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Conducted in a coffee house on the GMU campus.

Interview with Software Developer F. He works on an open source software project that uses Vanilla Forums.

The interview focuses on his experiences with Forums in general and working to support forums on the open source software project. There is some interesting discussion of **trolling,** and of what kinds of things people do to warrant **respect** in forums. There are some good member check like things in his reactions to features like **post count** and **sigs.** Throughout the discussion there is good info on **how control is enacted in forums** by developers and administrators.

T: So, lets make sure that this thing is recording. Could you tell me a little bit about your history with the web.

F: As like completely general?

T: Yea lets start like completely general

F: I guess my fist experience with the web was when AOL first became popular. Yeah so ever since I was about 10 or 11 Ive spent at least a few hours online a day. And by high school it was a significant part of my life and I knew that it was going to be for the rest of my life as I wanted to be a software developer.

T: And what were some of the early things you did for software development particularly in relation to the web.

F: Um the most basic stuff was For software development I started right before high school. As all adolescent boys I wanted to make video games. Um and actually even before that I guess in middle school I was looking into what is not actually not web development but just making web pages. You know the most basic content creation on the web

T: So could you tell me what some of those were

F: I honestly don't think I could. I have no idea. It was mostly incredibly dumb things that struck my fancy for a few days at a time

T: What were you using to do them?

F: Even then things like dreamweaver were popular but I did not respect them. So I was working with a text editor then as I do now

T: And where would you go to get information like how did you

F: The Internets (laugh) have all the information I need. Yeah, I mean. Yeah. Until college everything I learned was maybe one text book teaching me c++ and everything else was basically from various Internet resources.

T: So, how do you think you found those resources and could you tell me what you mean by Internet resources.

F: I was a big fan of dog pile. Which was a search engine aggragator, which was popular for a while. I mean the terrible resources the equivalent now is W3C schools. And occasionally I would find better resources which probably don't exist now.

T: As I mentioned, my primary interest is in Web Forums. So could you list as many web forums that you might have participated at some point, or just some highlights.

F: I use to participate in a ton of game specific forums. You know that was my introduction to web forums and possibly spoiled the experience for me early (laughs) aside from those, what I would consider real forums now , the only ones I frequent now are the Zotero ones for work and the Ars Technica open forums for… everything else. Other than that I frequent forums for when they show up in search results basically. The Ubuntu forums particularly. And pretty much, now that I think about it Open Source forums are the only ones Ive actually found useful and So those tend to be the only ones I end up clicking on when they are in search results. As opposed to experts exchange.

T: So what do you see as the difference between those. Why do you think some are valuable and some a'rnt in those cases

F: The ones that have no motivation to get me there are generally the useful ones, and the others are mostly search engine spam

T: So the motivation, so whats the motivator in those cases

F: I mean not my motivation, their motivation. So they have some other motive other than it serving their own purposes to get and provide information.

T: Could you restate that one more time (laugh). So whats their. Another way to say this is. SO what's their motive and what's your motive

F: ==My motive is to get the information I am looking for.== To answer whatever question has caused me to go searching. Um their motivation it depends on what the forum is. If it is an open source forum or generally free or not advertising forum their motivation is to get, to be, in my position in other cases. For them to get information for themselves and occasionally to provide it if they are able. Where as you know companies that are making money of forums, their motivation is to get page views, and they don't really care if you go away with the answer you are looking for and actually, they probably want to make you click on as many pages as possible before you find that answer.

T: Sounds good, So we've got a lot of different examples here. And I think what we'll try and do is I'll ask you some questions that are about like specific incidents that happened in these things. Specific information you found, those sorts of things and you can just sort of tell me about. So, Try and remember one of the earliest times you used a forum or participated in a forum and just sorta walk me through why you went, what brought you there, what you did that sort of stuff.

