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Who benefits from disclosure? Exploration of attachment style differences in the effects of expressing emotions

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Abstract

Pennebaker's disclosure paradigm is a powerful manipulation: writing or talking about emotional experiences has positive effects on health. Nevertheless, the effect does not work for all people and some studies, including those of the highly emotional event of bereavement, have failed to demonstrate any effect at all. This paper reviews empirical evidence and proposes an integrative model to help explain discrepant findings and assess individual differences in the manipulation's effectiveness. Taking bereavement as exemplary of an attachment-related loss experience, it examines the relationship between styles of attachment, internal representations of the self and other, and patterns of disclosure in the coping process. Research has shown disturbances in disclosure among insecurely attached persons. We argue that secure persons are less likely to benefit from the disclosure paradigm, since they are better able to disclose in ways that further the adjustment process in their everyday lives. Targeting persons with insecure attachment styles and providing attachment-style-specific disclosure instructions are likely to increase the power of the manipulation. Our examination of these individual difference patterns is compatible with recent cognitive and linguistic analyses underlying the disclosure paradigm's impact on health.

1. Introduction

> "Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break."
> [Shakespeare, Macbeth]

> "Grief, keep within and scorn to show but tears... Distain to sigh, for so can slender cares, Which but from idle causes, grow."
> [Line from the 16th Century poet Danyel]

Is it beneficial to our health and well-being to share the troubles of stressful life events such as bereavement, as Shakespeare advocates, or, should we contain our grief, to avoid an incremental effect on our negative emotions, as the words of Danyel suggest? Research by Pennebaker and colleagues during the last two decades indicates that disclosure about upsetting experiences, through writing or talking, is beneficial to one's health (e.g., Pennebaker, 1997a, 1997b). This positive effect of emotional expression has been shown to pertain to diverse domains, including

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varied traumatic experiences, job loss, imprisonment, or even less extreme adaptations, such as coping with the stresses of college life. However, some investigators who have tried to replicate such results have either found only limited support, or have failed to find any positive effects of disclosure. Furthermore, a distinct but relevant body of research by Rimé and his colleagues, on the impact of social sharing of emotion on recovery, indicates that merely sharing an emotion with others does not alleviate the emotional impact of an upsetting event, although people retain the belief that it actually does help (e.g., Rimé, 1999; Rimé, Finkenauer, Luminet, Zech, & Phillipot, 1998; Zech, 2000).

Even when positive effects are found in disclosure studies, the manipulation will not necessarily be working for everyone. It is even possible that for some persons and/or for some topics, such confrontation of emotions may work negatively (Kelly & McKillop, 1996). Many studies of the impact of debriefing after traumatic events–which typically involves the expression of thoughts and emotions connected to the trauma–have failed to demonstrate the efficacy of such a technique (for reviews, see Rose & Bisson, 1998; van Emmerik, Kamphuis, Hulsbosch, & Emmelkamp, 2002).

What, then, are the salient characteristics of individuals for whom the manipulation does, versus does not, work? And why does not sharing one's emotions work so well in some studies, or for some life events? With a few recent exceptions (e.g., Cameron & Nicholls, 1998; Paez, Velasco, & Gonzalez, 1999), little research has investigated personality or individual difference variables, to distinguish between those who do versus do not benefit from the disclosure manipulation, or to link these with the particular situations under investigation (Pennebaker & Keough, 1999). More fundamentally, while earlier research explored the range of stressful situations and experiences that people could usefully write about (e.g., from moving to college to coping with prison or unemployment), recent theoretical analysis has focused on cognitive and linguistic processes that may underlie the efficacy of the disclosure paradigm (e.g., Bower, Kemeny, Taylor, & Fahey, 2003; Pennebaker & Francis, 1996; Pennebaker, Mayne, & Francis, 1997). Despite such developments, there has been no theoretical framework to guide assumption-building, channel research and systematically investigate individual differences.

In this article we review the empirical evidence and propose a theoretical explanation for discrepant findings, to suggest when and for whom disclosing emotions about upsetting experiences will further recovery from negative life events. Following our own line of research, to focus examination of this broad area on one specific life stressor, we take the experience of bereavement as exemplary, indicating how our conclusions can be generalized to other domains that have been investigated using the paradigm. The life stressor of bereavement lends itself to examination of the disclosure paradigm. It has, after all, been classified as the life event requiring the most intense readjustment (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). Since it encompasses at least as much upheaval as many of the stressors investigated by Pennebaker do, the disclosure effect should be easily replicable in the case of this stressor. In fact, it is generally believed that individuals need to confront their loss experiences and do their grief work. Although it seems reasonable to assume that confronting one's grief in written or verbal disclosure should support the grief work process, as we will elaborate below, most studies have failed to find positive effects (e.g., Bonanno, Keltner, Holen, & Horowitz, 1995; Nolen-Hoeksema, McBride, & Larson, 1999; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1991; Wortman & Silver, 1989, 2001). These negative results need theoretical explanation too.

In summary, our aims are twofold: we want to explore underlying patterns to explain when disclosure does (not) work for people, and we want to apply the emergent model to further our understanding of coping with one stressor in particular, namely, bereavement. This analysis enables integration of two major theoretical and empirical research areas: we incorporate Pennebaker's Self-Disclosure Health Model within the attachment theory framework, to guide research and increase the power of predictions about adaptation to stressful life experiences.

2. The writing paradigm: efficacy and explanation

Pennebaker and colleagues developed a paradigm whereby people are induced to disclose their thoughts and feelings about emotional topics (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990; for recent reviews, see Lepore & Smyth, 2002; Pennebaker, Zech, & Rimé, 2001). Inducing disclosure in participants is expected to have a healing effect. For the most part, participants are asked to write, rather than speak, about their personal experiences. Typically this is done in a laboratory, with random assignment to a manipulation or control group. The former group is asked to write about assigned topics for 3 to 5 consecutive days, 15 to 30 min each day. Most importantly, instructions include such phrases as "*...really let go and explore your very deepest emotions and thoughts...*", thus encouraging

ventilation. The control group participants are typically asked to write about superficial topics, and instructions omit any reference to such deep-seated feelings.

2.1. Evidence for the paradigm's effect

Most though not all (see Meads, 2003; Zech, 2000) reviews of the body of experimental research adopting the paradigm have concluded that writing or talking about emotional experiences, relative to writing about superficial control topics, is associated with positive effects on a number of different outcome measures (e.g., Lepore & Smyth, 2002; Littrell, 1998; Pennebaker, 1997a; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Smyth, 1998). For example, improvements have been found on number of physician visits (e.g., Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker et al., 1990), immune functions (e.g., Esterling, Antoni, Fletcher, Margulies, & Schneiderman, 1994; Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988; Petrie, Booth, Pennebaker, Davison & Thomas, 1995), better grades at college, and long-term improvement in mood and well-being (see Pennebaker & Keough, 1999). Smyth's (1998) meta-analysis provided an overview of the effects. Overall, he reported significant long-term (3–6 months) health improvements for participants in experimental compared with control conditions (see Zech, 2000 for critical evaluation of this meta-analysis). Recently, Pennebaker compiled a list of over sixty disclosure studies that have been conducted, including a number conducted since the Smyth meta-analysis (see http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu). Many of these studies are indeed supportive of the efficacy of the paradigm, though some are not (we review these in the next section).

