The Decline Of Compassion In Society

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Part 1: A reflection of lack of compassion

Background

A harsh wake-up call regarding the lack of compassion of certain Ontarians was given to Canadians in February. Following the late-night alert on cellphones that indicated 11-year-old Riya Rajkumar had been abducted, some individuals took to social media to moan about their restless nights rather than to show concern for a kid in danger (Rajkumar was eventually discovered dead). Others complained to 911, clogging the system for those who had an emergency. The reaction to the retaliation was immediate and furious. However, a few months later, during another Amber Alert, the same cycle was set off (thankfully, the three-year-old boy was discovered safe).

The self-centred response to the warning was evidenced by the public's declining capacity for empathy, "me-first" narcissism, and the ongoing erosion of the social compact between all people. Even more interesting was the response to the response, which included sarcasm, derision, and reflexive judgment. The controversy is a microcosm of a much larger struggle: the urgent need for compassion as a last-ditch fix for collapsing political, medical, civil society, and environmental systems.

The fervent acclaim bestowed upon New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern for her compassionate response following the devastating assaults on Christchurch mosques that claimed 51 lives and injured numerous others in March signalled the public's thirst for compassion in politics. Following her Muslim greeting of "As-Salaam-Alaikum," which means "Peace be upon you," Ardern attempted to bring people together by saying [1], "We feel grief, we feel injustice, we feel anger, and we share that with you." She contributed more than just "thoughts and prayers"; her administration also introduced legislation outlawing most semi-automatic guns and provided financial support to families to help with funeral costs. The public's desire for compassion in politics was evident in the outpouring of praise for New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's empathetic response to the horrific attacks on mosques in Christchurch in March, which left 51 people dead and hundreds of others injured. "We feel grief, we feel injustice, we feel anger, and we share that with you," Ardern said, trying to unite people after extending her Muslim greeting. [2], "As-Salaam-Alaikum," which means "Peace be upon you." More than "thoughts and prayers" were sent; under her administration, legislation banning most semi-automatic firearms was adopted, and families received financial assistance to help with burial

expenses.

Personal Reflection

The U.S. government has institutionalized cruelty, caging migrant children and arresting “Good Samaritans” helping ailing migrants at the Mexican border. Austerity programs, including those in Ontario, are targeting the vulnerable—people with low incomes, children, and those on the margins. The divisive, toxic political climate gave rise to the British group Compassion in Politics, founded last fall by activists and academics. “People look at British politics and see a lack of compassion in policy on refugees, immigration, housing, Brexit,” group co-founder Matt Hawkins tells Maclean’s. According to him, forty years of free-market, neo-liberal policies have resulted in growing disparities, declining wages, and a depressed populace. “There is dissatisfaction with a political system that prioritizes party over progress for all, and parliamentary majorities over cooperation,” Hawkins reports that there has been overwhelming positive support, notably from Noam Chomsky and moral philosopher Peter Singer; they are in contact with Ardern’s office and have expressed interest in Australia. In May, British MPs from different parties demanded that laws include a “compassion threshold.”

Compassionomics, a book by American physician-scientists Stephen Trzeciak and Anthony Mazzarelli, highlights the systemic inhumanity within patient-based medicine. The authors argue that treating patients more kindly improves health outcomes, reduces doctor burnout, and lowers costs. Toronto physician Brian Goldman, author of The Power of Kindness: Why Empathy is Essential in Everyday Life, believes that the Canadian system has designed a system that edits out empathy, making it almost impossible. James Doty, founder of Stanford University’s Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education, links a societal lack of compassion to various personal and political issues, such as stress, anxiety, depression, bullying, crime, wealth and health inequality, and more children growing up in poverty. Doty presents compassion as a value proposition, stating that businesses lose well over $200 billion secondarily to anxiety and depression, which translates into decreased productivity, decreased creativity, increased healthcare costs, and increased human resources costs.[3].

The quest for compassion and empathy has become a micro-industry, with the mainstreaming of mindfulness and the Dalai Lama’s 2001 book, An Open Heart: Practicing Compassion in Everyday Life, being a bestseller. Neuroscience, including brain-mapping fMRI scans, has revealed how compassion and empathy can change us physically and mentally. Animal rights advocacy has also shaped our understanding of compassion and human nature. Goldman’s The Power of Kindness provides a tour of the global compassion complex, taking readers from a lab at Université Laval to Japan to engage with empathetic androids. However, a line is drawn between the utility of empathy, which is feeling and understanding another’s emotions, and compassion, which involves action. Compassion and empathy have become a micro-industry, with the pursuit of compassion becoming a self-help sub-genre. Neuroscience, brain-mapping fMRI scans, and animal-rights advocacy have shaped our understanding of compassion and human nature. The Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science, published in 2017,

was the first collection of academic research on the topic.

