Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy
2016, Vol. 8, No. 4, 477–486

1942-9681/16/$12.00 http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tra0000133

A Naturalistic Study of Narrative: Exploring the Choice and Impact of Adversity Versus Other Narrative Topics

Sherry Hamby and Elizabeth Taylor
Sewanee: The University of the South

John Grych
Marquette University

Victoria Banyard
University of New Hampshire

Objective: Many narrative interventions require participants to write about trauma and adverse experiences, but some research suggests that open-ended topic prompts can also be effective. In this study, we investigated the topics participants chose to write about in a values-narrative program that offered wide discretion in topic and theme, and explored how that was associated with perceptions of investment and impact. ***Method:*** Participants were 717 individuals (68% women) from the rural South, United States who had participated in a values-narrative program. ***Results:*** Almost half of the narratives (44%) focused on an adverse experience as part of the development of their personal values. Other personal stories were also common (37%), and only 19% wrote a narrative not connected to a personal life experience. Participants who had more exposure to family or peer victimization were more likely to write about adversity. Participants who wrote about adversity and shared their narratives with others reported more positive and fewer negative impacts. Encouragement and more time writing were also associated with better outcomes. ***Conclusion:*** When given the choice of essay topic, participants who chose to write about an adverse event were likely to have had a more meaningful writing experience. Values narratives offer a potentially important opportunity for incorporating narrative into primary prevention programs, because they can be used with groups that include individuals who have and have not experienced adversity. Narratives have been shown to be a powerful psychological intervention and expanding to primary prevention holds considerable promise. Further, they do not require prior disclosure of adversity.

Keywords: trauma, victimization, narrative, prevention, expressive writing

Narrative is a meaning-making process that involves organizing personal experiences into a cohesive story (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007; McLean, Wood, & Breen, 2013). It is well-established that trauma-focused narratives are helpful interventions for many individuals who have been victimized or exposed to other adversity (Cohen & Mannarino, 2008; Cohen, Mannarino, Kliethermes, & Murray, 2012). Research has also shown the benefits of narrative for a range of health and mental health problems (Burton & King, 2008; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Niles, Haltom, Mulvenna, Lieberman, & Stanton, 2014; Pennebaker & Chung, 2011). Many narrative exercises are structured in that they ask people to write about a traumatic experience or other presenting problem (Cohen & Mannarino, 2008; Craft, Davis, & Paulson, 2013; Kliewer et al., 2011; Mosher et al., 2012; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Smyth & Helm, 2003; Young, Rodriguez, & Neighbors, 2013). However, some studies have suggested that writing on other topics can also be beneficial (Burton & King, 2004; Burton & King, 2008; Rosenberg et al., 2002).

Despite widening use of narrative, we know surprisingly little about the writer's experience, because most narrative studies constrain the kind of experiences that participants are asked to write about and how long they can write about them. Researchers are increasingly soliciting client and participant perceptions of a wide range of prevention and intervention programs (e.g., Bloom et al., 2014; Edwards, Rodenhizer-Stämpfli, & Eckstein, 2015; Finkelhor, Vanderminden, Turner, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2014; Hamby, Nix, De Puy, & Monnier, 2012). These studies help improve prevention and intervention by identifying the most and least successful elements of programs from the participant perspective, but such studies are rare for narrative programs. This study builds on this nascent literature by asking participants in a narrative program to provide feedback on their experiences. We explore how common it is to write about adversity when given a choice and whether those choices are affected by trauma history. We also examine whether perceived

This article was published Online First March 28, 2016.

Sherry Hamby and Elizabeth Taylor, Department of Psychology, Sewanee: The University of the South; John Grych, Department of Psychology, Marquette University; Victoria Banyard, Department of Psychology, University of New Hampshire.

This project was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation. The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the John Templeton Foundation.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sherry Hamby, Department of Psychology, Sewanee: The University of the South, 735 University Avenue, Sewanee, TN 38383. E-mail: sherry.hamby@gmail.com

impact varies based on topic, other features of the writing experience, or characteristics of the writer. Better understanding of whether people use narrative exercises to process adversities holds potential for developing narrative as a universal prevention tool to promote well-being.

The Potential of Narrative in a Universal Prevention Context

Even in school-based and other universal prevention settings that serve youth, a high percentage of the population will have already experienced some adversity. Nationally representative data indicate that 60% of youth experience some form of victimization every year (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, & Hamby, 2009). Inattention to this high victimization burden is one limitation of existing prevention programs, which tend to assume—incorrectly—that participants have not yet been exposed to trauma (Hamby & Grych, 2013). However, despite these alarming rates, not all youth have a trauma history, and therefore, existing trauma-focused narrative exercises cannot be used in universal prevention. Nonetheless, given the benefits of narrative, the ease of incorporating narrative into many settings, and concerns about labeling children as victims in some settings, it is worth exploring whether general expressive writing opportunities can help address traumatic experiences. Narrative could be integrated into the emerging emphasis on strengths-based approaches to prevention and resilience promotion (Elias & Leverett, 2011).

Existing Research on Narrative

Social and developmental research on narrative. Substantial evidence indicates that even brief narrative exercises improve mental and physical health in a variety of populations (e.g., Baikie, Geerligs, & Wilhelm, 2012; Facchin, Margola, Molgora, & Revenson, 2014; Guay, Ratelle, Roy, & Litalien, 2010). In fact, narrative has been called the "two-minute miracle" (Burton & King, 2008). Considerable research has operated on the assumption that narrative's benefits come from the focus on trauma. For example, Pennebaker's (1997) original paradigm instructs participants to describe the most traumatic event they ever experienced, which has become a common prompt even outside of formal therapeutic interventions (Baikie et al., 2012; Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005; Smyth & Helm, 2003). However, some evidence suggests that overly directive instructions do not add to the benefits. For example, Rosenberg and colleagues (2002) asked cancer patients to write narratives that focused on their cancer diagnoses, but found that most participants ignored these instructions and wrote about other current stressors instead of or in addition to the cancer diagnosis, still with positive benefits. This literature has established that writing about negative emotional experiences is more beneficial than assigned writing on neutral topics, such as time management (Austenfeld, Paolo, & Stanton, 2006; McLean et al., 2013; Pennebaker, 1997), but it is not known how important it is to focus on adverse experiences versus positive emotional experiences or what people will write about when given the opportunity to choose more or less emotional topics.

