Structured Journal Writing for Recovery from
Romantic Relationship Loss

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of a structured journal writing intervention on 20 university students (18 females and 2 males, ages 20 to 30 years) who had experienced a breakup within the preceding 12 months. Writing occurred for six sessions over a period of 3 weeks. Experimental group participants (n = 10) responded to questions aimed at eliciting an account of the breakup, with emphasis on emotional expression and cognitive re-appraisal of the loss. Control group participants (n = 10) wrote about neutral topics. Pre- and post-test measures of self-esteem, self-concept, time orientation, inner-directedness, and capacity for intimacy were taken using the Self Description Questionnaire III and the Personal Orientation Inventory.

Contrary to the hypotheses, no significant differences were found between groups at post-test. Post-hoc analyses revealed significant improvements in the experimental group in self-esteem, inner-directedness, Emotional Stability self-concept, and Opposite Sex Peer Relations self-concept, while the control group improved in Opposite Sex Peer Relations self-concept only. Possible explanations for the findings are discussed and implications for future research are presented.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The breakup of a romantic relationship can be one of the most difficult crises in a person's life. On the Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment Scale (1967), divorce and separation are rated as the second and third most stressful life events, next to the death of a spouse. For some, the psychological distress from a breakup can take years to overcome, regardless of whether the couple was married or unmarried or whether the decision to separate was the partner's or one's own. Feelings may range from grief, anger, loneliness, depression, guilt, fear, rejection, anxiety, failure, and confusion to helplessness, hopelessness, and despair. Self-esteem and self-concept may suffer a severe blow as the individual is thrust headfirst into a painful crisis of meaning and identity (Krantzler, 1974; Orbuch, 1992; Rossiter, 1991; Vaughan, 1986; Weiss, 1975). For many people, relationship loss also signifies the loss and disorganization of an entire way of life. Social networks, economic status, career, education, parenting, sexual activity and personal habits may all undergo massive disruption and change (Ambrose, Harper, & Pemberton, 1983; Vaughan, 1986). The crisis of a breakup can also mean an opportunity for growth, and some people experience a sense of relief, excitement, and independence as they reclaim their lives as single adults (Ambrose et al., 1983; Sprecher, 1994; Veevers, 1991; Weiss, 1975; Wiseman, 1975).

Healthy recovery from a breakup depends in large part upon the successful completion of several cognitive, emotional, and behavioural tasks, including: working through negative feelings, developing greater awareness and understanding, rebuilding self-esteem, learning new skills and behaviours, achieving greater independence, and strengthening social supports (E. O. Fisher, 1973; Krantzler, 1974; Kressel, 1980; Morris & Prescott, 1975; Weber & Harvey, 1994). Of primary importance in the adjustment process is the individual's ability to cognitively re-evaluate the meaning of the relationship and its loss and to create an identity separate from the ex-partner (Kitson & Raschke, 1981; Orbuch, 1992; Vaughan, 1986; Weber, 1998). The search for meaning and identity is facilitated by the formation of accounts or story-like narratives that describe and explain one's experience (Cupach & Metts, 1986; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Weber, 1992, 1998; Weber, Harvey, & Stanley, 1987; Weiss, 1975). By arriving at a satisfactory explanation of how and why the breakup occurred, individuals can gain a greater sense of closure and move on with their lives.

One way in which an account can be made is through the process of writing. Neimeyer (1995) and Carlsen (1988) describe writing as essentially a meaning-making activity, instrumental in shaping self-concept and enhancing self-esteem. Personal writing is associated with extensive psychological and physiological benefits and has been used for a wide range of problems (Riordan, 1996; Smyth, 1998; Youga, 1995). In recent years, researchers have been paying increasing attention to the effects of writing on individuals coping with trauma (see, for

example, Donnelly & Murray, 1991; Murray & Segal, 1994; Pennebaker, 1997;

Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990). The use of journal writing for the trauma of

relationship loss is the focus of the present study.

Purpose of the Study

This study examines the effectiveness of structured journal writing as a

means of coping with romantic relationship loss. With a structured approach to

journal writing, the individual responds to specific questions and instructions (e.g.,

"Write a detailed account of the events leading up to the ending of your

relationship"), in contrast to a more unstructured or free-flow approach, where the

individual writes whatever thoughts and feelings come to mind about a particular

subject. In the present study, I explore the effect of a six-session structured journal

writing intervention on the following measures of post-loss psychological

adjustment and mental health: (a) self-concept and self-esteem, as measured by the

Self Description Questionnaire III, and (b) time orientation, inner-directedness,

and capacity for intimacy, as measured by the Personal Orientation Inventory.

In addition, I review the literature on the psychological impact of romantic

relationship loss on adults, the tasks and process of post-loss adjustment, and the

therapeutic interventions for recovery. My focus is on the post-loss psychological

adjustment of the individual, after the couple has separated or where separation is

imminent, and does not include issues of parenting, child adjustment, or

family/marital interventions. I also summarize the literature on the uses and

benefits of journal writing and review the empirical research on the effects of writing about traumatic life events.

Rationale for the Study

While numerous treatments have been offered for individuals adjusting to romantic relationship loss, the vast majority of strategies involve group approaches for marital separation and divorce. The present study addresses the need for greater research on effective alternatives to group therapy and on therapeutic approaches that serve the needs of both married and unmarried populations. As a technique that is low-cost, portable, and highly accessible to most individuals, journal writing is an attractive candidate for empirical investigation.

Furthermore, most studies on the psychological benefits of writing are theoretical, qualitative, or anecdotal in nature, and empirical research in this area is sorely lacking. Important exceptions to this can be found in several experiments exploring the use of writing for issues related to trauma (see, for example, Murray, Lamnin, & Carver, 1989; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker et al., 1990; Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988). While these studies support the efficacy of writing as a tool for coping with traumatic life events, most of them focus primarily on physiological health as the dependent variable. Clearly more empirical research is needed to determine the specific psychological effects of journal writing.

Hypotheses

The goal of the writing intervention in this study is the improvement of post-loss psychological adjustment and mental health, as evidenced by positive changes in self-concept, self-esteem, orientation toward the present, inner-directedness, and capacity for intimacy. In assessing the effectiveness of the intervention, the focus is on the short-term outcome (i.e., on post-test levels of the dependent variables within a week of treatment completion). Accordingly, the following research hypotheses are tested:

1. Participants who complete a structured journal writing intervention for romantic relationship loss (i.e., the experimental group) will demonstrate a significantly more positive self-concept compared to the control group, as measured by mean post-test scores on the Emotional Stability, Opposite Sex Peer Relations, and Physical Appearance scales of the Self Description Questionnaire III (SDQ III).

2. Participants in the experimental group will show significantly higher levels of self-esteem compared to the control group, as measured by mean post-test scores on the General Self-Esteem scale of the SDQ III.

3. Participants in the experimental group will show a significantly greater tendency to live in the present compared to the control group, as measured by mean post-test scores on the Time Competence (Tc) scale of the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI).

4. Participants in the experimental group will show a significantly higher level of inner-directedness compared to the control group, as measured by mean post-test scores on the Inner Directedness (I) scale of the POI.

5. Participants in the experimental group will demonstrate a significantly greater capacity for intimacy compared to the control group, as measured by mean post-test scores on the Capacity for Intimate Contact (C) sub-scale of the POI.

Definition of Terms

My discussion on the effectiveness of a structured journal writing intervention for individuals adjusting to romantic relationship loss assumes the following definitions:

1. Journal writing: I use the term journal writing synonymously with the terms journalling and personal writing to describe the written recording of one's personal thoughts, feelings, perceptions, beliefs, behaviours, events, goals and fantasies—in short, one's personal experience of the world. Structured journal writing is a form of journal writing in which the individual is provided with specific exercises or questions to write about. This is in contrast to unstructured or free-flow journal writing techniques in which the individual is asked to write about whatever thoughts and feelings come to mind.

2. Romantic relationship loss: This refers to the ending of a marital or nonmarital relationship through the choice of one or both partners. In this study, I use the term synonymously with the terms relationship loss, breakup, and

separation.

3. Psychological adjustment: For the purposes of this study, psychological adjustment is defined as one's success in coping with the changes resulting from the relationship loss. Signs of coping are evident in one's interpersonal relationships as well as in one's relationship to the self. The particular aspects of coping highlighted in this study are self-concept, self-esteem, time orientation, inner-directedness, and capacity for intimacy. These factors are not intended to represent an exhaustive list of the factors of psychological adjustment.

4. Self-concept: Self-concept is a multidimensional construct that refers to the perceptions and evaluative attributions that one holds about oneself (Marsh & Byrne, 1993; Marsh & O'Neill, 1984; Marsh, Richards, & Barnes, 1976; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). The Self Description Questionnaire III (SDQ III) developed by Herbert Marsh (1989) identifies 13 facets of self-concept (e.g., Physical Appearance, Emotional Stability, and Opposite Sex Peer Relations). Self-concept answers the question "Who am I?" and it is in this sense I have used the terms self-concept and identity synonymously throughout this study.

5. Self-esteem: I use this term to refer to the self-appraisal of one's own worth. Individuals with high self-esteem positively value and accept themselves whereas individuals with low self-esteem feel inherently unacceptable and unworthy. Self-esteem is a component of self-concept (Battle, 1990; Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). Perceptions contained in a person's self-concept do not necessarily influence self-esteem. For example, my belief that I am a poor

swimmer may be part of my self-concept but may have no effect on my self-esteem. In this study, I have used the terms self-esteem, self-worth, and self-regard synonymously.

6. Emotional Stability: This SDQ III self-concept scale measures perceptions of oneself as being calm, anxious, happy, depressed, optimistic, or worried.

7. Opposite Sex Peer Relations: This is a scale of the SDQ III that assesses self-perceptions of one's popularity and quality of interactions with opposite sex peers. In this study, I interpret the term "opposite sex," as it appears in the SDQ III, as the gender with which one typically forms romantic relationships regardless of one's sexual orientation.

8. Physical Appearance: In the SDQ III, this scale assesses individuals' perceptions of their physical attractiveness and their level of satisfaction with their appearance

9. Time orientation: As measured by the Time Competence scale of the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI), time orientation refers to the extent to which an individual lives in the present, without being overly burdened by guilts, regrets, and resentments from the past or by fears, worries, and negative expectations about the future (Shostrom, 1974). Moreover, the individual is able to link together past and present in a reflective and meaningful way, and future goals are realistically tied to present circumstances and activities.

10. Inner-directedness: This refers to an individual's tendency to act on and be guided by inner standards, principles, and motives as opposed to external

standards and pressures (Shostrom, 1974). An individual who is inner-directed has a sense of independence and personal control, whereas an individual who is outer-directed conforms more to the standards and judgments of other people. Inner Directedness is a scale of the POI.

11. Capacity for intimacy: I use this term to refer to one's ability to form warm, caring, meaningful, and intimate interpersonal relationships. Capacity for Intimate Contact (C) is a sub-scale of the POI that indicates one's ability to develop intimate relationships with other human beings where the relationships are unencumbered by excessive demands and obligations (Shostrom, 1974).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Psychological Impact of Romantic Relationship Loss

For most adults, the ending of a romantic relationship marks a time of intense

emotional crisis. In Dasteel's (1982) survey of 161 people attending an adult

education course on divorce, an overwhelming number of respondents reported an

unusual degree of stress (91%), and a majority reported feeling unhappy (66%),

worrying about the future (65%), and feeling blue (63%). Nearly half of the

respondents reported that they were bothered often or almost all of the time by fear

of being single, feelings of isolation, a sense of failure, nervousness, feeling left

out, and self-blame. Kolevzon and Gottlieb (1983) found higher levels of

depression and hostility and greater difficulty forming intimate relationships

among a sample of 157 divorced women and men. These symptoms were

strongest within the first year or two after the divorce and subsided over time. In

another study on the psychological impact of divorce, adults whose marriages had

recently ended experienced feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, extreme

resentment toward the past, and fear of the future (Gray, 1978).

Weiss (1975) conceptualizes relationship loss in terms of the inaccessibility

of a specific attachment figure, namely, the ex-partner, and the separation distress

that ensues. He describes the symptoms of separation distress as apprehensiveness,

anxiety, fear, panic, difficulties in sleeping, inability to concentrate, appetite loss

or compulsive eating, anger, depression, sense of worthlessness, self-blame, and

obsessive review of the relationship. The individual may also be left with a lack of self-trust and a reluctance to engage in new relationships. Woodward, Zabel, and DeCosta (1980) focus on the loneliness and rejection experienced by divorced people for whom the marriage had previously provided a sense of belonging and identity. In some cases, the ending of a relationship may precipitate suicidal despair (Jacobson, 1983; Weiss, 1975; Zeiss, Zeiss, & Johnson, 1980). Among 62 people who completed a survey on their experience of divorce, 40% of respondents had thought about suicide, 15% had seriously considered taking their lives, and 6% had made an actual attempt on their lives (Huddleston & Hawkings, 1991).

Whereas an intimate relationship often adds a sense of meaning, order, and continuity to one's life, the ending of a relationship can threaten the sense of living in a meaningful, ordered, and predictable world (Vaughan, 1986; Weber & Harvey, 1994). A person's most basic assumptions and expectations about life may be shattered, and previously held beliefs about social relationships and the rules governing them may be called into question (Elbedour, 1997). In the wake of a breakup, the individual may experience an extreme sense of powerlessness, insecurity, and loss of control, especially when the breakup was unwanted and unexpected (Ambrose et al., 1983; Robak & Weitzman, 1995; Vaughan, 1986; Veevers, 1991).