Animal rights advocacy has also shaped our understanding of compassion and human nature. Marc Bekoff's 2010 The Animal Manifesto: Six Reasons for Expanding Our Compassion Footprint argues that the competitive "nature, red in tooth and claw" paradigm does not reflect how animals interact co-operatively. Charles Darwin also believed that animals, like humans, could be emotional, empathetic, and moral. Compassion research offers selfish reasons to behave kindly, such as increased self-empowerment, happiness, less loneliness, and reduced anxiety and depression. Helper's high has been linked to the release of feel-good neurotransmitters dopamine, oxytocin, and serotonin. Daily meditation reduces anxiety and decreases the risk of depression, making one a more thoughtful, happy person. Volunteering might even extend life, according to a 2019 University of Buffalo study of 800 people who experienced war and other forms of trauma, typically predictors of a shorter lifespan; those who volunteered lived far longer. [4].

Studying compassion also reveals a problematic paradox: it can be inhibited by fear, greed, and tribalism, fueling the call for compassion. To be compassionate, people have to feel safe, and the biological mechanisms that drive nurturing and caregiving can only emerge if our habitual "self-preservation" and "vigilance-to-threat" systems are not front and centre. People in the compassion sector say media can stoke fear, but it also creates a narrow version of the world that plays into the hands of the extreme right. The call for compassion is rooted in recognizing that our problems are too big to be solved alone. Following the mosque attacks, Canadian Prime Minister Ardern and French President Emmanuel Macron unveiled the "Christchurch call," a global bid to fight online extremism. Over a dozen countries, including Canada, Germany, and the U.K., have signed on, while the U.S. has not. Enshrining compassion in legislation is complex but possible, with examples such as Scotland's act to reduce the number of children living in poverty by 2030 and Wales's 2015 The Well-being of Future Generations Act.

The compassion sector employs familiar language—framing compassion as a value proposition. Economist Joseph Stiglitz calls for adopting a progressive capitalism conducive to individual well-being to remedy the inequities and injustices rising from neo-liberal politics. Mark Wafer discovered the business case for compassion when he co-owned six Tim Hortons franchises in Scarborough, Ontario, with his wife, Valarie. He used his data to show that disabled employees had higher productivity rates, worked more safely, were absent less, were more innovative, required less supervision, and stayed seven times longer than workers without disabilities. Businesses and politicians are also recognizing the value of empathy and compassion. [5]. The Empathy Toy, a blindfold game for children, costs $499 ($299 for "educators"). "Empathy-based" research is the new buzzword in product development, and compassion slogans are expected during the upcoming federal election campaign. However, there is a paradox in politicians giving lip service to compassion at a time when so many see its systemic adoption as essential to human well-being.

Part 2

Introduction

The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and the national security of the United States were significantly impacted by the cognitive and emotional intelligence of President John F. Kennedy. As the country's president, he was a key player in the crisis and made the decisions that determined any fallout. His cognitive style and emotional intelligence directly influenced his reaction to hearing about missiles in Cuba. Kennedy's measured response prompted by this intelligence may have been the only thing that prevented tensions in the crisis from reaching a point where a worldwide nuclear exchange was possible.

Background information

Before examining President Kennedy's actions and ideas, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of emotional intelligence and cognitive style. These two terms, created by Fred Greenstein, allow academics to evaluate and contrast previous American presidents. The cognitive style of a president refers to his or her ability to take in, analyze, and make judgments based on the copious amounts of information continuously flowing through the Oval Office. The president's capacity to channel emotions into advancing an administration's agenda is referred to as emotional intelligence. [6]. This word describes the president's approach to managing emotional feelings when confronted with the demanding responsibilities of leading the Free World. Kennedy exhibited these two qualities of a president during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Cognitive and emotional intelligence collaborated well when assessing the present security threat to the United States and how the president should respond. They influenced his choices regarding the country's future course of action and the potential responses from Cuba and the Soviet Union.

Reflection

The president's flawless cognitive approach during this crisis is evidence of his superior mental faculties. Kennedy was frequently able to quickly become an expert on many government documents when he was in office. He could read quickly thanks to his mental faculties, a valuable ability for a head of state. Given the urgency of getting information to the president during the missile crisis, this general cognitive approach would be especially notable. Kennedy would have to go to several intelligence briefings, communicate with foreign countries, and decide what to do next.

Kennedy's mentality played a role in the missile crisis even before he knew the danger to the country. Emergency meetings were called on the night of October 16 in response to fresh spy photographs showing missiles arranged in an open field. Although this issue was known to many in the Kennedy administration, Presidential Special Assistant McGeorge Bundy neglected to alert the president.

Rather, he reasoned, the president would receive unverified reports of a security threat that he could not act upon immediately. The president wanted to take this knowledge with his advisors and sleep peacefully after this revelation; therefore, the briefing about Cuba was postponed until the next morning.

The president and other Kennedy administration officials were given several new briefings and information in the early hours of this crisis. Those in the administration were shocked to learn that there were missile sites in Cuba when the Central Intelligence Agency released images of fields with ballistic missiles. [7]. The president was left in disbelief by the photographic evidence shown to him after experts gave their testimonies before the committee. According to Robert F. Kennedy's description of the presentation, his brother trusted the advice of intelligence professionals but was perplexed by the photographs. Even later, the president claimed that the locations merely "looked like a football field to him," citing CIA information. JFK and the ensuing Executive Committee would make important national security choices based on this briefing and these photographs, notwithstanding his response to the material before him.