2.2. Explanation of the paradigm's effect

Why should disclosure of traumatic and stressful events positively affect health? One of Pennebaker's focal explanations has to do with *the self*. Pennebaker (e.g., Pennebaker et al., 1988; Pennebaker & Keough, 1999) argued that traumas may be detrimental psychologically because they threaten core aspects of the self. There are two self-related processes that mediate the relationship between traumatic experience and health, namely, inhibition and disclosure. First, inhibiting both thinking and talking about these experiences will lessen the threat, which, in Pennebaker's framework, blocks "me" and "I" development. However, such inhibition is effortful, and may be a physiological strain, resulting in illness. As we will argue below, inhibition will come more naturally to some than to others, and people will differ accordingly in the extent to which they are at risk of the detrimental health consequences.

Second, Pennebaker argued that disclosure may be effective because "...it helps people gain meaning about their experiences, reframe these experiences as non-threatening, assimilate them into the self, and in some cases, engage in dramatic reconstruction of the self-system...(Pennebaker & Keough, 1999, pp. 109–110)." As such, disclosure is said to repair and rebuild the self and consequently to result in better physical health. Pennebaker conducted fine-grained linguistic analyses that provided evidence for this proposition. He showed that the words people use to refer to the self in disclosing a trauma predicted improvements in mental and physical health (c.f. Pennebaker & King, 1999; Pennebaker et al., 1997; for a review, see Pennebaker, Mehl, & Niederhoffer, 2003). As we will also argue below, assimilation of the threatening experience into the self through disclosure will be done naturally by some but not other persons. Furthermore, persons who reframe their experience in the process of disclosing to others–whether in written or spoken form–will be more protected from the detrimental effects of traumatic experiences on their health (meaning also that the physiological work of inhibition is not necessary), than those who do not. It is important, then, to identify who will or will not be helped by the disclosure, and under what conditions.

3. Disclosure effects: examination of non-supportive results

Studies that have either failed to show the benefits of sharing generally, or to replicate the paradigm's beneficial effects specifically, provide clues about the boundary conditions for the paradigm's impact. Thus, on the one hand, information can be drawn from the broader field of emotional expression and studies of sharing grief, and, on the other hand, from verbal disclosure studies and the non-replications of the writing paradigm effect. We consider the implications of the various bodies of evidence for our conceptual analysis in the following section. We do not review the debriefing studies mentioned in introduction further here, because this intervention technique incorporates additional interactive dimensions such as feedback and social comparison.

3.1. Research on social sharing

One would expect parallel results to those reported in the previous section, from research on the effects of social sharing of emotions. It should surely help to tell others about one's traumatic experiences and negative emotions. And yet, Rimé and his colleagues have consistently found, in both correlational and experimental studies, that sharing emotional experiences fails to bring about emotional relief (e.g., Rimé et al., 1998; Rimé, Phillipot, Boca, & Mesquita, 1992). Their program of research on social sharing set out to examine "... the revocation of an emotional experience in a socially shared language with some addressee, the latter being present at least at the symbolic level (Pennebaker et al., 2001, p. 518–519)." Thus, these investigators explored the natural phenomenon of sharing upsetting experiences with others, and its intra- and interpersonal consequences. Surprisingly, Rimé and his colleagues found almost an opposite relationship to that observed in the Pennebaker studies: lack of recovery was associated with the perpetuation of sharing, and, even more markedly, with the perpetuation of the need to share.

Even in experimental studies inducing social sharing of emotions, Zech and colleagues failed to find benefits to recovery from emotional events (e.g., Zech, 2000; Zech & Rimé, 2005; Zech, Rimé, & Nils, in press), although it is possible that social sharing serves other functions, such as constructing and consolidating memory, and enhancing social integration (Rimé et al., 1998).

Some of the studies on social sharing resembled the Pennebaker paradigm quite closely. For example, in one study, subjects in a laboratory setting were assigned to talk either about an emotional episode or (as controls) about a non-emotional topic (Zech & Rimé, 2005). Although there was recovery over time, experimental did not differ from control participants in terms of the upset and intensity of their emotions, even though the experimental group reported more subjective benefits from the session than the control participants did.

3.2. Verbal disclosure: bereavement

One of Pennebaker's earliest studies surveyed 19 survivors whose spouses had either died in an accident or by suicide (Pennebaker & O'Herron, 1984). A positive correlation was reported between increase in illness rates from before to after the death and *ruminating* about the spouse's death. It seemed that, the less bereaved people were able to put the death out of their minds, and the more they constantly thought about it, the greater was the increase in illnesses after loss. Unfortunately though, reports were only obtained retrospectively. Pennebaker and O'Herron (1984) also concluded that talking to friends about the loss was beneficial to health, which might seem supportive of the disclosure effect reported in the previous section. However, these correlational results could be interpreted as showing that persons with poor bereavement outcome come to be in poorer health, and simply talk less about their loss. Such puzzles were clarified in subsequent experimental studies (e.g., Pennebaker & Beall, 1986) which did not, however, focus specifically on bereavement.

Bereavement research by Bonanno and colleagues included a manipulation of disclosure, although it did not strictly follow the Pennebaker paradigm (e.g., Bonanno, 2001; Bonanno et al., 1995; Bonanno, Notarius, Gunzerath, Keltner, & Horowitz, 1998). Adults who had lost their spouses within the previous 6 months were asked into a laboratory to talk about their deceased partner for 6–10 min. The more emotional and the more they talked about their spouse's death, the more poorly they coped at a later point in time. However, it remains unclear from these results whether disclosure reflected grief or whether it affected it (Pennebaker et al., 2001). Many studies report high symptomatology and expression of grief early in bereavement as being highly predictive of grief later on (Pennebaker et al., 1997; Stroebe, Hansson, Stroebe, & Schut, 2001). Thus, the manipulation may not have been causal in the longer term poor coping. It could have been a reflection of grief, rather than an intervention for it. In other words, people who talk more, and more negatively, may simply be more depressed, and may talk to relieve their distress (e.g., the fever model of Stiles, Shuster, & Harrigan, 1992, Stiles, 1995). Although people believe that expressing their emotions is cathartic, the Rimé studies reviewed above cause doubt about this.

3.3. The Pennebaker paradigm: limited or no benefits

What about limited or non-confirmatory results of studies that have more narrowly adopted the Pennebaker paradigm? Among those finding only limited effects, a couple of studies have claimed most benefits for persons exposed to extreme circumstances. We report these studies next. Others have identified the most favorable writing

effects among persons with particular intrapersonal characteristics (e.g., Cameron & Nicholls, 1998; Christensen & Smith, 1994; Lumley, Tojek, & Macklem, 2002; Paez et al., 1999). These studies are important in relation to emotional expressiveness and attachment styles. Thus, we review them later. Finally, a few studies have failed to find any benefits at all. We review these here, focusing on the bereavement studies.

3.3.1. Traumatic events in general

Although Greenberg and Stone (1992) did find an effect of emotional writing among a subgroup of persons who had experienced severe traumas, when they examined the moderating role of previous disclosure, they found no difference in the effects of induced emotional writing on disclosed versus undisclosed traumas. The implications of this finding are unclear, since *no* effects of induced writing were found for either type of trauma. This latter detail is often overlooked in reports of this study.