F: Ok, So. As I said my earliest forum experiences were with game specific forums. Um I went there

T: Well, so could you just drill down, I mean if you have got like a specific game, if you have a memory, if you don't well go in the general sense, but if you've got like…

F: I think the first game I got that into was Teniris um which is a was a very old online Tank combat game. Um. So I think I frequented those forums. So I frequented those forums to you know find out how to be better at the game and yeah, I guess. So I was terrible. Um {laugh} and yea. I guess. Once I got involved there, it was also a very small community wise game by the time I started playing, so there was definitely a you see this person on a game server and you see them the next day too, and you see them and you get to recognize them and you get to know people. So there actually is a community there unlike with a lot of large games today. Um so I mean that, the fourms are just an extension of that. Its just another place to interact with the community outside of the game. For example, when you re at school and you can't play the game. But you need something to, not do class work.

T: So in that case, you sorta talked about going there to get information and then you talked about sorta how it became an extension of the like you saw the same people that you see in the forums, did you start participating in different ways, or were you still primarily just seeking information there.

F: Um with the community aspect I started participating. I still don't participate in forums when I am just searching for information. But yea, the, in terms of my early forum experiences I was, I started out information seeking, but that phase ended pretty quickly, turning into just community engagement and wasting time engagement in an entertaining manner.

T: Could you give me some examples of community engagement and wasting time? Both of them?

F: Getting into pointless arguments about the game and strategy and and talking shit to each-other. (both of us laugh)

T: So in the game and strategy examples what would an exchange actually look like.

F: I mean a certain of the old players who had been playing for many years. There was an effort to get the newer people to be up to snuff so they could be an actual change and {laugh} and I guess that is pretty self serving to, so that you know they could actually have more fun. So a lot of those, the most popular of those were like introductions and guides things you would see on wikis today um just to reveal the knowledge that took many years for people to gain otherwise to give you a head start.

T: And so talk about wasting time, what does that look like?

F: I guess what you'd expect on the Internet {laugh} especially with games where the a population ranged from ten year olds to fifty and sixty year olds. Um. People showing off. Um,

saying they are better than everybody else and why. And the a conversations and arguments that ensue from that. As well as just posting about whatever strikes your fancy that day and has nothing to do with the game. Because in a community, in a gaming community especially, there is going to be a lot of shared interests even outside the game

T: Gotcha, So in the example of the teneris forums, what were the features, what things could you do

F: Um its your typical phpbb features. I guess. You know start threads sticky threads respond to threads with comments um. There were post counts which is always a controversial feature. Um.

T: What's controversial about it?

F: Weather it provides anything other than a method of measuring {laughs and pauses} to go back to a phrase that I haven't heard in a long time saying how big your e-penis is.. um and weather that encourages anything useful or just post whoring that doesn't contribute anything to the forum and is just annoying.

T: Could you unpack post whoring?

F: So Post whoring, and whoring in general in that particular dictionary, um. Basically just posting to increase your post count. Yea, and attaching more meaning to post count. And all its attached whatevers than there is or should be for other people or would give it.

Comment [1]: Trevor Owens: Good stuff here on post count

T: So lets go in the opposite direction. What was your most recent web forum excursion

F: Seeing what was posted overnight in the Zotero forums. Um. Yea basically. most days if I can bring my self to (laugh) I will browse through all of the forum activity in the Zotero forums that I missed whenever I stooped looking the previous day. And usually avoid answering unless it is specifically directed at me.

T: We will return to the Zotero stuff in a bit, I mean that is, its your job. So some of the other ones..

F: So a more recent Forums experience? Last night trying to figure out a new feature, or how to restore an old feature, on my most recent update to my operating system. Again, just going through Google search and the answers generally appearing on the ubuntu or kubuntu forums. And again, never actually posting on those, just searching for information and if that's where it is hooray, otherwise I go looking somewhere else

T: And the next one would be, the last time you posted in something that wasn't the Zotero forums. Or just a recent time

F: I'm struggling to remember even a remotely recent time. That's how much I've come to avoid interacting on forums. (laugh) Um. I think I may have posted once a few months ago on Ars Technica forums. I had a partial answer to a question there and was still searching for other information and it being a fairly esoteric question I was not likely to find the answer elsewhere so I figured I would actually engage for once and hope that they would come back with what I desired.

T: So in both of those cases it sounds like you avoid posting to forums?