Clinical research on narrative. Additional benefits have been identified in research on trauma-focused cognitive–behavioral therapy (TF-CBT; Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006). TF-CBT was developed to ameliorate the negative impacts of traumatic events for children and their caregivers. A central feature of TF-CBT is the construction and processing of a trauma narrative. TF-CBT has revealed evidence of sustained benefits at 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years after treatment (Cohen & Mannarino, 1998; Deblinger, Mannarino, Cohen, Runyon, & Steer, 2011; Deblinger, Mannarino, Cohen, & Steer, 2006). Through narrative, therapists are able to help youth overcome tendencies to avoid thinking or talking about traumatic experiences, identify cognitive distortions, and put the experience into a broader life context (Cohen & Mannarino, 2008; Murray, Cohen, & Mannarino, 2013). Clients are allowed to choose the story format (e.g., writing, oral account dance, song). TF-CBT has several structured sections that begin with asking the patient to decide where to start and how to convey the traumatic story. Afterward, patients are encouraged to share their stories with those they feel comfortable with (Fitzgerald & Cohen, 2012; Runyon & Deblinger, 2014). Although in its original version, the trauma was often presumed to be a single incident or type, more recently, Cohen and colleagues (2012) developed guidelines for incorporating multiple traumatic events (i.e., polyvictimization) into the narrative, expanding its flexibility (see also Kliethermes & Wamser, 2012).

Gaps in Knowledge About Narrative Writing

A naturalistic study of narrative can inform basic questions about which the field currently has surprisingly little information (Banyard, Hamby, de St. Aubin, & Grych, 2015). We know little about how often people choose to write about traumatic experiences when asked to engage in more open-ended expressive writing. Is this a common choice or an unusual inclination that would not be likely without a specific prompt? One of the few studies that varied the prompt from "the most traumatic experience" instructed college students to write about "a current difficulty" instead. The focus on a current problem led to few narratives (<10%) on victimization or other traumatic events (Gortner, Rude, & Pennebaker, 2006). However, the instruction about a current difficulty may have shifted the focus away from past traumas. Another alternative instructed students to write about "the most wonderful experience" with some benefits (Burton & King, 2004; Burton & King, 2008), but this instruction also did not address what people would write about given less specific instructions. The research of Pennebaker and others (Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker & Chung, 2011; Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999) has indicated that writing on an assigned neutral topic such as study skills is less impactful than processing stressful events, but in a naturalistic environment, it seems unlikely that many people would choose to write essays on studying. If it is fairly common for people to write about adversity even without explicit instructions to do so, then this would be promising for universal prevention or self-help programs, because less structured prompts can apply to those with and without a trauma history and without forcing self-disclosure on participants in schools or similar settings.

Features of Narrative Participation

The existing literature also offers little information on other features of the writing experience, including how much time

someone spends on it and whether they receive any feedback or encouragement from others. Researchers in the field need to better understand whether there are participation characteristics that might boost positive effects or ameliorate any negative effects for participants. These are important questions to address for consideration of narrative as a potential universal prevention tool, as they help unpack potential moderating factors that might contribute to benefits or costs of writing exercises.

For example, in many studies, variables such as the amount of writing time and other parameters are fixed. Following Pennebaker's and colleagues' original experimental paradigm (Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990), which involved three 20-min sessions, most narrative prompts instruct people to write for 15–20 min on three to five separate occasions (Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005; Burton & King, 2004; Gortner et al., 2006). Some prompts have been as short as 2 min of writing on two occasions (Burton & King, 2008). These relatively fixed and short-term parameters limit the ability to explore how individuals approach the task. Developmental studies of shared narratives have indicated that sharing between parents and children or others can help storytellers practice narrative cohesion and gain social support (Fivush, 2014). As mentioned, encouraging sharing is also a feature of TF-CBT, and we found it to be an important theme in a qualitative study of narrative writers (Banyard et al., 2015). However, less is known about whether sharing one's narrative adds any benefit to narrative writing exercises.

Demographic Differences in Responses to Narrative

In terms of moving beyond "one size fits all" approaches to treatment, it might be helpful to know which subgroups of the population might most readily respond to narrative exercises and which might be more reluctant to write about their adversities. One study found that Asian participants and those reporting higher levels of ambivalence about emotional expression benefited more from expressive writing (Lu & Stanton, 2010). However, for the most part, individual differences have received scant attention. Even in terms of basic sociodemographic characteristics, we do not know whether girls respond differently to narrative than boys, whether younger children respond differently than older children, or whether race and ethnic identity affect perceptions of the narrative process. Although the literature is too scant to suggest specific hypotheses, exploring whether some subgroups benefit more than others is important to consider from a prevention standpoint or for "scaling up" narrative to broader audiences.

The Current Study

The current study took place in a community that had implemented a values-based narrative program in the schools called the Laws of Life Essay. With more than 100,000 annual participants worldwide, the Laws of Life Essay program is one of the largest school-based programs. This program encourages participants to reflect on and write about their values and how those values developed, with the goal of promoting character development (Elias, 2008; Elias & Leverett, 2011; Veljkovic & Schwartz, 2001). The program is administered in English classes. Students choose a principle or value that is important to them. A range of prompts is available to teachers, such as "I am thankful for all the experiences in my life. However, what shaped me into who I am today was . . ." and "I will never forget the lesson (name) taught me that day in . . ." (Taylor, Jouriles, Brown, Goforth, & Banyard, 2016). None of the prompts specifically mention adversity, but they are designed to encourage students to focus on the most memorable and impactful moments in their lives. The essay is discussed in two to three class periods and students have the opportunity to work on their essays (mostly at home) over the course of a week. Opportunities are provided for students to share their essays with other students and with program organizers when it is completed, which is similar to the sharing encouraged in TF-CBT (Fitzgerald & Cohen, 2012; Runyon & Deblinger, 2014). To our knowledge, this study involved the largest group of narrative participants ever to be included in a research study.

