

Fostering Emotional Stability Through “Pages of Petals: Narratives of the Soul”

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges that individuals with reserved personalities face when it comes to expressing their emotions, which can significantly affect their mental health and overall well-being. One effective way to support these individuals is by providing reading materials that resonate with their experiences, offering comfort and helping to alleviate their emotional burdens. This involves creating an e-book titled “Pages of Petals: Narratives of the Soul” and publishing it on Medium, an online platform that focuses on emotional struggles, personal growth, and unspoken experiences through narratives and reflections. It also aims to provide readers with comfort, validation, and a sense of emotional connection. To better understand the audience’s emotional needs and preferences in storytelling, a survey was conducted, which helped shape the themes and topics of the content. Interviews further refined these narratives, ensuring they are relatable and profound. This approach highlights the power of storytelling as a tool for fostering empathy, self-awareness, and connection. Ultimately, it seeks to inspire readers and encourage emotional expression in diverse and supportive ways.

Keywords: Emotional Stability, Reserved Personalities, Narrative Therapy, Mental Health

INTRODUCTION

Medium is an online publishing platform developed by the co-founder of Blogger and Twitter, Evan Williams, which was launched in August 2012 (Hayes, 2024). It is managed by a company called A Medium Corporation. Medium presents a combination of personal blogs and articles from larger publications by bringing together amateur and professional writers. It is often perceived as a platform for individuals to create and share their thoughts, stories, and articles, much like a mix between social media and journalism. Therefore, many people also use Medium as a blogging platform as it offers a variety of content from personal blogs to professional publications.

The choice to use both formats, e-book and Medium, was made after considering the benefits of each media. Both are conveniently accessible to people wherever and may be accessed on any device. However, the e-book provides a more personal, comprehensive collection, while Medium can reach more readers as it specialises in those who are looking for quick reads and offers greater audience engagement opportunities. This is possible because of its variety of features, like comments on specific parts of writing, a clap button, and the chance to reach a wider audience through its community.

“Pages of Petals: Narratives of the Soul” is a compilation of narratives, monologues, and personal reflections that are available in the form of an e-book and also on a use-rising app called Medium. These narratives are written from the viewpoint of a quiet, neurodivergent person attempting to make sense of a complex, loud reality world. The content explores themes such as life, hope, fear, emotions, and self-growth, aiming to express feelings and experiences that many people find difficult to articulate.

This approach is making sensible use of technological advancements to help people express their emotions to society and reach out to others (Ruini & Mortara, 2022; Allen et al., 2020). In the past, those seeking to

express their thoughts or opinions could write to newspapers or simply create blogs. One such area is the “Letter to the Editor” section, which deals with newspapers, magazines, and other printed publications. It is a space where people may voice their opinions to the public or share information about various concerns, which can be viewed as a fantastic method to raise awareness of particular issues (Nagy, 2019). In contrast, modern platforms like Medium are now assuming the role of a place for these kinds of expressions, providing readers with immediate feedback, a more direct line of communication, and a wide range of topics on which to write or read at their leisure (Nasir, 2024; Ogbeiwi et al., 2024; Kwak, 2021).

Problem Statement

People who have reserved personalities often repress their emotions or feelings. The term “suppressed emotions” refers to a common coping mechanism for handling complicated, overwhelming, or negative feelings (Jason, 2024). Some possible contributing factors include feelings of invalidation, fear of judgement, difficulty expressing oneself, past trauma, and the surroundings. Hence, an individual's mental health may suffer as a result of this behaviour. This is due to the fact that suppressing negative emotions can result in chronic tension, depression, low self-esteem, and even physical illness in severe cases (Parvez, 2024). Martin (2024) states that a million people over the age of 15 were found to be suffering from depression, according to the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2023: Non-Communicable Diseases and Healthcare Demand (NHMS). He continued by saying the survey revealed that the number of persons experiencing depression had doubled between 2019 to 2023, and was higher in younger age groups, particularly those between the ages of 16 to 29.