F: Yes, because from my early experiences in gaming forums I wasted a whole lot of time with very little productive coming out of it.

T: and um... see which of these are... So this will be the last one in this sequence. Can you tell me about a time when you were in a conversation or a back and forth that got really heated.

F: Um, I mean, I guess it would have been years ago in gaming forums. I can't really, I can say it got heated on the otherside but.

T: Sure, so just walk me through it.

F: My particular personality, um I sometimes enjoy trolling people. Mostly other people can't get me worked up much. So when other people try to engage me in a heated discussion I mostly just laugh and depending on how bored or evil I'm feeling I will engage or not to provoke them and continue to waste more of their time than I'm wasting of mine.

T: so Can you walk me through what trolling means or how would you describe trolling.

F: I guess at it's most basic provoking reactions from other people. Especially if they think you're taking the exchange seriously when your only motive in the exchange is not what you are saying but to get the most entertaining responses you can from them.

T: Ok, I'm just going to make sure that this is still recording.... Sweet. In keeping with that I'm just going to jump to another part of this. So you defined trolling um, what's the motivation for trolls, why are people doing it?

F: Because their board and they can. and especially when other people take things more seriously than they should. um. I feel like part of it is trying to show to the rest of the world this is how ridiculous people are (laugh) and don't be that way.

T: So then, a few of the terms that come up some time, I'll just ask you if your familiar with them and if you could describe them. What is a sock puppet?

F: A sock puppet is a usually a fake account that takes on um roles or positions or motivations that belong to the people controlling them. Generally to make it look like that position has more support in the community than it actually does.

T: Ok, so double posting:

F: So double posting is when you post twice in a row with no responses in between with basically the same content. Or alternatively, starting a discussion in two different areas either because you really don't know where to put it, or because you think you will get responses faster.

T: And bumping

F: Bumping is posting to a thread so that it returns to the top of the most recent threads posted to. Basically so that you get more eyeballs on it again.

T: Were there times where these things came up, and you already mentioned trolling in the game forums, the other things, would these be things that people would do.

F: Yes, well sock puppeting not as often, more often it was a the fake accounts were just more trollish. and bypassing bans for being trollish.

T: So could you tell me more about bans.

F: I mean banning, is baning, blocking the account from posting possibly viewing the forum. Reasons for being banned very widely form violating posted guidelines to disagreeing with the administrator.(laughs)

T: gotcha, so what kind of general guidelines would be things that people would violate in those cases?

F: No double posting, no trolling (laugh) a not reading the FAQ before posting, although generally you won't get banned for that. a posting in all caps, using certian words depending on the morality of the given community or the administrators.

T: What would be the logic behind some of these. I mean, why don't they want people to doubble post?

F: Mostly because it is just annoying to everybody reading the forums. Um. So (Girls are talking loudly in the background) I'm busy esve drooping here. Sorry, was distracted, um what was the question again?

T: Ok, so why no trolling?

F: Uh, I mean mostly yea ==because the forum is probably there for a reason, and that is not serving a reason, and it is distracting from the actual reason and sometimes administrators get embarrassed because they fall victim to trolling.==

T: But so not reading the FAQ

F: You know again, it leads to a lots of wasted time and people getting upset and annoyed and generally ==the interests of the frequent forum users trump the interests of the one time poster who will violate that==.

Comment [2]: Trevor Owens: knowledge base interests

T: and why is that the case?

F: Because it goes back to the reasons I visit forums vs. the fourms that I don't visit. The motivation is for the community's purposes to be served for the most part um and those people have demonstrated, that they or often have demonstrated, not always, that they are productive parts of that community, or serve the interests of that community.

T: So when they are productive, what is being produced?

F: It depends entirely on the forum.

T: Give some for instances.

F: Usually um, the common base of knowledge, or possibly an actual product that's being worked on in the case of open source software it may actually be a software product. that is moving further towards the goals it was started to reach.