These data allowed us to explore the topic and investment in an expressive writing exercise designed to be personally meaningful (unlike the control groups of some narrative studies), but did not have a mandatory topic. Exploratory retrospective studies such as this one allow for an efficient examination of understudied factors and new research questions (Dishman et al., 2006; Nicholls, Polman, & Levy, 2012), and we explored the exercise and participants' responses to it in a less-structured setting, allowing for wide variation in features such as topic, the amount of time invested, and sharing. Further, although all participants wrote their essays during middle or high school, the age at which they were interviewed for this study ranged from adolescents who had recently completed the expressive writing task to adults for whom some time had passed since they experienced the exercise. This broad age range allowed us to explore both short- and longer term reflections on the impact of the expressive writing experience, as well as to explore statistically whether those varied. We explored how a history of different types of victimization might be associated with topic choice. Finally, we explored whether certain demographic characteristics would be associated with topic choice and investment.

Method

Participants

Participants were 717 people from rural areas in the southern United States who had participated in the Laws of Life narrative program during middle or high school. The data came from a larger study on character strengths and resilience. Age of participants averaged 25.4 years (SD = 10.1) and the sample comprised 68% female and 32% male. Most (71%) of the sample described themselves as White/European American (non-Hispanic), 15% were African American/Black (non-Hispanic), 9% of participants identified as Hispanic/Latino (any race), 5% reported being of more than one race, 0.2% were American Indian/Alaskan Native, 0.3% were Asian, and 0.2% were Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Regarding education, 17% of participants were currently in school, 36% held either a high school diploma or a GED, 6% had dropped out, 21% had some college with no degree and the rest (20%) had an associate's degree or higher. Forty-five percent of participants reported earning $20,000 or less per year (total household income), 36% reported earning $20,000 to $50,000, and 19% reported earning $50,000 or more. Most of the sample (75%) lived in small towns with a population of 2,500–20,000 people, 21% of partic-

ipants lived in rural areas with populations of fewer than 2,500 people, and the others (4%) lived in more populous areas. Education and income data were consistent with census data for the counties represented in the study.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through a range of advertising techniques in 2013 and 2014. The majority of participants (66%) were recruited at local community events, such as festivals and county fairs. Word-of-mouth was the second most productive recruitment strategy, accounting for 20% of participants. The remaining 14% were recruited through other strategies, including flyers, newspaper and radio ads, and direct mail. This wide range of recruitment strategies allowed us to reach segments of the population rarely included in psychology research. Interviewers offered to meet participants in multiple locations throughout the community (including our research center, other campus locations, and their homes), during daytime or evening hr, to provide the widest range of people an opportunity to participate. This region of Appalachia still has limited cellular and Internet service; therefore, the survey software, Snap10, was specifically chosen to operate without Internet connectivity and the survey was self-administered on laptops and iPads. An audio option was available. Technical problems (such as iPads overheating) and time limitations prevented some individuals from completing the survey; overall, the completion rate was 85% and the median completion time was 53 min. This is an excellent result by current survey standards, especially considering the survey length, with current completion rates often under 70% (Abt/SRBI, 2012) and sometimes under 50% (Galesic & Bosnjak, 2009). All participants received $30 Walmart gift cards and information on local resources. All procedures were conducted in accordance with APA ethical principles and approved by the IRB of the study's home institution.

Measures

Positive and negative narrative impact (adapted from Pennebaker et al., 1990) were assessed with four questions based on Pennebaker and colleagues' widely used items, adapted slightly for this classroom experience. "Overall, how personal was the essay that you wrote?" (*Very* to *not at all personal*); "In the time since the Laws of Life Essay, how often have you thought about what you wrote?" (Not at all to *more than 10 times*); "Looking back on the Laws of Life Essay, how much do you feel that the experience had a positive effect on you?" (*Very positive* to *not at all positive*); and "Looking back on the Laws of Life Essay, how much do you feel that the experience had a negative effect on you?" (*Very negativ*e to *not at all negative*). The first three items were combined to create a standardized index of positive responses, and to explore negative reactions, the last item was examined separately.

Participation characteristics included one additional item from Pennebaker (1997) on sharing the essay with others: "Not counting required class discussion, how often did you talk with other people about what you wrote?" (0 to *more than 10 conversations*). Four additional questions were developed to explore the effect of the ways the assignment was presented and how much effort they put into it, including whether the essay was required or optional, how much time they spent working on their essay (*less than an hr* to *more than 5 hr*), and whether anyone encouraged them while they were writing and if so, who.

Narrative topic was assessed with one structured and one open-ended item. The structured item asked participants to choose from seven categories derived from a review of previously published Laws of Life Essays (Meyer, Meyer, & Veljkovic, 2003; Veljkovic & Schwartz, 2001). These categories were classified into three broader topic areas: adversity (e.g., death or serious illness of a family member, being bullied or picked on by someone at school, dealing with a hard time in life); personal (e.g., an inspiring person they know, how a parent influenced them, or a trip that made an impact); and impersonal (e.g., a famous quote or famous person who had inspired them). Participants could also have chosen to respond *Other* to this structured question, fill in an answer, and were also asked to respond to an open-ended item, "What Law of Life did you focus on?" These supplemented the structured categories. If an adversity was mentioned either in the structured or open-ended questions, the topic was coded as adversity. If no adverse experience was mentioned, but a personal experience was indicated in either the structured question or open-ended topic, it was coded as personal. Other topics were coded as impersonal.

The Narrative Engagement Index-Short Form (NEI-SF; Roberts, Hamby, Grych, & Banyard, 2015) assesses an author's perception of reflection, reappraisal, and disclosure in a narrative writing experience. These 10 items were developed based on theory and data. First, we drew on the narrative literature regarding what comprises engagement in narrative tasks and exercises. Second, we examined past essay writers' reflections of their personal experiences in the Laws of Life program (Veljkovic & Schwartz, 2001) and qualitative interviews with a subset of participants in the current sample (Banyard et al., 2015) to identify how they described their approach to and involvement in the writing process. A sample item is "How much did writing the Laws of Life Essay help you understand yourself better?" Items are scored on a 4-point Likert scale (*very much*, *somewhat*, *a little*, and *not at all*), with higher scores indicating more engagement in reflection and reappraisal. Internal consistency was very good ($\alpha = .94$). Construct validity was established with correlations with related constructs such as meaning making (Roberts et al., 2015). The short form correlated highly with the full NEI, $r = .97$.

