Expression in the Post-September 11th Web Sphere

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Abstract

 In this article we demonstrate that the Web functioned as a both a site and surface for personal expression after the events of 9/11/01. First, we identify the forms of expression manifested on the Web in the three weeks (September 11th -October 2nd) following 9/11, noting changes in dominant forms of expression over time that deserve further study. Next we compare the post-9/11 Web expression with emotional phases identified in the literature on public mourning and bereavement. We demonstrate that post-9/11 Web expression included more than these emotions, suggesting that the functions of the Web-based post-9/11 expression went beyond public mourning and bereavement and included attempts at analysis, sense-making, and advocacy. We conclude by arguing that the broader range of expression on the Web after 9/11 (in contrast with expression documented from offline/non-Web contexts in the public mourning and the bereavement literature), is at least partially due to characteristics of the Web and processes/practices of Web production that distinguish it from traditional broadcast and print media.

Large-scale crises exacerbate our need and test our ability to communicate with each other. Disasters simultaneously create an urgent demand for accurate information and frustrate communication efforts by taking down telephone lines, blocking roads, and cutting off power sources. September 11, 2001 was no different. The attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. were large-scale crises by any definition. While structural damage and loss of life remained fairly localized, people in geographically dispersed areas experienced the attacks via the mass media.

News organizations responded to the attacks by interrupting normal broadcasts in favor of round-the-clock live coverage and newspapers printed special editions. According to a survey conducted 48 hours after the attacks, television served as the primary source of information both during and immediately after the attacks, capturing the attention of over 80% of those surveyed (Rainie & Kalsnes, 2001). Early evaluations of the media's response to the crisis tended to praise the response of traditional media, such as television, radio, and newspapers, while giving the Internet mixed reviews (e.g. Goldsborough, 2001). However, most of these evaluations of the Internet's performance were focused on its ability to provide timely news and information relative to traditional forms of media—a comparison that overlooks the broader affordances and potential functions of the Internet in a crisis situation.

Television and other traditional forms of mass/news media are limited in their utility during a crisis because information is drawn from a relatively small set of sources, and the flow of communication is primarily unidirectional. The common rhetorical construction of users of traditional mass media as "media consumers" implies passivity, corresponding with a notion of media as channels through which a small set of actors transmit messages to large audiences. In contrast, the Internet supports a broad array of user actions, from access to news from a wide range of sources, to co-production of news, to opportunities to produce and share personal responses with large and diverse audiences (Schneider & Foot, In Press). Rainie and Kalsnes (2001) found that within hours of the attacks people turned to the Internet in record numbers, flooding news sites and creating an unprecedented demand for some government sites. A survey

conducted after September 11, 2001, revealed that "more than 100 million Americans sent or received 'I care mail' for emotional support, messages of concern and information about victims" (UCLA Internet Survey Project, 2002). However, like other studies, the authors of the UCLA Internet Survey Project focused primarily on the use of the Internet as an information channel. Internet users also appeared in chat rooms, on message boards, and on listservs. These latter applications, which support Internet users' ability to engage in dialogue, are a significant part of what distinguishes the Internet from traditional forms of mass media. While the Internet has the potential to fulfill the same roles as traditional media during a crisis, it has the added potential of two-way communication.

Our understanding of the roles traditionally assumed by the mass media during a crisis is limited. Historically, this field of research has focused on the role of the mass media in preparing communities for impending disasters through the dissemination of warnings or evacuation announcements. However, this approach fails to recognize the dual and occasionally conflicting goals of reporting events as they occur and participating in disaster prevention and response activities (Quarantelli, 1989). In addition, this perspective fails to recognize the limitations of these roles during times of "collective stress and mass emergency situations such as…terrorist attacks…" (Quarantelli, 1989, p.2). Information on citizens' media use and needs during a crisis is equally limited. Studies have focused primarily on what forms of media those affected turned to either during or immediately after a traumatic event, finding a consistent preference for television coverage (Piotrowski & Armstrong, 1998; Rainie & Kalsnes, 2001). However, it should be noted that in these studies preferences were measured in terms of those actions, (such as providing news coverage), at which television excels and ignored the broader affordances of newer technology. For example, in Piotrowski and Armstrong's study of media preference after Hurricane Danny, the only measure of Internet use was limited to reliance on Internet weather sites.

Most natural or localized disasters may claim national or international attention for a few days, given the usual patterns of traditional mass media coverage. In contrast, mass media coverage of the September 11th attacks, and television in particular, provided a simultaneous experience of the attacks and ongoing coverage of their aftermath for viewers around the world, over the course of several weeks. This had a tri-fold effect of: 1.) extending the geographical boundaries of the disaster internationally; 2.) multiplying the number of people who shared in a mediated experience of the attacks and the resulting emotional/ psychological devastation.; and 3.) lengthening the window of time during which media users' attention was focused almost solely on the crisis. However, while television enabled viewers to identify with the victims of the tragedy and thus generated a vicarious experience of the event (Stone & Pennebaker, 2002), unlike the Internet, it did not enable a large-scale exchange of personal responses among viewers.

This study of online expression in the wake of 9/11 provides an understanding of how the Internet was employed by many as a tool for communication and coping in the aftermath of an international crisis. It sheds light on the types of public expression evoked by personal or mediated exposure to a crisis, and posted on the Internet. It also serves as a case study in collective mourning on the Internet. Previous studies of online grief have determined that there exists a desire to talk about collective traumatic experiences online (Cose, 1999; Harris, 1999; Stone & Pennebaker, 2002), but few have been able to examine what people share and how they express themselves in their discussions. [1] This study of expression, produced by a broad range

of entities and posted on Web sites, provides further illumination of how people cope with tragedy of this magnitude.

