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Social Media's Impact on Compassion

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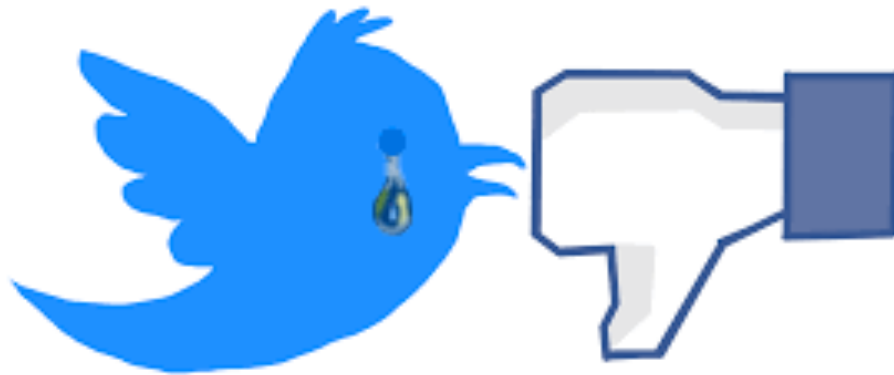🌀 Part of the Cognitive Psychology Commons, Digital Humanities Commons, and the Social Media Commons

Social Media's Impact on Compassion

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Journalism and Media Studies
Spring 2016

Table of Contents

HCOM 475: Senior Capstone Essay Project Proposal

Name: Courtney Tulipani
Concentration: Journalism and Media Studies
Alignment with Common Theme: Loss of compassion through technology, namely social media (Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter).
Purpose: My project's primary purpose is to understand why individuals lose their sense of compassion through the use of using social media. I also want to investigate how individuals can maintain our humanity online in this ever-changing, and fast-paced technological age.
Capstone Title: Social Media's Effects on our Compassion or Compassion Fatigue and Social Media
Working Summary:

A severely bullied fifteen year-old girl named Amanda Todd posted a video on YouTube in 2012, crying out for help as she explained her tragic story as to why she was bullied. Todd had no one she could turn to and she used social media as a last desperate attempt to have someone care about her. Instead of individuals reaching out to help her, people ignored Todd's torment, and made the situation worse by posting horrible comments on her video, goading the young teenager to kill herself. A month after posting the video, Todd committed suicide.

 I will investigate social media sites, specifically Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube and find examples as to how people are losing their compassion through use of these sites. I also want to look into what effects people's cruel thoughts/opinions/comments have on other individuals (look into cyberbully case studies such as the Amanda Todd case). Further I want to find if we are becoming desensitized to tragic issues because we are constantly bombarded with negative news within social media. Lastly, I want to see if there is a way to stop this trend in compassion fatigue and the ethical approaches to doing so.

Sources: Scholarly, peer-reviewed journals that discuss how technology desensitizes us to sad or tragic events and causes "compassion fatigue." Also, I want to try and find individual accounts of people who had been cyberbullied or harassed through social media, and reference one of our class texts, "Program or be Programed."
Next Steps: I will need to collect sources relating to this topic as soon as possible. Then I will begin my outline and put down all the information that I find important. After that, I will insert quotes and facts from my sources that pertain to the information I want to include in my paper. Lastly, I will write two separate drafts and then do my final draft.
Timeline: End of February/ Beginning of March- Collect information on topic, complete necessary readings, find sources, submit final capstone proposal. Middle/End of March- Begin outline of essay. Beginning of April- Edit first draft of essay. Move on to second draft. Edit the second draft. End of April- Begin final draft. May- Finish project.

Social Media's Impact on Compassion

In the 21st century we are more connected than ever before, and we now have the ability to look into the lives of others on a global scale with a single swipe or click through our digital technology. With the growing popularity of using social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube, individuals can put their lives on display and in turn gain acceptance from not only their peers, but strangers as well. Unfortunately, if one does not tread carefully in this world of observation and judgment, individuals can find themselves falling victim to cruel online users, as well as finding themselves in difficult situations that will not be easily forgotten due to the Internet's permanent record. In this paper I will be discussing whether individuals are losing their sense of compassion (or empathy as these terms are interchangeable), through social media, and if so, what we can do to reclaim our compassion online.

Social media sites act as a medium for individual's to learn all about the lives of others, but at the same time, these sites can act as shields in truly getting to know and understand another individual. In *Program or be Programmed: Ten Commandments for a Digital Age,* Douglas Rushkoff comments on this trend of depersonalizing behavior this social generation is experiencing:

> As if desensitized by all this disembodiment, young people also
> exhibit an almost compensatory exhibitionism. Kids on social
> networking sites and video channels share explicit photos of
> themselves, not just for money or items on their "wish lists" but
> simply to get noticed. (Rushkoff 75).

Striving for attention and validation through the use of social media can be satisfying and even rewarding to many individuals. However, in turn, this kind of behavior can cause thoughtless, and destructive tendencies.

One destructive tendency that has emerged from the growth of social media is cyberbullying. The act of cyberbullying is harassment online that can consist of a "bully" circulating humiliating photos, videos, as well as hateful and threatening messages, with the intention of emotionally harming a targeted victim. Dr. Justin Patchin and Dr. Sameer Hinduja, Directors of the Cyberbullying Research Center, state that:

> What makes cyberbullying so deadly is that unlike traditional
> schoolyard bullying, It is not a stretch to say that physical harm—
> such as being beaten up—might even be preferred by some victims
> to the excruciating pain they experience from nonphysical harm
> because the former can heal quicker. (Patchin & Hinduja 155).

The harmful images or comments sent out online, which are aimed toward a certain victim, has a repetitive quality "(e.g., a single e-mail maybe sent to hundreds of different individuals), and it occurs among individuals whose relationship is characterized by a power imbalance." (Whittaker, Kowalski 11). These harmful words and images can then never be removed from the Internet's vast circulation. They are out there for everyone to see and view over and over again so that the humiliation and pain is never-ending.

