woman.

Case 3: I'm pregnant [2] ...



OMG = Oh my God, so OMFG...

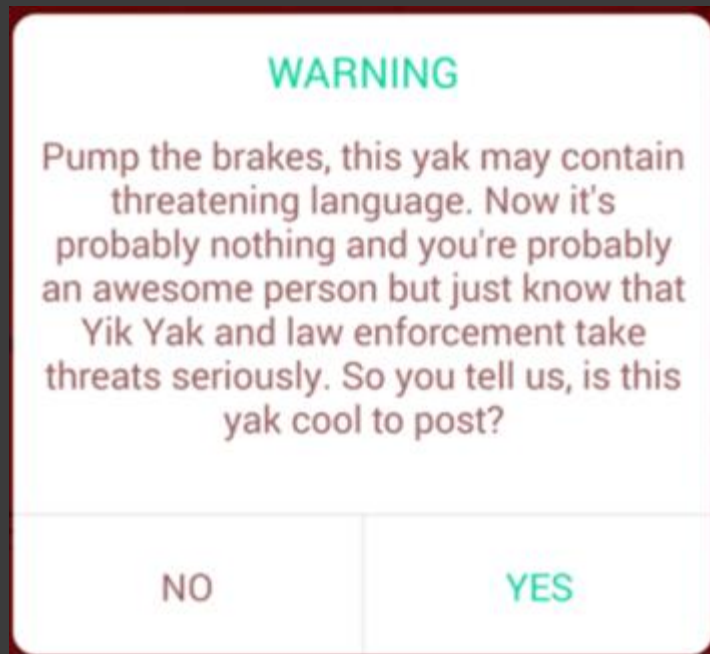
Other bystanders raise their voice

End an offensive post by being 5th downvote

Flag for deletion by Yik Yak administration

Screenshot from EMU YikYak, 2015.

Safeguards 1



WARNING

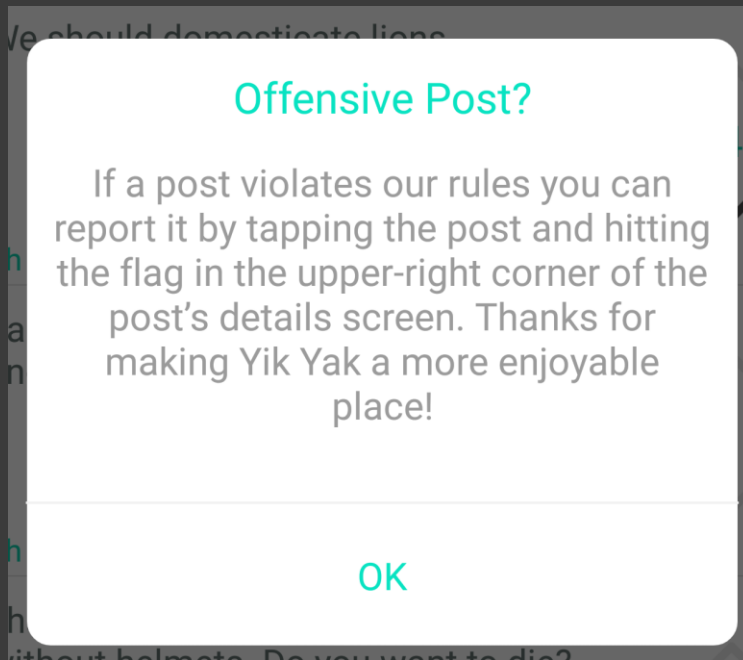
Pump the brakes, this yak may contain threatening language. Now it's probably nothing and you're probably an awesome person but just know that Yik Yak and law enforcement take threats seriously. So you tell us, is this yak cool to post?

NO YES

- Certain words (“gun” in this case) trigger this warning
- Is the list of trigger words gender sensitive?

