The Blog Effect: The Distressed Anticipation Response

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Abstract

In a study of emotional reactions to self-disclosure online, 81 undergraduates participated in a 40-minute online exposure to posts taken from either painful or positive popular blogs, and participants’ affect was measured pre- and post-exposure. As hypothesized, blog readers’ emotional reactions to the painful blogs did not conform to the traditional “positive” vs. “negative” affect distinction. Rather, these participants reacted with distressed anticipation, which might attract individuals to painful self-disclosure rather than repel them from it. These results may shed light on the reason behind the attraction people feel towards painful personal information publicly shared in social media.

The Little Prince – Draw Me a Sheep, Black.
Blog Post Published November 30, 2003

Hi Everyone,

This is probably my last post. Yesterday I decided that I needed to talk with mom regarding psychotherapy. I told her I was feeling bad and needed someone to talk with about all of this.

She didn’t understand. She said I could talk with her, with friends, with neighbors, but no. I need a psychologist. I am afraid of the responses of people that I know and I won’t come out of the closet.

She suggested I was feeling bad because I don’t go to school, because I’m stuck with my computer all day and because I don’t act as expected of me at home. But it is exactly the other way around.

I am doing all of these things because I’m feeling bad, and I’m feeling bad because there is a big secret inside of me that I have to let out, because I’m tired of hiding and lying.

She didn’t understand. Every time she asked what was wrong I told her “you don’t understand”. It wasn’t very helpful.

Eventually, she didn’t agree. She told me that a person can decide when he is sad and when he is happy and that I can change my situation if I want to.

But she doesn’t know the situation. She doesn’t know what is going on. I can’t change.

Besides, she told me they don’t have money now. Psychological treatment costs a lot of money.

That must be the reason my father bought a brand new cell phone.

They don’t have money.

I just sat there and exploded inside, felt how it was all inside screaming “let me out” and how I was resisting and biting my lips.

Later on I heard her talking with dad at night. Something about me being spoiled and about “how could I expect them to help if I’m not saying anything?” and something about them taking my computer.

This morning my suspicions were confirmed and they told me they were taking my computer, even though I paid a few thousand for it and even though it’s the only place I have to talk with you about it all.
Great people - my parents, I really love them.
I’m going to miss you all.
And if the decision is changed I hope I’ll be back...

Yours,
The Little Prince

(The Little Prince, 2003)

“The Little Prince” was the blog of a young homosexual Israeli teenager who, while he was growing up, openly shared his life experiences with the outside world: coping with his strict parents, his lack of friends, his difficulties at school, his secrets. Thousands of Israeli blog readers followed the Little Prince before his computer was taken by his parents and access to his readers was blocked.

This example was originally posted in 2003 to a blog site called “Isra-Blog.” It was one of the blog posts used in this study to examine emotional reactions of readers to painful personal blog texts posted online.¹

Self-Disclosure in the Internet Age

Self-disclosure is defined as the “act of revealing personal information to others” (Archer, 1980). Whereas extensive research exists on the emotional and interpersonal consequences of self-disclosure from the point of view of the discloser (Pennebaker, 1989; Pennebaker, Zech, & Rimé, 2001; Rimé, Philippot, Boca, & Mesquita, 1992; Zech & Rimé, 2005), little is known about these consequences from the point of view of those exposed to the self-disclosure of others. Several authors have reported that exposure to self-disclosure leads to emotional and physical distress (Archer & Berg, 1978; Coyne, 1976; Lazaros, Opton, Monikos, & Rankin, 1965; Shortt & Pennebaker, 1992; Strack & Coyne, 1983). In contrast, other researchers have found that study participants exposed to self-disclosure reacted with both negative and positive affect (e.g., Christophe & Rimé, 1997). In the Christophe and Rimé study, subjects were asked to recall a situation in which someone had shared an emotional experience with them socially, and referring to that memory, were asked to write open answers to questions regarding their emotions, verbal responses, interpersonal gestures, and secondary sharing. However, none of the above-mentioned studies were conducted in online environments, which have their own unique attributes.

