

WIRED TO WORRY

NEGATIVITY in my Newsfeed



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The other day I was assaulted by a baby elephant. More specifically by multiple people sharing the heartbreaking story of baby elephant who cried after it had been stomped on and rejected by its mother. If you haven't already seen the story you might want to think twice before you search for it, unless you would enjoy feeling bummed out for the next three or four days.

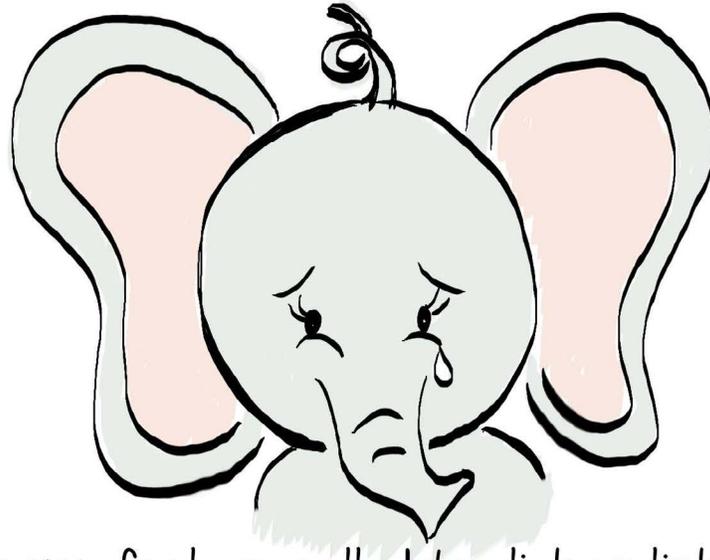
After I recovered from reading this story I can never unread, I started to reflect more on why people share these stories and why I clicked on the link in the first place. Reading the comments section for the story did not offer much up in the way of surprising insights. Most

of the commentators were looking for something or someone to blame.

Some had diagnosed the mother with postpartum depression, others suggested that she had gone crazy after being imprisoned at the zoo. Another cluster of people felt that the baby was lucky that the keepers at the sanctuary (not zoo) were there to save the baby. The original news story did not provide enough detail to sort out the cause, but that did not stop anyone from speculating and blaming in an attempt to make sense of this sad story.

I find this sort of online behaviour fascinating - why certain memes or stories go viral, how we

Negative Cognitive Bias Screening Inventory: Item #16



True or False: Do you feel compelled to click on links to stories about crying baby elephants, even when you know it will ruin your day?

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respond to them, and what it says about how our minds work. Many people criticize the news industry for being too focused on the negative or politicians for using negative ad campaigns - but they are simply giving us what we want (or at least what our brains seem to want). The brain's negativity bias is well-documented in the research literature with various studies finding that negative stimuli results in increased attention, better recall and increased

arousal than neutral or positive stimuli.

Given that it is unlikely that people are going to stop sharing these depressing stories anytime soon, it seems that my only course of action is to override my own negativity bias and stop clicking those links. For those times when I inadvertently read something I don't need to read, I am glad I have a mediation practice that allows me to accept that we live in an imperfect

world. The more I meditate, the more I can practice acceptance and shake off the things that I can't change.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR:

Christine Korol, Ph.D. is a cartoonist, psychologist in private practice in Calgary, Canada and the host/producer of a podcast on WiredToWorry.com that provides free online anxiety and stress reduction education videos.