Posttraumatic growth includes nine items that assess positive outcomes following adverse or stressful events (adapted from Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). A sample item is "I changed my priorities about what is important in life." Response categories were a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *Not true about me* to *Mostly true about me*. Internal consistency was very good ($\alpha = .90$) and construct validity was established with moderate to strong correlations with subjective well-being ($r = .56$) and purpose ($r = .60$).

The Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire–Key Domains Form includes 20 items assessing lifetime history of a range of interpersonal victimization types (adapted from Finkelhor, Hamby, Ormrod, & Turner, 2005; Hamby, Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2004). A sample item is "During your childhood, did one of your parents get hit or pushed by another parent?" Dichotomous items (*yes* or *no*) were summed to create victimization scores. Internal consistency α in this sample was .91 and construct validity has been established, with moderate correlations with trauma symptoms (average $r = .29$; Finkelhor et al., 2005). In this sample, we focused

on incidents that were reported to occur before age 12 and created two scores, one for family-perpetrated incidents and one for peer-perpetrated incidents, both of which included witnessing the victimization of others by a family member or peer. In this vulnerable sample, most reported exposure to victimization before age 12, including 59.9% by a family member and 79.9% by a peer.

Demographic information, including information on participant's age, gender, race/ethnic identity, urbanicity of residence, and household income, was also collected (full text for all items is available at http://lifepathsresearch.org).

Results

Narrative Topic Choice and Responses to the Narrative Program

Adversity was the most commonly chosen topic, reported by 44.1% of the sample, or more than two in five essays. Personal essays about some important person or experience in their own lives was next most common, reported by 37.2% of participants. Impersonal topics about famous people or sayings were relatively infrequently chosen, reported by only 18.7% of participants.

The results indicate that the majority of participants were invested in the writing process. About two in five participants (41.4%) reported that they worked for 3 or more hr on the essay, and 28.7% said they worked for about 2 hr on it. Only 7.2% reported working less than 1 hr on it, and 22.7% reported about an hr of effort, suggesting that the essay time allotted in many experimental studies has been shorter than what the majority of youths do in a less structured setting. More than three out of four students (76.5%) reported talking about their essays with others, in addition to any required class discussion, and almost half of the students reported three or more additional conversations (44.8%). See Table 1.

The responses to the items adapted from Pennebaker (1997) indicated good investment, with about two of three (64.2%) reporting that their essays were somewhat or very personal, and about three of four (73.9%) reporting that they had thought about their essays since they had written them. Over half (51.5%) of the sample said they had thought about the essay three or more times since writing them. Almost everyone (88.6%) reported at least some positive benefit from it. From the NEI, the most highly endorsed items were items on "a chance to focus on the values that are most important to you" (78% *somewhat* or *very much*) and "a chance to express your thoughts and feelings" (75.7% *somewhat* or *very much*). Although a nontrivial percentage also reported some negative feelings (26.1%), only 2.2% reported only negative responses and no positive responses, and even most of those reports (69% of that subgroup) were *a little negative*, rather than *highly negative*. In the end, of 717 participants, only four individuals reported *somewhat* or *very negative* effects with *no positive* effects.

Table 1
Descriptors of Narrative Topic Choice, Participation Characteristics, and Responses to the Narrative Program

Variable	Percentage
Type of essay	
Adversity	44.1
Personal	37.2
Impersonal	18.7
Essay was required	
Yes	67.3
No	32.7
Time spent on essay	
More than 5 hr	15.4
About 3–5 hr	26.0
About 2 hr	28.7
About an hr	22.7
Less than an hr	7.2
Number of conversations about the essay	
>10 conversations	9.5
5–9 conversations	11.0
3 or 4 conversations	24.3
2 conversations	18.6
1 conversation	13.1
No conversations	23.5
Received encouragement	
Yes	56.9
No	43.1
If yes, who encouraged:	
School personnel	47.3
Family or friends	52.7

Associations of Impact With Participation Characteristics and Narrative Topic

To explore whether the classroom presentation of the narrative program affected participants' responses, we used multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) to assess the effect of several features on our four indicators of impact (see Table 2). Topic was associated with all four outcome indicators; multivariate $F(12, 1692) = 8.36$, $p < .001$. Participants who wrote about an adversity reported more positive and less negative impact, especially in comparison with participants who wrote on impersonal topics. People who shared their essays with others (outside of required class discussion) and who received encouragement also had better outcomes for all four indicators; $F(4, 571) = 21.52$, $p < .001$. For the most part, encouragement from teachers or other school personnel was similar to encouragement from family or friends, and both were superior to no encouragement, although for narrative engagement, teachers were associated with significantly higher ratings than others; $F(4, 575) = 10.02$, $p < .001$. Those who spent 2 or more hr on the essay also reported more positive impact on all three positive indicators, but they did not report fewer negative outcomes than those who wrote more briefly; $F(4, 567) = 10.01$, $p < .001$. In contrast, those who reported that the essay was required (vs. optional) reported somewhat less positive impact on two of four indicators; $F(4, 569) = 2.76$, $p < .05$. Finally, no significant differences in impact were observed for essay participation in middle school versus high school; $F(4, 541) = 1.65$, $p = .16$.

Factors Associated With Choosing to Write on Adversity

We next explored whether we could identify correlates of the choice to write on an adverse topic. We used logistic regression analysis to explore the associations of demographic characteristics, trauma history, and participation characteristics with topic choice. See Table 3 for odds ratios. Each increase in the number of types of family or peer victimization increased by 9% and 8%, respectively, was associated with the chances that a participant would write on an adversity. No other characteristics were significant.

