

The Rutgers suicide: Was the Internet to blame?

"Has social networking gone too far?" said Rick Hampson in *USA Today*. The latest victim of Facebook culture is Tyler Clementi, a freshman at Rutgers University, who committed suicide last week after his roommate surreptitiously filmed his dorm-room tryst with another man and streamed the footage live on the Internet, using his Twitter account to drum up an audience.

"Throughout the tragedy, the Internet was a key player," with Clementi even posting a farewell message—"Jumping off the gw bridge sorry"—to Facebook before throwing himself from the George Washington Bridge into the Hudson River. Clementi's roommate, Dharun Ravi, and alleged accomplice Molly Wei are facing criminal charges, said Derrick Jackson in *The Boston Globe*. But technology also played a critical role in this horrible story. Our "laptops, webcams, and cell phones" can be wonderful tools for helping us connect with one another, but "they can also be the most terrible of weapons."

Homophobia and cruelty, not Facebook or Twitter, killed Tyler Clementi, said Susan Jacoby in *WashingtonPost.com*. Despite the slowly growing acceptance of gays in our society, the process of "coming out" for a gay teenager is still painful and terrifying. That's because of heartless bullies like Dharun Ravi, who decided to "out" his roommate online in the most humiliating fashion possible. Society in general may be moving toward greater acceptance of homosexuality, said Jesse McKinley in *The New York Times*, but teenagers are as cruel to each other, and as viciously intolerant of anyone "different," as they ever were. Last month, a gay 15-year-old from Indiana hung himself after "a constant stream of invective against him at school," and two weeks later, a gay 13-year-old



Clementi: He posted before jumping.

from Texas shot himself for the same reason.

But it's new technology that makes that harassment so deadly and so prevalent, said the New York *Daily News* in an editorial. The anonymity of the Internet "can amplify sociopathic tendencies" in otherwise "normal" people. Worse, it has left the victims of bullying with nowhere to run, and no time to recover, as they know the next attack could come at any moment, day or night, and will reach them wherever they are, via laptop or smart phone. Ravi and Wei have

been charged with violating Clementi's privacy, said Neil Steinberg in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, but as 18-year-olds "reared in the blogger-Twitter-Facebook culture," they likely have a very different concept of privacy than the rest of us. Today's young people grew up online, sharing every thought and every intimate detail of their lives with anonymous strangers. Many of them may now be "incapable of drawing lines between private and public."

Particularly when it comes to sex, said *Investor's Business Daily*. The digital revolution has ushered in a second sexual revolution, a species-wide "mass psychosis" that has seen us abandon all notions of privacy, shame, and obscenity. Teen girls eagerly post lingerie or nude shots of themselves on Facebook; middle class couples upload videos of their sexual activities for millions to watch. Clementi is a casualty of a society that "has come to think 'all the bedrooms are a stage.'" If we want to avoid more of these tragedies, said Kathleen Parker in *The Washington Post*, "we have to rally ourselves to stop the insanity of narcissism and exhibitionism" that has infected our culture. For our own sake, and in Tyler Clementi's memory, "Let's try friending decency."