The research questions guiding this analysis are: 1.) what kinds of expression were posted on the Web after 9/11?; 2.) how prevalent was of each type of expression in a range of Web sites during the first three weeks after the attacks?; and 3.) how do these forms of online expression compare with public mourning and bereavement? After reviewing the literature on the Web in crisis communication, public mourning and bereavement, we reveal how the Web functioned as a both a site and surface for personal expression after the events of 9/11/01. First we identify the forms of expression manifested on the Web in the three weeks (September 11th - October 2nd) following 9/11, noting changes in dominant forms of expression over time that deserve further study. Next we compare the post-9/11 Web expression with emotional phases identified in the literature on public mourning and bereavement. We demonstrate that post-9/11 Web expression included more than these emotions, suggesting that the functions of the Web-based post-9/11 expression went beyond public mourning and bereavement and included attempts at analysis, sense-making, and advocacy. We conclude by arguing that the broader range of expression on the Web after 9/11 (in contrast with expression documented from offline/non-Web contexts in the public mourning and the bereavement literature), is at least partially due to characteristics of the Web and processes/practices of Web production that distinguish it from traditional broadcast and print media.

Literature Review

Crisis communication research has barely begun to examine the role or potential uses for the Internet during a crisis. Friedman (2001) alludes to historical examples of the Internet's utility in crisis situations and the potential for future reliance on the Internet to reach large audiences. However, this view perpetuates a vision of the Internet as an extension of the traditional mass media, whose communication capabilities are limited to a unidirectional flow of information with little or no input or response from the users. Many have based their appraisal of the Internet's 'success' during a crisis on its ability to provide information and support interpersonal communication needs (e.g. Ojala, 2001). Goldsborough (2001) describes the superior response of 'old media' such as television and newspapers during the attacks, focusing on their reliability and quick response. However, he goes on to note the "distinct advantage" the Internet holds by enabling the "natural human impulse to reach out to others during a disaster". Fisher and Porter (2001) also acknowledge that the communication advantage of the Internet is greater than its ability to mimic the action of the television in providing information, and the telephone in helping us to communicate. Golson further elaborated on this distinction between the Internet and other forms of media by contrasting the psychological experience of using the Internet or television. He finds, that through the Internet, we are "able to express emotion collectively, not just have emotion beamed at us" (2001, p.20).

Individual responses to such large-scale traumatic events such as the 9/11 attacks are not yet well understood. Traditionally, studies of the impact of disasters focus on the emotions of individuals who directly experience loss of friends, family, or property. Anticipated reactions include experiences of grief, as characterized by shock, numbness, sadness, sense of loss, anger, fear and anxiety, guilt, separation pain, and more (Shuchter & Zisook, 1993). Contrary to many media depictions of public reactions to large-scale crises, however, widespread panic is not a common occurrence (Quarantelli, 1989). Grief, both public and private, progresses rapidly

through three distinct stages: shock and disbelief, separation pain, and mourning (Raphael, 1983). While the first two stages may pass quickly, the third stage, mourning, characterized by a need to speak of the dead, may last considerably longer (Raphael, 1983). According to Stone and Pennebaker (2002), the desire to talk about a shared traumatic event with others is a common reaction to a disaster. And, Taylor and Fraser (1980, as cited in Raphael, 1983) suggest that providing rescue workers the opportunity to talk through their experience reduced the negative physical and psychological symptoms associated with exposure to crises. When the losses occur locally but involve elements or symbols of national identity, such as the World Trade Center and Pentagon, it is probable that public reaction occurs on both an individual and communal level. Pennebaker and Harber (1993) developed a 3-stage social support model of coping based on examples of communal trauma. The three stages are 1) emergency, characterized by extensive thinking and talking about the event, 2) rehabilitation, where people continue to think but not talk about their experience, and 3) adaptation where they neither think nor talk about the crisis.

Raphael (1983) argues that the intensity of the emotional response to a disaster is associated with the magnitude of the loss, as measured by the following elements: the loss of human life, home, possessions, and sense of security. Other aspects of a crisis, all applicable to September 11, can also heighten the emotional impact, including the suddenness of the attacks, the magnitude of the losses, and being caused by humans rather than nature (Raphael; Sitterle & Gurwitch, 1999). In addition, research indicates that a high level of exposure to a disaster or crisis through television has two main effects on the emotions evoked by a crisis. First, television tends to heighten the intensity of emotional response in viewers by increasing an audience's identification with victims (Stone & Pennebaker, 2002), and second, continuous exposure to the event eliminates the psychological defense of denial (Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti, 1998). A study of children whose experience of the Oklahoma City bombing was television-mediated and who showed signs of emotional trauma two years after the event highlights the strength of television in evoking strong emotional responses among viewers (Pfefferbaum, *et al*., 2000). Thus the high level and extended duration of media coverage of the attacks, in combination with the large-scale loss of life and destruction of property affiliated with national identity, can be assumed to have elicited intense emotional responses among television viewers. Yet despite their role in amplifying the effects of the disaster on audiences traditionally outside of the localized area of the disasters, other than the Internet, traditional broadcast media provided little, if any outlet for the expression of the emotions they evoked.