Without a doubt, a great deal of social work has been done, including awareness campaigns and treatment, yet the problem persists in the same area. Therefore, by being the voice for them, the development of “Pages of Petals: Narratives of the Soul” may be able to contribute to a decrease in this number. In addition, the narratives are designed to give the impression as if the reader is reading their own diary, which validates their feelings and puts to rest the idea that they are alone. Hagan (2022) wrote that reading can help young people understand themselves and the world around them, especially when the stories correspond to their own experiences. Additionally, he mentioned that readers may find solace in the knowledge that they are not alone in their struggles by relating to people who experience similar problems. Thus, this approach might be a comforting companion for those who find it difficult to express their feelings in words or to have their beliefs validated (Rauch & Ansari, 2025; Heck & Tsai, 2022). Along with providing comfort and support, this may also lessen the emotional load that many people bear in silence (Banisafar et al., 2024; Lilly, 2023).

Therefore, this study seeks to focus on the connection between young people’s emotional expressiveness and reading. Its specific objectives are:

1. To be the voice of those who find it difficult to express themselves
2. To give readers relatable experiences and perspectives that would enable them to feel validated for the sentiments and emotions they are experiencing
3. To offer consolation and comfort while providing inspiration and motivation in life’s obstacles.

In accordance with the stated objectives, this study seeks to establish a safe and encouraging space in which individuals may freely explore their own emotions, discover solidarity in shared experiences, and get familiar with the tools as a means of self-expression. By voicing out the frequently unsaid complexities associated with emotional expression, “Pages of Petals – Narratives of the Soul” strives to enhance its audience’s mental well-being.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study started with an online survey designed to gather a variety of perspectives regarding the different kinds of topics or themes that needed to be the focus. This method assists in gathering audience insight on matters that are essential and relevant to the community. Multiple-choice questions in the survey provided an understanding of the majority of people who find it difficult to put their emotions into words, and the number of people who find narratives to be helpful when dealing with life’s inner conflicts. In addition to its function

in identifying topics, the survey includes a single open-ended question that allows participants to express their thoughts and experiences in their own words. To reach a wide range of respondents, the survey was distributed using social media sites and messaging applications, including Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram. In order to create a safe space for honest and unrestrained answers, respondents' anonymity was also guaranteed.

To complement the survey results, two participants were chosen to participate in semi-structured interviews. Participants in the interview are Hanis Najwa binti Mohd Noor (R1), pursuing a Diploma in Human Resources at Kolej Technology Antarabangsa Cybernetics (KTAC), and Nurul Iffah binti Mohd Zahid (R2), currently studying for a Diploma in Counselling Psychology at Kolej UNITI. The interview participants were chosen based on their familiarity and trust with the interviewer. This measure was used to foster an atmosphere in which participants felt comfortable and at ease, which in turn encouraged open and honest responses. These interviews provided an opportunity for a deeper exploration of individual stories with numerous viewpoints. The interviews were guided by the same questions as the survey, but with open-ended answers, allowing them to respond in their own way and freely express their opinions. The interviews were conducted in person and lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes each and were recorded with participants' consent.

Multiple-choice questions survey data were quantitatively analysed by calculating response frequencies and identifying patterns across participants, while the one open-ended question provided more detail on possible topics. These patterns were then analysed to identify recurring themes and areas of interest, which contributed to the selection of topics. A more thorough comprehension of the perspectives provided by the respondents was gained by comparing the survey results with the data collected from the interviews. It was to ensure that the chosen topics not only reflected statistical significance but also captured the richness of personal experiences and emotions.

Once the list of topics and themes has been finalised, it will be compiled and categorised into different chapters. The writing process began once the chapters and the topics were organised. The writing process went through several drafts to ensure there were as few errors as possible, proofread it, and produce a high-quality result.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A survey was done to explore the audience's emotional struggles, interests, and preferences in narratives about such struggles. The results provided valuable insights into the themes and content of the project. The survey was created using Google Forms, and 70 respondents were gathered. While the survey included 16 questions, the discussion focuses on 7 main questions related to the development of narrative topics and themes, as well as the participants' personal interest in this kind of area.