Lutgendorf, Antoni, Kumar, and Schneiderman (1994) asked subjects to report about a stressful or traumatic topic that they had previously only disclosed minimally to others, over a number of disclosure sessions (during a 3-week period). They found individual differences in subjects' ability both to involve themselves in the disclosure process, and to "…abandon their avoidance of the stressful topic (p. 63)" and these differences were related to antibody decrements. The effects were stronger for persons who disclosed older and more troublesome events.

3.3.2. Bereavement-specific studies

The few studies that have investigated the efficacy of the disclosure paradigm within the bereavement domain have yielded generally negative results, with the majority of investigators failing to replicate the effect at all. Segal, Bogaards, Becker, and Chatman (1999; see also Guinther, Segal, & Bogaards, 2002; Segal, Chatman, Bogaards, & Becker, 2001) actually claimed some effects of a vocal, not written, disclosure manipulation on older bereaved individuals, but it is difficult to attribute effects specifically to the intervention procedure. As the authors themselves noted, "The weakness [of this study] is the lack of a control group against which to measure the follow-up effects. Without this experimental control, it is impossible to attribute the changes to the intervention (Segal et al., 1999, p. 307)." The reported improvements could have been due to the passage of time, or demand characteristics, rather than to the intervention. Thus, this study does not provide convincing evidence for the effectiveness of the paradigm.

In a study using a stronger design, Range, Kovac, and Marion (2000) also failed to find effects of written disclosure. The study was conducted among undergraduates who had experienced the accidental or homicidal death of a significant person. There was only a time effect, but no significant interactions by writing condition. There were negative findings not only on psychological measures, but also on reported number of visits to doctors. Another bereavement study by Kovac and Range (2000) found at least partial effects of a written disclosure manipulation. They investigated the impact of writing on 40 individuals who had lost a loved one to suicide in the past 2 years. They found no indication of general, overall improvement in the group that wrote about their deepest feelings rather than a trivial topic, but there was evidence of a beneficial effect between post-test and follow-up for the manipulation compared with the control condition on a measure that assessed specific aspects of reactions to suicidal bereavement.

A study by Stroebe, Stroebe, Schut, Zech, and van den Bout (2002) closely followed the Pennebaker paradigm and failed to find any positive effects of disclosure on bereaved adults. Bereaved individuals were randomly assigned to either the Pennebaker writing task, or to a no-essay control condition. The writing task did not result in a reduction of distress or of doctors' visits either immediately after, or at a 6-month follow-up. Beneficial effects could not even be demonstrated for those bereaved who had suffered an unexpected loss or, at the time of the study, had expressed a high need for emotional disclosure.

Similarly negative results of writing about a past bereavement were reported recently in a disclosure intervention study by Bower et al. (2003). These investigators examined changes in meaning-related goals as well as in immune function following diary writing. Participants were women who had lost a close relative to cancer, and who were themselves at risk of cancer. Written disclosure about the death, as compared with writing about non-emotional topics, did not induce changes in these parameters (although a positive association was found between reporting positive changes in meaning-related goals and improvement in immune function for both bereavement and control conditions). However, it is important to note that the bereavement stressor was long in the past for some participants in this study. Thus, they are likely to have adjusted to the loss, and also to have known of their own health risk, for a long time.

All in all, there is so far little evidence that the Pennebaker paradigm is effective in coping with bereavement. While methodological weaknesses could account for some failures to find an effect, at least some of the studies

followed the paradigm procedure closely, and still did not manage to replicate Pennebaker's usual findings. In particular, the failure to find positive effects on physical health is noteworthy, since physical health is the measure of choice in most of the Pennebaker studies (e.g., Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker et al., 1988, 1990).

4. The disclosure effect: consideration of discrepant findings

There is little doubt that Pennebaker's disclosure paradigm can operate as a forceful mediator between trauma and ill health. But the effect has not always been found, and expressing one's emotions in general is not always associated with recovery. First, we consider how the discrepancies between the disclosure paradigm studies and the social sharing research results can be explained.

4.1. The content of disclosure

In trying to reconcile their results, the authors themselves (Pennebaker et al., 2001) point to the differences in research interest, as reflected in differences in a number of features about their studies. The studies of Rimé and colleagues were designed to examine the impact of "putting emotions into words" on emotional recovery, the latter being defined as the "evolution over time of the arousal still elicited when a given emotional memory is reaccessed" (Pennebaker et al., 2001, p. 518). By contrast, Pennebaker's paradigm never set out to examine this "ventilation effect"—he did not investigate the possibility that it is *this particular process* that is responsible for a disclosure effect. Rather, he wanted to investigate how written disclosure was conducive to health, and to examine the role of inhibition and linguistic processes—not ventilation. As Zech, Rimé, and Nils (in press) summarized: "…the writing design does not address the empirical question raised by the common sense belief. It does not test whether putting a specific emotional episode into words ends up in some emotional relief … (p. 18 of manuscript)." As these authors also pointed out, the process through which written disclosure impacts on health could be totally other than a ventilation effect. This is the most important difference to identify here: ventilation alone does not help, some other process(es)–including those investigated by Pennebaker–is (are) likely to underlie the diary paradigm effect.

To elaborate on the underlying processes: ventilation is likely to include rumination. Ruminative coping has been defined as thoughts and behaviors that focus one's attention on symptoms of distress and the meanings and consequences of these symptoms in a repetitive and passive way (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001). Nolen-Hoeksema has consistently found associations between rumination, negative affect and poor adjustment and has identified ruminative coping as detrimental. This line of reasoning is compatible with Zech and Rimé's (2005) program of research, and also with Stiles et al. (1992) and Stiles (1995) fever model, referred to previously. Stiles argued that distressed people disclose more, and that this serves the functions of reducing anxiety, promoting (over time) the assimilation of the upsetting event. Thus, according to these different bodies of research, processes underlying effectiveness would be more than ventilation or rumination alone.

Of course, it would also be possible for individuals to simply ruminate in the disclosure manipulation, and we need to be aware that enforced confrontation may not help these ruminators as much as it might certain other individuals. In fact, Pennebaker and Keough (1999) and Pennebaker et al. (2003) have provided supportive indirect evidence (persons whose linguistic categories showed least change–suggesting ruminative disclosure–across the days of the writing, benefited least). But the disclosure paradigm does encourage confrontation and reassessment for some individuals, and may even change the nature of their subsequent social sharing.

4.2. The specific event and writing topic

Turning to the writing paradigm studies that found no beneficial effects: the bereavement studies are particularly disappointing. Focusing on the latter, Pennebaker et al. (2001) suggested reasons why the disclosure intervention may sometimes have a relatively minor or no impact. They pointed out that disclosure is particularly beneficial in helping people come to terms with chaotic, unexplained events, and those that are difficult to talk naturally to others about. If people are disclosing their negative emotions naturally and in a reappraising manner in the course of their daily lives, the manipulation is unlikely to be impactful. And yet, Pennebaker found effects for all sorts of life events, some of them seemingly much less extreme than a bereavement, and for which one would have expected natural disclosure to have taken place. It is difficult to reconcile the findings. However, Pennebaker (personal communication) recently

suggested that writing may indeed not be beneficial in cases where events are neither ambiguous nor associated with conflict. It seems plausible that many bereavements would fall into this unambiguous, non-conflictual category: there is little to be resolved, but simply, a lot to adapt to gradually, over the course of time.