Furthermore, the individual's identity may be shaken to the very core. Romantic relationships are one of the primary means through which individuals

define who they are and how they relate to other people (Kingma, 1987; Krantzler, 1974; Weiss, 1975). They provide individuals with a set of social roles and norms to live by and serve as a context through which a social identity is construed (Krantzler, 1974; Orbuch, 1992; Weber, 1998). When a relationship ends, therefore, the individual loses the social framework upon which the definition of self had been built. Depending on the how central the relationship was to the person's social identity, the loss of the partner is experienced as a loss of self and can be extremely distressing (Krantzler, 1974; Orbuch, 1992; Rossiter, 1991; Weiss, 1975).

With a crisis of identity may come negative self-perceptions and diminished self-esteem (Chiriboga & Catron, 1991; Kelly, 1981; Krantzler, 1974; Morris & Prescott, 1975; Weiss, 1975). Many people view a breakup as a major personal failure and as evidence of their worthlessness and inability to succeed at the task of relationship (Ambrose et al., 1983; Vaughan, 1986; Weiss, 1975). Barron (1987) suggests that women's self-esteem may suffer as a result of perceiving the divorce as a failure in fulfilling their primary social role as the nurturers of a marriage. In a survey of 141 divorced men and women, almost half of the respondents reported strong feelings of failure, and more than a quarter reported medium feelings of failure (Crosby, Lybarger, & Mason, 1986). Furthermore, self-esteem may be jeopardized by self-blame (Ambrose et al., 1983; Kelly, 1981; Weiss, 1975), or the individual may blame the partner in an effort to protect a flagging sense of self-worth (Ambrose et al., 1983; Kingma, 1987; Webb, 2000).

To this point, I have reviewed some of the most common psychological effects of romantic relationship loss. However, there is no single or universal set of responses to a breakup, and each person's reaction is unique. Moreover, the ending of a relationship has its positive side in addition to the negatives. Veevers (1991) asserts that although divorce can have an extremely negative impact on the individual, it can also be a strengthening or growth experience, with some people experiencing feelings of achievement and independence. Ambrose, Harper, and Pemberton (1983) echo this view in their study of 91 divorced men, in which some men suffered from feelings of depression, sleep problems, irritability, worrying, anger, failure, alienation, and despair while others experienced increased self-confidence, independence, and self-awareness. The ending of a relationship may also be followed by a sense of relief, excitement, or euphoria (Krantzler, 1974; Sprecher, 1994; Vaughan, 1986; Weiss, 1975; Welch & Granvold, 1977). Zeiss, Zeiss, and Johnson (1980) argue that from the standpoint of positive psychological adjustment, those who divorce or separate may be better off in the long run than those who choose to remain in unhappy marriages.

One factor that may influence the individual's response to a breakup is gender, although the relationship between gender and post-loss distress is not altogether clear from the research literature. Ambrose et al. (1993) suggest that men experience greater psychological distress after divorce than do women. Conversely, Chiriboga and Catron (1991) assert that psychological symptoms are more pronounced among women. Helgeson (1994) distinguishes between short-

term and long-term effects of relationship loss, arguing that initial distress is greater for women while long-term distress is greater for men. In contrast, Sprecher (1994) found no gender differences in overall distress in a sample of 51 males and 54 females recovering from a breakup, and Robak and Weitzman (1985) assert that men and women are similar in the length of post-loss recovery.

In terms of the specific symptoms of distress, some researchers suggest that women may show greater post-loss symptoms of stress and anxiety (Chiriboga & Catron, 1991; Robak & Weitzman, 1995; Zeiss et al., 1980), loneliness (Woodward, Zabel, and DeCosta, 1980), and uncertainty about their identity (Chiriboga & Catron, 1991) than do men. At the same time, men may be more likely than women to experience depression and suicidal ideation in the wake of a breakup (Ambrose et al., 1983; Mowatt, 1987; Zeiss et al, 1980). Kaczmarek, Backlund, and Biemer (1990), however, suggest that levels of post-loss depression are independent of gender. More research might help illuminate some of the apparent differences and contradictions found in the literature.

The impact of a breakup also tends to vary depending upon which partner initiated the split. Compared to partners who initiated the breakup, non-initiators typically experience greater stress (Frazier & Cook, 1993), more negative emotions (Ambrose et al., 1983; Jacobson, 1983; Robak & Weitzman, 1998; Sprecher, 1994), higher levels of depression (Kolevzon & Gottlieb, 1984; Mowatt, 1987), and greater feelings of insecurity about the future (Weiss, 1975). Feelings of anger and hostility toward the ex-partner may be greater for the non-initiator

(Kolevzon & Gottlieb, 1984; Robak & Weitzman, 1998; Vaughan, 1986; Webb, 2000), while a sense of guilt may be more likely for the partner who initiated the breakup (Crosby et al., 1986; Vaughan, 1986; Weiss, 1975). Although a sense of failure and inadequacy may be experienced regardless of whether or not the person initiated the breakup, the research literature suggests that non-initiators tend to suffer a greater blow to their self-esteem than initiators (Ambrose et al., 1983; Kressel, 1980; LaGrand, 1986; Vaughan, 1986; Weiss, 1975). Webb (2000) and LaGrand (1986) argue that losing a relationship through the partner's choice to separate is a greater affront to a person's self-esteem than losing a partner through death, and the fact that the ex-partner is still alive serves as a painful reminder of the rejection.

While the vast majority of the research literature focuses on relationship loss through marital separation and divorce, there is relatively little research on the experience of breakups for nonmarital or dating couples and even less research on differences between marital and nonmarital breakups. Kelly (1981) maintains that the reactions of college students to romantic relationship loss are essentially the same as the reactions of people experiencing separation and divorce. Similarly, when Orbuch (1992) examined the self-report responses of 150 individuals who had experienced nonmarital relationship loss, she concluded that the reactions of the married and unmarried are alike. However, a weakness of Orbuch's study, as with most studies on nonmarital loss, is the failure to include a marital sample for comparison. In one of the few studies comparing marital to nonmarital loss, .

Cupach and Metts (1986) suggest that married partners may be more emotionally and structurally dependent on each other than are dating partners. Given the greater degree of interdependence (e.g., financial pooling of resources and the presence of children) more often found in marriages than among dating partners, one might expect to see some differences between the married and unmarried in response to relationship loss. Additional research is needed to explore possible differences.

Several researchers have suggested that there is a fundamental lack of societal recognition and support for individuals experiencing nonmarital relationship loss compared to loss through marital separation and divorce (Kaczmarek, Backlund, & Biemer, 1990; LaGrand, 1986; Orbuch, 1992; Robak and Weitzman, 1995, 1998). Robak and Weitzman (1998) found that grief following the breakup of romantic relationships in young adulthood tends to be disenfranchised or minimized by family members, unless marriage had been considered. Despite the tendency to minimize the seriousness of young adult relationships, in reality they may be very serious for those involved, and relationship loss may prompt severe depression or suicidal ideation (Kaczmarek et al., 1990). The extreme distress experienced by many young adults in the face of a breakup is evident in a study by LaGrand (1986) on loss in young adulthood. Among the 3510 college students in his sample, the ending of a romantic relationship was the second most commonly experienced loss, next to the death of a loved one. The majority of participants reported feelings of depression (73.5%), anger (55.0%), emptiness (54.5%),

loneliness (50.2%), and frustration (50.1%) after the loss; and many respondents also reported disbelief, shock, helplessness, loss of self-confidence, and guilt.

Tasks of Adjusting to Romantic Relationship Loss

One of the primary tasks of post-loss recovery is the development of a new identity (Chiriboga & Catron, 1991; Dasteel, 1982; Kitson & Raschke, 1981; Orbuch, 1992; Vaughan, 1986; Weber, 1998). Rossiter (1991) argues, in fact, that the word "recovery" fails to describe the actual process experienced at separation, since the individual's former self is never truly recovered in the sense of being regained. Rather, the old self is lost to a new self that develops slowly over time. Similarly, Chiriboga and Catron (1991) state that the identity is not re-established, but is re-evaluated and reworked instead. The reworking of identity typically involves seeing oneself as a single person rather than as a member of a couple (Dasteel, 1982; Morris & Prescott, 1975; Orbuch, 1992). As a single person, the individual takes on a new set of social roles and creates a new social identity and context for the self (Harvey, Weber, & Orbuch, 1990; Orbuch, 1992; Weber, 1998).

E. O. Fisher (1973) asserts that the identity crisis brought on by divorce represents an opportunity to develop greater independence and self-determination. No longer tied to the social roles expected of them as married people, individuals who are separated or divorced can rely more on their own internal standards, values, and judgments. Other researchers and clinicians also see the development

of autonomy and self-directedness as central to the adjustment process. Dasteel

(1982) suggests that divorced adults must come to view themselves as individuals

capable of independent functioning, of making decisions, establishing careers,

creating new relationships, and supporting themselves financially, without the ex-

partner. Krantzler (1974) states that one of the surest signs of healing after divorce

is coming to the realization that one has survived and can make it on one's own.

The post-loss period is also a time for rebuilding self-esteem, working

through negative feelings, achieving greater self-understanding and insight,

gaining new skills, and moving away from a preoccupation with the past (E. O.

Fisher, 1973; Krantzler, 1974; Kressel, 1980; Weber & Harvey, 1994). Weber

(1998) writes that coping with a breakup involves taking stock of one's strengths

and assets in the wake of the loss. According to Chiriboga and Catron (1991), the

crucial task of post-loss adjustment is re-establishing a positive self-image and

bolstering self-esteem. Morris and Prescott (1975) discuss the importance of

working through difficult feelings, increasing self-esteem, developing better

problem-solving abilities, and understanding the dynamics of the past relationship

so as not to repeat the same patterns again. Ideally, the individual is able to move

on from preoccupation with the past and begins to formulate plans for the future

(Krantzler, 1974; Morris & Prescott, 1975). McCarthy, Lambert, and Brack (1997)

emphasize the need to find positive aspects of the breakup while mourning the loss

at the same time. Rossiter (1991), too, stresses the importance of "claiming the

gift" or finding some positive gain from the separation (p 150).

The need to find positive value in the past and hope for the future is inextricably linked to the process of "account making." An account is a written or verbal narrative held together by attributions (i.e., causal explanations), descriptions, personal reactions, interpretations, and characterizations of self and others in relation to a past event (Weber, 1992; Weber & Harvey, 1994). It conveys the story of what happened, why it happened, and one's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs related to the event. Many researchers see the formation of accounts and the attributions or causal explanations that go along with them as a natural response to relationship loss and as a crucial task for recovery (Cupach & Metts, 1986; Harvey, Weber, et al., 1990; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Weber, 1992; Weiss, 1975). Weber (1998) writes:

> After a breakup, the survivor's mind, whether breaker or breakee, is likely to become an attributional Disneyland (or more aptly, a house of horrors). Regardless of who left whom, both parties to relationship termination wonder, perhaps obsessively, "What did I do wrong?" "When did it begin?" "What signs did I miss? Is this really the end?" "'Is there any way to keep from repeating this pain?" (p. 279).

Weber identifies the typical characteristics of an account of relationship loss: acknowledgement of the storyteller's audience; history of the relationship's early stages; explanation of the factors that led to the breakup, including the "fatal flaws" that existed from the relationship's inception but that only became clear in retrospect; recounting of the person's emotional reactions to the loss; description of the person's efforts to cope with the loss; and the unending search for meaning (p. 176).

Accounts serve several important functions for people recovering from a breakup. Through the formation of accounts, individuals may gain an increased sense of control (Collins & Clark, 1989; Harvey, Weber, et al., 1990; Weber & Harvey, 1994), a better sense of closure or resolution of the loss (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Weber & Harvey, 1994; Weber et al., 1987), enhanced self-esteem (Davidoff & Schiller, 1983; Harvey, Weber, et al., 1990; Newman & Langer, 1981; Sprecher, 1994; Weber et al., 1987), and greater emotional release (Harvey, Weber, et al., 1990; Weber et al., 1987). Weiss (1975) sees accounts as a means of organizing the confusing events of separation into a manageable unity that makes sense and that allows the person to move on with his or her life. By providing the individual with socially acceptable and desirable justifications for the breakup, accounts help in the preservation of self-esteem and redefinition of social identity (Cupach & Metts, 1986; Fincham, 1985; Harvey, Agostinelli, & Weber, 1989; Harvey, Weber, et al., 1990; Sprecher, 1994). Additionally, accounts give meaning and value to the relationship and its loss. People learn from their losses, and the lessons from the past help shape behaviours, expectations, and plans for the future (Harvey et al., 1989; Harvey, Orbuch, & Weber, 1990; Weber, 1992, 1998).