Cyberbullying can happen to anyone- not just certain minorities, races, ethnicities, genders, or individuals of varying sexual orientations. The effects caused by cyberbullying, both short and long term, can be devastating to the individual:

> The negative effects inherent in cyberbullying, though, are not

slight or trivial and have the potential to inflict serious

psychological, emotional, or social harm. When experienced among

members of this highly impressionable and often volatile

adolescent population, this harm can result in violence, injury, and

even death. (Patchin & Hinduja 149).

Victims of cyberbullying can suffer from poor academic performance, low self-esteem,

anxiety, depression, and in the most severe cases, death by suicidal acts. Sadly, the

individuals that are the most susceptible to falling victim to cyberbullying and its damaging

side effects are children and teenagers.

In one severe cyberbullying case, the victim was a 15 year-old girl named Amanda

Todd from Port Coquitlam, British Columbia. In 2010, Amanda Todd was in the seventh

grade when she began using the Internet as a way of meeting new people through the

network of online chatrooms. Through these online chatrooms, Todd had begun to

converse with a male stranger online who flattered Todd profusely and made her feel

special. The situation took a dangerous turn when the stranger was then able to manipulate

Todd into flashing her breasts to him via webcam. Without realizing the tragic

repercussions that would follow her afterward, Todd acquiesced to the stranger's request.

What followed afterwards would release a series of tormenting events that would

follow Todd until the end of her life. The stranger demanded Todd to flash him on multiple

occasions and if she refused, he threatened to send the topless photo of her to all her

classmates, friends, and family. Todd refused the stranger's incessant demands, which

resulted in the police notifying the teenager at her home in the middle of the night that her

topless photo was circulating the Internet. If this was not enough, the online stranger then

made a Facebook profile using Todd's topless photograph as his profile picture. He began to "friend" Todd's classmates through this social media site in order to continually humiliate her. Todd was taunted relentlessly at school because of the fake Facebook profile, and she soon developed anxiety, depression, and panic attacks due to the harassment she began facing both online and offline.

Todd and her family moved to different cities and changed schools so that she would be able to start new, but despite these moves, Todd's tormentor was still able to continually follow her through the use of social media. After suffering for two years from "sexual exploitation, blackmail, and cruel attacks from strangers and peers," (Kral & White 122), Todd decided to share her story so that she would no longer have to hide her past from anyone anymore. To accomplish this task, Todd decided to use the same tool that was ruining her life—Social media.

Todd chose the social media site YouTube as the platform for where she would share her story. She tiled the video, "My story: Struggling, bullying, suicide, self harm," and way Todd did her video was "…She uploaded a nine-minute YouTube video to the Internet where she silently displayed a series of handwritten cards to give an account of her experience and ongoing suffering. This video went viral." (Kral & White 122). Todd hoped that by sharing her story and bringing it out into the open, individuals would have empathy toward Todd and understand the mistakes she had made online and thus, reach out to help the suffering teenager and be a friend to her.

Todd's video sharing her personal story of being a cyberbullied victim, held the attention of 17 million viewers from around the world. However, it did little to alleviate the situation Todd was facing. "In the case of Amanda Todd, using flashcards and social media

to communicate that "something was amiss" was a "culturally resonant means of
expressing distress" within our present globalized, digital culture." (Kral & White 129).
Todd's distressing circumstances were met with anonymous users posting brutal things in
the comments section of the video, tearing Todd apart by calling her things like a "slut" and
"whore." A month after the video was posted on October 10th, 2012, Todd committed
suicide.

       Todd was prepared for some online users to react negatively toward her story.
However, even with the expectation of receiving a few "haters," Todd wrote beneath her
video an introduction expressing her hope that by openly sharing her story, she would gain
some empathy from online users:

> I'm struggling to stay in this world, because everything just touches
>
> me so deeply. I'm not doing this for attention. I'm doing this to be an
>
> inspiration and to show that I can be strong. I did things to myself to
>
> make pain go away, because I'd rather hurt myself then [sic]
>
> someone else. Haters are haters but please don't hate, although im
>
> [sic] sure I'll get them. I hope I can show you guys that everyone has
>
> a story, and everyones [sic] future will be bright one day, you just
>
> gotta [sic] pull through. I'm still here aren't I? (Amanda Todd).

Sadly, many of the YouTube users who watched Todd's video were quick to dismiss her
torment and only made the problem worse.

       When looking into the Amanda Todd case and the treatment she received online, it
calls into question why individuals would act this way towards someone who was clearly
suffering. One theory of online users acting in this manner could stem from compassion

fatigue. The term "compassion fatigue" is often used in professions that care for others, such as nursing and social work. Individuals in these professions can experience "compassion fatigue" at some point in their careers:

> The cost of caring for people with emotional pain, and its detrimental
>
> effects can include exhaustion, an inability to focus and a decease in
>
> productivity, as well as unhappiness, self -doubt, and loss of passion
>
> and enthusiasm. (Lester 11).

Just like nurses and social workers, individuals who access the Internet on a daily basis are exposed to witnessing tragedy constantly. With the world at our fingertips via the Internet, individuals can tap into every tragic event that is occurring all over the world. Unlike the individuals in these helping professions though, we have the ability to simply exit out of our news feeds on Facebook or turn off our laptops and phones. We can have these tragedies out of sight and out of mind if we so choose. We have the ability to control what we see and how we can react to it, and in the process our compassion towards these events literally becomes fatigued. The tragic case of Amanda Todd is just one amongst the hundreds of other cyberbullying cases that occur every year. The tragedy that can result from cyberbullying begs the question: Did individuals not have any compassion towards Amanda Todd because of "compassion fatigue"?

One theory explaining why online users may be experiencing this "compassion fatigue" and desensitization online could be through constant bombardment of negative news through social media sites:

> It has long been acknowledged that the media contribute to how
>
> individuals construct reality. For many, American reality

includes an acceptance of violence coupled with desensitization

to its true consequences. (Funk, Bechtoldt Baldacci, Pasold &

Baumgardner 35).