Among these, sixty-six (94.3%) respondents were aged between 18 and 24, while the remaining participants were over 30 years old. Additionally, the majority of respondents identified as students. As shown in Figure 1, the survey revealed that forty (57.1%) respondents sometimes find it difficult to express their feelings, and twenty-two (31.4%) respondents reported always facing such an issue. In contrast, six (8.6%) respondents rarely experienced this challenge, and two (2.9%) respondents indicated they never encountered it. The major effects reported by respondents due to suppressed emotions include impacts on their mental and physical health as well as feelings of stress and anxiety.

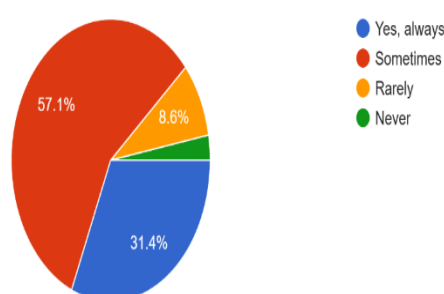


Figure 1. The pie chart to the question “Do you find it hard to be honest with what you feel and speak it out?”

As evidenced in Figure 2, the top reasons provided by respondents for not expressing their emotions are fear of judgement (23), feeling unheard (19), and being unable to find a suitable word (14). This shows that societal attitudes are the main factor why people hesitate to express their feelings, often choosing to bottle them up till it affects their well-being. Additionally, a lack of knowledge or access to suitable vocabulary to accurately convey their emotions (14) further contributes to this struggle.

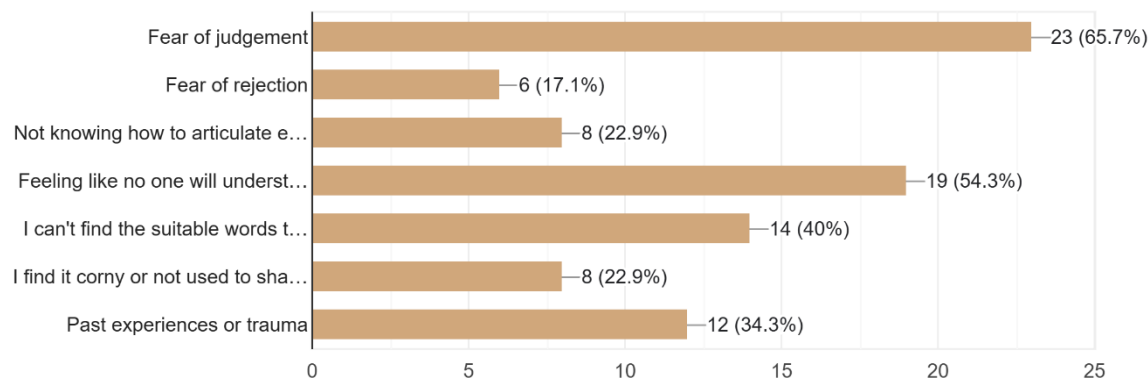


Figure 2. The bar chart to the question “What situations or factors make it harder for you to express how you feel?”

Thirty-two respondents (45.7%) expressed interest in reading reflections that explore emotional struggles, while another thirty-two (45.7%) respondents indicated an ambiguous interest, dependent on the relatability of the content. The other six respondents (8.6%) showed no interest in such material. Therefore, this highlights the importance of writing narratives that resonate with a broad audience, a goal that can be guided by analysing respondents’ preferences. Additionally, in the interviews, both participants agreed that reading relatable narratives would be helpful. This is illustrated in the following response provided by R2:

“Yes, it’s helpful because it’s one of the ways for us—like I mentioned before, certain people just can’t express their feelings, so they look for others who feel the same. At least then they see there’s a solution, which gives them a bit of motivation and makes them think, ‘If they found a way to deal with this, maybe I can give it a try too.’”

The analysis of responses from the survey and the interview resulted in the identification of nine topics. These topics were categorised into four chapters, each representing different stages of growth and self-reflection. These chapters are as follows: 1) Seeds of Uncertainty, 2) Wilted Petals, 3) Veiled in Thorns, and 4) Tangled Branches. The selection of these themes was guided by respondents’ preferences, as shown in Figure 3.