Process of Recovery

Much the literature on relationship loss relies heavily on stage theory to explain the process that individuals undergo in attempting to cope with their loss. Some researchers and clinicians borrow from stage theories on mourning and

bereavement to describe the process of post-loss adjustment (Herman, 1974; Krantzler, 1974; Kressel, 1980; Webb, 2000). For example, Herman (1974) conceptualizes the divorce process in terms of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' (1969) five stages of bereavement (i.e., denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance). Others incorporate crisis theory (Wiseman, 1975), stress response models (Harvey, Weber, et al., 1990), attachment theory (Thweatt, 1980; Weiss, 1975), and social role theory (Orbuch, 1992) into their own models and descriptions of the adjustment process. Still others reject the notion that recovery occurs in discrete stages at all (Rossiter, 1991). Where a stage model is proposed, the stages are usually presented as being overlapping, with individuals cycling back and forth between stages or missing a stage altogether. The important thing to keep in mind is that while some patterns or stages of recovery may be common, each person's adjustment process is unique.

Based on findings from their pilot study (Crosby, Gage, & Raymond, 1983) and a later follow-up study involving a sample of 141 divorced adults (108 women and 33 men), Crosby and his associates (1986) propose a three-stage model to explain the grief resolution process in divorce. Each stage consists of three factors (affective, cognitive, and behavioural), and responses are further divided into the three categories depending upon the person who initiated the separation (actives, passives, and mutuals). The researchers state that although there is a general progression through the stages, the grief resolution process is different for each individual, and there can be much circling back through the stages. In stage one,

from first awareness of serious marital problems to separation and/or filing, both the active and mutual initiators feel fear and approach the possibility of divorce, both cognitively and behaviourally. The passives or non-initiators, on the other hand, feel hurt and show a mixture of approach and avoidance in their thoughts and actions. In the second stage, separation and/or filing to final decree, the actives and mutuals move toward feelings of hope, toward cognitive acceptance of the divorce, and toward reconstruction of their lives. For the passives, there are feelings of hurt, cognitive acceptance, and attempts to engage in negotiation with their partners. Whereas passives lag behind the actives and mutuals in the first two stages of divorce, in the third stage, from final degree to penultimate closure, all three groups show similar signs of recovery, including feelings of hope, cognitive acceptance, and rebuilding of their lives. While Crosby's model is one of the most elegant and comprehensive in the research literature on separation and divorce, further research is necessary to determine its applicability to nonmarital populations.

The social psychologists Harvey, Weber, and Orbuch (1990) have adapted the stress response model of Horowitz (1986, as cited in Harvey et al.) to explain the process of coping with trauma, particularly the trauma of relationship loss. In their model, Harvey et al. list seven stages of coping, along with the feelings and behaviours characteristic of each stage:

1. Traumatic event: involving feelings of shock, overwhelm, and numbness.

2. Outcry: involving the emotional expression of panic, exhaustion, despair, and hopelessness.

3. Denial: early attempts at account making, possibly involving avoidance behaviours and isolation.

4. Intrusion: continued or initial account making, involving distraction, rumination, or obsessive review.

5. Working through: intensified account making and confiding in others.

6. Completion: completion of the story, with acceptance and possession of coping skills.

7. Identity change: behavioural expectations formulated in line with the account (p. 50).

In this model, account making is a healthy and natural strategy for working through the loss, arriving at a sense of closure, and achieving the ultimate goal of redefining one's identity. Harvey et al. argue that failure to engage in account making, particularly during the later stages of coping, may result in psychosomatic responses, prolonged grief and anxiety, difficulty coping with current or future losses, and other maladaptive patterns.

Wiseman (1975) borrows from crisis theory to explain the process of divorce. She sees divorce as a crisis event that occurs in five overlapping stages. As the individual moves through the stages, perceptions gradually shift from seeing the divorce as a fundamental threat to basic needs, to seeing the divorce as a positive challenge, mobilizing new modes of problem solving and furthering personal

growth. In the first stage of divorce, denial, individuals try to convince themselves that they can accommodate or adjust to the relationship, with all of its problems. This is essentially an attempt to ward off the anxiety that comes from the threat of loss. In the stage of loss and depression, fears of impending loss break through awareness, and the reaction is one of grief, despair, and isolation. In the third stage, depression begins to give way to anger and ambivalence. Here, preparations are made for life apart from the spouse and there may be last-ditch efforts to save the marriage. In the fourth stage, reorientation of life-style and identity, the divorce has become a reality, and the focus moves to present functioning and future planning. It is in this stage that the individual is challenged to develop new ways of coping. The major challenge is the reworking of identity in all spheres of the individual's life (i.e., personal, vocational, sexual, and social). Finally, there comes a stage of acceptance and improved functioning, where feelings of anxiety, depression, and anger have abated and a new identity becomes firmly established. Having developed new ways of relating both to the self and to other people, the individual is ready for the challenge of a new relationship.

Rossiter (1991) rejects stage theory altogether in explaining the process of separation adjustment. Her observations from clinical practice have led her to conclude that instead of recovery occurring in predictable stages, the post-loss period is characterized more by "good days" and "bad days" (p. 146). In the first few months after separation, individuals are likely to experience extreme grief and despair, disturbances in sleep and appetite, inability to concentrate, and incessant

rumination about the relationship that has ended. Eventually, the occasional good day breaks through periods of despair and rumination. Good days become more frequent and alternate with bad periods as the weeks unfold. In time, good days begin to occur in two's and three's, until an entire "good week" is experienced, followed once again by despair. The up and down nature of the process may feel frustrating and confusing, with the individual fearing that he or she will never feel better again. For most people, however, there gradually comes a time when life consists primarily of good days, punctuated by the occasional bad day, and there is a renewed sense of hope and optimism for the future.

Therapeutic Strategies for Post-Loss Adjustment

While descriptions of various therapeutic approaches for post-loss adjustment abound in the literature, surprisingly few of these approaches have undergone rigorous empirical investigation. In 1983 Sprenkle and Storm found just six outcome studies on divorce interventions. Of these studies, only two used random assignment to experimental and control groups, and all six involved group therapy. Sprenkle and Storm concluded:

> We are left with no controlled research about what is probably the most widely practiced form of divorce therapy today, namely, individuals or couples who go to a therapist for help in getting through the emotional trauma of divorce. In short, the most basic controlled research remains to be done (p. 255).

Unfortunately, little has changed in the last decade and a half since Sprenkle and Storm published their review. My own search of the published scholarly literature

came up with not a single empirical study (i.e., controlled experiment with random assignment to treatment and control groups) on the efficacy of non-group interventions for relationship loss. While two studies compared alternative group therapies (Graff, Whitehead, & LeCompte, 1986; Kessler, 1978), I found no studies that included comparisons with non-group therapies. This is a glaring shortcoming in the research literature, especially when one considers that group therapy may be neither desirable nor suitable for everyone. As Mowatt (1987) asserts, the diversity of people undergoing relationship loss necessitates a wide variety of approaches to assist them. Clearly more empirical research on alternative therapies for post-loss adjustment is required. In the paragraphs that follow, I discuss several alternative approaches that have yet to be empirically evaluated as well as some of the outcome studies on group treatments for individuals recovering from divorce.

Huber (1983) presents a cognitively-based model for the assisting individuals to cope with the distress of divorce. He specifies two cognitive dimensions that account for the feelings that individuals have about their relationship loss. In the first dimension, devastation/disappointment, the individual may hold an extreme perception of the divorce as awful, catastrophic, and "100 percent bad," or, more realistically, the person may view the divorce as disappointing and upsetting, but not the worst thing that could have happened (p. 358). The more the divorce is seen as being devastating, the more intense and distressing the feelings of loss. In the second dimension, demandingness/desirousness, the individual may make

unrealistic or impossible demands on reality by believing that the divorce must not or should not have happened. Alternatively, the individual may have desires and preferences about outcomes without seeing them as absolute necessities. A greater degree of demandingness is related to a longer duration of distress over the divorce. According to Huber, psychotherapy can help reduce both the intensity and duration of post-loss distress by shifting the person's thinking away from the devastation and demandingness ends of the two spectrums toward a view of the divorce and/or some of its effects as being disappointing and unwanted.

Granvold (1989) proposes a cognitive-behavioural approach to post-divorce adjustment. One of the primary requirements of this approach is a thorough assessment of the individual's adjustment problems, including a functional analysis of the factors (i.e., antecedents and consequences) that reinforce the problem behaviour. Assessment also involves the selection of appropriate change strategies and the continual evaluation of the effectiveness of these strategies in helping to produce desired outcomes. The therapist pays particular attention to the individual's self-perceptions, self-statements, and self-efficacy beliefs, while at the same time attempting to foster positive outcome expectancies for change. The basic principles of cognitive therapy are introduced, and the individual is helped to see how thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations affect emotions. Together, the therapist and client identify and challenge faulty information processing (e.g., absolutistic thinking, overgeneralization, and selective abstraction). Cognitive restructuring techniques are used to modify irrational beliefs and expectations

(e.g., "I am nothing without my ex-partner," and "It's all my ex-partner's fault").

Granvold also suggests a variety of behavioural methods for treating post-divorce

distress, including stress management (e.g., deep muscle relaxation, biofeedback,

and physical exercise); skills training using modelling, behavioural rehearsal,

behavioural shaping, and in-vivo assignments; and measurement and self-

monitoring methodologies.

E. O. Fisher (1973) speaks more generally of the goals and tasks of post-

divorce counselling. Through individual psychotherapy, divorced people are

helped to work through painful feelings associated with the loss and to gain

greater awareness and understanding of themselves, the ex-partner, and the

dynamics that contributed to the demise of the relationship. The focus of

counselling is not limited to the experience and circumstances of the divorce itself.

Rather, the counsellor must consider the individual's thoughts, feelings, and

behaviours in relation to all aspects of the individual's reality, including children,

family, friends, sexual activity, dating, work, hobbies, society, and life in general.

The ultimate goal of post-divorce counselling, according to Fisher, is personal

growth, independence, and greater contribution to society. With effective

counselling, individuals are helped to develop their own internal standards and

judgments, achieve greater self-acceptance and acceptance of others, increase

problem-solving abilities, and define constructive new roles for themselves in

society.

Sprenkle (1989) identifies three main goals of therapy for post-divorce adjustment: (a) facilitate grief work, (b) help the client revise self-destructive meanings attributed to the divorce, and (c) identify and maximize the client's internal and external resources (e.g., family, friends, community, and work). To help clients work through their grief, Sprenkle recommends a self-help book on coping with divorce by Bruce Fisher (1981). In this book, Fisher describes a series of 19 steps or "rebuilding blocks" for post-loss adjustment, and he supplies numerous exercises and self-assessment checklists to help people along the journey toward recovery. To combat clients' destructive beliefs, Sprenkle suggests cognitive techniques, such as rational-emotive therapy and cognitive reframing. Sprenkle sees the development of the individual's self as a resource as the most challenging and crucial task of the therapist. This task is accomplished through developing basic life skills (e.g., cooking and fiscal management); acquiring time-management skills, especially learning how to come to terms with spending time alone; and assessing inner strengths and competencies. Sprenkle makes use of experiential techniques (e.g., "empty chair" work) to help clients dialogue with the part of themselves that feels strong, confident, and capable of dealing with stress.

Aslin (1976) provides a framework for counselling divorced women, based on the six areas or processes of divorce identified by Bohannan (1970): emotional, legal, economic, parental, community (social), and psychic. The task of the counsellor, according to Aslin, is to help the divorced woman work through her loss of role as wife and establish a new identity for herself in each of the six areas.

With the emotional process of divorce, the counsellor encourages the woman to share her feelings and helps her develop a sense of herself as emotionally strong, mature, and independent. For issues related to the legal and economic aspects of divorce, the woman receives assertiveness training and is encouraged to seek legal information, job training and/or employment, and new financial skills. In the area of parenting, the woman is helped to adjust to the role of single-mother, to assist her children in coping with the divorce, and to build a workable relationship with the ex-spouse. The woman emerges from this process as a more loving and capable parent. In the social and community sphere, the counsellor helps the woman to develop an understanding of others' reactions to the divorce, to explore options for new friendships and romantic relationships, and to develop a stronger social support network. Finally, counselling clients through the psychic process of divorce involves grief work, and the woman is helped to develop a sense of purposefulness, security, and confidence as she builds a new life for herself and her children.

As part of her self-help book for people coping with the ending of their romantic relationship, Kingma (1987) suggests a series of structured written exercises designed to bring about emotional and cognitive resolution of the loss. One such exercise, entitled "Telling the Love Story" (p. 123), involves writing an account of the experience of falling in love with the ex-partner, the feelings and expectations experienced in the initial stages of the relationship, and any early warning signs that the relationship might not work out. In a subsequent exercise

that Kingma calls "Telling the Real Story," the person writes about the developmental process that was operating in the relationship (p. 125). Specifically, the person addresses the questions: What purpose did the relationship serve given each partner's personal history, current stage of development, and life circumstances? How did the early warning signs eventually manifest themselves in the ending of the relationship? Kingma suggests additional written exercises to help the person move through some of the emotions of the loss, for example writing "unsent letters" where intense feelings such as guilt and rage are vented (p. 131). All of these exercises, in essence, attempt to promote psychological adjustment through a written account of one's loss.