Choice of the writing topic is also likely to be critical. For example, beginning college students benefited more from writing about emotional aspects related to their transition to college, than about traumatic experiences (see Pennebaker et al., 2001). Writing about the former, salient issues positively affected their grades. Similarly, Kovac and Range (2000) found the only beneficial effect of writing on a measure that tapped the suicide-death bereaved person's specific reactions to the suicide. Probably benefits are most evident on variables to do with the specific, salient problems experienced by the writers (e.g., performance among college students; stigmatization associated with deaths by suicide for those bereaved following this cause of death).

4.3. Stressor specific problems: individual differences in the disruption of bereavement

Pennebaker et al. (2001) drew attention to the need for *identification of people who (do not) benefit from the disclosure manipulation*. Referring to the bereavement studies, they argued that disclosure interventions may only be effective for those coping poorly. Only if studies select these vulnerable individuals will the manipulation be effective. A randomly selected sample "...will be less likely to show benefits of disclosure because most of the participants will be in relatively good shape (Pennebaker et al., 2001, p. 536)." This line of argument fits the pattern emerging from studies examining the efficacy of bereavement intervention (Schut, Stroebe, van den Bout, & Terheggen, 2001). Intervention is effective only for those at high risk of–or already suffering from–complicated grieving.

4.4. Conclusions

Two main conclusions can be reached: first, people who do not cope well should benefit more from the disclosure paradigm than those who do. The disclosure induction may not benefit people who are naturally sharing, either because the event is not so severe and/or it can easily be talked about and assimilated, or because a person's characteristics assure that expressing emotions comes easily. Second, as the work of Zech and Rimé (2005), and of Nolen-Hoeksema (2001) has shown, expression alone is not going to do much good, and rumination can even be harmful. Following Pennebaker et al. (2003) induction toward change in type of disclosure is necessary, as well as restructuring and reorganizing of complex emotional experiences (e.g., greater use of positive emotion words, moderate use of negative words, and increasing use of cognitive words). Changes in self-as-mediator across the writing period are also a significant component part (see Pennebaker & Keough, 1999).

5. The (non)efficacy of disclosure: an attachment framework

There are good reasons to argue that the attachment theory perspective is useful for identifying persons likely to have problems with disclosure, and consequently, those who might benefit particularly from the disclosure paradigm. According to attachment theory, a person's style of attachment evolves in part as a result of experiences related to communication and expression of emotions within interpersonal exchanges (Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 1998; Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 1999). Yet, despite the apparent importance of interpersonal ties in guiding disclosure, the recent monograph "*The Writing Cure*" by Lepore and Smyth (2002), which provides a comprehensive review of research on the disclosure paradigm, makes no mention of attachment theory. In this section, we explore the parameters of this major interpersonal theory of loss as an explanatory framework for understanding the differential effects of the disclosure paradigm described above.

The term "attachment bond" refers to an affectional tie, "entailing representation in the internal organization of the individual (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 711)." Attachment bonds are said to have their origins in the relationship that develops early in life between an infant and his or her caregiver. The nature of this relationship is a major determinant in the formation and maintenance of subsequent relationships across the course of one's life (for recent reviews, see Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Simpson & Rholes, 1998; for implications for the expression of emotions, see Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 1999). These patterns have been described in terms of *styles of attachment*, which are classified as either secure or insecure (of which there are three types). Attachment styles are also understood to evolve as a result of experiences *related to the expression of emotions in relationships*, especially with caregivers

(Feeney et al., 1998; Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 1999). Learning experiences involving emotional expression lead to the development of mental models of relationships, which emerge as attachment styles and which, in turn, are linked to patterns of (non)expressive emotional behavior (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 1999).

5.1. Attachment styles

Hazan and Shaver (1987) proposed a three-category model of attachment styles, while Bartholomew (1990), following the approach of Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy (1985), introduced a four-category system. In describing the basic patterns, we follow the four-category system, since this is linked to patterns of internal representations, which are central to our subsequent theoretical analysis. Particularly when following the categorical system that assigns individuals to one of four styles, it is important to remember that individuals will be more, versus less, prototypical of any one attachment style, and that there will be some variations across relationships and time.[1]

Before describing the four styles, it is also important to note the methodological and conceptual complexity relating to attachment styles (e.g., Simpson & Rholes, 1998). There are problems associated with methods (e.g., possible biases through use of self-report measures) and with assumptions (e.g., establishing extent of continuity across relationships and across the passage of time). Some of the diversity arises from different research traditions or research domains (e.g., caregiver–child versus adult romantic relationship research). Hazan and Shaver (1987) measured attachment styles using discrete categories, whereas Collins and Read (1990) and Simpson (1990) introduced continuous adult attachment scales, to indicate how characteristic each attachment category is of a given individual. Labels for the three insecure styles differ too (and insecure is sometimes referred to as *anxious* attachment), and measures do not assess identical attachment classifications (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998). Bartholomew and Shaver (1998) concluded, however, that although there was some incompatibility between different approaches, there was also considerable convergence in classifying adult attachment patterns.

Adults with a *secure* pattern of attachment find it relatively easy to get close to and be intimate with others. They are comfortable depending on others and, in turn, having others depend on them. Secure attachment allows individuals to express distress, and to receive comfort and support. Secure attachment is associated with the most satisfaction with respect to relationships, and with the highest levels of psychological well-being (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, Noller, & Callam, 1994; Fuller & Fincham, 1995; Simpson, 1990).

Investigators have identified three types of *insecure* attachment (for detailed accounts, see Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Simpson & Rholes, 1998). We follow the terms adopted by Bartholomew (1990) and Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), namely, *preoccupied*, *dismissing*, and *fearful.* Adults in the category *preoccupied* attachment see others as reluctant to get as close to them as they would like, and worry about their partner's love and desire to stay with them. They anxiously seek to gain acceptance and validation from others. They express distress in a heightened way. Adults identified as having a *dismissing* style are uncomfortable with closeness to others, which they try to avoid, and find it difficult to trust others completely, or to allow themselves to depend on others. They get nervous when a love partner gets too close, and defensively deny the value of close relationships. They restrict expressions of distress and avoid seeking support from others, about which they have negative expectations. Finally, the *fearful* group is more varied in behavior, which is typified by contradictory or apparently fearful actions. Adults in this category want close relationships but feel uncomfortable with closeness because, fearing rejection, they find it difficult to trust others or let themselves depend on them. Like the preoccupied, they are highly dependent on others' acceptance and affirmation, but avoid intimacy to avert suffering rejection. At times their expressions of distressing emotions would be somewhat like those of dismissing individuals, namely restricted, but following their wish to be close to others, at times they may also try to express negative emotions and open up. Following their general relational style, though, such disclosures may lack coherence.

Not surprisingly, given the above descriptions, the insecure attachment styles are associated with greater psychological difficulties than secure attachment. For example, there is quite a strong body of empirical evidence linking insecurity of attachment to psychopathology in adulthood (see the special section on Attachment and

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[1] Recently, attachment researchers have made strong arguments for the use of attachment dimensions rather than the categorical styles. Nevertheless, we have chosen to follow the categorical approach in this article. There is compatibility between dimensions and styles (see Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), and use of styles facilitates presentation of our theoretical propositions.

Psychopathology, in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1996, 64; also Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Dozier, Stovall, & Albus, 1999).