Violence has becomes an everyday reality that we are practically injected with by

technology. With all kinds of tragic news available to be viewed from around the world

24/7, it may be difficult for an individual to have compassion towards any single tragic

event, when there are so many other tragic events happening at the same moment.

On Facebook, it's not uncommon to view at least one or two tragic news stories

within only a few minutes of scrolling through one's news feed. "The bad news syndrome is

exacerbated by the tendency of the media to present problems but not their solutions,

contributing to feelings of inefficacy among media consumers." (Kinnick 688). It is a

helpless feeling when tragedy is being thrown at us on a daily basis, yet no real solutions

are provided as to how to actually help those that are actually suffering in these tragic

circumstances.

Social media is not necessarily destroying our empathy because it is an inherent

human capability, but it can become numbed or exhausted. When this happens, individual's

reactivity to tragic situations over time may lead to emotional withdraw, and they might

not be able to express their empathy towards others:

This phenomenon has already been described with the

appearance of mass media, especially television (with an increasing

number of channels), and when terrible scenes of natural disasters,

epidemics, wars, violence, famine and the like poured from televisions,

leading to desensitization and cognitive-affective dissociation as

self-defensive reflexes. (Milivojević & Ercegovac 109).

Excessive amounts of violence and tragedy through the media can lead to desensitization.

This can affect individuals psychologically through their cognitive development, and can be

extremely detrimental in terms of an individual being able to have empathy towards

others.

In a study conducted by the University of Toledo in 2004, subjects were tested to

find if there was any connection between violent media and desensitization in adolescents.

In the study, 150 fourth and fifth graders were measured on their exposure to media

violence, real-life violence, video game life, as well as the subjects' attitudes and empathy

towards violence in general. The study came to the conclusion:

> Attitudes towards violence play an important role in the translation of
>
> negative cognitions and affect into behavior. In several studies, stronger
>
> proviolence attitudes in children and adolescents have been associated
>
> with aggressive behavior. (Funk, Bechtoldt Baldacci, Pasold &
>
> Baumgardner 26).

The study found that exposure to video game violence was the most significant predictor of

a child having a low empathy score. Although the study was unable to quantify media's

effect on the children's empathy, the researchers of this study related how like violent

video games, "Media presentations of justified violence may also change the belief that

violent behavior is wrong, encouraging the development of proviolence attitudes. (Funk,

Bechtoldt Baldacci, Pasold & Baumgardner 26). When violence becomes the norm,

individuals' attitudes toward it become more accepting.

In cases of cyberbullying, adolescents are more susceptible to victimizing others online because they are led to believe that aggressive behavior and violence is normal, so therefore it is acceptable. In some violent video games, individuals are rewarded for their violent actions by being able to progress through the different levels in the game. The violent behavior without negative consequences message received in violent gaming, can allow adolescents to gain the same reasoning that their aggressive behavior will not have any repercussions through other forms of media:

> Cognitive desensitization is evident when the belief that violence is uncommon and unlikely becomes the belief that violence is mundane and inevitable. Emotional and cognitive desensitization to violence decrease the likelihood that violent behavior will be either censored or censured… As a result, actions may be taken without consideration of their moral implications. Empathy and attitudes towards violence are important components of the process of moral evaluation which may be affected by exposure to violence in real life or in the media. (Funk, Bechtoldt Baldacci, Pasold & Baumgardner 25).

Violent behavior becomes associated with positive feedback such as when a child progresses to a new level in their game by fighting and killing other players. This behavior can transfer over into social media aggression, such as a child gaining approval from peers when they cyberbully a victim or multiple victims. It can be difficult to reverse this thought process during such a critical period of moral development in an adolescent.

Social media and online users have increased exponentially in the past 20 years and there does not appear to be a single concrete answer to whether or not our

compassion is being negatively affected by social media or the Internet in general.

"However, the question as to how low empathy or how high proviolence attitudes must be

to label an individual "desensitized" was not addressed and remains a study limitation and

a question for future research." (Funk, Bechtoldt Baldacci, Pasold & Baumgardner 35).

Many studies that mirror the University of Toledo's research are still being undertaken

today, so there will be more in-depth and specific findings available in the future.

In addition to the study conducted by the University of Toledo, a similar study was

undertaken by Nanyang Technological University. This study looked into affective empathy

and cognitive empathy and its association with cyberbullying among adolescents. The

study was conducted on 396 adolescent subjects from Singapore, ranging between the ages

of 12-18:

> As far as we are aware, this is the first study investigating both types of
>
> empathy together with gender on cyberbullying behavior. Previous
>
> research studies have either focused primarily on traditional offline
>
> bullying behavior or have not distinguished between types of
>
> empathy… At present, generalizability of these findings to the
>
> population remains limited and current results await further
>
> replication especially when the size of the effect is small. (Ang & Goh 395).

The small data sample of this study, which was conducted halfway across the world, helps

prove that cyberbullying is an international problem. Also, the effects on individuals'

empathy online in relation to cyberbullying, is still in its beginning stages of research, but

the research that exists now points out there is a connection between low empathy and

cyberbullying.

The video Todd posted on YouTube in an effort to have individuals empathize with her and reach out to her in her darkest moment, did not have the effect that Todd had probably hoped for. Todd's vulnerability as well as her actions which she shared online, led to brutal criticism and severe scrutiny by YouTube users. Analyzing the video and the responses it evoked from viewers from an ethical standpoint, it can be argued that individuals are losing their sense of compassion online. "To others including me, You Own Your Words served as an ethical foundation: You, the human being on the other side of the modem, are responsible for what you say and do here. You are accountable." (Rushkoff 68). YouTube users, because of their anonymity, knew they could in no way be held accountable for what they said on Todd's video, therefore they did not express compassion towards Todd.

Using ethics as a guide when analyzing Todd's video and its responses, there would appear to be a deficit of compassion existing through social media. An Ethics of Care model implies that individuals should conduct themselves in a caring manner towards others in order to meet the needs of not only others, but ourselves as well. Leading feminist and moral theorist, Virginia Held, states:

> The ethics of care can help us to listen to the views of others and try to understand their points of view. Care inherently involves attentiveness to others and responding to needs, and its values prepare us to do what is needed to reduce and undermine trends toward violence. (Held 127).