Morris and Prescott (1975) describe a group approach for separation and divorce offered at the University of Idaho Counselling Center. The groups were called "Transition Groups" to reflect the meaning of divorce as a developmental transition from a marital partnership to a single life. Groups met for eight or nine weekly sessions and were co-led by a male-female counsellor team at the Center. Emphasis was on the supportive sharing of feelings and concerns; the development of greater self-awareness, self-acceptance, and insight; and the better management and planning of personal affairs. The topics for discussion were not selected in advance by the group leaders but arose instead from the needs, flow, and emotional tone of the group.

According to Morris and Prescott, the Transition Group helped participants work through their feelings of grief, anxiety, bitterness, hostility, and confusion

and arrive at a more objective evaluation of the marriage and its dissolution. Participants developed a deeper understanding of the expectations and motivations for the marriage as well as the part that each partner played in its dissolution. A greater sense of belonging replaced previous feelings of loneliness and isolation, and members gained self-confidence and self-esteem. Gradually, participants moved from a preoccupation with the past to a focus on the here-and-now and plans for the future.

In one of the few outcome studies on group interventions for post-loss recovery, Lee and Hett (1990) examined the effectiveness of a structured, cognitive-behavioural group approach for separated and divorced individuals. Participants (21 women and 3 men) were randomly assigned to the treatment group (n = 12) or a wait-listed control group (n = 12). The treatment group met for eight sessions over a 6-week period and was co-led by the primary researcher and his assistant. Each session was devoted to the instruction and practice of specific coping skills (i.e., relaxation, visualization, and communication skills) and to the discussion of issues and topics related to divorce. Topics covered in the group included: stress management; stages of uncoupling; interpersonal communication; relationships with family, friends, and ex-spouse; children and divorce; legal issues; loneliness and depression; and sexuality and dating. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to express their feelings and concerns associated with the separation or divorce.

Lee and Hett found that, compared to the control group, the treatment group showed significant increases in independence, spontaneity, capacity for intimacy, and ability to live in the present as opposed to the past or future, all of which were determined by pre- and post-test scores on the Personal Orientation Inventory. The treatment group also exhibited lower levels of depression, as measured by the Beck Depression Inventory, and an increased ability to cope with anxiety, as indicated by the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory.

A limitation of the study is that one of the researchers himself facilitated the treatment group, thus subjecting the study to the risk of experimenter bias and demand effects. As no follow-up measures were taken of the dependent variables, it is not possible to reach any conclusions about the long-term effectiveness of the program. Moreover, the results can be explained by a variety of factors, such as the understanding, attention, and support of the group leader and members. To tease out the specific factors responsible for the therapeutic effects, the treatment would need to be compared to other group and non-group interventions.

Graff, Whitehead, and LeCompte (1986) compared the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioural and supportive-insight group methods for recently divorced women. The researchers randomly assigned participants to one of four conditions: (a) cognitive-behavioural treatment (n = 12), (b) supportive-insight treatment (n = 12), (c) waiting-list control (n = 11), and (d) minimal-contact control (n = 11). Pre-test measures were taken of participants' levels of depression, using the Beck Depression Inventory and Lubin Depression Checklist; general neuroticism, as

measured by the Eysenck Personality Inventory, Form A; and self-esteem, as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory. These same measures were assessed at termination of the treatment and at a 4-month follow-up.

Participants in the cognitive-behavioural group received approximately 17 1/2 hours of therapy over the span of about 4 weeks. Treatment involved cognitive restructuring, where the women were taught to replace irrational beliefs with more realistic cognitions. Participants were also assigned specific exercises for homework. In the supportive-insight group, participants were offered approximately 20 hours of treatment spaced over 4 weeks. The format of the treatment was a group discussion in which participants were encouraged to share their feelings and concerns, to examine their maladaptive responses to the divorce, and to try out new behaviours in the group. Participants were told that the goal of the treatment was to gain greater awareness and understanding through the self-disclosure of group members. No specific homework was assigned, though the leaders suggested that participants keep a daily journal of their experiences. The therapists were graduate students in social work with several years of counselling training and experience, and they co-led both groups. In the minimal-contact group, participants received literature on coping with divorce. Each week, the participants were asked if they had read the literature and were told that reading the material would help them feel better. Participants in the waiting-list group were not contacted until the two treatment groups were completed, at which point they were given the opportunity to receive individual therapy.

Graff et al. found that both the cognitive-behavioural and supportive-insight treatment groups showed less depression, less neuroticism, and higher self-esteem at post-test than did the two control groups. The two treatment groups were similar on all measures, except that the cognitive-behavioural group showed less neuroticism immediately after the intervention. Therapeutic effects were generally maintained for the two groups over the 4-month follow-up period. However, the effects were stronger for the cognitive-behavioural group than for the supportive-insight group. Graff et al. concluded that while both cognitive-behavioural and supportive-insight approaches are helpful to women's post-divorce adjustment, a cognitive-behavioural group intervention is more effective in the long term. The researchers speculated that the differences might be attributable to the greater structure of the cognitive-behavioural intervention, the more active role of its therapists, and the provision of structured homework assignments. Additionally, the therapists were aware that the experimenters had a bias toward the cognitive-behavioural approach, and it is possible that this bias may have been communicated to the participants. From the audiotapes of both treatment conditions, the researchers noticed that the therapists seemed more enthusiastic and encouraging in the cognitive-behavioural group than in the supportive-insight group, further supporting the suggestion that unconscious biases may have affected the results.

Kessler (1978) compared the effectiveness of structured and unstructured group formats for adults coping with divorce. Participants (19 women and 11 men)

were randomly assigned to one of three groups: (a) an unstructured group (n = 10), (b) a structured group (n = 10), and (c) a wait-listed control group (n = 10). Both therapy groups met for a total of 24 hours over a period of 8 weeks. In the unstructured group, the leaders responded to the spontaneous flow of the group and to the immediate needs of individual members. Self-disclosure and the discussion of feelings and events were emphasized. The structured group spent approximately half of each session on unstructured discussions and the other half on structured exercises designed to improve interpersonal skills, increase self-awareness, and promote understanding of divorce-related issues. A series of short film vignettes on divorce provided a focus and structure for the exercises.

Results indicated that compared to the unstructured group, the structured group showed a more positive self-identity and higher self-esteem, as reflected in mean post-test scores on the Tennessee Self Concept Scale. The structured group also showed greater initiative, self-assurance, and maturity, as measured by the Self Description Inventory. Kessler suggested that the advantage of a structured group treatment is that it promotes a more active stance toward goal setting and problem solving and helps individuals achieve a greater sense of mastery over much-needed coping skills. Kessler's conclusions need to be considered with some caution, however, since the same leader facilitated both groups and a bias toward a structured approach may thereby have been introduced into the treatments.

Uses and Benefits of Journal Writing

Journal writing, or the act of translating one's personal thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and experiences into words and recording them onto paper, has a long history of use as a tool for personal exploration and growth. The earliest known use of journalling was in the 10th-century, where women of the Japanese royal court recorded their private thoughts and fantasies in what came to be known as "pillow books" (Wylie, 1995). Centuries later, in Renaissance Europe, Samuel Pepys and other members of the English gentry used journals to record both private and public events (Youga, 1995). By the 18th century, the famous physician Benjamin Rush was instructing patients to keep detailed written records of their symptoms, and he observed that patients who followed his instructions showed improvements in their physical conditions (McKinney, 1976). It has only been in the past few decades that journal writing has received widespread attention for its psychological benefits, both as an adjunct to psychotherapy and as a tool for self-help and personal growth. Journal writing has been used with individuals, couples, families, and groups of all ages, genders, cultures, and social classes (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999) for a wide variety of purposes and problems. Clinical applications have been for depression (Esterling, L'Abate, Murray, & Pennebaker, 1999; L'Abate, 1991), stress and anxiety (Colman, 1997; Esterling et al., 1999), trauma (Pennebaker, 1997; Riordan, 1996; Youga, 1995), grief and loss (Riordan, 1996; Spera, Burhfeind, & Pennebaker, 1994), insomnia (Adams, 1996; Youga, 1995), addictions (Riordan, 1996), eating disorders (Rabinor, 1998;

Youga, 1995), behavioural problems (Abbott, 1995; Davis, 1995), and personality

disorders (Adams, 1996; Hymer, 1991; Oberkirch, 1983).

Numerous potential benefits are described in the research and self-help

literature on writing. Among the most commonly cited benefits is catharsis or

emotional release. Journal writing can provide an outlet for venting feelings such

as anger, fear, and frustration that the individual may feel uncomfortable or unsafe

expressing elsewhere (Colman, 1997; L'Abate, 1992; McKinney, 1976;

Pennebaker et al., 1990; Youga, 1995). According to Pennebaker and his

colleagues (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker et al., 1990), writing about

one's feelings associated with the traumatic events in one's life may improve

physical and mental health. From a more cognitive perspective, journal writing is a

means of ordering one's thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a way that gives

them meaning and coherence (Colman, 1997; Riordan, 1996; Youga, 1995).

Through journalling, individuals can obtain distance from their problems and, in

the process, gain new understanding, insight, and perspective (Kelley & Williams,

1988; Mishara, 1995; Riordan, 1996).

Many researchers and clinicians refer to the positive effects that journal

writing can have on self-concept and self-esteem (Adams, 1996; Donnelly &

Murray, 1991; Esterling et al., 1999; Youga, 1995). Through writing, individuals

shape their identities, or, as Geis (1997) succinctly states it, "We write ourselves

into existence" (p. 46). Journal writing can help people gain a sense of

independence and personal control (Colman, 1997; Esterling et al., 1999; L'Abate,

1992; Progoff, 1975) and can lessen reliance on friends, family members, and therapists (Adams, 1996; Baldwin, 1991; Jordan, 1998). Furthermore, journalling can help in the mastery of new thought patterns and behaviours. In a journal, individuals can reflect on aspects of themselves that they wish to change and can envision, rehearse, and monitor new ways of thinking and behaving (Esterling et al., 1999; Hymer, 1991; Maultsby, 1971).

The many advantages of journal writing must be weighed against some of its drawbacks. Hymer (1991) states that for some people, writing promotes intellectualization instead of catharsis and insight, while for other people, emotions are expressed without cognitively processing the meaning of these emotions. Riordan (1996) writes that some people use writing as a substitute for action or as a form of obsessive rumination, especially when the writing is not structured or monitored. Some researchers have found that although writing about traumatic events can lead to physiological and psychological improvements in the long run, it can lead to increases in negative affect in the short term (Donnelly & Murray, 1991; Murray & Segal, 1994; Pennebaker et al., 1988). For individuals who are working through intense trauma or have deep emotional disturbances, journal writing may be overwhelmingly painful and ill-advised without the guidance of a therapist (Adams, 1996; Youga, 1995). Journal writing can also be isolating for some people and can be used to avoid authentic self-disclosure and sharing with others (Kelley & Williams, 1988; L'Abate, 1992). Furthermore, journalling may be inappropriate for people who demonstrate extreme aversion or

apprehension in response to writing (Daly & Miller, 1975; McKinney, 1976; Youga, 1995).

Outcome Studies on Writing About Traumatic Life Events

While writing as a therapeutic intervention has received increasing attention in the research literature in recent years, there is a shortage of empirical, quantitative research in this area. Much of the support for the use of writing has come from case studies, program evaluations, anecdotal reports of counsellors and educators, and writers' self-reports. A promising line of experimental research by James Pennebaker and his colleagues (e.g., Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker et al., 1988; Pennebaker & Francis, 1996; Spera et al., 1994) and by other researchers using variations of Pennebaker's writing protocol in their research designs (e.g., Donnelly, & Murray, 1991; Murray et al., 1989) has provided important evidence in support of the therapeutic value of personal writing. Among these studies are a number of experiments investigating the impact of writing about traumatic life events on physiological functioning, affect, cognition, behaviours, and long-term health.

In one of the most frequently cited experiments on the therapeutic effects of personal writing, Pennebaker and Beall (1986) randomly assigned 46 university undergraduates (34 women and 12 men) to one of four conditions: (a) the control condition (n = 12), in which participants were asked to write as objectively as possible about superficial topics (e.g., a description of the room in which they

were sitting); (b) the trauma-emotion condition (n = 12), in which participants wrote about their feelings associated with one or more traumatic events in their lives, without mentioning the specific events that actually occurred; (c) the trauma-fact condition (n = 11), in which participants wrote about the facts surrounding traumatic events, without referring to their feelings about the events; and (d) the trauma-combination group (n = 11), in which participants wrote about both their feelings and the facts surrounding the trauma. Writing occurred for 15 minutes each day for 4 consecutive days in all four groups. Before and after each writing session, measures were taken of participants' blood pressure, pulse rate, self-reported moods, and physical symptoms. At the beginning of the experiment and 4 months afterwards, participants completed a questionnaire that assessed several health-related behaviours (e.g., self-reported number of days sick and the number visits to the student health centre). In addition, student health and counselling centre records were obtained for the 3 months prior to and 6 months following the intervention.

The researchers found that individuals who wrote about their emotions associated with traumatic life events (i.e., participants in the trauma-emotion and trauma-combination conditions) demonstrated a significant increase in negative affect after each day's writing session but a decrease in health problems relative to participants in the trauma-fact and control conditions at the 6-month follow-up. These differences were most pronounced for individuals who wrote about both their feelings and the specific facts surrounding the traumatic event. In addition,

the number of visits to the student health centre, as measured by health centre records, was significantly lower for the trauma-combination condition than for the other conditions. No differences were obtained between the trauma-fact and control conditions. Furthermore, although women reported writing about events that were more personal than did the men, no other gender differences were found in any of the conditions. Based on these findings, Pennebaker and Beall concluded that the mere act of writing about a traumatic event and the emotions surrounding it is beneficial for long-term health. They suggested that the mechanism behind this effect is that the disclosure of personally traumatic events reduces the physiological stress associated with the inhibition of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours associated with these events and thereby increases physical well-being.