Table 2
The Association of Narrative Topic Choice and Participation Characteristics With Perceived Impact of the Narrative Program

Variable	Outcomes			
	Narrative engagement *M* (*SD*)	Pennebaker positive index *M* (*SD*)	Pennebaker negative index *M* (*SD*)	Posttraumatic growth *M* (*SD*)
Type of Essay				
Adversity	.22 (.71)$^{***}_{a}$	.22 (.74)$^{***}_{a}$	−.05 (1.11)$^{*}_{a}$	.06 (.79)$^{*}_{a}$
Personal	.06 (.77)$_{a}$	−.00 (.78)$_{b}$	.12 (.84)$_{ab}$	.02 (.74)$_{a}$
Impersonal	−.54 (.77)$_{b}$	−.50 (.81)$_{c}$	.20 (.69)$_{b}$	−.20 (.82)$_{b}$
Number of Conversations about Essay				
1 + Conversations	.12 (.75)***	.14 (.77)***	.01 (.99)**	.04 (.75)**
0 Conversations	−.39 (.81)	−.52 (.77)	.28 (.67)	−.16 (.86)
Received Encouragement (by anyone)				
Yes	.23 (.71)***	.18 (.79)***	.00 (1.05)*	.10 (.71)***
No	−.27 (.82)	−.26 (.79)	.16 (.78)	−.15 (.85)
Person who encouraged				
School personnel	.33 (.62)$^{***}_{a}$	.11 (.80)$^{***}_{a}$	−.12 (1.15)$^{*}_{a}$	.08 (.73)$^{**}_{a}$
Family or friends	.14 (.77)$_{b}$	.24 (.79)$_{a}$	.10 (.95)$_{ab}$	.11 (.69)$_{a}$
No One	−.26 (.81)$_{c}$	−.25 (.78)$_{b}$	.14 (.79)$_{b}$	−.14 (.85)$_{b}$
Time Spent on Essay				
2 + Hours	.11 (.75)***	.09 (.81)***	.10 (.93)	.03 (.76)*
1 Hour or Less	−.26 (.84)	−.28 (.80)	−.03 (.99)	−.11 (.85)
Essay Required				
Yes	−.04 (.82)*	−.08 (.81)**	.08 (.96)	−.01 (.77)
No	.12 (.73)	.15 (.80)	.02 (.91)	.01 (.78)
Grade Level When Participated				
Middle School	.08 (.75)	.03 (.79)	.09 (.90)	−.03 (.80)
High School	−.05 (.84)	−.06 (.84)	.02 (1.02)	.00 (.78)

Note. All measures converted to *z* scores for comparability. Different subscripts indicate significantly different means for three-category variables.
* $p = < .05$. ** $p = < .01$. *** $p = < .001$.

Multivariate Analysis of Perceived Impact

Finally, to explore which of these factors had the strongest unique associations with our four outcome indicators and to determine how much variability in perceived impact we could explain, we conducted multivariate regressions with four outcomes, narrative engagement, Pennebaker (1997) positive index, negative impact, and posttraumatic growth, as dependent variables and demographics, victimization history, and narrative characteristics as the predictors. See Table 4 for β and R^2 values.

Table 3
Logistic Regression Analysis of Narrative Topic Choice and Participant Characteristics

Variable	Adversity chosen as topic of essay	
	OR	95% CI
Age of participant	1.00	[.98, 1.02]
Gender	1.02	[.69, 1.50]
Black/African American	1.33	[.81, 2.19]
Latino/a	.54	[.28, 1.06]
Peer victimization	1.09*	[1.0, 1.19]
Family victimization	1.08**	[1.02, 1.14]
Essay was required	1.32	[.89, 1.92]
Time spent on essay	.95	[.88, 2.06]
Number of conversations about essay	1.01	[.45, 1.12]
Received encouragement	1.06	[.70, 1.50]

Note. $N = 543$; Black/African American and Latino/a variables were dichotomized against all other options. R^2 for total model = .07.
* $p = < .05$. ** $p = < .01$.

The regression accounted for 27% of the variance in narrative engagement. Participants who wrote on an adversity or personal topic reported higher engagement (with impersonal topics the referent category). Essay characteristics accounted for most (23%) of the 27% explained variance: Sharing, encouragement, and more time writing were all associated with more narrative engagement. Female and African American participants reported higher engagement than others, but together those only accounted for 3% of the variance. Similar results were observed for the Pennebaker (1997) positive outcome index, with that regression accounting for 31% of the variance, primarily due to essay characteristics. No demographic or trauma-history characteristics were associated with positive impact on the Pennebaker index. Few characteristics were associated with negative outcomes and less variance was explained, perhaps due to floor effects. However, notably writing on an adversity, sharing the narrative, and a history of family victimization were also significantly associated with a less negative response. Participants' current posttraumatic growth was also significantly associated with writing on adversity and sharing their essays. More family victimization was significantly associated with lower posttraumatic growth.

Discussion

As far as we are aware, this was the first study to show that adversity is the most commonly chosen topic when participants are given free rein to write about any value, instead of the common

Table 4
Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses of Factors That Impact an Essay Writer on Four Outcomes: Narrative Engagement, Pennebaker Positive Index, Pennebaker Negative Index, and Posttraumatic Growth

	Outcomes							
	Narrative engagement		Pennebaker positive index		Pennebaker negative index		Posttraumatic growth	
Predictor	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.03		.01		.01		.02	
Age of participant		−.03		.01		.04		.05
Gender		.13**		.08		.07		.11
Black/African American		.10*		.04		−.06		.02
Latino/a		.08		−.01		.02		−.01
Step 2	.00		.01		.02		.00	
Peer victimization		.00		.05		.08		.05
Family victimization		.05		.08		−.13**		−.03**
Step 3	.23		.29		.05		.03	
Essay required		.06		.10**		.02		−.02
Time spent on essay		.14**		.13**		.07		.05
Number of conversations about essay		.17***		.34***		−.16***		.01***
Received encouragement		.19***		.13**		−.04		.11
Adversity essay topic		.36***		.28***		−.12*		.15*
Personal essay topic		.26***		.16**		.00		.08
Total R^2	.27		.31		.07		.05	

Note. Black/African American and Latino/a variables were dichotomized against all other options.
* $p = < .05$. ** $p = < .01$. *** $p = < .001$.

instruction to write about their most traumatic experience. Notably, participants who wrote about an adversity reported more positive outcomes and also fewer negative (unintended or backlash) effects from the essay writing experience than others. Other promising features of narrative exercises include sharing the narrative with others, receiving encouragement while writing, and spending more time on the essay (2 or more hr was beneficial, longer than the 1 hr that is typical in many studies). This study also showed that individuals who reported more extensive victimization histories prior to the narrative exercise were more likely to focus on an adversity than others. This suggests that values narratives have potential as a prevention and self-help tool, as we elucidate in more detail below. Those who do not have such a history can write about something else personal, which also seems to have positive benefits. The values-focused prompt yielded more narratives on adversity than instructions to focus on a current problem in another study (Gortner et al., 2006), suggesting the values approach might be better for prevention and self-help purposes. This was also the first study, as far as we are aware, that explored narrative in a low-income, rural population. Many prior studies on narrative have been conducted with college students and others who might be expected to be relatively experienced writers (at least with respect to the general population). Our results indicate that narrative is beneficial, even in one of the most disadvantaged United States communities.

