

---

# *Writer's Statement about "The Disinhibition of Reddit Users"*

---

TIFFANY GAGNON

When I entered ENC1102 in Spring 2013, it was a little daunting. I knew the entire course was basically dedicated to composing a well-written research paper. An entire semester building up to one assignment wasn't really something I'd encountered before. Before I knew it, Professor Richardson was having us choose our topics and write research proposals. My topic changed numerous times. Honestly, I don't even remember how many topics I came up with or what half of them were, which probably goes to show how easily they lost my interest. After submitting a research proposal, receiving Professor Richardson's feedback, and realizing that the topic wasn't something I really wanted to focus on, I ended up choosing a topic relevant to my interests: Reddit. I've explored this social media site from a research perspective before. In fact, it was for my ENC 1101 course the previous semester when I had to write a digital discourse community ethnography. While others in my class were preparing surveys and interviews, I knew my research method of choice would be observation. When Professor Richardson told us we could do an ethnographic study if we had experience with it, I knew I was set. I felt confident enough to continue in the direction I was headed, especially after discussing it with Professor Richardson during her office hours.

Remembering something I had read in ENC 1101—parts of *The Psychology of Cyberspace* by John Suler—I knew I wanted to explore the presence of the disinhibition effect within Reddit. In a nutshell, I wanted to analyze how anonymity affects how people present themselves. This topic differed greatly from my previous ethnography but still allowed me to question how people are affected by online rhetorical situations.

When beginning my research, I had very limited experience in navigating databases and finding relevant articles. This task proved to be a little tougher than it seemed, but I was quick to pick up on how to word my searches and utilize the search options to produce the most relevant results. I found many useful scholarly articles that guided me in my research on online disinhibition. It was helpful to use notecards to record important pieces of information I found and the source. Creating a review of literature and an annotated bibliography was a lot less daunting than it seemed, especially with the help of my professor and peer review sessions. Once I felt I had an adequate grip on the scholarly "conversation" on online disinhibition, I felt ready to occupy my research niche and begin observation within Reddit.

A lot of my observation occurred in some of the default communities of Reddit, and once again I used notecards to record observations and note where I found them. I also found it important to take screenshots, or, even better, bookmark links back to the original content. Once I had a substantial amount of data, I sorted through what I had collected and determined which subtopics would be important to discuss in my research paper because of the patterns I had observed.

When writing my paper, I kept the rhetorical context in mind, especially the audience. I made it a point to explain the basics of Reddit that were crucial to understanding how I observed

and analyzed. Being a part of this online community and understanding its functions definitely affected my writing because, as an “insider,” I had a good grasp on what was going on inside Reddit. I made it clear to my audience that I was familiar with Reddit far before this research took place.

The entire writing process of this research paper was a valuable learning experience. I gained skills in research and experience with writing a review of literature, an annotated bibliography, and an organized and well-written research paper. I’ve improved as a researcher and writer and it is reflected in my work.