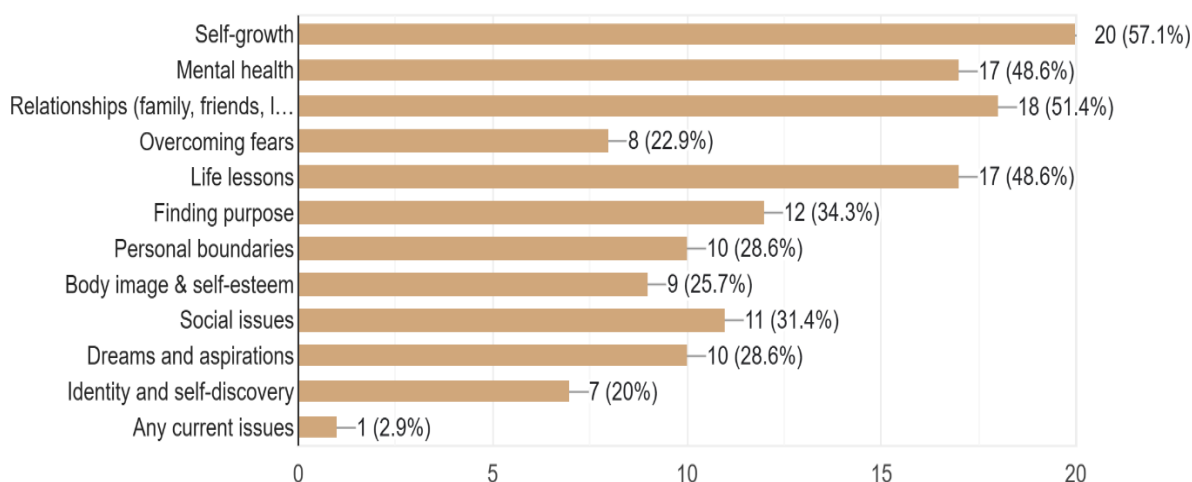


Figure 3. The bar chart to the question “What topics or themes would you be most interested in reading about?”

Seeds of Uncertainty

This chapter generally addresses the concept of fear of the unknown, particularly in relation to what may occur in the future. It also explores moments of self-doubt and hidden anxiousness of questioning whether life's concerns will ever have answers. Furthermore, it captures the internal conflict between hope and despair, leading to an endless cycle of overthinking about purpose, aspirations, and fear of failure. The chapters emphasize the vulnerability of dreams and the unsettling feeling of time slipping away, as if everything is temporary and unreachable. This theme was addressed in guiding individuals confronting self-doubt, fear of the future, and overthinking issues that might negatively impact their daily routines. Besides, each topic was thoroughly written in order to ensure that the project's objectives were met.

Excerpt 1:

"I am uncertain about what lies beneath and what awaits me ahead. Every part of me longs to go back, yet the boat continues to sail forward, and I feel powerless to steer them. It feels like the paddle that I held forcefully; it seems wasted in the hands of one so lost, floating in the ocean of unknowns."

This excerpt captures the quiet frustrations of those who feel lost and anxious related to facing upcoming life events, as well as degraded self-perception that indicates an inability to handle their own lives. This aligns with **Objective 1** and **Objective 2**, as it serves as a voice for feelings of failure that are difficult to express, thereby validating the experiences of audiences who resonate with the same situations.

Excerpt 2:

"Don't rush. Rushing blurs your vision and fuels mistakes. Take your time and be kind to yourself."

The readers are provided with a sense of comfort by this excerpt, which is aligned with **Objective 3**.

Where do you go when you're nowhere?

The future remains an unknown for humans, evoking feelings of uncertainty and worry. This fear could result from an expectation of negative outcomes or situations beyond one's control. This topic delves into the emotional complexities associated with managing life's difficulties and the final destination that awaits ahead, be it an accomplishment or a failure. In addition, there was also a reflection on the fear of time passing quickly before one had the chance to show their pride to the world. The narrative highlights the pressure to meet societal expectations and the emotional impact of dealing with unexpected life changes.

The hours I cannot hold.

