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Being Blind to Peoples’ Suffering: The Unfortunate Reality
In Gaza, a child lays hungry and in pain in the wreckage of his once home. In the bustling city of Mumbai, an old street sweeper searches the trash in hopes to find a meal for himself and his family. In Burma, a family is kept unjustly in a concentration camp with deprival of their basic human rights and needs. In the border of Syria, another plastic boat is being loaded with families trying to escape the harsh reality of their existence. In the streets of Mecca, a child with both his limbs missing is seen begging for money; the only piece of clothing on him is a ratty brown t-shirt covered in rips and holes. In the deserts of Tanzania, a malnourished child is forced to skip another meal; it is the second meal she has skipped that day. In China, a 7-year-old boy (and victim to child labor) watches the other kids laughing in school while he tediously sits on the side of the road polishing shoes to earn enough money for his dinner. And while all of this is happening outside our borders, we American’s are sitting in front of our televisions tuning in to watch the latest episode of Keeping Up With the Kardashians.

We know that poverty and suffering and oppression are also prevalent here in the States. There is no denying that. I mean poverty and suffering are prevalent in all areas of the globe. It is just hard to disregard the fact that it’s more present globally and, in most cases, it’s more severe and causes more disruption and is overlooked. While it is wrong to generalize, it is hard for us to ignore the vast majority of the American population that seems to be more intrigued with these useless reality TV shows and other things of insignificance while there is so much suffering, injustice, and persecution occurring in the world around us.

But why is it? Why are we so blind to the suffering and misfortune of others? Can it be because we are all heartless human beings? No, of course not. Humanity is not completely dead, while it might seem to be otherwise. But this question has been circulating in my mind ever since I can remember and I often find myself getting offended when no one else seems to have the same question. I wonder how different the world would be if everyone were conscious of the injustices that occur 24/7 around the globe. You would think with all the inequalities of the world we would be cultivating an environment that breeds more humanitarians. Yet, in a day where more humanitarians and human rights activists are needed, we seem to fall short. But let’s try to answer the question. In my mind and through my research it has become abundantly clear that there are 3 key factors that hinder us from progressing forward for a better future: Social media, egocentrism, and materialism. And while there are definitely other dynamics that go into the issue of ignorance, I find these to be the 3 top contributors for the sole fact that they are inescapable and manifest themselves in someway in each of our lives.

In our modern day and age, social media is definitely inescapable and is an extremely powerful weapon. Whether it is used correctly or incorrectly, its effects can impact millions of people at a time. Social media channels itself through various sources: newspapers, magazines, T.V, Instagram, twitter, Facebook, BuzzFeed, and Snapchat are only a few ways social media can spread through. It’s fascinating to see how fast I have witnessed articles, memes, and rumors spread. It’s like wildfire. Social media has the ability to distort the way we view the world, and this can be either positive or negative. People often fall victim to social media bias, or they pretty much believe everything and anything they see on the World Wide Web. The drawbacks to this are clear: we are breeding a society that takes everything at face value. For example, in pretty much all cases, strongly worded headlines are used to provoke a reaction. Moreover, social media bias exists. You see these huge social platforms choose who are what they want to cover
and how long they want to talk about it. Ultimately, they have the ability to choose who or what you are going to feel strongly about for that specific time period. We often hear the saying “don’t believe everything you see online,” but we usually don’t think much of it. Myself included, I often find myself believing everything I see or hear online just because it looks so legitimate. And for that, I’m wrong. It’s important to understand and learn about the world for yourself. And while news channels and other social media outlets can be useful, they are by no means the ultimate reality. There is more out there and it is our duty to look deeper into issues we hear about to diverge from these biases. When it comes to social media, you can’t be naïve. While I don’t really believe in conspiracy theories, I believe that there are people out there that don’t want you to see the world for what it really is.