In a recent study to examine the emotional and interpersonal consequences of exposure to self-disclosure during an online chat interaction (Bareket-Bojmel & Shahar, 2011), it was found that “emotional contagion” occurred. Emotional contagion is the tendency for two individuals to converge emotionally. When people unconsciously mimic the expressions of emotion of the person they interact with, they come to feel reflections of their partner’s emotions (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993). In the online chat study, it was found that exposure to an individual expressing an emotion produced a corresponding change in the emotional state of the listener. Specifically, participants who were exposed to a chat with a partner who disclosed details with regards to a negative life experience reacted with increased negative affect. Conversely, participants whose partner disclosed details with regard to a positive life experience reacted with positive emotions (Bareket-Bojmel & Shahar, 2011).
In general, self-disclosure occurs more frequently online than during face-to-face encounters (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Joinson, 2001; McKenna & Bargh, 1998; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Wallace, 1999). One aspect of self-disclosure online is noteworthy: it is easier to construct an identity and carry out impression management online. People communicating online have more control over the way they present themselves than they do in face-to-face encounters (Turkle, 1995). Therefore, disclosing personal information to another person online might not involve the increased vulnerability that usually accompanies self-disclosure of personal information face-to-face (Ben-Ze’ev, 2003), an observation that provides clues as to why people share their emotions so intimately online. Thus online environments offer fertile ground for the study of self-disclosure, including reactions to self-disclosure.

**Blogging and Blog Psychology**

Blogs (originally weblogs), defined as “online diaries where information is electronically posted, updated frequently, and presented in reverse chronological order” (Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005), are a classic form of electronic self-disclosure communication.

In a thorough analysis of blog characteristics, Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, and Wright (2005) conducted content analysis on 203 randomly-selected blogs. They found that 70.4% of the blogs were of the “personal journal” type, in which the bloggers reported on their life and inner feelings. Other researchers also report that the most popular topic among bloggers is “me” (Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008). In an article titled “Why we Blog,” Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, and Swartz (2004) identified various reasons for blogging. Among them, bloggers are driven to document their lives, and often blogs serve a cathartic function as an outlet for feelings and emotional expression. Blogs have even been described as a psychological means for “working out my own issues” (Nardi et al., 2004, p. 44). Blogs are simple to use and invite a sense of self and of self in relation to others (Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008). The current study focuses on the most common blog type, the “personal journal” (Herring et al., 2005).

What is perhaps most interesting about personal journal blogs is that they blur the distinction between the private and public (Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008). Miller and Shepherd (2004, n.p.) observe that “[b]logs can be both public and intensely personal in possibly contradictory ways. They are addressed to everyone and at the same time to no one.” Moreover, they involve sharing “unprecedented amounts of personal information” with potentially millions of strangers. “The technology of the Internet makes it easier than ever for anyone to be either a voyeur or an exhibitionist—or both” (Miller & Shepherd, 2004, n.p.). Blogging, therefore, offers a rich environment in which to observe the psychology of the Internet (Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008).

Most research on blogs focuses on blog authors (e.g., Herring et al., 2005; Miura & Yamashita, 2007; Qian & Scott, 2007). Very little is known regarding the emotional reactions of people exposed to blogs. The purpose of the present study is to examine readers’ individual emotional responses to self-disclosure via blogs online. In most cases, when the term “self-disclosure” is used in the literature (Archer, 1980; Joinson, 2001; Jourard, 1971), it refers to disclosure of negative events or affect, as a result of which the discloser expects to reduce his or her emotional load.
Negative Self-Disclosure

Alone.
In this whole mess, I’m alone.
And the troubles just grow and grow, and every day I wake up and find out I’m sicker.
I wonder why I joined the army. What for? To ruin my health? So I could go from one
stupid doctor to another? For a country with values I don’t believe in?
I wanted to contribute something from myself and instead I’m doing nothing.
I need someone to fight with me in this war.
I have no one at all…

(Snow White, 2007)

In cyberspace, where self-disclosure is often intense, people can share their emotions with others, receive feedback, respond to that feedback, and benefit from the interpersonal exchange (Gilat & Shahar, 2009). Psychotherapists have argued that the open expression of unpleasant feelings is necessary in order to overcome distress and maximize psychological well-being (Jourard, 1971). Surprisingly, however, no clear evidence to date supports the prediction that sharing an emotion reduces the emotional load of the person who discloses it. It has been found that self-disclosure of negative or traumatic experiences promotes physical health (Locke & Colligan, 1986; Pennebaker, 1989) and leads to self-reported benefits to the discloser (Pennebaker, Zech, & Rimé, 2001). But these self-reported benefits were unrelated to observed emotional recovery outcomes. For example, in a report titled “Is talking about an emotional experience helpful?” it was found that participants assigned to talking about negative emotional experiences reported more subjective benefits from the session than did the control participants. However, participants assigned to talking about their emotions did not demonstrate beneficial recovery effects at three days, seven days, or two months compared with participants assigned to providing a factual description of the event (Zech & Rimé, 2005).