The September 11th attacks were the largest attacks on American soil since Pearl Harbor, but they are not alone in eliciting broad public reactions. Recent examples of large-scale crises that have evoked widespread public mourning include the Oklahoma City bombings and the deaths of Princess Diana, John. F. Kennedy Jr., and Versace. In each case, the public responded with very visible public memorials, which according to Raphael (1983) provides an outlet for coping with large-scale disasters. Communal mourning or collective grief can thus be manifested as a physical public display with candles, flowers, cards and other tokens of remembrance or online as a virtual though still public memorial (Harris, 1998; Lord, 1997; Sitterle & Gurwitch, 1999; Stone & Pennebaker, 2002). According to Lord, public memorials offer a socially acceptable venue for working through a loss. Support for this premise can be found in the expression posted to memorial Web sites and message boards established after the deaths of Princess Diana (Stone & Pennebaker, 2002) and Versace (Harris, 1998). In each of these examples, people used the Web to create public memorials and express their grief.

This study offers an exploratory analysis of expression on the Web in response to an international crisis. Also, it provides a look at how the Internet provided a different service as a two-way communication tool in a large-scale crisis, suggesting that our models of mass communication roles in crisis are too limited. In addition, it implies that studies of community reactions to trauma should extend beyond people's self-reported responses to disaster and move toward examining how people created and participated in large-scale communicative exchanges in their efforts to cope with trauma. Employing an adaptation of the distinction between site and surface introduced by Taylor and van Every (2000) in their study of the relationship between organization and discourse, we view the Web as a surface on which expressive discourse is facilitated, comprised of multiple sites on which expression is manifested. Some Web sites on which the site producers' own expressive actions were observed also provided surfaces for further expression; these sites functioned as dialogue-enabling communication tools. Although the Web materials examined for this study exhibited patterns of expression based on bereavement literature, they also revealed that a wider range of expression took place on the Web than may have been observed in previous studies.

Methods

We focus in this study on Web sites that allowed people to both access the expression provided by others and those sites which supported the production and posting of expression to public spaces on the Internet. Moreover, we have limited this analysis to 9/11-related expression posted in public spaces on the Internet, that is, spaces that could be accessed without existence of a pre-established relationship or need for membership in an organization. These included chat rooms, message boards, guest books, listservs, and Web sites maintained by a variety of producers including individuals, corporations/businesses, non-profits, governments, and others. We suggest that these spaces functioned as both "sites" and "surfaces" for communication (Taylor & van Every, 2000).

The data for this study were Web materials captured in the September 11 Web Archive (http://www.september11.archive.org). The archive is a collection of Web sites identified, collected, and cataloged by the U.S. Library of Congress, the Internet Archive, the Pew Internet and American Life Project, and WebArchivist.org, in collaboration with volunteers from around the world. Each Web site identified as containing material relevant to 9/11 was archived on a daily basis between September 11, 2001 and December 1, 2001. The goal in creating the archive was to preserve not only the individual Web sites, but rather an interlinked Web sphere, characterized and bounded by a shared object orientation or reference point (Foot & Schneider, 2002; Schneider and Foot, In Press).

Initial analysis of archival impressions of 247 English-language Web sites, produced by a range of entities, (based primarily in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain), was conducted to identify those Web sites suitable for this study. [2] Sites were selected for this study based on the capacity for visitors to post their own textual expression and/or access the textual expression of others. A total of 84 Web sites were identified as containing accessible expression. These Web sites represent a broad cross-section of Web site producers including personal or individual sites, charity or civic organizations, businesses, and governments, as well as Web sites constructed for the sole purpose of memorializing the attacks.

A preliminary analysis of expression on these Web sites demonstrated that in order to capture the full range of expression in the post-9/11 Web sphere, we needed to go beyond categories of emotion identified in grief and bereavement literature to include expressions such as analysis and response advocacy. Through our preliminary analysis we identified the following nine types of expression: 1.) initial emotion; 2.) depressive emotion; 3.) negative emotion ; 4.)religious/spiritual expression ; 5.)patriotism ; 6.) critical analysis; 7.) advocacy of a conciliatory response; 8.) advocacy of a hostile/aggressive response, and 9) misuse or abuse of a Web site .

The type of expression coded as initial emotion includes expressions of shock, disbelief, incredulity or otherwise a sense of surreality. Depressive emotion included expressions of sadness, sense of loss or condolences to victims, their families, etc. Negative emotion included expressions of anger, fear, and/or hate. Religious or spiritual expression consisted of references to prayer, quotations taken from religious or spiritual texts, and phrases such as "God bless you". Patriotic expression was characterized by support for relief and rescue efforts, America in general, and standard phrases such as "Proud to be an American". Critical analysis included rational or critical expression attempting to analyze the attacks, their antecedents, and potential outcomes. Two similar categories measured whether the expression present advocated for either a conciliatory response to the terrorist attacks or a hostile response through the use of force, the military, or other violent or aggressive action. The final category, misuse or abuse of Web sites, is characterized by the use of a Web site in a manner other than that intended or expressly invited by the site producer(s).