The Ethics of Care model sees every individual as having a unique situation and they should be cared for, especially those that are vulnerable and in need of caring.

When Amanda Todd posted her YouTube video, she wanted the reasons as to why she was being so severely bullied be known to the world. She was bullied because of two mistakes she had made which she deeply regretted, but had not understood the impact of her actions at the time. Todd's first mistake was flashing the stranger online, who would later became her tormentor, without realizing the photo he took of her could never be removed from the Internet. Todd also did not understand at the time that even though he lived somewhere else, it did not mean he would be unable to follow her around in every aspect of her private life. Another mistake Todd had made, which she deeply regretted and shared in her video, was an old guy friend of hers had reached out to her Todd during a time she had lost all her friends. This "friend," whom already had a girlfriend, acted interested in Todd and she hooked up with him.

     These two actions, flashing a stranger online and hooking up with a boy who was already in a relationship, could be seen as morally wrong and placed the stigma of Todd being a "slut" and a "whore." This could have played a reason as too why social media users so viciously attacked Todd online, instead of trying to empathize and understand her regret for these actions:

> While we cannot know for sure what Amanda Todd lived through
>
> in the months leading up to her suicide…we can certainly imagine
>
> that her experience as a victim of sexual exploitation and
>
> blackmail led to social ostracism and contributed to a stigmatized
>
> identity. Within this particular cultural context, her social
>
> relations likely became increasingly rejecting and demeaning.
>
> Through the extensive digital footprint that Amanda Todd left

behind, we see evidence of her resistance (i.e., using the cards to

tell her story), and we also see her becoming an object of hatred.

(Kral & White 129).

Todd had done something wrong and she alone had made these decisions which had

caused her so much pain. It is possible online users felt their critical responses were

acceptable and fair because Todd was not forced into these seemingly bad decisions, and

she had chosen to put herself in social media's spotlight of judgment.

Nel Noddings, another leading philosopher in Ethics of Care and feminist theory

notes, "We recognize that in fear, anger, or hatred we will treat the other differently, but

this treatment is never conducted ethically. Hence, when we must use violence or

strategies on the other, we are already diminished ethically." (Noddings 5). According to

Noddings' statement, the cruel comments Todd received on social media, many of which

incited further violence on Todd's life, would not consider online users acting

compassionately.

Looking at the case of Amanda Todd and the treatment she received online,

through an ethics of care lens, it could be argued that individuals are losing their

compassion online.:

The ethics of care understands the value and necessity of caring labor

and it emphasizes the values of empathy, sensitivity, trust, and

responding to need… At its most basic level it understands persons as

interrelated, in contrast with the model of the independent, self-

sufficient individual of liberal theory. The ethics of care as it has

developed is increasingly appropriate for the wide but shallow

human relations of global interactions as well as for the most

personal and deepest human relations of care in families.

(Held 117).

There probably were quite a few social media users that did empathize with Todd and her situation, but because of the global scale within YouTube, these users lacked a real, and true relationship with her. As a result, the empathetic users did not know how to actually care for Todd and help her through her suffering.

A sense of helplessness as some online users could have experienced in the Amanda Todd case, combined with the information overload that exists within social media today can be numbing. This rings especially true after scrolling through multiple social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, which can repost and retweet the same tragic news stories that occurred that day repetitively. Despite the overload of tragedy individuals can experience when opening up a social media site, these sites have the ability to help individuals engage with one another in a deeper, more connected way. These engagements can be more meaningful than those which existed in a pre-social media world:

A mediaspace that used to make us feel utterly alone now connects us

to anyone, anywhere. For some, this means finding other people like

themselves for the very first time. Survivors of rare cancers can find

support groups, gay kids can find people who have lived through

being the only "out" student in a high school, and fans of esoteric

books or music can find global communities willing to discuss what

no one else in their lives even knows exists. (Rushkoff 33).

Individuals who are in long distance relationships or have loved ones living at a great

distance from them, can use Skype or Facebook messenger video calls, to be able to see and

talk to each other. Facebook can also help individuals find an old childhood friend or

message a classmate for homework help. Also, "In spite of its many dehumanizing

tendencies, digital media is still biased toward the social." (Rushkoff 78). With the many

different outlets of socializing available to us now, the ease of communication has aided in

creating new relationships, as well as strengthening existing relationships.

Social media has many positives and it does create many opportunities for us to

be more social with one another, but its negative sides do need to be addressed. The

actions taken to confront cyberbullying presently are not always effective. Cyberbullying is

a new phenomena, which laws and school policies are still in the infancy stage of being

created and implemented. It is difficult to pass laws against cyberbullying because it could

impede on an individual's rights to free speech. Also, due to the anonymous nature of

cyberbullying, even if effective laws are in existence, it is a long, complicated, and

sometimes impossible task to locate an online bully and then bring charges against them. A

harsh punishment on cyberbullies or nothing being done at all appears to be the two

extreme mediums that exist today, with no grey area in between. This needs to change.

Mediation, prevention, and education are three recommendations of what should be

established to deter this growing trend in cyberbullying, as well as create more

compassionate online users in the future.

In the Ethics of Care model, restorative justice is quintessential in developing

empathy and fostering more caring relationships from one individual to another. "Our

efforts must, then, be directed to the maintenance of conditions that will permit caring to

flourish." (Noddings 5). Restorative justice focuses on a criminal making amends to an individual or community that had been affected by the criminal's wrongful actions. The intended effect is for caring relationships to flourish between a criminal and their victim in order to help heal scars and move forward from the past. In some restorative justice cases, meetings can be facilitated between the criminal and victim.

In the case of cyberbullying, a restorative justice approach could be beneficial for a cyberbully to have mediation sessions with the victim they had bullied. In many cases, an individual responsible for cyberbullying is punished by expulsion from their school. This would be effective if the case involved in-person bullying. However, when the bullying occurs online, a school expulsion would not be an effective solution to the problem. The bully would still have the capabilities in tormenting their original victim online, and also at a new school, the bully could find another victim to torment through the use of social media.

