Why Empathy + Compassion Matter

Empathy and compassion are critical to every aspect of our lives, from our personal relationships (romantic, familial, platonic) to solving complex problems (to do so, we need to understand unique challenges people face).

Current Landscape

- Loneliness epidemic
  - Lack of in-person connection
- Over a third of young people use social media "almost constantly"
- Increased polarization in digitized content
  - Echo chambers
- Faux intimacy
  - Social media creates a false sense of closeness
- Curated content
  - Leads to lack of empathy because of lack of unfiltered personalities

Social Media

- Social media constantly blamed for youth mental health
  - Comparison/body image
  - Anxiety
  - FOMO
  - Addictive content
  - Information overload and compassion fatigue
  - Easy to become emotionally numb
- Important to recognize the positives
  - Social media has allowed me to build Talk With Zach, which now has a global reach
  - Allows us to find communities in ways that weren't possible before
    - For ex, an LGBTQ+ person in a conservative environment can seek support
  - Creates channels for communication and connection with people worldwide
  - Plethora of useful information and education
  - Gives individuals more reach and democratizes the sharing of stories
    - Often marginalized or silenced voices can be heard

Tech x mental health

- Tech mental health innovation is on the rise
- I consult for startups that use features like personalized AI chatbots and mood trackers
  - Increases access to anyone with a phone, whereas previously these resources were more expensive and harder to come by
- Intersection of in-person and tech
  - I run workshops that combine an online curriculum with in-person engagement
  - Feature a blogs section on my website that showcases stories from young people around the world
- Looking ahead: does tech *actually* create connection?
  - As new technologies emerge, more will be known about the positives of tech as a tool for empathy and compassion

The Digital Age and Empathy + Compassion

- Social media and technology have a complex impact on empathy and compassion
- They've expanded my awareness by introducing users to perspectives and experiences we might never have encountered otherwise.
  - I've read personal stories of struggle, resilience, and injustice that have moved me deeply
  - They also create a sense of numbness to feeling real emotion since there's an overload of these kinds of stories
- Technologies allow us to stay connected and deepen our relationships
  - Texting, FaceTime, group chats, social posts

Boundaries and Agency

- It can be difficult to use technology for good
- We actually *do* have agency over how we leverage social media and tech
  - By being mindful of our own limits and what is advantageous for our mental health, we can create a framework for what usage works for us
- Social media should be *social*
  - Instead of mindless scrolling, connect with others while spending time on the apps
- Don't be afraid to try new innovations
- Practice empathy and compassion online
  - If you see something you disagree with, instead of arguing in the comment section, consider why the creator posted what they did
  - Too much charged up behavior on social media, so avoid argumentative traps
    - For ex, rage bait

Takeaways

Social media and tech has the ability foster empathy and compassion if used properly and intentionally. In fact, I'm a strong believer that technology has the potential to deepen our humanity as long as it is used purely as a supplement to in-person connection.