Comment [3]: Trevor Owens: knowledge base explicit

T: Sure, great Ok so shifting gears a little bit, you mentioned PhPBB a little earlier, um could you list as many forum software packages that you are aware of, things like phpBB

F: Man I use to know so many, a Vanilla and PhPbb are the only ones I can think of the actual names of the projects right now

T: Keep thinking about it

F: (long pause) I mean it depends on how you classify forums, cus there are things like UserVoice and Disqus that serve the same purpose but I don't lump those into my idea of the canonical forum software.

T. Um, so what are the features of the canonical forum software then?

F: um installable, as separate instances, a allowing threading, user accounts, persistence, customizability and categorization of threads discussion areas whatever.

T: In terms of customizability what do you mean there.

F: um, it not being like a the administrators having options for how it works in practice. Um. how much control depends a lot. um. installable software obviously most of it you have control of the source code so you can actually change whatever you want. At the higher level just the administrative interface, saying there are no post counts or there are post counts and a user can post x number of times in y seconds and there are these three discussion areas with these titles and no others and users can post anonymously or require registration.

T: So you said Phpbb and vannilla. I can throw a few others out and see if you are aware of them.

F: Yes, um Yes I have seen it and have similar disrespect for it.

T: So similar disrespect for it? Um

F: Yes, as for PHPBB.

T: So those are both? What don't you respect about them?

F: They are notorious for having security vulnerabilities that don't get fixed for quite a while, which lead to everything on the Internet being infected basically, because those are the easiest and most commonly available and being not particularly well developed.

T: so Vanilla you are more happy with in that respect?

F: For the most part yes? Although weather that's because it is just less popular and the security vulnerabilities just have not surfaced or not im not sure. But from the code it looks much cleaner, so I have more faith in its robustness.

T: So what does cleanness look like in this case?

F: Um, its the same as, um Im talking about the actual source code, not any stylistic things on the surface, um its fairly well commented, it doesn't have a bunch of magic variables or constants that nobody understands why they are there, it actually has a publicly stated design for the structure of the code and its actually readable. Um. I can actually open up any of the source files, read through a function and not necessarily have a complete understanding but have a general idea of what's going on there.

T: Are there other thigns you would identify between vanilla and phpbb or vbullitan.

F: I haven't looked at the others in too many years, um, I know the vanilla developers have some philosophical problems with some of the features of the others. I don't really care about those so much. I assume those philosophical differences show up other places but not that I am well versed enough to talk about.

T: So one of those philosophical differences, or well no, tell me what you mean when you are talking about those philosophical differences. And feel free to say "It's crap you talked about so"

F: Well even before you talked about that crap, (laugh) um Phpbb and vbullitan are very much throw in all the features and let the people installing it do whatever they want so they will stop complaining or because the developers might actually want those features. Where as the vanilla developers seem to have much more of an idea for how they think the forums should be used and they are not going to implement things that don't do those although they will let that happen with plugins.

T: So um, so that's another thing that's a difference between Vanilla and Phpbb is plugins, or at least versions of phpbb that I'm aware of.

F: I was not aware of that, I would have assumed that they would have plugins. I would assume that they were very poorly implemented but, a

T: so for example there are a lot of sites called things like PHPbb hacks

F: are those modifications of phpbb or are those exploites? I could take it to mean both

T: modifications

F: so yea, if you don't allow plugins you are going to get sites like those.

T: So what would the difference between a hack and a plugin be?

F: Hopefully a plugin would interface much more cleanly because it is a designed modification of the system whereas a phpbb hack would be somebody who may or may not understand what is going on in that source code trying things until it looks like they have got what they want, which will very often introduce security issues as well as possibly break the system on any system other than their own.

T: Right... So how would you describe how forums are used for the Zotero project, or what are the points if there are more than one.

F: So for the most part, providing very quick and a I guess stable slash lasting slash publicly available support for end users. Forums are not generally used for too much actual nuts and bolts development discussion, though it is also used for getting feedback for the community. So I guess the main goal is interaction with and between the wider community including end users not officially associated with the Zotero project providing support for other end users which leads the core developers free to code instead of spending all their time trying to provide user support.

T: How would you categorize people that participate in the forums.

F: <laughs> as in what pigeon holes they fit into

T: sure whatever categories you think of people in, and feel free to say anything you want here, if I was ever to use any of this I would be able to obfuscate what project you worked on.

