

## Extending the Expressive Writing Paradigm Is Writing Haiku Poetry Healing?

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There is now a significant literature documenting the therapeutic effects of writing in narrative form, which have been found to be effective across age, gender, culture, social class and personality type (Frattaroli, 2006; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). Both psychological (e.g., decreases in anxiety, depression, and traumatic symptoms) and physiological (e.g., fewer doctor visits, reductions in symptomatology) markers have been found. The paradigm was originally developed concerning traumatic experience (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986), and significant findings have now been found in numerous populations, including various medical populations and college students (Frattaroli, 2006).

In contrast to the clear effectiveness these findings present overall, determining the mechanisms by which the expressive writing paradigm operates has been more complex. An argument that has received considerable attention, however, is the importance of narrative structure. Researchers supporting this view note, for example, that writing in a list-like manner without narrative coherence does not lead to the same health benefits as writing in narrative (Smyth, True, & Souto, 2001). Another approach has been to cite the extensive literature demonstrating higher rates of mental illness and suicide in creatives, especially poets (Kaufman & Baer, 2002; Kaufman & Sexton, 2006). Considered in this way, poetry easily becomes the *de facto* antithesis of the narrative approach. However, a list is not a poem, and everyone who writes poetry is not looking to publish.

The growing literature concerning the value of “everyday creativity” (Richards, 2007; Runco & Richards, 1998) provides an alternative perspective from which to consider the potential value of writing in a manner that carries meaning without narrative. Poetry has also been a part of culture throughout the ages and continues to be represented in the healing arts: bibliotherapy and poetry therapy have a notable presence (Mazza, 2003), as do the humanities and poetry in medicine (Campo, 2003; Coulehan & Clary, 2005). From this perspective, it seems worth examining empirically what effect writing poetry might have.

The purpose of this study was to examine whether composing poetry according to the framework of the expressive writing paradigm would provide an effective alternative in a normal sample. Haiku was selected as the poetic form for a variety of reasons. First, haiku is perhaps the least narrative-driven form of poetry available; as the shortest poetic form, it provides a

stark contrast to the narrative instructions typically used in the writing paradigm, which ask participants to write quite freely. Second, within its culture of origin, haiku is known for its ability to connect one with nature, the traditional topic associated with the form. It is intriguing to note that a growing body of literature is demonstrating the health benefits of exposure to nature, even as images (Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 2008). We chose to retain the traditional topic of nature in the present study, both to provide an alternative to the traditional expressive writing topics and to evaluate haiku poetry first on its own terms. Third, the poetic form has spread around the world and become widely popular, lauded for its simplicity, concreteness, and ease of use (Blasko & Merski, 1998). In the present study, this simplicity allowed minimal instruction to support effective haiku composition.

Thus, this study asked whether writing haiku poetry within the framework of the expressive writing paradigm would be similarly beneficial. The specific benefits considered were anxiety, depression, physiological symptomatology, hope, and spiritual meaning. Two groups wrote haiku, either about a nature topic (Haiku-Nature) or a control topic (Haiku-Control). It was hypothesized that writing haiku about nature would lead to increases in hope and spiritual meaning, and decreases in anxiety, depression, and physiological symptomatology. No significant improvements were hypothesized for the Haiku-Control group.

## Methods

### Procedure

The writing intervention involved writing haiku poetry for 20 minutes a day for 3 days consecutively, with questionnaires filled out at baseline, immediately following the writing intervention, and at a one-month follow-up. On Day 1, participants filled out questionnaires (Time 1), followed by the first day of writing. Day 2 simply continued the writing intervention, while on Day 3 participants wrote and subsequently completed the questionnaires once again (Time 2). Both participant assignment to groups and the order of questionnaires were randomized throughout the study. Four weeks (28-35 days) after the last writing day, participants returned to complete the questionnaires a final time (Follow-up). During the writing intervention, participants were led through a generic visualization that guided them through each of the five senses to aid them in formulating their writing topic. The same script was used for both groups and was read slowly by the researcher.

Participants were run in small groups of up to 10. The participant packets were randomized with respect to group such that participants in any given session included several members of both the Haiku-Control and Haiku-Nature groups. The instructions read by the researcher were designed to apply to both groups; instructions specific to each group were presented in printed form. Thus, the researchers were blind to participant condition and were typically running

participants from both groups simultaneously. Participants in the Haiku-Control group received the following instructions with respect to topic: "You will be writing about the Psychology building hallway. What aspects of this space you write about is up to you, but please stick to just the hallway of this building specifically for the full 20 minutes. If you cannot picture it exactly, visualize a hallway similar to it." Participants in the Haiku-Nature group received the following instructions: "You will be writing about an experience you have had in nature that is calming to you. It can be any nature experience you like, but focus on those aspects of nature that were calming to you in the experience. Please stick to the same experience for the full 20 minutes." These were the only instructions that differed between the groups.