Test for yourself, publicize results, make recommendations, publicize/pressure

Safeguards 2



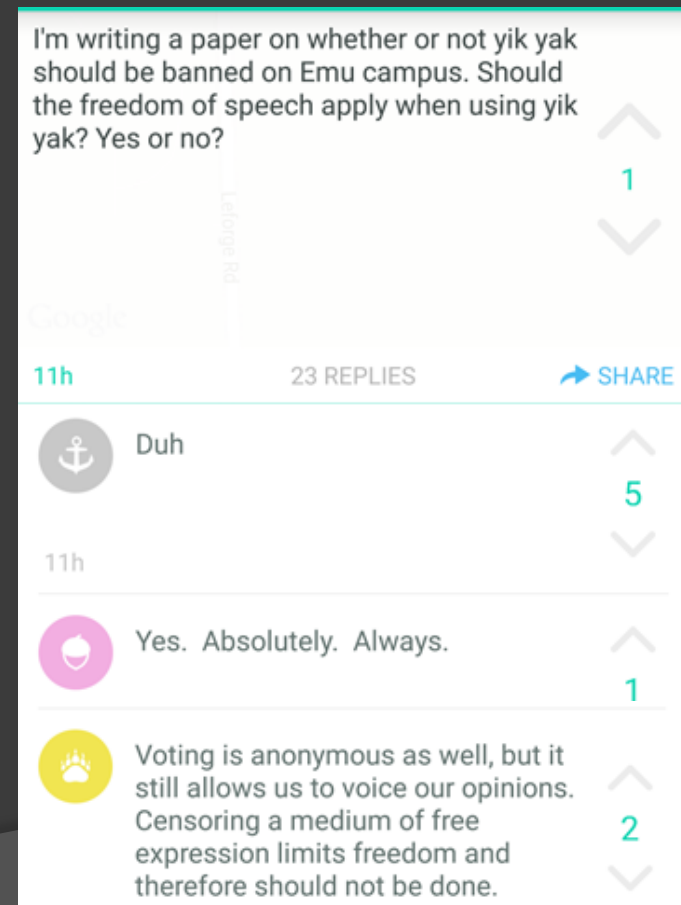
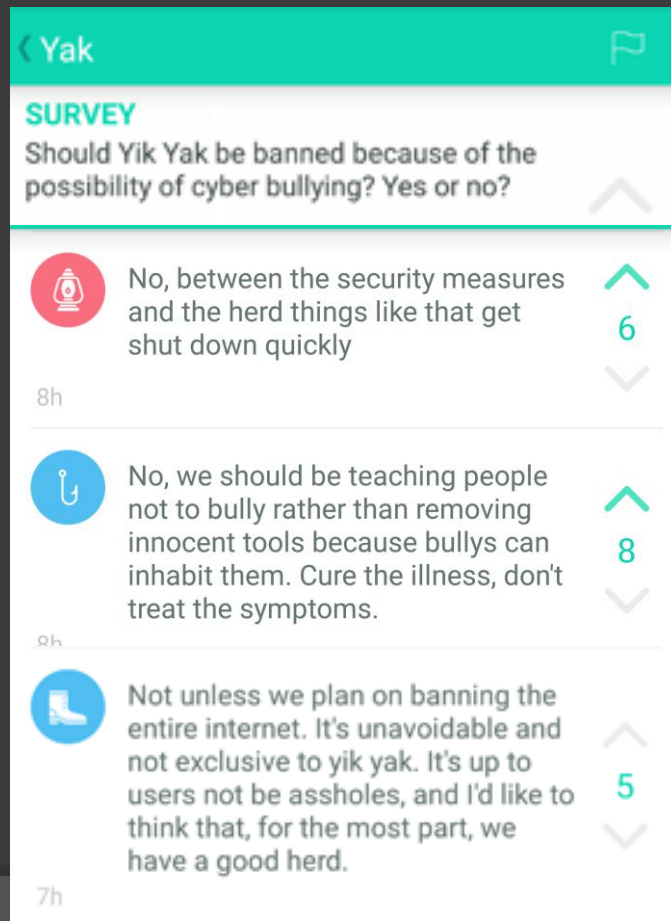
- Downvoting a post triggered this warning
- Is the follow-up of removing offensive posts gender sensitive?

