

Regarding the pain of others in the age of social media

Using social media to effect a positive change

Margot Herster

What changes every day is faster speeds of network technology and media culture built and economized around our ability to distribute and respond to so many words and images per second. Raging animosities turned to violence, intimidation, protest, cover-up, lies are not new.

Pictures, photographs, videos and movies are not new. Cameras are not new; their speeds are not new. The global spread of words, pictures and moving images are not new but geographical reach has expanded at exponential speeds.

We don't have to be so brief, clever, cute or fast in what we say or show just because the platform encourages it. We can read slowly and watch slowly even if it's hard. We can use slow motion tools. We can pause and repeat. We can avoid click-bait because every time we click on spectacular ridiculousities and journalistic train-wrecks we pay for ad-clicks and pay into the economies for more of those stories to be written, shared, seen and acted upon.

We can be more thoughtful and loving in how we respond and act toward others. We can look more, hear more, listen more and see more. We can draw together hearts. We can shift shapes. We can slow down fireballs.

We can stop posting or commenting just because we want engagement, tears, likes and shares. We can amplify or mute. We can speak only if we have something important to say. We can meander social networks and stumble upon what doesn't appear in our feeds; circumvent algorithms directing what we see and read. We can discover images and stories that aren't like those we usually see or respond to.

We can use language that meets people where they're at. We can frame or re-frame for the audience we are trying to reach.

Who or what we choose to ignore because we don't agree, don't want to be seen liking or commenting on, or are unsure how to react to, can ignite and propel anxieties. We don't know every person in our network or the experiences that colour their views. We can start conversations with "what do you think," "what do you want", "why?" We can invite people we assume are on the wrong side of history, or who support Trump or whoever we're



PHOTO: BIGSTOCK

We can reach out to people, even if we don't know them well enough, who seem distressed or angry or ignored

against. We can take the time to explain what we think we know and why. We can stop shaming, slamming and unfriending people because we don't agree with them.

We can log off when we're getting stressed and take care of ourselves, our families and friends in real life. We can come back when ready. We can be humble in our opinions and still hold them dear. We can forgive after someone shows up too angry, scary or doing something stupid. We can give more than one second chance.

We can reach out to people, even if we don't know them well enough, who seem distressed or angry or ignored. We can set limits for how hard we try to engage and understand someone who offends our values. We can grieve in our own ways. We can give more than one second chance.

We can choose if we want to expose ourselves to a public forum or become a poster child or hashtag. We can respect others' privacy and ways of grieving. We can learn more about what another feels is at least semi-acceptable to say or do. We can read the comments and be the one to add a thoughtful, factual, caring comment because someone who needs to hear it might read it. We may reach a friend of a victim, a judge, a police officer, a politician,

a power broker. Or an isolated could-be copycat or would-be abuser. Or another might-be abused or lost life.

We can use more words and spell those words out. We can say "I think," "I feel," "I prefer," "I saw," "I hope," "I wish," "I pray," "I noticed," "I tried," "This is what happened to me," "This is how I felt when I saw this happen to someone else." We can tell our own stories and emote less judgement.

We can read long stories and watch uncut videos. We can fact-check each other. We can believe each other's personal experience.

We can lead with trust until we're pretty sure we've been betrayed. We can protect ourselves until we're pretty sure we don't need protection. We can explain why we feel irate or hurt by someone's opinion or deed.

We can shift our language to meet people where they're at

We can shut down hate and cruelty even if we are the media and are supposed to document not intervene. We can call out authoritative, arrogant calls for what to think or do. We can question assumptions that are off point, cruel or dangerous. We can share knowledge with our POV revealed so people can interpret who we are, where we're from. We can show

more parts of ourselves, admit our biases and tell people how we know what we think we know.

We can counteract the "influencers" or popular crowds who get it wrong, miss the point, spew incomplete and misleading facts, or seem overconfident or delusional. We can stop being scared we'll tick off a big name or alienate someone with power over our career, money or other parts of our lives. We can say or do something even when we're also scared.

We can keep our circles small or open them far and wide. We can interrupt, meditate, mediate, disrupt, protest, pacify, sing, dance, sooth, cry, scream, sleep, and wake. We can think about how, when, where and with whom we do each thing. We can work inside systems, outside systems or in between systems.

We can learn the mechanisms of social media and news media and how they are economised, politicised and propagandised. If we learn how the system works, we can interrupt its dangerous, hurtful messages and deeds. We can also change the system. We can show compassion and empathy. We can tell little stories that mean something more to us and we think others may understand. We should be clear that we not only tell facts but use metaphor to reveal truth.

We can reveal our own vulnerabilities and admit we may not understand others. We can teach, be taught and invite others to join difficult, emotional conversations. We can delete or undo if we were wrong, change our mind or see someone hurt by us. We can admit mistakes. We

can apologise. We can try to make amends.

We can distance ourselves from people or places we fear as long as we double-check our motivations and prejudice. We can have opinions about people's realities of another race, religion, ideology, gender, sexuality, age, geography, income, profession, lifestyle or history.

We can know our own power. We can be reflective, intentional and careful about using our power. We can think longer before acting, clicking, tweeting, posting, sharing, liking, wowing, raging or texting. We can cry. We can laugh.

We can ask for help and be specific in what we want. We can reject care that doesn't feel right. We can come back later to ask for the care we rejected before. We can go back for people, check to see how they're doing, and ask if they want or have help to give.

We can expect mutual exchange; we can be givers and takers. We can be political friends. We can be real friends. We can draw together hearts. ●

Margot Herster (@010hero) is founder of BUREAU of CHANGE, an education-centric studio for collaborative media arts. She lives in New Orleans, in the American state of Louisiana which has been the site of recent extra-judicial shootings of black men by police officers, as well as civilian shootings of police officers.