After verifying these categories of expression in relation to the data, we then systematically coded up to three different impressions of each Web site (depending on availability in the archive) to establish the prevalence of each of these types of expression. To establish the prevalence of each type of expression across these sites over time, we coded multiple impressions of each Web site; one impression for each of the three weeks after the attacks (September 11-October 2, 2001), based on their availability in the archive. Due to the large variance in the nature of the Web sites, it was necessary to standardize the amount of expression coded per impression of a site. This was accomplished by analyzing the first five discrete units of textual expression; a discrete unit was defined as a temporally bounded entry posted to the Internet by an author. All expression was coded for manifest content. Thus a unit could be attributed to multiple categories. For example, the phrase 'God Bless America' would be categorized as both patriotic and religious/spiritual. In addition to assessing the prevalence of each type of expression, we conducted a textual analysis of the units of expression. In the following section we present our findings, illustrated by excerpts from the expression texts and links to the archived Web materials.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis of the prevalence of each type of expression on the Web sites examined, and cursory analysis of their change over time, revealed the following patterns (see Table 1). The most common type of expression, depressive expression (sadness, grief, condolences), appeared on 75% of Web sites analyzed, and unlike the other types, depressive expression appeared consistently throughout the time period of this study.

Table 1. Percent of Web sites analyzed containing each type of expression.

Subtype of Expression	% Web sites analyzed on which subtype of expression is present
Depressive Emotion	75%
Religious/Spiritual Expression	61%
Negative Emotion	52%
Initial Emotion	48%
Patriotic Expression	46%
Critical Analysis	37%
Advocacy of a Conciliatory Response	36%
Advocacy of a Hostile/Aggressive Response	25%
Misuse/Abuse	8%

Religious or spiritual expression (references to prayer, quotations from sacred texts, etc.), the second most common subcategory, appeared on over 60% of the Web sites with declining frequency over the three weeks. While patriotic and initial expression appeared on 46% and 48% of Web sites surveyed respectively, patriotic expression was found consistently throughout the three weeks while expressions about the initial shock of the attacks was found with increasing frequency over the period of this study. Analysis of the data also reveals an increasing trend for expression in advocacy of a conciliatory response and for critical analysis or expression related to deliberation over who and what caused the attacks. At the same time, the number of sites with expression advocating a hostile or aggressive response declined over time. Misuse/abuse, the final and least common type of expression, consistently appeared on less than 10% of the Web sites in this study. The following discussion offers a more in-depth look at how these different types of expression were manifested on the Internet.

The most common form of expression, present on approximately 75% of Web sites analyzed, was depressive emotion. Together with initial and negative emotion, which appeared on 48% and 52% of Web sites respectively, these three categories constitute the type of expressive responses predicted by most studies in grief and mourning (Raphael, 1983). Whereas most research tends to lump these different types of expression together under the spectrum of emotional reactions to trauma or crises, they were recorded and analyzed separately in this study because that is how they appeared on the Internet. While these three types of expression do appear in combination in some messages, they were each manifested separately in online expression.

Based on patterns noted in the bereavement and mourning literature, we expected to see manifestations of initial emotion appearing chronologically first in online expression. Initial emotion as we've conceptualized it, corresponds closely to the early stages of coping with a crisis, and appeared in Internet users' messages as expressions of shock, horror, numbness, and incredulity at the attacks. One important element captured by this study further substantiated Quarantelli 's (1989) assertion that people do not tend to panic in crisis situations. The following example, taken from a taken from a single message board, where a discussion was already taking

place when the attacks occurred on 9/11, shows a discussion of the crisis devoid of both panic and initial emotion, even among eyewitnesses. [3]

Plane crashes in to the word trade center. Apologies for not linking to anything besides the main CNN page but there are no full stories on this yet. The plane crashed into the building about six minutes ago, from what the TV is saying. We are about sixty blocks north and we can see the smoke over the skyline.
posted by karen at 5:58 AM PST (491 comments total)

oops looks like i missed it by a minute.
posted by karen at 6:00 AM PST on September 11

I missed it by two. That doesn't look good.
posted by rcade at 6:01 AM PST on September 11

Just as an FYI, it's New York City, not Chicago.
posted by karen at 6:03 AM PST on September 11

My entire workplace witnessed the 2nd plane crash. It looks like the first one hit near the top of the building with the anntenna. The second circled around and hit the other building somewhere near the middle.

Over time, as the extent of the situation became apparent, expression became more emotional. The next example, taken from the same message board as the example above but captured several hours later, highlights this shift. Expression now tends to focus on emotional elements commonly found in people exposed to a disaster or traumatic experience.

i've spent the entire morning alternating between a state of mind-numbing shock and soul-twisting sadness…as i watch the news i see the city i used to call my playground covered in rubble and smoke…50,000+ dead because someone disagreed with an opinion our country had…and now i'm at work. trying to deal with this as people call me to tell me their computers are acting funny…*sigh*

For today, after everything I've read and seen, I am completely shocked. I could never fathom what it was like to be in that building when this happened, or what it was like to be in those planes knowing that you were witnessing the end. Today will have an effect on our nation like nothing has ever before…. Closure will not happen in my lifetime, my heart and tears go out to the victims families, I don't know what I could say...
posted by samsara at 3:04 PM PST on September 11

It should also be noted that messages exhibiting initial expression were not limited to Internet users physically close to World Trade Center towers, Pentagon, or Pennsylvania sites. Expressions of condolences and support were submitted by Internet users around the world. Messages posted to condolence books hosted by the governments of Canada and the Isle of Man reflected the combined elements of expression characteristic of mourning and also presented offers of support. The expression below, taken from the guest book hosted by the Canadian government, demonstrates how online structures allowed both personal expression and international dialogues.