F: That's OK its pretty clear I think to most people who read the forums for any significant amount of time. There are core developers, um, outside developers, do you want me to describe these?

T: Yeah,

F: Um so outside developers that actually write code either for Zotero or for associated with ZOtero but are not associated with CHNM or ZOtero. and there are power users who, um, are advanced and if they actually need support its for usually either actual bugs that we need to fix and know about or for ridiculous use cases that for some reason they decided they wanted to do and somehow they usually figure out between them and the other power users. and those people are usually the most helpful posters for answering actual end user support questions for more basic issues that they would not have problems with. Then there are the less advanced less technically savoy, users of ZOtero who have an issue or possibly have a misunderstanding of how ZOtero works or why it does what it does. Cuz its true its not entirely obvious in some cases why Zotero does something some way. Then there are a subset of those users who are, what would to many people would appear to be trolls but they seem to be serious. Very opinionated users who don't care, who are not seeking information, they are for lack of a better word loud and um I assume they are that way in real life too. and um they want to post their personal problems, ridiculous feature request, world views on the ZOtero forums for whatever reason. And they do so. often. (laugh)

T: So it seams that in that cases there was sorta like a, no, was there any logic to the order that you gave those in, or. You went from core devs, outside devs, power users, uh less advanced, less technically savoy down to a subset of those who are <cut off>

F: Start at the top of the pyramid.

T: and how does that pyramid work?

F: actually, it's more of a diamond. there aren't really that many annoying users. Um I mean basically I was going in order of technical knowledge, and so how helpful the users might actually be. and so in other words in going up the pyramid the level directly above it should often be able to answer the questions directly below it. and there is um usually an observable hierarchy like that. and questions work there way up that hierarchy. which generally, hopefully, saves time.

T: Um how would you compare and contrast web forums and face to face discussions. or just discussions that arn't mediated by forums

F: By forums or by technology?

T: um take it where you want to go.

F: Forums, like other Internet communication by virtue of sometimes perceived anonymity sometimes just a lack of the possibility of social stigmas can and often times are more, I guess less civilized actually, and deteriorate into arguments faster, than um a discussion face to face. Also a large part of that is a a, a lack of phisical ques to read emotions and communication intent, which is especially a problem for people who tend toward sarcasm or a dry sense of humor, um for the most part though, I mean there is also a positive side to forums in that they are not real time which gives people more time to compose their response and um hopefully leads to um more I guess fixed positions than stream of consciousness.

T: Great. Um so the last piece of this is I will present you with quotes form some books about web forums and about running them. So just read aloud and feel free to interject as you go if you have comments.

F: <reading> You'll need a great deal of patience, you will be dealing with idiots and if your site is large enough plenty of them <laughs> People who will quite frankly want to upset you or rattle your cage. Nasty messages, venomous hatred, they are now a part of your life, you need to accept this and get on with your life <End reading>

T: So, what do you think?

F: Accurate. <laugh> um as I said I sometimes enjoy being one of those trolls, although I avoid nasty messages, usually.

T: So, who is it OK to troll? or when is it Ok to troll?

F: Um, That depends entirely on your personal ethics. um for me. I don't troll people who are genuinely trying to be helpful. um Or who, as far as I can tell, show respect to myself, other users, people with differing opinions um So for me personally my trolling is mostly a response for a perceived lack of respect for other people.

T: So in this case, does this apply primarily to. We talked about a couple different forums you participate in, Zotero, Ars Technica, Tenaris forums. How does this relate to those forums?

F: It applies to all of them to differing degrees. depending on what the subject of the forum is. The game forums are very much just your there because you feel like. It's nobodys job to be there. and people are, don't take it as seriously, its their personal time and they feel like they can do what they want there. and I guess they feel like they are only wasting other peoples

personal time. um for Zotero forums possibly because it is generally going to be a much older population they are sometimes more mature and its generally a more serious discussion place. there are definitely still people who don't know, or apparently don't know how to conduct themselves in a civilized manner, on the Internet. <laugh> um but the number of those is much smaller and you don't actually see much of this venomous hatred. Mostly it's just people being clueless.