On November 13, 2015, around 130 innocent victims were murdered in the beautiful city of Paris (Jethro, Don & Paul 2015). The world was torn to pieces; every social media website, newspapers, news channels, journal articles, and magazine headlines consisted of the same heartbreaking story. Thousands of pictures with the same “We Stand With Paris” slogan circulated the web, along with blog posts, video reactions, and prayers. On April 2, 2015, just a few months earlier to this attack, an attack was made in Kenya in the Garissa University. 147 students were ruthlessly murdered (Wendling 2015). There was little to no media coverage, no pictures circulating the web, and no prayers being sent to the victims and their families. What made this attack any different than the Paris attack? Where was the media coverage? Where were the pictures in tribute to the dead? Why was the world so blind to the blatant murder of innocent college students? Where was the uproar? Doesn’t it hurt your heart a bit? This is just one from the hundreds of cases that go unheard of every single day. Again, social media bias exists.

Another great example is the Burmese Genocide. Did you know that the Burmese people are amongst the most oppressed here on this world? They are oppressed by the militia and are kept in concentration camps; more than hundreds have been ruthlessly murdered and hundred are attempting refuge in countries like Malaysia (Graeme 2014). The few pictures that are circulating the web are absolutely horrendous and grotesque. All I see is blood and mutilated bodies. And this has been going on for years. Where are the prayers for these innocent civilians? Why is the world not outraged? Where is the media coverage? Its astonishing to me that we live in the 21st century yet have the ability to ignore a genocide that is occurring across the seas. We have the technological capabilities to share pictures of our Panera Bread lunches but not the ability to call out a social injustice? It’s sickening.

Now, let’s stop putting all the blame on social media and the bias it can create. Obviously, the problem runs more deeply than CNN and Facebook. The problem is internal. It lies within us. The problem is called being too egocentric and too materialistic. I had mentioned these two previously as being the second and third key factors that causes us to be ignorant. If I were to put a mathematical statistic on this, I would say that egocentrism and materialism are 80% of the problem. The rest of the 20% can be external conditionings such as social media, family and friends, and the environment you were raised in. Eighty percent is a massive number, isn’t it? By definition, egocentrism is a cognitive bias that refers to the natural restriction on our perception caused by the fact that we can only see the world from our perspective (Whitbourne, 2012). To put simply, it’s the ‘me, myself, and I’ syndrome. With that being said, egocentrism and materialism go hand in hand. Materialism simply means valuing money and material possessions; in an article it even stated that some negative impacts of leading a materialistic life...
are unhappiness, being excessively dissatisfied, and having poor health (Mark, John, Robert, & Carole 2014). So, what does that mean? It means that when you are materialistic, you are never truly content with what life is offering you which leads to egocentric traits such as being selfish which ultimately leads you to not care about anything other than yourself. It’s like a domino effect. We need to ensure that we don’t push the first domino down. We need to step away from the egocentric and materialistic forces that lay within us. If we manage to move away from solely caring about ourselves, we can understand how blessed we truly are and have a bit more compassion towards those who don’t have as much.

America is an extremely materialistic and egocentric nation. There is no need to sugarcoat it. Our society thrives off our own consumerist values. We are wasteful and don’t even realize it. That sandwich we threw away because it had too much mayo or the boxes of expired food…do we forget that there are people out there who don’t even have a single meal to eat? We waste money on items that we don’t even need and fail to remember that there are millions out there who struggle to put food on the table and clothes on their backs. We always feel the need to have more. We need the newest cars. We have to have the shiniest gadgets. We have to be in the loop with the newest fashion trends. We have to have the most followers on twitter or the most likes on our Instagram picture. We yearn so much to be the best version of ourselves that we neglect to truly see the world for what it is: a place where oppression, prosecution, and injustice run rampant. A world where it is all right for a child to starve, a world where people are murdered based on their skin color or religious values, and a world where nobody seems to care.

And that’s the thing with egocentrism; it sometimes goes unnoticed. We don’t realize that sometimes we may just be too engrossed in our own struggles and personal conflicts that we fail to put things into perspective. This isn’t said to undermine our struggles, but to shed light to the struggles of others. And by shedding this light we become more sympathetic and more aware. Egocentrism and materialism are diseases that we all contract at some point or another. The consumerist societies we are brought up in do nothing but fuel our need to buy expensive things, live lavishly, and only care about ourselves. And sometimes its okay to focus on ourselves a little, but not to the point where we ignore the (more severe) problems of those around us. It’s easy to get trapped in our own bubbles. Especially when the problems and injustices that are occurring around the world are thousands of miles away. But just because there is a great distance between them and us, doesn’t make it all right to neglect their situation. The Palestinian conflict in Gaza has been occurring for a decade and thousands have been removed from their homes and murdered, but many Americans don’t seem to care. If they did care, something would have been done. It’s just another example of how egocentrism can get in the way of humanity.