While this study broke new ground in the area of the health benefits of writing, it also has several limitations. The number of participants in each group was quite small, and some of the effects reached only marginal significance. Because participants were drawn from a psychologically healthy population, the findings cannot be generalized to clinical populations. In addition, as Pennebaker and Beall point out, demand effects and changes in coping strategies may have intervened between the debriefing and the follow-up evaluation. Specifically, the researchers debriefed participants about the design of the experiment after the final writing session, though the researchers did not share their hypotheses about which conditions they believed would be related to greater health. It is possible that participants' beliefs and expectations arising from the debriefing influenced their

subsequent visits to the health centre and self-reports. Also, several participants stated in their follow-up reports that they had continued writing about their traumatic experiences on their own, and this may have affected the follow-up results.

In a subsequent study by Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, and Glaser (1988), Pennebaker and his associates used the same writing protocol as in the prior study by Pennebaker and Beall (1986) to investigate the effects of writing about traumatic events on immune system functioning. Fifty undergraduate students (36 women and 14 men) were randomly assigned to write either about personal traumatic events in their lives or about superficial topics for 20 minutes each day over a period of 4 consecutive days. Autonomic levels (e.g., blood pressure and heart rates) were measured and blood samples were taken for each participant prior to the first writing session and at the end of the fourth session. Blood samples were assayed for T-lymphocyte (white blood cell) response to mitogens (substances foreign to the body), where greater proliferation of T-lymphocytes in response to mitogen stimulation is seen as indicative of better immunological system functioning. Before and after each writing session, participants completed a self-report questionnaire on their moods and physical symptoms. At a 6-week follow-up, blood samples and autonomic levels were collected again, and information was obtained from the health centre regarding the number of visits each participant had made for illness for the 5 months prior to the study and the 6 weeks of the study. Three months after the study, participants were asked to

complete questionnaires aimed at assessing subjective distress and health-related

habits (e.g., smoking and physical exercise patterns).

Results from the experiment indicated that, compared to the control group,

individuals who wrote about their traumatic experiences showed an improvement

in physical health, as measured by higher T-lymphocytes activity in response to

mitogen stimulation and by fewer visits to the health centre. The increase in

immune response occurred both at the conclusion of the writing portion of the

study and at the 6-week follow-up. Participants in the trauma condition reported

more physical symptoms and negative moods immediately after writing than did

the control group. At the 3-month follow-up, however, the trauma group reported

feeling significantly happier than the control group. No differences were found in

short-term autonomic levels or in long-term health-related behaviours. The

researchers concluded that although writing about traumatic events may be painful

in the short term, writing improves physiological health in the long run. As with

the study by Pennebaker and Beall (1986), the generalizability of findings is

limited to psychologically healthy populations, and the same possibility that

demand characteristics and changes in coping strategies may have affected the

results applies here.

Spera, Buhrfeind, and Pennebaker (1994) extended Pennebaker's writing

protocol to individuals coping with job loss. In their study, 63 middle-aged

professionals (62 men and 1 woman) were voluntarily recruited from an

outplacement agency that was assisting them in finding re-employment after

having been laid off from a large technical firm 5 months earlier. The researchers

randomly assigned participants to three groups: (a) the experimental writing group

(n = 20), in which participants were asked to write their deepest thoughts and

feelings surrounding the layoff; (b) the writing control group (n = 21), in which

participants were asked to write about their plans for the day and their activities in

the job search; and (c) the nonwriting control group (n = 22), whose members did

not participate in the writing sessions. The writing groups wrote for 5 consecutive

days, for 20 minutes per session. Pre- and post-test dependent measures included

stress levels, as measured by physical health (e.g., blood pressure and heart rate)

and self-reported mood; motivation, as measured by self-reports and agency

records on job search behaviours (e.g., number of job interviews and number of

letters sent out to employers); and employment status. Follow-up measures were

taken 12 days after the writing sessions and once a month for the next 3 months.

Findings were that participants who wrote about their job loss were re-

employed significantly sooner than participants in the two control conditions.

However, no differences in stress levels and motivation were found between

groups. To explain the greater success of the experimental writing group in finding

re-employment, the researchers suggested that writing about losing their job may

help individuals achieve a greater sense of emotional and cognitive closure on the

loss. With greater closure, individuals may have a more positive attitude toward

the job search and do a qualitatively better job searching for work. As a result,

they increase their chances of finding re-employment. However, this explanation

went beyond the scope of the data and, therefore, could not be validated. Another point to note when interpreting the data is that participants were all laid off from the same firm. In all likelihood, many of the participants knew each other, and some may have been in contact with each other during the experiment, thus biasing the results. Furthermore, with the study's sample being comprised primarily of middle-aged male professionals, the generalizability of the findings is limited.

Murray, Lamnin, and Carver (1989) compared the written expression about traumatic life events with the description of traumatic events through psychotherapy. From a sample of 56 college students (half female and half male), the experimenters randomly assigned participants to one of three conditions: (a) expressive writing, (b) psychotherapy, or (c) control group. In the expressive writing condition, participants were asked to write about a traumatic or disturbing event from their past or present and to be as explicit as possible about their emotional responses to the event. Participants in the psychotherapy condition were asked to describe to a therapist (a trained graduate student in clinical psychology) a traumatic or disturbing event from their past, also emphasizing their emotional responses to the event. The psychotherapy was eclectic in nature, involved a warm, empathic approach to elicit students' feelings, and encouraged problem solving, adaptive behaviour, and a cognitive reappraisal of the traumatic event. Students in the control group were asked to write about superficial topics (e.g., the contents of their room and clothes closets), being as objective as possible and

avoiding the use of emotional terms. Intervention in all three groups took place for two 30-minute sessions spaced 2 days apart. Before and after each session, participants completed a self-report questionnaire on their mood, and measures were taken of each participant's blood pressure and heart rate. After the intervention was complete, the researchers performed a content analysis on the written entries of the two writing groups and on the tape recordings of the psychotherapy group to assess changes in emotion, cognition, self-esteem, and adaptive behaviours. In addition, participants were asked to complete a follow-up physical health questionnaire 6 months after the intervention.

Murray and his colleagues found that although the expressive writing group exhibited positive changes in self-esteem, cognition, and adaptive behaviour compared to the control group, these improvements were significantly lower than those for participants in the psychotherapy condition. The expressive writing group also showed greater arousal of negative affect and less positive affect after each treatment than the psychotherapy group. The differences between the psychotherapy and traumatic writing groups were particularly evident in the first day of the intervention and decreased from the first to the second day. No significant differences in physiological measures or physical health were found between the groups. Based on these findings, the researchers concluded that written emotional expression about traumatic events is not enough to bring about positive change and that cognitive reappraisal of the event must occur along with emotional discharge.

Although the argument made by Murray et al. about the necessity of combining emotional expression with cognitive reappraisal is compelling and corroborates the conclusions reached by Pennebaker and Beall (1986), the results need to be interpreted with some caution. Differences between the expressive writing and psychotherapy conditions could be accounted for by a number of variables, such as the warmth, empathy, and positive reinforcement of the therapist. Furthermore, it appears that participants in the traumatic writing condition were asked to write about their emotional responses to the traumatic event, with no explicit instructions being given to write about their thoughts as well. Perhaps an intervention in which participants were asked to write about both their thoughts and feelings associated with a traumatic event would have yielded different results. Moreover, with only two 30-minute writing sessions spaced 2 days apart, the length of treatment was relatively short. As Murray and his colleagues suggest, it is possible that a greater number of writing sessions might have brought about more positive improvements.

Some of these limitations were addressed in a follow-up study by Donnelly and Murray (1991) involving a total of 102 undergraduates (60 men and 42 women) randomly assigned to the three groups (expressive writing, psychotherapy, and control writing). Here, the experimenters increased the number of sessions in each condition to 4 consecutive days and asked participants in the writing condition to write about their deepest thoughts and feelings associated with the traumatic event. Instructions for the psychotherapy and writing control

groups were the same as in the experiment by Murray et al. (1989). Dependent

measures were also similar, with participants reporting on their mood before and

after each session and with changes in affect, self-esteem, cognition, and adaptive

behaviour over the course of the 4 days being determined through content analysis

and participant self-reports. Additionally, participants completed a health

questionnaire at pre-test and at 3 months following the intervention.

Content analysis revealed similar improvements over the 4 days for

participants in the traumatic writing and psychotherapy groups relative to the

control group. Specifically, both groups demonstrated a decrease in negative affect

and an increase in positive affect, self-esteem, and adaptive cognitions and

behaviours compared to the control group. In the post-experimental questionnaire,

both the expressive writing and psychotherapy groups reported feeling better about

themselves and their topic as a result of the intervention and also reported greater

cognitive changes than the control group, with the traumatic writing group

showing greater improvement than the psychotherapy group. No changes in

adaptive behaviours were reported by either group. Furthermore, no differences in

physical and mental health were found between the three groups at the 3-month

follow-up. In terms of pre- and post-session mood changes, the expressive writing

group showed a decrease in positive mood and an increase in negative mood in

each of the four sessions, especially in the first day, with males reporting greater

emotional pain and upset about their writing topic than did females. For the

psychotherapy group, however, positive mood decreased in the first day of

treatment, but in subsequent sessions, there was an increase in positive mood and decrease in negative mood. Feelings of emotional pain and upset were greater for females than for males in the group. The researchers concluded that with a greater number of writing sessions (i.e., an increase from two to four sessions), writing about traumatic experiences produces improvements comparable to those produced through psychotherapy. Writing may have a tendency, however, to produce more negative moods, especially in men.

Recently, Smyth (1998) performed a meta-analysis of experiments on written emotional expression, where these experiments contained a variant of Pennebaker's writing protocol (see Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). Over 800 individuals from 13 separate experiments were included in the analysis. The written emotional expression task in these experiments varied in duration (from 15 to 30 minutes per session), number (from a total of one to five sessions), and time period over which the writing sessions were spaced (from 1 to 28 days apart). Smyth found that writing about traumatic events led to positive long-term outcomes in terms of improved health (e.g., health centre visits), psychological well-being (e.g., positive and negative affect), physiological functioning (e.g., liver function and blood pressure), and general functioning (e.g., re-employment and absenteeism). While the traumatic writing conditions produced greater emotional distress during writing than the control conditions, this distress was not related to any of the psychological or physical health outcomes. Overall effect sizes were greater for writing spaced out over time and for studies containing

higher percentages of males. However, effect sizes for psychological well-being and physiological functioning outcomes were unrelated to gender. Smyth suggested that while it is not possible to strictly compare effect sizes between experiments when the outcome measures are different, it appears that the effect sizes of the writing task are similar to those found in other quantitative analyses of psychological interventions. An important limitation of Smyth's findings is that the experiments included in his analysis relied on samples of psychologically and physically healthy individuals. It is unknown at this point whether similar effects occur in other populations.

Rationale for a Structured Journal Writing Intervention

Throughout the research literature, one sees the ending of a romantic relationship as a time of intense and pressing psychological needs for the individual, including: the need to express and work through painful feelings; to render an account of the loss in a way that makes sense and has meaning for the individual; to restore self-esteem and forge a new identity; to gain a sense of self-mastery and independence; to obtain closure on the loss and live more fully in the present; and to feel greater hope and optimism for the future. One also finds support in the literature for the use of journal writing as a tool for promoting emotional expression, self-awareness, insight, meaning, self-esteem, self-identity, independence, and a sense of control. When the potential benefits of journal writing are held up against the needs of individuals who have experienced a

breakup, journal writing makes good sense as a possible intervention for post-loss recovery.

My review of the literature also reveals a critical need for the research and development of therapeutic alternatives for individuals coping with romantic relationship loss. A writing program may provide one such alternative, particularly for individuals seeking cost-effective, accessible, and self-directed strategies for dealing with their loss. One of the advantages of journal writing as a therapeutic technique is its versatility: it can be used as a tool for self-help or as an adjunct to psychotherapy.

Furthermore, most of the empirically-validated interventions for coping with traumatic life events have relied on an unstructured approach to writing (i.e., individuals are instructed to write whatever thoughts and feelings come to mind about an event), where the researchers make no explicit attempt to help the writer cognitively reframe her or his experience. Esterling et al. (1999) and L'Abate (1991, 1992) suggest that structured writing interventions (i.e., having individuals write in response to questions) may be effective in relieving psychological distress for people suffering from depression and anxiety. The intervention in the current study applies structured writing to the specific trauma and distress of romantic relationship loss and, as such, fills a gap in the research on therapeutic writing.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

<u>Participants</u>

Participants were undergraduate and graduate students from the University of

Victoria who volunteered for this study. All participants were recruited through an

on-campus advertisement requesting volunteers for a research study on the

effectiveness of a short-term journal writing intervention for individuals

recovering from romantic relationship loss. A total of 20 people (18 females and 2

males) participated in the study and were included in the data analysis. An

additional 3 people were excluded from the final data analysis for the following

reasons: (a) dropped out of study after completing the pre-test questionnaires but

before beginning treatment either because of reconciliation with the former partner

or withdrawal from the university (n = 2), or (b) completed the questionnaires

incorrectly (n = 1).

