Editor’s Letter-Spring 2014

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Too Much Information

The tendency to divulge everything about ourselves to anyone we think might be listening is a phenomenon that’s called oversharing. Just check any social media platform, and you’ll find plenty examples of this. Wall Street Journal writer Elizabeth Bernstein called the tendency “BYB: Blabbing Your Business.” “In the culture we live in, it’s hard to remember that some things should be private,” she declared.

Why do some of us feel compelled to share each and every detail of our lives? Turns out, scientific studies have examined the proliferation of loose lips, and one found that dropping personal information about ourselves to people we don’t know simply gives some folks a pleasant feeling.

Another study found that the anonymous nature of the Internet makes self-disclosure online easy and appealing to many. Some relish the act of letting it all hang out because these true—or often untrue, for those who practice deception—confessions work like therapy. Once we spill our guts, somehow, we feel better. I call that the “confession effect.”

A 2010 study also reports that people divulge too much about themselves in an effort to re-create their image. Online, we can change ourselves into that sexy, smart, cool, daring and interesting person we yearn to be. So what if the colorfully, outrageous tales we tell about our adventures are merely wishful thinking. Fantastic fabrications that recount our walking on the wild side can transform us into celebrities online.

When measured against obscurity, being talked about and getting noticed may seem infinitely more appealing to some of us. At last, we can be somebody popular, a personality with a life other people discuss. But the possible negative consequences of all this soul baring are foolishly ignored.

In addition, this willingness to expose every nook and cranny of ourselves doesn’t only apply to what we say. Many people post notorious images of themselves online—doing goodness knows what. Sometimes the pictures are taken by others, and we approve them for publication. Other times, the photographs are those we snap of ourselves—the ubiquitous “selfies”—that have become a meme in our social media-obsessed life and times.

Today, the line that separates what constitutes our public and private selves and lives has become

blurred. Some trace it back to the arrival of reality TV. Where we are today in the art of self-exposure is an expansion and growth of a culture that thrives on what may qualify as a corrupted and unhealthy expression of self-love.

Sure, there’s an upside to being willing to disclose our personal information. This is a way to affirm our connection to others, a way to say we’re all in this together. I think that can be a good thing.

But there is a difference between sharing our experiences with others in a self-respecting way and thoughtlessly disrespecting ourselves by simply saying too much. As with most actions in life, moderation is key.

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