It’s time we open our eyes. In a world filled with such sufferings, oppressions, and injustices, we simply do not have the time to be so egocentric and materialistic, nor do we have the time to fall into social media bias. It’s blinding us to the issues that are important and it’s blinding us to the cries of help of those who always seem to be unheard. We have to move away from the things that are slowly poisoning our vision. Start becoming more aware of our surroundings. Read books to avoid ignorance, be in touch with the news but understand that everything you hear or see should not always be believed, and surround yourself with good company. You want to be around the kinds of people you can have stimulating conversation with about national and global issues. You want to be around people who won’t drag you into the trap
of egocentrism and materialism. The power of having a good friend circle is truly unmatched. I didn’t think it mattered too much until I met some extraordinary people who have impacted my life for the better and made me understand how much more there is to living than a 4.0 GPA and a cute outfit. Volunteer more and humble yourself. Expose yourself to an environment you aren’t familiar with and put yourself in the shoes of another human being. Be bold. Don’t be afraid to enlighten the people around you and never be afraid to speak your mind. If you see an injustice or hear about it, talk about it! Life is too short to not be aware of what is going on around us. It’s too short to only focus on ourselves. Being ignorant just makes you look incredibly stupid. It’s time we open our eyes and make the world a better place.
References


Reflection

The inquiry process is something I have never had to do before. The most interesting thing I learned from my research was statistics I found that support my topic. Some of the numbers were startling and it was intriguing to relate these numbers and use them to support my argument. Specifically for my research paper, I struggled a lot with finding sources. My paper is very opinion orientated (so to say), so it was challenging to find scholarly sources that backed up my thoughts. I really had to sit down and break down my argument to the smallest level I possibly could. I wasn’t able to research my topic as an entirety, but had to research aspects of it. With the writing process, I struggled a lot with citations. I have never been graded for accurately citing so I had to be extremely meticulous to ensure I didn’t make a silly mistake.

My inquiry question stayed the same for the most part. If anything, I changed my approach. I turned my paper into a call to action more than just an argument. I made it more personal than I had previously intended. It’s important to look at the context of my topic because it’s more than just ignorance to peoples’ suffering; it’s a deeper look into the human condition. I think my analytical skills have changed to a certain degree. It’s hard to see change based off of one assignment, but I definitely know that I am better at conducting research and citing than I was before. I also found that this project made me go more in depth with my topic since I needed to have 6 pages; I couldn’t afford to not talk about something. So, research and analyzing my sources was key. I am really proud of how passionate I began to sound at parts of my paper. Honestly, writing this paper was more fun than I thought it would be. I am proud that I picked a topic I am so passionate about and it just made the process that much easier.

This inquiry topic was a bit different than most in the sense that it wasn’t really an argument. It is supposed to be a call to action. I wanted to start off with a question and let my reader wonder about what we should do next as a whole society. I think I concluded it well with saying that it is time we open our eyes, because I truly believe that it is time we open our eyes. If there is anything else I wonder about my topic I would ask people how they felt after reading my paper and survey them to see if they ever fall in the trap of media bias.

I loved the group collaboration! It was nice to be able to read my peers’ work and give constructive criticism while they critiqued mines. I read Jon Jon’s paper and Ginger’s draft and tried to help them formulate more ideas or directions they could take their papers in. I read over Ginger’s annotated bibliography and tried to ask more about her research paper. If I were ever confused with anything, I knew my group would have some advice. More than actually editing papers, our group was very collaborative. We spent a good 15 minutes per person going over our concept maps. It was so nice to finally be able to give and receive positive feedback. Every member in my group was dynamic and ‘useful’ (to put it blatantly). They motivated me to go deeper than I was planning to go into my topic and suggested I talk about my personal experiences with ignorance in America. It was really beneficial overall!