By using mediation instead of expulsion, the bully and victim can come to terms and acceptance with what had transpired between them. The victim would be able to confront the bully face-to-face, and in the process be left with a sense of closure of the issue. The bully would finally be forced to face the consequences of their actions, "Because it does not occur face-to-face, bullies are able to mete out pain without witnessing the consequences and victims often cannot stand up for themselves, even if they are so inclined." (Beale, Hall 9). The bully could then possibly be left with a sense of empathy after they had gained an understanding of what the victim had been through. Unfortunately, this type of approach could be difficult to achieve due to the anonymity of cyberbullying. There may also be an unwillingness between victim and bully to participate

in a facilitated mediation. However, this approach could be most beneficial for both victim and bully and when it is possible, a meeting should be set up despite the limits presented.

Another recommendation that could help stop the growing trend of cyberbullying is prevention. Innovative software such as ReThink can help aid individuals in making more deliberate, and thoughtful decisions online. This online software is a non-intrusive and helpful tool that has the main purpose in stopping cyberbullying at its source before any harm actually occurs. Fourteen year-old Trisha Prabhu, an innovator and advocate who was a finalist at a Google Science Fair in 2014, created ReThink in order to help individuals stay accountable for what they say and send online. ReThink is made up of online "widgets" that recognize harmful phrases that are being typed out by individuals through social media.

ReThink works by asking an individual whether they really want to send a harmful message they had typed and are about to send. Just that one simple question, that one moment of having the individual briefly pause and consider their words, can stop a cyberbully from causing any harm. The creator of ReThink, Trisha Prabhu, explained the potential her software has for working towards solutions in preventing cyberbullying from happening:

> After a total of 1500 well-controlled and fair trials, I was faced with some stunning results. An incredible 93% of the time, when adolescents were posed with a Rethinkalert, they changed their mind, and decided not to post the offensive message! Overall willingness dropped from an initial 71.4% to 4.6%. (Trisha Prabhu).

Prabhu designed the software in the idea that an individual's decision to 'send' is the most crucial point in cyberbullying, and that a single question can help prevent it. The trial run of ReThink helped to prove that one's conscience can be difficult to break.

Instilling education about social media and cyberbullying in a young adolescent's schooling can also be another strategy to deter the growing trend in cyberbullying and create more compassionate online users. Through education, adolescents can better understand and learn about the vast capabilities of the Internet, which have immensely evolved over the years. There should be social media responsibility and cyberbullying education implemented within schools so that adolescents can be taught how to be more compassionate and responsible individuals online:

> First, empathy training and education should be included in
> cyberbullying intervention programs, with additional emphasis on
> cognitive components of empathy for boys and affective components
> of empathy for girls. Such training has been successful in reducing
> offline aggressive, bullying behavior... For example, adolescents could
> be taught to view issues and grievances from the victim's
> perspective, and to learn to vicariously experience the emotions of
> the victim as opposed to engaging in typical responses of victim
> blaming. (Ang & Goh 394).

Learning from an early age could be the most effective solution to instill this knowledge in young people as they are largely the group affected by harmful online actions.

Parents too have a large part to play in their child's development in using the Internet. Instead of restricting their children from using social media, which can then lead

the child to use it in an irresponsible manner, parents should set the rules on what is

allowed and what is not allowed in the children's social media usage. By using an Ethics of

Care approach, parent's can help nurture their children into more caring, and empathetic

Internet users:

> Care instructs us to establish the means to curb, contain, prevent,
>
> and head off the violence that characteristically leads to more
>
> violent behavior. In bringing up children, this requires a long
>
> process of nurturing and education in order to cultivate
>
> nonviolent feelings, self-restraint, appropriate trust, and an
>
> understanding of the better alternatives to aggressive conflict.
>
> (Held 126).

When there is a safe and comfortable environment established for a child to ask their

parent about social media, the child could be better guided to become a more responsible

Internet user. In addition, in the possible case the child was cyberbullied, he or she

wouldn't hesitate asking for help on what to do from the parent. A child would not have to

suffer silently because of the fear of being reprimanded and punished for using social

media when they were not permitted to.

Overall, individuals need to become more accountable for their actions and come to

the understanding that what is posted, commented on, retweeted, and shared through

social media can never be retracted. As Amanda Todd wrote on one of the flashcards in her

YouTube video concerning her nude photo which circulated throughout social media, "I can

never get that photo back." Whatever we send out into social media can stay there forever,

and affect individuals more negatively than is realized. Our actions online not only affect other individuals, but ourselves as well:

> The less we take responsibility for what we say and do online,
>
> the more likely we are to behave in ways that reflect our worst
>
> natures—or even the worst natures of others. Because digital
>
> technology is biased toward depersonalization, we must make an
>
> effort not to operate anonymously, unless absolutely necessary.
>
> We must be ourselves. (Rushkoff 71).

We should be more willing to own our online actions and words, because they carry more power than we think. When we put on the mask of anonymity online, we lose our identities as human beings.

We cannot be one person online and then another in real life. The Internet and social media have become so interwoven in our lives that technology and our private lives are no longer two separate things, but have now merged into one. The Internet and social media are a part of our lives and they are here to stay, whether we want them to be or not. We cannot simply be compassionate individuals in real life, but then not transfer that compassion over into our social media life:

> Our digital experiences are out-of-body. This biases us toward
>
> depersonalized behavior in an environment where one's identity
>
> can be a liability. But the more anonymously we engage with
>
> others, the less we experience the human repercussions of what
>
> we say and do. By resisting the temptation to engage from the
>
> apparent safety of anonymity, we remain accountable and

present—and much more likely to bring our humanity with us

into the digital realm." (Rushkoff 68).

Our lives online have become as real as our lives offline. What we say and do through social media can affect many other individuals (including ourselves), in a damaging and negative way. When we retweet an embarrassing photo of someone, when we like a cruel comment on Facebook, when we send injurious words to another person through social media, we are not only displaying who we are as individuals, but we are also reflecting humanity as a whole. Thus, let us leave a good mark on others and ourselves in the world of social media—a mark of responsibility, caring, honesty, respect, and most of all compassion in this new, globalized community that we live in now.