Test for yourself, publicize results, make recommendations, publicize/pressure

Conclusions 1

- Given self-expression on Yik Yak, banning it is an act of bullying

Screenshots
from EMU
Yik Yak,
June 2015

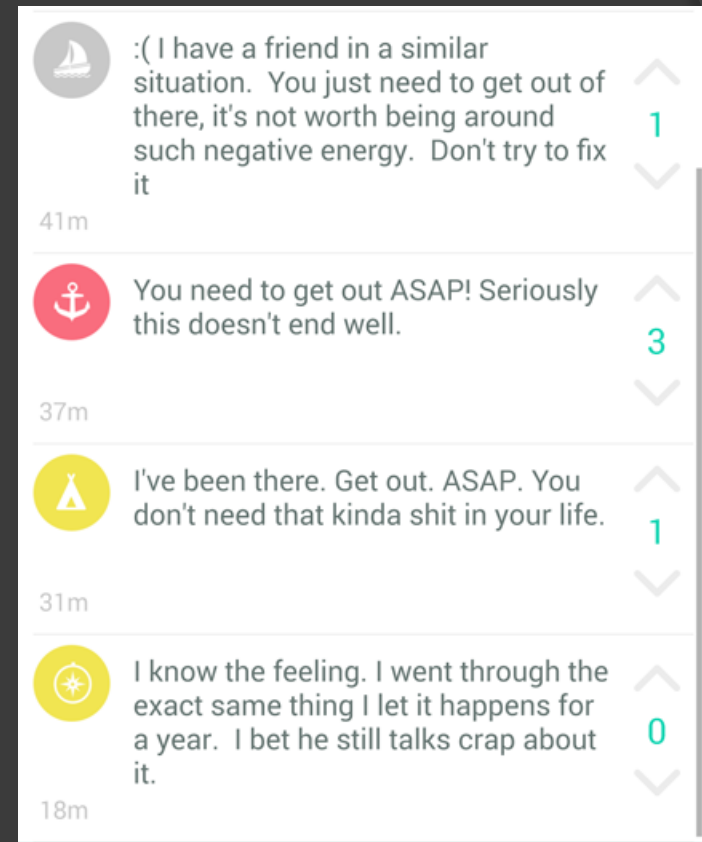
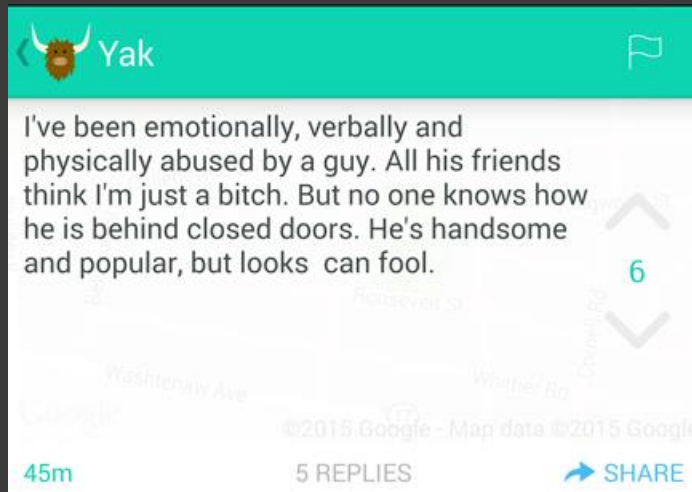


Conclusions 2

- ⦿ Larger problems of bullying reflected on Yik Yak (as well as altruism)
- ⦿ Same anonymity that makes it easy to harass also emboldens bystanders to intervene
- ⦿ How to promote positivity and effective bystander interventions, esp for harassment that reinforces oppression?

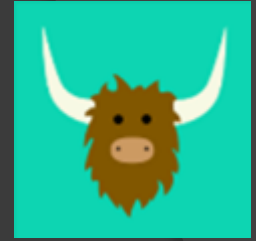
Conclusions 3

◎ OCCUPY



Screenshots from EMU Yik Yak,
June 2015

Action Steps



- ⦿ Dynamics of Yik Yak reflect ‘the Herd,’ so recruit good people to participate
- ⦿ Supporters to
 - Monitor
 - Quick response to downvote offensive posts & upvote positive ones
 - Provide information, referrals, support
- ⦿ Work to enhance ability to be articulate in 200 characters
- ⦿ Test Yik Yak safeguards, recommend improvements, publicize/pressure

Dr. Paul Leighton is a professor in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology & Criminology at Eastern Michigan University. He has been teaching a graduate level course on domestic violence and sexual assault for the 17 years he has been at EMU. Leighton served six years, including two as president, on the board of SafeHouseCenter.org. He is a co-author of *Class, Race, Gender & Crime*, 4th ed.

More information about him is available on his website,
<http://paulsjusticepage.com/paul/pauls-cv.htm>

His DV and SA class

<http://paulsjusticepage.com/emu/crm550.htm>

This presentation is a revised and expanded version of one originally presented at a 2015 ACE-EMU panel, *Workplace Bullying, Harassment, Stress and You*, as part of Women's History Month programming.