Doubts and worries are common in life, but when they become unmanageable and constant, they can affect a person's mental and physical well-being (Robinson et al., 2024). This topic addresses the influence of overthinking on an individual's life, especially when it comes to sleep problems. This results in an internal pressure between the need for rest and the fear of regretting lost time. Thus, the persistent idea that sleep is a waste of time becomes progressively unsettling as the mind's voice remains unavoidable. The topic also portrays personal development, transitioning from perceiving sleep as a kind of escapism to seeing it as an exhausting task.

Are we listening or just responding?

This topic covers the sense of emptiness experienced in communication when individuals attempt to express their issues, sometimes resulting in feelings of being unheard or misunderstood. It questions the sincerity of interactions and delves into the deep longing for genuine, meaningful connections, even if it means simply being there for someone in silence. This narrative discussed the idea that listening to understand is more valuable than listening merely to reply. It also addresses the significance of being present for someone,

emphasising that responses are not always necessary when being a listener, as every small gesture is meaningful enough.

Wilted Petals

In the following chapter, the focus shifts to the complexities of relationships, exploring the hurdles of expressing love, managing emotional absorption, and setting personal boundaries. It delves into the struggle of desiring connection with others while dealing with the emotional burden of being an empath, where personal feelings often get lost under the weight of guilt for acknowledging one's own emotions. This chapter also highlights the challenge of wanting to express love while feeling awkward and uncertain about the right way to proceed with it. Besides, it explores how strict personal boundaries can result in losing a sense of self-identity. The image of *wilted petals* reflects feelings of emotional exhaustion, isolation, and the barriers individuals create to shield themselves.

Excerpt 1:

"I absorb the energy of my surroundings. Perhaps I stand as a mirror in a crowded room; I reflect everything I see, every emotion laid bare. What they feel, I feel."

The excerpt is an instance that describes the personality of an individual who is deeply empathetic and capable of absorbing the emotions around them. This suggests that such traits and feelings are not uncommon, offering reassurance to those who may share similar experiences or attitudes. Therefore, this aligns with **Objectives 1 and 2**, emphasising the validation of emotions and fostering understanding.

Excerpt 2:

"Because being yourself is not just about letting others in, it's about proving, to yourself most of all, that you're someone worth being."

Based on excerpt 2, it achieved **Objective 3** by providing consolation and offering a way to encourage individuals to adapt it to their situations.

Who said you could dance in their rain?

The word "sonder" is a word to describe the awareness that every random bystander is living a life as full and complicated as one's own, and that one may only get a glimpse of their feelings once in a lifetime (Brend, 2022). This particular narrative addresses the exhaustion caused by being an empath alongside the realisation that every human has their own stories, resulting in emotional paralysis due to guilt.

Love, with two left feet.

Humans are full of numerous kinds of emotions, among which love is especially stand out. Despite it being a popular theme in all forms of media, such as poems, songs, and films, the expression of love remains a daunting and confusing matter for many. This issue may impact an individual's relationship, as humans tend to believe solely in what they perceive and hear. This topic discusses learning to express love in ways that are not limited to words.

Living behind an ivy wall.

This topic involves an individual who is afraid to be themselves, influenced by the belief that others may not accept them for their true identity. This forces individuals to create high boundaries to conceal parts they prefer others not to see, leading them to live up to what they believe people would like. However, this action caused guilt, as they refused to allow anyone to get too close while also desiring company.

Veiled in Thorns

This chapter explores the personal struggles related to self-image and self-esteem. It reflects the journey of discovering inner beauty amidst the challenges of insecurities and the inner voices of self-doubt. The metaphor of *thorns* captures the struggle of finding self-acceptance in a world that always expects perfection. It also explores the concept of being one's cruellest critic, where aspirations and desires are held back by fear and self-sabotage. This chapter captures the journey of facing imperfections while yearning for acceptance and self-love.

Excerpt 1:

"But I feel their eyes anyway, invisible daggers piercing me from all directions, whispering cruel things only I can hear. They tell me how terrible I look, how strange my walk is,..."

The above excerpt reflects a common yet often overlooked experience, dismissed by many as a mere overreaction, despite being a valid emotion. Addressing this gives a voice to those unable to express it, aligning with **Objectives 1 and 2**.

