

How I failed the Turing test

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Some time around March, I started receiving a number of random instant messages from people I've never met before. Apparently, my AIM alias had been added to at least two online lists and people all over the world were busy importing me as a buddy.

I say "at least two" because the people who contacted me fell into one of two camps: people who thought they were contacting a celebrity and people who thought they were contacting a robot. As I talked to more and more of these folks, I began to discover something really disturbing about myself:

I consistently fail to be perceived as human.

When this first started happening, a typical conversation with a celebrity admirer would go something like this (participant's IM handle is fabricated):

angelcutie42: hi!

jmstriegel: hey. what's up? do i know you?

angelcutie42: no

angelcutie42: someone gave me a bunch of screen names. i heard you are a celebrity.

jmstriegel: that's weird. i'm afraid i'm not a celeb at all.

angelcutie42: oh.

angelcutie42: bye

This was entertaining at first, but it quickly became a bit depressing as the angelcutie42s of the wired world would, one after the other, decide I wasn't worth talking to if I wasn't a celebrity. Want to know what it's like being dumped by a random groupie 5 times a day? Not good at all, thank you very much.

So that's when I started hamming it up a bit. I'm not really proud of it, but my fans wanted a celebrity.. so I gave them one:

sexybumkin123: hey.. so you're famous right?

jmstriegel: Who me? I'm a movie star.

jmstriegel: Shit, I gotta go.

jmstriegel: My limo just arrived and Paris wants her damned sidekick back.

sexybumkin123: Oh my god. Come back!

sexybumkin123: I love you!!!!

My groupies loved it. The more celebrity balogna I manufactured, the more they ate it, and the more they loved me.

Then, something strange started happening. As my career as an artificial celebrity started to take off, I began to receive some strange IMs from a whole new class of random people. These new admirers were convinced I was a robot... and it suddenly became clear to me that something was very wrong.

Nobody would believe I was human. In one troubling conversation after another, I felt my intellectual teeter-totter quickly tip from actual to artificial.

fratburger86: hey. so you're a sex bot?

jmstriegel: umm, no. who the hell are you?

fratburger86: yeah you are! i found your im online

jmstriegel: that's fine and all, but i'm pretty sure you have me confused with someone else.

fratburger86: just a normal chat bot then?

jmstriegel: nope. i'm human

fratburger86: ok. sure.

fratburger86: asl?

jmstriegel: no thanks.

fratburger86: what?

jmstriegel: i'm not really interested in any conversation that starts with "asl"

fratburger86: oh come on. say something sexy.

jmstriegel: seriously, i think you want to talk to someone else.

fratburger86: i knew it!!!

fratburger86: you are totally a robot!

This is where things took a turn for the worse.

I mentioned already that I couldn't convince a single person that I wasn't a chat bot. It's one thing for people to think you are artificially intelligent. I can live with that, I guess. What really killed me was that the more I tried proving my "actual" intelligence, the more my "artificial" intelligence would get called into question.

Take this pivotal conversation:

jmstriegel: no, really. I'm quite human.

jmstriegel: test me if you want

shymuffin32: ok

shymuffin32: why do you like music?

jmstriegel: hmm. i've never really considered that.

jmstriegel: hell, i'm not going to be able to contrive a good answer for that one. ask me something else.

shymuffin32: jesus, you're worse than eliza

And there you have it. I've been intellectually humbled by a 1960s robotic psychologist.

Stripped of all dignity and self respect, I decided to take my troubles to Eliza, robot psychologist and intellectual superior. Maybe she could help with the questions I now have. Perhaps there is some meaning to all of this that my feeble mind is incapable of investigating on its own.

eliza: Hello, I'm Eliza

jmstriegel: hi

eliza: How are you today.. What would you like to discuss?

jmstriegel: people think i am a robot

eliza: How long have you been a robot?

jmstriegel: i'm not a robot

eliza: Do you believe it is normal to be not a robot?

jmstriegel: are you saying i'm not normal?

eliza: Perhaps in your fantasies I am saying you're not normal?

jmstriegel: no. i just want to be human

eliza: What if you never got to be human?

What if I never get to be human? It's a good question. What does it mean to not exist in the minds of others? I've not only failed as an intelligent human, but I couldn't even pass as artificially intelligent. Even Eliza appears sceptical... how long *have* I been a robot?

So what if I'm not intelligent? What if I'm not even *artificially* intelligent? What if I *never* get to be human?

At least I can pass as a pretty convincing celebrity.

<http://www.blogcadre.com/blog/jason_striegel/how_i_failed_the_turing_test_2005_09_04_13_26_29>

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