Narrative Appears to Be an Appropriate Intervention for Many Sociodemographic Groups

We were largely unable to detect differences in narrative topic choice or impact for some key sociodemographic variables, including age, gender, race, and ethnicity. It is good news that narrative appears to have similar impacts for many youth, although these patterns need to be replicated. We observed only two differences. Female and African American participants reported somewhat more narrative engagement than other participants, but this finding was not observed across other outcomes. Further, the features of the essay program and the participants' effort accounted for far more variance even for narrative engagement; all of the sociodemographic characteristics together explained only 3% of the variance in narrative engagement, whereas essay features explained 27% of the variance in that analysis.

Strengths and Limitations

These findings should be considered in light of the limitations and strengths of this study. In terms of limitations, this was a retrospective study. However, retrospective studies are cost-effective, efficient ways of exploring new research questions (Dishman et al., 2006; Nicholls et al., 2012). A cross-sectional approach is commonly used to explore perceptions and reactions to prevention programs (Bloom et al., 2014; Edwards et al., 2015; Finkelhor et al., 2014; Hamby et al., 2012). We were unable to identify whether essay writers were more likely to seek other types of intervention. Future researchers would also benefit from using variables in addition to self-report. We identified several promising features that can be further studied in more resource-intensive randomized controlled trials. Our approach allowed us to include a larger sample than the majority of existing narrative studies, which gave us more statistical power to explore new constructs. The values focus of the Laws of Life program might encourage more essays on adversity than other prompts, and alternative prompts should be explored. One benefit of our study was our rural, economically disadvantaged population. Many narrative studies have relied on college students or other relatively advantaged populations. Although this sample had some racial and

ethnic diversity, particularly with regard to European American, African American, and Latino participants, more could be done to explore narrative in more sociocultural groups. Our sample had more female than male participants and future research could further explore gender differences.

Research Implications

Given the power of narrative, previously studied elements are fairly limited. More could be done to explore program parameters to optimize their impact. Now that some potentially important parameters have been identified, it would be worthwhile to invest in more resource-intensive research designs, such as program evaluations that involve head-to-head comparisons of different types of narrative programs. These studies should not be limited to what is designed to be an ineffective control group, but rather compare treatment-as-usual narrative paradigms to those that systematically manipulate variables that we have shown may influence impact, such as longer time spent writing and sharing with more people. Future research could also further explore differences between writing on adversity and writing on other personally meaningful topics. More could be done to explore whether there are ways to adapt narrative exercises that make them more or less relevant for certain sociodemographic groups. Better understanding of negative perceptions is also an important area for future study.

Clinical and Prevention Implications

We believe that the most important implications of this study are for prevention and intervention. A narrative component that allows youth to connect the messages of resilience and violence prevention with their own life history may be a way to increase the modest effects of most classroom-based prevention curricula and to offer help for victims without requiring explicit help seeking or diagnoses.

What Is the Optimal Way to Introduce a Narrative Exercise?

Make room for adversity. Implicit in the Pennebaker (1997), TF-CBT and similar paradigms is the idea that writing about trauma is good for you. However, two pieces of information are missing from past directive approaches that instruct or even require people to focus on adversity. First, directive approaches do not tell us whether people will choose to focus on adversity. This is important for understanding resilience—most people recover from adversity without the benefit of formal therapeutic intervention (Harvey, 1996). We still understand little about how they do so. The current study findings suggest that individuals who experience adversity seem willing to take advantage of opportunities to process and gain perspective on those experiences. Qualitative interviews with a subset of this sample also revealed that this was a commonly mentioned value by participants (Banyard et al., 2015). Finding innovative ways to give people access to those opportunities may help make communities more supportive of resilience processes.

Second, most past research has compared trauma-focused narratives with topics that were designed to be less meaningful, such as study skills. As far as we are aware, this is the first study to compare adversity to topics that were also expected to have an impact on character development. Adversity appears to be one of the better topic choices, with better responses observed for all four outcomes after controlling for prior victimization and other characteristics. Consistent with some past research, we found similar results for personal but nontraumatic and adversity topics in some analyses (Baikie et al., 2012; Burton & King, 2008). However, although personal topics were associated with higher perceived impact than impersonal ones, they were not as consistently associated with better outcomes as focusing on adversity. Many people who experience adversity take the opportunity to process it through writing, but a values-based approach also makes the narrative exercise available to those without having experienced significant adversity, as they can also receive benefits from writing about other personally meaningful topics.

Connect to individuals' life experiences. One important aspect of writing about adversity is the personal connection to one's life story. Other types of personally focused narratives are also beneficial (Burton & King, 2004; Rosenberg et al., 2002). In these data, impersonal topics, such as reflections on famous people or general virtuous principles, had little impact in comparison to personal or adversity topics. We believe this is also important for considering the future of violence prevention, because most current prevention curricula focus on teaching general principles or debunking myths. Often, this material is presented without any connection to participants' actual attitudes or values. The general emphasis on attitudes that many youths already reject or knowledge that many youths already possess (Finkelhor et al., 2014), may be one reason why so many prevention programs have modest, if any, impact on behavior (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Shorey et al., 2012). The well-established "self-reference effect" demonstrates that information connected to the self is better learned and retained than other information (e.g., Kuiper & Rogers, 1979; Sui & Zhu, 2005), but this principle has not been incorporated into prevention. (At least implicitly, it is an inherent aspect of psychotherapy.) As we think about crafting the next generation of prevention programs, we should do more to build on this principle. Writing tasks can be an important strategy to facilitate this process.