5.2. Internal working models of self and other

Associated with these attachment styles, a fundamental parameter of attachment theory is the notion that experiences with attachment figures come to be represented psychologically as "*internal working models*", which impact on both the making and breaking of so-called affectional bonds (Bowlby, 1979; Bretherton & Munholland, 1999; Shaver & Tancredy, 2001). Accordingly, the child builds implicit working models of relationships between the self and others and develops schemas about how these relationships work. These working models persist with quite some consistency across the life cycle (see Fraley, 2002 for a meta-analytic review). They serve as guides for interpreting experience and may be viewed as distinctive ways of viewing the world. The notion of internal working models is particularly important for the analysis of coping with the loss of the loved relationship. Bartholomew (1990) and Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) argued that models of the self can be seen as positive (the self is seen as worthy of love and attention) or negative (the self is seen as unworthy). Similarly, models of others can be positive (they are available and caring) or negative (they are unreliable or rejecting). Secure individuals have a positive self model and positive other model. Preoccupied individuals have negative self and positive other models, dismissing individuals have positive self and negative other models, while fearful–the terrible double bind–have both negative self and negative other models. There are remarkable parallels between these working models with Pennebaker's (e.g., Pennebaker & Keough (1999); Pennebaker & King, 1999) analysis of the self, and with his interpretation of how (non)disclosure relates to–and impacts on–the self. To elaborate: Pennebaker argued that reframing experiences and assimilating them into the self were fundamental in making disclosure effective. According to Pennebaker, mere expression is not enough, it is the translation into a coherent narrative that helps people make sense of their world and reconstruct their self-stories. Persons with positive self and other images would not need disclosure for reframing or assimilation so much, but persons with negative working models would benefit by disclosure that furthers such reconstruction of the self–and other–systems. For example, in some bereavements, the deceased person would have been the one to enhance positive feelings of self, and in turn to be positively evaluated by the bereaved. Narrative reconstruction should be comparatively easy. Sometimes, however, preoccupied, conflicted or dependent relationships may make this meaning-making process in bereavement more difficult. More benefits should come from a reframing through language, due to the negative components in internal working models.

5.3. Attachment styles, internal working models and patterns of disclosure

Research by Mikulincer and colleagues has provided evidence of attachment style differences in patterns of disclosure in adjustment to a variety of traumatic experiences (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, for a review). For example, Mikulincer and Nachshon (1991) examined attachment styles and patterns of disclosure among undergraduate Israeli students. Secure and preoccupied people reported more self-disclosure than dismissing people. Secure people also showed more disclosure flexibility than those in either of the two insecure groups. Dismissing style persons not only reported a low proneness to self-disclose, they also did not disclose personal information even to others who were high disclosers. By contrast, preoccupied, anxious people reported heightened proneness toward self-disclosure, and also tended to disclose indiscriminately to persons who did not want to participate in intense interactions, and they tended to be unresponsive to the other's disclosure. In a more recent study, Mikulincer and Florian (1998) showed that in coping with distress (this was not a bereavement-specific study), anxious-preoccupied individuals tended to engage in rumination and express more distress, whereas dismissing individuals were more likely to adopt distancing strategies. Similar results with respect to the patterns of self-disclosure according to attachment styles were reported by Pistole (1993).

Appraisal of the situation itself may vary according to attachment style, and thereby affect the perceived threat and consequent need to disclose: Mikulincer and Shaver (2003) reviewed studies of a variety of different stressors, and summarized findings as follows: ". . . anxiously attached people were found to appraise events in highly threatening terms and to hold the most serious doubts about their abilities and skills for dealing with them. In contrast, securely attached people reported the lowest levels of threat appraisal and the highest levels of perceived self-efficacy. With regard to avoidant persons, the findings are less consistent and seem to depend on contextual characteristics of the

threat (p. 54)." Furthermore, people's coping strategies in general were as would be expected from the disclosure patterns. As Mikulincer and Shaver (2003) also reported, secure people use support seeking and constructive attempts to solve problems (problem-focused coping), while anxious persons score high on emotion-focused coping measures (known to intensify distress), and dismissing (avoidant) persons were high on distancing coping, involving cognitive and behavioral withdrawal from the source of the distress.

Thus, secure individuals would be expected to appraise situations as less threatening and to experience and express emotions to a moderate degree. They should be able to access memories and discuss them coherently: more than dismissing (who suppress and avoid), but less than preoccupied individuals (who are emotionally expressive, but not in a constructive way). Fearful individuals would be likely to have trouble giving a coherent account to others about their appraisal of a stressful situation or about their emotional reactions.

One would also expect the content of what is disclosed by people with the different attachment styles to reflect their working models of self and other (Bartholomew, 1990; Collins & Read, 1990). As Mikulincer and Nachshon (1991) suggested: "Our hypothesis . . . that attachment styles are related to self-disclosure . . . was based on a path going from attachment experiences to self-disclosure through inner working models and interaction goals (p. 322)." Their empirical results were in line with these predictions. They argued that secure persons' working models led to "responsive self-disclosure" (responsiveness to the partner's self-disclosure as well as using one's own to further formation of intimate relationships). However, their research did not focus directly on the associations–on the one hand–between attachment styles and self and other representations, and–on the other hand–with self-disclosure. Thus, these paths need empirical testing.

5.4. Summary and conclusions

We have described attachment styles, and demonstrated how secure attachment is associated with better health and well-being than the insecure styles. Internal working models of the self and other are basic theoretical constructs associated with attachment styles: negative views of self, and/or other underlie insecure attachment. Not only are the models of the self and other systematically related to patterns of disclosure, but they fit closely with Pennebaker's analysis of disclosure about the self. Thus, we predict that inducing disclosure about traumatic life experiences would particularly benefit insecure persons if it changes the negative views of self and other (particularly the deceased, in the case of bereavement) in a positive direction. The manipulation would probably not be strong enough to effect a change from insecure to secure attachment (e.g., Stone, 2003), but it could be expected to aid adjustment to traumatic or stressful experiences most particularly among insecure persons. Situational factors (e.g., extremity of the trauma) will also play a part in determining for whom the manipulation is most beneficial.

6. Attachment and disclosure in bereavement

Like some but not all of the traumas that Pennebaker has studied, bereavement can be characterized as an interpersonal, attachment-related loss. Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) seminal three volume work "*Attachment and loss*" conceptualizes grief as a form of separation anxiety, the breaking of an attachment bond due to the death of a significant person. Paradoxically, in some cases (e.g., spousal bereavement) bereaved persons have been separated from the very one to whom they would most naturally turn to disclose and share their grief. It stands to reason that a theory of interpersonal relationships should help us understand the impact of loss on bereaved individuals, or any other attachment-related traumas/losses. Recent theoretical and empirical research has shown that the nature of the interpersonal relationship a person has with, say, his or her spouse impacts on the way that this person goes about grieving, should the loved one die.

In this section we examine theoretical propositions and empirical evidence for relationships between attachment styles, patterns of disclosure, and adjustment to bereavement.

6.1. Attachment style and bereavement outcome

A number of investigators have drawn their attention to the association between attachment styles and reactions to bereavement (Parkes, 2001; Shaver & Tancredy, 2001; Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2005). Styles of attachment closely parallel the types of complicated grief that have been identified in the scientific literature (e.g., Parkes & Weiss, 1995).