The topical instructions were followed by three rules, which were identical for the groups. "Rule 1: The writing topic will be assigned. Please stick to the assigned topic throughout the study. Rule 2: Write poems that are 3 lines long—no more, no less. Rule 3: Keep the poems to 11 words or less for each poem. If you prefer thinking in syllables, use 12-17 syllables per poem." These rules were followed by six optional suggestions to help participants for whom three rules might not be enough guidance to compose poetry. The suggestions were derived from typical practices in composing haiku poetry and included suggestions such as focusing on describing a scene or experience as simply and directly as possible, avoiding figurative language, and not worrying about rhyme or rhythm.

The word "haiku" was not mentioned during the course of the study so as to avoid priming effects (Tulving & Schacter, 1990) that might detract from the purpose of examining the writing form itself apart from cultural references with which it might be associated. It was found at Follow-up that this approach was reasonably effective: only 28% of the participants were able to correctly identify the poetic form as haiku.

## Measures

Five self-report measures were used in this study. The positive attributes considered were hope and spiritual meaning. The *Herth Hope Scale* (HHS; Herth, 1991) is a 30-item measure intended to assess an individual's level of hope. The measure had a coefficient alpha of .90 in the present study. The *Spiritual Meaning Scale* (SMS; Mascaro, Rosen, & Morey, 2004) is a single scale, 15-item self-report inventory that measures the extent to which a person believes that life, or some force of which life is a function, has a purpose, will, or way in which individuals participate, independent of religious orientation. Psychometric characteristics of the SMS show a one-month test-retest reliability of .84; the internal consistency was .94 in the present study.

The negative attributes considered were anxiety, depression, and physiological symptomatology. Anxiety and depression were measured using the respective subscales of the *Personality Assessment Inventory* (PAI; Morey, 1990). Each subscale includes 24 items; the anxiety subscale (PAIA) had a coefficient alpha of .96 in the present study, while the depression

subscale (PAID) was .86. The *Pennebaker Inventory of Limbic Languidness* (PILL; Pennebaker, 1982) is a 54-item questionnaire that measures the frequency of self-reported physiological symptomatology. The coefficient alpha was .94 in the present study and two-month test-retest reliability ranges from .79 to .83.

### Participants

The participants in this study were 26 undergraduate psychology students from a large southwestern university, participating for credit in introductory psychology classes. Ages ranged from 18-21; 61% were male and 39% female. Fifty-four percent of the participants were White/Caucasian, 27% were Hispanic/Latino, 11% identified as more than one race, 4% were Asian and 4% were Black/African American.

### Results

The means and standard deviations are reported in Table 1. The first set of analyses tested for differences between the Haiku-Control and Haiku-Nature groups with three series of one-way analyses of covariance (ANCOVA): Time 2 controlling for Time 1, Follow-up controlling for Time 1, and Follow-up controlling for Time 2. While there were no significant results ( $\alpha < .05$ ) at Time 2 controlling for Time 1, nor at Follow-up controlling for Time 1, both physiological symptomatology [ $F(1,25) = 4.38, p = .048, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.87$ ] and spiritual meaning [ $F(1,25) = 5.55, p = .027, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.98$ ] yielded statistically significant changes at Follow-up controlling for Time 2. The spiritual meaning of neither group changed from Time 1 to Time 2, but the Haiku-Nature group increased from Time 2 to Follow-up while the Control group again remained constant. For physiological symptomatology, both groups decreased overall. However, the Nature group exhibited a slight increase from Time 2 to Follow-up, which was significant relative to the Control group's decrease.

A second set of analyses were run to test whether there would be any significant effects in writing haiku poetry regardless of topic. The data was collapsed across groups and paired samples t-tests were run comparing Time 1 and Time 2, Time 1 and Follow-up, and Time 2 and Follow-up. Contrary to our hypothesis, both anxiety and physiological symptomatology were found to significantly decrease over time, regardless of group. Anxiety decreased from Time 1 to Follow-up [ $t(1,25) = 3.43, p = .002, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.67$ ] and from Time 2 to Follow-up [ $t(1,25) = 2.03, p = .053, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.40$ ]. Physiological symptomatology also decreased from both Time 1 to Time 2 [ $t(1,25) = 2.95, p = .007, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.58$ ] and from Time 1 to Follow-up [ $t(1,25) = 3.41, p = .002, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.67$ ].

