# Konnikova, Daniels & *Feels Good Man*
# Paper Prompt

Course:          ENC1939: Unfollow—Culture & Identity on the Internet
Instructor:      Nico Cassanetti

**Formatting Requirements**:  Double spaced, Garamond or TNR font, MLA formatted and minimum 4 <u>full</u> pages with a complete and correct Works Cited page.

**Total Points Possible:**          100

**Rough Draft Due Date:**          TBA
**Peer Review Due Date:**          TBA
**Final Draft Due Date:**          TBA

Your first paper asked you to construct an argument on the way machine learning A.I's (like computer algorithms) effect our online activities in broad strokes and the ethical implications of the interconnectedness of a world-wide web. We raised philosophical questions surrounding "Big Data" discussed by Harari, as well as the manipulation of that data through the use of algorithms as depicted in *The Social Dilemma*. The selection of readings and films you will be using for this paper narrows our focus to how these things come into play in a specific part of online culture: **Social Media***.*

<u>**Overview:**</u>
Where *the Social Dilemma* (hopefully) expanded your understanding on how algorithms can be used/ exploited to drive users to certain content in order to "keep our attention", the articles and films in this section offers evidence and examples on how many social media platforms (most notably Twitter) can be used to shift our personal ideologies and societal beliefs.

Maria Konnikova's 2017 *New Yorker* article, "How Norms Change," explores how language that dehumanizes a specific group of people—particularly when they come from those in positions of power—creates the potential for normalizing violent and bigoted behavior in society. We paired the Konnikova reading with Jesse Daniel's 2017 article "Twitter and White Supremacy: A Love Story" that delineates how the KKK, white Nationalism and the "Unite the Right" movement gained a large online following through various social media platforms. The following week, we learned during our viewing of *Feels Good Man,* that one way these extremist/hate groups succeeded in altering social norms was by using fringe internet communities like 4chan—a type of social media in itself—who created viral content by appropriating otherwise neutral characters like Pepe the Frog.

This culture of online extremism and white supremacy has used the social connectedness of the internet to foster the deadly transition from online hate speech to offline acts of physical and emotional violence—including the 2016 Charlottesville protests and, most recently, the 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol—and has left indelible marks on our socio-political history.

**Drawing on these 3 sources, create and support an argument about social media's impact on civility, social norms and morality—both on and offline—and, if applicable, what is the most valuable change (or changes) that can/should be done to stop online extremism:**
1. **Who can and should be held accountable (think logistically)**
2. **Is the First Amendment (free speech) outdated in the age of the internet?**
3. **What other ethical quandies come up here?**

<u>General Guidelines:</u>
If you feel like this prompt is pretty broad/open-ended, you're right. I wanted to give everyone the chance to approach this paper through a lens that most interests you. However, you MUST be sure to acknowledge both sides of the argument and really think about the weight of each side in terms of what you argue should or should not be done/changed.

In addition to the formatting criteria at the beginning of this prompt, **you MUST cite Daniels, Konnikova, and *Feels Good Man* at least ONCE each in your paper.**

Likewise, **you can use and build on any of the ideas from our online discussions and lesson—such as the role of various social media platforms (like 4chan, Twitter, Reddit, TikTok and Parler), content moderation, free speech vs. hate speech, and the use of algorithms to drive content popularity.** Other outside CREDIBLE sources (such as any of those found in the Lessons for weeks 6, 7, 8 and 9) are permitted but not required. You should also revisit the rhetorical strategies and various handouts, rubrics and worksheets from previous weeks to help you write and revise your essay.

### MORE QUESTIONS/LINES OF INQUIRY TO CONSIDER:
You are welcome to consider any of the questions below to help you begin brainstorming ideas for your paper. You care also welcome to use the Paper 2 Brainstorm Discussion Board or stop by a Zoom Q&A to talk out some of your ideas ☺

- What is the purpose of social media? Should it be a place where everyone can speak freely and exchange information and ideas? Does that kind of open forum end up privileging the loudest and most extreme voices? What changes would you like to see on the internet, and why?
- What level of accountability and responsibility should there be from users/companies/government for the content that is shared on these sites? What about content or users that are flagged, reported or removed for inciting violence, sharing illegal content, or breaking community rules/standards?
- How does the Internet seem to be changing our attitudes about people with differing backgrounds and beliefs? What is it doing to gender relations and political discourse?
- Is it possible to retain an open and free internet while also limiting the proliferation of malicious/violent and illegal content?
- Lesson 8 talked A LOT about the role 4chan played in the growth of online extremism, and Jessie Daniel's article focused on the use of Twitter…but how have they responded? Research how these and other social media sites like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and

Reddit have responded to the growth of online extremism. What policies have these and other social media companies adopted to combat hatred on the web? What else, if anything, do you think they should be doing to curb online intolerance?