Annotated Bibliography

Ang, Rebecca P., and Dion H. Goh. "Cyberbullying Among Adolescents: The Role

of Affective and Cognitive Empathy, and Gender." *Child Psychiatry*

Hum Dev Child Psychiatry & Human Development 41.4 (2010): 387-97.

Web. 12 Apr. 2016.

In this journal, a study was conducted on affective empathy and cognitive empathy and its association with cyberbullying among adolescents. This study was conducted on 396 adolescents from Singapore ranging from ages 12-18. From the test results, it was found that both boys and girls who had low cognitive empathy had higher scores on cyberbullying than those adolescents with higher cognitive empathy. Even though this study was conducted in Singapore, the findings were comparable to cyberbullying rates in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. This journal is consistent with the argument I'm trying to make in my paper because it shows there is a link between low empathy and cyberbullying. This journal also furthers contributes to my paper because it discusses how cyberbullying has become a universal issue which is affecting adolescents internationally.

Bahirwani, Krishna. "Wonder Girl Makes You ReThink Cyberbullying: 14-year-old Tech

Genius and Author Trisha Prabhu Tells Her Story in Her Own Words, of

How She Plans to Make the World ReThink Its Actions." *DNA : Daily News*

& Analysis, (2015). Web. May 10, 2016

In this newspaper article, Trisha Prabhu, the young innovator and creator of the online software ReThink, is interviewed about the path she has paved in preventing cyberbullying. In her interview, Prabhu says that she was inspired to become an advocate to stop cyberbullying after she read the story about an eleven year old girl named Rebecca Sedwick who committed suicide after being severely cyberbullied. Prabhu was astonished that a girl at such a young age would find her life unlivable form individuals who had tormented her online. After learning about this story, Prabhu became motivated to find ways in which to bring cyberbullying to an end. This interview opened up new insights for me as I was working on the recommendations section of may paper. Prabhu made the point

that the burden is placed on the victim to get help in cyberbullying cases. Sadly, 9 out of 10 times, a cyberbullied victim will suffer silently instead of tell someone about what they are enduring. Prabhu's innovative software ReThink, helps stop a cyberbully in their tracks by asking them if they really want to send a message filled with harmful language to a person. I found this software fascinating and it fit perfectly in my recommendations section for ways to prevent cyberbullying.

Beale, Andrew V., and Kimberly R. Hall. "Cyberbullying: What School

    Administrators (and Parents) Can Do". *The Clearing House* 81.1

    (2007): 8–12. Web. 15 Mar. 2016

   This article further helps touch on recommendations that parents and schools need to undertake to ensure children learn how to use the internet safely and responsibly. Some of the methods the author suggests are schools hosting workshops to inform parents about the nature and form of cyberbullying, school policies need to state exactly what cyberbullying is and then specify the exact consequences expected by engaging in that behavior, create a comfortable climate at school where students feel encouraged in talking with a faculty member about being cyberbullied, and then also creating anti-cyberbullying programs to keep schools safe and secure. Besides this journal helping me build my recommendations section, it also goes into individuals' motivations to cyberbully. This will also help me give an informed description on what cyberbullying is so as to better understand it and explain it within my essay.

Funk, Jeanne B., Heidi Bechtoldt Baldacci, Tracie Pasold, and Jennifer

    Baumgardner. "Violence Exposure in Real-life, Video Games, Television,

    Movies, and the Internet: Is There Desensitization?" *Journal of*

    Adolescence 27.1 (2004): 23-39. *ScienceDirect*. Web. 10 Apr. 2016.

   A psychology journal which investigates the relationship between young adolescents' empathy and how it's affected by media violence exposure, as well as video games and movies that contain violence. The study was done on 150 fourth and fifth graders to measure their level of empathy and attitudes toward violence. The study found that exposure to violent video games was the main cause in lowering of empathy and pro-violent attitudes in adolescents. Video games, unlike media, reward the players for using violence. While this journal focused more on loss of empathy in adolescents through video game violence, it does help add to my argument about loss of compassion through media.

This journal largely contributes to the psychology section of my essay, such as when the authors compared how adolescents gain proviolence attitudes from violent video games, which can potentially transfer online to social media. This journal further contributes to my essay about how overexposure to violence while adolescents are still developing "their moral scaffolding" can have a negative affects on their empathy.

Held, Virginia. "Can the Ethics of Care Handle Violence?" *Ethics & Social*

      Welfare, 4.2 (2010): 115-129.

      Virginia Held is a leading moral, social, and political feminist philosopher who focuses on the subject of the ethics of care. Held states that using the ethics of care approach can be very effective in dealing with family, friends and other personal relationships. However, the ethics of care seems like a less effective approach when dealing with larger issues such as war, terrorism, and violence against other individuals. Held acknowledges the fact that the acting of simply caring would not be the best thought of solution when dealing with these issues. However, Held argues that the soft touch of care could be better used to confront these issues as opposed to the harsh arm of the law. Held's argument can help me to better explain the ethics of care approach to dealing with cyberbullying, which could be considered an issue of violence.

Hinduja, Sameer, Patchin, Justin. "Bullies Move beyond the Schoolyard: A

      Preliminary Look at Cyberbullying - Cyberbullying Research

      Center." *Cyberbullying Research Center*. N.p., 31 Mar. 2006. Web. 24

      Feb. 2016.

      This article discusses and explores the movement of "schoolyard bullying" to bullying online. In the past, bullying affected children primarily at school, but victims were then able to escape this treatment once they left school and went home. However, with the access to laptops, tablets, iPads, and smartphones, the once schoolyard bully can attack on any front beyond the school yard. Individuals can harass other individuals day and night, anywhere at any given moment. This study discovered that 30% of adolescent respondents reported that they had been ignored, disrespected, name called, and been victimized online. The point of this source is to explain what cyberbullying is and how it can occur from children and adolescents who are trying to strive for acceptance amongst peers, without really understanding the consequences of these actions. This journal will help me to build my argument as to how cyberbullying can affect bully and victim psychologically. This journal will also help me to build my recommendations section on how to be more compassionate Internet users.