According to the theoretical analyses of Parkes (2001) and Shaver and Tancredy (2001) secure attachment will be associated with normal, uncomplicated grieving (unless the loss has occurred in unusually traumatic circumstances). These persons are likely to suffer and grieve deeply for their lost one, for their interpersonal ties are characterized as close and very positively experienced. Nevertheless, they adjust to their bereavement comparatively well over the course of time. By contrast, persons with insecure styles are more prone to complicated forms of grieving, and these vary according to the type of insecurity. Dismissing individuals tend to suppress and avoid attachment-related emotions, and may show delayed, inhibited or avoided grief. Preoccupied individuals are typically very emotional following loss, and may be subject to chronic grief. The case of unresolved/fearful attachment is rather unusual: persons with this style may show indications of fear and "unresolved grief" as reflected in the inability to talk coherently about their loss. Parkes (2001) suggested that these persons may fit a "learned helplessness" paradigm (Seligman, 1975), that acts as a precursor of depression and withdrawal.

While it is important to identify basic categories and associations, in actual fact, such cut-and-dried classification will not be so easy to make, either with respect to allocation to an attachment style or to normal/complicated grieving. Also, there is continuing debate about the diagnostic classification of types of complicated grief. For example, "traumatic grief" is defined in different ways by different investigators (see Stroebe, Schut, & Finkenauer, 2001 for a review). Empirical investigation of the relationship between attachment styles and bereavement reactions needs to take this complexity into account.

6.2. Attachment style and adjustment: empirical evidence

At this point, there is much support from clinical observation (e.g., Holmes, 2001), but insufficient research has as yet tested the assumptions (1) that types of complicated grief are associated with attachment style, or (2) that well-being and adjustment to bereavement vary according to attachment style. With respect to complicated grief, Parkes (2001) has suggested that persons with insecure attachment styles are over-represented among bereaved psychiatric patient samples, suggesting that complicated grief is indeed related to attachment styles. With respect to well-being and health, a few studies have shown associations between attachment styles and adjustment to bereavement (van Doorn, Kasl, Beery, Jacobs, & Prigerson, 1998; Field, Hart, & Horowitz, 1999; Field & Sundin, 2001; Mireault, Bearor, & Thomas, 2001; Wayment & Vierthaler, 2002). For example, van Doorn et al. (1998) conducted a longitudinal investigation of adjustment to the loss of a spouse, and concluded that insecure attachment styles increased the risk of complicated grief reactions. Similarly, Wayment and Vierthaler (2002) found that securely attached persons reported lower levels of depressive symptomatology than insecure individuals. Anxious-preoccupied individuals reported greater levels of grief and depression, which was not the case for dismissing (avoidant) individuals. However, somatization was more likely to be reported for the latter group. Indirect support comes from a large-scale, prospective study of adaptation to bereavement among older persons (e.g., Carr et al., 2000). Attachment style was not measured, but pre-bereavement assessment was made of related marital quality variables. Results showed that those who were highly dependent on their spouses during the marriage had elevated anxiety after bereavement, while those who were not dependent had lower levels.

Although there is no substantial body of research on the specific stressor of bereavement, it is noteworthy that the health/well-being differences according to the attachment style patterns have emerged quite consistently across investigations of very different stressors. For example, in a study of reactions to a trauma (missile attack), Mikulincer, Florian, and Weller (1993) found differences according to attachment style: preoccupied persons reported more distress than secure ones, while dismissing persons had higher levels of somatization.

Taken together, the studies reviewed above suggest that securely attached persons adjust to stressful life experiences such as bereavement more easily than the insecurely attached.

7. Patterns of disclosure in coping with bereavement

What is effective coping with bereavement, and how does this relate to patterns of disclosure and attachment style? Traditional models have focused on the role of "grief work" in coming to terms with loss (see Stroebe & Schut, 2001 for a review). The grief work notion links confrontation with the experience of bereavement to adaptation: one has to face the pain and distress associated with thoughts and feelings about the deceased person, to adjust to the reality of loss and come to terms with bereavement. Bereaved people tend to do this by talking or writing about their loss
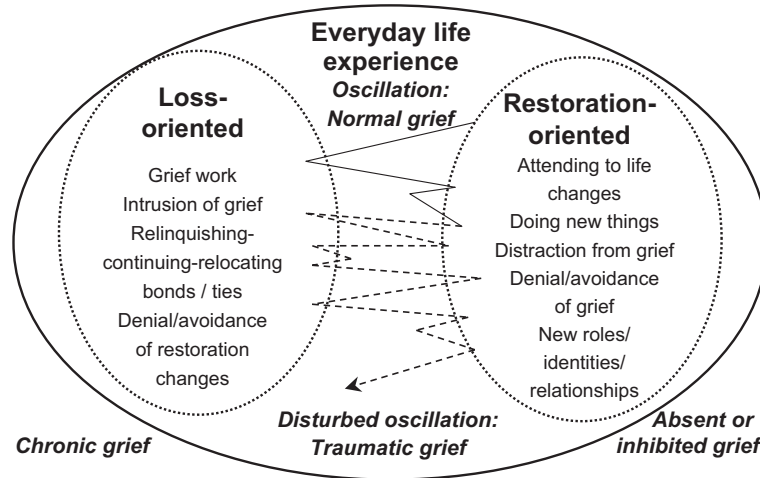
Fig. 1. A dual process model of coping with bereavement: normal and complicated grief.

experience. Following this perspective, disclosure could be considered an integral part of adapting to loss. Adaptive grief work is, however, difficult to distinguish from maladaptive rumination: disclosure that is merely repetitive ventilation about the loss would not be beneficial (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001). Stroebe and Schut (1999) therefore suggested that adaptive coping includes the confrontation and avoidance not only of thoughts and feelings about the deceased, but also confrontation and avoidance of the secondary stressors, such as learning the skills that a deceased partner may have taken care of. Following this perspective (see Fig. 1), *oscillation* between these various demands of the situation is necessary for grieving to be effective. Disclosure emerges as part of a complex regulatory process of attention to and avoidance of different stressors.

The question is how attachment style differences would influence patterns of disclosure about bereavement. One would expect secure individuals to be flexible in both confronting and avoiding grief, and thus to oscillate easily. Secure persons are indeed characterized by greater mental and behavioral flexibility than insecure ones (George & Solomon, 1999). Shaver and Tancredy (2001) argued that people with different attachment styles handle their grief differently. Secure people would typically acknowledge and express their feelings associated with bereavement (both loss- and restoration-oriented aspects) to a moderate degree, and consider the causes and implications of their emotions: "They should be able to assemble a coherent narrative about the loss and its aftermath (p. 78)." Avoidant (dismissing) persons would suppress or avoid loss-related emotions and be unlikely to disclose their grief, just as they would have shared little with their partner before his or her death. These persons would be likely to focus on topics to
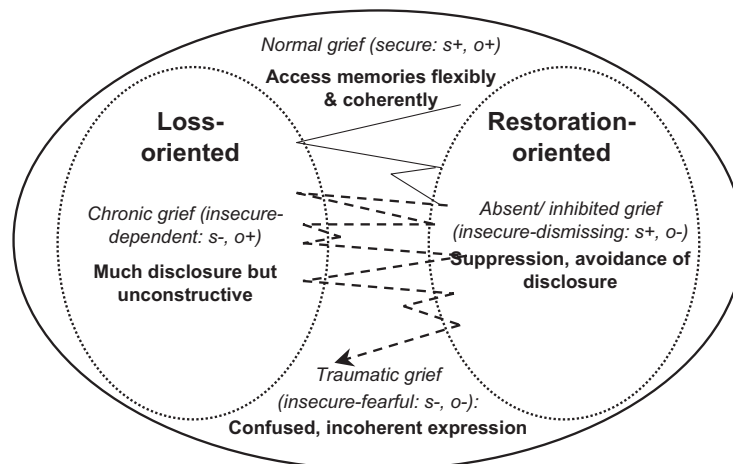