Excerpt 2:

"I'll start tomorrow," is the excuse we often use but it just means you lost today. Dreams, no matter how small, need a beginning. The path will be uncertain and uneven, but one day, you'll look back and be proud of how far you've come.

Excerpt 2 serves as a source of reassurance for the audience, urging them to take action despite hardship and to maintain belief in hope, thereby achieving **Objective 3**.

Pretty in me.

The issue of insecurity was discussed in this topic, focusing on someone who is struggling to appreciate their own beauty. It is a narrative about the road of self-acceptance and the understanding of the balance between embracing change and recognising personal limitations. It emphasises that beauty is not solely about appearance; rather, it is a matter of developing the ability to see it within oneself.

The florist who kills their own garden.

This topic reflects individuals with low self-trust, which may negatively affect future aspirations and goals. Subconscious worries, low self-esteem, or doubts can all contribute to self-sabotage, which can result in actions that make one wish to quit reaching goals (Copley, 2024). Consequently, it is necessary to address this topic in order to help individuals overcome pessimistic mindsets and to emphasise the significance of every dream that deserves the opportunity to be pursued.

Tangled Branches

This chapter describes the phase of self-growth in which one realised that life covers more than the expectations formed throughout childhood. The metaphor of *tangled branches* represents the intricate nature of life, including obstacles, dreams, and personal growth that form a part of one's true self. It reflects on the complexity of life, which is what defines life.

Excerpt 1:

"I've realised that all those years of studying left me unprepared for the world outside the classroom. I don't know how to "adult." My age doesn't reflect my readiness. I mastered exams but missed out on the lessons of life"

Based on excerpt 1, it discusses how one has missed out on a lot of actual life while being consumed with academic pursuits, only to find oneself drifting in uncertainty. This situation accurately describes individuals who may share similar feelings, hence aligning with **Objectives 1 and 2**.

Excerpt 2:

“You’re not a failure for starting late; you’re brave for starting at all.”

Excerpt 2 proves that it achieves **Objective 3**, as it provides advice that offers the audience a sense of comfort and ease.

Let a little light in.

Individuals frequently find themselves preoccupied with their jobs and the responsibilities of everyday life in today’s fast-paced world, which can result in a tendency to ignore their own feelings and emotions. Even while it might seem necessary to stay busy, neglecting these feelings can make them build up and finally result in overwhelming moments that come up unexpectedly. This chapter reflects people who become so caught up in the busyness of life that they constantly postpone dealing with their feelings. The title explores how one can confront and care for their feelings instead of suppressing or ignoring them.

Grades on paper, but what’s in your hands?

The focus of this topic is on academic chasers who dedicated their entire lives to the belief that earning good grades is the peak of success and achievement. However, it turned into the realisation that there is a lot to learn about life. This topic also explores the identity crisis, where one starts to doubt their value in a society that expects much more than academic success and past achievement fades into just a memory. In addition, the narrative highlights the longing to refuse the unavoidable process of growing up, as though a child still lives inside an adult body, afraid to confront the future.

CONCLUSION

The survey and interview results have led to the creation of four chapters containing ten topics that are suited to the interests of the audience and intended to address unsaid experiences as well as life reflections. These chapters include: 1) Seeds of Uncertainty, 2) Wilted Petals, 3) Veiled in Thorns, and 4) Tangled Branches.

The findings from the survey and interviews shaped the detailed concepts of each chosen topic. The narratives in “Pages of Petals: Narratives of the Soul” aimed to effectively demonstrate the effectiveness of storytelling in addressing personal growth, self-discovery, and emotional struggles, providing readers with a unique perspective on life’s complexities. On the other hand, while the narratives aim to resonate with a wide audience, their impact may differ based on certain individual experiences and emotional readiness to engage with introspective themes.

To conclude, this approach emphasizes the importance of amplifying unheard voices and personal stories in the current loud world through various platforms and materials. Moreover, it is recommended that similar approaches be explored further to expand their focus and address more diverse narratives. In addition, feedback and opinions from readers can guide further developments to enhance the quality.

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