Kinnick, Katherine N., Dean M. Krugman, and Glen T. Cameron. "Compassion

Fatigue: Communication and Burnout Toward Social

Problems." *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 73.3

(1996): 687-707. *ProQuest.* Web. 28 Mar. 2016.

This journal explores what "compassion fatigue" is and how it has become a phenomenon related to social problems. This term has been commonly used to describe what those in helping professions, such as nursing and social work, experience in their jobs. These individuals may experience an overload of emotional problems, causing them to begin feeling less compassion or "compassion fatigue" towards those they are helping. This term now stretches beyond what individuals in helping professions experience. With the onslaught of negative news media individuals are exposed to daily, they too can experience "compassion fatigue." This journal will help me better explain what "compassion fatigue" is and how media can cause this. While this journal does not touch up on how social media specifically affects individual's compassion, it still discusses the relationship between the media and compassion. The media carries abundant information that overwhelm individuals, however, the study undertaken in this journal does not have a concrete answer whether or not the media is the cause in affecting individuals' compassion online.

Milivojević, Tatjana, and Ivana Ercegovac. "Empathy and the Internet: Positive

Potentials Vs. Risks." *Kultura (Skopje)*, 11 (2015): 103-112. Web. 26 Mar. 2016.

This journal discusses how the Internet enables us to increase our communication with others and opens up our social and geographical horizons. The arguments made are whether or not social networks help to increase our empathy or if they shut it down entirely. The excess and rapidity of information individuals view online can create an information overload in our brains. However, the connections individuals have online can increase their empathy because there are certain barriers broken down online that allow people to have deeper, more understanding relationships. Some people feel more comfortable opening up to someone online rather than face-to-face. This journal can help me with my research by providing reasons how social networks can affect our empathy. It also can help me develop my counterargument because the journal also provides the perspective of how social networking and help deepen our empathy.

Noddings, Nel. *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*.

Berkeley: U of California, 1984. Print.

In this book, author Nel Noddings builds a philosophical argument about using care in helping an individual make an ethical decision. The Ethics of Care recognizes that caring for others or that desire to be cared for, is an intrinsic human quality. When individuals focus on this quality, they can make decisions that will be more beneficial to those that will be affected in the ethical decision. Other ethical theories such as Utilitarianism and Kantianism, are rigid in following principle and rule. However, the Ethics of Care recognizes that every person is a unique individual with an unique situation. I will be using this book in my paper to explain what the Ethics of Care is and how it helped me figure out whether people are losing their compassion online. I used the Ethics of Care lens to judge the feedback and comments Amanda Todd's YouTube video received. The conclusion that I came to was that from an Ethics of Care standpoint, it appeared to me that individuals were losing their compassion online. However, there are many grey areas in ethical theories so there is no concrete answer from an ethical standpoint whether online users are truly losing their compassion.

Rushkoff, Douglas, and Leland Purvis. *Program or Be Programmed: Ten*

Commands for a Digital Age. Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull, 2011. Print.

In this book, the author debates whether the Internet is good for our humanity, or if the Internet is destroying our humanity. However, despite the arguments for and against the Internet, what it comes down to is that the Internet and social media are here to stay. Whatever negative implications have come with increased digital media usage, we as online users, have to adapt and resolve these issues. This source fits into my essay because it discusses anonymity as a downside to Internet usage and it can have dehumanizing tendencies. This is very much like cyberbullying—online anonymity that has dehumanizing qualities. This book can help back up my argument that things like social media sites distract us from the coming challenges of the future (such as a continual increase in cyberbullying), and we need to learn how to face as well as act upon these challenges. This book also talks about another topic I bring up in my essay, which is how we are becoming desensitized to issues online, and even though humans are more connected now than they ever have been, there's a real disconnect from what's happening around them.

Todd, Amanda. "My Story: Struggling, Bullying, Suicide, Self-Harm." Online video clip.

YouTube. YouTube, 07 Sept. 2012. Web. 10 May 2016.

In this YouTube, fifteen year old Amanda Todd shared her story to the world through a series of flashcards of how she had become a victim of cyberbullying. The video

is in black and white and only shows part of Todd's face, forcing the viewer to take in the written words of her story. Todd walks the viewer through her story, from its innocent beginnings of talking to a stranger online, to her naked photo being circulated throughout the Internet and social media, to finally becoming a victim online and offline to her peers' animosity. I used the Amanda Todd case study as my primary source within my essay. Todd's YouTube video, as well as the reactions it garnered, demonstrated the true power social media plays in our humanity. Todd had reached out to other individuals through YouTube for some compassion and she did not receive it. Todd committed suicide a month after she posted the video which inspired the whole idea of my paper of how social media is negatively impacting our compassion.

White, Jennifer, and Michael J. Kral. "Re-Thinking Youth Suicide: Language,

Culture, and Power." *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and*

Psychology 6.1 (2014): 122-34. Web. 27 Apr. 2016.

This journal investigates youth suicides, particularly high profile teen suicides that resulted from cyberbullying. The authors investigate the conditions that could make a life unlivable and if teen suicides are dependent on political, sociocultural, or relational issues. The authors then further discussed relations of power, culturally specific social practices, and language that can cause teen suicides. The recently developed cultural frameworks that are now influencing teen suicide are also brought into the discussion. The journal talks about the Amanda Todd cyberbullying case, as well as the details about her YouTube video and the reasons why she posted it. After the authors talked about the Amanda Todd case, they continued on with preventive measures that should be taken to prevent teen suicides in the future. While this journal focused more on different motivations for teen suicide rather than specifically Amanda Todd's cyberbullying case, there are still a couple of statements I used to help back up my claims of the case. Also, the preventive measures part in this journal helped contribute to the recommendations section of my essay.

Whittaker, Elizabeth, and Robin M. Kowalski. "Cyberbullying Via Social

Media." *Journal of School Violence* 14.1 (2014): 11-29. Web.