## Discussion

This study aimed to explore whether writing haiku poetry would demonstrate similar effects as have been found in the expressive writing paradigm. As the shortest common form of poetry, haiku is not considered to have a narrative component, which has been argued to be a central component of the expressive writing paradigm results (Kaufman & Baer, 2002; Kaufman & Sexton, 2006; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Smyth et al., 2001). Significant differences over time were hypothesized between groups writing haiku about nature versus a neutral topic; no significant results in writing haiku were hypothesized when collapsed across groups.

Regarding differences between groups, the Haiku-Nature group experienced an increase in spiritual meaning (SMS) at Follow-up controlling for Time 2, relative to the Haiku-Control group's decrease. Also, compared to the general decrease in physiological symptomatology (PILL) overall, the Haiku-Nature group experienced a slight increase from Time 2 to Follow-up. These results exhibited a large effect size according to Cohen's tentative guidelines (1992; Cohen's  $d = 0.87-0.98$ ). And contrary to our hypothesis, anxiety (PAIA) and physiological symptomatology (PILL) decreased across both groups: anxiety from Time 1 to Follow-up and Time 2 to Follow-up, and physiological symptomatology from Time 1 to Time 2 and Time 1 to Follow-up. These findings were of roughly medium effect size (Cohen's  $d = 0.40-0.67$ ).

In keeping with the results of the writing paradigm literature, the overall decrease in anxiety and physiological symptomatology for both groups suggests that writing can be therapeutically beneficial (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). However, in contrast to this literature, these results also suggest that the narrative component may not be essential as has often been argued (Kaufman & Baer, 2002; Kaufman & Sexton, 2006; Smyth et al., 2001). Further, the relative increase in spiritual meaning for the Haiku-Nature group in comparison to the Haiku-Control group at Follow-up controlling for Time 2 suggests that writing haiku poetry about nature may increase one's sense of spiritual meaning. This finding is in keeping with haiku's origins in the Japanese tradition and ties to Zen Buddhism (Suzuki, 1959), where there is the sense that writing about the topic of nature via the haiku form has the potential to connect one to a whole greater than oneself. The statistically significant finding concerning the curbing of the overall decrease in physiological symptomatology for the Haiku-Nature group relative to the Haiku-Control group, at Follow-up controlling for Time 2, is less clear. The result may be due to a simple lack of significant change in physiological symptomatology in the Haiku-Nature group relative to the Haiku-Control group, which came up as statistically significant in the context of an overall significant decrease. On the other hand, this finding may reflect a significant trend. Haiku poetry is associated with Zen Buddhism in the Japanese tradition (Suzuki, 1959); other central aspects of Zen Buddhism include meditation and mindfulness. It may be that composing haiku poetry about nature increases sensitivity to one's surroundings and experience (Cahn &

Polich, 2006).

Several important limitations constrained this study. First, the sample size was small; even though several notable findings surfaced, it may be that other measures might have been significant but for the lack of sensitivity to detect the effects. Second, participants were run together in small groups in a controlled setting, which may have lessened the effect of the writing intervention. Previous research has suggested that participants are more likely to disclose when writing in a non-controlled, private space (Frattaroli, 2006). It is worth noting, however, that this research literature has most often involved negative emotional disclosure; the effects involved with writing haiku about neutral or calming topics may be different. Nevertheless, a university classroom may not be the most conducive location for creative writing—few haiku poets would be inclined towards it. Third, only self-report measures were included in this study. Fourth, the Haiku-Control condition did not function ideally as a control group, as exhibited by the significant reductions in anxiety and physiological symptomatology in which it shared. It appears that the Haiku-Control writing instructions were too open, such that a number of the participants found ways to engage the topic in a manner that was more interesting and creative than intended.

While limited in these ways, the findings from this study provide sufficient promise to merit further inquiry, and we hope to both replicate and expand upon these results in future studies. In an effort to better understand form versus content in writing haiku, additional topics could be examined, such as composing haiku about a negative or positive life event. And once writing haiku poetry is better understood, it could be compared to the typical narrative writing that constitutes the expressive writing paradigm. Pennebaker found in a previous study (cited in Pennebaker & Chung, 2007) that dance alone was not therapeutic, but it was in combination with writing in a narrative format afterwards. The findings from this study raise questions about the interplay of art and narrative, which would be a particularly interesting area to examine within the Japanese poetic tradition, where haiku combined with narrative has a long history known as haibun.