If sharing a negative experience with others does not contribute to emotional recovery, why would one engage in it? And more importantly for the present study – why would one choose to be exposed to the negative experiences of others (for example by reading negative content blogs)? This study attempts to address the latter question.

Positive Disclosure

It doesn’t take much to make me happy.
I went out this morning for an hour or so. It’s amazing, the sun decided to shine and
everybody went outside with their shorts and flip-flops and it’s a great joy.
Students are throwing Frisbees.
Happy squirrels are running around and it’s a warm and fun 18 perfect degrees outside.
Joggers are everywhere with their iPads.
Students are doing assignments outside, sitting on the grass and leaning on trees - holding a
book and a calculator.
This is what every day should look like!

(Slightly Mad, 2007)

The sharing of negative experiences is not the only possible means of relief. Self-disclosure may be positive as well, as it is when people share intimate, happy, personal aspects of their lives with
one another. Although the role of positive disclosure has been addressed less frequently in the literature than the role of negative disclosure, the findings of previous studies are consistent with the hypothesis that positive disclosure has an uplifting emotional effect on the discloser. For example, individuals who told their spouses about their most positive event of the day reported greater positive affect afterwards (Hicks & Diamond, 2008), and the positive affect of college students who engaged in brief conversations in which they disclosed positive information increased after the conversations (Vittengl & Holt, 2000). These results support Baumeister and Leary’s (2000) proposed need for a social relationships model in which positive affect accompanies relationship facilitation.

Sharing positive life events may also have an uplifting emotional effect on others. In this article I explore the roles of both positive and negative disclosure and their effects on blog readers.

The Study

In attempting to account for the inconclusive pattern of previous research results regarding people’s emotional reactions to self-disclosure, and in trying to explain why people would voluntarily choose to be exposed to negative content online (blogs, in this case), I surmised that these reactions go beyond the traditional “positive” vs. “negative” affect distinction. Specifically, I suggest that painful self-disclosure online is likely to elicit among readers a wide spectrum of emotions pertaining to marked anticipation, high arousal, attentiveness, and surprise, none of which fall neatly into the aforementioned distinction between negative and positive affect.

To examine this hypothesis, I had individuals participate in a 40-minute online exposure to posts taken from popular blogs. All posts included self-disclosure. However, half of the participants (readers) were randomly assigned to view painful posts that dealt with terminal diseases, death, suicidal tendencies, anxiety, and adolescent gender identity, whereas the other half was exposed to positive posts that included amusing personal experiences, expressions of joy and happiness, humor and jokes, and so on. Participants’ (readers’) affect was measured immediately before and after exposure to the blog contents by means of the Positive Affect Negative Affect Scale (PANAS-X, Watson & Clark, 1994). This measure allows for the examination of negative affect (fear, hostility, guilt, and sadness), positive affect (joviality and self-assurance), and a host of other types of affect not readily qualified as either negative or positive (e.g., attentiveness, serenity, surprise, fatigue, and shyness).

Method

Participants, Experimental Design, and Procedure

Eighty-one undergraduates (64 woman and 17 men; mean age = 23.6 years; age range: 18-33) who were enrolled in an introductory psychology course at an Israeli university participated in the study for course credit. Participants were recruited through advertisements published around the university campus, as well as through an advertisement published on online student forums.

Two web pages containing links were created for the experiment. Each included links to eight different posts selected from blogs on the popular Israeli blog platform Isra-Blog (www.israblog.co.il), which allows individuals to create their own pages. The two web pages containing links were identical in look and feel, but differed in that one page included links to
“positive” posts and the other to “negative” posts. Figure 1 illustrates the appearance of the link page for negative posts. All posts were in Hebrew, the language of the participants.

The positive posts (including happiness, humor, amusing personal stories) and the negative posts (including suicidal tendencies, adolescent homosexuality, terminal disease during childhood) were selected from the most popular blogs at that time (by number of unique visitors). The researcher did the pre-selection: The 100 most popular blog posts were identified and “tagged” as to whether they were positive or negative overall. “Neutral” (informative for example) blog posts were omitted from the list. Then, three independent judges, Israeli psychology doctoral students with expertise in emotion research, reviewed the pre-selected blog posts. Each judge rated the blog posts according to their negativity or positivity on a scale of 1 to 10. The eight most positive and eight most negative posts (determined by summarizing the ratings of the three judges) were included on the positive/negative link pages. All of the posts included in this article as examples are taken from the selected posts. An example of one of the posts as it was displayed to study participants after clicking on one of the links is shown in Figure 2.
Each participant was randomly assigned to either a “positive” or “negative/painful” exposure condition. Upon reaching the lab, participants completed a short demographic questionnaire followed by a mood questionnaire (PANAS-X, described below). Next, each participant was directed to spend 40 minutes surfing the links site (positive or negative) to which s/he was randomly assigned. The only instructions were to stay in the “positive” or “negative” links (according to the condition to which they were assigned). Participants could freely navigate around the different links (blog posts) they were assigned to in a way that simulated a real online experience. Following 40 minutes of exposure to the blogs, candidates completed a manipulation check questionnaire and the PANAS-X. Finally, participants were reimbursed with one course credit.

Measures

Manipulation check

In order to verify that exposure to the blogs was indeed “positive” or “negative” according to the participant’s condition, participants rated on a scale of 1 to 5 both how negative the blogs were in content and how positive the blogs were in content. In this way, it was possible to compare participants’ self-report and the condition to which they were randomly assigned and thus verify the effectiveness of the manipulation.

Affect

The PANAS-X (Watson & Clark, 1994) is a 60-item adjective check list, expanded from an earlier version, the PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The PANAS-X is designed to measure the two higher-order affects of negative affect (composed of the following items: afraid, scared, nervous, jittery, irritable, hostile, guilty, ashamed, upset, distressed) and positive affect (composed of the following items: active, alert, attentive, determined, enthusiastic, excited, inspired, interested, proud, strong), along with 11 specific emotions: fear, sadness, guilt, hostility, shyness, fatigue, surprise, joviality, self-assurance, attentiveness, and serenity.
Participants reported the extent to which they were currently feeling 60 emotional states on a five-point scale ranging from very slightly or not at all (=1) to extremely (=5). The PANAS-X has been shown to have acceptable internal consistency (alpha = .87), temporal reliability (2 month test-retest r = .71), and convergent validity (Watson & Clark, 1991).

Results

Manipulation Check

One-way ANOVA with type of exposure (positive blog posts/negative blog posts) as predictor and self-reported impression as an outcome revealed that: (1) participants exposed to positive posts rated their experience as more positive than participants exposed to negative posts ($F_{[1,78]} = 165.03, p < .001$), and (2) participants exposed to negative posts rated their experience as more negative than participants exposed to positive posts ($F_{[1,78]} = 199.14, p < .001$). Thus, the effectiveness of the manipulation was confirmed.

Repeated Measures Analysis for Hypothesis Testing

A series of Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted, in which blog post (negative vs. positive) served as a two-level between-subject factor, time (pre- vs. post-exposure) served as a repeated measure factor, and each of the PANAS-X emotions (fear, hostility, guilt, sadness, joviality, self-assurance, attentiveness, fatigue, shyness, surprise, and serenity) served as dependent variables. Table 1 summarizes the results of these analyses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M (SD) T1</th>
<th>M (SD) T2</th>
<th>Positive Blog</th>
<th>Negative Blog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>T-Value</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>T-Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>1.52 (0.09)</td>
<td>1.48 (0.09)</td>
<td>1.29 (0.09)</td>
<td>1.76 (0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility</td>
<td>1.19 (0.06)</td>
<td>1.16 (0.06)</td>
<td>1.19 (0.10)</td>
<td>1.63 (0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>1.30 (0.06)</td>
<td>1.28 (0.05)</td>
<td>1.18 (0.05)</td>
<td>1.24 (0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>1.57 (0.09)</td>
<td>1.54 (0.10)</td>
<td>1.40 (0.11)</td>
<td>2.01 (0.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joviality</td>
<td>2.90 (0.10)</td>
<td>2.80 (0.10)</td>
<td>2.77 (0.09)</td>
<td>2.53 (0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-assurance</td>
<td>2.79 (0.09)</td>
<td>2.78 (0.10)</td>
<td>2.41 (0.09)</td>
<td>2.39 (0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attentiveness</td>
<td>3.26 (0.10)</td>
<td>3.30 (0.10)</td>
<td>2.96 (0.09)</td>
<td>3.41 (0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>2.68 (0.16)</td>
<td>2.54 (0.16)</td>
<td>2.57 (0.15)</td>
<td>2.08 (0.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shyness</td>
<td>1.76 (0.10)</td>
<td>1.75 (0.10)</td>
<td>1.45 (0.09)</td>
<td>1.66 (0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>1.33 (0.08)</td>
<td>1.23 (0.08)</td>
<td>1.90 (0.14)</td>
<td>2.59 (0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serenity</td>
<td>3.89 (0.11)</td>
<td>3.93 (0.11)</td>
<td>3.76 (0.14)</td>
<td>3.01 (0.14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * <0.1, ** <0.05, *** < 0.01

Table 1. Mean changes in affect subscales from pre- to post-exposure to negative vs. positive blogs
The focus of these analyses was on the blog posts by time interaction. This interaction was statistically significant for eight out of the 11 subscales: fear, hostility, sadness, attentiveness, fatigue, shyness, surprise, and serenity. The interaction was not significant for the formation of “negative” or “positive” feelings, which are composed of selected emotions, as described above. A probe of the statistically significant interactions was conducted by means of dependent-sample t-tests. A detailed summary of the findings follows.

Summary of Findings

Fear
The interaction Time x Blog-type was significant (F_{1,78} = 15.31, p < .000). Dependent-sample t-tests revealed that participants experienced increased levels of fear following exposure to negative blogs (t_{1,38} = -2.32, p < .05) and decreased levels of fear following exposure to positive blogs (t_{1,40} = 4.29, p < .000).

Hostility
The interaction Time x Blog-type was significant (F_{1,78} = 7.89, p < .05). Dependent-sample t-tests revealed that participants experienced increased levels of hostility following exposure to negative blogs (t_{1,38} = -3.04, p < .005), while no change in hostility levels was detected following exposure to positive blogs.

Sadness
The interaction Time x Blog-type was significant (F_{1,78} = 28.23, p < .000). Dependent-sample t-tests revealed that participants experienced increased levels of sadness following exposure to negative blogs (t_{1,38} = -4.68, p < .000) and decreased levels of sadness following exposure to positive blogs (t_{1,40} = 2.48, p < .05).

Serenity
The interaction Time x Blog-type was significant (F_{1,77} = 21.81, p < .000). Dependent-sample t-tests revealed that participants experienced decreased levels of serenity following exposure to negative blogs (t_{1,38} = 6.39, p < .000), while no change in serenity levels was detected following exposure to positive blogs.

Fatigue
The interaction Time x Blog-type was marginally significant (F_{1,77} = 3.43, p < .07). Dependent-sample t-tests revealed that participants experienced decreased levels of fatigue following exposure to negative blogs (t_{1,38} = 3.28, p < .005), while no change in fatigue levels was detected following exposure to positive blogs.

Surprise
The interaction Time x Blog-type was significant (F_{1,78} = 16.22, p < .000). Dependent-sample t-tests revealed that while participants experienced increased levels of surprise following exposure to both negative (t_{1,38} = -9.13, p < .000) and positive (t_{1,40} = -4.46, p < .000) blogs, surprise levels were higher following exposure to negative blogs.
**Attentiveness**

The interaction Time x Blog-type was significant ($F_{[1,78]} = 8.37, p < .005$). Simple dependent-sample t-tests revealed that participants experienced no change in attentiveness levels following exposure to negative blogs. However, they did experience a decrease in attentiveness levels after exposure to positive blogs ($t_{[1,40]} = 3.71, p < .001$).

**Shyness**

The interaction Time x Blog-type was significant ($F_{[1,78]} = 4.06, p < .05$). Dependent-sample t-tests revealed that participants experienced no change in shyness levels following exposure to negative blogs, but they did experience a decrease in shyness levels after exposure to positive blogs ($t_{[1,40]} = 4.29, p < .000$).

**Discussion**

People disclose more openly online. The online environment affects the way people interact with one another, allowing for the sharing of personal experience with complete strangers (Bareket-Bojmel & Shahar, 2001; Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Joinson, 2001). Kang notes that online, sharing with strangers is easier: “[B]y contrast (to cyberspace), in most urban settings, few environments encourage us to walk up to strangers and start chatting. In many cities, doing so would amount to a physical threat” (2000, p. 1161).