We are so sorry for your loss. We have shed many a tear this past week.
Barbara&David Boyles - Cobble Hill, B.C. : 22:55:19 2001-09-16

I would like ot send my deepest condolences to the United States of America in the midst of such dark times. If history has shown anything, it is that the USA has bounced back time after time after time, and will do so again, with the help of Canada, the United Kingdom, and the rest of the free world. God Bless America.
John McLean - Calgary : 22:54:09 2001-09-16

En mon nom et au nom de mes enfants, j'aimerais exprimer aux parents, amis, collègues de travail des victimes des attentats du 11 septembre 2001 mes plus sincères condoléances. Ayant plusieurs membres de ma famille qui résident aux États-Unis, dont certains sont des citoyens américains à part entière depuis de nombreuses années. En cet instant, la frontière qui nous séparent me semble bien futile, ces gens disparus le 11 septembre sont aussi mes compatriotes.
Daniel Savard - Beloeil, Québec, Canada : 22:40:06 2001-09-16

As an American as well as a New Yorker, I would like to thank the great people of Canada and all that they have done after that tragedy which occured last Tuesday...your prayers and support have uplifted us...you truly are great neighbors and friend! We are truly touched....and just saying thank you is not enough...I ask that you pray for all those rescue workers as well as the families of those that are still missing or are dead. Once again..thank you!
Steve M - New York : 22:12:55 2001-09-16

Pennebaker and Harber's (1993) collective coping stages model suggests that initial expression should appear and disappear quickly as people move from the emergency stage into the inhibition and adaptation stage. However, we found no evidence of a decrease in initial expression on Web sites over the three weeks of the study, although initial expression did appear less frequently over time than either negative or depressive emotion. One reason may be that as people continue to post expression related to the attacks, by telling their September 11 stories or otherwise recalling their experiences of the attacks, these emotions continue to figure prominently in their recollections.

Depressive expression appeared on nearly three-quarters of all Web sites analyzed making it the most common type of expression. Characterized by statements of sadness, a sense of loss, and condolences to families and friends of victims, depressive emotion was the most common form of expression found in this study and can be seen in the following examples.

"My heart is heavy with pain and my eyes fill with tears as I send the families of the victims this messege. I'm a US Marine and wish I could do something to ease your pain. I cannot even imagine how you all feel. My heart goes out to you all. I know in my heart that the people responsible for this action will be found and they will punished, if not by man, than by God. God be with you all. Texas hearts are with you.
Adolfo, Jill & Emily"

"I am paralyzed by the horror and sadness of what has happened. It is beyond me to express the sadness and concern I feel for everyone who is suffering today. I am sending healing thoughts

and energy out to everyone who cannot help but be changed by this and eventually made stronger in our resolve to stand together against such heinous, inhuman behavior. With Care, Trisha, ME USA"

In contrast, negative expression, characterized by expressions of anger, hate and/or fear, was manifest in a variety of forms ranging from personal stories of discrimination, to a fear of violence against Arab Americans or Muslims, to hate speech directed at terrorists or other Internet users who posted unpopular or controversial proclamations on the Internet. In the following example taken from a personal Web log, or blog, authored by Jish, he describes his experience with the new climate of racial tension after the attacks.

Wednesday, September 12
God dammit, I'm Canadian
I was doing better today, until a short while ago when I was at a cafe for breakfast. As I stood in line, someone (very loudly and in a very accusing tone) asked: "Are you from Afghanistan??" All eyes turned upon me, burning, each one accompanied with accusatory frowns. Needless to say, I very sheepishly said: "I am not from Afghanistan.", then I quietly left ... with an empty stomach and almost crying.

I felt so small and I now feel so unsafe and uncomfortable.

In the next example, from a Web site dedicated to "uncovering media myths about the Middle East," the site producer posted a letter to the public expressing his apprehension, fear and gratitude over the messages sent to him since September 11. The excerpts he included, from personal messages he received in the wake of the attacks, also embodied elements of negative expression.

It is extremely hard to write this morning, and yet I feel I have to. Everything hurts so much. After a few hours sleep, I woke up in the dark, hoping and praying that I had woken up from a nightmare. The nightmare is still there. Today, as dawn breaks over New York City and the country, we will start to come face to face with the enormous tragedy and crime that struck yesterday, and we will begin to learn of countless thousands of families whose loved ones have been ripped from them. They have will have names and faces. It is beyond imagination and comprehension...I hope too that Americans will maintain their humanity and not surrender to their basest feelings as understandable anger, frustration and grief rise. Arabs and Muslims in America now live with real fear and apprehension. From early yesterday morning, I began receiving to my website, as well as to the email of the Arab American Action Network messages that only deepened the pain of the day.

"You are going to feel the wrath of all Americans. LEAVE this country while you can. ALL ARABS ARE COWARDS AND BARBARIANS. DEATH TO ALL ARABS ALL PERSIANS ALL MUSLIMS!!!!!!!" wrote Darrell Hawley, adding for good measure that Arabs, Muslims and "Persians" "deserve nothing less than extermination." "Pay back time...will come soon," was the simple message from REise99@aol.com. Doug asked "Ali, why do your people love when civilians are killed. You are Evil." "Dear dirty towel-heads," wrote Brook Shuler, "Please take your illogical, misogynistic and murdering religion back to the Middle East. We have tolerated you disgusting people long enough in our country." Brook added "I hope the US wipes out every

man, women and child Arab in the middle east. You people, like the AIDS virus, are a disease of this world. I will rest more easily when all of you are dead."