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Table 1

*Assessment Measures by Group*

Assessment	Haiku-Control group (n=13)		Haiku-Nature group (n=13)	
	M	SD	M	SD
<b>PAIA</b>				
Time 1	60.77	9.48	61.65	9.96
Time 2	58.66	8.24	60.99	11.13
Follow-up	57.79	9.31	58.00	11.52
<b>PAID</b>				
Time 1	62.35	10.59	62.84	8.41
Time 2	59.94	10.13	62.67	6.94
Follow-up	59.41	8.66	61.37	8.30
<b>PILL</b>				
Time 1	121.31	23.38	106.85	20.05
Time 2	115.00	22.47	99.08	19.34
Follow-up	107.46	18.65	103.31*	21.19
<b>HHS</b>				
Time 1	58.46	5.62	55.85	6.26
Time 2	58.96	4.88	57.46	6.69
Follow-up	57.92	6.51	57.54	7.40
<b>SMS</b>				
Time 1	67.92	6.40	62.69	7.76
Time 2	68.31	5.81	62.38	8.46
Follow-up	67.15	7.05	65.54*	8.84

*Note.* PAIA = Personality Assessment Inventory—Anxiety T scores, PAID = Personality Assessment Inventory—Depression T scores, PILL = The Pennebaker Inventory of Limbic Languidnes, HHS = Herth Hope Scale, SMS = Spiritual Meaning Scale

\* $p < .05$

Table 2

Assessment Measures Collapsed Across Groups

Haiku collapsed across groups (n=26)		
Assessment	M	SD
<b>PAIA</b>		
Time 1	61.21	9.54
Time 2	59.83	9.67
Follow-up	57.90 <sup>*a, **b</sup>	10.26
<b>PAID</b>		
Time 1	62.59	9.37
Time 2	61.31	8.62
Follow-up	60.39	8.37
<b>PILL</b>		
Time 1	114.08	22.57
Time 2	107.04 <sup>**c</sup>	22.09
Follow-up	105.38 <sup>**d</sup>	19.67
<b>HHS</b>		
Time 1	57.15	5.98
Time 2	58.21	5.79
Follow-up	57.73	6.83
<b>SMS</b>		
Time 1	65.31	7.46
Time 2	65.35	7.72
Follow-up	66.35	7.87

Note. PAIA = Personality Assessment Inventory—Anxiety T scores, PAID = Personality Assessment Inventory—Depression T scores, PILL = The Pennebaker Inventory of Limbic Languidnes, HHS = Herth Hope Scale, SMS = Spiritual Meaning Scale

<sup>a</sup>Time 2 to Follow-up. <sup>b</sup>Time 1 to Follow-up. <sup>c</sup>Time 1 to Time 2. <sup>d</sup>Time 1 to Follow-up.

\* p = .05, \*\* p < .01

*Abstract*

## Extending the Expressive Writing Paradigm: Is Writing Haiku Poetry Healing?

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It has been suggested that narrative is an essential aspect of the therapeutic value of writing as demonstrated in the expressive writing paradigm. In this study, writing haiku poetry was investigated to examine this theory empirically. Writing haiku poetry on three consecutive days for 20 minutes a day about either a neutral topic or nature led to decreases in anxiety (at one month) and physiological symptomatology (immediately following and at one month); and that writing about nature, relative to a neutral topic, forestalled the overall decrease in physiological symptomatology (at one month) and increased spiritual meaning (at one month). These findings are discussed within the context of the expressive writing paradigm and recommendations are made for future research.

Key words : expressive writing, poetry, psychological health, creativity

## 表現的ライティングパラダイムの拡張： 俳句形式の詩を書くことは癒やしになるか？

キットレッジ・スティーブソン デビッド・H・ローゼン

表現的ライティングパラダイムにおいて例証されているように、ナラティブはライティングの治療的価値のなかでも本質的な一側面であることが示唆されてきた。本研究では、この理論を実証的に検討するため、俳句形式の詩のライティングについて探究がなされた。三日間連続して一日20分間、中立的なトピックや自然について、俳句形式の詩をライティングする課題により、不安（1ヵ月後の時点）と、生理的症候（直後と1ヵ月後）が軽減された。そして、自然についてのライティングは、中立的なトピックとの比較において、生理的症候（1ヵ月後）の全般的な軽減という点では一貫した傾向を示さず、スピリチュアルな意味 [の感覚]（1ヵ月後）を増加させた。これらの発見は、表現的ライティングパラダイムの文脈で論じられ、将来の研究に向けて提言がなされた。

キーワード：表現的ライティング、詩、心理的健康、創造性