Only students whose relationship ended within the preceding 12 months, who

were between the ages of 19 and 30, and who answered affirmatively to the

following questions were included in the study: (a) Are you having a difficult time

getting over the loss? (b) Are you experiencing some distress over the loss (e.g.,

feelings of anxiety, grief, stress, anger, fear, rejection, loneliness, guilt, confusion,

self-blame, and a decreased sense of self-worth)? (c) Does the loss feel unresolved

to you? For example, are you left without a sense or closure, or do thoughts,

feelings, and memories of the relationship intrude upon your sense of well-being

or peace of mind?

Participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (n = 10) or the control group (n = 10). Each group consisted of 9 females and 1 male. In the experimental group, the mean age of participants was 24.9 years, with a range of 21 to 30 years. The mean length of time since the relationship breakup was 3.3 months, with a range of 1 to 9.5 months. Of the relationships that ended, 9 were nonmarital and 1 was marital. In the control group, the mean age was 25.0 years, with a range of 20 to 29 years. The mean length of time since the breakup was 5.4 months, with a range of 1 to 11.5 months. As with the experimental group, 9 of the breakups were nonmarital and 1 was marital. All of the breakups in the sample involved heterosexual relationships.

<u>Dependent Measures and Instruments</u>

Pre- and post-intervention measures were taken of participants' (a) self-concept, as measured by the Emotional Stability, Opposite Sex Peer Relations, and Physical Appearance scales of the Self Description Questionnaire III (SDQ III); (b) self-esteem, as measured by the General Self-Esteem scales of the SDQ III; (c) time orientation, as measured by the Time Competence (Tc) scale of the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI); (d) inner-directedness, as measured by the Inner Directedness (I) scale of the POI; and (e) capacity for intimacy; as measured by the Capacity for Intimate Contact (C) sub-scale of the POI.

<u>Self Description Questionnaire III</u>. The Self Description Questionnaire III

(SDQ III) is a 136-item Likert-type instrument developed by Herbert Marsh

(1989), based on Richard Shavelson's multidimensional theory of self-concept

(Marsh & O'Neill, 1984; Shavelson et al., 1976). The SDQ III is comprised of 13

scales designed to measure specific facets of academic and nonacademic self-

concept for late adolescents and young adults. Nonacademic facets include:

Physical Abilities, Physical Appearance, Opposite Sex Peer Relations, Same Sex

Peer Relations, Relations with Parents, Spiritual Values/Religion,

Honesty/Trustworthiness, Emotional Stability, and General Self-Esteem. The

scales used in this study are the General Self-Esteem, Emotional Stability,

Opposite Sex Peer Relations, and Physical Appearance dimensions of

nonacademic self-concept. The General Self-Esteem scale measures individuals'

self-acceptance, self-respect, and positive feelings toward themselves. The

Emotionality Stability scale measures individuals' perceptions of themselves as

being calm, anxious, happy, depressed, optimistic, or worried. Opposite Sex Peer

Relations measures self-perceptions of popularity and quality of interactions with

members of the opposite sex. In the present study, participants were instructed to

interpret the term "opposite sex," as it appeared in the SDQ III, as the gender with

whom the participant normally has romantic relations. The Physical Appearance

scale measures individuals' perceptions of their physical attractiveness and their

level of satisfaction with their appearance.

The suitability of the SDQ III for the present study is based on its solid theoretical foundation, its multidimensionality, and its strong validity and reliability with young adult populations. A multidimensional view of self-concept has been supported by several researchers in the area of self-concept theory and instrumentation (Hattie, 1992; Fitts, 1991; Marsh & O'Neill, 1984; Norem-Hebeisen, 1991; Shavelson et al., 1976). Internal consistency estimates (coefficient alphas) range from .72 to .95 (Lopez & Heffer, 1998; Marsh, 1989; Marsh & Byrne, 1993). Test-retest reliability coefficients range from .66 to .94, with a mean $r = .86$ (Byrne, 1988; Hunter & Stringer, 1993; Lopez & Heffer, 1998; Maltby, 1995). Strong support for the construct validity of the SDQ III has appeared throughout the research literature (Byrne, 1988; Marsh & Byrne, 1993; Marsh & O'Neill, 1984; Marsh et al., 1986; McInman & Berger, 1993; Vispoel, 1996). For example, factorial and multitrait-multimethod analyses have shown strong support for the divergent and convergent validity of the SDQ III among Outward Bound participants aged 16 to 31 (Marsh et al., 1986), 15- to 43-year old females (McInman & Berger, 1993), and Australian and Canadian university students (Marsh & Byrne, 1993). Studies by Byrne (1988) and Marsh and O'Neill (1984) that compared self versus other ratings of self-concept among late adolescents and university students found support for the construct validity (convergent and divergent), test-retest reliability, and internal consistency of the SDQ III. Vispoel (1996) found a high correlation between adults' scores on the SDQ III and their scores on the Arts Self Perception Inventory for Adults.

Personal Orientation Inventory. The Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) is

a 150-item forced-choice instrument intended to measure the degree of self-

actualization in the individual (Shostrom, 1974). Shostrom's definition of the self-

actualized person is based largely on the humanistic theories of Maslow, Riesman,

Rogers, and Perls and refers to an individual who develops and uses her or his

unique potentialities to the fullest. According to Shostrom, a self-actualized person

lives primarily in the here-and-now as opposed to the past or future and functions

autonomously, relying primarily on internal standards and motivations rather than

external pressures to conform. The POI consists of two basic scales, namely, the

Time Competence (Tc) scale and the Inner Directedness (I) scale, and the

following 10 sub-scales: Self-Actualizing Value, Existentiality, Feeling Reactivity,

Spontaneity, Self Regard, Self Acceptance, Nature of Man, Synergy, Acceptance

of Aggression, and Capacity for Intimate Contact. Lee and Hett (1990) note a

correspondence between the variables measured by the POI, particularly the Tc

and I scales, and the variables typically emphasized in post-divorce adjustment.

The Time Competence scale is designed to assess the ability to live in the present,

rather than in guilts, regrets, and resentments from the past or in unrealistic

expectations, fears, and worries for the future. The Inner Directedness scale

measures the individual's independence and the extent to which she or he is

guided by internal motivations and principles rather than external influences and

standards. Capacity for Intimate Contact (C) measures the individual's ability to

form warm, meaningful, and intimate relationships with other people. Kolevzon

and Gottlieb (1983) see the ability to form intimate contacts as an important variable in post-divorce adjustment.

The POI is typically seen as a measure of positive mental health and therapeutic effect (Coan, 1972; Lorr, & Knapp, 1974), and its solid psychometric help make it one of the more commonly used instruments in the research on divorce and post-divorce interventions (for example, see Gray, 1978; Kolevzon & Gottlieb, 1983; Lee & Hett, 1990; Saul & Scherman, 1984). There is considerable support for the POI's test-retest reliability and internal consistency in the research literature (Bloxom, 1972; Shafer & Jones, 1977; Sherrill, Gilstrap, Richir, Gench, & Hinson, 1988; Tosi & Lindamood, 1975; Wise, 1977; Wise & Davis, 1975). Bloxom reports test-retest reliability coefficients ranging from .55 to .85. Shafer and Jones (1977), Wise (1977), and Wise and Davis (1975) have found the POI to be internally consistent, with Shafer and Jones reporting split-half estimates of .67 to .89 for the Tc, I, and C scales of the instrument. A large body of research supports the construct validity of the POI (Burwick & Knapp, 1991; Hyman, 1979; Knapp & Knapp, 1978; Leak, 1984; Murphy, DeWolfe, & Mozdzierz, 1984; Tosi & Lindamood, 1975; Weiser & Meyers, 1993; Yonge, 1975). Numerous studies have shown the POI's ability to differentiate between known groups (Burwick & Knapp, 1991; Goldman & Olczak, 1975; Hattie, 1986; Hattie & Cooksey, 1984; Murphy et al., 1984; Tosi & Lindamood, 1975) and to detect expected therapeutic changes related to self-actualization (Hyman, 1979). Strong correlations have been

found between the POI and other measures of self-actualization (Hyman, 1979;

Leak, 1984; Weiser & Meyers, 1993; Yonge, 1975).

Procedure

Prior to the experiment, the researcher informed potential participants that the

study involved completing six journal writing sessions over a period of 3 weeks at

the University of Victoria. Participants were told that the topics might be of a

personal nature and that the specific topics for writing would be supplied by the

researcher. Mention was made that the sessions might occur in a group setting

(i.e., participants might be writing in the same room) but that this was strictly for

purposes of convenience and that there would be no group discussion between

participants. They were also told that they would be asked to complete a series of

questionnaires on psychological well-being in the week prior to the first writing

session and once again upon completion of the writing program. Potential

participants were assured that all personal information, journal entries, and

questionnaire data would be kept confidential and anonymous by the researcher.

However, because participants might be writing in a group setting, it would not be

possible to protect anonymity within the group.

After agreeing to participate in the study, participants were randomly

assigned to the experimental group or the control group. Arrangements were made

with each participant to meet at the University for questionnaire completion and

for the journal writing sessions. Meeting times were scheduled such that there

would be no intermixing of groups (i.e., only members from the same condition would be together for any one session).

In the week prior to the intervention, participants met with the researcher at the University where, once again, they were given a brief explanation of the study. Participants were encouraged to keep an open mind about the specific questions and topics that they would be asked to write about in the weeks ahead. They were assured that a full debriefing would occur at the end of the experiment, at which point their questions would be fully addressed. After signing a written consent form (Appendix D), each participants was asked to select a subject number that would be used instead of the participant's name to identify all written entries and questionnaire data. Participants then completed the pre-test questionnaires over a period of 45 to 90 minutes.

Over the next 3 weeks, participants wrote twice per week for a total of six sessions. Writing occurred at the University in small groups of 1 to 5 individuals, with the researcher present throughout. At the start of each session, the researcher read aloud the instructions, guidelines, and questions/topics for the day's journal writing. Participants were instructed to write for a minimum of 20 minutes and a maximum of 50 minutes per session and to avoid discussion with other participants in the group. At the end of each session, participants submitted their written entries to the researcher. Besides from presenting and clarifying the instructions for each session, the researcher avoided discussion with the participants until the experiment was complete.

Participants assigned to the experimental group were asked to address specific questions pertaining to the relationship breakup. The questions were aimed at eliciting an account of relationship and its loss, with emphasis on the following dimensions of the participant's experience: (a) early stages of the relationship and possible warning signs that the relationship might not work out; (b) strengths that the participant brought to the relationship and an account of how the relationship ended; (c) explanation of why the breakup occurred; (d) past and present efforts to cope with the breakup, and strengths and resources that have helped; (e) effect of the relationship and the breakup on the participant's learning and personal development; and (f) description of hopes, needs, and wants for a future relationship and how a new relationship would differ from the one that ended (see Appendix A for a list of the specific journal writing questions). At the start of each session, participants were asked to explore their thoughts and feelings as deeply as possible in their writing.

Participants in the control group were asked to write about a different topic each session. The topics were of a superficial nature and were unrelated to the relationship breakup. Specifically, participants were asked to describe: their activities from the preceding day, their plans for the following 24 hours, the home they were currently living in, their activities since waking, the room they were currently sitting in, and their plans for the following week. In contrast to the experimental group, participants in the control group were instructed to be as objective as possible in their descriptions and to avoid writing about their feelings,

opinions, and interpretations about what they were describing (see Appendix B for further details on the topics for each session).

In both groups, participants were encouraged to not worry about grammar, spelling, writing style, making sense, or being a "good writer"; to be honest in their writing; to keep their pens moving as much as possible; to omit identifying information about themselves or third parties; and to write legibly. To protect their anonymity, participants were instructed to write their subject number instead of their names on each written entry.

Within one week of the sixth session, participants returned to complete the post-test questionnaires. In addition, participants were asked to complete a brief feedback questionnaire on their experience of the study and the impact that the study had on them (Appendix D). The session ended with a full debriefing in which participants were thanked for their involvement in the study and informed of the design, hypotheses, and general background of the study. Participants were invited to ask any questions that they had about the study and were told that the results would be made available to them upon request. The control group was also offered the opportunity to receive the experimental treatment at their convenience. All control group participants except one person accepted this offer and received the journal writing questions and topics by e-mail over the subsequent three weeks.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Data Analysis of Dependent Measures

One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed on pre-test levels

of each dependent variable to determine if any differences existed between the

experimental and control groups before treatment. Results indicated that the

experimental group had significantly lower scores on General Self-Esteem ($\underline{F}$ (1,

18) = 4.486, $\underline{p}$ < .05) and Emotional Stability self-concept ($\underline{F}$ (1, 18) = 6.269, $\underline{p}$ <

.03) at pre-test than did the control group. No other differences were found

between the groups at pre-test. Table 1 displays pre-test means, standard

deviations, and tests of significance for each variable.