Taking one's time and sharing one's story. This naturalistic study of narrative indicates that most people spend more time than the 60 min that is used in the paradigm developed by Pennebaker (1997) and used by many others—and considerably more than the even shorter narrative interventions in some studies (Burton & King, 2008). Further, the longer they spent writing, the more benefits they reported. Our results suggest that 2 or more hr of writing time is optimal, with some indication, which needs replicating, that benefits max out around 5 hr. Still, it is notable that a nontrivial portion of writers devoted that much time to the task. Sharing one's story with others was also associated with more perceived benefits and fewer adverse consequences. Past research on sharing stories has suggested that this offers practice in narrative cohesion and improvements in social support (Fivush, 2014). In other analyses from this sample, participants described the importance of sharing their stories—including hoping that others could learn from their experiences and a sense of empowerment from using their voices (Banyard et al., 2015). The possibilities that narratives may help others in one's social network is another

topic for future research and potentially another way to help greater numbers of people recover from trauma.

References

Abt/SRBI. (2013). *Second National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV II): Methods report*. Silver Spring, MD: Author. http://www.srbi.com/Newsroom/Feature-Stories/2013/National-Survey-of-Children%E2%80%99s-Exposure-to-Violence.aspx

Anderson, L. A., & Whiston, S. C. (2005). Sexual assault education programs: A meta-analytic examination of their effectiveness. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 29,* 374–388. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2005.00237.x

Austenfeld, J. L., Paolo, A. M., & Stanton, A. L. (2006). Effects of writing about emotions versus goals on psychological and physical health among third-year medical students. *Journal of Personality, 74,* 267–286. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2005.00375.x

Baikie, K. A., Geerligs, L., & Wilhelm, K. (2012). Expressive writing and positive writing for participants with mood disorders: An online randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 136,* 310–319. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2011.11.032

Baikie, K. A., & Wilhelm, K. (2005). Emotional and physical health benefits of expressive writing. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment, 11,* 338–346. http://dx.doi.org/10.1192/apt.11.5.338

Banyard, V., Hamby, S., de St. Aubin, E., & Grych, J. (2015). Values narratives for personal growth formative evaluation of the Laws of Life Essay Program. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. Advance online publication. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022167815618494

Bloom, T. L., Glass, N. E., Case, J., Wright, C., Nolte, K., & Parsons, L. (2014). Feasibility of an online safety planning intervention for rural and urban pregnant abused women. *Nursing Research, 63,* 243–251. http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/NNR.0000000000000036

Burton, C., & King, L. A. (2004). The health benefits of writing about intensely positive experiences. *Journal of Research in Personality, 38,* 150–163. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566(03)00058-8

Burton, C. M., & King, L. A. (2008). Effects of (very) brief writing on health: The two-minute miracle. *British Journal of Health Psychology, 13,* 9–14. http://dx.doi.org/10.1348/135910707X250910

Cohen, J. A., & Mannarino, A. P. (1998). Factors that mediate treatment outcome of sexually abused preschool children: Six- and 12-month follow-up. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 37,* 44–51. http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/00004583-199801000-00016

Cohen, J. A., & Mannarino, A. P. (2008). Trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy for children and parents. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 13,* 158–162. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-3588.2008.00502.x

Cohen, J. A., Mannarino, A. P., & Deblinger, E. (2006). *Treating trauma and traumatic grief in children and adolescents*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Cohen, J. A., Mannarino, A. P., Kliethermes, M., & Murray, L. A. (2012). Trauma-focused CBT for youth with complex trauma. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 36,* 528–541. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2012.03.007

Craft, M. A., Davis, G. C., & Paulson, R. M. (2013). Expressive writing in early breast cancer survivors. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 69,* 305–315. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2012.06008.x

Deblinger, E., Mannarino, A. P., Cohen, J. A., Runyon, M. K., & Steer, R. A. (2011). Trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy for children: Impact of the trauma narrative and treatment length. *Depression and Anxiety, 28,* 67–75. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/da.20744

Deblinger, E., Mannarino, A. P., Cohen, J. A., & Steer, R. A. (2006). A follow-up study of a multisite, randomized, controlled trial for children with sexual abuse-related PTSD symptoms. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 45,* 1474–1484. http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/01.chi.0000240839.56114.bb

Dishman, R. K., Hales, D. P., Pfeiffer, K. A., Felton, G. A., Saunders, R., Ward, D. S., . . . Pate, R. R. (2006). Physical self-concept and self-esteem mediate cross-sectional relations of physical activity and sport participation with depression symptoms among adolescent girls. *Health Psychology, 25,* 396–407. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0278-6133.25.3.396

Edwards, K. M., Rodenhizer-Stämpfli, K. A., & Eckstein, R. P. (2015). Bystander action in situations of dating and sexual aggression: A mixed methodological study of high school youth. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 44,* 2321–2336. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10964-015-0307-z

Elias, M. (2008). Laws of Life: A literacy-based intervention for social-emotional and character development and resilience. *Perspectives in Education, 26,* 75–79.

Elias, M., & Leverett, L. (2011). Consultation to urban schools for improvements in academics and behavior: No alibis. No excuses. No exceptions. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation, 21,* 28–45. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2010.522877

Facchin, F., Margola, D., Molgora, S., & Revenson, T. A. (2014). Effects of benefit-focused versus standard expressive writing on adolescents' self-concept during the high school transition. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 24,* 131–144. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/jora.12040

Finkelhor, D., Hamby, S. L., Ormrod, R., & Turner, H. (2005). The Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire: Reliability, validity, and national norms. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 29,* 383–412. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2004.11.001

Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., Ormrod, R., & Hamby, S. L. (2009). Violence, abuse, and crime exposure in a national sample of children and youth. *Pediatrics, 124,* 1411–1423. http://dx.doi.org/10.1542/peds.2009-0467

Finkelhor, D., Vanderminden, J., Turner, H., Shattuck, A., & Hamby, S. (2014). Youth exposure to violence prevention programs in a national sample. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 38,* 677–686. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2014.01.010

Fitzgerald, M. M., & Cohen, J. A. (2012). Trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy. In P. Goodyear-Brown (Ed.), *Handbook of child sexual abuse: Identification, assessment, and treatment* (pp. 199–228). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Fivush, R. (2014). Emotional content of parent-child conversations about the past. In C. Nelson (Ed.), *Memory and affect in development* (Vol. 26, pp. 39–78). New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Galesic, M., & Bosnjak, M. (2009). Effects of questionnaire length on participation and indicators of response quality in a web survey. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 73,* 349–360. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfp031

Gortner, E.-M., Rude, S. S., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2006). Benefits of expressive writing in lowering rumination and depressive symptoms. *Behavior Therapy, 37,* 292–303. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2006.01.004

Guay, F., Ratelle, C. F., Roy, A., & Litalien, D. (2010). Academic self-concept, autonomous academic motivation, and academic achievement: Mediating and additive effects. *Learning and Individual Differences, 20,* 644–653. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2010.08.001

Hamby, S., Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R., & Turner, H. (2004). *The Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ): Administration and scoring manual*. Durham, NH: Crimes Against Children Research Center.