Fig. 2. Relationship between bereavement, attachment style and disclosure. S=an internal representation of the self; O=an internal representation of the other; +=a positive representation; and −=a negative representation.

do with restoration orientation. The anxious or preoccupied would be highly emotional and expressive in grieving but unable to cope constructively with their loss-related feelings. They would be likely to produce ruminative accounts focusing on loss-orientation topics. This type of disclosure would do them little good: thinking or writing without restructuring is akin to ruminative coping, which Nolen-Hoeksema (2001) has identified as a precursor of poor health outcome in bereavement. Finally, those with fearful orientations would be unable to think or talk coherently (logically, fluently, understandably) about their attachment-related losses. Their pattern of disclosure would tend to mirror the intense and detrimental intrusion–avoidance sequences noted by Horowitz (1986) for traumatic stress responses of disclosure are in line with the different types of complicated grief that we identified earlier. The patterns of disclosure in relationship to coping with bereavement, attachment styles and internal representations are summarized in Fig. 2.

8. Implications for diary intervention efficacy

The patterns described above have implications for the efficacy of diary intervention. We have argued that disclosure is not likely to be equally efficacious for persons across the different attachment styles. The disclosure paradigm will work better for those who are unable, alone or in their daily interactions with others, to create a coherent account of their thoughts and feelings. Our prediction is that, in general, secure persons will not benefit very much from diary writing, whereas persons within the three insecure categories are more likely to do so. The reasoning behind these predictions is detailed next for each of the attachment styles.

8.1. Secure attachment

Since secure individuals already confront and express their emotions toward others to a moderate degree, and are able to give coherent accounts of their experiences, even though adaptation is difficult for them too, unless there are frightful circumstances, there may be little extra that a diary intervention can offer to them. Perhaps this explains the unexpectedly negative results of the few bereavement diary studies. For example, in the Stroebe et al. (2002) diary study most of the respondents would fall into the secure attachment style category: This was a non-clinical sample, and frequently 60–70% of such samples are securely attached (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Van Vliet, 2001). The manipulation should work best for a small minority of respondents who were insecure. But it did not even seem to work for a small minority. It may be necessary, in addition, to target those individuals who had experienced difficult circumstances of bereavement. This explanation is compatible with Stroebe et al.'s (2002) interpretation, which focused on the "normality" of the loss experiences in these particular persons' lives. The negative results of the other studies reported earlier could likewise be due to the fact that non-clinical populations, comprised mostly of securely attached, naturally disclosing individuals, and disclosing about life events that they could thereby easily make coherent and assimilate, were investigated.

8.2. Insecure preoccupied attachment

Preoccupied individuals would *not* benefit if the diary intervention simply provided them with an opportunity to express and ruminate about their grief without the occurrence of any new coherence to their narrative account. Pennebaker and Francis (1996) showed that very high use of negative (ruminative?) emotion words in various diary studies (including writing about bereavement) correlated with poorer health. Preoccupied individuals *would* benefit by having instructions that guide them away from their intense expression of negative emotions, for this does nothing to improve their negative working model of the self. They could be helped by instructions to reappraise the meaning of loss. Diary instructions might also usefully direct them to write about secondary stressors such as dealing with changed family circumstances, for they are likely to have neglected these in their preoccupation with thoughts and feelings about the deceased person.

8.3. Insecure dismissing attachment

By contrast, dismissing people might benefit from instructions to write about the deceased person and the events leading up to and surrounding the death, even to confront its negative implications, for these are the things that they have suppressed. In the Pennebaker and Francis (1996) study, not only very high, but also very low use of negative

emotion words correlated with poorer health. Although it seems reasonable to suppose that dismissing people would benefit from such specified diary writing, other considerations could lead to different expectations: "Dismissing individuals may grieve less without being "unresolved" in the attachment-theoretical sense (Shaver & Tancredy, 2001, p.79)." Accordingly, they might be expected to do well enough without a diary intervention. Thus, it may be important to specify more closely: a moderately dismissing person might continue to use a dismissive coping strategy to good enough effect (after all, it is his/her generally preferred style), but extreme avoidance would, following inhibition theory (e.g., Pennebaker, 1989), be associated with poor health outcome and indeed be helped by diary confrontation, at least in the long term. Furthermore, it may be important to distinguish different types of "dismissing" styles more precisely. The category may include persons with limitations in different types of emotional expression, for example, those with deficits in emotional awareness and understanding (alexithymia) in contrast to those with repressive personalities (Lumley et al., 2002). Lumley et al. (2002) suggested that the former may benefit less from disclosure techniques than those whose expression is hindered by inhibition. All in all, it is difficult to make general predictions about this style (see also Fraley & Shaver, 1999).

8.4. Insecure fearful attachment

Perhaps fearful persons might benefit most from diary writing, for this could further the development of a coherent account in terms of logic, fluency and understanding, and change the pattern of unbidden traumatic intrusion–avoidance into one of more normal oscillation between the different stressors of bereavement (related to the deceased and to the changed world). Asking persons to confront both of these types of stressor systematically might be most helpful. It is also interesting to surmise that the very routine of diary writing might bring about some stability in their intrusion–avoidance process, inducing a less unbidden, more natural confrontation–avoidance (oscillation) of thoughts and memories.

8.5. Internal working models as mediators?

This analysis can be taken a step further, to examine the impact of the diary manipulation on models of the self and other. Pennebaker and Keough (1999) argued that the writing task is helpful because it induces a dramatic reconstruction of the self-system and helps assimilation of the threatening experience into the self, so that it is no longer threatening. Meaning is gained, and events become reframed as non-threatening. We noted that Pennebaker et al. (1997) found that people whose diary writings were characterized by an increase in the level of insight or words about causes, showed an improvement in health, leading them to argue that it was the *change* in thinking patterns, and not simply thinking about the loss, that brought about health improvements. Following both Pennebaker's Disclosure Health Model and Bartholomew's (1990) analysis of self/other representations, it seems reasonable to assume that it is the *changes in thinking about the self and other* that are particularly salient thinking patterns in attachment-related experiences such as bereavement. Further support comes from the work of Lepore, Greenberg, Bruno, and Smyth (2002) and King (2002), who identified self-regulation as mediating between expressive writing and health. While Lepore et al. (2002) argued that expressive writing confers health benefits by regulating extreme (excessively controlled or excessively uncontrolled) emotional responses, King (2002) focused on the functions that writing serves in helping individuals learn about themselves, their personal values and interpretation of their emotions.

Secure people, with their positive models of self and other, probably need to make fewer changes or adjustments to these self and other images following bereavement than people in any of the insecure categories. Secure people already have coherent views of self and other, are autonomous and comfortable with intimacy, which enable them to go on to make sense of their changed worlds. By contrast, insecure individuals do need to work on their negative models of self and/or other, particularly when the other has died, and to come to better-organized descriptions of this deceased person. Preoccupied individuals who become bereaved will need to reconstruct their "selves" as worthy individuals in their own right. If they could ruminate less (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001) and bring positive meanings (words) into their diaries (Folkman, 2001; Fredrickson, 1998), they would be likely to benefit. Dismissing persons' positive self/negative other pattern is effortful to maintain, since they are thrown back on themselves and their own intrapersonal resources in a potentially stressful situation. Since fearful persons self and other images are both negative, they may for this reason stand to benefit the most from diary writing, to gain more coherence in their representations of both self and other (particularly the lost person) during bereavement.