In order to adjust for initial differences in General Self-Esteem and Emotional

Stability, post-test comparisons of scores on these scales were performed using

analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs), with the pre-test scores as the covariate. No

significant differences were found between groups on these measures, as indicated

in Table 2. For all other measures (i.e., Time Competence, Inner Directedness,

Capacity for Intimate Contact, Opposite Sex Peer Relations, and Physical

Appearance), simple one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed to

compare the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups. As can be

seen in Table 3, no significant differences were found between groups.

Post-hoc comparisons were performed to determine within-group differences

from pre- to post-test on each of the dependent variables. With the experimental

Table 1

Pre-test means, standard deviations, and tests of significance for POI and SDQ III
scales

Scale	Experimental (n = 10)		Control (n = 10)		Test of Significance	
	M	SD	M	SD	F	p
POI						
Time Competence	12.70	2.58	14.10	3.60	0.997	.331
Inner Directedness	75.20	8.47	79.70	13.06	0.836	.373
Capacity for Intimate Contact	17.30	3.59	16.60	3.69	0.185	.672
SDQ III						
General Self-Esteem	4.95	1.04	6.05	1.27	4.486	.048*
Emotional Stability	3.56	0.96	4.69	1.06	6.269	.022*
Opposite Sex Relations	5.03	1.08	5.73	1.33	1.672	.212
Physical Appearance	4.96	1.39	6.00	1.22	3.142	.093

*significant at p < .05

Table 2

Post-test means, adjusted means, standard deviations, and tests of significance for

SDQ III General Self-Esteem and Emotional Stability scales, with pre-test scores

as the covariate on post-test scores

Scale	Experimental (n = 10)			Control (n = 10)			Test of Significance	
	M	Adj. M	SD	M	Adj. M	SD	F	p
General Self-Esteem	5.75	6.22	1.01	6.05	5.88	1.23	0.909	.354
Emotional Stability	4.24	4.72	0.91	5.20	4.72	1.33	0.000	.986

p < .05

Table 3

Post-test means, standard deviations, and tests of significance for POI scales and

SDQ III Opposite Sex Peer Relations and Physical Appearance scales

Scale	Experimental (n = 10)		Control (n = 10)		Test of Significance	
	M	SD	M	SD	F	p
POI						
Time Competence	14.20	2.86	15.20	3.61	0.471	.501
Inner Directedness	85.10	10.75	84.70	14.08	0.005	.944
Capacity for Intimate Contact	18.20	4.44	18.00	4.64	0.010	.923
SDQ III						
Opposite Sex Relations	5.69	0.72	6.15	1.30	0.958	.341
Physical Appearance	5.48	1.17	6.18	1.18	1.770	.200

p < .05

group, results of paired t-tests revealed significant increases from pre-test to post-test on four scales: Inner Directedness ($t = 3.763$, $p < .01$), General Self-Esteem ($t = 3.289$, $p < .01$), Opposite Sex Peer Relations ($t = 3.577$, $p < .01$), and Emotional Stability ($t = 4.314$, $p < .01$). No significant differences were found in Time Competence, Capacity for Intimate Contact, or Physical Appearance, at an alpha level of .05. In the control group, a significant difference was found for Opposite Sex Peer Relations only ($t = 3.096$, $p < .02$). No significant differences were found for any of the other variables.

Participant Feedback

On the post-intervention feedback questionnaire (Appendix C), 9 of the 10 participants in the experimental group wrote that they found the intervention helpful to them. Specifically, all but one participant indicated that the journal writing helped them achieve greater insight, self-awareness, and understanding or helped them organize their thoughts and feelings into a clearer and more coherent perspective. For example, in reflecting on the impact that the study had on them, participants wrote:

> Being asked to look in depth at aspects I'd never thought as much about helped to dissect my motivations and behaviours—showing more and more about what got me into the mess.

> It has made me organize my thoughts and feelings on paper rather than keep it jumbled in my head.

> The study made me realize that my relationship had been going downhill for months before it ended and that it wasn't all the other person's fault.

Three participants commented that the journal writing helped them release feelings

that they previously blocked. For example:

> It's good just to get things out so they don't get blocked inside you.

> At first, I had a lot to say, a lot of angry words I hadn't been able to tell anyone before....[The journal writing] helped me release my anger and start to let go.

In three cases, participants stated that the intervention helped them gain a greater

sense of closure on their loss and move on with their lives. One person wrote:

> [I] had almost let go of my "ex" but [was] not quite there. [The journal writing] was a good opportunity to give myself some closure—I didn't really ask myself any of the journal questions before now.

It is also clear from the written feedback that most participants (7 out of 10) found

that writing about the relationship and its loss was at times emotionally painful or

difficult. For example:

> The first few sessions were difficult because they made me remember things I had previously tried to block out. I started having dreams about the breakup and how it initially felt. I considered dropping out of the study, but didn't because I knew I had to work through all the feelings.

> Sometimes I felt really positive when I finished answering questions and other times I found it difficult and felt quite down for awhile after the journal writing session.

One person indicated being unsure of how helpful the journal writing sessions

were, as the writing brought up painful memories from the past:

> I think it's put me back into some of the anger and grief areas of loss that I thought I'd left behind—Who knows, maybe they weren't properly dealt with before and this will be beneficial?!

> In contrast to the experimental group, most participants in the control group

stated that the study had either no impact at all (3 of the 10 participants) or that

they were unsure whether or not the intervention had any impact on them (3

participants). Three participants believed that they were more observant or

objective about the details of their lives. For example:

> I do notice I pay more attention to detail in what I do, for example just
> walking down the hallway.

Another participant stated that the journal writing was a welcome distraction from

obsessively thinking about the ex-partner:

> When I immediately walked out of each session, I don't think I was thinking
> about my ex as much.

Some commented that they found the intervention "interesting" (4 participants) or

"confusing" (2 participants). In one case, the participant found the writing

"grounding," and in another case, the writing gave her "moments of introspection,

confidence, and well-being."

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a structured journal writing intervention on the psychological adjustment of individuals recovering from romantic relationship loss. From a review of the literature, it was clear that for many people, the ending of a relationship represents a time of intense crisis as well as an opportunity for personal growth. The literature also revealed a shortage of empirical outcome research on alternative interventions for post-loss recovery and thus provided a major impetus for the present study. Further motivation and direction came from the growing body of research on the effects of personal writing as a means of coping with traumatic life events, and a primary intent of this study was to extend the research to the specific trauma of romantic relationship loss.

Participants were 20 students (18 women and 2 men) from the University of Victoria whose relationships had ended within the previous year and who reported experiencing some distress over the loss. The study relied upon a pre-/post-test experimental design, with equal numbers of participants randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. Each group wrote for a total of six sessions spaced over a period of 3 weeks. In the experimental group, participants were provided with questions and topics aimed at eliciting an account of the relationship and its loss. Emphasis was on emotional expression, identification of strengths and

resources, and cognitive re-appraisal of the individual's experience. Participants in the control group were given emotionally neutral and superficial topics to write about and were instructed to avoid expressing their feelings, interpretations, and opinions.

The research hypotheses were that the experimental intervention would lead to significantly higher levels of post-loss psychological adjustment compared to the control treatment, as evidenced by a more positive self-concept (i.e., higher scores on the Emotional Stability, Opposite Sex Peer Relations, and Physical Appearance self-concept scales of the SDQ III); a higher level of self-esteem or self-worth; a stronger tendency to live in the present, without being overly preoccupied with past disappointments or future uncertainties; greater inner-directedness, where the individual has a sense of independence and personal control and is guided more by internal standards and motivations than by external standards and pressures; and an increased capacity to form intimate, caring, and meaningful interpersonal relationships. Measures of the dependent variables were taken in the week preceding the intervention and once again within a week of the final writing session, using Marsh's (1989) Self Description Questionnaire III and Shostrom's (1974) Personal Orientation Inventory. Participants also completed a brief post-intervention questionnaire on their personal experience of the study.

Analyses of variance and covariance on post-test scores indicated no significant differences between the two groups following the intervention, and, therefore, none of the hypotheses were confirmed. At the same time, post-hoc

comparisons within the experimental group revealed significant improvements

from pre- to post-test on four scales: Inner Directedness, General Self-Esteem,

Emotional Stability self-concept, and Opposite Sex Peer Relations self-concept.

This is in contrast to the control group, where pre/post-test differences were

significant for Opposite Sex Peer Relations only.

Discussion and Implications

From the post-hoc analyses, it appears that the structured journal writing

intervention had some tendency to improve psychological adjustment among

individuals recovering from relationship loss. Specifically, pre- to post-test

comparisons suggest that the journal writing intervention was effective in

enhancing self-esteem, inner-directedness, and self-perceptions of emotional

stability. However, the lack of significant differences between the experimental

and control groups at post-test seem to indicate that the treatment effect was not

strong enough to attain significance. Moreover, the intervention had no significant

effect on time orientation, capacity for intimacy, and self-perceptions of physical

appearance; and pre- to post-test comparisons of Opposite Sex Peer Relations self-

concept failed to differentiate between the experimental and control groups on this

measure.

Several explanations may account for these findings. To begin with, pre- and

post-test measures were taken approximately 3 weeks apart. It is possible that this

was too brief a period for treatment effects to show up or that the testing

instruments were not sensitive enough to detect short-term changes in the

dependent variables. Perhaps significant improvements would have been found at

a long-term follow-up, for example 3 or 6 months following the intervention.

From the subjective reports on the feedback questionnaire, it appears that most

experimental group participants believed that the treatment helped them achieve

greater resolution of the loss. The self-reports also seem to indicate that the journal

writing brought up painful or negative feelings for participants. It could be that the

release of negative emotions confounded the immediate effectiveness of the

treatment and yet had beneficial effects on psychological adjustment in the long

term. Without follow-up testing on the long-term effects of the intervention, this

hypothesis cannot be confirmed. However, the argument is consistent with the

findings of previous researchers that while writing about traumatic events

produces short-term increases in negative affect, it also leads to long-term

improvements in physical and mental health (Donnelly & Murray, 1991;

Pennebaker et al., 1988; Smyth, 1998).

Pre-existing group differences and uncontrolled factors related to post-loss

recovery may help explain the treatment outcomes. Although random assignment

to groups theoretically controls for initial group differences, in reality, equality of

groups can never be fully guaranteed. This limitation is especially relevant when

sample sizes are small, as is the case in the current study. From pre-test group

comparisons on each of the dependent variables, it was established that the

experimental group had lower levels of self-esteem and more negative self-

perceptions of emotional stability at the start of the intervention than did the control group. Lower self-esteem and a more negative self-concept have both been associated with greater emotional distress and poorer post-loss adjustment in the research literature (Chiriboga & Catron, 1991; Fletcher, 1983; Frazier & Cook, 1993) and may have influenced the results here. In addition, the average length of time since separation was shorter for the experimental group (3.3 months) than for the control group (5.4 months), and without further research, there is no way of knowing if such a difference is large enough to significantly impact treatment outcomes. Other uncontrolled factors that may have impacted the results are the length of the relationship, whether or not the individual initiated the breakup, and whether the individual received counselling or journal wrote on his or her own while simultaneously participating in the study.

Another possibility is that some facets of self-concept are more stable and less susceptible to change over time, while other facets may rebound quickly after a breakup, with or without therapeutic treatment. Specifically, it could be that significant improvements were not found in Physical Appearance because this is a relatively stable dimension of self-concept. In contrast, the finding that Opposite Sex Peer Relations scores improved in both the experimental and control groups from pre- to post-test may be due to the strong responsiveness of this dimension to such factors as the passage of time, the placebo effect, and the attention of the researcher. The research literature provides few answers here as research on these particular facets of self-concept is fairly new.

The lack of a significant treatment effect may also be due in part to developmental issues related to identity. There is some indication in the research literature that the process of identity formation generally intensifies in late adolescence and young adulthood (Conger & Galambos, 1997; Marsh, 1989) and that from late adolescence onwards, self-concept tends to become more positive and stable with age (Chiriboga & Catron, 1991; Marsh, 1989). Kaczmarek et al. (1990) suggest that from a developmental standpoint, young adults may actually be more vulnerable to relationship loss than they would be in later life, as their identities are undergoing rapid change. A question that arises from this is whether the effects of the writing intervention were confounded by developmental forces acting upon self-concept. Perhaps with an older sample, the treatment effect would be less susceptible to unpredictable variations in self-concept or to negative influences on identity.

In addition, it could be that by requiring that participants complete two fixed writing sessions per week, the experimental intervention did not allow for variability in individuals' readiness to confront the specific issues and questions presented to them. Some individuals may have required more time between sessions to integrate the thoughts and emotions that arose from their writing. This view was reflected in the feedback of one experimental group participant who wrote: "I think it would have been better if I could have moved through the topics at my own times and pace." Future research might compare the effectiveness of fixed versus variable writing schedules over a range of durations. Moreover, as the

same journal writing questions were given to all members of the experimental group, no special provision was made for the individual's particular stage or level of post-loss recovery. In other words, the effectiveness of specific journal writing questions might have depended on where the individual was in the recovery process, and alternative questions might have been more effective for different stages of recovery.

The effectiveness of the journal writing intervention may also have been compromised by the group setting of the writing sessions. While participants often wrote in groups of up to 5 individuals, the researcher made no effort to promote social interaction or discussion between group members, and there was minimal dialogue between the researcher and participants. It is possible that some participants felt uncomfortable or self-conscious writing in the presence of strangers, and, consequently, may not have been as deep and open in their exploration of thoughts and feelings as they might have been in either a friendlier or more private setting.

Lastly, the lack of significant improvement in time orientation raises the important question of whether writing about the past keeps some people stuck in the past as opposed to helping them put past issues to rest and live more fully in the present. In most empirical studies on the therapeutic effects of writing, the researchers were working with psychologically healthy populations, where one might reasonably assume that pre-occupation with the past was at normal levels. With individuals who have experienced romantic relationship loss, however, there

is a tendency toward repeated or obsessive rumination (Collins & Clark, 1989; Jacobson, 1983; Weiss, 1975). It may be that the structured journal writing intervention, with its emphasis on forging an account of the past, may have maintained the tendency toward rumination for some participants. In contrast, the superficial and emotionally neutral topics in the control group may have had the unforeseen effect of providing a distraction from the past. Whether the temporary focus on the past in the experimental treatment actually facilitated the achievement of greater closure in the long term is unknown. More research on the relationship between time orientation and writing about past traumatic events, using both psychologically adjusted and distressed populations, would help illuminate the current findings.

The foregoing discussion needs to be considered in light of the study's limitations. Given that all of the participants were young university students and all but two of the relationships were nonmarital, it is not possible to generalize the findings to older, less-educated, and married populations. Moreover, with 90% of the sample consisting of women, one cannot make conclusions about the effectiveness of the intervention on men, and any gender differences in treatment effects remain unknown. No consistent gender differences have been found in the research literature on the psychological effects of writing about traumatic life events (Pennebaker, 1997). However, none of the studies to date have examined gender as a variable in a writing intervention targetted specifically at individuals recovering from romantic relationship loss. A follow-up to the present study, with

gender included as an independent variable, could make an important contribution to the body of research on therapeutic writing. Such a study might also shed some light on possible gender differences in the psychological impact of separation and divorce. From the earlier discussion of the literature in this area, it appears that gender differences in post-loss distress are far from clear. Were such differences to exist, it is conceivable that they might have a significant influence on the effectiveness of the journal writing intervention.

Furthermore, the present study's findings are limited to the short term only, since no long-term measures were taken. As previously noted, the sample size was also quite small, and a number of factors were not controlled for in the research design (e.g., degree of psychological distress, initiator status, length of the relationship, and whether or not the individual was undergoing psychotherapy). Several aspects of post-loss psychological adjustment (e.g., levels of depression, stress, and anxiety) were left out of the study, and, therefore, the effectiveness of the experimental treatment on these variables is unknown. The subjective feedback of the experimental group would seem to suggest that the treatment may have helped some individuals achieve greater insight, self-awareness, and a sense of order. However, none of the objective measures in the study specifically tapped into these factors. Furthermore, the researcher oversaw each session, thereby possibly introducing experimenter bias into the results.

Future studies might include larger samples, long-term follow-up evaluations (e.g., at 1, 3, or 6 months following treatment), and alternate testing instruments

that may be more sensitive to short-term treatment effects on the dependent variables. It would be worthwhile to measure different dependent variables, such as depression and anxiety, and to compare the effect of the journal writing intervention on different populations. For example, gender and age-related differences might be explored, and one might also control for initial differences in levels of distress. A non-writing control condition could be added to further isolate the factors contributing to the group outcomes. Individuals might be permitted to complete the journal writing questions at their own pace, within a specified time limit. The questions themselves could be varied to determine if some questions are more effective than others in producing the intended results, and separate sets of questions could be developed and tested based on pre-existing group differences, such as stage of recovery and initiator status. Finally, structured journal writing could be compared to unstructured writing approaches and to alternative therapeutic treatments, such as group or individual counselling.

While the present study contributes to the greater understanding of journal writing and romantic relationship loss, it raises more questions than it answers. For the most part, research on therapeutic interventions for relationship loss has just begun, and there is much that is not yet known. Clearly, further research is needed in this area and would be of benefit to individuals working through the many challenges of recovery.

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Appendix A

Experimental Group Writing Topics

The following guidelines and instructions were given to the participants at the start of each journal writing session:

During today's session, please write for at least 20 minutes and no more than 50 minutes in response to the questions and topics presented below. If you run out of things to say before 20 minutes are up, then go into greater detail about one or more aspects of your entry.

In your writing, please keep in mind the following guidelines:

1. Do not worry about grammar, spelling, punctuation, or writing style. There is no right or wrong way to journal write. The important thing is that you accept whatever comes and explore your thoughts, feelings, and actions deeply.

2. Do not worry about making sense or about being a "good writer." Remember that no one will be judging your writing, and this is not about creating a "literary masterpiece."

3. Be open and honest in your writing. Remember that your writing will be kept totally anonymous and confidential.

4. Keep your pen moving as much as possible. Do not censor what you

write.

5. Do not include any identifying information about yourself or third parties in your writing. You may wish to use pseudonyms or initials to identify individuals.

6. Write legibly.

At the beginning of the each session, the researcher also stressed the importance of participants' exploring their thoughts and feelings deeply in their writing. The specific questions for each journal writing session were as follows:

First session

1. Write an account of the early stages of your relationship. In your account, you may wish to consider the following questions: How did you and your former partner meet? What attracted you to this person? What were your needs and life circumstances at the time you first became involved? What were your feelings, hopes, and expectations in the early stages of the relationship?

2. Were there any early indications that the relationship would not work out? What were they?

Second session

3. What were some of the strengths that you brought to the relationship? What would you say you "did well"?

4. How did the relationship end? Describe the events leading up to, during,

and following the ending of the relationship. What were your emotional, physical, and mental reactions to the loss?

Third session

5. What about the relationship was not working for you? What needs of yours were not being met?

6. Why do you think your relationship ended? Can you think of any "fatal flaws" in the relationship that can explain its ending? How did these fatal flaws eventually manifest themselves in the ending of your relationship?

Fourth session

7. Describe your past and present efforts to heal from the ending of the relationship. What are some of the things (e.g., actions and thoughts) that seem to have helped or are currently helping? What else do you think might help?

8. What are some of your inner strengths and resources that have helped you through the ending of your relationship? In what ways have they helped? In what ways have they shown up in other areas of your life?

Fifth session

9. Looking back on your experience of the relationship and its ending, what would you say you have learned?

10. How are you a different person now, after the relationship? In what ways have you grown and changed?

11. What purpose would you say your relationship and its ending has served in your personal development?

<u>Sixth session</u>

12. Imagine yourself being in a satisfying and healthy relationship in the present or future. What does this new relationship look like? What are your hopes, needs, and wants? How would you like this relationship to be different from the relationship that ended?

13. What are some of the strengths and gifts that you have to offer in an intimate relationship?

Appendix B

Control Group Writing Topics

The following guidelines and instructions were given to participants at the start of each journal writing session:

During today's session, please write for at least 20 minutes and no more than 50 minutes in response to the questions and topics presented below. If you run out of things to say before 20 minutes are up, then go into greater detail about one or more aspects of your entry. Try to be as objective as possible in your description; avoid writing about your feelings, opinions, or interpretations about what you are describing.

In your writing, please keep in mind the following guidelines:

1. Do not worry about grammar, spelling, punctuation, or writing style. There is no right or wrong way to journal write.

2. Do not worry about making sense or about being a "good writer." Remember that no one will be judging your writing, and this is not about creating a "literary masterpiece."

3. Be open and honest in your writing. Remember that your writing will be kept totally anonymous and confidential.

4. Keep your pen moving as much as possible. Do not censor what you

write.

5. Do not include any identifying information about yourself or third parties in your writing. You may wish to use pseudonyms or initials to identify individuals.

6. Write legibly.

The journal writing topics for each session were as follows:

First session

Describe yesterday's activities and events from the time you awoke to the time you went to sleep. Include as much detail as possible, as if all of your activities were being played back on a video tape recorder. You may wish to "fast forward" through some activities, while for others you may wish to run through them in "slow motion."

Second session

Describe the activities and events that you imagine that you will be engaged over the next 24 hours. Include as much detail as possible, as if your future activities were being recorded on a video tape recorder. You may wish to "fast forward" through some activities, while for others you may wish to run through them in "slow motion."

Third session

Describe the home that you are currently living in, for example your house, apartment, or residence on campus. Include as much detail as possible. You may wish to write about each of the rooms in your home and/or focus on a particular room and describe the objects in that room. You might also wish to describe your home's exterior and the landscaping and scenery around your home. It may help to imagine that you are seeing your home through a camera that allows you to zoom in and out, allowing you to notice your home from different perspectives. Or you might imagine that you are describing your home to a foreigner from a strange land who has never seen a home like yours before.

Fourth session

Describe today's activities and events from the time you awoke to the present moment. Include as much detail as possible, as if all of your activities were being played back on a video tape recorder. You may wish to "fast forward" through some activities, while for others you may wish to run through them in "slow motion."

Fifth session

Describe the room that you are currently sitting in, in as much detail as possible. You may wish to imagine that you are seeing the room through a camera that allows you to zoom in and out, allowing you to notice your surroundings from different perspectives. Or you might imagine that you are describing the room to a

foreigner from a strange land who has never seen a room like this before. Next, imagine that you are leaving this room and walking across campus to your car, bus, or bike. Describe everything that you notice (e.g., see, hear, smell, etc.) along the way.

Sixth session

Describe the activities and events that you imagine you will be engaged in over the next week, beginning from tomorrow. Include as much detail as possible, as if your future activities were being recorded on a video tape recorder. You may wish to "fast forward" through some activities, while for others you may wish to run through them in "slow motion."

Appendix C

Participant Feedback Form

What has participating in this study been like for you?

What impact, if any, would you say participation in this study has had on you?

Do you have any other comments that you would like to share with the researcher?

Appendix D

Consent to Participate

You are being asked to voluntarily participate in a study entitled "Journal Writing for Individuals Recovering from Romantic Relationship Loss" that is being conducted by a graduate student, Jessica Altrows, as part of the requirements for the Masters in Counselling degree at the University of Victoria. The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of journal writing on psychological well-being for individuals who have experienced the loss of a romantic relationship through breakup or separation.

If you agree to participate you will be asked to complete a series of six journal writing sessions over a period of 3 weeks. Each session is expected to take approximately 20 to 50 minutes to complete and will require that you write about topics specified by the researcher at the start of each session. These topics may require that you write about issues of a personal nature. Your writing samples will remain confidential and anonymous, as detailed further below. The written samples will be retained by the researcher who will read a random sample of written submissions after each session. In addition, at the start and completion of the journal writing sessions you will be asked to complete questionnaires on various measures of psychological well-being. These questionnaires are expected to take a total of approximately 45 minutes to complete.

The sessions will take place in a group setting at the University of Victoria and will be conducted by the primary researcher. The groups will meet solely for the purpose of individual journal writing and testing. These sessions are not intended as a support group or as a form of group therapy, and there will be no group discussion during or after the session. In addition, participants will be requested not to discuss the details of the study with anyone until after the writing sessions and final testing are complete.

A full debriefing of the study will occur at the end of the final testing. You will have the opportunity to discuss your experiences and impressions of the study and to ask any questions that may have arisen for you as a result of your participation in the study. In addition, you will be given the opportunity to hear the results of the study.

There is the possible risk that the journal writing may result in a change in perceptions and attitudes about yourself and other individuals in your life. This change is not expected to be in any way harmful. However, should you experience any unexpected ill effects as a result of journal writing, you may speak to members of the research committee who have professional expertise in counselling and who have agreed to make themselves available for this purpose. The contact numbers for these members will be made available to you by the researcher upon request.

All data (i.e., written submissions and questionnaires) collected in the study will remain confidential. Your name will not be associated with any aspect of the data, and your anonymity will be protected by using a code number to identify all data. You will be asked not to include identifying information about yourself or about third parties in your

writing. There will be <u>no</u> group discussion during or after the sessions. However, given that you will be meeting in a group, it is not possible to protect your anonymity within the group, and others may know or recognize you.

Only the primary researcher (Jessica Altrows), her graduate supervisor (Dr. Geoff Hett), and members of the research committee (Dr. Anne Marshall and Dr. Valerie Kuehne) will have access to the data.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you are free to refuse to participate, to withdraw from it, or to refuse to answer certain questions, without any negative consequences. In the event that you withdraw from the study, your data will be destroyed. Your participation or refusal to participate in the project will not have any effect on your standing or grades at the university.

All of the raw data (i.e., written samples and questionnaires) will be destroyed at the end of the study.

The results of this study will be prepared for presentation at a special meeting with the researcher's graduate supervisor, members of the research committee, and an examiner. In addition, copies of the results of this study will be placed in the University of Victoria Library and in the office of the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies. The results may also be published in a scholarly journal. Your name will not be attached to any published results. An abstract of the study will be made available to research participants upon request.

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, you may contact either Jessica Altrows or Dr. Geoff Hett at (250) 721-7783. You may also contact the Associate Vice President of Research at the University of Victoria if you have any concerns about the study that the student and supervisor cannot help you with. The resources for conducting this study are being provided by Jessica Altrows and by the University of Victoria.

Having understood the above information and been given an opportunity to have my questions answered, I agree to participate in this study:

Signature of Participant _____   Date _____