T: Gotcha, so , what were some of the other forums you mentioned. The Ars technica forums, the Ubuntu forums. Or.

F: So I think both of those are much more, at least the parts of them that I have looked at, that there are Ars Technica forums for just hanging out and interacting with community, I haven't looked much at those, um, but most of them are actual information sharing forums. So people are going there because they need information or have information. So there is much less of a, there is no real purpose to this so do whatever you want.

T: So the second one, <refering to the next quote to read>

F: <reading> Signatures and avatars allow your users to express their individuality</reading> That is another forum feature I neglected to mention. I was debating weather that was forum specific or a necessity. Um.

T: So you can start by briefly just saying what signatures and avatars are.

F: so signatures are the forum equivalent of email signatures, although they more often include artistic banners, what amounts to banner adds for that user. Um. But some identifying text or image, so that you can one associate a fixed identity with a post and 2 especialy in the case of images be able to pick out the posts by a certain user quickly. um. Avatars are similar except exclusively generally thumbnail images. Which serve the same purpose for the most part.

T: So then how would you assess the idea that they allow members to express their individuality.

F: Theoretically I guess they do? From my experience, based on how many are carbon copies of other ones, or stolen from other forums, I am not sure how much individuality you are expressing with them. um but sure choosing and curating images I guess expresses individuality, so their valid, its just an argument of weather you want to allow some of the expression you are inevitably going to get with those. Which um are usually harmless but um sometimes incredibly annoying or offensive. For example, some people will if you don't have technological limitations will inevitably put a 3 mega byte 17 screen height tall images in their signature. Which often breaks the formatting of the forum and always is annoying to everybody who uses it.

T: Gotcha, So in terms of the fourms we've talked about thus far do these things and which don't.

F: All gaming forums Ive been an active member of have generally allowed both avatars and signatures. Um. Ars technica forums I believe have both. Zotero forums im not even sure. I know we allow avatars but I think it is hard to figure out how to add them. And signatures, I don't think I've actually seen anyone with one, so maybe we have them disabled.

T: If memory serves me right Vannilla by default doesn't have sigs. Um.

F: Which is a decision I approve of. For the most part they are a waste of time and space. In my opinion. Other people don't feel that way.

> **Comment [4]:** Trevor Owens: sigs

T: so is there a competing value to the individuality in that case?

F: I prefer forums to be used to express individuality in the actual postings as it is more substantive. Um. seeing the same weather its a smart or dumb quote in a signature 17 times in a single thread does not appeal to me. I don't think it adds much. There is the option to only show a signature on a post on the first post in a thread, which is an improvement on this, but I also don't need to see the active posters signature in every single thread I view.

> **Comment [5]:** Trevor Owens: sig argument

T: So I'll read this next one. So it's um "Creativity never hurts when you are trying to get major league idiots off your community" He then goes on to talk about in this case, things like simulated down time, global ignore where a poster can continue to post and they can see their comments in a discussion thread but no one else sees their comments. Um. using IP deny manager to give 404s out to particular IP addresses. Are these things you are familiar with? Do you have thoughts on them?

F: Wait what was the first one? I think that was the only one I've heard of.

T: Simulated downtime. That is related to giving out 404s to anyone who visits the site.

F: Then I have not seen any of those. I was taking simulated downtime to mean basically I guess it could be implemented this way, temporary bans weather you tell the user or not. The other ones, I like the sound of, they sound hilarious, but I have not seen them in practice.

T: Why do they sound hilarious?

F: It's if it seams like a form of trolling, or anti-trolling, or reverse trolling on the part of the forum administrators. which I approve of.

T: ok, then um, you can read this one.

F: <reading> users are customers of your community, so you often need to take somewhat of a customer service approach to answering questions</reading> What do I think of that? Um, Again it depends on the forum. If you are actually trying to provide a service then yes that is fairly accurate. Um. if you are a benevolent service provider, just providing a forum for discussion for whatever purposes, um it depends completely on how much your ego depends on people participating in that. um if you don't give a crap if people leave and don't use it any more than you don't have to treat them as customers, you can do whatever the hell you want. Yea so, if the users are providing value to you then you have to treat them as customers, if you are providing value to them they may have to treat you as a customer. and I would imagine the balance for various forums falls everywhere in that continuum.