President Kennedy's reading skills contributed to his continued sound and keen cognitive style for the remainder of the crisis. John F. Kennedy made time for outside reading despite international tensions with the Soviet Union and Cuba. He had been reading Barbara Tuchman's book The Guns of August, which describes how rising tensions and poor judgment led to worldwide warfare during World War I. Throughout this crisis, the president's decision-making process was significantly influenced by this book.

Role of Personal choice in decision-making at top national leadership

Another aspect of Kennedy's mental state, emotional intelligence, surely played a significant role in the president's choice. The president's emotional intelligence fluctuated between private conversations and public appearances over thirteen days. The relationship between the president's public and private appearances can be better understood by looking at a timeline of Kennedy's remarks regarding the missiles from September to November, both publicly and privately.[8]. The president never wavered in his emotional intelligence when speaking to the public and never displayed any overt signs of mental illness. Kennedy, however, regularly used his emotions to advance the goals of his White House. His emotions heavily influenced Kennedy's dealings with the public, and the Cuban Missile Crisis was no exception. This notion is made very clear in the president's speech to the nation and his first detailed statements to Congress. JFK encountered some resistance when he informed congressional leaders of the missile proof and the Executive Committee's decision to place the country under quarantine [9]. The president listened carefully since he had already decided on the subject, rather than answering his sceptics negatively. Kennedy maintained emotional control while taking a firm stance against the Soviet Union's activities in his next speech to the nation that day.

Even the president's high emotional intelligence with the American public was demonstrated by his words near the end of the crisis. Kennedy informed the country in his speech on November 2, 1962, that ballistic missiles were being disassembled in Cuba. JFK made sure not to openly blame Russia or Cuba for the crisis nor to declare victory for the United States in an arrogant manner. Instead, he only provided the facts about the current state of affairs. Rather, the president addressed the nation on a gradual de-escalation of hostilities to alleviate citizens' concerns nationwide.

During this crisis, the president's emotional intelligence revealed a different man guiding the country at times. Because there were so many stakes in these events involving Cuba, there was also a great deal of stress over the possibility of a violent war. As soon as the president learned that ballistic missiles were being stationed in San Cristobal, Cuba, he assumed that "action would have to be taken" if the allegations of these missiles were true. Should the president have stuck to this belief, a call to action would have probably resulted in armed confrontation and perhaps even nuclear destruction. Rather, he carefully analyzed the following steps and resisted the need to act on impulse.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy's emotional intelligence was essential as he evaluated the Executive Committee's alternatives and considered the possible consequences of his choices. He was adamant that he would not act on impulse or be moved by his feelings, as doing so would bring about an unparalleled worldwide disaster. Kennedy's understanding of a possible confrontation was strengthened by his reading of The Guns of August and his cognitive powers. He emphasized the significance of peace in all discussions over the removal of Cuban ballistic missiles. Kennedy did not have perfect emotional intelligence, though [10]. A specific period within the crisis saw the nation draw closer to an inevitable war with Russia or Cuba. Kennedy's self-doubt arose upon hearing the news of a submarine accompanying Soviet tankers, and he had to consider the gravity of his actions in issuing a quarantine.

The relationship between emotional intelligence and cognitive style is pertinent to the Cuban Missile Crisis because the president's actions demonstrate how these two traits overlap. When managing a national crisis or threat, a president's emotional and cognitive intelligence are more crucial than before. Kennedy, for example, made judgments about Cuba after gathering fresh facts over several days to avoid acting on impulse. Two essential traits of the current American president are cognitive style and emotional intelligence. The United States' efforts to resolve the matter and halt the missile installation were made clear by President Kennedy's response to the national threat during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Conclusion

The events described in Part 1 demonstrate that the public's declining capacity for empathy has led to a growing need for compassion in politics, medicine, and the environment. The public's response to the Christchurch mosque attacks, New Zealand's legislation banning semi-automatic guns, and the U.S. government's austerity programs have all contributed to this struggle. Compassionomics, a book

by Stephen Trzeciak and Anthony Mazzarelli, highlights systemic inhumanity in patient-based medicine. The quest for compassion has become a self-help sub-genre, with neuroscience and animal rights advocacy shaping our understanding of human nature. Enshrining compassion in legislation is complex but possible. As described in part 2, The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis was pivotal in U.S. national security, largely influenced by President John F. Kennedy's cognitive and emotional intelligence. Kennedy's cognitive style involved quick analysis and judgments, while his emotional intelligence focused on managing emotions to advance the administration's agenda. His reading skills and emotional intelligence played a significant role in his decision-making process, fluctuating between private conversations and public appearances. Kennedy's ability to manage emotions and make informed decisions influenced the country's future course of action and potential responses from Cuba and the Soviet Union. This particular event demonstrates how a leader's emotional intelligence can influence the outcome of significant events in a nation's history.

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