Both examples highlight the expression of anger and fear unaccompanied by the other emotions in the spectrum of bereavement. While this does not necessarily mean they should not be considered an offshoot of the mourning process, it is worthwhile noting that these emotions exist along a continuum.

Cose (1999) contends that online expressions of grief, like those shown in the preceding examples, are a thing apart from real grief. Using the example of John F. Kennedy Jr.'s sudden death, he argues that for those whose experience of a crisis occurs primarily through mediated channels, both the sense of intimacy or shared experience and grief are an illusion. Therefore, virtual grief is not accompanied by "actual pain, anger and depression". Although it is impossible to know what emotions may have motivated people to express themselves online, the variety of expression generated after the 9/11 attacks both mimics expected patterns for emotional or psychological responses to trauma and extends beyond the predicted boundaries. Thus, the experience of the attacks, though mediated, evoked a range of response from people around the world.

A second composite category of expression involves those types of expression related to individual's attempt to "make sense" of the attacks. This sense-making process was manifested on the Web through expressions of analysis of the cause and effects of the attacks, and evaluation or advocacy of response options. The three types of related expression—critical analysis, advocacy of a hostile/aggressive response, and advocacy of a conciliatory response— were differentiated based on whether or not the expression was purely analytical, or indicated a preference for or endorsement of one form of response over another. Overall, critical analysis (37%) and advocacy of a conciliatory response (36%) appeared more frequently than advocacy of a hostile or aggressive response (25%).

Critical analysis expression often sought to answer questions such as who, what, or why. In the following post to a discussion on a message board, the author offers his/her own understanding of chosen targets and offers a potential answer to the question of 'why?'

…The World Trade Centre was not just another tall building; it was a symbol of America's economic pre-eminence. The other target was the Pentagon, symbol of America's military might. By attacking and destroying or crippling the two symbols of America's economic and military power, the terrorists proved the point that America was as vulnerable as any other nation. No matter what security arrangements the US government takes, its enemies can still manage to strike at will and at a place and time of their choice…

Expression advocating a hostile or aggressive response often focused on the power of the United States military or on Osama bin Laden and his supporters as primary targets. Some messages however, advocated violence against Muslims or Afghanistan as a whole. Alternately, some authors expressed a desire for a conciliatory response to the attacks and urged America to refrain from lashing out. Frequently, as illustrated in the following examples, these two opposing types of expression were found near each other on message boards.

By KILL OMASA (- 151.202.50.200) on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 - 10:04 am:

I AM A LEBANESE CATHOLIC AMERICAN AND I FEEL THAT PALESTINIAN MUSLIMS SHOULD BE GATHERED UP AND FREAKIN SHOT. THEY MAKE THE MIDDLE EAST LOOK LIKE AN ANIMAL HABITAT. I HAVE LOST A FAMILY MEMBER AND A GREAT PERSON IN THIS HORRIFIC ACT OF DISGUST.

PLEASE DO NOT LUMP THE LEBANESE AMERICANS WITH THESE BARBARIANS THAT DARE CALL THEMSELVES HOLY!!!

By bethy (- 209.214.123.54) on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 - 03:31 pm:

We should not harbor any ill feelings toward Muslim Americans. We all live in this great country for a reason. Race should not become an issue EVER.

By Lydia (- 64.148.146.162) on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 - 06:53 pm:

Please keep calm heads, everyone is full of anger, it is hard to understand who could be full of that much hate, could be so full rage, how someone can be so brain washed to do such a thing. Enough people have suffered. Please don't turn your anger into the same thing that cause this by miss directing it against our neighbors and co-workers. We all know that God had nothing to do with this. Another force was at work here. Making threats against all Arab people will not help. Only hurt. Please, please don't make this horible thing that happened any worse. Peace

One type of expression surprisingly absent from traditional bereavement and mourning literature is religious or spiritual expression. Appearing on over 60% of the Web sites analyzed, this expression is identified by religious or spiritual messages including prayer(s), passages from religious text, and general references to a God (or Allah, etc). Most frequently this type of expression appeared as closing dialogue or as a reference to prayers and praying or in a common phrase related to blessings ("God bless...."). Other examples focused on the religious overtones behind the attacks. The following examples come from a message board open to the general public and hosted by a Web site dedicated to improving rescue and relief responses to disasters. These excerpts are representative of the religious expression that was present on Web sites produced by both sacred and secular organizations.

By salinarae (- 152.163.213.182) on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 - 04:52 pm:

I would like to seen my utmost condolences out to the family, and friends of the victims of this terrible tragedy. Remember look towards God. That is where true strength snd comfort come from.

By thornbls (- 66.68.150.96) on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 - 06:28 pm:

I would like to let all of the friends and family of the the victims know that my prayers are with you. Many of my friends are also praying. My heart is broken for all the pain and suffering this evil event has caused. But our God is a big God. You will see our country unified as never before. You will have help and support like you never thought possible. This country will and is rallying behind you and will for a long time to come.

May God give you the strength and courage you need in the days to come. May He provide for ALL of your needs for you and your families. God Bless.

By Melissa Carver (- 209.45.185.9) on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 - 06:49 pm:

My prayers are with the victims and the families of this horrid event. God will take care of you and He will provide you with everything you need to get through this. Just have faith and remember that God loves you, just as your loved ones do, whom are looking down from heaven.

A second form of expression unmentioned in the bereavement literature, but unsurprising in this case, stems from the renewed sense of patriotism that emerged after the attacks. People responded by displaying the flag outside of homes and on cars, and radio stations promoted patriotic selections such as " God Bless America" and "America the Beautiful". Online patriotism, appearing on 46% of these Web sites, is characterized by traditional slogans such as "God bless America" or "United We Stand" and as the primary subject of expression. In the first example, from a Web site created to memorialize the attacks, patriotic expression forms the basis of the message.

This past week, evertime I have come across an American flag, it has brought tears to my eyes. Tears of sorrow, anger, but mostly patriotism. I love this country. Always have the entire 18 years of my life. Despite all the critisism that America has received in the past, both from afar and within, the world remains in total shock, for America, the home of the proud and the free, has been violently struck at this past week. I think of it as a flesh wound. Sure, it looks bad presently; it hurts, stings, makes you want to cry. But it will eventually heal, leaving a scar as a remembrance, for we can never forget this tragedy.The terrorists this past week, and anyone out there who dares to attack America must know that you can't destroy the her heart; it has been wounded, but with the spirit of America pumping though it, it will never perish.

In the meantime though, we're going to seek out those cowards who wounded us from afar, raise them up for the whole world to see, and crush them into dust. Being in the Naval Reserves, I know my time may come where I may have to go off and fight a war. To protect the greatest country on earth, I'd go anywhere and do just about anything. God bless you all. I'm so proud to be an American.

Online expression also urged people to demonstrate patriotism through such offline actions as dressing in red, white, and blue, displaying the flag, donating money, and giving blood. Another tactic of online patriotism focused on the importance of maintaining a semblance of normality and not giving into fear or anger. One Web site entitled "Betting on America," urged visitors to demonstrate their patriotism "by going about [their] lives without the fear that the events of September 11th helped to put there." Expression posted in the guest book of this Web site shows support for this notion that "Terrorism only works if you are afraid…" and other messages encourage people to continue traveling, working and investing in America.

The final and least common form of expression, misuse and abuse, appeared on almost one out of every twelve Web sites. We categorized expression as misuse if it was incongruent or inappropriate to the context or purpose of a Web site, or abuse if it ignored or transgressed the site producers' explicit intentions for allowing public expression their particular Web site.

Obvious and subtle forms of abuse and misuse were apparent on Web sites, and both provide information about how some Internet users took advantage of the sudden opportunity 9/11 provided to create online expression. Examples of misuse and abuse include entering false identities into victim's registries, trying to solicit business on memorial message boards, and general acts of cyber-vandalism. It should also be noted that we cannot know how much attempted abuse or misuse was precluded by site producers who removed inappropriate expression before it reached the public.

The following example of abuse was quite extensive and occurred on a memorial Web site offering visitors the opportunity to 'pay their respects to the victims' by lighting a virtual memorial candle. Visitors were given the option of including their name or a brief message underneath the candle, and many people did post messages reflecting the site producer's intention. Examples of entries that accorded with the site producer's intent included: "Melissa Woodruff, God Bless All"; "In loveing memory Off 911 day love amber"; "To the courageous who gave their lives". However, some users abused the opportunity to post expression and generated candles with the following messages: "NUKE OSAMA + SADDAM + CASTRO NOW !!!!!!", "NEVER AGAIN~PRE-EMPTIVELY NUKE OSAMA NOW", "NUKE TALIBAN DRUG TRAFFICKING TERRORISTS", "USSCOLE+ EMBASSIES+WTC+ PENTAGON+PA =OSAMA", "BUY GUNS+SUVS+DEFENSE STOCKS INVEST USA", "FRANCE WILL NUKE GREENPEACE TERRORISTS", "GREENPEACE=OSAMA MONEY LAUNDERING FRONT".

Another case of misuse concerned the posting of 'missing person' announcements by family or friends on Web surfaces not intended to support this user action. Although less offensive than the previous example, these cases similarly involved the posting of expression inappropriate to the context. For example, the following text appeared on the message boards of the Disaster Center a Web site dedicated to general discussions of disaster preparedness and response effectiveness.

By cooks (- 208.232.164.3) on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 - 05:29 pm: Our prayers go out to the victims and their families. We must come together as a nation to defend our freedom. We MUST pray for our leaders at this time. They need wisdom and guidance in what they are preparing to do. If you have any information on Daphne Pouletsos of Westwood,NJ. Please call 800-999-0904 ext 4667 She was on the 103rd floor of the southern tower at the WTC at the time of the attack. We have not heard from her. Family is worried sick.

The message conveys the desperation of a family seeking loved ones; it is nonetheless out of place in the context of the message board on which it was posted.

Interestingly absent from post September 11 online expression, but prevalent in Shuchter and Zisook's (1993) multi-dimensional description of grief are elements of guilt among the living. Perhaps this is one emotional element that is absent from crises occurring on a communal scale, or when individuals are further removed from the situation. Also of interest is the frequency of both religious/spiritual and patriotic expression, neither of which has received much attention in earlier studies.

One potential role for the Internet in post-crisis coping is its service in establishing online social support networks or communities based on a common interest. As Pennebaker and Harber

(1993) note in their model for collective coping, social inhibitions, arising in the second to third week after a crisis, tended to limit the outlets for expression. They found that while people reported a desire to talk about the event, they did not want to listen to others' experiences of the crisis. This has two different implications. First, considering the therapeutic effects of talking about a crisis (Cohen, 2001; Taylor & Fraser, 1980, as cited in Raphael, 1983), a sharp decline in available listeners during a time when people still have a need to talk about the event could interfere with the recovery process. Second, while it may be therapeutic to express oneself, the experience of listening may evoke stress in the listener, making avoidance of discussion regarding a crisis a form of self-defense against further emotional distress (Pennebaker & Harber, 1993). This may explain the inhibition that appears in social interactions leading to a suppression of conversations about the traumatic event. By offering a place for people to express themselves without simultaneously being exposed to either the stress of listening to another person or risking the possibility of social censure, the Internet may facilitate the grieving or coping process. Because users are in control of the extent to which they read and engage with others' expression they have the ability to limit their exposure to stress. And in a study of people coping with loss due to suicide, Hollander (2001) found that surviving family and friends did turn to online social support networks as a place for expression, due to a perception that grieving was unwelcome in their external social circles.

If people experiencing the loss of a family member or friend feel all alone or isolated in their grief, is it also possible to feel alone when the crisis affects an entire community, perhaps even an entire nation? While opportunities to discuss collective experiences of a crisis may be widely available in cities and metropolitan areas, where there is also professional counseling help and a large number of other survivors with whom to share stories, this type of social support may be rare in outlying areas.   For people in areas geographically distant from a crisis, unlike traditional broadcast media, the Internet may provide a connection with a larger community through which people can discuss their own mediated experiences of the crisis. In addition, Rainie and Kalsnes (2001) found that people who used the Internet during 9/11 were also more likely to participate in other community events such as attending vigils, religious or memorial services, and donating blood. It is possible that those individuals who sought the opportunity to express themselves online represent a segment of the population, a vocal minority perhaps, that needs or desires a sense of connection to a larger social network. While online communities may be invisible, their utility as an outlet for personal expression is highly visible. Thus, perhaps it is the ability to join a community removed from the confines of one's traditional social networks that allows for frank discussions of death and loss and where people can make sense of the tragedy that evokes such strong reactions in the first place (Hollander, 2001)

Conclusion

The purpose of this essay has been to contribute to knowledge about online, public expression in the wake of an international disaster. Our findings show that the Internet served as a site and surface for citizens around the world to post their personal expression and engage with the writing of others. It is this unique interactive capability of the Internet that separates it from traditional media. Whereas television, newspapers, and radio may increase the segment of the public who are informed of and perhaps touched by a crisis, the Internet further supports the subsequent needs of the public in coping with the tragedy by facilitating shared personal expression and emotional support from within the larger online community.

The contributions of the Web to facilitation of individual or collective mourning and bereavement through personal expression may be found in the variety of expression we observed. Overall, the forms of expression produced in response to the September 11 attacks both support and diverge from expectations for individuals coping with traumatic stress in their lives based on the studies of public mourning cited previously, as well as with Pennebaker and Harber's (1993) stage model of collective coping. For example, there seems to be strong evidence of expression related to 'making sense' of the attacks, which Raphael (1983) notes may accompany unexpected trauma or sudden loss for which there is no ready explanation. In both cases, however, the expression observed on the Web extends beyond the boundaries of previous expectations. The relative anonymity and protection from social censure afforded to Internet authors, relative to face-to-face interactions, coupled with the ability of the Internet to connect like-minded but geographically distant groups of people may account for the larger variety of expression found online. To some extent, this may in fact represent a more realistic sample of the emotional response to a crisis than found in earlier research.

By analyzing actual online expression rather than collecting self-reports of expression, we removed the potential for respondent bias by delimiting boundaries on potential subjects' responses that can impinge on survey or interview methods. Furthermore, previous studies have suffered from a time lag between the actual disaster and the collection of data on people's response to the event, thus introducing the possibility of error through stimulated recall exercises. We were able to overcome this difficulty by examining actual expression as it appeared on the Internet simultaneously with the impact of the first airplane in New York, and over a period of three weeks. Last, a third advantage of our approach comes from the face validity that a pseudo-field observation such as this one allows. Because all content was produced in response to the event and not to the researcher's inquiries, the content is considerably freer from bias than traditional survey studies.

We note that the September 11 attacks were a unique event in world history and that the expression generated in response to this event may not be representative of how people in other crisis contexts would respond. We suggest that future studies might further explore the extent to which online expression can be considered an extension of the type of dialogue that takes place in a conversation. It would also be fruitful to analyze the extent to which online expression mimics dyadic conversations concerning collective experiences of trauma or crisis.

The Web sites analyzed in this study reveal that Internet users view the Web as far more than a tool for just retrieving or even exchanging information. The Web has become a realm for creating and seeking personal expression of all kinds. It contains the full spectrum of emotive action, manifested in art and memorials, texts and images. In the wake of the September 11 attacks, the Web was a commons for human expression.

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[1] Recently, some studies have examined how individuals diagnosed with terminal illnesses or experiencing the traumatic loss of a spouse or child cope express themselves in online environments. Although similar in nature, their utility for comparison with September 11th is limited.

 [2] It was not possible to ascertain the nationalities of contributors to these sites. There were Web sites in other languages with similar expression-related activities that were developing simultaneously that were not included in this study.

[3] All examples are quoted as they appeared online with grammatical and spelling errors preserved.

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