T: So in the Zotero forums, who is the customer

F: somewhere in the middle on that continuum. We are providing a service, we are providing software rather our forum isn't our service necessarily and we want people to use it, we want people to give us feedback to improve it. Um. and there are incredibly helpful users that we want to stick around and continue to be helpful. and those people we to a certain extent need to treat as customers. but our software is also free, for the most part, the users posting for help are not paying for anything um and we don't gain a significant amount from any individual user being around, especially on the forums, so those people will generally be required to be respectful and follow the rules or we don't want them around anyway so they will be banned,

T: so I think we have another one...

F:<reading> The problem with virtual community spaces is that there can be few if any real world consequences for bad behavior. A user can ruin a good conversation by posting nonsense all night and simply go to bed. In the real world there would be consequences for their actions.</reading> I dispute that assertion. that there are often consequences in the real world for acting like a jerk. <laughs> Um. but people do perceive it that way. So that is to a certain extent true. um. on the other hand it also goes the other way around. Somebody is being a jerk on a forum, as I always go back to XKCD. You don't have to correct someone who is wrong on the internets. You can turn off your computer and go to bed and ignore them and let them post to themselves all night. Um.

T: Um, to some extent, it seems like there is a sentiment in there that is similar to something you were talking about earlier, um. I think I have a note on this here. "A lack of a possibility of social stigma in online social spaces"

F: yea, in that context I was talking more about you know dirty looks and snide remarks that as social creatures we react to voluntarily. There are social stigmas on forums too. They are much less instantaneous. Its much more like developing a bad reputation on a forum that you want to be a part of. and in those cases social stigma is every bit as effective online as offline. Um. but if they have no investment in that forum then it is true that they are not as effective in the online world.

T: Gotcha,

F: <reading> developers of community tools should bury the post button. the more clicks it takes to make a post the better the posts will be. By burying the post button you are bringing the users together and letting the content act as a filter. When your users get to the posting area they'll all have some degree of commonality. </reading> I might agree with it, but for an experience I had a couple months ago, although it wasn't the post button it was the start a discussion button. A user had to come to the office because they could not find the start a discussion button on the forums. So, after the last visit when I told them to post to the forums to get a better answer to their question than I could give they apparently searched for the button and could not find it and therefore could not get any help. So, while trying to get users to read through whats already there before posting is good, you can go too far, and in general trying to add clicks is just bad design.

T: So, if we took adding clicks, another way to say it would be, take clicks out of the discussion, how easy should it be to find the start a new discussion button or the post button.

F: Um. it should be very easy to find it. <laughs> if it is not easy to find it you are going to lose a lot of value in your community from people who actually know answers but can't post them. um.

T: so here is another way of saying this. so that makes sense. If um. I think I may not have the context of the quote here enough. The idea that you could have like respond at the top of the page. Lets say its easy to find but where should it be on the page.

F: Yes, in context if it is talking about burying the post button at the bottom of a discussion thread I can get behind that. People can get down to the bottom of the page. That's not asking too much of them. and in most cases that's where the post will show up so putting the add a comment button there makes sense. Um. I guess a more specific design question would be weather you hide it on every page of a discussion which isn't the last page. Which may or may not be useful. It should be obvious on the screen, but I don't think it needs to be accessible on any page load. It should be in a place where anyone who wants to can find it.

T: Cool, Is there any other things you would like to add, things you think I should ask you about.

F: um. I don't know it's been such a whirlwind. <laugh>

T: if you had a few pieces of advice for someone setting up forums for their project what would they be.

F: Um, keep it clean, as in I don't respect mess-ily designed forums and I am not going to participate in it if it hurts my eyes to look at it. But forums can be incredibly useful or an incredible time sink and you should think about how you want your forum and your users to

behave um your forum will set the tone weather subliminally or in very concrete terms for how your users treat it. um. and don't power trip.

T: Sounds good: