

We're All 'Snowflakes' Now

A quote frequently attributed to Socrates says that "When the debate is lost, slander becomes the tool of the loser."

And probably the most cited logical fallacy these days is the *ad hominem*, which is an attack "against the person" rather than his or her actual argument.

For these reasons, I and many others have decried the frequency of name-calling in today's society, especially when it comes to politics. Go over to Breitbart and you're likely to see frequently complaints about "libtards" and "SJWs," and go over to Slate and you'll likely see the terms "Conservaturds" and "Republicunts."

I'd like to say that we never see such insults on Intellectual Takeout's Facebook page—which promotes rational discourse in an increasingly irrational society—but alas, we do.

But then again, part of me wonders if we might be overreacting to name-calling and insults in today's society. Granted, name-calling has no place in the realm of formal logic. But logic is not the only means by which humans come to know about truth, and the modern exaltation of *logic* risks overlooking the important role of *rhetoric* in human life.

First off, name-calling is nothing new in the history of American politics.

In 1800 newspaper editor James Callender [referred](#) to John Adams' "hideous hermaphroditical character, which has neither the force and fitness of a man, nor the gentleness and sensibility of a woman."

Abraham Lincoln was called a "Filthy Story-Teller, Despot, Liar, Thief, Braggart, Buffoon, Usurper, Monster, Ignoramus Abe, Old Scoundrel, Perjurer, Robber, Swindler, Tyrant, Field-

Butcher, Land-Pirate.”

In his speeches, Cicero referred to Mark Antony as a “fool,” “imbecile,” “sheep,” “rogue,” “prostitute,” “debauchee,” and “brainless.”

Of course, as part of the realm of the profane, many of you are not surprised that there is an established record of insults in politics. But it should be noted that name-calling is nothing new in the Bible either. After all, Jesus refers to the Pharisees as a “brood of vipers”, Peter in one instance as “Satan,” and non-believers as “swine” and “dogs.”

What’s changed in recent years, as Joseph Tartakovsky [noted in a Wall Street Journal piece](#), is that insults have become more coarse and are often devoid of style and intelligence. And they usually come out of the mouths of those who lack the latter two virtues.

In addition, unlike our forebears, we live in a postmodern world, and flee labels like the plague. Name-calling is viewed as “totalizing” act of violence. UC Santa Cruz professor Jerome Neu summarizes this belief when he [says](#), “To be insulted is to suffer a shock, a disruption of one’s sense of self and one’s place in the world.”

But make no mistake: plenty of people today merely feign being hurt by someone’s insult as a means to gain an advantage over them. That’s the irony of the term “snowflake”—it’s being used to denote a weak person, when really the behavior associated with “snowflakes” is typically an act of aggression. [In stark contrast to all previous history](#), claiming victim status has become the quickest and surest route to becoming a victimizer.

Reflecting on the above causes me to wonder what’s more dangerous to a free society: insults... or the unnaturally strong aversion to them that we seem to have today?