8.6. Attachment style and efficacy of disclosure: indirect evidence

We know of no direct evidence in support of the predictions outlined above. However, studies of other individual differences provide some indirect evidence.

Cameron and Nicholls (1998) examined the effects of different types of disclosure manipulations on adjustment and physical health among students entering college. The authors looked at a variable that would reflect positive and negative emotional experience, namely, optimism versus pessimism. They assigned participants to either a self-regulating condition (disclosure about entering college and formulating coping plans), or to simply expressing thoughts and feeling about the move without regulation, comparing these with a trivial topic condition. Who would benefit more from which disclosure condition? Optimists benefited on the health measure from both the self-regulation and simple disclosure conditions, while pessimists benefited in this way only from the self-regulation. However, the self-regulation effect appeared to be equivalent for pessimistic and optimistic participants (we would have expected it to be greater for pessimists). Nevertheless, these results suggest that persons who are habitually negative will not be helped by simply ventilating their emotions. In line with the arguments presented above, for these persons particularly, help with constructive planning and reorganization seems necessary.

We have suggested that insecure persons might benefit more from the diary paradigm, given their problems in expressing emotions. A number of studies suggest that people who have difficulty communicating with others about their emotions benefit more from writing about emotional events than those who do not (e.g., Pennebaker et al., 2001). Paez et al. (1999) found that individuals high on alexithymia – associated with problems in communicating emotions – benefited more from writing than those low on the trait (see also, Lumley et al., 2002), although the benefits may not extend to alexithymic persons suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (Gidron, Peri, Connolly, & Shalev, 1996). Along different lines, Christensen and Smith (1994) pre-selected participants in a diary study on hostility (one might assume that this increases interpersonal communication problems), and found that those high on this variable benefited more than those who were low in hostility.

Finally, on the basis of the meta-analysis, Smyth (1998) concluded that men profited more than women did from diary writing. This would fit the general pattern of gender differences in emotional expression. Women are typically more communicative about their emotions than men and men are more likely to inhibit emotional expression than women are (see Lumley et al., 2002; De Ridder, 2000). Research has also shown that men who had difficulties in coming to terms with bereavement were more helped by a counseling program that focused on emotional expression, whereas women with difficulties benefited by focusing on problems that had come about as a consequence of their loss (Schut, Stroebe, de Keijser, & van den Bout, 1997).

Thus, in general, although the studies reviewed above did not examine attachment style specifically, they provide preliminary evidence that persons who are less expressive of their emotions, or persons who have difficulty in communicating with others, may benefit more from a disclosure manipulation. The patterns are compatible with what one would expect from an attachment perspective.

9. Conclusions

Pennebaker and Keough (1999) claimed that "...although some individual differences are undoubtedly related to writing's effects ... the writing paradigm itself is sufficiently powerful to statistically swamp most individual difference measures (p. 109)." We challenge this statement. We propose that attachment style is a powerful individual difference variable that impacts on the efficacy of disclosure in Pennebaker's paradigm. Following the review of the diverse research areas brought together above, we would predict more powerful effects of disclosure through diary writing for insecure than for secure individuals, particularly in the case of attachment-related emotional experiences/traumas such as bereavements. This does not mean to say that securely attached individuals would not profit at all from a diary intervention (nor that insecurely attached individuals would always benefit). Clearly there are situational and other factors that are also influential. For example, a securely attached person may have suffered a highly ambiguous loss of a loved one (e.g., through suicide) and be unable to talk about it (e.g., it was an extra-marital relationship). Conflicts or ill health that arises from such a situation might be (partly) resolved through diary writing. In other words, our individual difference approach is complementary–rather than alternative–to the analyses provided by other theorists who have focused on situational, or cognitive/linguistic factors. Taking these perspectives together, one would hope to increase predictive potential about the outcome of the disclosure manipulation.

Are the attachment style differences that we have identified simply personality differences? Do we really need an attachment framework to explain the patterns? Of course, attachment styles are related to personality traits, but there is some evidence to indicate that they are not simply redundant with the latter existing constructs. Shaver and Brennan (1992) examined this empirically, and came to the conclusion that attachment styles were related in theoretically predictable ways with personality traits. However, the constructs were indeed not simply redundant with each other. Furthermore, attachment style measures were more powerful in predicting relationship outcomes. For such reasons, it would seem more useful to pursue individual differences in attachment styles in preference to those in personality traits.

The framework put forward in this article lends itself to further empirical testing. In particular, research needs to explore the relationships between attachment styles, working models of self and other (and disclosure patterns), and efficacy of diary writing systematically across the broad range of attachment-related and non-attachment-related emotional experiences and traumas. It seems plausible that similar predictions could be made across the attachment-related life stressors (e.g., illness of a loved one; birth of a baby; divorce), since – by definition – they involve interpersonal bonding processes. Some of these situations clearly involve separation, which are therefore situations where the attachment behavioral system is activated. But what about non-attachment-related emotional experiences? Because of attachment style's influence on the way that one copes in general, the impact of the manipulation might be related to this individual difference variable in similar ways, perhaps less closely though. Such predictions about comparative relationships are empirically verifiable too. In addition, recent developments in linguistic analysis (e.g., the development of the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count, LIWC; e.g., Pennebaker, Francis, & Booth, 2001; for an extensive review, see Pennebaker et al., 2003) now enable fine-grained examination of a number of theoretical propositions. For example, linguistic markers identified by Pennebaker and King (1999) can be examined in relation to differences in style of attachment, self/other models and disclosure patterns.

On a theoretical level, there is scope for integration beyond an individual differences approach. It will have become evident that our arguments on the role of attachment in disclosure efficacy are compatible with Pennebaker's basic theoretical analyses, although distinctive in introducing an attachment framework. Other recent developments can be incorporated within our perspective. Contemporary research on the disclosure paradigm, by Pennebaker himself and a growing number of researchers (see Lepore & Smyth, 2002; Pennebaker et al., 2003), is focusing on understanding the emotional and cognitive mechanisms linking expressive writing to health outcomes (e.g., King, 2002; Lepore & Smyth, 2002). As mentioned before, this line of research includes analyses of emotion regulation (e.g., processes such as cognitive reappraisals, attention, and habituation) of extreme responses and the impact of these processes on subjective, physiological and behavioral channels (Lepore, Greenberg, Bruno, & Smyth, 2002). Indeed, the identification of vulnerable people who benefit from disclosure manipulations that we have focused on here must go hand in hand with further examination of underlying processes.

Finally, we return to the expressions of the poets, Shakespeare and Danyel, that we cited at the beginning of this article. Both, it would seem, are right. But Shakespeare speaks more for the dismissing and fearful, for whom expressing emotions about emotional events may indeed be a "cure". By contrast, Danyel captures the needs of preoccupied, dependent persons. In these latter cases, expressing one's emotions in a habitual, repetitive manner may not only fail to do any good, but it may even be detrimental in the sense that it may impede adaptation and adjustment following the impactful event.

Acknowledgments

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