Hamby, S., & Grych, J. (2013). *The web of violence: Exploring connections among different forms of interpersonal violence and abuse*. New York, NY: Springer. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-5596-3

Hamby, S., Nix, K., De Puy, J., & Monnier, S. (2012). Adapting dating violence prevention to francophone Switzerland: A story of intra-western cultural differences. *Violence and Victims, 27,* 33–42. http://dx.doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.27.1.33

Harvey, M. R. (1996). An ecological view of psychological trauma and trauma recovery. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 9,* 3–23. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/jts.2490090103

Kliethermes, M., & Wamser, R. (2012). Adolescents with complex trauma. In J. A. Cohen, A. P. Mannarino, & E. Deblinger (Eds.), *Trauma-focused CBT for children and adolescents: Treatment applications* (pp. 175–196). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Kliewer, W., Lepore, S. J., Farrell, A. D., Allison, K. W., Meyer, A. L., Sullivan, T. N., & Greene, A. Y. (2011). A school-based expressive writing intervention for at-risk urban adolescents' aggressive behavior and emotional lability. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 40,* 693–705. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2011.597092

Kuiper, N. A., & Rogers, T. B. (1979). Encoding of personal information: Self–other differences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37,* 499–514. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.37.4.499

Lu, Q., & Stanton, A. L. (2010). How benefits of expressive writing vary as a function of writing instructions, ethnicity and ambivalence over emotional expression. *Psychology & Health, 25,* 669–684. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08870440902883196

McAdams, D., & McLean, K. (2013). Narrative identity. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 22,* 233–238. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0963721413475622

McLean, K. C., Pasupathi, M., & Pals, J. L. (2007). Selves creating stories creating selves: A process model of self-development. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 11,* 262–278. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1088868307301034

McLean, K., Wood, B., & Breen, A. (2013). Reflecting on a difficult life narrative construction in vulnerable adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 28,* 431–452. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0743558413484355

Meyer, S., Meyer, J., & Veljkovic, P. (Eds). (2003). *Teen ink: What matters* (Vol. 5). Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications.

Mosher, C. E., Duhamel, K. N., Lam, J., Dickler, M., Li, Y., Massie, M. J., & Norton, L. (2012). Randomised trial of expressive writing for distressed metastatic breast cancer patients. *Psychology & Health, 27,* 88–100. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2010.551212

Murray, L. K., Cohen, J. A., & Mannarino, A. P. (2013). Trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy for youth who experience continuous traumatic exposure. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 19,* 180–195. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0032533

Nicholls, A. R., Polman, R. C., & Levy, A. R. (2012). A path analysis of stress appraisals, emotions, coping, and performance satisfaction among athletes. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 13,* 263–270. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2011.12.003

Niles, A. N., Haltom, K. E., Mulvenna, C. M., Lieberman, M. D., & Stanton, A. L. (2014). Randomized controlled trial of expressive writing for psychological and physical health: The moderating role of emotional expressivity. *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping, 27,* 1–17. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2013.802308. Erratum: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2013.815449

Pennebaker, J. W. (1997). Writing about emotional experiences as a therapeutic process. *Psychological Science, 8,* 162–166. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.1997.tb00403.x

Pennebaker, J. W., & Chung, C. (2011). Expressive writing: Connections to physical and mental health, *Oxford Handbook of Health Psychology* (pp. 417–437). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Pennebaker, J. W., Colder, M., & Sharp, L. K. (1990). Accelerating the coping process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58,* 528–537. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.58.3.528

Pennebaker, J. W., & Seagal, J. D. (1999). Forming a story: The health benefits of narrative. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 55,* 1243–1254. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-4679(199910)55:10<1243::AID-JCLP6>3.0.CO;2-N

Roberts, L., Hamby, S., Grych, J., & Banyard, V. (2015). Narrative engagement: The importance of assessing individual investment in expressive writing. *American Journal of Social Sciences, 3,* 96–103.

Rosenberg, H. J., Rosenberg, S. D., Ernstoff, M. S., Wolford, G. L., Amdur, R. J., Elshamy, M. R., . . . Pennebaker, J. W. (2002). Expressive disclosure and health outcomes in a prostate cancer population. *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine, 32,* 37–53. http://dx.doi.org/10.2190/AGPF-VB1G-U82E-AE8C

Runyon, M. K., & Deblinger, E. (2014). *Combined parent–child cognitive behavioral therapy (CPC-CBT): An approach to empower families at-risk for child physical abuse*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Shorey, R. C., Zucosky, H., Brasfield, H., Febres, J., Cornelius, T. L., Sage, C., & Stuart, G. L. (2012). Dating violence prevention programming: Directions for future interventions. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 17,* 289–296. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2012.03.001

Smyth, J., & Helm, R. (2003). Focused expressive writing as self-help for stress and trauma. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 59,* 227–235. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/jclp.10144

Sui, J., & Zhu, Y. (2005). Five-year-olds can show the self-reference advantage. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 29,* 382–387. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/01650250500172673

Taylor, E., Jouriles, E., Brown, R., Goforth, K., & Banyard, V. (2016). Narrative writing exercises for promoting health among adolescents: Promises and pitfalls. *Psychology of Violence, 6,* 57–63. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/vio0000023

Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (1996). The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory: Measuring the positive legacy of trauma. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 9,* 455–471. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/jts.2490090305

Veljkovic, P., & Schwartz, A. J. (2001). *Writing from the heart: Young people share their wisdom*. Radnor, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.

Young, C. M., Rodriguez, L. M., & Neighbors, C. (2013). Expressive writing as a brief intervention for reducing drinking intentions. *Addictive Behaviors, 38,* 2913–2917. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2013.08.025

Received July 9, 2015
Revision received February 10, 2016
Accepted February 17, 2016 ■