This psychology journal researches three different studies on prevalence rates of cyberbullying in college-age students, what are indicators of a targeted victim, and the settings which cyberbullying takes place with social media as a the central focus in the study. The study found that texting and social media sites were the main settings that cyberbullying took place through. The study also found that individuals perceived cyberbullying negatively if online negative comments were directed at peers. However,

cyberbullying was perceived less negatively if directed at anonymous people online. This journal fits into my paper because it provided me with psychological insight on possible motivations of cyberbullying, and how cyberbullying is not just relevant amongst adolescents, but college students as well. The journal also gave me more insight how social media was a favored platform for cyberbullying. The findings in this journal will help shape my argument how people appear to be losing their compassion online because they feel the anonymity cyberbullying allows, makes it more acceptable.

Final Synthesis Essay

At the very beginning of HCOM 475, I was nervous about the class and had no idea what to expect or what I would get out of the class. My first problem was that I had not a single clue as to what I wanted to do for my final senior project. My second problem was our class theme of Technology and Humanity troubled me because it was a subject I was not entirely interested in or knowledgeable about. The last problem I had was the class being entirely discussion based. Throughout my four years of being an HCOM major at CSUMB, I always struggled with the discussion portions in my classes. However as a senior in my capstone course, I felt like I needed to push past my previous bad experiences with discussion classes and grow to embrace it.

While I loved writing papers and contributing in successful team projects, I found myself very unwilling to participate in discussions. I had this attitude because within my classes over the past four years, I found that there would be select students who always seemed to make the class discussions very difficult to participate in. There would be that one student who would not stop talking so no one else could jump into the discussion or make their own points. Then there would be another student who would aggressively establish their personal opinions to the class, but would be rude and unwillingly to accept anyone else's opinions. Finally, there would be students like me. Those individuals who potentially could very well contribute to a discussion, but were too shy to speak up.

However, despite all my shortcomings with previous discussion based classes within HCOM, the seminar style of HCOM 475 was an enjoyable experience and really pulled me out of my shell by the end. I felt as though that by participating in the discussion, it was the most beneficial way in helping me to better grasp and understand our class's theme of Humanity and Technology.

During our class discussions, of course there would be differing viewpoints and some individuals would be hesitant to accept other's opinions on a topic. Fortunately, discussions never got out of hand and all my classmates were very respectful of one another and did not purposely interrupt, talk over another, or was rude or aggressive to another individual who had a differing viewpoint. It created a safe, and comfortable environment where I felt willing to speak up. Eventually, I contributed to the discussions, even starting the discussion out twice—something I had rarely if ever done before this class.

By actively participating, as well as listening to an entire class's thoughts and opinions, I learned so much more of the particular subjects we discussed. I gained more ideas for my own paper, as well as gaining a new insight on many other topics that I knew nothing about before. I learned how there is a gender gap that exists today in technology use and STEM research, the possibility of a drug being manufactured that can help humans live longer and the implications of this drug, and the topic of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) technology and whether or not this technology endangers our meaning of what makes us human.

Within HCOM 475, I have demonstrated an ability to work collaboratively with others through actively participating in our class seminars as well as other class activities.

At first I found it rather intimidating because before this semester, speaking up in class and expressing my opinions was something I had never been comfortable doing. However, I came to the realization that my classmates could help me gain a better grasp on many of the topics we discussed, as well as further open my mind to all the different opinions and perspectives on the different topics of our class theme. At some points while I independently worked on my essay, I would recall an excellent point someone had made previously in class which related to my own topic, and then include that idea in my essay. By contributing to the seminars and being receptive to my classmate's words, not only did I gain a better perspective on a certain topic, but I also was able to write a more well-rounded essay.

Discussing the class readings with a peer also helped me to get a better grasp of the material, which had often seemed confusing to me at first. Hearing what my peer had to say about the readings, and then talking out loud to them about what I thought the reading was about, helped me to better understand the subject at hand. This collaboration then gave me the confidence to participate in the seminars. I would then take the new ideas and perspectives that I gained through class collaboration, and then I was able to transfer them over into certain areas of my essay.

In addition, when we had a practice poster presentation, by doing a peer review, I realized I needed to practice presenting my poster because I found it difficult in delivering the important parts of my essay in a clear and concise manner. By my peer asking me questions and then offering suggestions on what I should mention when presenting my poster, I figured out how to present my research more articulately. Overall, I think it really

helped me to develop a more informative research essay that included different perspectives on an issue.

My project specifically demonstrates my deepening understanding of our section's theme by how social media is negatively affecting human compassion. From the findings in my research, it would appear that social media is negatively affecting our compassion online. This could be dangerous for our humanity because technology and our lives have seemingly merged into one, rather than remaining separate. What we say online is a reflection of who we are. If we say horrible, cruel things online to others, not only does it affect those individuals, but also we may start becoming more of cruel, negative person in our real lives. My research has really helped me to better understand that being compassionate online is extremely important in preserving our humanity. It is not too late in instilling practices that can make younger generations more compassionate, and responsible online users.

My senior project met the standards and requirements of a research essay because I completed 20 pages worth of analytical research, based on a question and thesis. My thesis of whether we are losing our compassion online, was backed up through my findings of peer-reviewed sources and books. I also provided support in my claims by my primary source, the cyberbullying case of Amanda Todd and her YouTube video.

In previous HCOM courses I had the experience in writing about cyberbullying as well as ethical theories, so I built upon this previous knowledge throughout my essay. My essay was unbiased as I presented the implications of Amanda Todd's case as truthfully and factually as I could. While I was firm in my stance of social media negatively affecting our compassion, I did include a counterargument in my paper that explained that despite social

media's downside, there are many positives to it. If this class and HCOM as a whole has taught me anything, it is that you need multiple perspectives to understand an issue or a topic. I learned there is no single, concrete answer to anything and everything can be opened to debate and discussion. In the end, by sharing our thoughts, opinions, arguments, and viewpoints, and by actively working together, we can achieve incredible new insight.