As expected, exposing readers to painful self-disclosure online resulted in increased distress (i.e., increased levels of fear, hostility, and sadness, and a decrease in serenity), which is consistent with the concept of “emotional contagion” (Hatfield et al., 1993) and with previous studies that found that negative affect was enhanced by exposure (listening/reading) to negative self-disclosure (Archer & Berg, 1978; Bareket-Bojmel & Shahar, 2011; Coyne, 1976; Lazarus et al., 1965; Shortt & Pennebaker, 1992; Strack & Coyne, 1983). However, exposure to negative self-disclosure also resulted in increased anticipation, as reflected in a pre/post-experimental increase in surprise, paralleled by a decrease in fatigue. The increase in surprise is particularly informative, given that this emotion has been shown to be related to high arousal, excitement, and pleasure (Kellaris & Kent, 1993; O’Neill & Lambert, 2001). Thus, despite the distress individuals may feel upon exposure to painful self-disclosure in general and painful blog posts in particular, they might find such content attractive because it is arousing, and hence exciting and pleasurable.

Conversely, exposure to positive blog posts yielded a decrease in fear, sadness, and shyness. The calming and uplifting effect of positive posts, manifested by a decrease in fear and sadness, is to be expected.

In a study that examined how emotions shape the virality of online content, it was found that virality is driven by psychological arousal. Content that evokes high arousal emotion is more likely to go viral (Berger & Milkman, 2009). This evidence is aligned with the findings described here. Content that leads to high arousal is more appealing and, consequently, is shared more often.
In a world of “reality culture” where exposure to other people’s real lives is a form of entertainment, it is important to understand the emotional effects of such exposure. The concept of pleasure which is derived from the misfortunes of others (Schadenfreude) may serve as a reason here. People use downward social comparison as a means of defense – they look to other individuals whom they consider worse off in order to feel better about themselves and their situations (Wills, 1981). Research on reality television stresses the role of “voyeurism” in creating a form of “guilty pleasure” when consuming reality TV (Baruh, 2010). This approach is aligned with the findings of the present study; reading a negative blog may make one feel bad, but it is also surprising and arousing and hence, to that extent, pleasurable. One may feel “down” after such exposure, but, in a strange way, one enjoys the suffering.

**Conclusions**

This study provides compelling evidence regarding the complex emotional response to painful self-disclosure online, a response that does not conform to the traditional positive affect/negative affect distinction. Instead, the findings suggest that such a response follows a “distressed anticipation” pattern, which appears to attract readers to online painful blogs, rather than repel them.

One limitation of the present study is the fact that the pre/post-experimental assessment was made immediately before and after the exposure, thereby limiting the researcher’s ability to learn about longer-term emotional reactions. In addition, self-disclosure usually occurs in an interpersonal context, and this exchange may have implications different from those of blogs. Some of the emotional consequences of self-disclosure online in an interpersonal context during chat sessions are discussed by Bareket-Bojmel and Shahar (2011). Future research should also address personality attributes and their role in mediating or moderating the experience of self-disclosure. Last, it would be interesting to examine how self-disclosure affects the reader’s perception of the author (e.g., in terms of liking and respect).

The social world had changed in recent years. We now have tools that enable us to share our thoughts, experiences, and emotions in ways that were impossible just a few years ago. In a world of social media, in which many of us choose to share our lives openly with potentially millions of others, it is important to conduct extensive research on the psychological consequences of computer-mediated sharing. As always, real life inspires research, and The Little Prince is now no longer a 14-year-old teenager, but rather a young adult. Nine years after his dramatic post quoted at the beginning of this article, he returned for a brief moment to his readers:

**The Little Prince – Draw Me a Sheep, Black.**

**Blog Post Published May 20, 2011**

Who are you, the 100 people who still bother to visit here?
Nostalgic? Addicted to innocence? Vacuum cleaners?
When I read what I wrote here once, I try not to criticize myself.
But how can you explain all of these emotions? The feelings I felt, really felt?

(The Little Prince, 2011)
Like the Little Prince, many of us share our life events online, share our deepest secrets and emotions. Many others read them and react emotionally. This phenomenon warrants further additional research.

Notes

1. This example and all of the other examples used in this article were originally posted in Hebrew and were translated into English by the author.

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Biographical Note

Liad Bareket-Bojmel [liad.bojmel@gmail.com] received her Ph.D. in Psychology from Ben-Gurion University in 2011. Her main research interests are emotions that follow from online interactions and self-disclosure online.